

# Malachi

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**Summary:** *Malachi 1 opens the final prophetic book of the Old Testament with God's declaration of love for Israel: 'I have loved you.' When Israel questions this love, God points to the contrast between Jacob and Esau — Jacob chosen, Esau's territory made a desolation. The chapter then turns to its central indictment: the priests are offering defiled sacrifices — blind, lame, and sick animals that they would never dare present to their own governor. God would rather someone shut the temple doors than continue accepting these worthless offerings. The chapter climaxes with a stunning universalist declaration: 'From the rising of the sun to its setting, my name is great among the nations' (v. 11).*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Malachi's distinctive literary form is the disputation dialogue — God makes a statement, the people challenge it ('How have you loved us?' 'How have we defiled you?'), and God responds with evidence. This pattern occurs six times in the book and gives it a forensic, courtroom quality unique among the prophets. The name 'Malachi' means 'my messenger' and may be a title rather than a proper name (cf. 3:1, where 'my messenger' appears). The declaration that God's name is great 'among the nations' and that 'pure offerings' are presented to him everywhere (v. 11) is one of the most universalist statements in the Hebrew Bible — either describing gentile worship that God accepts or prophesying a future universal worship.*

**Translation Friction:** *The phrase 'I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated' (vv. 2-3) is theologically challenging. The Hebrew *sane* ('hate') in this context means 'rejected, not chosen, set aside' rather than emotional hatred — it is election language, not emotion language. Paul quotes this in Romans 9:13. The word *mal'akhi* ('my messenger') in 1:1 may be the prophet's actual name or a title derived from 3:1 — we treat it as a proper name following convention. The claim that God's name is great 'among the nations' (v. 11) in the present tense is debated — is it describing current gentile God-fearers, or is it a prophetic present for a future reality?*

**Connections:** *The Jacob/Esau contrast reaches back to Genesis 25:23 and 27:27-40. Paul quotes 'Jacob I loved, Esau I hated' in Romans 9:13. The defiled-sacrifice indictment echoes Deuteronomy 15:21 and 17:1 (no blemished animals). The universalist statement (v. 11) connects to Isaiah 45:6, 59:19, and Psalm 113:3. The name Malachi ('my messenger') anticipates 3:1 and the Elijah prophecy of 4:5.*

<sup>1</sup>An oracle: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.

<sup>2</sup>"I have loved you," says the LORD.

But you say, "How have you loved us?"

"Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I loved Jacob,

<sup>3</sup>but Esau I have rejected. I have made his mountains a wasteland and given his inheritance to the jackals of the wilderness."

<sup>4</sup>Even if Edom says, 'We have been crushed, but we will rebuild the ruins,' this is what the LORD of Armies says: They may build, but I will tear down. They will be called 'the territory of wickedness' and 'the people with whom the LORD is angry forever.' <sup>5</sup>Your own eyes will see this, and you will say, 'The LORD is great — even beyond the borders of Israel!'

<sup>6</sup>A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is my honor? If I am a master, where is the reverence due me? says the LORD of Armies to you, priests, who despise my name.

You ask, 'How have we despised your name?'

<sup>7</sup>You offer defiled food on my altar.

You ask, 'How have we defiled you?'

By saying, 'The table of the LORD is contemptible.'

<sup>8</sup>When you offer a blind animal for sacrifice — is that not wrong? When you offer a lame or sick one — is that not wrong? Try presenting it to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he show you favor? says the LORD of Armies. <sup>9</sup>Now then, try entreating God's favor — will he be gracious to you? This has come from your hands — will he show any of you favor? says the LORD of Armies. <sup>10</sup>If only one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not kindle useless fires on my altar! I take no pleasure in you, says the LORD of Armies, and I will not accept an offering from your hands. <sup>11</sup>For from the rising of the sun to its setting, my name is great among the nations. In every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering — for my name is great among the nations, says the LORD of Armies. <sup>12</sup>But you profane it when you say, 'The Lord's table is defiled,' and, 'Its food is contemptible.' <sup>13</sup>You also say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously, says the LORD of Armies. You bring stolen, lame, and sick animals — you bring them as your offering! Should I accept this from your hands? says the LORD. <sup>14</sup>Cursed is the cheat who has a healthy male in his flock and vows it but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great King, says the LORD of Armies, and my name is feared among the nations.

#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word *massa* ('oracle, burden') introduces the book as a weighty prophetic pronouncement. The name *Mal'akhi* means 'my messenger' and may be a proper name or a title. The LXX translates it as 'his messenger' (*angelou autou*), treating it as a descriptive title rather than a name. We follow the Masoretic tradition of reading it as a proper name. The preposition *beyad* ('by the hand of') indicates Malachi as the instrument of divine communication.
2. The first disputation dialogue opens immediately. God's declaration *ahavti etkhem* ('I have loved you') uses the perfect tense — completed, demonstrated, historical love. The people's retort *bammah ahavtanu* ('How/in what way have you loved us?') is not a genuine question but a challenge — they doubt God's love. God's response points to the choice of Jacob over Esau — twins, brothers, yet one chosen and one not. The verb *va'ohav et-Ya'aqov* ('yet I loved Jacob') begins the contrast completed in verse 3.
3. The Hebrew *sane'ti* ('I have hated') in covenant/election contexts means 'rejected, set aside, not chosen' rather than emotional hatred (cf. Genesis 29:31, where Leah is 'hated' = 'less loved'). Paul quotes this in Romans 9:13 to illustrate divine election. The contrast is between Jacob's descendants (Israel, restored from exile) and Esau's descendants (Edom, permanently devastated). Edom's mountains were indeed devastated — historically by Nabataean expansion and natural decline. The *tannot midbar* ('jackals of the wilderness') represent utter desolation.
4. Edom's resolve to rebuild — *venashuv venivneh* ('we will return and rebuild') — is defiant, but God's response is decisive: *hemmah yivnu va'ani eheros* ('they will build and I will tear down'). The contrast with Israel is implicit: Israel's rebuilding succeeds (Haggai, Zechariah), Edom's fails. The title *gevil rish'ah* ('territory of wickedness') and the phrase *za'am YHWH ad-olam* ('the LORD is angry forever') represent permanent divine judgment on Edom — a stark contrast to Israel, toward whom God's anger is temporary.
5. The statement *yigdal YHWH me'al ligevul Yisra'el* ('the LORD is great beyond the border of Israel') can mean either that God's greatness extends beyond Israel's borders (his sovereignty is universal) or that God will be praised beyond Israel's borders (the nations will acknowledge him). Either reading advances the universalist theme that will climax in verse 11. The people themselves will make this confession when they see the evidence.

6. The second disputation begins. God uses universally recognized social obligations — sons honor fathers, servants respect masters — to expose the priests' failure. The word *kavod* ('honor, glory') is from the same root as *kavod* ('weight, glory') — to honor is to treat as weighty, significant, important. The priests are *bozei shemi* ('despisers of my name') — they treat God's name as light, trivial, unimportant. Their retort *bammeh bazinu et-shimekha* ('How have we despised your name?') reveals oblivious guilt — they genuinely do not see their own contempt.
7. The word *lechem mego'al* ('defiled food/bread') refers to sacrificial offerings that fail to meet the requirements of purity. The altar is called *shulchan YHWH* ('the table of the LORD') — the sacrifice is God's meal, and the priests are serving him garbage. The word *nivzeh* ('contemptible, despised') is from *bazah* ('to despise') — the same root used for the priests' attitude toward God's name in verse 6. They have not said the words out loud, but their actions declare it.
8. The rhetorical question *ein ra* ('is it not evil/wrong?') is sarcastic — the priests have convinced themselves that defective offerings are acceptable. The devastating test: *haqrivenu na lepechatekha* ('try offering it to your governor'). The Persian governor (*pechah*) would never accept a blind, lame, or sick animal as a tribute gift. The priests give God less respect than they give a human official. The phrase *hayissa panekha* ('would he lift your face?' = would he show you favor?) exposes the double standard.
9. The sarcasm continues: *challu-na penei-El* ('try softening God's face'). The priests who offer defective sacrifices are invited to pray for God's favor — but the question is rhetorical: with such offerings, why would God listen? The phrase *miyedkhem haytah zot* ('this has come from your hands') places the blame squarely on the priests — they are the gatekeepers who allowed substandard sacrifices.
10. God's wish is devastating: *mi gam-bakhem veyisgor delatayim* ('Who among you would shut the doors?') — he would rather the temple be closed than continue receiving worthless worship. The phrase *lo ta'iru mizbchi chinnam* ('you would not kindle fire on my altar for nothing') means their altar fires are pointless — they produce nothing of value. The declaration *ein-li chephets bakhem* ('I take no pleasure in you') is total rejection of the priestly ministry as currently practiced.
11. This is one of the most remarkable verses in the Hebrew prophets. The statement *gadol shemi baggoyim* ('my name is great among the nations') appears twice, framing the declaration. The present tense — not 'will be' but 'is' — has generated intense debate: (1) God already receives acceptable worship from gentile God-fearers; (2) the prophetic present expresses a future certainty as if already real; (3) the worship of the 'Most High God' in various cultures is accepted by the LORD. The phrase *uvkhol-maqom muqtar muggash lishmi* ('in every place incense is offered and brought to my name') implies that the nations, even without knowing the LORD by name, offer worship that he accepts — a stunning contrast to Israel's priests who know his name but despise it.
12. The verb *mechallelim* ('profaning') is from *chalal* ('to profane, to make common') — the opposite of *qadash* ('to make holy'). The priests profane God's name by treating his altar as defiled (*meگو'al*) and his food (*nivo*, 'its produce/fruit') as *nivzeh* ('contemptible'). The irony is sharp: the offerings are defiled not by some external contamination but by the priests' own contemptuous attitude. They have created the very profanation they describe.
13. The phrase *hinneh mattela'ah* ('What a weariness/burden!') reveals the priests' attitude: worship has become drudgery. The verb *hippachtem* ('you snuff/blow at it') is a gesture of contempt — blowing dismissively at the offering as if it were worthless. The addition of *gazul* ('stolen') to the list (alongside lame and sick) means some offerings are not even legitimately owned — animals taken by force or theft, offered to God. The rhetorical question *ha'ertseh otah miyedkhem* ('should I accept this from your hands?') expects the answer: absolutely not.
14. The *nokhel* ('cheat, deceiver') is someone who has a perfect animal (*zakhar*, 'a male' — the required unblemished sacrifice), vows it to God, but then substitutes a *mashchat* ('blemished, corrupted') animal. This is deliberate fraud against God — promising the best and delivering the worst. The curse (*arur*) is formal covenant-curse language. The closing declaration — *ki melekh gadol ani* ('for I am a great King') — is the theological basis for the entire indictment: a great king deserves great offerings. The phrase *shemi nora baggoyim* ('my name is feared among the nations') reprises verse 11 — the nations give God more respect than his own priests do.

## 2

*Summary: Malachi 2 continues the indictment of the priests (vv. 1-9) before turning to two new charges: the men of Judah have married foreign women and have divorced their Israelite wives (vv. 10-16). God warns that he will curse the priests' blessings and spread dung on their faces if they do not honor his name. The covenant with Levi — the priestly covenant of life and peace — is held up as the standard they have violated. The chapter then addresses the breaking of the 'covenant of our ancestors' through intermarriage and faithlessness toward 'the wife of your youth.' The chapter concludes with the third disputation: the people have wearied God by calling evil good.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: Verse 16 — traditionally rendered 'For the LORD, the God of Israel, says that he hates divorce' — is one of the most debated verses in the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew is genuinely difficult. The verb *saneh* ('hate') may have God or the divorcing husband as its subject, and the phrase *shalach* ('sending away') has been read multiple ways. Modern scholarship generally reads it as a conditional: 'If he hates her and divorces her... he covers his garment with violence.' We present*

*the text carefully with extensive notes on the interpretive options. The covenant with Levi (vv. 4-7) provides an idealized portrait of the priestly calling: the priest's lips should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, 'for he is the messenger of the LORD of Armies' (v. 7).*

**Translation Friction:** *Verse 16 is the primary translation challenge. The MT reads *ki-sane' shalach*, which could be: (1) 'For he hates and divorces' (the divorcing husband is the subject — 'If one hates and divorces'); (2) 'For I hate divorce' (God is the subject — the traditional reading); (3) 'For he who hates, let him divorce' (an ironic permission). The LXX and other versions differ significantly. We follow a reading that preserves the difficulty while being syntactically defensible. The intermarriage issue (vv. 10-12) echoes Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13:23-27, placing Malachi in the same post-exilic reform context.*

**Connections:** *The covenant with Levi (vv. 4-7) connects to Numbers 25:12-13 (the covenant of peace with Phinehas) and Deuteronomy 33:8-11 (Moses's blessing on Levi). The priest as 'messenger of the LORD of Armies' (v. 7) uses the same word as the book's title (*mal'akh*). The intermarriage critique connects to Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13:23-27. The 'wife of your youth' language echoes Proverbs 5:18. The 'covering garment with violence' (v. 16) connects to the garment imagery of Ruth 3:9 (spreading a garment as protection).*

<sup>1</sup>Now then, priests, this command is for you. <sup>2</sup>If you will not listen, and if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the LORD of Armies, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you are not taking it to heart. <sup>3</sup>I am about to rebuke your offspring. I will spread dung on your faces — the dung from your festival offerings — and you will be carried away with it. <sup>4</sup>Then you will know that I sent this command to you so that my covenant with Levi might continue, says the LORD of Armies. <sup>5</sup>My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave these to him as something requiring reverence. He revered me and stood in awe of my name. <sup>6</sup>Truthful instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and integrity, and he turned many away from iniquity. <sup>7</sup>For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth — for he is the messenger of the LORD of Armies. <sup>8</sup>But you have turned from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of Armies. <sup>9</sup>So I have made you despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not kept my ways but have shown partiality in your instruction. <sup>10</sup>Do we not all have one father? Did not one God create us? Why then do we deal treacherously with one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors? <sup>11</sup>Judah has acted faithlessly. A detestable thing has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. <sup>12</sup>May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this — whoever he may be — even if he brings an offering to the LORD of Armies. <sup>13</sup>And this is another thing you do: you cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning, because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it favorably from your hand. <sup>14</sup>You ask, 'Why?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have been faithless — though she is your companion and the wife of your covenant. <sup>15</sup>Did not the one God make them and preserve the spirit of life for them? And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring! So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless to the wife of your youth. <sup>16</sup>"For if one hates and divorces," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "he covers his garment with violence," says the LORD of Armies. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.

<sup>17</sup>You have wearied the LORD with your words.

You ask, 'How have we wearied him?'

By saying, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the eyes of the LORD, and he delights in them,' or, 'Where is the God of

#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The direct address *hakohanim* ('priests') makes clear that the entire oracle of verses 1-9 targets the priestly class specifically. The *mitsva* ('commandment/charge') that follows is not a new law but a warning about the consequences of continued negligence.
2. The conditional threat: if the priests will not *latet kavod lishmi* ('give honor/weight to my name'), God will *aroti et-birkoteikhem* ('curse your blessings'). The priestly blessing (Numbers 6:24-26) was the priests' most sacred duty — God will turn their blessings into curses, rendering their ministry counterproductive. The shocking addition *vegam arotihah* ('indeed, I have already cursed them') means the judgment has already begun —

they are already pronouncing empty blessings.

3. The degradation is extreme: *vezeriti peresh al-peneikhem* ('I will spread dung on your faces'). The *peresh* ('dung, offal') is from the festival sacrifices (*chaggeikhhem*) — the intestinal waste that was supposed to be burned outside the camp (Exodus 29:14; Leviticus 4:11). God will take the refuse from their own hypocritical festivals and smear it on them. Being 'carried away with it' (*venasa etkhem elav*) means they will be thrown onto the dung heap — removed from priestly service in the most humiliating way possible.
4. The purpose of the warning is preservative, not merely punitive: *lihyot beriti et-Levi* ('so that my covenant with Levi might stand/continue'). God's goal is to restore the priestly covenant, not to destroy it. The 'covenant with Levi' refers to the priestly covenant tradition (Numbers 25:12-13; Deuteronomy 33:8-11; Nehemiah 13:29) — the special relationship between God and the Levitical priesthood.
5. The original Levitical covenant is described with two gifts: *hachayyim vehashshalom* ('life and peace'). In exchange, God expected *mora* ('reverence, awe'). The ideal Levite (Levi himself, or the patriarchal priests) *vayira'eni* ('feared/revered me') and *umippenei shemi nichat hu* ('was shattered/humbled before my name'). The word *nichat* ('shattered, dismayed, humbled') is intense — true reverence involves being overwhelmed by God's holiness, not comfortable familiarity.
6. The ideal priest's qualifications: *torat emet* ('truthful instruction/torah') on his lips, no *avlah* ('wrong, injustice'), walking with God *beshalom uvemishor* ('in peace and in uprightness'), and turning many from *avon* ('iniquity'). This portrait presents the priest as primarily a teacher and moral guide, not merely a ritual functionary. The phrase *halakh itti* ('he walked with me') uses the same language as Enoch (Genesis 5:22) and Noah (Genesis 6:9) — intimate companionship with God.
7. The ideal priestly function: guarding knowledge (*da'at*) and dispensing *torah* ('instruction'). The climactic identification — *ki mal'akh YHWH-Tsevaot hu* ('for he is the messenger of the LORD of Armies') — uses the same word *mal'akh* that appears in the book's title (*Mal'akhi*, 'my messenger') and in 3:1 ('I will send my messenger'). The priest is God's authorized representative — his messenger on earth. This elevates the priestly calling to angelic status while devastating the current priests who have abandoned it.
8. The contrast with the ideal priest is devastating: *sartem min-hadderekh* ('you have turned from the way') — departure from the priestly path; *hikhshaltem rabbim batorah* ('you caused many to stumble by the torah/instruction') — their teaching leads people astray instead of guiding them; *shichchattem berit halevi* ('you have corrupted the covenant of Levi') — the covenant itself is damaged by their behavior.
9. Measure-for-measure justice: the priests who treated God as contemptible (*nivzeh*, 1:7, 12) are now themselves *nivzim ushephalim* ('despised and humiliated') before the people. Their partiality in instruction — *nos'im panim batorah* ('lifting faces in the torah,' i.e., showing favoritism) — means they adjusted their teaching to favor the powerful rather than speaking truth impartially.
10. A new section begins with rhetorical questions establishing shared identity: *av echad* ('one father') and *El echad* ('one God') who created us all. The word *nivgad* ('deal treacherously, act faithlessly') is the key verb of this section, appearing five times in verses 10-16. It describes covenant betrayal — the breaking of sworn commitments. The *berit avoteinu* ('covenant of our ancestors') may refer to the Sinai covenant or the broader family/tribal bonds within Israel.
11. The word *to'evah* ('abomination, detestable thing') is the strongest term for covenant violation — used for the most serious moral and ritual offenses. The phrase *qodesh YHWH asher ahev* ('the holiness/sanctuary of the LORD which he loves') may refer to the temple ('the sanctuary he loves'), to the covenant people themselves ('the holy one[s] he loves'), or to the institution of Israelite marriage. The intermarriage described — *ba'al bat-el nekhar* ('marrying the daughter of a foreign god') — is not ethnic but religious: the objection is to women who worship foreign deities, bringing idolatry into Israelite households.
12. The phrase *er ve'oneh* ('aroused and answering' or 'witness and advocate') is an ancient idiom meaning 'anyone at all' — a merism covering the full range of persons. Some translate it 'teacher and student.' The point is universal: no one is exempt from judgment for this sin, even if he brings offerings (*umaggish minchah*). Religious ritual cannot compensate for covenant betrayal.
13. The 'tears' on the altar may be: (1) the tears of the divorced wives who come weeping to God's altar for justice; (2) the men's own tears when their offerings are rejected; (3) the figurative weeping of the altar itself. The first reading is most compelling in context — the abandoned wives cry out at God's altar, and their tears make the offerings of their faithless husbands unacceptable.
14. Another disputation: the men ask 'Why?' (*al-mah*) God won't accept their offerings. The answer: God himself is a witness (*he'id*) to the marriage covenant. The wife is described with three terms: *eshet ne'urekha* ('wife of your youth' — the one you married when young and passionate), *chavertekhka* ('your companion' — your intimate partner and friend), and *eshet beritekha* ('wife of your covenant' — the one bound to you by sworn oath). Each term intensifies the betrayal: they are abandoning not a stranger but a companion bound by covenant.
15. This is one of the most difficult verses in the Hebrew Bible textually. The phrase *velo-echad asah* ('did not the one/One make?') likely refers to God creating the first couple as one flesh (Genesis 2:24). The 'godly offspring' (*zera Elohim*) is God's purpose for faithful marriage — children raised in covenant faithfulness. The practical command — *venishmartem berukhakhem* ('guard yourselves in your spirit') — means maintaining inner integrity and commitment. The prohibition *al-yivgod* ('do not be faithless') uses the same verb that has dominated this section.
16. This verse is one of the most debated in the Hebrew Bible. The traditional reading ('I hate divorce') takes God as the subject of *sane* ('hate'). However, the Hebrew grammar more naturally reads *ki-sane' shalach* as 'for/if he hates, he divorces' — the divorcing husband is the subject. We render it as a conditional describing the man's action: 'if one hates and divorces, he covers his garment with violence.' The phrase *vekhissah chamas al-levusho* ('he covers violence on his garment') may mean (1) violence is as visible as a stain on clothing, or (2) the garment that should protect (cf.

Ruth 3:9, spreading the garment as a sign of protection) has become an instrument of violence. The repeated command *venishmartem berukhakhem* ('guard yourselves in your spirit') brackets the section.

17. The third disputation. The verb *hoga'tem* ('you have wearied') pictures God as exhausted by their words — not their volume but their content. The charge is twofold: either (1) they claim God approves of evil (*kol-oseh ra tov be'einei YHWH*, 'everyone doing evil is good in the LORD's eyes'), or (2) they question God's justice (*ayyeh Elohei hammishpat*, 'Where is the God of justice?'). Both statements deny divine moral governance — one says God approves evil, the other says he doesn't act against it. This sets up the coming of the messenger and the refiner in chapter 3.

### 3

**Summary:** *Malachi 3 answers the question posed at the end of chapter 2 ('Where is the God of justice?') with one of the most dramatic prophecies in the Hebrew Bible: 'I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord whom you seek will come to his temple — the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. He is coming!' (v. 1). God will come as a refiner's fire and a launderer's soap, purifying the Levites. The chapter then addresses the people's failure to tithe — 'You are robbing me!' — and issues the famous challenge: 'Bring the full tithe into the storehouse... Test me in this!' (v. 10). The chapter closes with the book of remembrance written for those who fear the LORD, and the promise that God's treasured possession will be spared.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The messenger prophecy (v. 1) is quoted in all four Gospels as fulfilled by John the Baptist (Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27; cf. John 1:23). The phrase *mal'akhi* ('my messenger') in verse 1 uses the same word as the book's title, creating a literary loop. The tithing challenge (v. 10) is unique in Scripture — God invites the people to 'test' (*bachan*) him, using the same word applied to gold-testing in Zechariah 13:9. The 'book of remembrance' (*sepher zikkaron*, v. 16) echoes the heavenly books in Exodus 32:32-33, Psalm 69:28, and Daniel 12:1, anticipating the 'book of life' in Revelation 20:12.*

**Translation Friction:** *The identity of 'my messenger' (v. 1) versus 'the messenger of the covenant' is debated: are they the same figure or two different figures? The syntax allows both readings. We treat them as likely two figures — the preparatory messenger (John the Baptist) and the Lord himself ('the messenger of the covenant'). The tithing passage (vv. 8-10) uses language from the priestly Torah (Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:21-24) and raises questions about whether the tithe obligation applies beyond the Jerusalem temple system. We render the text without imposing later theological interpretation.*

**Connections:** *The messenger prophecy (v. 1) is quoted in Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, and Luke 7:27. The refiner's fire (v. 2) connects to Zechariah 13:9 and Isaiah 48:10. The covenant with Levi (v. 3) continues from 2:4-7. The tithing command (v. 10) connects to Leviticus 27:30, Numbers 18:21-24, and Deuteronomy 14:22-29. The 'book of remembrance' (v. 16) connects to Exodus 32:32-33, Psalm 69:28, and Daniel 12:1. The term *segullah* ('treasured possession,' v. 17) echoes Exodus 19:5 and Deuteronomy 7:6.*

<sup>1</sup>"I am sending my messenger, and he will clear the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord whom you are seeking will come to his temple — the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight. He is indeed coming," says the LORD of Armies. <sup>2</sup>But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like a launderer's soap. <sup>3</sup>He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. <sup>4</sup>Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old, as in former years. <sup>5</sup>"I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, adulterers, and those who swear falsely, against those who defraud workers of their wages, who oppress widows and the fatherless, who turn aside the foreigner, and who do not fear me," says the LORD of Armies. <sup>6</sup>For I, the LORD, have not changed, and you, sons of Jacob, have not been destroyed.

<sup>7</sup>From the days of your ancestors you have turned from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you, says the LORD of Armies.

You ask, 'How shall we return?'

<sup>8</sup>Will a person rob God? Yet you are robbing me!  
 You ask, 'How are we robbing you?'  
 In tithes and contributions.

<sup>9</sup>You are cursed with a curse, because you — the whole nation — are robbing me. <sup>10</sup>Bring the full tithe into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the LORD of Armies, and see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour out a blessing until there is more than enough. <sup>11</sup>I will rebuke the devourer for you so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil, and the vine in your field will not fail to bear fruit, says the LORD of Armies. <sup>12</sup>All the nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of Armies.

<sup>13</sup>"Your words have been harsh against me," says the LORD.  
 You ask, "What have we said against you?"

<sup>14</sup>You have said, 'It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping his requirements and walking in mourning before the LORD of Armies?' <sup>15</sup>So now we call the arrogant blessed. Those who do wickedness prosper, and those who test God escape punishment.'" <sup>16</sup>Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another. The LORD paid attention and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him for those who fear the LORD and honor his name. <sup>17</sup>"They will be mine," says the LORD of Armies, "on the day when I act — my treasured possession. I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." <sup>18</sup>Then you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not.

#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This verse contains three figures: (1) mal'akhi ('my messenger') who prepares the way — identified in Mark 1:2 with John the Baptist; (2) ha'Adon ('the Lord') who comes to his temple — God himself; (3) mal'akh habberit ('the messenger of the covenant') in whom they delight. Whether (2) and (3) are the same figure is debated. The word pit'om ('suddenly') carries a threatening edge — God's arrival will be without warning, catching people unprepared. The ironic phrase asher-attem mevaqeshim ('whom you are seeking') and asher-attem chaphetsim ('in whom you delight') turns the people's own desires against them: they asked for the God of justice, and now he is coming — but they may not like what justice looks like.
2. The rhetorical questions — mi mekhalkel ('who can endure?') and mi ha'omed ('who can stand?') — expose the naivety of asking 'Where is the God of justice?' (2:17). When justice comes, it burns. Two purification images: esh metsareph ('a refiner's fire') that burns away impurities from metal, and borit mekhavesim ('a launderer's soap/lye') that scrubs stains from fabric. Together they represent complete purification — internal (fire removes embedded impurity) and external (soap removes surface contamination).
3. The image of sitting (veyashav) is significant — the refiner sits before the crucible, watching intently until the metal is pure enough to reflect his own face. The sons of Levi are purified first because their purification is prerequisite to the purification of the community's worship. The phrase maggishei minchah bitsedaqah ('presenting offerings in righteousness') is the goal: offerings that are tsedaqah — genuinely righteous, fulfilling the covenant obligations properly.
4. The verb arvah ('will be pleasing, will be sweet') describes God's acceptance of the purified offerings. The phrases kimei olam ('as in the days of old') and ukeshanim qadmoniyyot ('as in former years') look back to an idealized past — perhaps the wilderness period, the Solomonic era, or any time when worship was genuine. The promise is not innovation but restoration: worship will return to its original intended quality.
5. God becomes both judge and witness — ed memmaher ('a swift/eager witness'). The catalog of sins spans ritual (sorcery), sexual (adultery), verbal (false oaths), and social (economic exploitation of workers, widows, orphans, and foreigners). The list echoes the Decalogue and the prophetic justice tradition. The final phrase velo yere'uni ('they do not fear me') is the root cause — all the listed sins stem from the absence of reverence for God.
6. God's unchanging character (lo shaniti, 'I have not changed') is the basis for Israel's survival. If God changed — if he abandoned his covenant promises — Israel would have been consumed (khalitem). The pairing is theology at its most compressed: God's faithfulness preserves people who deserve destruction. The 'sons of Jacob' designation reminds the people of the patriarch who himself was a deceiver yet was loved and preserved by God (cf. 1:2).
7. The call shuvu elai ve'ashuvah aleikhem ('return to me and I will return to you') echoes Zechariah 1:3 verbatim — the same reciprocal promise. The people's response bammeh nashuv ('How shall we return?') is the fourth disputation. Unlike a sincere question, this is defensive — they do not recognize their departure and therefore cannot imagine what return would look like. God's answer (vv. 8-10) will be concrete: the tithe.
8. The verb qava' ('rob, defraud') is rare and forceful. The question is rhetorical: robbery of God should be unthinkable, yet they are doing it. The answer — hamma'aser vehatterumah ('the tithe and the contribution') — specifies the violation: the mandatory tithe (one-tenth of agricultural produce, Leviticus 27:30) and the terumah ('contribution, offering' — the portion dedicated to priests and Levites, Numbers 18:24-28) are being withheld.

9. The cognate accusative *bamme'erah attem ne'arim* ('with a curse you are cursed') is emphatic — the curse is already in effect, not merely threatened. The scope is *haggoy kullo* ('the whole nation') — this is not individual sin but collective, systemic withholding. The connection between robbing God (withholding tithes) and experiencing the curse (economic hardship) echoes Haggai 1:6-11 — covenant disobedience produces covenant consequences.
10. The *beit ha'otsar* ('storehouse') was the temple storage area for tithes (cf. Nehemiah 10:38-39; 13:12-13). The phrase *viyhi tereph beveiti* ('so there may be food in my house') is startlingly practical — the tithe funded the temple operations and supported the Levites. God invites testing: *uvechanuni na* ('test me, please') uses the same verb applied to gold testing. The promise — *arubbot hashamayim* ('windows of heaven') opened and *berakhah* poured out *ad-beli-dai* ('until there is not enough room') — echoes the Genesis flood language (Genesis 7:11), but now heaven's windows release blessing instead of destruction.
11. The 'devourer' (*ha'okhel*, literally 'the eater') likely refers to locusts or other crop-destroying pests — agricultural enemies that God will personally rebuke (*ga'arti*). The agricultural promises — produce protected, vine bearing fruit — reverse the covenant curses described in Haggai 1:6-11 and Deuteronomy 28:38-40. God's blessing is tangible, measurable, and agricultural.
12. The promise extends beyond agricultural blessing to international reputation: *ve'ishsheru etkhem kol-haggoyim* ('all the nations will call you blessed/happy'). The phrase *erets chephets* ('a land of delight/desire') echoes *chemdah* from Haggai 2:7 and Zechariah 7:14. Israel will be so visibly blessed that the nations will recognize and proclaim it — fulfilling the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 12:2-3.
13. The fifth disputation. The verb *chazqu* ('have been strong/harsh') describes words that are forceful and defiant. The people's oblivious response — *mah-nidbarnu alekha* ('What have we said against you?') — follows the now-familiar pattern of defensive incomprehension.
14. The people's words expose a transactional view of religion: *shav avod Elohim* ('it is vain/useless to serve God'). The question *mah-betsa* ('what profit?') treats worship as an investment that should yield returns. The phrase *halakhnu qedorannit* ('we walked in mourning/gloom') suggests they performed penitential rituals expecting reward and received none. Their theology is: if obedience does not produce immediate visible benefit, it is worthless.
15. The people's complaint concludes: the arrogant (*zedim*) are blessed, the wicked (*osei rish'ah*) prosper, and those who test God (*bachanu Elohim*) escape consequences. This is the classic theodicy complaint — why do the wicked prosper? — but here it is used to justify religious indifference rather than as genuine lament. The irony: in verse 10, God invited them to 'test me' (*uvechanuni*) with tithes, but here they complain that others 'test God' (*bachanu Elohim*) with impunity.
16. The scene shifts from the cynics to the faithful. The *yir'ei YHWH* ('those who fear the LORD') speak to each other — mutual encouragement in a hostile environment. God's response is threefold: *vayyaqshav* ('he paid attention'), *vayyishma* ('he heard'), and *vayyikkatev sepher zikkaron* ('a book of remembrance was written'). The *sepher zikkaron* echoes the Persian royal practice of recording notable deeds (cf. Esther 6:1-2). Those who 'think upon his name' (*ulchoshevei shemo*) are people who value and meditate on God's character. Their names are permanently recorded.
17. The word *segullah* ('treasured possession, special treasure') is the term used for Israel's unique status in Exodus 19:5 and Deuteronomy 7:6 and 14:2. Now it is applied specifically to the faithful remnant within Israel — the God-fearers of verse 16. The comparison — *ka'asher yachmol ish al-beno ha'oved oto* ('as a man spares his son who serves him') — combines parental tenderness with the recognition that the son is faithful/obedient (*oved*, 'serving'). Sparing here means protecting from the coming judgment.
18. The verse answers the complaint of verses 14-15 that there is no visible difference between the righteous and the wicked. God promises that the distinction will become unmistakable. The verb *veshavtem* ('you will return/again') suggests a restored ability to perceive moral reality. The parallelism — *tsaddiq/rasha* ('righteous/wicked') and *oved Elohim/asher lo avado* ('serving God/not serving him') — defines righteousness as active service, not merely moral status.

## 4

**Summary:** *Malachi 4 (Hebrew 3:19-24) is the closing chapter of the prophetic canon and the final word of the Old Testament before the intertestamental period. The coming day will burn like a furnace, reducing the arrogant and wicked to stubble — but for those who fear God's name, 'the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings' (v. 2). The people are commanded to remember the Torah of Moses. The book and the prophetic canon close with the promise that God will send Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD, to turn the hearts of parents to children and children to parents — 'lest I come and strike the land with utter destruction.'*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *These are the last prophetic words of the Old Testament. The final verses create a literary bridge spanning the entire Hebrew Bible: Moses (the Torah) and Elijah (the Prophets) stand together at the close, just as they will stand together on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8). The 'sun of righteousness with healing in its wings' (v. 2) has become one of the most beloved messianic images in Christian tradition. The Elijah prophecy (vv. 5-6) is quoted in Luke 1:17 as fulfilled by John the Baptist, and Jesus identifies John as the promised Elijah in Matthew 11:14 and 17:12-13. In Jewish tradition, an empty chair is set for Elijah at every Passover Seder,*

*awaiting his return.*

**Translation Friction:** *English chapter 4 corresponds to Hebrew 3:19-24 — the Hebrew Bible does not have a chapter break here. We follow the English versification (4:1-6) while noting the Hebrew numbering in translator notes. The phrase shemesh tsedaqah ('sun of righteousness,' v. 2) is grammatically feminine in Hebrew (shemesh is feminine), though the 'wings' (kenaphayim) suggest the winged sun disk imagery common in ancient Near Eastern art. Whether 'righteousness' modifies the sun (a sun characterized by righteousness) or is the sun's name (Righteousness personified as the sun) affects interpretation. The final word of the Hebrew Bible is cherem ('utter destruction/ban'), ending the prophetic canon with a warning rather than a comfort — a deliberate choice.*

**Connections:** *The burning day (v. 1) connects to Isaiah 34:9-10 and Joel 2:31. The sun of righteousness (v. 2) informs Luke 1:78-79 ('the rising sun from heaven'). The command to remember Moses (v. 4) creates a canon-bridging reference to the Torah. The Elijah prophecy (vv. 5-6) is fulfilled in John the Baptist (Matthew 11:14; 17:12-13; Luke 1:17). The turning of hearts (v. 6) is quoted in Luke 1:17. The final word cherem connects to the very beginning of the conquest narrative (Joshua 6:17-21). Moses and Elijah together appear at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8).*

<sup>1</sup>For the day is coming, burning like a furnace. All the arrogant and all who do wickedness will be stubble. The coming day will set them ablaze, says the LORD of Armies, leaving them neither root nor branch. <sup>2</sup>But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. You will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. <sup>3</sup>You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the LORD of Armies. <sup>4</sup>Remember the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded him at Horeb — statutes and ordinances for all Israel. <sup>5</sup>I am sending you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. <sup>6</sup>He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with utter destruction.

#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Hebrew verse numbering: 3:19. The image of the tannur ('furnace, oven') is concrete — the clay oven used for baking bread, in which straw/stubble was burned as fuel. The arrogant (zedim) and the wicked (osei rish'ah) become qash ('stubble') — dry, worthless fuel. The comprehensiveness of the destruction — lo ya'azov lahem shoshet ve'anaph ('leaving them neither root nor branch') — means complete annihilation: no root (no foundation, no future progeny underground) and no branch (no visible growth, no continuation above ground). The destruction is total — nothing survives to regenerate.
2. Hebrew verse numbering: 3:20. The phrase yir'ei shemi ('you who fear my name') echoes the God-fearers of 3:16 — the faithful remnant. The shemesh tsedaqah ('sun of righteousness') has been interpreted as messianic (a righteous ruler who brings healing light) or theophanic (God himself appearing as the rising sun). Luke 1:78 echoes this: 'the rising sun will come to us from heaven, to shine on those living in darkness.' The word kenaphayim ('wings') usually means the wings of a bird but here refers to the sun's rays — like outstretched wings of light. The calves (eglei marbeq) released from the stall leap and run with the joy of freedom — the contrast with the furnace and stubble of verse 1 is total.
3. Hebrew verse numbering: 3:21. The verb asottem ('you will trample') pictures the righteous walking over the remains of the wicked, who have been reduced to epher ('ashes') by the furnace of verse 1. The phrase bayyom asher ani oseh ('on the day when I act/make') leaves the specific timing open — 'the day I am preparing' or 'the day I act.' The emphasis is on God's initiative: he creates the day of judgment.
4. Hebrew verse numbering: 3:22. The command zikhru ('remember') is not merely mental recall but active obedience — to 'remember' the Torah is to live by it. The reference to Chorev (Horeb = Sinai) reaches back to the foundational moment of the covenant. Moses is called avdi ('my servant') — the same title used for David and the messianic Branch. The chuqqim umishpatim ('statutes and ordinances') encompass the full range of Torah legislation. This verse creates a canonical bridge from the Prophets back to the Torah — the end of prophecy points back to the beginning of revelation.
5. Hebrew verse numbering: 3:23. The Elijah prophecy is among the most influential in Jewish and Christian tradition. In Judaism, Elijah is expected before the messianic age — an empty chair and cup are set for him at Passover. In Christianity, Jesus identifies John the Baptist as the fulfillment (Matthew 11:14; 17:12-13), while the angel Gabriel quotes this verse when announcing John's birth (Luke 1:17). The phrase yom YHWH haggadol vehanora ('the great and awesome day of the LORD') uses nora ('awesome, fearsome') rather than the KJV's 'dreadful' — the day inspires awe, not merely dread.
6. Hebrew verse numbering: 3:24. The mission of Elijah: veheshiv lev-avot al-banim velev banim al-avotam ('turning the hearts of parents to children and children to parents'). Luke 1:17 quotes this directly for John the Baptist. The verb heshiv ('to turn, to return, to restore') is from the same root as teshuvah ('repentance/return') — generational reconciliation is itself a form of repentance. The final word of the Hebrew prophetic canon is cherem —

the total ban of destruction. This is deliberately ominous: the prophetic message closes with a warning, not a promise. Jewish scribal tradition repeats verse 5 after verse 6 when reading in the synagogue, so that the prophets do not end on a note of cursing. The entire arc of the prophetic canon — from Joshua through Malachi — begins with the *cherem* of Jericho and ends with the threat of *cherem* against the whole land. Elijah's mission is to prevent it.