

# THE BIBLE

## in a nutshell

### Malachi

—by Dr Peter Hammond



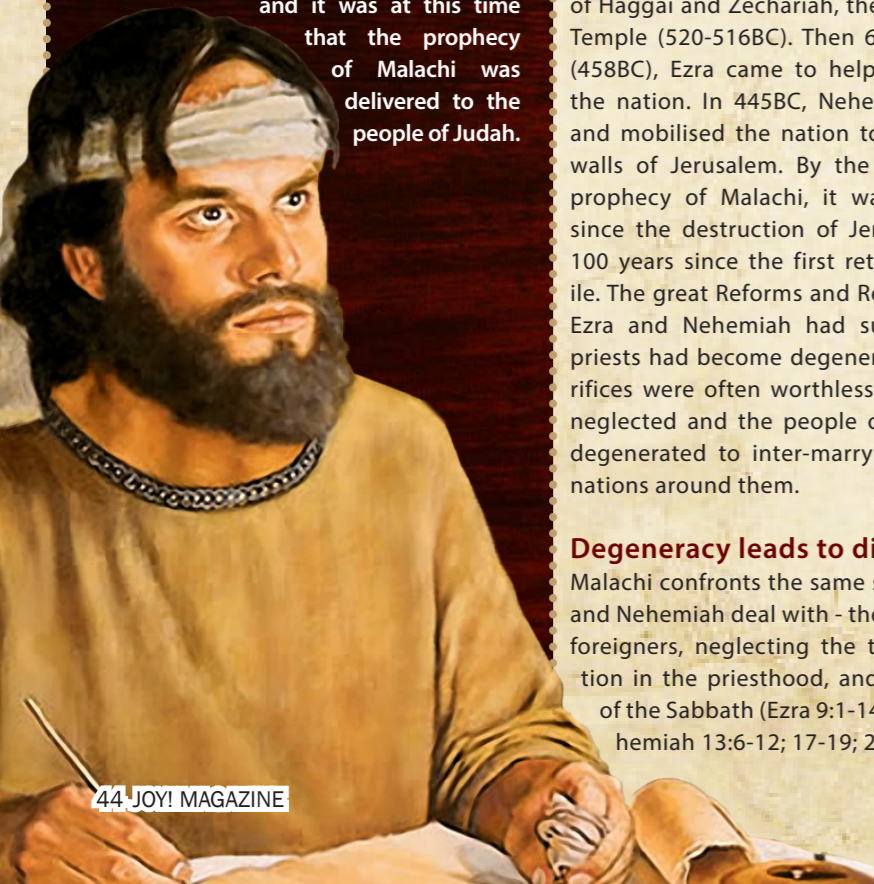
*“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His Temple.” Malachi 3:1*

### Who was Malachi?

The name Malachi means: God’s Messenger. We are given no details of his parents, place of birth, or occupation. Malachi was a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah. There are many who believe that Ezra may have been the author of the Book of Malachi.

### Dating Malachi

Malachi was written in the 5th century BC. The reference to the governor (1:8), confirms that the Book was written during Persian rule. In 433BC Nehemiah returned to Persia and it was at this time that the prophecy of Malachi was delivered to the people of Judah.



**M**alachi is the last Book of the Old Testament. Malachi is the bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Malachi is given in prose, not poetry, indicating that the Lord’s love for His people was wearing thin, exhausted by their faithlessness and backslidings.

#### Historic background

A remnant had returned from Babylonian captivity in 536BC. Under the leadership

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of Haggai and Zechariah, they rebuilt the Temple (520-516BC). Then 60 years later (458BC), Ezra came to help re-establish the nation. In 445BC, Nehemiah arrived and mobilised the nation to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. By the time of the prophecy of Malachi, it was 170 years since the destruction of Jerusalem, and 100 years since the first return from Exile. The great Reforms and Revivals under Ezra and Nehemiah had subsided. The priests had become degenerate. The sacrifices were often worthless. Tithes were neglected and the people of Judah had degenerated to inter-marrying with the nations around them.

#### Degeneracy leads to disaster

Malachi confronts the same sins that Ezra and Nehemiah deal with - the marrying of foreigners, neglecting the tithe, corruption in the priesthood, and desecration of the Sabbath (Ezra 9:1-14; 10:10), (Nehemiah 13:6-12; 17-19; 23-30).

#### The dialogue in Malachi

Malachi is set forth in a form of a dispute with a question and answer dialogue. The Lord’s solemn charges against His people were frequently met by cynical questions. As the prophecy of Malachi was presented, there were hecklers in the crowd who argued with the prophecy. This is presented in a form of a lawsuit, by God’s advocate, posing questions to the people based upon their defiant and rebellious complaints and criticisms.

#### Indictment

Malachi indicts the priests and the people of Judah on 6 counts of grievous sin:

- Repudiating and rejecting God’s love (1:2-5)
- Refusing God the honour due our Heavenly Father (1:6 - 2:9)
- Rejecting God’s faithfulness (2:10-16)
- Redefining God’s righteousness (2:17 - 3:5)
- Robbing God’s riches (3:6-12)
- Reviling God’s grace (3:13-15)

#### Judgement delivered

Malachi renders God’s judgement:

- To the priests (2:1-9)
- To the nation (3:1-6)
- To the remnant (3:16 - 4:6)

#### You cannot expect maximum blessings from minimum commitment

Now they were wanting to know what was the minimum amount of money that they could get away with in their offerings, and what was

### Religion without relationship

It was a time of spiritual decline when religious observance had become empty formality and heartless ritual. The people of Judah were plainly disappointed, disillusioned, and depressed. They despairingly asked whether all their efforts had been worthwhile. They were attending some Temple activities, but it was rituals without reality. There was no relationship with Almighty God.



the minimum amount of time they needed to spend on religious observances.

#### The downward descent of backsliding

When one generation begins to ask ‘why bother about God?’, The next generation asks ‘why be good at all?’ Those who question whether they needed to be faithful to God would soon be questioning whether they needed to be faithful to their wife. As the family is the basic building block of society, this led to a breakdown of social cohesion. Along with divorces, came marrying outside of their own people.

#### The last prophet of the Old Testament

During this time of backsliding and apostasy, the prophet Malachi comes as the last Old Testament prophet and presents the capstone prophecy of the Old Testament. *“I have loved you, says the Lord. Yet you say, in what way have You loved us? Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? Says the Lord. Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated... Thus says the Lord of Hosts: They may build, but I will throw down...”* Malachi 1:1-5

#### Creator, King and Judge

God is the Creator in our past, the King in our present, and the Judge of our future. In this egalitarian age, many claim that God loves everybody equally. However, here we have this: *“Jacob, I have loved, but Esau I have hated...”* (1:2-3). This passage is quoted in Romans 9:13. There are people that God hates, including Esau, who despised his heritage so much that he married Hittite women and an Ishlamite, and sold his birth-right for a mere plate of food. His descendants, the Edomites, became the most intractable enemies of the people of God.

After the fall of Jerusalem in 586BC, the Edomites moved into the land and took a major part in the looting of Jerusalem. The Edomites continued to maintain a stranglehold on the land after the return of the Exiles, so much

so, that it was an Edomite king, Herod, who ordered his soldiers to butcher all the babies in Bethlehem, to snuff out the Messiah at His birth.

#### God will destroy the works of the wicked

The Lord says to those who hate him: *“Thus says the Lord of Hosts: They may build, but I will throw down...”* (1:4) For those who believed that God was obligated to protect His people, His Temple, and His land, the

of violating their terms of the Covenant. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586BC were devastating confirmations of that. It is a constant emphasis throughout the Bible that we must let the earth hear His voice. We are to proclaim God’s Word to the nations.

#### Cowardly compromise for popularity and profit

Malachi then condemns the priests for being people-pleasers, tickling the people’s ears with what they are itching to

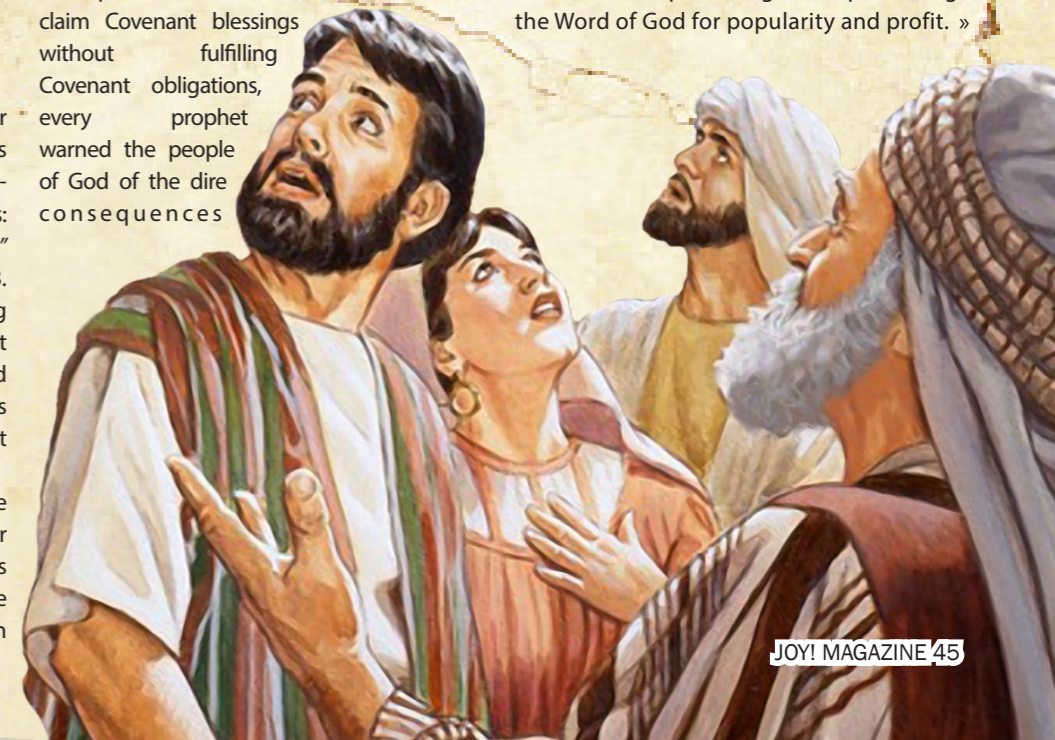
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Word came: *“The Lord is magnified beyond the border of Israel.”* (1:5)

#### Every promise has a condition

To emphasise that one cannot claim Covenant blessings without fulfilling Covenant obligations, every prophet warned the people of God of the dire consequences

hear, instead of faithfully proclaiming the Law of God. Servants of God are meant to fear God, not please men. Because they did not fear God they had become craven cowards, compromising and perverting the Word of God for popularity and profit. »



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### Despising God

Malachi 1:6 charges the priests with bringing His Name into disrepute and dishonour. Instead of offering the best sacrifices as required by the Law of God, they were choosing the worst. The priests were offering blemished, blind, and crippled "sacrifices". They were not giving God their best; they were giving God their leftovers (Malachi 1:8).

### You worship in vain

Malachi rebukes the priests with "the burden of the Lord", asking them to rather shut the doors to the Temple "So that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain. I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of Hosts, nor will I accept an offering from your hands." Malachi 1:10. "But you profane it... Oh, what a weariness! And you sneer at it... And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick... Should I accept this from your hand? says the Lord. But cursed be the deceiver... for I am a great King, says the Lord of Hosts, and My Name is to be feared among the nations." Malachi 1:12-14. The Lord states that the Gentiles have more reverence for God than these Jews do (1:11-14).

### Lawless Levites condemned

Those who will not take God's Word to heart and give glory to His Name will be cursed. "I will send a curse upon you. And I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take it to heart. Behold I will rebuke your descendants..." A minister of God should keep knowledge and the people of God must seek knowledge. "But you have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the Law, you have corrupted the Covenant..." (2:8). They were already under a curse, and worse was to come. Many of their

### Judgement begins with the people of God

The Word of the Lord comes to these arrogant sceptics that the Day will come when the Lord will put all things right. He will start by cleansing His own Temple. Yes, God is a God of Justice and He will Judge wickedness, but He will begin with the priests that serve Him and with the people who claim to be His.

### The Lord will come to His temple

"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom

The people of Judah were so backslidden that they were questioning the justice of God. They were accusing God of being unfair and indifferent to whether people were good or evil.

children would die and the priesthood would come to an end.

### Demographics is destiny

Even after 400 years in Egypt, the Israelites never became Egyptians. Nor were the people who lived in the land, that was to become Israel, ever to be considered Israelites. A nation is an ethno linguistic people-group of a shared faith. "Can two walk together unless they be agreed?" Yet the people of Judah were breaking up legitimate marriages and engaging in illegitimate ones. Many were practising serial polygamy. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught that consecutive polygamy amounts to adultery. God categorically states that He hates divorce (2:16).

### Doubtful questions

"You have wearied the Lord with your words..." Malachi 2:17. The people of Judah were so backslidden that they were questioning the justice of God. They were accusing God of being unfair and indifferent to whether people were good or evil.

you seek, will suddenly come to His Temple... But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire... I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien - because they do not fear Me... Return to Me, and I will return to you..." Malachi 3:1-7

### The Lord will judge the wicked

God identifies those that He will Judge: sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers, profiteers who exploit wage earners, widows and orphans, those who defraud labourers of their wages, use unjust weights and measures to exploit the poor, those who deprive the foreigner of justice. The Lord will send His messenger who will prepare the way for Him and the Lord Himself will come suddenly, unexpectedly, into His Temple and He will come like a refiners fire. Who will be able to stand when He appears? "For I am the Lord, I do not change..." (3:6-7)

### You have stolen from God

"You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all

*"Those who are proud and wicked will be burned up on the day of judgement and become like stubble. They shall be ashes under the soles of your feet. However for those who fear the Lord, the Son of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings and you shall go out with joy and trample the wicked under your feet."*

Malachi 4:1-6

the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My House..." Malachi 3:8-10

### Give your first fruits, your best to God

Malachi charges that the people are stealing from God. God is our Creator and our Sovereign Lord. Everything belongs to Him. He requires the first fruits, as an offering to acknowledge that He is the source of all good things that we have. Practically, this tithe and offering system provided for the full time workers of the Lord and for the ad-

the righteous and the wicked, those who serve God, and those who do not serve Him (3:17-18).

### Warning and promise

"Those who are proud and wicked will be burned up on the day of judgement and become like stubble. They shall be ashes under the soles of your feet. However for those who fear the Lord, the Son of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings and you shall go out with joy and trample the wicked under your feet." Malachi 4:1-6.

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vance of His Kingdom. People who rob God and cheat on their commitments should not expect blessings, but rather curses. Here the Lord challenges the people to test Him.

### Droughts are a judgement

This prophecy was given during a time of poor harvest and drought. "And try Me now in this, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of Heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it." (3:10).

The immediate context of this promise was rain that would break the drought and enable such a large harvest that their storehouses would not be able to contain the agriculture blessings.

### Fear God

The Lord states that He has a book of remembrance where those who fear Him and meditate on His Name are written. "So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His Name" (3:16).

### A day of division is coming

There is a time coming when the Lord will divide all into two categories. There will be

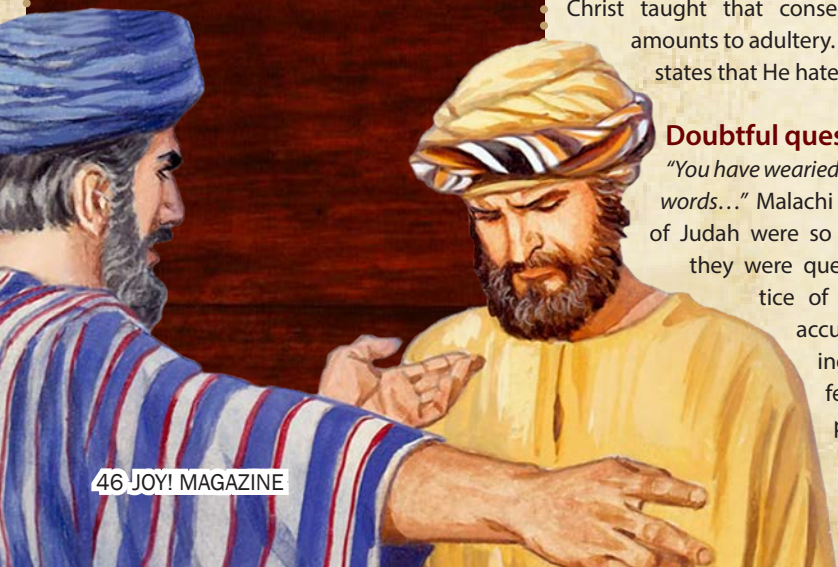
### Moses and Elijah

In the last chapter of the last Book of the Old Testament, God calls His people to remember Moses, who gave them the Law of God and Elijah, the first major prophet who challenged the idolatry and immorality of Israel. If the people of Judah do not listen to the message of Elijah, then the land will be struck with a curse.

They would receive one last chance before the Day of the Lord. One more prophet would come to prepare the way for the Lord. For over 400 years the people waited. During this time, the land of Judah was occupied by Persians, Egyptians, Syrians, Greeks, and then the Romans.

### The messenger

Finally the day of grace dawned. A man dressed like Elijah, eating locusts and wild honey, like Elijah, came and preached a similar message to Elijah. He called people back to wisdom and back to loving their children and their parents. He made clear that he was not the Messiah, he was only a voice crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord, makes paths straight, fill every valley, level every mountain, make a straight path for the Lord. »



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#### John fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah

John the Baptist baptised with water, but the Messiah would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Jesus identified his cousin John with Elijah. *"But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." Matthew 17:10-13.* So Malachi and Matthew go side by side. Matthew tells us how the message of Elijah came through John the Baptist.

#### Christ in all the Scriptures

All the prophets point to Christ. Moses and Elijah pointed to Christ. Christ has come. The Lord Himself came into His Temple and

**Christ is the fountain who brings blessings to all the nations of the earth. Those who bless Christ will be blessed.**

cleansed it. He is the Son of Righteousness who has arisen with healing in His wings. Christ is the fountain who brings blessings to all the nations of the earth. Those who bless Christ will be blessed. Those who curse Christ will be cursed. He is the only hope for mankind. *"Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds' as of many, but as of One, and to your Seed, who is Christ." Galatians 3:16. "Therefore the Law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by Faith." Galatians 3:24*

#### Turn your heart

God knows all things. He sees all things. He hears our prayers. He examines our attitudes and the motives of our heart. We must fear the Lord, love Him, and serve Him wholeheartedly. The Old Testament ends with a warning of a curse, as the New Testament ends with a promise of God's blessings on those who will trust and obey Him.

#### The end of an era

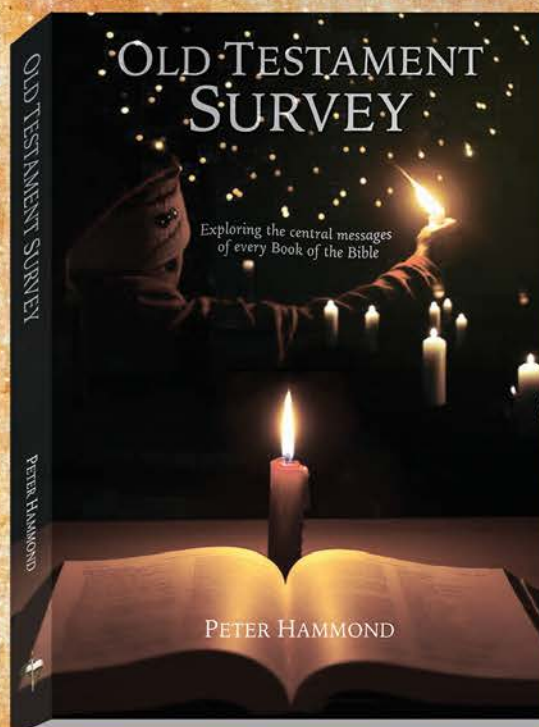
Malachi's prophecy represents the end of an era - the end of the Old Covenant. God's last Word for 400 years between the Old and New Testament. Malachi has a message of love, a message of admonition, and a message of judgement and hope. We are commanded to remember God's love, to return to Him and to put God to the test. Here we see Divine love, Divine displeasure, Divine promises and Divine victory. Back to God's House! Back to God's Word! Back to God's Work! Back to God's grace! ■

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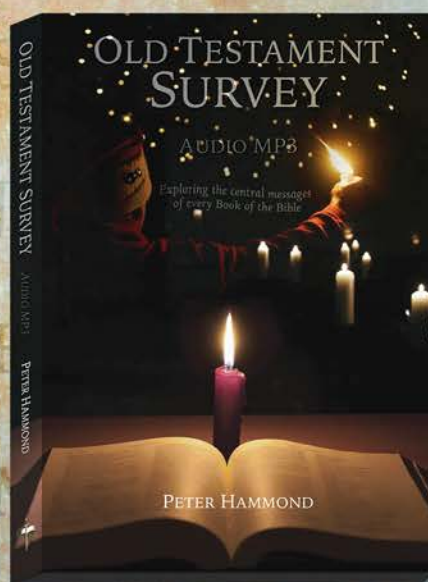
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Luke 24:27

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2 Timothy 3:16-17



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