

Mal'akhi ~ Part 1

Some have suggested that the book was written anonymously, noting that the name, meaning "my messenger" or "the Adonai's messenger," could be a title rather than a proper name. It is noted that the name occurs nowhere else in the **Tanakh**, nor is any background information provided about the author. However, since all other prophetic books have **Historically** identified their author in the introductory Heading, **this** suggests that **Mal'akhi** was indeed the name of the last prophet of the **Tanakh** in **Isra'el**. **Jewish** tradition identifies **Him** as a member of the **Great Synagogue** that collected and preserved the **Scriptures**. Nothing is known about the author except **His** name. The book emphasizes the message rather than the messenger; **God** speaks in about 47 of the 55 total verses.

Preface

1¹ A prophecy, the word of Adonai to Isra'el through Mal'akhi:

In the first chapter, we find Adonai making certain charges against the people, and the people replying with strong denials. First, **ADONAI** pleads **His** love for them, and they ask **Him** to prove it: *How do you show us your love?* **He** does so by reminding them of **His** love for **Ya'akov** (from whom they were descended), **His** rejection of **Esau**, and **His** judgments on **Esau's** descendants, the **Edomites**. The eyes of the people of **Isra'el** would see the desolation of **Edom**, and they would acknowledge the greatness of **God**.

God's Love Continues

² "I love you," says Adonai. But you ask, "How do you show us your love?" Adonai answers, 'Esav was Ya'akov's brother. Yet I loved Ya'akov³ but hated 'Esav. I made his mountains desolate and gave his territory to desert jackals.'⁴ Edom says, "We are beaten down now, but we will come back and rebuild the ruins." Adonai-Tzva'ot answers, "They can build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Land of Wickedness, the people with whom Adonai is permanently angry.⁵ You will see it and say, 'Adonai is great, even beyond the borders of Isra'el.' "

To motivate **God's** demand for proper worship (vv. 6–14), for marital faithfulness (2:10b–17), and for wholehearted commitment to **God** signified by acknowledging **His** ownership of all they had (3:7–4:6), the **Lord** reminded the people in 1:2–5 of **His** faithful love throughout their history (Jeremiah 31:3). But **Y'hudah** disputed **God's** love, showing they had allowed life's trials to blind them to **His** faithfulness and loving presence. Such spiritual depletion was at the root of not only **Isra'el's** insulting religious rites (**Malachi** 1:6–14), but also the moral decay and spiritual indifference that **Malachi** described. **God's** love had been abundantly demonstrated in recent **History**, in contrast to **His** dealings with the nation of **Edom** (descended from **Jacob's** twin brother). Someday **Isra'el** would no longer doubt **His** love. **God** had demonstrated **His** love by choosing **Isra'el** out of all the nations for an intimate relationship and by **His** subsequent faithfulness. "I loved Jacob" refers to **God's** choice of **Him** over Esau as the recipient and instrument of **His** blessing (Gen 25:23; Ro 9:10–13), as well as to **God's** enduring love for **Ya'akov's** descendants. **God hated 'Esav** inasmuch as **He** did not choose to make a covenant of blessing with **Him** and **His** descendants (the **Edomites**) but instead destroyed them for their rebellion. That nation was noted for its pride, treachery, greed, and violence. Although **God** disciplined **Isra'el** severely, **He** did not destroy them completely as **He** had done with **Edom**.

Blemished Sacrifices

Affirming the unconditional love of the **Lord** (vv. 2–5) did not absolve guilt, **Malachi** delivered an opening indictment against the priests, the nation's spiritual leaders, pointing out how they were showing contempt for **God's** sacrifices (vv. 6–14).

⁶ "A son honors his father and a servant his master. But if I'm a father, where is He honor due me? and if I'm a master, where is He respect due me?—says Adonai-Tzva'ot to you, cohanim who despise my name. You ask, 'How are we despising your name?'⁷ By offering polluted food on my altar! Now you ask, 'How are we polluting you?' By saying that the table of Adonai doesn't deserve respect,⁸ so that there's nothing wrong with offering a blind animal as a sacrifice, nothing wrong with offering an animal that's lame or sick. Try offering such an animal to your governor and see if he will be pleased with you! Would he even receive you?" asks Adonai-Tzva'ot.⁹ So if you pray now that God will show us favor, what your actions have accomplished is that Adonai-Tzva'ot asks, "Will He receive any of you?"

The only appropriate response to **God's** holiness is **fear**, which is essential to wisdom and true faith as well as wholehearted devotion and obedience. The **Temple altar** is compared to a divinely hosted dinner table, a symbol of hospitality and relationship (Ezekiel 44:16). Their casual attitude toward the altar betrayed how little the people valued their relationship with **God**. They were bringing to their **God** what they wouldn't dare offer their governor. Besides, these offerings violated the **Mosaic Law**. Judging the acceptability of sacrifices was the **priest's** responsibility. Asking for **God's** favor in verse 9 is ironic and is understood as a kind of condition. Both the questions here are assumed to have a negative reply.

¹⁰ Why doesn't even one of you shut the doors and thus stop this useless lighting of fires on my altar? I take no pleasure in you," says Adonai-Tzva'ot, "and I will not receive an offering from you.¹¹ For from far east to far west, my name is great among the nations. Offerings are presented to my name everywhere, pure gifts; for my name is great among the nations," says Adonai-Tzva'ot.¹² "But you profane it by saying that the table of Adonai is polluted, so that the fruit and food offered deserve contempt.¹³ You also say, 'It's all so tiresome!' and sniff scornfully at it," says Adonai-Tzva'ot. "Then you bring animals that were taken by violence, or they are lame or sick. This is what he sort of offers you. Am I supposed to accept this from you?" asks Adonai.¹⁴ "Moreover, cursed is the deceiver who has a male animal in his flock that is damaged, but vows and sacrifices to Adonai anyway. For I am a great king," says Adonai-Tzva'ot, "and my name is respected among the nations."¹

Adonai-Tzva'ot wishes that someone would **shut the doors** of the temple so that the sacrifices might stop, because the sacrifices were utterly unacceptable to Him. But **Adonai-Tzva'ot** will vindicate **His name ... among the nations (Gentiles)** even though **His** own people will not honor **Him**. The **Jews** despised the sacred things of the **Temple** and were wearied of serving **God**. A curse would rest upon all who brought their **damaged** odds and ends to **God** for **sacrifices**. The reason is that **Adonai-Tzva'ot** is a **great King**, and **His name is respected among the nations**.

You may be juggling multiple responsibilities at home and feel that your spiritual life is becoming neglected, similar to the offerings mentioned in **Mal'akhi** that were not given their best. Make a commitment this week to carve out a specific time each day for personal devotion, whether through prayer, reading Scripture, or reflecting on **God's** goodness with your family. Share what you discover with your loved ones, fostering an environment where faith is discussed and celebrated, reminding each other of **God's** presence in your daily lives.

In our next post, we will continue to explore **Mal'akhi**.

¹ Mal'akhi 1:1–14.