THE BOOK OF MALACHI

The King Who Sends His Messenger

Malachi, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Sends His Messenger: The Book of Malachi, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the WEB. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

Picture a youth group where everyone shows up, sings the songs, and checks the boxes, but nobody really cares anymore. Eyes roll. Phones come out. People give God whatever is left over after everything else. And when someone says God loves them, the honest reaction is, Really? Prove it.

That's the generation Malachi spoke to. They weren't wild rebels. They were bored. They had returned from exile, rebuilt the temple, and waited for God's big promises to come true. Nothing spectacular happened. So they started going through the motions, offering sick animals, breaking promises, and wondering out loud whether serving God was worth it at all.

Malachi answers them with a series of sharp debates. God makes a statement. The people talk back. God answers. It's blunt, sometimes funny, and surprisingly personal. And it ends with a promise of a messenger, a refiner's fire, and a sun rising with healing in its wings. Then the Old Testament goes quiet, and the next voice you hear is a man in the wilderness shouting, Prepare the way.

This is the last book in this series. Let's finish strong.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Malachi in four chapters, one for each chapter of Malachi: leftover worship (Malachi 1), broken promises and bored priests (2), the refiner's fire and the book of

remembrance (3), and the sun of righteousness and the bridge to the New Testament (4).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains who Malachi was, when he lived, and how his book is organized. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or talk over with someone you trust; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as what Jacob I loved, Esau I hated means, or how tithing applies today, I'll try to be fair and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Malachi in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the thirty-ninth and final book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Malachi, whose name means my messenger, prophesied around 450-430 BC, close to the time of Nehemiah, to a generation that had grown cynical and careless about God. This book walks through his six debates with the people: about God's love, careless worship, broken covenants, God's justice, giving, and whether serving God is worth it.

It explains Jacob I loved, Esau I hated as covenant-choice language, presenting the main Christian interpretations fairly. On marriage and divorce in Malachi 2:13-16, it speaks gently to teens whose parents are divorced, makes clear that a divorce is not a child's fault, and states plainly that God never asks anyone to stay in an abusive situation. On tithing in Malachi 3:10, it presents the main Christian views fairly.

Real Talk boxes address doubting God's love, giving God our leftovers, honesty, divorce, waiting for justice, being refined, generosity, feeling unseen, and healing family relationships. A

safety box encourages any teen facing abuse at home to talk with a trusted adult and lists Childhelp (1-800-422-4453), 988, and 911.

The closing section, Where This Points, serves as a bridge from the whole Old Testament into the New, showing John the Baptist as the promised messenger and Jesus as the Sun of Righteousness. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

My prayer is that every reader who has been going through the motions will discover that God has loved them all along.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

My Messenger

The name Malachi means my messenger. We know almost nothing else about him: no father's name, no hometown, no king's reign to date his work. Some scholars even think Malachi may be a title rather than a personal name, since the same word appears in Malachi 3:1, where God promises to send His messenger. Either way, the point is clear. This book is a message straight from God.

When Malachi Lived

Malachi doesn't give a date, but clues help. The temple has been rebuilt, so it's after 515 BC. A Persian governor is in charge. And the problems Malachi addresses, careless priests, marriages to worshipers of other gods, and people failing to bring their tithes, are the same problems Nehemiah faced. So most scholars place Malachi around 450-430 BC, around the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

A Bored Generation

About a century had passed since the first exiles returned. Haggai and Zechariah had promised glory, but life was still hard, and Judah was still a small province of the Persian Empire. The people hadn't abandoned God completely. They still went to the temple. But their hearts weren't in it. They gave God their leftovers, broke their promises, and quietly wondered whether God even noticed.

You Say, God Answers

Malachi is structured as six debates. Each one follows a pattern. God makes a statement. The people push back, often with the words, Yet you say. Then God answers. The six debates are about God's love (1:2-5), dishonoring God (1:6-2:9), unfaithfulness (2:10-16), God's justice (2:17-3:5), robbing God (3:6-12), and whether serving God is worth it (3:13-4:3). It reads almost like a transcript of an argument.

The Last Word Before the Silence

In Christian Bibles, Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. After Malachi, no new prophetic book was written for about four hundred years. These are sometimes called the silent years. God was still at work, but no new prophet spoke until John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, announcing that the Lord was coming.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Malachi 1): Leftover worship.

Chapter 2 (Malachi 2): Broken promises and bored priests.

Chapter 3 (Malachi 3): The refiner's fire and the book of remembrance.

Chapter 4 (Malachi 4): The sun of righteousness and the bridge to the New Testament.

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CHAPTER 1

Leftover Worship

Malachi 1

Malachi's book opens with just four words from God, and they might be the most important words in it. "I have loved you, says the LORD."

You'd expect the people to respond with gratitude. Instead, they rolled their eyes. "Yet you say, How have you loved us?"

That's the first of six debates in Malachi. And it's a question many people still ask. If God loves me, why is my life so hard? Why haven't His promises come true? Why does it feel like He's not paying attention?

God's answer surprises many readers. He pointed to two brothers. "Wasn't Esau Jacob's brother? says the LORD, Yet I loved Jacob; but Esau I hated."

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Jacob I Loved, Esau I Hated**
>
> Those words sound harsh, and Christians have understood them in different ways. Most scholars agree that love and hate here are covenant language, describing choosing and not choosing. In the ancient world, a king might say he loved one nation and hated another, meaning he had chosen one as his ally. Jesus used similar language when He said His followers must hate their own families, meaning love Him far more. Jacob and Esau also stand for two nations, Israel and Edom. God chose Israel to carry His promises, not because they were better, but out of grace. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9. Some

Christians read it as being mainly about God's choice of nations and their roles in history. Others read it as also being about God's choice of individuals for salvation. Either way, the point in Malachi is that God's love for Israel was a choice He made freely, not something they earned.

God reminded them of what had happened to Edom, Esau's descendants. Their land had been devastated, and it would stay that way. But Israel was still here, still God's people, still being restored. "Your eyes will see, and you will say, The LORD is great."

REAL TALK **How Have You Loved Us?**

Have you ever felt that way about God? Maybe your family is going through a hard time, or you're struggling with loneliness, anxiety, or a prayer that never seems to get answered. It's okay to ask God hard questions. But notice how God answered. He pointed back to what He had already done. When you doubt God's love, look back. Look at the ways He has carried you so far. And look at the cross, the clearest proof of all that God loves you.

Then came the second debate, aimed at the priests. "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, then where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is the respect due me?"

The priests were shocked. How had they despised God's name? God's answer was specific. "You offer polluted bread on my altar."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Sacrifices Without Blemish**

The law of Moses said that animals offered to God had to be without defect. No blind, lame, or sick animals. Sacrifices were supposed to be costly, the best of the flock. A sacrifice represented giving your best to God. But in Malachi's time, people were bringing animals they didn't want anyway, the ones that were injured or sick or about to die. And the priests were accepting them.

Then God made a sarcastic challenge. "When you offer the blind for sacrifice, isn't that evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, isn't

that evil? Present it now to your governor! Will he be pleased with you?"

The governor was the Persian official in charge of the province. Nobody would dare give him a sick, limping animal as a gift. They'd bring him their best. But they were giving God their leftovers.

> **REAL TALK** **Leftover Worship**
>
> Today, most people don't bring animals to church. But we can still give God our leftovers. We give Him whatever time is left after sports, school, gaming, and social media. We pray when we're too tired to do anything else. We give whatever money is left after we've bought what we want. We serve when it's convenient. Malachi asks a hard question: would you treat someone important the way you treat God? You wouldn't show up late and distracted to meet the president or your favorite celebrity. God is greater than any of them. He deserves our first and best, not our leftovers.

God said He'd rather someone just shut the temple doors than keep offering worthless sacrifices. Fake worship was worse than no worship at all.

Then God looked beyond Israel. "For from the rising of the sun even to its going down, my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering."

That was a stunning statement. Even while Israel's priests were bored with worship, God promised that people all over the world would one day worship Him sincerely. Christians see this fulfilled as the good news of Jesus spread to every nation, and as people from every culture now worship God around the clock somewhere on earth.

But the priests had a bad attitude. They complained about their work. "You say also, Behold, what a weariness it is! And you have sniffed at it."

REAL TALK **What a Weariness**

The priests had the greatest job imaginable, serving in God's presence. And they were bored. They rolled their eyes and sighed. Sometimes, church, youth group, or Bible reading can feel boring. Maybe you've heard it all before. That's normal, and it's worth being honest about. But boredom can also be a warning sign that we've forgotten how great God is. Try asking God to show you something new about Him. Read a part of the Bible you've never read. Serve someone. Worship God in a new way. God isn't boring. Sometimes we just stop paying attention.

God ended the chapter with a reminder. "For I am a great King, says the LORD of Armies, and my name is awesome among the nations." God deserved better than leftovers because of who He was.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Six Debates**

Malachi's debates follow a pattern you can spot easily once you know it. First, God makes a claim, such as I have loved you, or You have wearied Me. Second, the people answer with a question that sounds innocent but is really a challenge: How? Third, God gives evidence. Some scholars compare this style to a courtroom, where God is both the judge and the one bringing the charges. Others compare it to the way Jewish teachers later taught, through questions and answers. Either way, Malachi doesn't just preach at the people. He lets their own words reveal their hearts.

Notice that the people never seem to think they've done anything wrong. Every time God points out a problem, they act surprised. That's one of the dangers of going through the motions. When religion becomes routine, it's easy to stop noticing that your heart has drifted. Malachi's questions are like a mirror. They help us see what we've stopped seeing.

KEY VERSE

For from the rising of the sun even to its going down, my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering;

Malachi 1:11 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the people asked, How have You loved us?
2. What do you think Jacob I loved, Esau I hated means?
3. In what ways do people give God their leftovers today?
4. What would it look like to give God your first and best this week?

TRY THIS *Look at your schedule for this week. Choose one time slot, maybe the first fifteen minutes of your day, and give it to God first before anything else. Pray, read a psalm, or simply thank Him.*

CHAPTER 2

Broken Promises and Bored Priests

Malachi 2

Chapter 2 begins with a serious warning to the priests. “Now, you priests, this commandment is for you. If you will not listen, and if you will not take it to heart, to give glory to my name, says the LORD of Armies, then I will send the curse on you, and I will curse your blessings.”

The priests had been entrusted with God’s covenant with Levi, the tribe of priests. God described what a faithful priest was supposed to be. “The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many away from iniquity.”

> BACKGROUND CHECK **The Covenant with Levi**
>
> In Israel, the tribe of Levi was set apart to serve God. Some Levites served as priests, offering sacrifices. Others helped in the temple and taught God’s law. Priests were supposed to be teachers, helping people understand God’s ways. Malachi says, “For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of Armies.” Notice the word messenger, the same word as Malachi’s name. Priests were supposed to be God’s messengers.

But the priests had failed. “But you have turned away from the path. You have caused many to stumble in the law.” They also showed favoritism, treating rich and powerful people differently from ordinary people.

> **REAL TALK** **Leaders Who Let You Down**
>
> Maybe you’ve been disappointed by a church leader, a coach, a teacher, or a parent. Maybe someone who taught you about God didn’t live it out. That can make you question your faith. Malachi shows that God cares deeply when leaders fail. He holds them responsible. But a leader’s failure doesn’t mean God has failed. If a leader has hurt you, talk to another trusted adult. And remember that God Himself is the perfect leader, who never lets you down.

Then came the third debate, about faithfulness. “Don’t we all have one father? Hasn’t one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, profaning the covenant of our fathers?”

The people were breaking promises to one another. Malachi gave two examples. First, some men had married women who worshiped other gods. In Nehemiah’s time, this had led many people away from God. The issue wasn’t race or nationality. It was faith. Marrying someone who worshiped idols meant bringing idols into the family.

Second, some men were divorcing their wives. And still, they came to the temple weeping and wondering why God wasn’t answering their prayers. “Yet you say, Why? Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and the wife of your covenant.”

BACKGROUND CHECK **Divorce in Malachi's Day**

In the ancient world, women had very few rights. A man could often divorce his wife for almost any reason, leaving her with no income, no home, and no protection. Some men in Malachi's time seem to have been divorcing the wives they had married when they were young, possibly to marry younger or wealthier women. Malachi calls this treachery, a betrayal of a sacred covenant. God was standing up for wives who had been abandoned. Translations of Malachi 2:16 differ. Some say God hates divorce. The WEB says that one who hates and divorces covers his garment with violence. Either way, the point is that God cares deeply about faithfulness and about protecting the vulnerable.

REAL TALK **If Your Parents Are Divorced**

If your parents are divorced, reading a passage like this might hurt. Please hear this clearly: your parents' divorce is not your fault. Nothing you did caused it, and nothing you could have done would have prevented it. Malachi is not saying God rejects people who have been through divorce. God loves you and both of your parents. Many divorces happen for painful reasons, including unfaithfulness, abuse, or abandonment. God is close to the brokenhearted. If your family has been through a divorce, it's okay to grieve. Talk to a trusted adult about how you feel.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Safety: Abuse Is Never What God Asks**

God values faithfulness, but He never asks anyone to stay in a situation where they are being abused. Malachi 2:16 links unfaithfulness with violence, and God stands against violence. If someone in your home is hurting you or someone else, it is not your fault, and you don't have to keep it secret. Tell a trusted adult, like a teacher, school counselor, or pastor. You can call or text Childhelp at 1-800-422-4453, any time. If you're feeling hopeless, call or text 988. If anyone is in immediate danger, call 911.

God's design for marriage is faithfulness. Malachi says, "Therefore pay attention to your spirit, that you don't be unfaithful." Jesus said

the same thing. "What therefore God has joined together, don't let man tear apart."

> **REAL TALK** **Keeping Your Word**
>
> Faithfulness starts long before marriage. It starts with keeping your word to your friends, your family, and God. Do you do what you say you'll do? Do you stay loyal to friends when it's hard? Do you keep secrets that should be kept and tell the truth when it matters? Every promise you keep now builds the kind of character that will make you a faithful friend, spouse, and person someday.

Then came the fourth debate. "You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, How have we wearied him?" God answered by quoting their complaints. They said that evil people seemed to be doing fine, as if God approved of them. And they asked, "Where is the God of justice?"

That's a question people still ask. Why do bullies get away with it? Why do cheaters win? Why do bad people prosper? Malachi's people were tired of waiting for God to make things right. The answer to their question comes in chapter 3. And it's not what they expected.

> **REAL TALK** **Where Is the God of Justice?**
>
> It's okay to be frustrated when you see injustice. God is frustrated too. But Malachi's people had turned their frustration into cynicism, deciding that God either didn't care or approved of evil. There's a difference between crying out to God about injustice and giving up on Him. The psalms are full of honest complaints that end in trust. If you're angry about something unfair, bring it to God. Then look for ways to do justice yourself: stand up for someone who's being picked on, speak the truth, and treat others fairly.

KEY VERSE

Don't we all have one father? Hasn't one God created us?

Malachi 2:10 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What did God expect from His priests?
2. Why does God care so much about faithfulness?
3. If your family has been through divorce, what do you want to remember from this chapter?
4. When have you wondered, Where is the God of justice?

TRY THIS *Think of one promise you've made and haven't kept, to a friend, a family member, or God. This week, keep it, or apologize and make it right.*

CHAPTER 3

The Refiner's Fire and the Book of Remembrance

Malachi 3

The people had asked, "Where is the God of justice?" God's answer came right away, and it was a promise. "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me! The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple."

Notice the two figures. First, a messenger would come to prepare the way. Then the Lord Himself would come to His temple. The people wanted justice. God said, I'm coming to bring it Myself.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **Preparing the Way**
>
> In the ancient world, when a king traveled, a messenger went ahead of him. The messenger announced the king's arrival and made sure the roads were cleared and repaired. Isaiah used the same picture: a voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the LORD. Malachi says God would send a messenger like that before He came. All four Gospels connect this promise with John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus. Mark's Gospel begins by quoting both Malachi and Isaiah.

The people said they wanted God to come. But Malachi warned them to be careful what they wished for. "But who can endure the

day of his coming? And who will stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like launderers' soap."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Refiner's Fire**

To purify silver, a refiner heated it in a pot over a very hot fire. As the metal melted, impurities called dross rose to the surface, and the refiner skimmed them off. The process was repeated until the silver was pure. An old story says a refiner knows the silver is ready when he can see his own reflection in it. Launderers' soap was a strong cleaning agent made from plants and ashes, used to scrub cloth until it was clean and white. Both pictures show God coming not to destroy His people, but to purify them.

Malachi said the Lord "will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them as gold and silver." Notice that the refiner sits. He stays close, watching carefully. He doesn't walk away while the silver is in the fire.

REAL TALK **In the Fire**

Sometimes life feels like a fire. A hard class, a broken friendship, a family crisis, an illness, or a season of loneliness. God doesn't cause every hard thing, but He can use hard things to shape us. Peter wrote that our faith is "more precious than gold that perishes, even though it is tested by fire." If you're in the fire right now, remember that the Refiner is sitting close by. He hasn't left you. He's making something beautiful. And if the fire feels like too much, please talk to a trusted adult, or call or text 988.

God also said He would come to bring justice against those who did wrong: sorcerers, adulterers, liars, and those who cheated workers out of their wages or oppressed widows, orphans, and foreigners. God sees how people treat the vulnerable. And He will make it right.

Then God said something wonderful. "For I, the LORD, don't change; therefore you, sons of Jacob, are not consumed."

REAL TALK **The God Who Doesn't Change**

Everything changes. Friendships change. Families change. Your body changes. Your feelings change, sometimes by the hour. But God doesn't change. His love, His faithfulness, and His promises stay the same. The only reason Israel hadn't been wiped out was that God had kept His promises, even when they hadn't kept theirs. The New Testament says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." When everything else is shifting, you can stand on Him.

Then came the fifth debate. God invited the people back. "Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of Armies. But you say, How shall we return?"

God's answer was surprising. "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me! But you say, How have we robbed you? In tithes and offerings."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Tithes and Offerings**

A tithe means a tenth. In the law of Moses, Israelites gave a tenth of their crops and animals to God. The tithes supported the Levites and priests, who didn't own farmland, and helped care for the poor, widows, orphans, and foreigners. In Nehemiah's time, people stopped bringing their tithes, so the Levites had to leave the temple and go work in the fields. When God's people stopped giving, God's work and the vulnerable both suffered.

Then God made a bold invitation. "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and test me now in this, says the LORD of Armies, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there will not be enough room for."

This is one of the only places in the Bible where God invites people to test Him.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Tithing Today**

Christians understand tithing in different ways. Some believe Christians should still give a tenth of their income to their local church, as a starting point for generosity. Others believe that the tithe was part of the law of Moses and that the New Testament calls Christians to generous, joyful giving without a fixed percentage. Paul wrote, "Let each man give according as he has determined in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Most Christians agree on a few things: everything we have comes from God, generosity should be cheerful and not forced, and God cares how we use our money. Some teachers have twisted Malachi 3:10 to promise that giving will make you rich. But the blessing Malachi describes is God's provision, not a guarantee of wealth.

REAL TALK **Generosity**

You might not have much money right now. That's okay. Generosity isn't about the amount. Jesus praised a poor widow who gave two tiny coins, because she gave everything she had. You can be generous with your time, your attention, your talents, and your kindness, as well as your money. Try setting aside a portion of whatever money you receive, from a job, an allowance, or a birthday gift, to give to God's work or to help someone in need. Generosity grows like a muscle. The more you practice it, the stronger it gets.

Then came the sixth and final debate. God said, "Your words have been harsh against me." The people asked what they had said. God quoted them. "It is vain to serve God." They complained that serving God didn't seem to pay off. Arrogant people seemed happy. Evildoers were doing just fine.

But not everyone felt that way. "Then those who feared the LORD spoke one with another; and the LORD listened and heard, and a book of memory was written before him for those who feared the LORD and who honored his name."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Book of Remembrance**

Persian kings kept official records of people who had done something good for the king, so they could be rewarded later. In the book of Esther, King Xerxes couldn't sleep one night, so he had his book of records read to him. He discovered that Mordecai had once saved his life and had never been rewarded. Malachi says God keeps a book like that, too. He remembers every faithful person, every quiet conversation, and every act of honor, even when no one else notices.

God said of those faithful people, "They shall be mine, says the LORD of Armies, my own possession in the day that I make." Other translations say my treasured possession, or my special treasure.

REAL TALK **Seen and Remembered**

Do you ever feel invisible? Like the good things you do don't matter, and nobody notices when you choose to do the right thing? Malachi says God notices. When a few faithful people talked to each other about God, He listened. He wrote their names down. He called them His treasure. You are not invisible to God. Every kind act, every honest choice, every prayer is remembered. And one day, God will show the difference between those who served Him and those who didn't.

KEY VERSE

Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me! The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple.

Malachi 3:1 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Who do the Gospels identify as the messenger who prepared the way?
2. How is God like a refiner?
3. What do you think about tithing and generosity today?
4. How does it feel to know that God keeps a book of remembrance?

TRY THIS *Choose one way to be generous this week with your money, your time, or your talents. Do it quietly, without telling anyone, and trust that God sees.*

CHAPTER 4

The Sun of Righteousness and the Bridge to the New Testament

Malachi 4

In English Bibles, Malachi's last six verses are numbered as chapter 4. In Hebrew Bibles, they're part of chapter 3. Either way, they form the grand finale of Malachi, and in Christian Bibles, of the whole Old Testament.

The final debate had asked whether serving God was worth it. Malachi's answer was that a day was coming that would make the difference clear. "For behold, the day comes, burning like a furnace, when all the proud and all who work wickedness will be stubble."

Stubble is the dry, leftover stalks in a field after a harvest. It burns quickly. Malachi says that those who choose pride and evil will have nothing left, "neither root nor branch."

But for those who honor God, the same day would bring something completely different. "But to you who fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings. You will go out and leap like calves of the stall."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Healing in Its Wings**

In the ancient Near East, the sun was sometimes pictured as a disk with wings, spreading its rays across the earth. Malachi borrows that image to describe the dawn of God's righteousness, bringing light and healing. The Hebrew word for wings can also mean the edges or corners of a garment. Some readers connect this with the woman who touched the edge of Jesus' cloak and was healed. Calves kept in a stall all winter would leap and run when they were finally let out into the sunshine. That's the kind of joy Malachi describes.

REAL TALK **Leap Like Calves**

Have you ever felt stuck, like a calf in a stall? Stuck in sadness, fear, shame, or the same old routine? Malachi promises that God's light brings healing and freedom. When Jesus heals someone, it's like a door swinging open and sunlight pouring in. Faith isn't meant to be grim and joyless. It's meant to make you come alive. If you're in a dark season right now, hold on. The sun is rising. And if the darkness feels too heavy, please talk to a trusted adult, or call or text 988.

Then Malachi gave two final instructions. First, look back. "Remember the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded to him in Horeb for all Israel, even statutes and ordinances." Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, where God gave Moses the law.

Second, look ahead. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Elijah Is Coming**

Elijah was one of the greatest prophets in Israel's history. He confronted wicked King Ahab, called down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel, and was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind without dying. Because of Malachi 4:5, Jewish tradition expected Elijah to return before the Messiah came. To this

day, at the Passover meal, many Jewish families pour a cup for Elijah and open the door to welcome him. In the New Testament, an angel said John the Baptist would go in the spirit and power of Elijah. Jesus said John was the Elijah who was to come. John even dressed like Elijah, in camel's hair with a leather belt.

Notice what Elijah would do. He would turn the hearts of fathers to their children and children to their fathers. Before the great day of the LORD, God would bring healing to families.

REAL TALK **Turning Hearts**

Maybe your relationship with your parents is strained right now. Maybe you argue a lot, or you feel like they don't understand you. Maybe a parent has left, or you feel far away from them even when you're in the same room. God cares about families. He wants to turn hearts toward each other. That might start with you: an apology, a kind word, a conversation. It doesn't mean pretending everything is fine, and it never means staying silent about abuse. If a parent is hurting you, tell a trusted adult or call Childhelp at 1-800-422-4453. But where healing is possible, God is in the business of turning hearts.

And then, the Old Testament ends. The last word in Malachi is curse.

BACKGROUND CHECK **How the Old Testament Ends**

Jewish and Christian Bibles contain the same books of the Hebrew Scriptures, but they arrange them differently. The Hebrew Bible ends with 2 Chronicles, where King Cyrus of Persia invites God's people to go up and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. It ends with an invitation to go home. Christian Old Testaments end with Malachi, with its promise of a coming messenger and the Lord coming to His temple. Then you turn the page, and the very next book is Matthew. In synagogues, when Malachi is read aloud, the second-to-last verse is often repeated at the end, so the reading doesn't finish on the word curse.

After Malachi, about four hundred years passed without a new prophetic book. During those years, the Persians fell to Alexander the Great. The Greeks ruled. The Maccabees fought for freedom. Then the Romans took over. Through it all, faithful people waited and remembered God's promises.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Silent Years**

The four hundred years between Malachi and Matthew weren't empty. The Jewish people collected and copied their Scriptures, and the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the language much of the world spoke. Synagogues sprang up wherever Jewish people lived, giving them places to pray and read God's word every Sabbath. Rome built roads across its empire, and Greek became a common language from Spain to Syria. Looking back, many Christians see God quietly preparing the world for the good news of Jesus to spread quickly. Paul later wrote that when the fullness of time came, God sent His Son.

REAL TALK **When God Seems Silent**

Have you ever prayed and heard nothing back? Maybe you've waited a long time for an answer, and it feels like God has gone quiet. Four hundred years is a long time to wait. But God wasn't absent during the silent years. He was preparing. When God seems silent in your life, it doesn't mean He has forgotten you. Keep reading His word, keep praying, and keep showing up. The same God who broke four centuries of silence with the birth of a baby can speak into your situation, right on time.

And then, one day, an old priest named Zechariah was serving in the temple when an angel appeared. The angel told him that his son, John, would go "in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children."

The silence was over. The messenger was coming. The Lord was coming to His temple.

KEY VERSE

But to you who fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings. You will go out and leap like calves of the stall.

Malachi 4:2 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What does the image of the sun of righteousness with healing in its wings mean to you?
2. Why do you think Malachi ends with a promise about families?
3. How did John the Baptist fulfill the promise of Elijah?
4. What difference does it make that the Christian Old Testament ends right before Matthew?

TRY THIS *Read Malachi 4 and then Luke 1:5-17 right after it. Notice how the angel picks up exactly where Malachi left off. Then thank God for keeping His promises, even after four hundred years.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

You've made it. Thirty-nine books, from In the beginning to the last words of Malachi. Along the way, the Old Testament has been building toward something: a Seed who would crush the serpent, a Lamb who would take away sin, a King from David's line, a Servant pierced for our transgressions, a Shepherd struck for the sheep. Malachi ends by promising a messenger who would prepare the way for the Lord Himself. Then the story pauses for four hundred years.

And then, turn one page in a Christian Bible, and you're in Matthew. "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." A few chapters later, John the Baptist appears in the wilderness. An angel had told his father that John would go "in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children." Jesus said of John, "For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you." And He added, "If you are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, who is to come." The messenger had come. That means the Lord had come too. John's father sang that "the dawn from on high will visit us." Jesus is the Sun of Righteousness, and He said, "I am the light of the world." Malachi's final word was a warning of a curse. But at the cross, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." The Old Testament ends with the threat of a curse. The New Testament ends with the promise that there will be no more curse.

Here's what that means for you, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God says, I have loved you. That was true for the bored generation in Malachi, and it is true for you.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all sinned.

Like the people in Malachi, we all give God our leftovers and break our promises. The Bible says all of us have sinned.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is holy, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus took the curse.

Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, died for our sins and rose again. He took the curse so we could receive the blessing.

> *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. You were healed by his wounds.* **1 Peter 2:24 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation isn't a reward for giving God your best. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus, who gave His best for you.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Welcome the King.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? Malachi says, Return to Me, and I will return to you. You can return to God today. You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've been going through the motions. I've given You my leftovers and doubted that You love me. Thank You that You have loved me all along. Thank You that Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, took the curse for me on the cross and rose again. Forgive me, refine me, and make me Yours. Turn my heart toward You and toward the people You've put in my life. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Malachi 3-4, then turn the page to Matthew 1-3 and Luke 1.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Turn the page. You've finished the Old Testament. Now start the New Testament, beginning with Matthew, and watch every promise come alive.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Malachi's generation had plenty of doubts too, and God answered every one. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Malachi is right, God has loved you all along, and the sun is about to rise.

But to you who fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings.

Malachi 4:2 (WEB)