

# OpenTheo

## October 5th: Malachi 1 & Matthew 24:29-51

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The Lord's first two disputes with the people. The coming of the Son of Man.

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## Transcript

Malachi chapter 1. The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, how have you loved us? Is not Esau Jacob's brother, declares the Lord.

Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country, and left his heritage to jackals of the desert. If Edom says, We are shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins.

The Lord of hosts says, They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called the wicked country, and the people with whom the Lord is angry forever. Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel. A son honors his father, and a servant his master.

If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? Says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, How have we despised your name? By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, How have we polluted you? By saying that the Lord's table may be despised.

When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor. Will he accept you or show you favor? Says the Lord of hosts. And now entreat the favor of God that he may be gracious to us.

With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? Says the Lord of hosts. O that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain. I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.

For from the rising of the sun to its setting, my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised.

But you say, What a weariness this is! And you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence, or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering. Shall I accept that from your hand? Says the Lord.

Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and bows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations. Malachi is the final of the prophets of the book of the twelve, and the last of the exilic prophets.

In contrast to the two books that precede it, Haggai and Zechariah, it is undated and we need to pick up on other clues in order to get a sense of the setting into which Malachi prophesied. Most of the book of Malachi contains disputes between the Lord and his people on a series of matters, six disputes in total. Commentators have noted the similarities between the issues raised by Malachi and some of the problems that were dealt with by Nehemiah, corruption in sacrificial practice, unfaithfulness in marriage practices, failure to pay tithes, and injustice in the society were all issues in Nehemiah's day, although Nehemiah seemed to have some success in dealing with them, slightly raising the likelihood that Malachi came either before or after Nehemiah.

The fact that he isn't mentioned in the book of Nehemiah is another thing to consider. This said, sins such as those tackled by Malachi were prominent at many points in Israel's history. The reference to the governor in verse 8 and to the house of the Lord suggests that at the least this was after the rebuilding of the temple and during the Persian period.

The name Malachi means my messenger. Malachi refers to the priest as a messenger in chapter 2 verse 7. 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 hosts. He also speaks of a coming messenger in chapter 3 verse 1. 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 and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight.

Behold he is coming says the Lord of hosts. Considering these references some commentators have wondered whether Malachi was the prophet's actual name but there is no compelling reason to believe that it wasn't. The disputes of the book of Malachi have a question and answer format.

The first chapter contains the first dispute in verses 1 to 5 and the start of the second which runs from verse 6 of this chapter to verse 9 of the next. As James Jordan observes such a disputation approach is not exclusive to Malachi. Paul uses a similar rhetorical technique in the book of Romans.

Anthony Patterson observes the manner in which the opening verses of the book are a series of three successive small A B B A chiasms. For instance I have loved you is juxtaposed with how have you loved us and says the Lord is juxtaposed with but you say. In this and other disputations the Lord gives voice to the unfaithful hearts of his people and then answers their sentiments.

The oracle or burden of Malachi opens with the Lord's declaration of his love for his people. A love manifested in his choosing of Jacob over his older twin brother Esau. Israel was the bride of the Lord chosen by him from among all of the peoples in love not an account of anything on Israel's part that would set them apart from any other.

As Moses taught in Deuteronomy chapter 7 verses 6 to 8. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you for you were the fewest of all peoples but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers that the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

The love that the Lord showed for Jacob is contrasted with his hatred of Esau the brother of Jacob. The contrast here is principally one between choice and rejection using the same verb for hating that is used of Jacob's attitude towards Leah in Genesis chapter 29 verses 31 and 33. The hatred there probably doesn't bear quite the same strong sense with which we are accustomed to using the term as in verse 30 of that chapter Jacob is described as loving Rachel more than Leah.

In its use here in Malachi the term probably has a stronger sense than it does in those verses in Genesis. Here hatred probably refers to the Lord's determined rejection of Esau and his posterity. He doesn't merely love them less.

Esau and his land also suffer condemnation and judgment from the Lord. The Lord's love for Jacob becomes more apparent when seen in contrast to Esau who is judged by the Lord. The Edomites had taken advantage of their brother Jacob's weakness at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem to plunder and to join in the cruelty.

In several prophecies perhaps especially Obadiah Edom is condemned for its behavior and judgment is declared over it. Our records of the relevant history are limited. Many scholars argued that the Babylonian Nabonidus was the one who brought Edom down in 553 BC.

This would have fulfilled the prophecy of Ezekiel chapter 35 verses 7 to 15. I will make Mount Seir a waste and a desolation and I will cut off from it all who come and go and I will fill its mountains with the slain on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those slain with the sword shall fall. I will make you a perpetual desolation and your cities shall not be inhabited then you will know that I am the Lord.

Because you said these two nations and these two countries shall be mine and we will take possession of them although the Lord was there. Therefore as I live declares the Lord God I will deal with you according to the anger and envy that you showed because of your hatred against them and I will make myself known among them when I judge you and you shall know that I am the Lord. I have heard all the revilings that you uttered against the mountains of Israel saying they are laid desolate they are given us to devour and you magnified yourselves against me with your mouth and multiplied your words against me.

I heard it thus says the Lord God while the whole earth rejoices I will make you desolate as you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate so I will deal with you you shall be desolate Mount Seir and all Edom all of it then they will know that I am the Lord. Although the Edomites would seek to return to their land and rebuild as Israel had done the Lord would doom such efforts to futility demonstrating his sovereignty over nations beyond Israel's borders. The Edomites were removed from their former territory which was now occupied by the Nabataean Arabs with old Edomite cities and fortresses falling into ruins.

Verse six begins the second disputation and the longest of all of the six. The Lord is in various points in the prophets and elsewhere compared to the father of his people and also to their master but yet fathers and masters receive honor and reverence but no reverence seems to be accorded to the Lord and most particularly by the priests who should lead the people in such a matter. Indeed the Lord goes so far to accuse them of despising his name naturally their response would be to claim innocence so the Lord declares why it is that he is judging them in such a manner.

Whatever they might say their judgments speak loudly about the true contents of their hearts even though they'd never say with their lips that they despised the There was

little doubting from their actions that they did so. They treated the altar, the Lord's table, with scant respect for its holiness offering sacrifices which were not fitting upon it. Deuteronomy chapter 15 verse 21 is one of the verses that speaks about unfitting sacrifices.

But if it has any blemish if it is lame or blind or has any serious blemish whatever you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord your God. They are seeking to pass off second class animals as if they were proper gifts to the Lord. In fact they seem to be using their sacrifices as a means of bribing the Lord and if that weren't enough of a perversion of sacrifice by itself the bribes that they are offering are very much of a lower quality.

The Lord sarcastically suggests that they offer these sacrifices to their governor knowing that the people are well aware that a governor would be offended by such substandard gifts. The people are naive and foolish if they believe that they're going to be heard by the Lord when they despise him in such a manner. They bear the name of the Lord particularly the priests and the high priest and yet they're acting with hypocrisy acting in a manner that undermines their identity as the people of God.

As Samuel said to Saul has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord. Behold to obey is better than sacrifice and to listen than the fat of rams. The Lord goes so far as to suggest that they'd be better off if one of the priests would just shut the doors of the temple and render it inoperative.

That would at the least prevent them from performing pointless sacrifices from offering offerings that the Lord would never accept. The unfaithful sacrifices of the Lord's people are contrasted in verse 11 to the sacrifices that will one day be offered by the people of all nations offering a pure sacrifice and acceptable incense to the name of the Lord. The name of the Lord that was dishonored among and by his people would be held in high esteem among the nations made great among them.

The Jews had treated the table of the Lord as a common thing suggesting that things of lesser quality could be offered upon it. They regarded the worship of the Lord and his sacrifices as onerous and a drudgery and yet despite their posture of heart they presumptuously expected that the Lord would be pleased with and would accept their sacrifices. He would of course do nothing of the kind.

It is not only the priests that are condemned. In verse 14 the individual sacrificer is condemned. The person who would not perform his proper vow.

A man who had vowed a fine ram of his flock when he was delivered from trouble or some other thing that had occasioned his vow was completed. He sacrificed to the Lord what was blemished. Lying to the Lord and breaking the vow that he had made.

The Lord declares that he is a great king. He is the Lord of hosts. An expression that's

used in about 40 percent of the verses of this book.

The nations would come to fear the name of the Lord and yet the Lord's own people were dishonoring his name by their practice. A question to consider. What can we learn from the fact that the altar is here called the Lord's table? Matthew chapter 24 verse 29 to 51.

From the fig tree learn its lesson. As soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves you know that summer is near. So also when you see all these things you know that he is near at the very gates.

Truly I say to you this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away. But concerning that day and hour no one knows.

Not even the angels of heaven nor the sun but the father only. For as were the days of Noah so will be the coming of the son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away.

So will be the coming of the son of man. Then two men will be in the field. One will be taken and one left.

Two women will be grinding at the mill. One will be taken and one left. Therefore stay awake for you do not know on what day your lord is coming.

But know this that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready for the son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

Truly I say to you he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself my master is delayed and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The language of the second part of Matthew 24 is arresting to us. It seems so extreme and cosmic that many people can't imagine it relating to anything other than the destruction of the entire universe on the last day. But it needn't be.

If we look in the Old Testament and we're familiar with Old Testament language we'll see many examples of this sort of cosmic language being used to speak of events in history.

In Isaiah chapter 13 verses 6, 9 to 11 and 19 we read So this arresting cosmic language in this passage refers to the fall of Babylon, an event in history. But it's using the symbolism of stars and sun and moon.

These represent rulers. If we spoke about 50 stars falling from the heavens people would know what we meant. Now that cosmic imagery is more prevalent within the Old Testament and within the imagination of the ancient Near East but we have it too.

We have it on our flags. We put stars on our flags. We put moons on our flags.

We have suns on some flags as well. They represent authority. They represent power and things that are secure in the heavens.

And those heavens being destroyed or rolled up, that's a sign of the world order being removed. Similar language can be found in Isaiah chapter 34 verses 3 to 4. Again the destruction of Babylon. Further examples of such language can be found in places like Ezekiel 32 or Joel 2 and 3. One of the things that we should be alert to here is that the fall of Jerusalem is being described in the same sort of language as the fall of Babylon.

It's become associated with that pagan city. Jesus then moves on to discuss the coming of the Son of Man. Now when we think about the coming of the Son of Man we think of a downward movement from heaven to earth.

That tends to be the way that Christians think about this concept. But it is the coming of the Son of Man into heaven itself that is in view here. And the background for this is once again in Old Testament prophecy.

If we know our Old Testaments much of this is not hard to read. It makes a lot of sense. Jesus throughout the gospels speaks like a prophet.

He uses the language of prophets, the illustrations, the symbolism. He uses the practice of prophets in a way that associates him with characters like Elijah and Elisha. He uses the parables of prophets and here he uses the apocalyptic symbolism of prophets.

In Daniel chapter 7 verses 9 to 14 we read, I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked the beast was killed and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beast their dominion was taken away but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

I saw in the night visions and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like the Son of Man and he came to the ancient of days and was presented before him and to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. The sign of the Son of Man in heaven, the evidence of the Son of Man in heaven, the fact that we can see that he is in heaven is

the vindication of the exalted Son of Man by the dispossession of the wicked tenants.

This is the sign that he has been given the kingdom. They are removed from office. Christ also shows his power by using the Romans as his means of doing this.

And the result of this is that all the tribes of the earth will mourn. This is language that looks back to Zechariah chapter 12 verses 10 following. It's still focused on Israel, the tribes of the earth or the land.

This is not the world in general it's the land and it's Israel, the tribes that are in view here. And all of this is about establishing the new age of the kingdom. It's not about just the end of the world, it's starting something new.

The angels or literally the messengers are then sent out to gather from the four winds. This is a new beginning. It begins with a trumpet blast.

It's a new year of jubilee and in that day a great trumpet will be blown and those who are lost in the land of Assyria and those who are driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain at Jerusalem. That's Isaiah chapter 27 verse 13 and Jesus is using the same sort of language here. He's also using the language of Deuteronomy chapter 30 verses 1 to 4. God is going to gather all his children together.

It's going to be from four winds of heaven. It's going to be all the scattered Israelites who believe. It's going to be all of the Gentiles who believe.

We see that in Matthew chapter 8 verses 11 to 12. Bear in mind the way that Jesus is picking up the same language here. He speaks then of the fig tree that's been connected with Israel earlier in the sign of the cursing of the fig tree.

They will see these signs if they're faithful and they will recognize that the time has come. And he assures them once more this generation will not pass away until everything occurs including the sun and the moon being darkened and all these sorts of things. All of that is going to take place.

Heaven and earth may pass away but his word will not pass away. Many people have wondered whether Jesus is a false prophet and that he makes all these predictions about the end of the world and they don't actually come to pass. And so the early Christian movement is about learning to live with the fact that their founders prophecies did not occur.

But they did. They occurred in AD 70. And he's not a false prophet but he's in the tradition of prophets like Jeremiah who prophesied the destruction of the temple and the exile.

Jesus is speaking with the same sort of language and once we understand the language



that he's using and the world in which he's speaking it makes sense. What he predicted came to pass. And he emphasizes the absolute necessity of watchfulness.

He gives the example of Noah and of Lot. Everything seems to be going on as it always has and then suddenly everything changes. In a single day your entire world order which you thought was so absolutely rock solid completely collapses.

And he uses this illustration of these people out in the field or these people in a bed or working in a particular context. One taken another left. For many Christians this has been associated with the rapture.

That the rapture is taking certain people up to heaven and those who are left are going to face the tribulation. That's not what's being referred to here. Rather one taken is taken in judgment.

Being taken is to face destruction. We should also maybe think of Matthew's attention to pairs and binaries coming in here. There is a distinction between the watchful and the unfaithful servant and maybe we are supposed to see that in the distinction between the one taken and the other left.

That there are two different ways. You don't want to be taken. So how are you going to ensure that? Well by being watchful, by being the faithful servant that Jesus talks about.

Christ will come as a thief in the night. They cannot predict the time of the Son of Man's coming but the signs will be there for the watchful and faithful servants which they are called to be. If they're paying attention they will recognize that his hour has come.

And Jesus knows that many of his disciples will start to doubt and his followers will start to wonder well 30 years have passed and we've not really seen any sign of this. We're all dying out and he said it would happen in this generation but there seems to be no evidence. And so many would doubt at that point maybe fall away and we have evidence of that in places like second Peter that that is a burning question at that stage in the church's life.

But it happens in that generation. Christ's word is fulfilled and we can find this hard to understand because we think of this fall of Jerusalem as an event just in a backwater country within the Roman Empire. But that's not what it is.

It's the final collapse of the old covenant order leaving the new covenant order to come into its own. The order of the kingdom. Now they will no longer go to Jerusalem to worship.

Its temple has been destroyed. There is no longer atonement to be found there. Rather they will go to Christ.

He will gather his elect from the four winds of heaven. Jew and Gentile alike will be brought into the kingdom. And this is a new world order that's set up.

The whole of the existing world order. A world order centered upon Jerusalem and what God was doing with that people has been changed. And now something new has started.

The church has been established in unrivaled significance as the place where God is working out his purposes. And that is established through the events of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70. This is not a minor event.

It's a radical change. A question to consider. The attitude of the disciples in the run up to the destruction of Jerusalem should be ours too.

Our worlds too will face their final reckoning. What are some of the ways in which Jesus's description of the sudden and devastating and unforeseen collapse of the world order and the watchfulness that shall characterize his disciples should inform our relationship to the world order that we inhabit in our own days.