

Malachi

SPEAKER	Wes Neely
DATE	Sunday, August 10, 2025
PASSAGES	Malachi 1; Malachi 2; Malachi 3; Malachi 4; Deuteronomy 28
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:18:25 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Malachi is not really a book about tithing or about John the Baptist, though both are in it. It is seven rounds of God speaking and Israel talking back, and every complaint carries the same assumption: God has failed us. The prophet's answer is that the covenant was broken from the other side, and the only way out is the one coming down the line.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Malachi is structured as seven exchanges. God makes a statement, and Israel answers with “but you say” — a complaint. Read the seven together and you have the whole book.
- ◆ “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” is covenant language, not the emotional hatred we mean by the word. Some translations render it chose and rejected. Wes did not pretend to settle it, and landed instead on what is certain: God is just.
- ◆ The priests kept the letter of the law with blind, lame and sick animals. Malachi says it would be better to shut the temple doors than to check the boxes.
- ◆ God is not interested in the leftovers. He gets all of you or none of you.
- ◆ “Where is the God of justice?” assumes we are the good people in the story. Israel asked for justice without noticing they were asking for it on themselves.
- ◆ The tithing passage is old covenant, and it is transactional on purpose — Deuteronomy 28 is stacked with *if*. It is not a formula for making your bank account fat.
- ◆ Prophecy stops for 400 years because the point had been made: Israel could not keep its end. What comes next is not another prophet but a new covenant.

- ◆ Wes's honest turn at the end: he says these seven things himself. So do we.

► 1:18:26

Matt finished Ephesians the week before and asked Wes to take this Sunday. “In keeping with my competitive spirit, I said, well, you just finished a book, so I’m going to start and finish a book.” This is the third in an intermittent habit — Jonah and Ruth earlier in the year — and Malachi is the only other Old Testament book with four chapters.

Why nobody reads the minor prophets

► 1:19:23

Wes looked up BibleGateway’s ranking of books by how often they are searched. All twelve minor prophets sit in the bottom fifteen. Malachi does better than its neighbors for an accidental reason: it is the last page before Matthew, so people reach it, glance at it, and skip ahead to Jesus.

It is also, so far as we can tell, the last book written before the intertestamental period — roughly 400 BC to Christ, with no major prophet sent to Israel. Plenty happened in those centuries; there is history and there are books about it. Prophecy is what stops. Malachi says his piece and then silence. We do not know who wrote it: *Malachi* means messenger, and it worked more like a title than a name.

The pattern: seven times, “but you say”

► 1:20:31

The whole book runs on one move. God says something; Israel answers by complaining about how God is treating them. Malachi marks each answer with the phrase *but you say*. Wes asked the room not to hear these as ancient Jewish grievances but as sentences we have said ourselves.

1. “How have you loved us?”

► 1:21:00

“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.”

MALACHI 1:2–3 ↗

Historically the complaint makes sense. Israel is back from exile and the temple is rebuilt, but they are a vassal state under Persian law, sending taxes to the people who carried them off. They remember David and Solomon. They look around and conclude the experiment is over — one too many mistakes, love withdrawn.

► 1:23:28

God answers by going back to Jacob and Esau, the sentence Paul picks up in [Romans 9:13](#). Wes handled it carefully. Our word *hate* is emotional; this one is covenantal — some translations read chose and rejected — and it concerns the covenant made with Jacob and the birthright Esau sold for a bowl of soup. Whole shelves have been written on that one line, and he declined to pretend otherwise. “God is just. We know this to be true. And if we don’t understand what this means and we are wrestling with it, the one thing we can rest in is that God’s God.” Our understanding is the thing that is lacking — which turns out to be the theme of all seven statements.

2. “How have we despised your name?”

► 1:30:12

“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?’”

MALACHI 1:6 ↗

The priests think they are doing a fine job. What they are actually offering is in [verse 8](#): blind animals, lame animals, sick animals. Malachi’s test is the governor — these same men were sending tribute to Persia, and no governor would take a sick animal. Wes updated it: you tell a friend you found him a couch, and it is the flea-infested one off the side of the road. He is not going to be pleased.

► 1:32:31

“Oh 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.”

MALACHI 1:10 ↗

If one priest had any guts, he would lock the temple. Doing nothing would be better than checking boxes. God is not after the bit left over after we have lived our lives — “he either gets all of you or he doesn’t want any of you.”

3. “What a weariness this is”

► 1:34:06

Called out, the priests start dragging their feet — the Lord’s table is polluted, its food may be despised, and all of this is such a bother ([Malachi 1:12–13](#)). They snort at it. Three, four and five arrive in sequence, and the sequence is the argument: give us your best; fine, but this is too hard; God isn’t being fair.

4. “Why does he not?”

► 1:34:41

“And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”

MALACHI 2:13–14 ↗

God’s reply says nothing about the sacrifices. It reaches instead for a marriage. Israel as a young nation, just out of Egypt, had a golden calf going almost before Moses was down the mountain ([Exodus 32:1–6](#)). God kept his end. They have not kept theirs. “Why would I bless you? That’s not how this covenant was set up.”

5. “Where is the God of justice?”

► 1:37:34

They have wearied the Lord, Malachi says, by insisting that evildoers are what God delights in and by asking where justice has gone ([Malachi 2:17](#)). Persia prospers. Israel does not. The good guys are losing and the bad guys are winning, so where is he?

This is the oldest complaint there is, and we named the assumption buried inside it: when we ask why good things happen to bad people, we have already cast ourselves as the good people. Israel had not

kept God's commands, was not walking with him, and was still expecting the ledger to come out in its favor.

► 1:39:16

The answer, when it comes, is the famous one — and it is not comforting.

“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... But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire.”

MALACHI 3:1-2 ↗

Where is the God of justice? He is coming soon. As much as you want him to show up — who can endure that day?

6. “How have we robbed you?”

► 1:40:38

“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you.”

MALACHI 3:6-7 ↗

They would not be a nation at all if God had not preserved them — through civil war, through the Assyrians wiping out the other ten tribes, through Babylon. And their response is to ask how, exactly, they are supposed to return. The answer is the tithing passage everybody quotes: bring the full tithe into the storehouse and put God to the test, and see whether he will not open the windows of heaven (Malachi 3:8-10).

We cut off the obvious misuse. This is not a promise that giving to the church makes your bank account fat. It is a nation under a specific covenant, with stipulated amounts and temple taxes, being told how to come back into it. Deuteronomy 28 shows how transactional that arrangement was:

“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth... Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field.”

DEUTERONOMY 28:1-3 ↗

Listen for the *ifs*. The blessings were never unconditional declarations, and the new covenant does not run this way — there is no guarantee our herds will grow. God works, Wes said, in a simpler and a better way.

7. “How have we spoken against you?”

► 1:45:18

The last one is the entitlement stated plainly: it is vain to serve God, there is no profit in keeping his charge, the arrogant are the blessed ones, evildoers put God to the test and get away with it (Malachi 3:13–15). They cannot get past being the chosen people, and so God had better be on their side no matter what they do.

The day that is coming

► 1:47:08

The book ends with a book of remembrance written for those who feared the Lord, and then with fire: the arrogant will be stubble, left neither root nor branch, while those who fear his name go out leaping like calves (Malachi 4:1–3). Then Elijah, sent before the great and awesome day, turning the hearts of fathers to their children (Malachi 4:5–6). Wes noted an alternate reading of that last line — the hearts of fathers and children turned back to the Lord — and admitted he is no Hebrew scholar but prefers it, because turning hearts back is what the entire book is for.

► 1:49:47

The furnace language reads harsh until you sit where they sat. This is a nation that has been the punching bag of regional politics for two centuries, with no autonomy and no way to stop anyone from taking its crops. Telling those people that everything ends in sunshine and everyone is happy would not have landed. They wanted justice. What they did not notice is that they were asking for it on themselves.

We know Christ as Savior, Wes said, and we know our debts are forgiven and that he will not destroy us. “But we also can’t forget that God is not only sunshine and puppies and rainbows.” There is a side of

him that is just, and powerful, and fear-inspiring — and looking at how he deals with the wicked, the thing you feel is *in a just world, that could have been me*.

These are our sentences

► 1:51:57

Lined up, the seven statements stop being about somebody else. “I actually feel like I say these statements,” Wes admitted. Start with the first, and remember it is not a question — *how have you loved us* means *you haven’t*. Said out loud to the God who sent a messenger to prepare the way for the one who would bring justice and peace, it is nearly comical.

He walked the rest the same way. *How have we despised your name?* — while offering him whatever energy is left at the end of a long week. *What a weariness* — a burden, to bring an offering to the God who made the universe and made the offering. *Why won’t you accept it?* — because we treat him as a transaction, and that is how friends work, not how God works. *How have we wearied you?* — asked by the party who owes everything and has nothing to pay with. There is never a point in this relationship where God is in our debt.

► 1:56:22

His own habit, when he catches himself asking how he has robbed God: *how have I not?* Everything he has is undeserved. And the truth Malachi wanted Israel to hear is that God is doing his part — working to bring salvation — but from inside one short life it rarely looks that way, so we question his goodness instead of our vantage point.

Why the silence, and what broke it

► 1:57:37

So prophecy is cut off. For 400 years Israel has only itself to deal with — not because God was absent, but because he was preserving a people until Christ came. Israel thought God was the problem. Israel was the problem, and when Jesus arrives the Pharisees and Sadducees prove nothing has changed: we do not need this Jesus, we are doing fine.

Which is exactly what the old covenant was for. It shows you that you cannot do what God requires. And if you cannot, the answer is to fall at Jesus’s feet: “I have sinned against you, God, and I have a debt that I cannot repay, but I know that you are just and you are merciful and that you came down and became man to save me.” Even while we put ourselves above him, he made himself a servant to save us.

► 2:00:38

Wes left the room with a diagnostic. When you talk to God this week, listen for which of the seven you are saying. Or say the other thing: “You are God and you are just, and I trust you, and I don’t understand your plan, but I want to. So teach me and help me.” His one-line summary of the book, and it fits in a sentence — do not put yourself above God, and trust his justice.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Malachi 1:2–3
- Romans 9:13
- Malachi 1:6
- Malachi 1:8
- Malachi 1:10
- Malachi 1:12–13
- Malachi 2:13–14
- Exodus 32:1–6
- Malachi 2:17
- Malachi 3:1–2
- Malachi 3:6–7
- Malachi 3:8–10
- Deuteronomy 28:1–3
- Malachi 3:13–15
- Malachi 4:1–3
- Malachi 4:5–6

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Which of the seven complaints have you actually said to God — in those words or your own? What was going on when you said it?
2. Wes said God is not interested in the leftovers. Where are you currently offering him the blind and lame animal rather than the best one?
3. Israel asked for justice without realizing they were asking for it on themselves. What changes about how you pray for justice if that is true of you too?
4. How do you tell the difference between trusting God's timing and quietly concluding he has stopped working?
5. This week, when you catch one of these sentences forming, what will you say instead — and to whom will you say it out loud?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Wes Neely teaches at Hope Chapel and was asked by Matt to take this Sunday after the Ephesians series finished. He has an intermittent habit of preaching an entire short book in one message — Jonah and Ruth earlier this year, and now Malachi, chosen partly because it is the only other Old Testament book with four chapters. He describes himself as a reader of the minor prophets and says plainly that he is not an expert in Hebrew.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SL4UGUHNwjo&t=4705s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.