



# BOOKS OF THE BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

by WAYNE PALMER

**M A L A C H I**





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## INTRODUCTION

The Book of Malachi was written to the people of Judah who returned from Babylonian captivity. By the time of Malachi, the second temple had been built, and the walls protecting Jerusalem had been restored.

This book confronts and exposes the unfaithfulness and impurity of the Levites, the priests who accepted animals that God's Law disqualified from sacrifice. They despised serving God at all the required offerings before the altar.

It also addresses the returned exiles who were grumbling against God. They failed to support the priests and Levites with their tithes and offered blemished animals as sacrifices—animals they themselves didn't want. They were unfaithful to their God and their Israelite wives, divorcing them to marry heathen foreigners.

God challenges all of them, threatening destruction in order to lead them to repentance so that He may refine, purify, and prepare them for the coming of the promised Savior.

## AUTHORSHIP

The identity of the author of Malachi is not clear. *Malachi* can be a name or a description. In Hebrew, it means "my messenger." This could be the prophet's given name or a title identifying the unnamed prophet as the Lord's "messenger." The Jews thought Ezra was the author, but there is no evidence to support that. Many of the themes in Malachi reflect situations Nehemiah encountered in his time as governor rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, so it is possible he was a prophet who assisted Nehemiah with instituting his reforms for Judah.

Almost the entire message of this book comes directly from God's lips, so in the author's words, if not his name, he truly was a *malachi*.

## PURPOSE

The Book of Malachi exposes the holiness of God, contrasting it with the unholiness of His people. It confronts the ungodly Israelites, urging them to repent and prepares them for the long four hundred years between the close of the Old Testament and the advent of the promised Savior whose coming is discussed in both chapters three and four.

## OUTLINE

For the purposes of this study, Malachi will be divided into the following sections:

1. God's Love
2. Condemnation of the Priests
3. The People Must Be Faithful through Proper Marriage
4. The Lord Will Establish Justice through His Messenger
5. A Call to Return to the Lord in Repentance
6. The Ones Who Fear the Lord Are Remembered by Him
7. Final Words

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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## MALACHI

God delivers His last message to Jerusalem's returned exiles before John the Baptist becomes His messenger on earth at the coming of Christ.

**Read 1:1.**

**Q 1: What is an oracle?**

A 1: The Hebrew word indicates a message from the Lord, not from the prophet himself. The Hebrew word generally means "a burden," a heavy weight that is carried. The reader should not expect this prophecy to be light, sweet Gospel, but firm reproof and a stern call to repentance.

## GOD'S LOVE

God declares His love for Israel, which is the true basis for worship and for properly serving the Lord. Yet the returned exiles question His love. Convinced that God is dependent upon their sacrifices, they feel they can bring any animals they wish, and God should be grateful to them.

### THE LORD REMINDS ISRAEL OF HIS LOVE

When the exiles challenge the Lord's declaration of love, He reminds them of what He said about their forefather Jacob and his brother, Esau.

**Read 1:2–5.**

**Q 2: What could make the returned exiles question God's love for them?**

A 2: The exiles had gone through difficult times both in Babylon and when they returned to Jerusalem. The temple was rebuilt under threats from Samaritans and neighboring peoples. They looked at their continuing domestic struggles, and their personal financial struggles and wrongly concluded that God did not love them.

This shows their utter ingratitude. God had spared them in exile and raised up prophets like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel to protect them from foreign rulers. He raised up Esther and Mordecai to save them from Haman's genocidal rage. He had brought them back to Judah and blessed them to rebuild the temple and the city walls. Yet the returned exiles claimed there was no evidence that God loved them. How often do we do the same?

**Q 3: Who were Jacob and Esau?**

A 3: Jacob and Esau were the twin sons of Abraham's son Isaac and his wife, Rebekah (Genesis 25:20–26). Though Esau despised the birthright that belonged to him as the firstborn, Jacob certainly showed himself no better: he coveted that birthright and bought it from Esau for a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:29–34). Jacob coveted their father, Isaac's, blessing and deceived him to obtain it (Genesis 27). By calling the returned exiles "Jacob" instead of "Israel" or "Judah," God is reminding them that they are as unworthy of His love and blessings as their ancestor Jacob was.

**Q 4: What evidence could God use to prove His love for Jacob and all the Israelites descended from him?**

A 4: God chose Jacob, multiplied his descendants into a great nation, delivered them from slavery in Egypt, brought them into the Promised Land, and sent them judges, kings, and prophets to deliver them. God protected them even while punishing their idolatry with captivity, and now He had brought them safely back to their homes.

**Q 5: How could the God of love say He hated Esau?**

A 5: God is not speaking of absolute hate but relative hate. He uses the word *hate* here to indicate choosing one person over another; giving one more honor and greater blessings than the other. Indeed, when you are not the one who is chosen and favored, it can feel like you are being hated.

**Q 6: What proof did God give to prove He "hated" Esau?**

A 6: After the Babylonians had conquered Judah and Jerusalem, God delivered Esau's descendants, the Edomites, into their hands. Even after God restored Jacob's exiled descendants to their homes in Jerusalem and Judah, Esau was not permitted to return and rebuild their cities.

**Q 7: What ambitious boast were the exiled Edomites making?**

A 7: Just like Judah, the Edomites vowed they would return home and rebuild their ruins.

**Q 8: Why did God refuse to permit the Edomites to return?**

A 8: The Edomites were perpetually hostile to their brother Israelites—even though their ancestor Esau had forgiven Jacob and welcomed him back to the Promised Land with open arms (see Genesis 33). In fact, when Judah was captured, and its fugitives had fled for safety to Edom, the Edomites betrayed them with malice and glee.

**Q 9: How does this fulfill God's words to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse"?**

A 9: Since the Edomites held on to their perpetual hatred of Jacob's descendants, they were declaring hatred for the Lord. Their hostility was even more grievous when we remember that the promised Savior, Jesus Christ, was a descendant of Jacob, not Esau.

**Q 10: What did God mean in verse 5 by saying, "Your own eyes shall see this"?**

A 10: As time went by, the people of Judah would notice that the Edomite towns were not being rebuilt or repopulated. The people of Edom were not returning from captivity.

**Q 11: Why is the phrase "beyond the border of Israel" important?**

A 11: The phrase illustrates that God is the God of all nations, a fact the Israelites all too quickly forgot.

## CONDEMNATION OF THE PRIESTS

The Lord addresses the priests of Malachi's day. After condemning the former priests who despised Him, He confronts the present priests.

### THE LORD IS FATHER AND MASTER OF ALL

The priests refuse to honor and fear the Lord.

**Read 1:6.**

**Q 12: How does the picture of a father and master reveal how the priests were despising God?**

A 12: The priests taught the people to love and serve their fathers and masters, but they had lost their fear and reverence toward God.

**Q 13: Why did the Lord point out the honor and fear lacking from the priests?**

A 13: God wanted the priests to realize they were being wholly cold and callous toward Him, going through the motions when it came to the service and offering unacceptable sacrifices.

**Q 14: Why did the priests challenge God's accusation?**

A 14: The priests thought it was enough to simply go through the motions. They were careful to say the right things about God, but they did not practice true fear, love, and honor toward God, particularly in their services.

### HOW THE PRIESTS HAVE DESPISED THE LORD'S NAME

God shows how the priests have despised His name by their practices.

**Read 1:7–14.**

**Q 15: What is polluted food?**

A 15: Polluted food, in this case, meant animals that were blemished—those with broken bones, cuts, disfigurements, and the like.

**Q 16: Why does God specifically call it “My altar” in verse 7?**

A 16: God said this because the altar belonged to God, not the priests. The priests felt they had the authority to determine what was acceptable for a sacrifice. But they had forgotten that God alone has the right to declare which sacrifices are worthy. Their responsibility was to obey God in honor and love by following the Law of Moses and instructing the Israelites about sacrifices that were acceptable to bring.

**Q 17: How did the priests despise God’s name?**

A 17: God’s name is His reputation. By offering unacceptable animals that the worshipers could clearly see were blemished, the priests made it obvious how little they thought of the God they served.

We should be cautious of what we say and do and perhaps ask ourselves about the generosity of the offerings we give at church.

**Q 18: Why was God so strict about rejecting sacrificial animals with blemishes and defects?**

A 18: Every sacrifice made to God pointed ahead to Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice. Jesus had to be spotless and pure to be sacrificed in our stead, otherwise, He would have to be punished for His sins and not ours.

**Q 19: Why did God bring up the priests’ gift to the governor?**

A 19: God knew the priests feared and dreaded their Persian governor and emperor; the priests wouldn’t dare try to deceive and insult them. So why did they think it was all right to insult the King of kings and Lord of lords, God Almighty?

**Q 20: Why does the prophet call on the priests to entreat God’s favor?**

A 20: God had established the priesthood to provide a mediator between God and sinners. The sacrifices pointed ahead to the ultimate sacrifice God would make in Jesus. If the offerings the priests sacrificed for the people were unacceptable to God, how could the people hope to find forgiveness and salvation? If God would grant forgiveness directly for His mercy’s sake, what need was there for priestly mediators?

This goes back to the Persian governor—if a subject wanted to win the governor’s favor, he would hardly offer the governor second-

rate gifts. The role of the priest was to entreat God's favor and thus open God's heart to share His grace with the people of Israel.

**Q 21: Why would the Lord prefer the doors of His house to be shut rather than allow services to continue there?**

A 21: This is a shocking statement. Imagine if the Lord wanted the doors of our churches locked because He could not stand our worship! The priests were deeply offending God and deceiving the people of Israel—as well as themselves. They thought they could go through the motions, and God would never punish them. The fact that God did not reveal His fierce wrath as quickly as a Persian governor might have certainly tempted the priests to think they could continue to get away with dishonoring God.

**Q 22: What would we need to do if Christ said that of *our* congregations—that He would prefer for us to lock the doors and never assemble again?**

A 22: We would need to repent and plead for His mercy. Then, He would be delighted to come among us in His house once more.

**Q 23: What does it mean for God's name to be “great among the nations” (v. 11)?**

A 23: The previous verse that stated God's desire for someone to close the temple doors was also a threat—one day, the temple doors would be shut forever. Throughout the Old Testament, Jerusalem was the one place where offerings were made, and incense was burned to God. But that ended in AD 70 when the Romans shut the temple doors forever and burned the temple to the ground. This verse speaks of the Gentile nations that were reached with the Gospel after Pentecost, the believers from every nation who bow to God in humble repentance and faith and offer sacrifices that are well-pleasing to Him.

When God's name is great, it means the people of the nations think highly of Him and honor Him. When we despise God's Word and live sinful lives, there is no reason for people to think highly of Jesus Christ. But Malachi predicts Judgment Day when every knee shall bow at the name of Jesus, and His name shall be great among all nations.

**Q 24: What does it mean to profane God's name?**

A 24: To profane God's name is to treat it as ordinary or insignificant rather than exalted and great.

**Q 25: What is meant by the phrase “what a weariness this is” in verse 13?**

A 25: The Lord required sacrifices in the morning and evening each day. The priests resented having to officiate over so many services, but



they should have felt honored to present sacrifices to such an awesome God. They also ate of the sacrifices they accepted. The fact that they were sick of the blemished animals they accepted from the people shows how corrupt they were.

**Q 26: What is implied by the priests' snorting?**

A 26: Snorting shows contempt for the Lord and the sacrifices made to Him—the very means that He had provided to take away sins before Jesus' death on the cross.

**Q 27: What does it mean for a sacrificial animal to be “taken by violence”?**

A 27: An animal was “taken by violence” when it was stolen from someone else then used for sacrifice—doubly dishonoring God by violating the Seventh Commandment.

**Q 28: Why would God hold the priests responsible when the Israelite laymen substituted blemished, imperfect animals in place of the better animals they had vowed?**

A 28: The lay Israelites themselves were definitely to blame, but the priests knew the animals were unfit for sacrifice yet accepted them anyway.

**Q 29: How does this relate to Cain's unaccepted sacrifice in Genesis 4?**

A 29: God rejected Cain's offering because it was offered in the same spirit these priests had toward their sacrificial duty. Weary of worship, they simply went through the motions to get it over with—much like Cain.

**Q 30: Why does God call Himself a great King in verse 14?**

A 30: The Israelites who had returned from exile were still subjects of the Persian king. God wanted to show them that they were treating the king of Persia far better than they treated God—but, again, on Judgment Day, God would call them to account.

**Read 2:1–9.**

**Q 31: What command is God giving to the priests?**

A 31: God commands the priests to stop corrupting God's name—His reputation—among His people and to fear and honor Him, or they will face stern punishment. It reminds us of the priests of Jesus' day who rejected Him and faced eternal punishment.

**Q 32: What does God's statement “take to heart” imply in verse 2?**

A 32: The statement charges the priests to give careful thought to what God is telling them, and not to just dismiss it outright without any real consideration.

**Q 33: What did God want the priests to take to heart?**

- A 33: God wanted them to truly respect and fear Him so they would do what was right and teach the Israelites to faithfully fear, love, and serve God as well.
- Q 34: What punishment did the priests risk incurring against themselves if they did not honor God?**
- A 34: They risked God sending a curse upon them and upon the blessings the priests spoke to Israel.
- Q 35: What does it mean for God to curse the priests' blessings?**
- A 35: The Lord had commanded the priests to pronounce His blessings upon His repentant, believing people. But the blessings of the priests were meaningless, and God would reverse their evil acts.
- Q 36: What did it mean for God to rebuke their offspring?**
- A 36: Rebuking their offspring means that, instead of establishing a priestly dynasty, God would break the priests' line.
- Q 37: What was the "dung" of their offerings?**
- A 37: The dung of their offerings was the contents of the sacrificial animals' intestines, which God had ordered to be removed from the sacrifice when it was slaughtered, taken outside the city, and burned.
- Q 38: What did it signify for that dung to be spread on the priests' faces?**
- A 38: This expressed God's displeasure and blatantly revealed the disgraceful actions of the priests, which, when exposed by the Lord, brought shame upon them.
- Q 39: What was God's covenant with Levi?**
- A 39: God had chosen the Levites out of all the tribes of Israel to offer sacrifices, oversee worship, and see to the religious instruction of God's people.
- Q 40: How would the exposure of the priests uphold God's covenant with Levi?**
- A 40: These priests brought shame upon the house of their father Levi. God would punish them to uphold the honor and dignity of the priestly office.
- Q 41: What did it mean for God to call His covenant with Levi "a covenant of life and peace"?**
- A 41: Through the Law and Gospel promises that the priests and Levites taught, God gave Israel eternal life and the peace of sins forgiven. Since early Levites like Moses and Aaron believed the Gospel, He gave life and peace to them as well as His people.

**Q 42: What does it mean to call it “a covenant of fear”?**

A 42: “A covenant of fear” should not be taken in the sense of being afraid that God would break His word or treat the Levites unjustly. They held God in awe. They recognized His greatness and obeyed Him, leading worship in a deeply reverential way.

**Q 43: Who is verse 6 speaking of?**

A 43: Verse 6 is speaking of the ideal Levitical priest. This includes Moses, Aaron, and all faithful Levitical priests such as Samuel. It also encompasses the prophets who faithfully proclaimed the Word of the Lord.

**Q 44: What does it mean that the faithful priest “walked” with God?**

A 44: The word *walk* is often used in Scripture to mean the way a person conducted his life. Not only would the ideal Levitical priest preach repentance and faith, but he would also live this out in his own life.

**Q 45: How did “he” turn many from iniquity?**

A 45: When a priest, prophet, or a pastor of today speaks God’s Word correctly, the Holy Spirit works through the Law to bring sinners to repentance and through the Gospel to assure them of God’s forgiveness and peace—it empowers them to turn from iniquity and live a new and godly life.

**Q 46: What should priests do in their speech?**

A 46: Since a priest is the Lord’s messenger, that is, the messenger of God’s Word, he should guard that divine knowledge from being corrupted by error and instruct people with God’s clear teaching.

**Q 47: How does God now turn against the unfaithful priests?**

A 47: God used the example of His faithful former priests to reveal how these unfaithful priests had turned aside and caused many to stumble.

**Q 48: What does it mean that they corrupted the covenant with Levi?**

A 48: God made a covenant with Levi’s descendants, promising that if they remained faithful priests, they would hold onto the priesthood perpetually. But now, it would pass to another tribe—namely, the tribe of Judah and our great High Priest, Jesus Christ.

**Q 49: What was going to be the priests’ punishment from God?**

A 49: Their punishment would be that the Israelite people would no longer respect the priests and hold them in honor, but treat them with the shame they deserved.

**Q 50: How were the priests showing partiality?**

A 50: The priests favored one group over another—perhaps the rich over the poor. They did this by overlooking the sins of the favored group and putting a spotlight on those of the unfavored group—or by accepting the sacrifices of one and rejecting those of the other.

## THE PEOPLE MUST BE FAITHFUL THROUGH PROPER MARRIAGE

God now turns to expose the sins of the returned exiles themselves.

### THE LORD IS FATHER AND CREATOR OF ALL

Before confronting the peoples' sin, Malachi reminds them that God is their Father.

**Read 2:10.**

**Q 51: Why does Malachi remind the people that God is the Father of Israel?**

A 51: Through creation, God is the Father of all mankind, and in Jesus' genealogy, Adam is called the "son of God" (Luke 3:38). But in a very special sense, God long ago called Abraham and created a new nation from his son of promise, Isaac. Here in Malachi, the Lord reminds the Israelite men they have to answer to their Father, the same God and Father of their wives.

**Q 52: Why does Malachi call them faithless? What covenant have they profaned?**

A 52: Under Moses, the Israelite men had covenanted to marry only Israelite women. The Israelites in the Book of Malachi had personally joined that same covenant under Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor (Nehemiah 10:30). However, they profaned and broke the covenant by marrying foreign women, and even worse, divorcing their Israelite wives to marry foreign women.

### THE PEOPLE ARE FAITHLESS TO THEIR SPOUSES AND GOD'S LAWS

God calls the Israelite men to repent for divorcing their wives.

**Read 2:11–16.**

**Q 53: How were the men who married foreign wives profaning the temple?**

A 53: These foreign wives were called "daughters of a foreign god" because they clung to their idols, refusing to give up their false gods to



worship the God of their Israelite husbands. By marrying them, the Israelite men were living in sin and promoting idolatry. Going to the temple while they were unclean with this unrepented sin meant they were profaning the temple—an abomination in God’s eyes.

**Q 54: Does this mean a Christian married to an unbeliever should not go to church or receive the Sacrament?**

A 54: The Law of Moses does not apply in the time following the Old Testament. God counsels Christians not to marry unbelievers, but if a Christian is married to an unbeliever, God does not require divorce. The Christian should faithfully attend church and receive the Sacrament to remain strong in the faith and serve as a witness to his or her spouse.

**Q 55: What curse does Malachi ask God to impose for this sin?**

A 55: Malachi asks that God would cut off not only the man guilty of this but his descendants after him. Malachi wanted God to remove anyone who brought offerings while married to idolaters.

**Q 56: What is the second accusation Malachi makes against the people?**

A 56: The Israelites’ divorced wives weep, groan, and lament to God because their husbands have abandoned them, leaving them destitute in a society in which they could not work for themselves.

**Q 57: Why did the Lord reject the offerings of the Israelite men?**

A 57: God witnessed the vows they had sworn to the Israelite wives of their youth. Since they broke those vows and divorced their wives, God called them to account.

**Q 58: What is implied by the phrase “wife of your youth” (v. 14)?**

A 58: The phrase is an appeal to the husbands to think back to the days of their youth and the love with which they entered their first marriages.

**Q 59: What does the word *companion* signify?**

A 59: First, the word *companion* hearkens back to God forming Eve for Adam (Genesis 2:18). Second, it reminds the husbands of every joy and sorrow they had experienced with their wives, the comfort and support that wives give, and perhaps any children their wives bore and raised for their husbands. God calls the men to realize what they threw away and leads them to repent.

**Q 60: What does it mean that God put “a portion of the Spirit in their union” (v. 15)?**

A 60: The union of husband and wife is one that is so important to God that His Holy Spirit takes part in that union. God blessed that

union to preserve the nation of Israel so they would raise up godly offspring for generations to come.

**Q 61: To whom does Malachi give the advice “So guard yourselves in your spirit”?**

A 61: Malachi is speaking to those faithful men of Judah who are still married to Israelite women, that they may treasure the wonderful gift God has given them in marriage and cherish their spouse and children. To court unrepentant sin of this or any kind endangers their spiritual salvation.

**Q 62: What does it mean that the husband who divorces his wife “covers his garment with violence” (v. 16)?**

A 62: The Hebrew phrase literally means “spatter himself with blood.” In God’s eyes, divorce is akin to murder.

We should take our marriages just as seriously, repenting where we have sinned and going forward in God’s peace, knowing it is His will to bless, strengthen, and preserve our marriages.

## THE LORD WILL ESTABLISH JUSTICE THROUGH HIS MESSENGER

Malachi gives his first Messianic prophecy.

### THE LORD ACCUSES THE PEOPLE

God levels His fourth accusation against the people, who claim that He delights in the evildoer and is not a God of justice.

**Read 2:17.**

**Q 63: Who is making the complaint here?**

A 63: It is not the faithful who are making the complaint, but those Israelites who are unrepentant regarding their blemished sacrifices, marriages to heathen women, and divorces.

**Q 64: Who are the evildoers that the complainers are speaking of?**

A 64: These “evildoers” are the Gentiles who do not go through the motions of worshiping God as they do.

**Q 65: What gave the people of Judah the impression that God delights in evildoers?**

A 65: We may get that impression too, especially when we see evildoers prospering in their plans. Sometimes, it appears that God is directly blessing their selfish efforts—at least, we don't see Him impeding them. The Israelites expected God to vindicate them publicly, to put down their Gentile rivals. They failed to realize God would come to punish their unrepentance first. So Malachi calls them to repent of their sin so they will be righteous through faith when the final judgment comes.

**Q 66: How can this same attitude in us lead to self-righteous pride and arrogance?**

A 66: When we try to judge God's justice based on our own experiences or those of others, we have crossed the line and tried to "become like God" as Satan first tempted Eve in the garden. We should cling to God's clear self-revelation in Scripture, and in faith and humility, believe Him when He says He loves the faithful but hates the evildoer and will bring punishment in His own time.

**Q 67: What does it mean that this accusation wearies the Lord?**

A 67: The almighty God cannot grow weak and tired, so this is not what *wearies* means here. Instead, it means God's patience with the evildoer and the accuser is reaching its limit. God is incredibly patient and long-suffering, but not infinitely so. On Mount Sinai, He promised blessings for Israel's obedience and curses for Israel's disobedience. When the Lord grew weary of their false accusations against Him, He was ready to withdraw His blessings and send forth His curses.

## **GOD WILL SEND HIS MESSENGER TO ESTABLISH JUSTICE**

Malachi announces the coming of the Messiah.

**Read 3:1–5.**

**Q 68: Who is the messenger Malachi speaks of at the beginning of verse 1?**

A 68: Verse 1 is a reference to Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist.

**Q 69: What does it mean that John "prepares the way" for Jesus?**

A 69: John taught the people to repent of their sins because the Savior had come. With those people who were prepared by John's strong preaching, Jesus could come in gentleness with Gospel forgiveness.

**Q 70: In verse 1, what does the phrase "the Lord whom you seek" mean?**

A 70: For generations, the people of Israel had been anxiously awaiting the coming of the Messiah. During the time of Malachi and the four

centuries that followed, the Messianic hopes of Judah grew even stronger, though they completely misinterpreted the mission of the coming Messiah.

**Q 71: What does the phrase “in whom you delight” signify?**

A 71: True believers delighted in the coming of God’s Son and the incredible gift of salvation He won for all of us.

**Q 72: What does the word *suddenly* signify?**

A 72: It did not signify that Christ would come immediately upon Malachi’s words or in Malachi’s lifetime. But when it came, it would come unexpectedly—He would be here at once. This is what happened in His first coming and will be the same when Judgment Day finally arrives.

**Q 73: What were the proud, self-righteous people of Judah expecting the Christ to do when He came?**

A 73: The people of Judah expected to be vindicated and see their Gentile opponents overthrown. That is why they rejected Jesus—they did not realize that the Messiah was coming to save those who repented of their sins, not those who were self-assured.

**Q 74: Why does Malachi ask who can endure the day of Christ’s coming?**

A 74: This is a reminder that the Messiah is the Son of God who will judge all mankind on the Last Day. He begins with the godless members of the covenant nation—the “lost sheep of Israel.” No person living is able to endure or stand before Christ on his own righteousness. Malachi points out that the self-righteous among the people of Judah need to repent of their sins and be cleansed by Christ.

**Q 75: What is a refiner’s fire and fuller’s soap?**

A 75: Refiners used intense fire to remove impurities from metals. Fuller’s soap was very strong lye used to remove fats from wool and make it white.

**Q 76: What did it mean that the Messiah would refine the sons of Levi?**

A 76: In the Old Testament, the sons of Levi were the spiritual leaders of Israel—the priests and Levites. Malachi was speaking of the New Testament priesthood of all believers. Through faith, Christ has purified and continues to purify His Church so that all Christians are the sons of Levi.

**Q 77: What righteous offerings can we bring to the Lord?**

A 77: Righteous offerings do not mean animal sacrifices but the pure preaching of the Word and correct administration of the



Sacraments, through which the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of good works in all believers—kind words and loving deeds.

**Q 78: How were the sacrifices of Judah and Jerusalem acceptable to God in former days?**

A 78: Faithful priests and Levites served at the temple in Jerusalem and, by faith, offered acceptable and pleasing sacrifices to God.

**Q 79: What will be the result of the cleansing Christ will bring?**

A 79: God will separate believers from unbelievers, proving Himself a righteous judge and not someone who takes delight in evildoers. He speaks of Judgment Day when all evildoers who do not have faith will be judged and banished from the earth.

## A CALL TO RETURN TO THE LORD IN REPENTANCE

God confronts His people for failing to pay the tithe required in the Law of Moses.

### THE PEOPLE ACCUSED OF ROBBING GOD

Convinced that God rewards evildoers, the people of Judah see no reason to keep giving their required tithes.

**Read 3:6–9.**

**Q 80: Why does the unchangeable nature of God keep the children of Jacob from being consumed?**

A 80: God is righteous and just, but He is also gracious, merciful, patient, and faithful to His promises—especially His merciful promise to send the Messiah.

**Q 81: Why did God accuse the people of Judah of turning aside from His statutes?**

A 81: The people of Judah were not paying the required tithes.

**Q 82: Why was tithing so important in the Old Testament?**

A 82: Tithes provided the wages of the Levites, so they could dedicate themselves to full-time service at the temple. Then, the Levites tithed to provide the wages for the priests. Likewise, our offerings enable pastors, teachers, and other church workers to give full-time service to our congregations.

**Q 83: In what sense did the people of Judah rob God?**

A 83: They withheld from God the things they owed Him, namely the tenth part of their income.

**Q 84: What curse fell on the people for not paying their tithes?**

A 84: They suffered financial difficulties and shortages because they did not act in faith and put God first.

## **THE LORD OFFERS BLESSINGS IN RETURN FOR FULL TITHES**

God promises to bless the people of Judah when they offer their tithes in full.

**Read 3:10–12.**

**Q 85: What was done with the food gathered in the storehouse at the temple?**

A 85: The food that was gathered in the temple storehouse was the wages for the priests and the assistance for widows, orphans, and aliens.

**Q 86: Why did God permit the people of Judah to put Him to the test when He condemned that action in others?**

A 86: God's permission to test Him is indeed unusual, but in this specific incident, God promised His faithfulness, so He encouraged the people to test Him—to see if He would keep His word or not. It would encourage them to continue supporting the work done at the temple. In that sense, it was similar to the tests Gideon asked of the Lord with the fleece and the dew (Judges 6:36–40).

**Q 87: What promise did God make to the people of Judah?**

A 87: God promised that He would shower blessings upon them, greater than the tenth part they would offer to Him.

**Q 88: How did this test demand faith on the part of the people of Judah?**

A 88: The people of Judah had to give away their tithes first before the rewards would come. Faithfully giving these showed who trusted God's promise and who did not.

**Q 89: How would God reward their tithes?**

A 89: God would command the devouring insects to stop consuming their crops in the fields and ensure their vines bore fruit for them instead of allowing unripe fruit to fall to the ground before it had time to ripen.

**Q 90: What would be the reaction from neighboring nations who saw the bounty of the crops of the people of Judah?**

A 90: They would call Judah blessed, acknowledging the goodness of Judah's God.

## THE PEOPLE ARE ACCUSED OF HARSH WORDS AGAINST GOD

God levels another accusation against the people of Judah.

**Read 3:13–15.**

**Q 91: What accusation is God making here?**

A 91: God accuses the people of Judah of unjustly speaking harsh words against Him.

**Q 92: What accusation is made by the people of Judah?**

A 92: Their accusation is that there is no profit in obeying the Lord because those who disobey Him are prospering.

**Q 93: What further accusation do they raise in verse 15?**

A 93: The people of Judah also say that those who are arrogant toward God are enjoying great financial benefits, even those who put Him to the test. The people expected their fasting and sacrifices were earning a reward with God, even though earlier in the book, Malachi assured them that God did not accept their sacrifices. This sad trend only intensified over the centuries until it was firmly entrenched among the Philistines in the time of Jesus' earthly ministry.

## THE ONES WHO FEAR THE LORD ARE REMEMBERED BY HIM

God answers this accusation and warns of Judgment Day when He will destroy unbelievers but bring healing, life, and joy for believers.

**Read 3:16–4:3.**

**Q 94: Who are those who feared the Lord and spoke together?**

A 94: Those who feared the Lord and spoke together were believers; they were unlike those who had spoken harshly against the Lord. The believers heard the blasphemous words of the unbelieving people of Judah and spoke with one another, giving encouragement, rebuke, and sharing God's promises. God heard their words, was pleased with them and answered them.

**Q 95: What is the book of remembrance (v. 16)?**

A 95: The Persian kings kept track of good deeds done by subjects that were worthy of reward for future reference and use. This very book of remembrance led to Mordecai being raised to a powerful position as the defender of the Israelites in the time of Esther

(Esther 6:1). It is similar to the Book of Life—God’s memory will never fade or fail. He remembers every faithful word uttered and will reward it.

**Q 96: What does it mean to esteem God’s name?**

A 96: To esteem God’s name is to fear God and stand in awe of His goodness, mercy, and love. This is quite a contrast to the priests who despised God’s name and those Jews who were divorcing their wives.

**Q 97: What is the treasured possession the Lord will make up?**

A 97: On Judgment Day, God will gather all believers together to enjoy eternal life with Him for the sake of Christ. They will enjoy eternal blessings, while those who hate God and speak against Him will be punished forever.

**Q 98: What distinction will we see on Judgment Day that we don’t see today?**

A 98: In God’s patience and mercy, He gives those who hate Him time to repent. He even makes them aware of the reward He will give the faithful so they will follow the example of the faithful. This is why it seemed that those who disobeyed God and tested Him were blessed by Him.

On Judgment Day, God will clearly divide the believers from the unbelievers, and here He assures believers that their faith and life of service will not be forgotten and is not in vain. We are all sinners, but through faith in Christ, we will be set free.

**Q 99: What day is God clearly describing in chapter 4, verse 1?**

A 99: God describes Judgment Day when all unbelievers will be cast into the fires of hell.

**Q 100: What is stubble?**

A 100: Stubble is the stalk of a plant after harvest. After the seed has been removed, the stalk lays in the field drying out. Stubble burns very quickly and easily.

**Q 101: To whom is verse 2 addressed?**

A 101: Verse 2 addresses those who fear God, meaning believers who hold God in reverence.

**Q 102: What is the sun of righteousness in verse 2?**

A 102: The sun of righteousness is a contrast to the blast of fire in verse 1. Like the sun, the coming Christ will warm our hearts and pour His blessings upon us.

**Q 103: Why would calves leap out of their stalls?**



A 103: Believers are often cast down and forced into hiding by unbelievers, like calves locked up in pens. But when Christ returns, and we are set free, we will be like calves freed from their pens, playing and leaping and running about. Believers will know this same joy when Christ returns for us.

**Q 104: How will the wicked be ashes beneath the feet of the righteous?**

A 104: This statement goes back to the burning of the wicked in verse 1. There will be nothing left of them but ashes—these same people who defiantly put God to the test and oppressed believers.

## FINAL WORDS

In the final words of the Old Testament, God reminds His people to remember the words of Moses as they look forward to the coming of the promised Savior, the Christ.

### A CALL TO OBSERVE THE LAW OF MOSES

As the returned exiles await Christ's coming, God calls them to observe Moses' Law.

**Read 4:4.**

**Q 105: Why did God call on the returned exiles to observe Moses' Law?**

A 105: The Law was enforced until the coming of Jesus Christ. It was especially important in the four hundred years of silence after Malachi when no prophet spoke a new message from God.

### THE PROMISE OF A GREATER PROPHET

God foretells the coming of John the Baptist.

**Read 4:5–6.**

**Q 106: Why does God call John the Baptist Elijah?**

A 106: When the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in the temple, he announced that Zechariah's son would come in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the children of Israel to righteousness (Luke 1:16–17). Jesus taught His disciples that Elijah had already come in the person of John the Baptist, and the people did whatever they wanted to him (Matthew 17:11–12). One confusing aspect of this is found in John 1:21. When messengers from the Jewish high court (Sanhedrin) asked John if he was Elijah, John said no. He appealed to Isaiah 40, where he was prophesied as the voice of one calling

in the wilderness. John did this because it was common Jewish thought that Malachi prophesied the return of the actual prophet Elijah, not another prophet who would come with Elijah's power and spirit. After all, Elijah had not died—he was taken alive to heaven in a chariot of fire pulled by horses of fire. So John honestly answered that he was not Elijah.

John's ministry mirrored that of Elijah in many ways—in the clothes they both wore, the food they both ate, and the stern message of repentance they both proclaimed. John the Baptist's ministry had as much impact as if the great Elijah had actually come back in person.

**Q 107: How did John turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children and the children to their fathers?**

A 107: Malachi describes a divide between generations from the time of Moses, Samuel, and David. Their ungodly descendants at the time of Malachi's message considered their ancestors old-fashioned and ignorant in their childlike faith in God. When the ungodly children repent and embrace the humble trust in God that was passed on by their faithful ancestors, there will be great joy in heaven and unity of the people of God from past, present, and future in Christ's eternal kingdom.