**Malachi Commentary**

**Malachi Chapter 1**

Mal 1:1

**“burden.”** The Hebrew is *massa* (#04853 מַשָּׂא), which means burden, load, and is then used of things that are a load or a burden. Many modern versions say something such as “oracle” or “word,” but that is not the proper meaning in the context of the prophecies of the prophets.

In their commentary on the Old Testament (note on Nah. 1:1), Keil and Delitzsch write:

[The Hebrew word] מַשָּׂא [*massa*] signifies a burden, from נָשָׂא, to lift up, to carry, to heave. The meaning has very properly been retained by Jonathan, Aquila, Jerome, Luther, and others, in the heading to the prophetic oracle. Jerome observes on Hab. 1:1: ‘*Massa* never occurs in the title, except when it is evidently grave and full of weight and labour.’ On the other hand, the LXX [Septuagint] have generally rendered it *lēmma* in the headings to the oracles, or even *horasis, horama, rhēma* (Isa. 13ff, 30:6); and most of the modern commentators since Cocceius and Vitringa, following this example, have attributed to the word the meaning of ‘utterance,’ and derived it from נָשָׂא, [the Latin] *effari*. …מַשָּׂא, which never means [the Latin] *effatum*, utterance, and is never placed before simple announcements of salvation, but only before oracles of a threatening nature.[[1]](#footnote-15393)

In his commentary on Malachi 1:1, Ralph Smith writes: “It is best to read it here as “burden” referring to something the prophet must accept, carry, and deliver to others.”[[2]](#footnote-21438)

It is easy to see why some translators would want to use “word,” “oracle,” or “message” instead of “burden” (or “burdensome message”). The vast majority of Christians have never had a “burden” or burdensome message from the Lord to deliver to another, so they have a hard time identifying with it. However, most people have been faced with difficult decisions about whether or not to confront another person and how to go about it. Confrontation is difficult, and giving bad news to someone is difficult too, and God called upon His prophets to do both, and it was difficult for them. It was indeed a “burden.”

Anyone who has received a prophetic message to deliver has experienced some of the burden of prophecy. Even if the prophetic word is generally favorable, the burden the prophet feels to deliver it at the right time in the right way with the proper emphasis is palpable. However, if the message is unfavorable, then that message is indeed a burden to the prophet and the one who hears it. The fact that the prophecy is a word from Yahweh is a given. The fact that it is a “burden” to the prophet and usually to the people who hear it is the truth that needs to be understood. The message given to a prophet to deliver to others is referred to as a “burden” in 2 Kings 9:25; Isaiah 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1; 21:11; 21:13; 22:1; 23:1; 30:6; Jeremiah 23:33, 34, 36, 38; Ezekiel 12:10; Nahum. 1:1; Habakkuk 1:1; Zechariah 9:1; 12:1; Malachi 1:1.

**“Malachi.”** The Hebrew word means, “My messenger.”

Mal 1:2

**“loved Jacob.”** God’s loving Jacob and hating Esau does not refer to how He treated the two men personally. In this context, “Jacob” and “Esau” are used figuratively for the nations built from their descendants.

[For more information on the use of Jacob and Esau in this context, see commentary on Rom. 9:13.]

Mal 1:3

**“Esau.”** Here in Malachi, the name “Esau” is not being used for the man, but rather for the nation that came from his descendants. Note how the nation is called by name, Edom, in Malachi 1:4.

[See commentaries on Malachi 1:2 and Romans 9:13.]

Mal 1:6

**“O priests.”** The very existence of priests shows the failure of humans to continue in a sinless relationship with God and demonstrates a need for there to be some specially appointed people who would teach the people about God and godliness and thus keep the way to God open to people. But when the priests who are entrusted with that sacred task act as bad or worse than the people they are supposed to be helping, the way of God becomes clouded and God holds them especially accountable.

**“O priests, who show contempt for my name.”** The fact that the priests showed contempt for Yahweh by cheating Him in tithes, offerings, and sacrifices is simply astounding. The priests in Judah had been very sinful before the Babylonian Captivity, and in fact, their sin in part caused the Babylonian Captivity, which involved the destruction of the Temple and their being carried to Babylon. They endured captivity and decades with no temple at all, and now, finally, they are back in Judah and have a temple. But instead of being profoundly thankful and dedicating themselves to serving God from a pure heart, they are right back in the sin that caused so much disaster in the first place.

Mal 1:7

**“food.”** The Hebrew word translated as “food” is more literally “bread,” but “bread” was a common idiom for food. “Bread” came to be used by metonymy for food in general because bread was the main food in the culture and a staple of life. See commentary on Leviticus 26:26.

**“table.”** We can see from the question and answer that in this context God is using the word “table” for His altar, the altar of sacrifice in the Temple (cf. Mal. 1:12; Ezek. 44:16). It is appropriate in this context for God to refer to His altar as a “table” because God is speaking to the priests (Mal. 1:6). The priests ate portions of many of the sacrifices. For example, the priest ate some of the grain offerings (Lev. 6:4-16, 18; 7:9-10), the sin offerings (Lev. 6:26, 29), the guilt offerings (Lev. 7:6), and the fellowship offerings (Lev. 7:28-34). The people who brought the sacrifice also sometimes got to eat some of it. Thus, in a very real sense, the altar of Yahweh was a table associated with food and eating. The altar is also called the “table” of Yahweh in other verses (cf. Ezek. 41:22; Mal. 1:7, 12; cf. Ezek. 39:20; 44:16).

Furthermore, it was customary in the biblical culture—customary, but not commanded by God—that the two parties who made a covenant would share a meal together. So for God to call His altar a table was also supposed to remind the priests that they had a covenant relationship with God that they were obligated to honor.

There are a few examples of covenant meals in the Bible. That there are not more examples is not surprising, because things that were customary and were “standard operating procedure” were often simply assumed and not specifically mentioned in the Bible. In Genesis 26:28-30 Abimelech made a covenant with Isaac and they shared a meal together. In Genesis 31 Jacob and Laban made a covenant together and shared a meal (Gen. 31:44, 46).

In Exodus 24, the people of Israel made a covenant with God, and that covenant formed the basis of what we now call “the Old Covenant” (or “Old Testament”). The people of Israel sacrificed animals and made the covenant with God (Exod. 24:4-8), then the elders of Israel, the representatives of the people, went up the mountain and saw God (Exod. 24:9-10), and then, upon seeing God, the elders ate a covenant meal (Exod. 24:11). Since the Old Covenant was inaugurated with a blood sacrifice and a shared meal, it is not at all surprising that the Lord Jesus would, at the Last Supper, tell the apostles to eat of the bread and drink of the wine that represented his body and blood. In that rare case, they ate the covenant meal before the covenant was made because Jesus was the sacrifice, and his shed blood inaugurated the covenant.

Mal 1:8

**“Present it now to your governor!”** The “governor” in this case was likely a Judean who had been appointed as governor by the king of Persia (cf. Hag. 1:1).

**“accept you.”** The Hebrew is an idiom and literally reads, will He “lift up your face?” When a person came before a superior such as a king or governor it was customary to bow or prostrate oneself with one’s face down. If the ruler accepted the person, he would lift up the person’s face, or say something that would cause the person to lift up his face. Thus, to “lift up the face” meant to accept someone.

The question is, “Will God be pleased with you or accept you?” The obvious answer in this context is “No.” The priests were cheating God, not fully serving Him. This should be a warning to those believers who want God’s blessing in this life and the next, but don’t fully commit themselves to serve God in the way He deserves. For example, many Christians say they love God, but they also follow their horoscope, or have “lucky” objects they believe in, or hold to superstitions (like “knock on wood”) that give credit to other things besides God. Or they simply ignore commandments that they don’t want to follow. The Shema of Israel should still apply to Christians: “Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone” and believers are to love Him with all their heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:4-5). In the future Kingdom of God on earth there will be no idols of any kind, and also no false prophets or demon spirits (Zech. 13:2). But God wants that right now among His people, and if Christians want His full blessing then they need to follow God with their full heart and not share the glory due Him with other things.

Mal 1:9

**“plead for God’s favor.”** The Hebrew text is an idiom: “appease the face of God.” It should go without saying that “pleading for God’s favor” while continuing in disobedience to His commands is not only worthless, it is absurd. If we are genuinely pleading for God to bless us, any expectation that our pleading would reach the ears of God is to be based on the fact that we have repented of sin and disobedience and are doing our best to serve God. The Bible makes it clear that in general, purposeful sin blocks the blessings of God (see commentary on Amos 5:22).

**“accept...you.”** The Hebrew is an idiom and literally reads, “lift up your face.” See commentary on Malachi 1:8 for the idiom.

Mal 1:10

**“Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors *of the Temple.*”** The priesthood in Israel was in a sad state of affairs. It seems the majority of the priests were willingly participating in the sinful activities going on in the Temple. It is not as if God thought that any single priest could make a fuss and actually shut the doors of the Temple and close it down, but if one saw the worthlessness of the sacrifices being made and spoke up for God that might help the situation.

**“in vain.”** This is one of the many verses in the Bible that says that if a person’s heart is not right with God, all the “religious actions,” such as offering, prayers, fasting, etc., are of no purpose. God looks on the heart. As God says in this verse, He will not accept an offering from these evil people.

[For more information about the sacrifices of wicked people being of no value, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Mal 1:11

**“my name *will be* great among the nations.”** In the Millennial Kingdom, people all over the earth will worship Yahweh (see commentary on Zeph. 2:11).

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mal 1:12

**“its product.”** The Hebrew is literally, “its fruit,” but here “fruit” is used of what the table of Yahweh produces. Like the Hebrews, we use the word “fruit” to refer to product or what is produced, such as when we say, “the fruit of one’s labor,” meaning what they produce. In this case, the “fruit” of the altar, or what the altar produces for the priests is the part of the sacrifices that the priests got to eat, thus, the “fruit” (product) of the altar was the food of the priests, but they disdained it.

**“its food, is contemptible.”** Although it is possible that the meaning of this phrase is that the food from the blind, lame, and otherwise blemished animals was not good, that is likely not its meaning. The priests got the best parts of the animals that were being offered as sacrifices and the fact that an animal was blind or lame usually did not affect the taste of the meat. The meaning is much more likely that it was the whole service of making sacrifices and offerings that the priests held in contempt (cf. Mal. 1:13).

Mal 1:14

**“my name will be feared among the nations.”** In the Hebrew text, the verb “will be” is not in the text, the verb “feared” is a participle, and the future tense “will be feared” comes from the context and scope of Scripture. God’s name was not then, and is not now, feared among the nations of the world, but the day is coming when it will be (cf. Zeph. 2:11).

**Malachi Chapter 2**

Mal 2:2

**“the curse.”** This could also be translated as, “I will send Curse against you,” as if Curse was a real being (it may be a real demon). The curse is in Deuteronomy 28:15-20 and following (see commentary on Deut. 28:20). Note that in Deuteronomy there is Curse, Confusion, and Rebuke,” and here in Malachi the priests and people are being disobedient and are under the curse (Mal. 2:2) and rebuke (Mal. 2:3).

Mal 2:4

**“that my covenant with Levi may stand.”** The Bible never explicitly says that God made a covenant with the Levites, but it is implied (e.g. Deut. 10:8-9). Here in Malachi 2:4, we learn that God did have a covenant with the tribe of Levi, and the priests are all from the tribe of Levi, and direct descendants of Aaron, the first High Priest.

Mal 2:7

**“for he is the messenger of Yahweh of Armies.”** The Hebrew word for “messenger” is *malak* (#04397 מַלְאָךְ), and it is also translated “angel” many times in the Old Testament because “angels” were messengers of God. The fact that a “messenger” could be a human or a spirit messenger, an angel, can cause problems for translators because in some passages we cannot tell whether the “messenger” is a human being or a spirit being. A good example is Judges 2:1, where the “messenger” who spoke to Israel could have been an angel or could have been a human being.

Mal 2:11

**“the holiness of Yahweh.”** In this context, the “holiness of Yahweh” is the Temple and the services in it.

**“which Yahweh loves.”** The Hebrew text is literally, “which he loves,” but the way the sentence is structured in English, the phrase “which he loves” could point back to Judah, which is not at all what the verse is saying. To avoid confusion, the REV has nuanced “he” to “Yahweh.”

Mal 2:12

**“the one who wakes and the one who answers, and the one who offers an offering to Yahweh of Armies.”** This is a difficult text, and many scholars, and the Septuagint, have offered emendations to the Hebrew text so that it makes more sense. The idea seems to be some kind of polarmerismos, where two extremes are given to represent a whole, thus “the one who wakes” and “the one who answers” becomes a figure for “everyone” (cf. CSB, ESV, NET, NIV). Also, “the one who offers an offering” must be taken in this context, that is, an ungodly offering, and that is why the person will be “cut off from the tents of Jacob.” In other words, God will cut off all those who offer at the Temple the ungodly offerings of the kind Malachi was talking about.

Mal 2:13

**“tears.”** The priests and people were crying, but for the wrong reason. They were not crying tears of repentance, being sorry for their sin and the way they had turned away from God and His Word. Instead, they were crying because they were not getting their way and God was not accepting them. Evil and prideful people want their way, and cry and complain when they don’t get it. That was the case with these people.

**“no longer pays attention to the offering.”** Sacrifices and offerings made to God by wicked people are detestable to God; He has no respect for them and will not accept them. Sacrifices and offerings were never designed to make a person with an evil heart acceptable in the sight of God. Proverbs 21:27 and 28:9 say that the sacrifices of a wicked person are an abomination to God.

[For more information about the sacrifices of wicked people being of no value, see commentary on Amos 5:22. For more information about God not hearing the prayers of the ungodly and unrepentant, see commentary on Prov. 28:9.]

Mal 2:14

**“the wife of your covenant.”** Biblically, marriage is a covenant relationship between a man and a woman. God’s plan was to make humans male and female (Gen. 1:27; 5:2) and then they would go on to have children—a family—and populate the earth (Gen. 1:28). The New Testament has the same idea that Malachi 2:13-17 has; if a husband and wife are at odds with no desire or attempts to become one flesh, their prayers are hindered. (1 Pet. 3:7).

Mal 2:15

**“But not one has done so who had a remnant of spirit.”** The Hebrew of this sentence is some of the most difficult in Malachi, and there are many ideas as to what it means, as is evidenced by the different English versions. It seems to point to the fact that people who have any reason (“spirit” being put for the activity of the mind), do not deal treacherously with their wife. This verse is important in helping to reveal that part of God’s purpose in creating people as male and female was so that there would be godly children. The best hope of having godly children is to have a godly father and a godly mother.

**Malachi Chapter 3**

Mal 3:1

**“Behold, I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.”** This phrase in Malachi 3:1 is quoted in Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27, and in Matthew and Luke, Jesus identifies this “messenger” as John the Baptist.

Mal 3:8

**“In tithes and offerings.”** For more on tithes, see commentaries on Genesis 14:20 and 2 Corinthians 9:7.

Mal 3:9

**“You are cursed by the curse.”** This could also be translated as “You are cursed by Curse,” (see commentary on Deut. 28:20 and Mal. 2:2). The curse is spoken of in detail in Deuteronomy 28.

Mal 3:10

**“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse.”** For more on tithes, see commentaries on Genesis 14:20 and 2 Corinthians 9:7.

Mal 3:16

**“and a book was written before him *in order* to remember those who feared Yahweh.”** God’s angel scribes write down what people do so that they can be dealt with justly on Judgment Day. These scrolls (aka, “books”) will be opened and referred to on Judgment Day (cf. Rev. 20:12). The scrolls that have the record of what people do in life are mentioned more than once in the Bible (e.g., Ps. 56:8). One of the scrolls is known as “the Book of Life,” and it is mentioned several times in the Bible (e.g. Exod. 32:32-33; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27).

Moses apparently knew about these record books (Exod. 32:32-33), and so did the psalmist (Ps. 56:8) and the Apostle John (Rev. 20:12), but how they knew is never stated in Scripture. Nevertheless, at certain times in history, God must have revealed things about the Judgment to His people that became general knowledge in the culture, and God also had them written down as part of the Bible. It makes sense that God would have scribes that write down what people do, because the Bible has many verses that say that on Judgment Day people will be repaid for what they have done. Sometimes that is quite explicitly stated, and sometimes only the fact that a person will be rewarded or punished for certain things is stated (e.g., Job 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:23-25. Cf. Eccl. 12:13-14; Jer. 32:19; Matt. 6:1; 10:41-42; Luke 12:47-48; 1 Cor. 3:14-17; 1 Tim. 6:17-19). Since God made it so clear that people would be judged for what they had done in their life, it makes sense that He would keep a record book of those things so that people could be judged justly.

When we realize that God’s angel scribes are writing down what we do in a book, and that book will be opened and referred to on Judgment Day, a couple of important facts are emphasized. One is that no person is a “mistake.” With millions of sperm and eggs available to become a particular individual, the fact that “you” exist is not a mistake. God designed every person with gifts and abilities and the capacity to love and serve Him, and God’s desire is that every person comes to know Him and be saved and be with Him forever (1 Tim. 2:4). God created each of us, and each of us has an obligation to our Creator to love and serve Him. When we ignore, disobey, or defy God there are consequences. This commentary entry is not the place to try to cover what those consequences are, but suffice it to say that the Bible gives us quite a bit of information about them. One consequence of ignoring God is that the unsaved will die in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

Another fact that is emphasized once we realize that what we do is being recorded is that we need to confess our sins. The Bible is clear that if we humbly confess our sins, God forgives them and expunges them from our record. If we confess our sins, God “cleanses” us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Everyone sins, so being forgiven for our sins is very important and comes up many different ways in the Bible. For example, there is the sin offering in the Mosaic Law which covered people’s sin. Also, David confessed and was forgiven (Ps. 51:17). Also, the person under the Mosaic Law who fears God (which would include doing the necessary sacrifices) has his sins removed “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps. 103:11-12). Also, the tax collector who humbly addressed his sin was declared righteous (Luke 18:9-14). Other examples could be used as well, but the point is clear: everyone sins, so to cleanse your record before God, deal honestly and humbly concerning your sins and confess them and they will be forgiven.

A note about the translation “scroll.” Some English translations read “scroll,” while others read “book.” Technically, what we today refer to as a “book” with pages that are bound flat did not exist until New Testament times. In fact, it was likely invented during the lifetime of the Apostle John, but at that early time a “book” would have been rare. However, the scrolls of the Old Testament times were their books, their way of recording information, so the translation “book” is acceptable from a practical information standpoint even if the “book” is a scroll.

**Malachi Chapter 4**

Mal 4:1

**“the day is coming.”** The day, or “time,” is coming when the wicked will be totally destroyed. This will start with the Great Tribulation and continue through the judgments, and finally be completed when the wicked are burned up in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

[For more on the prophecies of the destruction during the Great Tribulation, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on the wicked being annihilated in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“stubble.”** Evil people will be like “stubble,” i.e., like the dry grass in a field. They will be burned up in the Lake of Fire.

Mal 4:2

**“the Sun of Righteousness.”** A title of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This is a similar title to “the Rising Sun from on high” (Luke 1:78). It is fitting that Malachi would end with the prophecy of the coming Messiah, and the first question in the books we refer to as the “New Testament” is, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews” (Matt. 2:2).

**“wings.”** The “wing” is the border or outer edge of the garment (cf. Ruth 3:9).

Mal 4:4

**“Remember.”** This is the idiomatic or “pregnant” sense of the word “remember,” and in this context, it means to remember it and then “pay attention to it and obey it.” The NLT conflates the translation to “remember to obey.” It is appropriate to have this verse where it is because Malachi 4 starts with destruction foretold for the wicked (Mal. 4:1) but healing for the righteous who fear God (Mal. 4:2), then the destruction of the wicked again (Mal. 4:3) then the instruction on how to fear God and be righteous by “remembering” (obeying) the Law (Mal. 4:4). Then Malachi 4:5-6 foretells of the one who will come before the Messiah. So in this section, God does not just foretell the destruction of the wicked, He tells the people how not to be wicked.

[For more on the idiomatic sense of “remember,” see commentary on Luke 23:42.]

**“the Law of Moses.”** The Hebrew is “the *torah* of Moses,” where “*torah*” is much more than “law.” The *torah* involves instruction in many different ways (see commentary on Prov. 1:8).

Mal 4:5

**“Elijah the prophet.”** This “Elijah” was John the Baptist (Matt. 17:10-13). Calling John the Baptist “Elijah” is the figure of speech antonomasia, “name change,” where a person is called by a name other than his or her own name in order to import characteristics from the other person. Antonomasia was used and understood in the biblical culture (cf. 2 Kings 9:31; Isa. 1:10), and Elijah had been dead for over 400 years when Malachi was written and over 800 years when John the Baptist was born, so thinking people would have known that the real Elijah himself was not going to come, but instead someone like Elijah would come.

[For more on John the Baptist being called “Elijah” and more on the figure of speech antonomasia, see commentary on Matt. 17:10].

**“Day of Yahweh.”** The phrase, “Day of Yahweh,” which is translated as “Day of the LORD” in most English versions is one of the more common terms that refers to the End Times, and it can refer to the End Times as a whole, or it can refer to a specific part of the End Times. The meaning of the phrase must be determined from the context.

By far the majority of the times the phrase, “the Day of the Lord” is used, it is associated with wrath and destruction, and thus refers to the tribulation and destruction that will precede the Second Coming of Christ (cf. Ezek. 30:3, Joel 1:15; 2:1; Amos 5:20; Zeph. 1:7ff; 1:14ff; Mal. 4:1-5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10). For example, in Isaiah 13, the Day of the Lord is referred to as a “cruel day,” in which people will “wail,” and there is wrath and destruction (cf. Isa. 13:6, 9), and that cruel day is the Tribulation period before the actual Day of Judgment.

Some verses connect the Day of the Lord with the judgment that follows the tribulation (Joel 2:31; 3:14). Some Jews connected the Day of the Lord with God’s judgment of the nations, without properly realizing that they themselves would also go through the period of God’s wrath and the Judgment, but everyone alive on earth when the Tribulation occurs will experience it (Amos 5:18-20). Furthermore, the Jews will not get special treatment at the Judgment, but will be judged based on how they lived and what they did in this life, just as everyone else. The Old Testament Scriptures, Jesus, John the Baptist, and the New Testament all with one voice warn the Jews not to think of themselves as special just because they are Jews, but to obey God if they want to do well on the Day of Judgment.

Sometimes it can be difficult or impossible to tell exactly in any given context if the phrase “Day of the LORD,” or equivalent phrases such as “that Day,” includes the Judgment itself or just refers to the tribulation that precedes it. When used to refer to the End Times, “the Day of the Lord” can encompass the Tribulation that precedes the Second Coming of Christ, the Second Coming itself and the Battle of Armageddon, the judgments that follow Christ’s conquest of the earth, and the Millennial Kingdom of Christ on earth.

1. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Minor Prophets*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15393)
2. Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* [WBC], 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-21438)