Where Does the Old Testament End?

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Date: November 08, 2026
Church: 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel
References: Malachi 1-4, Malachi 1:1-2; Romans 1:21; Malachi 1:6; Malachi 1:7-8; Malachi 1:10; Malachi 2:1; Malachi 2:6; Malachi 2:8; Malachi 2:17; Malachi 2:13-16; Malachi 3:14; Malachi 3:15-17; Malachi 4:4-6

Introduction: The Condition at the End of the Old Testament

So, my first question to you is: where does the Old Testament end? It begins in Genesis. Where does it end? And the answer is, it ends in Malachi, just before the book of Matthew. Take your Bibles and turn to the book of Malachi.

It's not inconsequential that the book of Malachi is a statement of the end of the Old Testament. Where does the Old Testament end? Well, you're not surprised if you realize that it ends in a place of great need. The last verses are that the Lord is going to have to send Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children—somehow the hearts of the fathers weren't to the children—to turn the hearts of the children to the fathers. Somehow that wasn't right either. There was a big problem in the land of Israel amongst the people of God at the end of the Old Testament.

So, some interesting thoughts now: What would be the condition of the people of God at the end of the Old Testament? And related to that is, how did they get there? I want us to focus on this from a basic theme: What would be the symbols? What would be the signs of the destruction of a society? How bad could it get? How does it get that way?

You've been amazed at what's going on in the world in your lifetime. You may be not as amazed as some of us are, because you might not have lived as long as some of us have, but there have been some big changes in society in our lifetime. I wonder if, in fact, Malachi hasn't put his finger on what's wrong. And if we know what's wrong, the question would be: what do you do to set it right?

So follow with me now, quickly, as we skim through the book of Malachi. This is an attempt to explain the book of Malachi, four chapters, to you in the remaining twenty minutes. And if I fail, then you're not going to be surprised. But we're going to try to get a few thoughts in.

A Heart That Fails to Say "Thank You"

First of all, Malachi chapter 1 and verse 1:

> [Malachi 1:1-2 NKJV]
> [1] The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. [2] "I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, "In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved;

Can you imagine a people so depraved that when the Lord says, "I loved you," they said, "Oh yeah? How would You love me? I'm not sure." Can you imagine a people so bad who, when the Lord says, "I have loved you," they don't immediately respond with the words, "Thank you"? Surely that's what you would say, isn't it? Thank you.

There's a parallel passage to the book of Malachi. It's found in the last half of Romans chapter 1. Many of you have studied it in that context. But Romans chapter 1 raises the question, and it says... Well, I better just read it to you because I'm not quoting it from my memory properly. Romans chapter 1, verse 21:

> [Romans 1:21 NKJV]
> because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

What a terrible thing. People who knew their God didn't give Him glory, and they weren't even thankful. They didn't even say thank you. That's what was happening here in Malachi chapter 1. God says, "I loved you." And they said, "Oh, You did? I didn't notice." That's a long way from God.

Why did we come this morning? Well, we came to say thank you, didn't we? What a terrible thing if we hadn't come. Imagine being invited by the King of kings and Lord of lords to remember Him for all He done, and we said, "I'm awfully sorry, God. I've got something more important this morning." That's where it begins. That's not the last verse in the book of Malachi. That's where it begins: a heart that doesn't say thank you. "I've loved you," said the Lord. And their response was, "Oh, is that the case? I hadn't noticed."

Failing to Honor the Lord

All right. Verse number 6. You'll remember in the book of Malachi, there are many responses of the people. God said things, and the people responded. And so here you get the second of these many responses, and it's verse number 6:

> [Malachi 1:6 NKJV]
> "A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts To you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, "In what way have we despised Your name?'

Well, that's true. That's true. "We've gone through all the motions." A priesthood that went through all the motions of the priesthood and didn't honor the Lord. That was the priesthood that was in the days of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the priests who put Him on the cross. It was the priests who were tempting Him all the time—priests going through the priesthood motion and yet not honoring, not recognizing who He was and doing His will.

"A son honors his father." I understand that that is especially true in the Chinese community: lots of respect paid to forebears. Is that wrong? Well, not wrong to honor a father. But in fact, if one were to honor a father, would one not want to honor God, our Father? But you see, they didn't.

"If I'm your Master, where is My fear?" A lot of people say, "I can't come; I've got a job to do. My boss says I've got to." What? Have you ever said to your boss, "I'm sorry, I can't; God doesn't want me to"? Oftentimes we say, "I'm awfully sorry, God, we can't; my boss doesn't want me to." Not terrible? Why don't you say to your boss, "I'm sorry, I can't; my God doesn't want me to"? God says, "Where's My honor?" He says, "We've given You all You have."

So they weren't thankful. They weren't giving God honor. What's verse 7 say?

> [Malachi 1:7-8 NKJV]
> [7] "You offer defiled food on My altar, But say, "In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, "The table of the LORD is contemptible.' [8] And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts.

Now I say to you, beseech God that He will still be gracious. Verse 10:

> [Malachi 1:10 NKJV]
> "Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, So that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you," Says the LORD of hosts, "Nor will I accept an offering from your hands.

These people were saying, "I'm happy to serve the Lord, but I've got to get paid for it." We won't take time to read it. "I'll give God all kinds of things, but of course, I'll give Him the bad. I'll give Him a sheep, but it'll be a sick sheep. If I got two sheep here, one's healthy and the other's sick, I'll give God the sick sheep. He'll be happy, and I'll keep the good sheep for myself or I'll give it to somebody that may be more important."

Three terrible signs of the sins of these people: they didn't say thank you, they didn't give Him honor, and they gave Him second best as they were going through life.

It's not terribly appropriate, but I'll tell you the story anyway about the mother and father who were riding in the train, and they decided that they wanted some dessert. So they ordered strawberries—fresh strawberries in the middle of winter. They ordered fresh strawberries for themselves and prunes for the children. "They're only kids. They don't deserve." Would it be possible in our life to say, "He's only God; He doesn't deserve"? Or does He **always** get the best?

Chapter 2, verse 1:

> [Malachi 2:1 NKJV]
> "And now, O priests, this commandment is for you.

And He goes on for a long time. And verse 6:

> [Malachi 2:6 NKJV]
> The law of truth was in his mouth, And injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity, And turned many away from iniquity.

That's what a priest should do. But verse 8:

> [Malachi 2:8 NKJV]
> But you have departed from the way; You have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi," Says the LORD of hosts.

Priests weren't giving proper honor to the Lord. How tragic.

Perverted Thinking: Calling Evil Good

All right, we're going to skip down now to the end. I'm going to give you two thoughts on the end of chapter 2 and verse 17. 2:17. We'll start reading in verse 14... No, that's not the verse I want. Thank you. Verse 2:17:

> [Malachi 2:17 NKJV]
> You have wearied the LORD with your words; Yet you say, "In what way have we wearied Him?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil Is good in the sight of the LORD, And He delights in them," Or, "Where is the God of justice?"

How far down have they fallen? So far down that they said, it doesn't matter if you do bad. Everyone that doeth evil is acceptable in the sight of the Lord. I heard the other day a preacher who decided in his preaching he was no longer going to talk about hell; everyone will go to heaven somehow. That's not what the Bible says. "Everyone who does evil is acceptable. Everyone who does evil is acceptable. Everyone who does evil is acceptable to God." Why did Jesus die if that's the case?

That's pretty perverted thinking. It starts out by saying, "I'm not sure You really love me that much, Lord." Blame God for your problem. And then you get to the end, and you say, "It doesn't matter. Everyone who does evil is acceptable to the Lord." And the last line: "Or where is the God of judgment?" Questioning God for what He is. That's pretty serious.

Chapter 3 and verse 16:

> [Malachi 3:14 NKJV]
> You have said, "It is useless to serve God; What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, And that we have walked as mourners Before the LORD of hosts?

"We obeyed God and it didn't do us any good. What profit is it to serve God anyway?"

Okay, is this a healthy response of a healthy people toward the great and glorious God? No. Big problems.

So we've quickly skimmed. The first part is they knew God. He loved them. They didn't say thank you. They didn't understand. He didn't get the honor He should have got. He didn't get the offerings He should have got in terms of the quality; they gave God leftovers. And it ends with questioning the very goodness of God in the verses that I've just read. "It's vain to serve God," they concluded. "And what profit is it that we've kept His ordinance?"

The Breakdown of the Home and Society

But I left a middle part. And the middle part that I left out was a real challenge to me as I considered it. I want you to go back now to chapter 2 and verse 13. We'll pick it up at 13:

> [Malachi 2:13-16 NKJV]
> 13 And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, With weeping and crying; So He does not regard the offering anymore, Nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. 14 Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been witness Between you and the wife of your youth, With whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant. 15 But did He not make them one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. 16 "For the LORD God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one's garment with violence," Says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously."

And I said to myself, "Harold, what does that have to do with what we've just studied?" The nation has departed from God. We can understand. They wouldn't even say thank you. They got down to the point where they said it's no profit to serve God. What a departure! But what on earth has divorce got to do with it?

And then I said, "Harold, it's got **everything** to do with it." Where does divorce come from? It comes from the hardness of your heart. So here's the logic that I follow: If God, who loves us and gave us everything imaginable, can't satisfy us, how could your wife satisfy you?

I keep on thinking about the fact that some wives actually burn the toast in the morning. And I can imagine that some wives burn the toast almost every morning. And you say to her, "Listen, Susie, surely you can figure out how not to burn the toast." Or would there maybe be something else in a marriage that might go wrong? And if, in fact, you couldn't honor the God who made you and gave you everything, how could you honor a wife who can't possibly give you everything? And she may very well give you her best, but you would say it's not good enough. God gave us the best, and the world says it's not good enough.

What would this logic be here for? And I guess it's here because one of the signs that the nation is falling apart is not just that they go from "I can't understand how He loves us" to the point where he says it's of no value to serve the Lord, but on the way down, the love that should be there for God is not there; therefore, the love that should be for the wife or the husband is not there. It's a sign of going down, isn't it?

Have you ever looked at the statistics in our day? Whatever happened to divorce statistics? They went like this, didn't they? You read the movie stars—and people admire the movie stars apparently—you read them, and so you read the story, don't you, of this is what happened when this particular movie star was involved in doing something with his fourth wife. What? What happens when the heart goes wrong? If the heart goes wrong before God, the heart goes wrong before people. And it's a sign that the heart is going to keep on going down and down and down.

Have you noticed what's going on in the world in our day? I'll tell you. When we went to school, we read the Bible every day. The fear of the Lord was taught. When I was a child, I only knew of two people who had ever been divorced. Oh, it's true, I didn't have a very wide sphere, but I only knew of two people who had been divorced. What's going on today? What's happened to our society?

Have you noticed that the United States delights itself in the fact that they are spending less money on the police—defund the police? Why would they defund the police? Because evil is good. Did you notice in the news last week—I didn't read the story, I just saw the headline—it goes like this: The state of Texas got rid of their senator, who was a Republican, and they got rid of their governor, who was a Republican, and they also issued an edict after that saying that the police in Texas are no longer to consult the FBI or the CIA. We don't need law enforcement. Everybody is right. He that does evil is good in the sight of God.

What a tragedy. The nation plummeted from the grace of God in the days of David and… And that's happening in our day. And some of us who live longer watch it go down, one after another, after another, after another.

The Remnant and God's Jewels

Does it end there? No. What happens after the book of Malachi? Jesus comes! Hallelujah! Makes the change of everything. Huh.

Verse 18, verse 15 of chapter... no, I'm in the wrong book here. Yeah, chapter 15 of verse 3... Verse 15 of chapter 3. Okay, verse 15 of chapter 3. It says:

> [Malachi 3:15 NKJV]
> 15 So now we call the proud blessed, For those who do wickedness are raised up;
> They even tempt God and go free."'

What a terrible thing. And verse 16 says, then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another. What do the saints do? The saints get together. They say it's all wrong. What are we going to do? We're going to get together. We're going to talk one to another. We're going to encourage one another. And then we're going to go out on the streets and tell people about Jesus.

Verse 16 again:

> [Malachi 3:16 NKJV]
> 16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, And the LORD listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the LORD And who meditate on His name.

That's what we're going to do. We're turning our thoughts, not from all the bad things going on in the world—we're going to turn our thoughts to the Lord.

Verse 17:

> [Malachi 3:17 NKJV]
> 17 "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him."

What's going to happen on judgment day? God's going to have His own jewel box. And all those of us who love the Lord are going to be prime gemstones in God's great jewel box. Lots of things going wrong in the world, enough to scare you and scare me, but God is going to do His great work.

The Promise of Restoration and Hope

We're going to go to the last verses again. Chapter 4 and verse 4:

> [Malachi 4:4-6 NKJV]
> 4 "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments. 5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

Was it hopeless bad news? No, it wasn't hopeless bad news. God's blessing was going to flow. And it did. Josh Lee read us those verses from Ezekiel this morning. What's going to happen? There's going to be a river that flows out of Jerusalem. And the farther it goes, the better it gets. And it's going to go from the east of Jerusalem down through the Judean desert into that great, terrible plain of Sodom. And it's going to turn it into one of the most beautiful and bountiful places in the world.

If you want to see the price of land go up, buy yourself some land overlooking the Dead Sea. And as Ezekiel said, one day it's going to be really prosperous. You know, there's many in Israel today who are planning to build a tunnel that will go from the Mediterranean Sea to the Dead Sea, and it'll pour water from the Mediterranean Sea into the Dead Sea. And that has been espoused and been discussed in Jerusalem many, many times. Is that going to happen? Probably not. What is going to happen? God is going to send not a tunnel; He's going to send a river from the Mount of Jerusalem, and it's going to flow down the hill to the east, and it's going to bless the land of the Dead Sea.

Now, that's a marvelous prophecy. Is it going to happen? Well, yes, it will literally. But it could happen spiritually for you and me, couldn't it? We've got a life of sin. All we do is put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ; He gives us a brand-new life. What used to be the desolation of the plain of Sodom, the Dead Sea, becomes a place of luxury, beauty, and bounty. That's what God wants to do for us all.

Malachi, what you said, is it true? Yes, it is true. Is it happening right here in our day in the year 2026? Yes, it is. And you'd have to be blind not to notice.

Is that the end? No. What is the end? God is going to bless His people. And you say, "By the grace of God, I trust the Lord." And the Lord said, "Not only am I going to be pleased by that, I'm going to put you in My jewel box. And in that coming day, I'm going to show the jewel box out to all My friends." And one of those jewels in the jewel box can be you; can be me. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we want to thank You. It's true, we live in very difficult days. And we can understand why the Lord is going to have to come and punish the earth with a curse unless something happens. We thank You that the Lord Jesus came and there was a big change. We thank You that He's coming back. We thank You, Lord, when we get to the end of the book, that Jesus wins. And because we trust Him, we win. It's good news.

Lord, we pray that we'll take a look at what's going on in our world around us and acknowledge that it's bad, but acknowledge also that our blessed Savior is able to put it right. And so we thank You. We pray, Lord, that each of us will say, "Lord Jesus, I want You to make my land prosperous, please. I want You to make my life prosperous. I don't want to go through life saying Jesus didn't love me, I didn't get what I wanted."

What a terrible thing, Lord, if we didn't honor You as a Father and as a Boss. What a terrible thing if we offer to You the leftovers of life rather than prioritize. Lord, help us to do what's right, we pray.

And we pray for homes and marriages, Lord. Would You bless them? We think of this dear friend of mine who was planning to divorce his wife, then he got saved and he fell in love with his wife all over again. Lord, may that be true of many of us. Would You save not only our souls, Lord, but save our marriages, save our families, to save us, we pray. We give thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.

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