

Toledot: Malachi 1:1-2:7



With seventy years of bitter Babylonian exile receding into history, the second and third generations of Jews living in Judah and Jerusalem, along with the partially rebuilt Temple at their center, were losing spiritual steam. The grand redemptive promises of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah had not been fulfilled; God's presence was not palpable.

The Bible's final prophet, Malachi¹, begins his book and this Haftarah by reminding the Judeans that, as described in the Parashah, God lovingly and eternally chose them, the descendants of Jacob, over Jacob's brother, Esau, and his descendants, Edom. While they question His providence, the present decline is their responsibility, not His. The people and especially the priests disrespect God, the Temple, and its altar by sacrificing stolen and defective animals. Nonetheless, they expect God to favor them. The prophet's repeated literary pattern reflects the confusion of his time: **[A]** a complaint is lodged; **[B]** a reply, often sarcastic, is offered; **[C]** one side elaborates its point; **[D]** the prophet concludes with a rebuke or promise.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 1:1-2: Although God loves Jacob's descendants over Esau's, Israel does not see evidence of His affection.

Malachi 1:2	מלאכי א:ב
[A] "I have loved you [Israel]," said the Lord. [B] You said, "How have You loved us?" [C] "Was not Esau a brother to Jacob?", says the Lord, [D] "yet I loved Jacob."	אֶהְבֵּתִי אֶתְכֶם אָמַר ה' וְאַמַּרְתֶּם בְּפִמִּי אֶהְבֵּתֵנוּ הֲלוֹא־אֵחַ עָשׂוּ לְיַעֲקֹב בְּאֵם־ה' וְאֶהָב אֶת־יַעֲקֹב:

Verses 1:3-5: God detests Esau's Edomite descendants, cursing them with eternal destruction. This destruction will allow Israel to see God's power over the entire world.

Malachi 1:4	מלאכי א:ד
[A] Should Edom say, "We have been destroyed but we will return and rebuild the desolation!", [B] the Lord of Hosts says, "They shall build, but I will throw down! [D] They shall be called, "The Border of Evil, the people whom the Lord has forever cursed!"	כִּי־תֹאמַר אֲדוֹמִים רָשָׁנוּ וְנָשׁוּב וְנִבְנֶה חֲרָבוֹת כִּי אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת יְהוָה יִבְנוּ וְאֲנִי אֶהָרוֹס וְקִרְאוּ לְהֵם גְּבוּל רִשְׁעָה וְהָעָם אֲשֶׁר־נָעַם ה' עַד־עוֹלָם:

Verses 1:6-10: God expects respect, not scorn, from the Temple's priests. Their physically defective sacrifices would be disgraceful as gifts for a powerful official. God prefers closing the Temple over such defilement of its altar.

Malachi 1:8	מלאכי א:ח
[C] "When you present a blind [animal] to sacrifice, is there nothing wrong? When you present a lame or a sick [animal], is there nothing wrong? [D] Offer it to your governor! Would he accept you or would he favor you?" says the Lord of Hosts.	וְכִי־תִגִּישׁוּ עֹזֵר לְזִבְחֵ אֵין רָע וְכִי תִגִּישׁוּ פֶסֶחַ וְחֵלֶה אֵין רָע הֲקָרִיבֵהוּ לֹא לְפִתְתֵהּ הֲיִרְצֶה אוֹ הֲשָׂא פְנֵיהֶ אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת:

¹ Many consider "Malachi" (literally, "My Messenger") to be the prophet's personal name. The Talmud (Megillah 15a) interprets it to be Mordechai or Ezra. Da'at Mikra cites a view that, given the prophet's strong emphasis on Temple matters, he might be the High Priest at that time, Joshua son of Yehotzadak.

Verse 1:11: The prophet continues rebuking the priest's Temple service, exaggeratedly declaring that, by contrast, the rest of humanity respects God constantly by offering Him perfect and pure sacrifices.

Malachi 1:11	מלאכי א:יא
[D] "For from the sun's rising until its setting, My name is great among the nations. In every place incense and sacrifices are offered to My name, and a pure offering. For My name is great among the nations," says the Lord of Hosts.	כִּי מִמְזֶרְחַח-שְׁמֶשׁ וְעַד-מְבוֹאוֹ גָדוֹל שְׁמִי בְּגוֹיִם וּבְכָל-מְקוֹם מִקְטֹרֶת מִגֵּשׁ לְשִׁמִּי וּמִנְחָה טְהוֹרָה כִּי-גָדוֹל שְׁמִי בְּגוֹיִם אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת:

Verses 1:12-14: The priests and people sacrifice animals that are defective not only physically but morally. This includes stolen animals, or ones embodying their owners' intentional deceit.

Malachi 1:14	מלאכי א:יד
[D] "Cursed is a deceiver whose flock has an male yet vows and sacrifices a blemished one to the Lord. For I am a great King," says the Lord of Hosts, "and My Name is feared among the nations."	וְאָרוּר נוֹכֵחַ וְיֵשׁ בְּעֶדְרוֹ זָכָר וְנִטְרָה וְזִבְחָה מִשְׁחַת לְאֵדָקִי כִּי לְמַלְךְ גָּדוֹל אֲנִי אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת וְשִׁמִּי נוֹרָא בְּגוֹיִם:

Verses 2:1-3: The priests' disrespect prompts God to disrespect them and to curse even their blessings.

Malachi 2:2	מלאכי ב:ב
[A] "If you will not hear, and if you will not lay it to heart, to give glory to my name," says the Lord of Hosts, "then I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. [C] Indeed, I have cursed them already, because you do not lay it to heart."	אִם-לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ וְאִם-לֹא תִשְׁיִמוּ עַל-לֵב לְתֵת כְּבוֹד לְשִׁמִּי אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת וְשִׁלַּחְתִּי בְכֶם אֶת-הַמְאָרָה וְאָרוּתִי אֶת-בְּרִכּוֹתֵיכֶם וְגַם אָרוּתֵיהֶן כִּי אֵינְכֶם שֹׁמְעִים עַל-לֵב:

Verses 2:4-7: God will keep His covenant of life and peace with the Levites and priests as long as they act as His angelic messengers; live according to His true, upright words; and inspire others to avoid sin and seek Him.

Malachi 2:7	מלאכי ב:ז
[D] For the priest's lips should keep knowledge and they should seek teaching from his mouth, for he is a messenger of the Lord of Hosts.	כִּי-שִׁפְתֵי כֹהֵן יִשְׁמְרוּ-דִבְעַת וְתוֹרָה יִבְקֹשׁוּ מִפִּיהוּ כִּי מַלְאָךְ ה'-צְבָאוֹת הוּא:

Connections

Maimonides derives the **proper manner to rejoice** on major festivals from the Haftarah.

Mishneh Torah, Rest on a Holiday 6:18	משנה תורה, הלכות שבייתת יום טוב ו:י"ח
While eating and drinking [on Yom Tov], one must feed the stranger, orphan, widow, along with other poor unfortunates. But one who locks his courtyard doors, eating and drinking with his wife and children but not giving food and drink to the poor and to embittered souls - this not rejoicing in a commandment but rejoicing in one's stomach... Such joy is a disgrace for them, as stated (Malachi 2:3), "I [God] will spread dung on your faces, the dung of your festivals."	וּכְשֶׁהוּא אוֹכֵל וְשׂוֹתֶה חַיִּב לְהַאֲכִיל לַגֵּר לְיִתוּם וְלְאַלְמָנָה עִם שְׂאֵר הָעֲנִיִּים הָאֲמֻלְלִים. אֲבָל מִי שֶׁנֹּעַל דְלִתוֹת תְּצַרוּ וְאוֹכֵל וְשׂוֹתֶה הוּא וּבְנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְאִינוֹ מַאֲכִיל וּמִשְׁקָה לְעֲנִיִּים וְלַמְרִי גָפֶן אֵין זֶה שְׂמֵחַת מִצְוָה אֲלֵא שְׂמֵחַת כְּרִסוֹ... וְשִׂמְחָה כְּזוֹ קָלוֹן הִיא לָהֶם שְׂנְאָמַר (מלאכי ב ג) "וְזָרִיתִי פָרֶשׁ עַל פְּנֵיכֶם פָּרֶשׁ חֲגִיכֶם":

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