

## Shabbat HaGadol: Malachi 3:4-24<sup>1</sup>

Initially, things went well for the Judeans who returned from the Babylonian exile and built the Second Temple. But after a few generations, the restoration was losing steam. The grand promises of the previous generation's prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, were unfulfilled. The Bible's final prophet, Malachi<sup>2</sup>, once again directed the people, especially its priests and Levites, on God's path. His book is framed as a debate between God and His people. Its general pattern is [A] a complaint is lodged; [B] a reply, often sarcastic, is offered; [C] one side elaborates its point; [D] and the prophet concludes with a rebuke or promise. The Haftarah conveys his, and God's, final prophetic messages.

In the Haftarah, Malachi urges the people to desist from a variety of sins against one another and God. To encourage them, God even challenges them to test His ability to reward them so that He can bless them. More profoundly, seeing this blessing of His will answer the complaint of even those who fear Him: why do they suffer while evildoers prosper? God will further reply to that question on a "great and fearsome day" which the return of Elijah the prophet will portend. God will obliterate the wicked and the righteous will triumph over them, similar to the Exodus, commemorated on the upcoming Passover holiday.<sup>3</sup> Elijah will inspire intergenerational bonds that will prevent God from destroying the Land. In the meantime, God's people must continue to follow Moses's law.<sup>4</sup>

### Haftarah Breakdown

**Verse 3:4:** After harshly punishing and purifying its wayward priests, God will again accept Judah's offerings.

Malachi 3:4	מלאכי ג:ד
<b>[D]</b> Then the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of yore and in the years of old.	וְעָרְבָה לָהּ מִנְחַת יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם כִּימֵי עוֹלָם וּכְשֵׁנִים קִדְמֹנֹת:

**Verses 3:5-7:** God hurries to punish Judah for generations of sin. Just as He is unchanging, His people have not changed and continue to sin against Him. God nonetheless awaits their return to Him.

Malachi 3:5	מלאכי ג:ה
<b>[A]</b> "I will come near to you in judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, the adulterers, and those who swear falsely; against those who oppress [by withholding] a worker's wage, the widow, and the orphan; and [against] those who turn aside the stranger and do not fear Me," says the Lord of hosts.	וְקָרַבְתִּי אֲלֵיכֶם לְמִשְׁפֹּט וְהֵייתִי אִי עַד מְמַהֵר בְּמַכְשָׁפִים וּבְמַגְנָאִים וּבְנֹשְׁבְעִים לְשָׁקֵר וּבַעֲשָׂקֵי שֹׁכֵר־שֹׁכֵיר אֶלְמָנָה וְיָתוּם וּמַטִּי־גֵר וְלֹא יִרְאוּנִי אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת:

**Verses 3:8-9:** Despite the Levites' and Priests's sins, the rest of the people have sinned by not giving them tithes.

Malachi 3:8	מלאכי ג:ח
<b>[A]</b> Ought man to defraud God? Yet you defraud Me. <b>[B]</b> You ask, "How have we defrauded You?" <b>[C]</b> [By not giving] tithe and terumah.	הֲיִקְבַּע אָדָם אֱלֹהִים כִּי אַתֶּם קֹבְעִים אֹתִי וְאַמְרַתֶּם כִּימֵהוּ קֹבְעֵנוּדָה הַמְעַשֵּׂר וְהַתְרוּמָה:

<sup>1</sup> The reader repeats verse 23 to end the Haftarah "בכי טוב" (on a "positive note").

<sup>2</sup> "Malachi" (literally, "My Messenger") may be the prophet's personal name, a nickname for Mordechai or Ezra (Megillah 15a), or the era's High Priest, Joshua son of Jehotzadak (Da'at Mikra).

<sup>3</sup> This Haftarah relates to neither a Parashah, nor to the Maftir of a holiday or seasonal reading such as the Four Parashiyot. See [this article](#) for how it nonetheless became the customary Haftarah recited on the Shabbat before Passover.

<sup>4</sup> With emendations, all translations are from [Sefaria.org](#). To dedicate or subscribe, email [haftarahhelper@gmail.com](mailto:haftarahhelper@gmail.com). All Haftarah Helpers are available online through [OU Torah](#).

Verses 3:10-12: God tells the people to test whether He will compensate them for giving tithes. If they do, God will protect and grant their bountiful crops such that other nations will praise them and their Land.

Malachi 3:10	מלאכי ג':
<b>[D]</b> “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house. Test Me with that!”, says the Lord of Hosts, “[to see] if I will not open heaven’s windows for you, and pour out for you immeasurable blessing.”	הָבִיאוּ אֶת-כָּל-הַמַּעֲשֵׂר אֶל-בֵּית הָאוֹצָר וַיְהִי טָרֶף בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחַגְנוּנֵי נָא בְּזֹאת אָמַר ה' צְבָקוֹת אִם-לֹא אֶפְתַּח לָכֶם אֶת אַרְצוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהִרִיקֹתִי לָכֶם בְּרָקָה עַד-בְּלִיַּדִּי:

Verses 3 13-14: God records the complaint of those who fear Him- Serving God offers no gain since evildoers flourish and the righteous suffer?- and promises to reward them, compassionately, in the future.

Malachi 3:14	מלאכי ג':י"ד
<b>[C]</b> You have said, “It is vain to serve God! What profit is [there] for our having kept His charge, and for having walked mournfully [translation uncertain] before the Lord of Hosts?”	אָמַרְתֶּם שְׁוֵא עֲבַד אֱלֹהִים וּמַה-בְּצַע כִּי שְׁמַרְנוּ מִשְׁמַרְתּוֹ וְכִי הִלְכְנוּ קַדְרֻזִית מִפְּנֵי יְה' צְבָקוֹת:

Verses 3:15-21: During that furious judgment, God will utterly eradicate evildoers. The righteous will rejoice and be healed from their suffering, while trampling the wicked underfoot.

Malachi 3:21	מלאכי ג':כ"א
<b>[D]</b> “You shall trod upon the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,” says the Lord of hosts.	וְעַסוֹתֶם רְשָׁעִים כִּי-יִהְיוּ אֶפְרַח תַּחַת כַּפּוֹת רַגְלֵיכֶם בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת: (פ)

Verses 3:22-24: God’s final message: Remember the Torah while awaiting Elijah. His arrival will herald this mighty Day of God by joining the hearts of parents and their children, thereby preventing God from destroying the Land.

Malachi 3:23	מלאכי ג':כ"ג
Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.	הִנֵּה אֲנִכִּי שְׁלַח לָכֶם אֶת אֵלֵיהָ הַנְּבִיא לִפְנֵי בּוֹא יוֹם ה' הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא:

### Connection

The future role of Elijah, whose mysterious return concludes the Haftarah, is debated in the Mishnah.

Mishnah Eduyot 8:7	משנה עדיות ח:ז
R. Joshua said: “I have [heard] from R. Yohanan b. Zakkai, who heard from his teacher, and his teacher from his teacher, as a law [given] to Moses at Sinai, that Elijah will come neither to [declare] impure or to [declare] pure, nor to distance or to bring near- but to distance those brought near by force and to bring near those put away by force.” [...] R. Judah says, “To bring near, but not to distance.” R. Shimon says, “to conciliate disputes.” The Sages say, “neither to put away nor to bring near, but to make peace in the world, as (Malachi 3:23-4) says, “Behold I send you Elijah the prophet...and he shall turn the fathers’ hearts to the children, and the childrens’ heart to their fathers.”	אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, מִקָּבֵל אֲנִי מֵרַבִּי יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכַּאי, שֶׁשָּׁמַע מֵרַבּוֹ וּרְבּוֹ מֵרַבּוֹ, הִלְכָה לְמִשְׁה מְסִינֵי, שֶׁאִין אֵלֵיהוּ בָּא לְטָמֵא וּלְטָהֵר, לְרַחֵק וּלְקַרֵּב, אֲלֵא לְרַחֵק הַמְּקַרְבִּין בְּזִרוּעַ וּלְקַרֵּב הַמְּרַחֲקִין בְּזִרוּעַ. [...] רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר, לְקַרֵּב, אֲבָל לֹא לְרַחֵק. רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן אוֹמֵר, לְהַשׁוּת הַמַּחֲלָקִת. וְחֻכְמִים אוֹמְרִים, לֹא לְרַחֵק וְלֹא לְקַרֵּב, אֲלֵא לַעֲשׂוֹת שְׁלוֹם בְּעוֹלָם, שְׁנֶאֱמַר (מַלְאכִי ג) הִנֵּה אֲנִכִּי שְׁלַח לָכֶם אֶת אֵלֵיהָ הַנְּבִיא וְגו' וְהַשִּׁיב לֵב אֲבוֹת עַל בְּנֵים וְלֵב בְּנֵים עַל אֲבוֹתָם: