

Toledot: Malachi 1:1-2:7

With seventy years of 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 his brother, Esau, and his descendants, Edom, whom God hates and destroys.

Although the people question His providence, the present decline is not His responsibility but theirs. Malachi focuses strongly on priestly misdeeds. The people and priests disrespect God, the Temple, and its altar by sacrificing stolen and inferior animals even as they expect God's favor. In contrast to these dismal priestly realities, the Haftarah concludes with a stirring vision of how the exalted tribe of Levi ought to behave in light of God's special covenant of peace and life with 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.²

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 1:1-2: Although God loves Jacob's descendants over Esau's, Israel questions His love.

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 בְּמִהָ אֶהְבֵּתֵנוּ הֲלוֹא-אֵחָ עָשׂוּ לְעֵקֶב נְאֻם-ה' וְאֶהֱבֵ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל:

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

Malachi 1:4	מלאכי א:ד
[A] Edom will say, "We have been destroyed but we will return and rebuild the desolation!" [B] [But] the Lord of Hosts declares, "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 אֲדוֹם רְשָׁשָׁנוּ וְנָשׁוּב וְנִבְנֶה חֲרָבוֹת כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת יְהוָה יְבִנּוּ וְאֲנִי אֶהְרֹס וְקִרְאוּ לְהֵם גְּבוּל רְשָׁעָה וְהָעַם אֲשֶׁר-נִעַם ה' עַד-עוֹלָם:

Verses 1:6-10: God expects respect 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 עֹגֵר לְזִבְחֵ אֵין לֵע וְכִי תִגִּישׁוּ פֶסֶם וְחִלָּה אֵין הֵע הַקְרִיבֵהוּ לֹא לְפִתְחֵ הַזֶּבֶחַ אוֹ הַזֵּא פְּיָד אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת:

¹ Many consider "Malachi" (literally, "My Messenger") to be the prophet's personal name. The Talmud (Megillah 15a) interprets it as 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.

² With emendations, all translations are from Sefaria.org. To dedicate, comment, or subscribe, email haftarahhelper@gmail.com.

Verse 1:11-14: The rest of humanity who fear God and constantly offer pure, perfect sacrifices to Him. Yet the Judeans and their priests desecrate God, the Temple's altar and its service by sacrificing animals that are blemished, stolen, or that reflect their owners' disrespect for God's greatness.

Malachi 1:14	מלאכי א:י"ד
[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."	וְאֶרְוִיר בּוֹלֵל גַּיִשׁ בְּעֶדְרוֹ זָכָר וְגֵר וְזֶבֶחַ מְשֻׁחָת לְאֵלֹקֵי כִּי מִלֶּךְ גָּדוֹל אֲנִי אָמַר ה' צְבָקוֹת וְשָׁמִי בּוֹרָא בְּגוֹיִם:

Verses 2:1-3: The priests' disrespect prompts God to disrespect them and to curse 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 תִשְׁמְעוּ עַל-לֵב לְתֵת כְּבוֹד לְשָׁמִי אָמַר ה' צְבָקוֹת וְשִׁלְחָתִי בְכֶם אֶת-הַמְּאֹרָה וְאֶרְוִיתִי אֶת-בְּרִכּוֹתֵיכֶם וְגַם אֶרְוִיתִיהָ 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 word, 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-שִׁפְתַי כֹּהֵן יִשְׁמְרוּ-דְבַר וְתוֹרָה יִבְקָשׁוּ מִפִּיהוּ כִּי מַלְאָךְ ה'—צְבָקוֹת 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 וְשׁוֹתֶה חַיִּב לְהַאֲכִיל לְגֵר לְיְתוֹם וְלְאַלְמָנָה עִם שְׂאֵר הָעֲנָיִים הָאֲמָלְלִים. אָבֵל מִי שֶׁנֹּעַל דְלֵתוֹת חֲצָרוֹ וְאוֹכֵל וְשׁוֹתֶה הוּא וּבְנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֵינּוּ מַאֲכִיל וּמְשַׁקֶּה לְעֲנָיִים וּלְמַרְי נֶפֶשׁ אֵין זֶה שְׂמֵחַת מִצְוָה אֲלֵא שְׂמֵחַת פְּרִסוּ... וְשְׂמֵחַת כְּזוֹ קָלוֹן הִיא לָהֶם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (מלאכי ב ג) "וְתִרְוִיתִי פָּרֶשׁ עַל פְּנֵיכֶם פָּרֶשׁ חֲגִיכֶם:"

The Talmud describes the **proper persona of a Torah teacher** from the Haftarah's final verse:

Chagigah 15b	חגיגה ט"ו ב
Rabba bar bar Hana said that Rabbi Yohanan said: "What is the meaning of (Malachi 2:7), 'For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek Torah from his mouth; for he is an angel of the Lord of hosts'? It teaches: If a rabbi is similar to an angel of the Lord of hosts, they should seek Torah from his mouth; but if not, they should not seek Torah from his mouth."	אָמַר רַבָּה בַר בַּר חָנָה בְּרַ בַּר יוֹהָנָן: מַאי דְכַתִּיב: "כִּי שִׁפְתַי כֹּהֵן יִשְׁמְרוּ דְבַר וְתוֹרָה יִבְקָשׁוּ מִפִּיהוּ כִּי מַלְאָךְ ה' צְבָאוֹת הוּא." אִם דּוֹמֶה הָרַב לְמַלְאָךְ ה' צְבָאוֹת — יִבְקָשׁוּ תוֹרָה מִפִּיהוּ, וְאִם לֹא — אַל יִבְקָשׁוּ תוֹרָה מִפִּיהוּ