

Bellows Family

## MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanakh Learning Program

In loving memory of my father ARTIGAS MAURICIO MOSHE KOHN

### Malachi 1-2:1-9

Malachi is the last of the prophets of the second Temple, and he ends the sequence of prophecy in the Tanakh. His time period is not mentioned explicitly in the book, but based on his prophecies it appears that he prophesied after Chaggai and Zechariah, while the Temple was standing, close to the time of Ezra and Nechemiah. Malachi's identity is not clear, his father's name is not mentioned, and even the name "Malachi" may only be a description of the prophet as a messenger (*malach*). Malachi's prophecies reflect the reality of his time, when the Temple was already built, but the services in it were neglected. The central purpose of the Temple was not realized, and respect for the Temple went down in the eyes of both the people and the priests. Central to his prophecies is his debate with the priests, and his criticism of their attitude to the Temple. An additional problem which arises in the prophecies of Malachi is the trend of the people to divorce the Israeli women and intermarry, which is mentioned in the book of Ezra as well. The concept of covenant is important to the book – between the nation and God, the covenant of the Levites, and the covenant between man and wife.

### Perek 1

Perek 1 includes two prophecies: in the first prophecy (2-5) Malachi turns to the people and speaks of God's love of Israel and His hate of Edom. This is the only prophecy in the book which speaks of the relationship between Israel and the nations. All of the other prophecies are directed to Israel alone. The second prophecy (6-14) turns to the priests and harshly criticizes the contempt shown for God in the Temple. The two prophecies are constructed in a similar manner as dialogues: God's words to those listening, the surprise of the people listening ("*How have You loved us?*", "*How have we despised Your Name?*") and the extended answer of God.

## Malachi 1-2

### 1.

*"I loved you, said the Lord"* (2) The book of Malachi opens with a prophecy to the nation which focusses on God's love of Israel.

**a** | The prophecy ties the current attitude to Israel and Edom to the forefathers, and alludes to the story of Yaakov and Eisav in Bereshit. How does this allusion contribute to determining the nature of love in the prophecy, and how does it answer the people's question? Pay attention as well to the difference between the love of Yaakov and the love of Eisav in Bereshit 25:28.

**b** | What is the real background to this dispute in Malachi's time? Remember the predicament of the people in Chaggai's time (Chaggai perek 1) and the attitude toward Edom after the destruction of the Temple – as described in Ovadiah and Tehillim 137:7. See the commentary of the **Radak** on the prophecy:

Even though your land was desolate as well, you returned to it and you are living on it, but they will never return to their land, and it will be forever desolate and a wilderness...It was destroyed because of the evil doings of its inhabitants, for their evil was great before God, they betrayed their brothers, the children of Yaakov...and they rejoiced at their destruction and exile... and you say from within the borders of Israel: May God be exalted! Give praise and thanks that you sit within your borders and their borders are destroyed.

### 2.

In the second part (6-14), the prophet turns to the priests with harsh criticism. In the first prophecy the love of God for Israel was mentioned, and now the lack of honor and awe of the priests for God is discussed.

**a** | What is the role of the sacrifices and what is the source of their importance according to Malachi?

**b** | The criticism of the rituals in the Temple is reminiscent of the criticism of the prophets in the time of the First Temple. However, here the content of the criticism is completely different: compare Amos 5:22 and Yishayahu 1:11 to Malachi's rebuke in pesukim 10 and 13. Why does God reject the sacrifice in each of these cases? In each case, how does this difference reflect the difference between the First Temple and the Second Temple? **Y Kaufmann** comments:

At first ritual was something popular and natural...which was involved in all the nation's activities... the prophets attempted to explain to them that the rituals were not the point... in the conditions after the destruction, ritual became a sign of devotion to God – devotion despite the destruction. The desire to establish rituals expressed the desire for holiness, for drawing close to God, for separation from pagan ritual and attendance to the law of God.

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## Malachi 1-2

### Perek 2:1-9

The first part of perek 2 is another prophecy of rebuke from Malachi to the priests, which contains many references to the Torah and to the role and character of the Levi and Priest.

#### 3.

In pasuk 2 the prophet alludes to the role of the priests in blessing the people – birkat kohanim (Bamidbar 6:22-27) – and he reverses the blessing. Follow the reversal:

- Malachi uses the word curse (*a.r.h.*) three times, paralleling the three uses of the word bless (*b.r.kh.*) in the priestly blessing.
- Malachi begins and ends with paying heed (*sima al lev*) to parallel the end of the priestly blessing where it says “They shall bestow my name” (*vesamu et shemi*)
- There is also an allusion to the priestly blessing (*nesiat kapaiim*) in pasuk 3: “and it shall take you to itself” (*ve'nasa etchem eilav*)

What do you think is the reason for this harsh reversal of the priestly blessing? See also the allusion to the priestly blessing at the end of the prophecy (1:9) and see the reason brought there. Note as well that the priestly blessing was given after the sacrifices.

#### 4.

In pesukim 5-9 Malachi draws a picture of the ideal Levi and priest and contrasts them with the current priests who have violated the covenant.

**a |** The function of the Levi and his special covenant with God are described in pasuk 5 and the second half of pasuk 7. In between, the resulting roles of the Levi are described: learning Torah and teaching it to the public. How were these two functions violated in the time of Malachi (8-9)?

**b |** “The covenant of the Levi” in the prophecy of Malachi alludes to two places where the covenant with the priest and the Levi appear in the Torah: Malachi begins by referring to the covenant of peace which was made with Pinchas (Bamidbar 25:13). Later he refers to Moshe’s blessing to the tribe of Levi (Devarim 33:8-10). What are the formative events which bring about these covenants? How do they characterize the ways of the Levi and the priest? Pay attention to the emphasis on peace in the prophecy of Malachi.

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### APPENDIX: Motifs of Landscape and Agriculture from the Days of the Return to Zion: Agriculture in the Time of Malachi by Yehudah Felix

In the time of Chaggai and Zechariah, Israel was desolate. The inhabitants went hungry – they planted a lot, but harvested only small amounts (Chaggai 1:5). They had years of drought (Chaggai 1:10-11). The crops were afflicted with diseases and pests (Chaggai 2:17). Instead of beautiful orchards, forest trees grew, and Chaggai tells them to cut down these trees and use them for the building of the Temple (1:8). Chaggai foresees days of blessing and abundance after the completion of the Temple.

So it seems that the agricultural conditions in Israel improved over time. We can see this in Malachi's prophecy about Edom, which begins *"I loved you, said the Lord"* and continues *"And I hated Esau, and I made his mountains desolate"* – the prophet determines that all of Edom's efforts to rebuild their land will be unsuccessful, and he prophesies eternal desolation for them. Malachi places Edom in its destruction opposite the Land of Israel whose agriculture is flourishing – because of God's love for his nation.

While Malachi feels satisfaction at the progress in Israel, he fears that the curse which was on it for so many years will return because of the nation's sins. He warns them of the calamity which will befall a land whose priests do not respect God's Temple. Those very people whose role it is to bless the people and the land, and to enjoy the blessing of the land, may turn the blessing into a curse (2:2-3). The ethical and religious state of the various classes of the nation is degenerating. This degeneration is occurring as well in the people's relationship to the Temple, their marriages, their theft from employees, widows, orphans and strangers and their withholding tithes from the Levites. The result is already apparent: *"You are cursed with a curse"* (3:9) – years of drought return and the natural disasters multiply, especially the locusts which Malachi terms the devourers (*ha'ochel*). However, the prophet sees this as a warning, and as something which will pass quickly if the moral and religious state of the people is improved. He promises: *"if I will not open for you the sluices of heaven and pour down for you blessing until there be no room to suffice for it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sake, and he will not destroy the fruits of your land; neither shall your vine cast its fruit before its time in the field."* (3:10-11). So that despite these afflictions, Malachi is optimistic, he is full of hope for the future of agriculture in Israel.

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