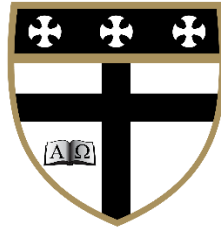


# The Whitefield Seminary Papers

“Law & Religion Forum”

Volume 2, Apostolate Paper #22



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## A HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

“Malachi’s Prophecy: A Prologue to the New Testament”<sup>1</sup>

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by

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<sup>1</sup> Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022). [www.roderickford.org](http://www.roderickford.org).

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by

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<sup>2</sup> Roderick O. Ford, *The Apostolate Papers* (unpublished research papers, 2015 to 2022). [www.roderickford.org](http://www.roderickford.org).

## Introduction

The Prophet Malachi was a 5<sup>th</sup> century Hebrew prophet who lived during the reign of the post-exilic period of the Jewish return from Babylon. Malachi's ministry occurred during the Second Temple period in Jerusalem where he was concerned with the decline in priestly holiness and diligence.

The Babylonian captivity began in 597 BC.

Cyrus the Great's decree, permitting the Jews to return to Jerusalem, was issued in 538 BC.

Under Darius I, and under the leadership of Governor Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua, the Jews recommenced the rebuilding of the Second Temple. The Prophets Haggai and Zechariah preached during this period, circa 520 BC.

The Prophet-Priest-Lawyer Ezra led a second wave of Jews returning from Babylon to Jerusalem during the period, circa, 468 to 458 BC.

The Prophet-Governor Nehemiah, who was a former cup-bearer to the Persian emperor Artaxerxes, returned to Jerusalem about 458 BC and was installed a governor. Nehemiah, as governor, worked with the Prophet Ezra in reinstating authentic Mosaic liturgical practices within the Second Temple.

Since the Prophet Malachi (i.e., "My Messenger") lived during this period, many have surmised that the Prophets Ezra and Malachi were the same person:

The editors of the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia implied that Malachi prophesied after Haggai and Zechariah and speculated that he delivered his prophecies about 420 BC, after the second return of Nehemiah from Persia, or possibly before his return. The Talmud and the Aramaic Targum of Yonathan ben Uzziel identify Ezra as the same person as Malachi. This is the traditional view held by most Jews and some Christians, including Jerome. This identification is plausible, because 'Malachi' reprimands the people for the same things Ezra did, such as marrying foreign pagan women. Malachi also

focuses extensively on corrupt priests; which Ezra, a priest himself who exhorted the people to follow the law, despised....

Opinions vary as to the prophet's exact date, but nearly all scholars agree that Malachi prophesied during the Persian period, and after the reconstruction and dedication of the Second Temple in 516 BC. More specifically, Malachi probably lived and labored during the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. The abuses which Malachi mentions in his writings correspond so exactly with those which Nehemiah found on his second visit to Jerusalem in 432 BC that it seems reasonably certain that he prophesied concurrently with Nehemiah or shortly after.

According to W. Gunther Plaut:

Malachi describes a priesthood that is forgetful of its duties, a Temple that is underfunded because the people have lost interest in it, and a society in which Jewish men divorce their Jewish wives to marry out of the faith.<sup>3</sup>

The Prophet Malachi preached about the changing of the guard from the corrupt Levitical priesthood of the Second Temple to a new (or older) priesthood of Christ, which is after the order of Melchizedek.

“For four hundred years after Malachi’s ringing condemnations, God remains silent. Only with the coming of John the Baptist (prophesied in 3:1) does God again communicate to His people through a prophet’s voice.”<sup>4</sup>

Towards the end of this 400-year period, the last Jewish regal dynasty (the Hasmonean Dynasty) was instituted in, circa, 140 BC and lasted until, circa, 37 BC, when the Roman empire effectively took control over ancient Judea and instituted its turbulent leadership under Herod the Great, whose reign coincided with the birth of Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> “Malachi,” Wikipedia (Online Encyclopedia): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malachi>. See, also, St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 752-753 (“The prophet Malachi... is by some... identified with Ezra the priest....”).

<sup>4</sup> “The Book of Malachi,” *The Holy Bible* (KJV) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 2017), p. 1226.

## Chapter One

### “Corrupted Second Temple Priesthood”

The Book of Malachi commences with a theological analogy regarding the brothers Esau and Jacob.<sup>5</sup>

It reminds its listeners or readers that God loved Jacob but hated Esau— despite the fact that they were blood brothers— because of Esau’s lack of faith and fidelity<sup>6</sup> — Esau despised his birthright.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, Esau (or his descendants, who were the Edomites) had erroneously resolved to build, or to rebuild their dominion, without true faith and fidelity towards God—but, here, Malachi states that this would be to no avail.<sup>8</sup>

The Book of Malachi thus forewarns the Jewish-Levitical priesthood that, even though they are the sons of Jacob, whom God loved, that these Jewish priests were actually walking in the footsteps of Esau— i.e., the priests were administering the Second Temple without faith and fidelity towards the Almighty God.<sup>9</sup>

The Second Temple priests have lowered the standards of both the liturgical animal sacrifices and the character of the priesthood in general.

“You place defiled food on my altar,” says the Prophet Malachi.<sup>10</sup> “But you profane it by saying, ‘The Lord’s table is defiled,’ and, ‘Its food is contemptible.’ And you say, ‘What a burden!’ and you sniff at it contemptuously,” says the Lord Almighty. “When you bring injured, lame or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?” says the Lord. “Cursed is the

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<sup>5</sup> Malachi 1:1-4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 25:34 (“So Esau despised his birthright.”)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Malachi 1: 7 [NIV].

cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and my name is to be feared among the nations.'"<sup>11</sup>

### *Social Effects of the Corrupt Priesthood*

In addition, and overall, the Levitical priests of the Second Temple had set a very bad example, as the Prophet Malachi writes:

**'For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth.**

But you have turned from the way and by **your teaching have caused many to stumble**; you have violated the covenant with Levi,' says the LORD Almighty.

**'So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law.'**<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the loss of fidelity in the institution of marriage, which is designed to raise up "godly offspring,"<sup>13</sup> to the rise in "divorce,"<sup>14</sup> and to the rise in marriages to women "of a foreign god,"<sup>15</sup> the Prophet Malachi proclaimed that the Jewish people had become, in general, thoroughly corrupted, saying to themselves: **"All who do evil are good... Where is the God of justice?"**<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Malachi 1:12-14 [NIV].

<sup>12</sup> Malachi 2:7-9 [NIV].

<sup>13</sup> Malachi 2: 15 [NIV].

<sup>14</sup> Malachi 2:16 ("I hate divorce") [NIV].

<sup>15</sup> Malachi 2:11 [NIV].

<sup>16</sup> Malachi 2:17 [NIV].

## Chapter Two

### “God Will No Longer Accept Blemished Sacrifices”

In response to the contemptible and blemished sacrifices offered by the Jewish-Levitical priesthood in the Second Temple, the Almighty God proclaims that he will no longer accept its sacrifices, to wit:

‘Oh, that **one of you would shut the temple doors**, so that you would **not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,**’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and **I will accept no offering from your hands.**

**My name will be great among the nations**, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and **pure offerings will be brought to me**, because **my name will be great among the nations,**’ says the Lord Almighty.<sup>17</sup>

According to Augustine of Hippo’s *The City of God*, this passage signifies the ending of the Levitical priesthood of the Second Temple and the restoration of the priesthood after the Order of Melchizedek instituted by Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> To this very point, Augustine writes:

Since we can already see this sacrifice offered to God in every place, from the rising of the sun to his going down, through Christ’s priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, while the Jews, to whom it was said, ‘I have no pleasure in you, neither will I accept a gift at your hand,’ cannot deny that their sacrifice has ceased, why do they still look for another Christ, when they read this in the prophecy, and see it fulfilled, which could not be fulfilled except through Him?<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, John Calvin reached the same general conclusion as Augustine’s, stating:

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<sup>17</sup> Malachi 1:10-11 [NIV].

<sup>18</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York, N.Y.: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 643 – 644.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 643.

Here God shows that he no longer cared for the Jews, for he would bid altars to be reared for him everywhere and through all parts of the world, that he might be purely worshipped by all nations. It is indeed a remarkable prophecy as to the calling of the Gentiles....

We now then see what the Prophet means when he says, that Great will be the name of God from the rising to the setting of the sun. It is simply said in Psalms 113:3

“From the rising to the setting of the sun wonderful shall be the name of God.”

There indeed it is only a promise, but here the Prophet includes the punishment which the Jews had deserved, as though he had said, that after they were rejected by God on account of their ingratitude, the Gentiles would become holy to God, because he would adopt them instead of that wicked and ungodly people.

But [as] I have said, that the calling of the Gentiles is here clearly proved....<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the Early Church had concluded that the perfect, unblemished sacrifice, which God had prepared, was Christ Jesus himself, available and accessible to both the Jewish nation as well as every nation upon earth.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Calvin's Commentaries on the Bible (Malachi 1:11).

<sup>21</sup> John 3:16.; Hebrews 10:1- 18 (“... we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all....”)



## Chapter Three

### “Announcement of John the Baptist (‘Elijah’) and the Advent of Christ”

The Early Church next gave chapter three of the Book of Malachi a very Christocentric interpretation that requires the allegorical method of biblical hermeneutics. This chapter begins as follows:

**‘I will send my messenger,** who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,’ says the Lord Almighty.<sup>22</sup>

Reformed theologian John Calvin concluded that this passage referenced John the Baptist of the New Testament, stating:

Behold, he says, I send my messenger, who will clear the way before my face. This passage ought doubtless to be understood of John the Baptist, for Christ himself so explains it, than whom no better interpreter can be found; and since John the Baptist was the messenger of Christ, the beginning of the verse can be applied to no other person. Afterwards the Father himself speaks as we shall see: but as he who appeared in the flesh is the same God with the Father, it is no wonder that he speaks, and then that the words which follow are spoken in the person of the Father....<sup>23</sup>

And in chapter four of the Book of Malachi can be found this passage: “‘See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes....”<sup>24</sup> Calvin interprets this passage as follows:

But Christ himself took away all doubt on this point, when he said, that John the Baptist was the Elijah, who had been promised; (Matthew 11:10:) and the thing itself proves this, had not Christ spoken on the subject. And why John the Baptist is called Elijah, I

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<sup>22</sup> Malachi 3:1 [NIV].

<sup>23</sup> *Calvin’s Commentaries on the Bible* (Malachi 3:1).

<sup>24</sup> Malachi 4:5 [NIV].

shall explain in a few words. What some say of zeal, I shall say nothing of; and many have sought other likenesses, whom I shall neither follow nor blame. But this likeness seems to me the most suitable of all, -- that God intended to raise up John the Baptist for the purpose of restoring his worship, as formerly he had raised up Elijah: for at the time of Elijah, we know, that not only the truth was corrupted and the worship of God vitiated, but that also all religion was almost extinct, so that nothing pure and sound remained. At the coming of Christ, though the Jews did not worship idols, but retained some outward form of religion, yet the whole of their religion was spurious, so that that time may truly be compared, on account of its multiplied pollutions, to the age of Elijah. John then was a true successor of Elijah, nor were any of the Prophets so much like John as Elijah: hence justly might his name be transferred to him.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, chapter three of the Book of Malachi announces the coming of Christ, as follows:

“I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. **Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,**” says the Lord Almighty.

But **who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?** For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; **he will purify the Levites** and refine them like gold and silver. Then **the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness**, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.<sup>26</sup>

Augustine of Hippo’s *The City of God* states that this passage references both the First and Second Coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> Augustine states that the First Coming of Christ is referenced by the passage, “[t]hen suddenly the Lord you are seeking

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<sup>25</sup> Calvin’s *Commentaries on the Bible* (Malachi 4:5).

<sup>26</sup> Malachi 3:1-4 [NIV].

<sup>27</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God*, supra, pp. 643-644.

will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come.”<sup>28</sup> Augustine stated that the Second Coming of Christ is referenced by the passage, “who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?”<sup>29</sup>

The Early Church thus interpreted the Book of Malachi as a prophecy of the advent of Jesus Christ and the institution of Christian Church.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 643-644.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 644 and pp. 752-753.

## Chapter Four

### “Social Justice”

Like his brother prophets Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zechariah, the Prophet Malachi proclaims that justice—and especially social justice—is much more important to the LORD God than religious rites, liturgical practices, and rituals.<sup>30</sup>

The Prophet Malachi especially emphasizes this when he compares the corrupted Second Temple priests to Esau whose heart was never faithful to God and who despised his birthright.

As previously stated, the Prophet Malachi proclaimed that the Jewish people had become, in general corrupted, saying to themselves: “**All who do evil are good... Where is the God of justice?**”<sup>31</sup>

Second, the Prophet Malachi states that the LORD truly desires “offerings in righteousness.”<sup>32</sup> Secondly, the Prophet Malachi strongly emphasizes that religious righteousness must be translated into social justice, to wit:

‘So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, **adulterers and perjurers**, against **those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless**, and **deprive the foreigners among you of justice**, but do not fear me,’ says the Lord Almighty.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, the Prophet Malachi admonishes whole nations to honor the LORD God through tithes and offerings, lest the nation remain “under a curse—the whole

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<sup>30</sup> **Isaiah 1:11-17** (“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? ... Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow”); **Hosea 6:6-7** (“For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me”); and **Amos 5:12-24** (“I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thug away from me the noise of thy songs: for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.”)

<sup>31</sup> Malachi 2:17 [NIV].

<sup>32</sup> Malachi 3:3 [NIV].

<sup>33</sup> Malachi 3:5 [NIV].

nation of you—because you are robbing me.”<sup>34</sup> And by this we are to understand that God expects civil polities, nations, and peoples to acknowledge and to honor Him.

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<sup>34</sup> Malachi 3:6-8 [NIV].

## Conclusion

The Book of Malachi is the final book in the Old Testament. The Early Church accepted it as a prophecy about the changing of the guard from the corrupted Levitical priesthood to the older Order of the Priesthood of Melchizedek (i.e., Christ) under a New Covenant.

The nature of that New Covenant priesthood was described by the Apostle Peter as follows: “[b]ut ye are a chosen generation, **a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people**; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”<sup>35</sup>

According to Reformed theologian John Calvin, the Book of Malachi foretold of John the Baptist. And according to Augustine of Hippo, the Book of Malachi also foretold both the First and Second Comings of Jesus Christ.

A distinguishing feature of the New Covenant Church—the religion of Christ—was its emphasis upon **social justice**, and upon **righteousness** as having a priority over **religious ritualism**.

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<sup>35</sup> 1 Peter 2:9. In Reformed theology, this passage describes the theological doctrine of the “**priesthood of all believers**.” For a **Roman Catholic** understanding of this doctrine, see, e.g., <https://www.catholic.com/qa/does-1-peter-29-indicate-that-we-are-all-priests>; for a **Reformed or Protestant** understanding of this doctrine, see, e.g., [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priesthood\\_of\\_all\\_believers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priesthood_of_all_believers). For the Protestant Reformers Luther and Calvin, the great 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian **Augustine of Hippo** was a primary authority on Christian theology, and Augustine himself embraced the “Reformed Protestant” conceptualization of the “priesthood of all believers,” where he writes:

“I desire to be a member, no matter what, or how small, of Thy priesthood. By **the priesthood** here means **the people itself**, of which He is the Priest who is the Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. This people the Apostle Peter calls ‘a holy people, a royal priesthood.’” *The City of God*, supra, p. 582.

“‘Put me in a part of Thy priesthood, to eat bread,’ is ... the Word of God who dwells in the **heart of one who believes**.” *The City of God*, supra, p. 582.

“For we see that priests and Levites are now chosen, not from a certain family and blood, as was originally the rule in the priesthood according to the order of Aaron, but as befits the new testament, under which Christ is the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, in consideration of the merit which is bestowed upon each man by divine grace. And **these priests are not to be judged by their mere title, which is often borne by unworthy men, but by that HOLINESS which is not common to good men and bad.**” *The City of God*, supra, p. 746. (Emphasis added in all-capital letters).

It is for this reason that the Protestant Reformation was indeed an “Augustinian” reformation of the Western Church.

The Apostle Paul would later teach that this mandate for social justice and righteousness *did not* annul the Law of Moses, but rather it *established* and *fulfilled* that sublime Law.<sup>36</sup>

“For four hundred years after Malachi’s ringing condemnations, God remains silent. Only with the coming of John the Baptist (prophesied in 3:1) does God again communicate to His people through a prophet’s voice.”<sup>37</sup>

Hence, the New Testament Church was deeply rooted in the sayings of both the Prophet Malachi and all of the several Hebrew prophets whose names appear in the titles of several books in the Old Testament.

**THE END**

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<sup>36</sup> Romans 3:31 (“Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.”); Romans 13:10 (“Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”) [NIV].

<sup>37</sup> “The Book of Malachi,” *The Holy Bible* (KJV) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 2017), p. 1226.

