



THE BOOK OF MALACHI

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INTRODUCTION

We know nothing about the prophet Malachi other than what is revealed in the book itself. Malachi is a shortened version of the name ‘Mal’ ‘akiy’, meaning ‘the messenger of the Lord.’

Malachi’s name defines the nature of his prophecy in reference to the messenger of the Lord that would be sent before the coming of the Messiah. In fact, the word ‘messenger’ refers to three different individuals in the book.

1. The word ‘messenger’ refers to Malachi himself as the messenger who delivered this message to Israel.
2. The word ‘messenger’ refers to John the Baptist as the messenger who would announce the coming of the Messiah.
3. The word ‘messenger’ refers to the Messiah as the immediate messenger of God.

Malachi is like the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost; he’s a ready, aim, fire kind of man. Malachi was direct in his approach and had a no-nonsense approach in telling God’s people where they were going wrong. Oh, how the world can do with more people like him today!

THE DATE

We know the book was written to those who had returned from the captivity in 536 B.C. and were offering sacrifices at the altar, **Malachi 1:7-10**. Since the people were under a governor, **Malachi 1:8**, the audience Malachi addressed would have been living while Palestine was still under Medo-Persian control.

Some of the priests were setting the wrong example by marrying foreign women, **Malachi 2:11**, which was a problem that existed during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

And so, with all this internal and external evidence, we can safely come to the conclusion that the Book of Malachi was written sometime during the fifth century B.C., when this problem was prevalent among those who returned from captivity.

BACKGROUND TO THE BOOK

During the middle or latter part of the fifth century, the Near East was still controlled by the Medo-Persian Empire under Artaxerxes, 465-425 B.C. However, the expansion of the Persians to the east was upset by the Greeks.

The Greeks dealt a stinging blow of defeat to the Persians at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. In 480 B.C., the Greeks made a heroic stand against the Persians at Thermopylae.

And then Xerxes was defeated at Plataea in 479 B.C. With these major defeats of the Persians, the Greeks were beginning to rise as the third world empire of the prophecies of **Daniel 2** and **Daniel 7**.

The initial exiles returned in 536 B.C., led by Zerubbabel, to reclaim their homeland possessions in the land of Palestine. Both Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the people to rebuild the temple, which was eventually rebuilt between 520 and 515 B.C. Ezra then rose up and told the people how to live properly and worship according to the Law of God.

In 444 B.C. Nehemiah, who was appointed governor of the land, led another group of exiles from the land of their former captors and encouraged them to start rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

In 432 B.C. Nehemiah made a second visit to Jerusalem. Since Malachi doesn't mention Nehemiah, we would conclude that his ministry took place before the arrival of Nehemiah, possibly between 460 and 450 B.C.

THE CULTURE AND ECONOMICS OF THE PEOPLE

It was a time when the ceremonies of the Law were ceremonially offered by a heartless people; they were just going through the motions. They offered animals that weren't fit to be offered to God, **Malachi 1:8**. The priests were neglecting their duties, **Malachi 2:7-8**.

There was intermarriage with foreign women, **Malachi 2:11**, and it was a time when the people were struggling, so they complained that God had blessed the nations around them but had ignored them.

The good news is that they seemed to learn from their history the lesson about idolatry; in fact, they never committed idolatry again after their captivity experience, but this was a lesson they had to learn the hard way.

As to why they were taken into captivity for seventy years, Israel had apparently failed to observe the land's one-year-in-seven sabbath for four-hundred and ninety years, so the term of the Babylonian captivity was set at seventy years to make up the deficit, **Leviticus 25:4 / 2 Chronicles 36:21 / Jeremiah 25:11**.

Malachi's message was against those who returned from captivity who had forsaken the Old Testament concerning their behaviour as the chosen people of God.

Through their insincere sacrificial ceremonies and intermarriage with foreign women, they were working against the efforts of God to re-establish Israel in the land as the people of God.

Holman's Bible Dictionary says the following.

'The purpose of Malachi was to assure his people that God still loved them, but He demanded honour, respect, and faithfulness from them. Malachi pointed out religious and social abuses and warned that judgment would come to purge the people of sin unless they repented. The style of the Book of Malachi is that of disputations. This style is not unique to Malachi. Micah and Jeremiah had disputes with false prophets, **Micah 2:6-11 / Jeremiah 27-28**. Jeremiah also disputed with God, **Jeremiah 12:1-6**. Job disputed with his friends. The Book of Malachi is made up of six disputation passages and two appendices. The disputes follow a regular form. 1. The prophet stated a premise. 2. The hearers challenged the statement, and 3. God and the prophet presented the supporting evidence.'

OUTLINE

- The love of God for Israel. Malachi 1:1-5
- The priests reproved for profanity. Malachi 1:6-2:9
- The people rebuked for social sins. Malachi 2:10-17
- The prediction of the two messengers. Malachi 3:1-6
- The people rebuked for religious sins. Malachi 3:7-18
- The prediction of the day of the Lord and of the Sun of Righteousness who ushers it in. Malachi 4

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

‘A prophecy: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.’ Malachi 1:1

Notice what the K.J.V. says, ‘The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.’ The word ‘burden’ in Hebrew is ‘massa’ and means ‘to lift up’, and although the N.I.V. and other translations use the word ‘prophecy’, **Malachi 1:1**, it simply means that Malachi is going to lift up his voice to speak the Word of God to the nation of Israel.

And as we mentioned earlier, Malachi is the prophet’s name and simply means ‘the messenger of the Lord.’ In other words, Malachi was a messenger of the Lord, with a message from God to the Israelites.

ISRAEL DOUBTS GOD’S LOVE

‘I have loved you,’ says the LORD. “But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’ “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.” Edom may say, “Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.” But this is what the LORD Almighty says: “They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD. You will see it with your own eyes and say, ‘Great is the LORD—even beyond the borders of Israel!’” Malachi 1:2-5

Now, as we go through this book, you will notice that we find a series of questions, questions asked by God and answered by God.

How have you loved us? Malachi 1:2.
How have we shown contempt for your name? Malachi 1:6.
How have we defiled you? Malachi 1:7.
How have we wearied him? Malachi 2:17.
How are we to return? Malachi 3:7.
How are we robbing you? Malachi 3:8.
What have we said against you? Malachi 3:13.

In other words, God already knows the answers to questions before you ask them. He knows what’s in people’s hearts and minds, **Psalm 139:1-5 / John 2:22-25**. Have you ever questioned if someone really loves you?

Imagine a man who beats up his wife every night and then says to her, ‘I love you’. We know that he doesn’t really love her because, as the saying goes, ‘actions speak louder than words’. Real love isn’t some fluffy feeling we get inside; love is shown in our actions, **1 Corinthians 13:4-8**.

God straight away tells Israel that He has loved them, and His actions backed up what He was saying, **Malachi 1:2**. They forgot or didn’t understand that God chose Israel as the nation through whom He would bring the Messiah and Saviour into the world.

They forgot or didn’t understand that all the work among the nations throughout the history of Israel was done for the purpose of preserving Israel until she had fulfilled her destiny of bringing forth the Messiah.

Too often, as Christians, we forget or don’t understand how much God loves us and has a purpose for us. Too often, we forget what God has done for us in the past, **Jeremiah 2:2 / Revelation 2:4**.

Malachi's ministry was to continue the preservation of Israel, **Exodus 19:6**. God sent Malachi in order to correct the behaviour of the people and to encourage those who feared God.

The purpose of their faithfulness to God was to maintain the identity of the people of God through whom the Messiah would come in the future, **Genesis 3:15**. The Israelites ask the question, 'How have you loved us?' **Malachi 1:2**. Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'The Lord's first word to His people was short and sweet. He had loved them. He had told His people of His love for them repeatedly throughout their history, **Deuteronomy 4:32-40 / Deuteronomy 7:7-11 / Deuteronomy 10:12-22 / Deuteronomy 15:16 / Deuteronomy 23:5 / Deuteronomy 33:2-5 / Isaiah 43:4 / Hosea 11:1 / Hosea 11:3-4 / Hosea 11:8-9**. Yet they were now questioning His love and implying that there was no evidence of it in their present situation in life.'

Having gone through the captivities of the Assyrians and the Babylonians, those who returned have become sceptical of God's work through them as a nation. They were suffering while the nations around them prospered. How often do we ask if God still loves us when difficult times come our way?

Remember, during this period of history, the Israelites were poverty-stricken, and because of this, they became discouraged and more or less disillusioned concerning what God was doing through them as a nation.

But notice how God responds to this question, He doesn't say well, I brought your forefathers out of Egypt or I brought your relatives out of Assyrian and Babylonian captivity. No.

God goes way further back than those events. He says, 'Do you remember Esau and Jacob!' God says, 'yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated', **Malachi 1:2-3 / Genesis 29:30-31**.

Morris, in his commentary on **Romans 9:13**, says the following.

'The word hate clearly seems to mean something like 'loved less', **Genesis 29:31-33 / Deuteronomy 21:15 / Matthew 6:24 / Luke 14:26 / John 12:25**. But it also says, 'the real thought here is much more like 'accepted' and 'rejected' more than it is like our understanding of the terms 'loved' and 'hated.'

God says, 'You want proof of my love for you? 'You want proof that I'm still working in and through you? 'I will bring an end to the Edomite nation.' This would be God's proof to Israel that He was still working in the lives of His people, to preserve them for the purpose for which He had chosen Jacob, the bringing of the Messiah.

Though Edom would never again exist as a nation, the Idumeans, Edomites, as a people would reside in the southern part of Palestine. From them would eventually rise the family of the Herods.

Herod the Great, who would be designated by the Romans as the king of Judea before the birth of Christ, would come from the Idumeans. Herod was a ruthless ruler, and remember it was he who ordered the killing of all babies under two years old in an attempt to kill Jesus, **Matthew 2:16**.

God chose Jacob over Esau in order to carry out His eternal plan of redemption, **Deuteronomy 7:8 / Hosea 11:1**.

Since He knew the future of the descendants of both sons of Abraham, He chose Jacob, who would produce a better heritage for a nation through whom the blessing promised to Abraham would come, **Genesis 12:1-3**. Esau wasted his birthright because he didn't value it, **Genesis 25:29-34**.

Throughout the struggles of Israel during the years of their captivity, the Edomites demonstrated unacceptable behaviour, **Lamentations 4:21-22 / Psalm 137:7 / Ezekiel 25:12**.

Though the Edomites might try to reclaim their territory and re-establish their identity, God would work against every effort they made in order to become a nation. Why?

Simply because of her wicked behaviour against Israel, and so, Edom would never be permitted to become a nation, this was God's judgment against the Edomites for their wickedness, **Obadiah 1:21**.

God says, ‘I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals,’ **Malachi 1:3**.

God’s preference for Jacob over Esau also extended to their descendants, **Joel 3:19**.

The Babylonians conquered both the descendants of Jacob and Esau, **Jeremiah 25:9 / Jeremiah 25:21**, but God restored Israel from exile and at this point, Edom hadn’t been restored.

Edom thought that they would rebuild the ruins, despite being crushed, **Malachi 1:4**, but God says otherwise, ‘they may build, but He will demolish’, **Malachi 1:4**. The land of Edom would now become known as the ‘Wicked Land’, and those who live there would constantly feel the effects of God’s wrath, **Malachi 1:4**.

Stuart, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Judeans had Persian permission and support in their rebuilding campaign, **Ezra 1:1-11 / Ezra 4:3 / Ezra 6:1-15 / Ezra 7:11-28 / Nehemiah 2:7-9 / Nehemiah 13:6**. That was God’s doing. The Edomites had no such help, which was also God’s doing and which sealed Edom’s fate as a people forever.’

God says when people from the other nations, that is, those nations outside of Israel, see what God has done to Edom with their own eyes, they will pass by declaring that ‘the LORD is great’, **Malachi 1:5**. Only Israel would retain its name but the name of Edom will be blotted out of the history books forever.

BREAKING THE COVENANT THROUGH BLEMISHED SACRIFICES

‘A son honours his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?’ says the LORD Almighty. “It is you priests who show contempt for my name. “But you ask, ‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’ “By offering defiled food on my altar. “But you ask, ‘How have we defiled you?’ “By saying that the LORD’s table is contemptible. When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?” says the LORD Almighty. “Now plead with God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?”—says the LORD Almighty. “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.’ **Malachi 1:6-10**

There’s nothing worse than having a son who doesn’t value or listen to their father, **Exodus 20:12 / Deuteronomy 5:16**. This has been a problem throughout the ages, but it seems even more so these days, as some kids just don’t respect their parents in general.

I remember the days when I was a kid and did something wrong, someone would say, ‘I know who your father is!’ And that was usually enough for me to stop doing what I was doing. These days, the kids just don’t seem to care, ‘tell my dad,’ they say, ‘he’ll come over and beat you up anyway.’

Because God was the Father of Israel, **Exodus 4:22-23 / Isaiah 1:2 / Isaiah 63:16 / Isaiah 64:8 / Hosea 11:1**, He deserved the honour that was due to a father, **Malachi 1:6**.

God created the nation of Israel by bringing it out of Egyptian captivity, **Malachi 2:10 / Isaiah 64:8 / Jeremiah 31:9**.

With a mighty arm, He redeemed Israel, **Deuteronomy 32:6 / Isaiah 63:16**. And so, if anyone deserved their honour, it was God, He was the Father and Creator of the nation of Israel.

Not only was God their Father, but He was also their Master, and Israel was the servant, **Malachi 1:6**, but once again, they weren’t obedient to God as their Master. Since God was their Creator, then He was to be honoured; if He was their Master, then He was to be obeyed.

And so once again the people ask God another question, ‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’ **Malachi 1:6**. The religious leaders showed disrespect for God as their Creator and Master by not obeying the laws concerning

the offerings at the altar, **Malachi 1:7**. In other words, the priests totally disregarded God's laws and, by doing this, showed no respect for God as their Master.

God says you've shown no respect because 'the food you offer on my altar is defiled', **Malachi 1:7 / Leviticus 22:17-30**. This was the altar where the animals were sacrificed.

By allowing the people to bring blemished animals as their sacrifices to the Lord, the priests were showing disrespect to God by violating the laws concerning sacrifices. They were offering blind animals; they brought blemished animals to be sacrificed on the altar, **Malachi 1:8 / Leviticus 22:18-25 / Deuteronomy 15:21**.

Wiersbe, in his commentary, says the following.

'What does this say to professed Christians who spend hundreds of dollars annually, perhaps thousands, on gifts for themselves, their family, and their friends, but give God a dollar a week when the offering plate is passed?'

According to the law, only the best of the animals were to be offered as sacrifices to the Lord. Now, they possibly may have thought this was only a minor violation of the law, but to God, it was evil. The people bring their offering for sacrifice, but it was the responsibility of the priests to check to see if an animal had any blemishes; if so, it was to be rejected.

Leviticus 1-7 gives the most detailed description of Israel's sacrificial system, including five types of sacrifices. The sacrifices and offerings that were brought by the people were to be the physical expression of their inward devotion.

1. Burnt offering.

The animal for this sacrifice could be a young bull, lamb, goat, turtledove, or young pigeon, but it had to be a perfect and complete specimen. The type of animal chosen for this sacrifice seems to be dependent on the offeror's financial ability.

The one bringing the offering was to lay a hand upon the animal so as to identify that the animal was taking the person's place and then kill it. The priest then collected the blood and sprinkled it around the altar and the sanctuary, and the worshiper cut up and skinned the animal.

2. Grain offering.

An offering from the harvest of the land is the only type that requires no bloodshed. It was composed of fine flour mixed with oil and frankincense. Sometimes, this offering was cooked into cakes prior to taking it to the priest.

These cakes, however, had to be made without leaven. Every grain offering had to have salt in it, **Leviticus 2:13**, perhaps as a symbol of the covenant. Only a portion of this offering was burned on the altar, with the remainder going to the priests.

3. Peace offering.

This consisted of the sacrifice of a bull, cow, lamb, or goat that had no defect. As with the burnt offering, the individual laid a hand on the animal and killed it. The priests, in turn, sprinkled the blood around the altar. Only certain parts of the internal organs were burned.

4. Sin-offering.

This was designed to deal with sin that was committed unintentionally. The sacrifice varied according to who committed the sin. If the priest or the congregation of Israel sinned, then a bull was required.

A leader of the people had to bring a male goat, while anyone else sacrificed a female goat or a lamb. The poor were allowed to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons. The one bringing the offering placed a hand on the animal and then slaughtered it.

5. Guilt offering.

This is hard to distinguish from the sin offering, **Leviticus 4-5**. In **Leviticus 5:6-7**, the guilt offering is called the sin offering. Both offerings were also made for similar types of sin. The guilt offering was concerned supremely with restitution. Someone who took something illegally was expected to repay it in full plus twenty per cent of the value, and then bring a ram for the guilt offering.

The burnt, grain, peace, sin, and guilt offerings composed the basic sacrificial system of Israel. These sacrifices were commonly used in conjunction with each other and were carried out on both an individual and a corporate basis. The sacrificial system taught the necessity of dealing with sin and, at the same time, demonstrated that God had provided a way for dealing with sin.

Malachi is basically rebuking the people for offering the lame and sick animals to God instead of the best, as the Levitical law required, and so, in effect, the people were defiling the altar and despising God.

God asks, would their governor accept these offerings? **Malachi 1:8**. The obvious answer is No! Who was this governor? This would have been the governor of Palestine who was commissioned by the Persians who controlled the land at this time, **Nehemiah 5:14 / Haggai 1:1**.

‘Now plead with God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?’—says the LORD Almighty. 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’. **Malachi 1:9-10**.

God says, if they repent, He would forgive them, **Malachi 1:9**, but He also says, it would be better to shut the doors of the temple than to receive worthless worship, **Malachi 1:10**. God wasn’t pleased with them and wouldn’t accept their worthless offerings, **Malachi 1:10**.

God goes on to warn them of the consequences if they don’t change their attitude towards Him. It would be better not to offer the sacrifice than to offer anything which is contrary to the law of God, **Malachi 1:10**.

God doesn’t allow substitutes for that which He requires, **Galatians 1:6-9 / 2 John 9-10 / Revelation 22:18-19**. Now obviously, we don’t offer animal sacrifices today, but God still requires us to sacrifice with the proper attitude, **John 4:24 / Matthew 22:37 / Hebrews 12:1**.

‘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. “But you profane it by saying, ‘The Lord’s table is defiled,’ and ‘Its food is contemptible.’ **Malachi 1:11-12**

Notice that the words ‘will be’, **Malachi 1:11**, are in italics, which tells us that they don’t necessarily need to be in the text in the future tense. They were defiling the Lord’s table, and God found their food disgraceful.

Some people feel that this part of the text, **Malachi 1:11**, needs to be understood metaphorically. In other words, this reference was pointing to the time of the Messianic era during which those of the church throughout all nations would bring praise to the name of God.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The total abolition of the Mosaic sacrifices, and the establishment of a spiritual worship over the whole earth, is here foretold. The incense of praise, and the pure offering of the Lamb without spot, and through him a holy, loving heart, shall be presented everywhere among the Gentiles and the Jews, and their mock offerings shall be rejected.’

But the passage could also be understood to refer to the time of those Israelites who were living at the time of Malachi’s ministry. The text is simply saying that God doesn’t depend solely on Israel for praise and glory.

Even at the time of Israel's existence, God was receiving praise and worship from others who weren't of Israel. There were those Gentiles by faith who had converted to the faith of Israel.

Since the Israelites had been scattered throughout the nations during the captivity, we can safely assume that they did their work in converting Gentiles to the faith of Abraham.

Since the problem that Malachi approached was with those Jews who were in Palestine at the time of writing, we mustn't assume that the same problem prevailed with those Jews who were still living in the lands to which they had been taken during the captivity.

Those who were living in the land were violating the ceremonial laws, **Malachi 1:12**, in reference to sacrifices, but we mustn't assume that all Jews throughout the Persian Empire were doing the same.

Clendenen, in his commentary, says the following.

'Whenever we disregard or circumvent the Lord's instructions and requirements, such as his requirements for elders and deacons, we profane his name and desecrate his worship.'

'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 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.' Malachi 1:13-14

By their violation of God's laws concerning sacrifice, **Malachi 1:12**, they were demonstrating their feelings that the law of God was a burden to bear, **Malachi 1:13 / 1 John 5:3**.

Some were bringing stolen animals to the altar, and the priests were excusing their behaviour, **Leviticus**

3:1 / Leviticus 3:6 / Hosea 4:9. Since the priests displayed a lifestyle of deceit, the people followed their example.

What they were offering, **Malachi 1:13**, displayed the fact that they were being stingy with God. They gave God the leftovers and that which they rejected. In doing so, they displayed their lack of reverence for God.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Their worship should have been passionate and joyful instead of boring and burdensome, **Colossians 3:16-17**. They were sniffing at it as something they despised and were bringing as offerings what they had stolen, as well as lame and sick animals, **2 Samuel 24:24**. Did they expect Him to receive such sacrifices from them? How could He?'

The word, 'cursed', **Malachi 1:14**, in Hebrew is 'arar', and it means to execrate, to loathe. In other words, God loathed anyone who offered unacceptable sacrifices, **Malachi 1:14**.

Remember when Jesus cleared out the money changers and those who were offering animals in the temple for sacrifice? **John 2:13-22**. Why did Jesus get so angry?

Partly, because the people didn't bring their own animal sacrifice with them like they were supposed to, the temple had become like a convenience store where people could come along and pick up a bargain. The Passover sacrifice was supposed to be a personal sacrifice; that's why the lamb had to stay inside their home until the sacrifice, **Exodus 12:3-6**.

We have to remember that we, too, are examples to those around us. If people don't see that worshipping God with the proper attitude isn't important to us, or if Bible study isn't important to us, then they won't think it's important to them either.

And we too can have a similar attitude towards worship, we come to worship late, we come to worship to receive instead of giving, we just mime the words of the hymns we sing, we don't really listen to what's been said, we just come along and go through the ritual of worship!

The LORD Almighty says He is a great king and His name is to be feared among the nations, **Malachi 1:14**. Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘They vowed to offer an acceptable animal as a sacrifice, but when it came time to present the offering, they substituted one of inferior quality. How totally inappropriate this was since Yahweh was a great King, the greatest in the universe, really the ultimate royal suzerain. His name would be feared among all the nations, yet His own people and their spiritual leaders were treating it with contempt.’

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

‘And now, you priests, this warning is for you. If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honour my name,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them because you have not resolved to honour me. “Because of you, I will rebuke your descendants; I will smear on your faces the dung from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it. And you will know that I have sent you this warning so that my covenant with Levi may continue,” says the LORD Almighty. “My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence, and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth, and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness and turned many from sin. “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.’ Malachi 2:1-9

ADDITIONAL WARNING TO THE PRIESTS

When God instituted the priests among Israel, He promised them the blessing of the support of the people if they carried out their duties according to His law, **2 Chronicles 31:4**.

However, in this case, if they continued in their injustice and indifference, God would command a curse upon them which means the priests would lose the support of the people, **Malachi 2:1-2** / **Deuteronomy 27:15-26** / **Deuteronomy 28:15-68**.

Merrill, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The inevitable result of covenant unfaithfulness was the imposition of the curses that were always spelt out in covenant texts, **Leviticus 26:14-39** / **Deuteronomy 27:11-26** / **Deuteronomy 28:15-57**.’

But as always, God is patient with people, especially His own people and offers a solution. They can repent, which means to reconsider what they’re doing, and after some reconsideration, change their attitudes and behaviour towards God and what He requires of them.

When God says, ‘I will curse your blessings,’ **Malachi 2:2**, He’s speaking about the benefits they enjoyed because they served in the temple, **Numbers 18:8-19**. When the people brought sacrifices to the altar, they had the privilege of taking some of the offering for their own use.

Remember, the Levites didn't receive any land; they were chosen to serve God in the temple, and the other Israelites were to take care of their needs, [Numbers 18:21](#) / [Numbers 18:24](#) / [Numbers 18:31](#) / [Numbers 18:25-26](#) / [Numbers 18:28](#).

In their insincere service, however, it seems that 'the curse' had already begun, [Malachi 2:2](#). The poverty-stricken people couldn't bring sacrifices to the altar and the sacrifices they brought were blemished and so, God rebukes them, [Malachi 2:3](#). What would possibly happen was that the offspring or the descendants of the priests, would be removed from being priests.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following about 'the curse', [Malachi 2:2](#).

'This may refer, generally, to unfruitful seasons or, particularly, to a dearth that appears to have happened about this time, [Haggai 1:6-11](#).'

Sacrificed animals still had excrement in their systems, and God said this should be burned outside the sanctuary, [Exodus 29:14](#). In other words, these existing priests would be removed as the 'dung' of the offerings was taken out of the city, [Leviticus 4:11-12](#) / [1 Samuel 2:29-30](#).

God wanted to correct the religious leadership, [James 3:1](#), and so, God said He would spread that dung on their faces, [Malachi 2:3](#), so that they would have to be taken outside the sanctuary.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'The disgusting picture is of God taking the internal waste of the sacrificial animals and smearing it on the priests' faces. Consequently, both sacrifices and priests would have to be taken outside for disposal. This play on words communicates a double curse, [Malachi 2:2](#). The priests' descendants would not continue because the priests would cease to bear any or many children, and their inferior sacrifices would render them unclean. They would not, then, be able to continue to function in their office.'

This 'covenant', [Malachi 2:4](#), between God and Levi isn't specifically mentioned in the Old Testament, other than the fact that Levi was in a mutual covenant relationship with God as a part of the entire Israelite family, [Deuteronomy 33:8-11](#).

Here in Malachi, Levi, [Malachi 2:4](#), stands for all the Levitical priests of Israel who stood before God. In God's covenant with Israel, [Malachi 2:5](#), and the Levites were given a special intercessory relationship with the people as ministers to God on behalf of the people, [Numbers 18:7-8](#) / [Numbers 18:19-21](#) / [Numbers 25:10-13](#).

They were to set an example of purity and obedience before the people, [Malachi 2:5](#). The Levites were to be the teachers of the law, [Malachi 2:6](#) / [Hebrews 13:17](#) / [James 3:1](#), they were also to demonstrate in their lives the nature of the commandments of God, [Ezra 7:10](#) / [Ezra 7:25](#) / [Nehemiah 8:9](#).

The Levites were to administer justice and be peacemakers among the people and they were to be known for 'the truth that proceeded out of their mouths', [Malachi 2:6](#) / [Nehemiah 8:7-9](#).

Malachi was a messenger of the Lord, [Malachi 1:1](#), and through his teaching of the law of God to the people, the Levitical priest communicated the will of God to the people, [Malachi 2:7](#).

Malachi was God's messenger to the people, as well as John the Baptist who would be the messenger sent before the Messiah, [Malachi 3:1](#). As the messengers of God, both Malachi and John delivered to the people the message of God. Remember that a priest spoke to God on behalf of the people, but prophets spoke to the people on behalf of God.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the qualifications of Levi, [Malachi 2:6-7](#).

1. 'He feared me'; he was my sincere worshipper.
2. 'He was afraid,' he acted as in the presence of a just and holy God and acted conscientiously in all that he did.
3. 'My law of truth was ever in his mouth,' by this, he directed his own conduct and that of others.
4. 'No iniquity,' nothing contrary to justice and equity ever proceeded "from his lips."

5. 'He walked with me in peace,' he lived in such a way as to keep up a union with me.

6. 'He did turn many away from iniquity,' by his upright administration, faithful exhortations, and pious walk, he became the instrument of converting many sinners.

This character suits every genuine minister of God. And as the priest's lips should preserve knowledge, so the people should seek 'the law at his mouth' for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts, Malachi 2:7.

The priests of Malachi's day had 'turned from the way', Malachi 2:8. It might have been because they had forgotten God's Law, Hosea 4:6, and so they didn't know what to do according to God's Law or it might have been because they weren't interested in God's Law.

And it's those people that God causes to 'stumble', Malachi 2:8. He causes them to stumble because they haven't understood the huge responsibility involved in being a leader, James 3:1. Whatever the reason, Malachi says they were still under the condemnation of God for not functioning as priests as they should, Malachi 2:9.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'Since the priests had despised the Lord, the Lord had made them despised in the eyes of the people. They did not obey His will but had told the people what they wanted to hear. Their penalty should have been death, Numbers 18:32.'

Even today, anyone who wishes to take on any kind of leadership role within the church must know what God requires of them and His people, and anyone who wants to be a leader but hasn't got a clue what God wants of them and His people is simply just a blind guide, Matthew 15:14 / Matthew 23:23.

Here in Malachi, the spiritual leaders led people away from God and through their behaviour, they became blind guides in the sense that they didn't honour the commandments of God, Mark 7:1-9. They violated the conditions of the covenant of the priesthood, and in their application of the law, they became 'partial' to the law, Matthew 23:23. God had given them the blessing of enjoying the support of the people through offerings, but now they had taken advantage of their full-time support and became partial to the rich so that they could keep their office as priests. It may have been that the full-time priests catered to the rich in order to receive some offerings, but in doing so, they ignored the poor.

I remember when I lived in Scotland, and I was speaking with a Church of Scotland minister about baptism. He didn't believe in christening or infant baptism, yet he still practised it.

I asked him why he did this, despite believing in a believer's baptism for the forgiveness of sin and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, and his response was, 'If I practised what I believed in the Church of Scotland, I would lose my job, my income and my house.'

I think there's an application and warning here for 'full-time preachers' within the Lord's church. Preachers need to be careful not to give in to their supporting congregation when their supporting congregation begins to dictate what happens within another congregation or how the preacher should understand certain doctrines and beliefs.

So often, preachers feel pressured to change their beliefs or practices in order to keep their financial support. There are times we need to put the truth ahead of everything else, including our finances.

BREAKING COVENANT THROUGH DIVORCE

'Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another? Judah has been unfaithful. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in

Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves by marrying women who worship a foreign god. As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD remove him from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings an offering to the LORD Almighty.’ Malachi 2:10-12

Malachi asked two questions here, Malachi 2:10, and the answer to both questions is ‘yes’. We all have one Father, and He is the God who created us, Deuteronomy 32:6.

The background to the rebuke in these verses is God’s purpose for the restoration of Israel to the land and the Israelites’ renewing of their identity as the people of God, Exodus 19:5-6 / Leviticus 19:18.

In order for the promises to the fathers to be identified as fulfilled through Israel, the people of God had to be identified as Israel at the time of fulfilment. For this reason, the people were dealing unfaithfully, in that they ‘married foreign women’, Malachi 2:11.

They had repented of their idol worship, which was partly the cause for their going into captivity. However, when they returned, they were marrying foreign women, and so because of that, they were destroying the identity of God’s people among the nations. In other words, they were marrying themselves out of existence as Jews.

It was God who created the nation of Israel by bringing them out of Egyptian captivity, Isaiah 43:1-21. God had created them as a nation and race of people, but they were destroying their identity through intermarriage with foreign women.

God had established a covenant with Israel, but their integration into the local people through the marriage of foreign women violated the conditions of the covenant, Deuteronomy 7:3-4.

Israel married women from Moab and brought the curse of God upon the people, Numbers 25. Solomon married foreign women who took his heart away from God, 1 Kings 11:1-10, and Ahab married Jezebel, who led Israel into new depths of depravity, 1 Kings 16:29-33.

Even the high priests themselves weren’t permitted to marry foreign women, and if they did, they would defile the priesthood, Leviticus 21:14-15 / Nehemiah 13:29.

The priests were allowing this to happen among the people, for they were also putting away the wives of their youth in order to marry younger, foreign women, Ezra 9:1-2.

Israel was supposed to be a people that were separated, that is, ‘holy’, from the nations of the world, and so they were a holy people, Leviticus 20:24. But in their marriage to foreign women, they violated the sanctity of their holiness.

Their practice was an abomination to the Lord, something that was ‘detestable’ in His sight, Malachi 2:11. They had been created as a nation but through their intermarriage with foreign women, they were working against the plan of God to re-establish Israel for the purpose of bringing the Messiah into the world, Solomon was famous for this very sin, 1 Kings 11:4.

As a result of this, God is going to ‘cut off the males’, Malachi 2:12, of the household who disrespect the covenant relationship between God and Israel through the marriage of foreign women. With the men being cut off from the household, there would be no one who could bring the offering to the Lord.

‘Another thing you do: You flood the LORD’s altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favour on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth. “The man who hates and divorces his wife,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “does violence to the one he should protect,” says the LORD Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.’ Malachi 2:13-16

With the offering of sacrifices came the common practice of mourning. In an effort to make their sacrifices more acceptable to God, they would pour out more ‘tears’, Malachi 2:13.

But as we know, God wants obedience in all areas of our lives, Proverbs 2:17 / Ezekiel 16:8 / Ezekiel 16:59-62 / Hosea 2:16-20. And so, they needed to change their behaviour, not pour out more ceremonial tears.

The same application can be made today; we can offer God £1000 in the offering every week, but if we don't live the rest of the week obediently, then we shouldn't think for one moment that our offering will be acceptable. We can't sing praises about how wonderful God is if we don't live as we believe it.

1. They were marrying foreign women, [Malachi 2:11](#).

2. They forsook their Jewish wife in order to marry foreign women, [Malachi 2:14](#).

They already had an Israelite wife, but then they put this wife away in order to marry foreign women. Talk about trading in your wife for a younger model. The older men were putting away the wives that they had married when they were young in order to marry younger, more beautiful wives in their older age. In other words, they had forgotten their 'marriage covenant' with their wife, [Malachi 2:14](#).

When one marries another, he or she comes into a covenant relationship with his or her partner. It's a covenant that is made in the eyes of God, and so it is honoured by God, [Genesis 31:50](#) / [Proverbs 2:16-17](#). When someone puts away his or her mate, he or she has broken the marriage covenant.

'Body and spirit', [Malachi 2:15](#), is in reference to when two are joined together in marriage. They become one in order to bring forth children to the glory of God, [Mark 10:9](#).

Parents who demonstrate godliness before their children may raise children who will continue their spiritual heritage, [Ephesians 5:22-6:4](#), but sadly, this isn't always the case.

Sometimes children will grow up and do their own thing, no matter how godly their parents are or how great the example they have been set. We have to remember, as Christian parents, we're called upon to raise our children in the ways of the Lord, we're not called upon to make them Christians!

Here in Malachi, the Jewish men were putting away the Jewish wives of their youth, so that they could marry foreign women. Because of this, they were bringing the influence of idolatry again into Israel, and there was a real danger that they could influence their children away from God, [Malachi 2:16](#).

GOD HATES DIVORCE

Now, let me ask, does God hate divorce? New Living Translation says yes. But the answer is no! He hated the way they were going about divorce, [Malachi 2:16](#).

Smith in the Word Biblical Commentary says the following.

'In light of this ambiguity, we likely should be careful in our interpretation and application of what we understand to be the meaning of this passage. The traditional interpretation of the first three-word sentence attributed to God is: 'I hate divorce'. The subject of which is based more on contextual evidence than on that of the manuscripts.'

Clendenen, in his commentary, says the following.

'The passage, [Malachi 2:10-16](#), does not deal with the case of a man divorcing a wife who has already broken her marriage vows, so it also does not apply to the case of a woman divorcing her husband who has already broken his marriage vows. This is another reason the passage should not be understood as an absolute condemnation of divorce under any circumstances. In fact, according to [Jeremiah 3:8](#), the Lord himself had divorced the Northern Kingdom of Israel because of her adulteries, [Hosea 2:2](#).'

Remember that Moses gave instructions concerning the 'Certificate of Divorce', [Deuteronomy 24:1-9](#). But that 'Certificate of Divorce' was given to bring the Israelites into conformity to God's law concerning marriage, that one man be married to one woman for life, [Matthew 5:31-32](#) / [Matthew 19:3-10](#) / [Mark 10:1-12](#).

The Hebrew word for ‘certificate of divorce’ is ‘kriythuwth’, which means a cutting of the matrimonial bond, i.e. divorce. The New Testament Greek word equivalent for ‘certificate of divorce’ is ‘apostasion’, and it means something separative, especially divorce.

The Hebrew word for ‘put away’ is ‘shalach’, which means to send away, or out. The New Testament Greek word equivalent for ‘put her away’ is ‘apoluo’, which means to send away.

God hated the putting away of their first wife so that they could marry another woman, [Malachi 2:16](#). The divorce here was based on the desire the man had toward another woman other than ‘the wife of his youth’ [Malachi 2:15](#). The detestable thing that was happening [Malachi 2:11](#), was that the wife of his youth, who was now as old as he was, was rejected for the sake of his marriage to a younger, more attractive woman.

The man, therefore, was thinking selfishly and not giving honour to his wife, with whom he had been in a covenant relationship for many years, [Ephesians 5:25-33](#), and so God hated this practice of divorce for such reasons. In other words, divorcing wasn’t the real issue; it was the way they were divorcing, trading their old wives in for younger models and divorcing their wives without the use of the ‘Certificate of Divorce’, which was an illegal divorce. A woman couldn’t marry anyone else unless she had this certificate, and if she did, she would become an adulterer. Please note that a ‘Certificate of Divorce’ wasn’t needed when the spouse died, [1 Corinthians 7:39](#), nor was it needed when one of the married couples committed ‘fornication’ or ‘adultery’, why?

Simply because the punishment was stoning to death, [Exodus 20:14](#) / [Deuteronomy 22:22](#) / [Leviticus 20:10](#). This is what Jesus was trying to drive home to the Jews in [Matthew 5:31-32](#), [Matthew 19:3-10](#), and [Mark 10:1-12](#).

And the effect of this practice was that the men were bringing ‘violence’ upon their divorced women, [Malachi 2:16](#). The Old Testament custom was when a man claimed a woman to be his wife, he would cast his garment over her, [Ruth 3:9](#) / [Ezra 16:8](#).

When a man put away the wife of his youth, he was dealing unfairly with his wife by taking another to be his wife. His unfaithfulness was in the fact that he had promised a lifetime covenant with his first wife and then broke the covenant by spreading his garment over another woman.

BREAKING COVENANT THROUGH INJUSTICE

‘You have wearied the LORD with your words. “How have we wearied him?” you ask. By saying, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them”, or “Where is the God of justice?” [Malachi 2:17](#)

[Malachi 2:17](#), introduces us to the punishment of those who had ‘tired God out’, so to speak, with their complaints that God was looking after evil people but neglecting His own people, [Isaiah 1:14](#) / [Isaiah 43:24](#).

The struggling Israelites looked to the nations from which they had come from and wondered ‘why those nations were prospering’, and yet they themselves were struggling to survive.

Their struggles led them to doubt whether God was actually with them, [Malachi 2:17](#), and this can easily happen when we go through trials and struggles and take our eyes off Jesus, [James 1:2-3](#) / [Matthew 14:22-32](#) / [Hebrews 12:1-2](#).

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

‘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. “So, I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers, against those who defraud labourers 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.’ Malachi 3:1-5

Those people who thought they could live unrighteously and still prosper, **Malachi 2:17**, weren’t alone in that belief. It was becoming widespread among God’s people, but God says, the time is coming when He will stop that kind of thinking when He sends His messenger, **Malachi 3:1**.

WHO IS THIS FIRST MESSENGER?

Malachi 3:1 is quoted in reference to the coming of John the Baptist, **Mark 1:2-3** / **Isaiah 40:3-5** / **Isaiah 52:7** / **Isaiah 57:14**. The priests in Malachi’s time were partial to the wealthy, as were those priests of Jesus’ time, **Luke 16:14**. This would indicate that the coming of the Messenger would be in a time similar to what Malachi was experiencing in his own generation.

As we looked at earlier in this study, when Jesus visited the temple during His ministry, He threw out the money changers and the fulfilment of the prophecy in John the Baptist would have been verified, **John 2:13-14**.

WHO IS THE SECOND MESSENGER?

Notice Malachi uses the words ‘The Lord,’ **Malachi 3:1**. This is from the Hebrew word ‘Adonai’, but it isn’t the word for ‘Yahweh’. This was the Lord, ‘Adonai’, whom Peter announced on the day of Pentecost in **Acts 2**, **Acts 2:36** / **1 Corinthians 12:3** / **Philippians 2:11**.

This Messenger is a different messenger than the one that was previously noted at the beginning of **Malachi 3:1**. Jesus was God in the flesh coming to His people, **John 1:14**.

This is the incarnate Lord Jesus, the Messenger of the new covenant, **Malachi 3:1** / **Jeremiah 31:31-34** / **Galatians 3:17** / **Hebrews 9:7-13**. He is the Mediator of the new covenant, **Isaiah 42:6** / **Jeremiah 31:32-33** / **Hebrews 8:6** / **Hebrews 8:9** / **Hebrews 12:24**.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘He that comes to fulfil the great design, in reference to the covenant made with Abram, that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed.’

He came to approve the new covenant with His blood offering, **Matthew 26:28** / **Hebrews 13:20**. Jesus was the revelation of the mystery of God, **Ephesians 3:1-5**. The judgment of God would first come to His people, ‘his temple’, **Malachi 3:1**, and He would first cleanse His people, **Ezekiel 9:6** / **1 Peter 4:17**. In other words, the Lord Himself would come to purify the priesthood.

After the Gospel was initially preached on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, there were many priests who were obedient to the faith, **Acts 6:7**, but the meaning here in Malachi is beyond the physical sons of Levi because all those who have obeyed the Gospel are now priests before God, **1 Peter 2:5 / 1 Peter 2:9**.

The priesthood of disciples was cleansed by their obedience to the Gospel by baptism, **Acts 2:38**, and as they walk in the light of the Gospel, they are continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus, **1 John 1:7**.

The question is asked, who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? **Malachi 3:2**. The answer is no one, **Psalms 130:3**. Notice Malachi uses the words, ‘like launderer’s soap’, **Malachi 3:2**. A launderer was someone who bleached and cleansed the clothes, **Revelation 7:14**.

He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver, **Malachi 3:3 / Psalms 50:3-4**. 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, **Malachi 3:4**.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Those who minister in their stead under the NEW covenant, for the OLD Levitical institutions shall be abolished, yet, under the preaching of our Lord, a great number of the priests became obedient to the faith, **Acts 6:7**, and, as to the others that did not believe, this great Refiner threw them as dross into the Roman fire, that consumed both Jerusalem and the temple.’

So why is the Lord coming? Simply to execute judgment upon the unrighteous. Jesus came into the world for judgment, **John 9:39**, and judgment came according to how a person responded to Jesus.

If one rejected Him, then they judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, **John 1:11 / John 3:18 / Acts 13:46**. When John the Baptist spoke of the baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire, he certainly had this prophecy in mind, **Matthew 3:11-12**.

Those who would receive the Lord Jesus would receive the benefits of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. However, those who would reject Jesus would receive the baptism of fire, which is speaking about the final judgment. They would be consumed in the fire of judgment that would purify the people of God, **Hebrews 12:29**.

Malachi 3:5 answers the question of **Malachi 2:17**. Once the temple of God’s people was cleansed, the injustices that prevailed among the people at the time of Malachi’s ministry would be set right. In the community of God’s people, there would be no sorcerers, adulterers, or those who dealt unjustly with employees, **Malachi 3:5**.

Widows and orphans would be cared for in the church of God’s people, **Malachi 3:5 / Deuteronomy 24:14-15 / Acts 6:1-6 / James 5:4**. Those social sins that prevailed at the time of Malachi would be corrected in the household of God, **James 1:27**.

BREAKING THE COVENANT BY WITHHOLDING TITHES

‘I, the LORD, do not change. So, you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your ancestors, you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,’ says the LORD Almighty. “But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’ “Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ “In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation— because you are robbing me.’ **Malachi 3:6-9**

Men change in reference to their obedience to God, but God doesn't change His commandments in order to comply with the behaviour of men, and He doesn't change in reference to His promises, **Malachi 3:6 / Numbers 23:19 / Psalms 102:27 / Hebrews 6:17-18 / James 1:17.**

The Jews were still claimed by God and because of that God didn't cast off His people as He did the nations that surrounded them, including the nations that took them into captivity, **Malachi 3:6.**

God could have justly cast off His people because they broke the conditions of the covenant but because He doesn't change, He maintained the covenant in order to preserve His people.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning **Malachi 3:6.**

‘Man would often have become weary of man's wickedness and waywardness. We are impatient with one another, readily despair of one another. God might justly have cast off them and us, but He changes not. He abides by the covenant which He made with their fathers; He consumed them not, but with His own unchangeable love awaited their repentance. Our hope is not in ourselves, but in God.’

Since the time of their ancestors they have turned away from God's decrees and have not kept them, **Malachi 3:7.** The solution however is repentance and so, returning to God, **Malachi 3:7,** through repentance is more than a change of mind and sorrow for sin, **Jeremiah 31:18 / Lamentations 5:21.** It's a behaviour change, it's a return to obedience to the will of God, **Matthew 3:8.**

The Jews may ask, how are we to return? **Malachi 3:7,** and God asks them, ‘Will a mere mortal rob God?’ **Malachi 3:8.** The Jews may ask, How are we robbing you? And the answer is in tithes and offerings, **Malachi 3:8.**

According to the law, a tenth of the produce and livestock was to be given to God for the food of the Levites, **Leviticus 27:30-32 / Numbers 18:21-24 / Nehemiah 9:38 / Nehemiah 10:32-39 / Nehemiah 13:10-14.**

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

The offerings included several classes of dues to God.

1. The first fruits.
2. The annual half-shekel, **Exodus 30:13-15.**
3. The offerings made for the tabernacle, **Exodus 25:2-3 / Exodus 35:5 / Exodus 35:21 / Exodus 35:24 / Exodus 36:3 / Exodus 36:6,** and the second temple, **Ezra 8:25,** at its first erection; it is used of ordinary offerings.
4. Of the tithes of their own tithes, which the Levites paid to the priests, **Numbers 18:26 / Numbers 18:28-29.**
5. Of the portions of the sacrifice which accrued to the priests, **Leviticus 7:14.**

The people were robbing God in that they weren't giving what was required by the law and so because of that God says they are ‘under a curse’, **Malachi 3:9.** During the days of Haggai, the land was suffering from drought because the people were being indifferent concerning the reconstruction of the temple, **Haggai 1:11.**

The same situation may have prevailed here because the people were being stingy in their offerings. They were consuming the offerings on themselves, rather than bringing the tithe to the temple for the priests.

DO CHRISTIANS NEED TO TITHE TODAY?

You would be forgiven for thinking Christians still have to tithe today; maybe that's the practice of some churches, but it doesn't make it right. The above verses are commonly used in some churches to get people to tithe, ‘give a tenth of their income’, but a careful study of the topic will put this practice to rest. It's not so much who is robbing God? But who is robbing the people?

1. The New Testament contains no commandment for the Christian to tithe.

In fact, the concept of tithing is completely missing from the New Testament. Tithing is a concept found only in the Law of Moses, and it was intended to support the Levitical priesthood, the operation of the temple and the observance of the Jewish festivals in Jerusalem.

2. The Levite priesthood is no longer functioning, and the Jewish Temple is no longer standing, so it's literally impossible for anyone, Jew or Christian, to tithe in the way Scripture requires.

More importantly, the Christian is not under the Law of Moses, **Romans 6:14 / Romans 7:6 / Galatians 5:18**, so the requirements of the Old Testament Law don't apply to the New Testament believer in any case.

3. The original law is found in **Numbers 18:21**, but **Hebrews 7:5** says, 'Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, from their fellow Israelites—even though they also are descended from Abraham.'

Christians are not Jews, and the 'pastor' is not a son of Levi. We're not under the law of Moses, **Galatians 5:4 / Hebrews 9:15-17. Malachi 3:10** was written to and for Israel, not for Christians. Christians don't practice tithing today, but they are still required to give, **Acts 2:42 / 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 / 2 Corinthians 8:1-7 / 2 Corinthians 9:7**.

'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.' **Malachi 3:10-12**

The people were evidently holding back part of the tithe for themselves, **Malachi 3:10**, thinking that they needed it more than the priests. The situation may have been that only a few were offering their tithes, and so the support of the priests depended on the support of a few. Others were robbing God by not tithing at all.

Malachi's encouragement was that everyone must bring their tithe in order that the priesthood is supported, **Malachi 3:10 / Nehemiah 13:10-12 / 1 Corinthians 9:14**.

The grain offerings were stored in the temple, **Malachi 3:10**, and God says test me in this, **Malachi 3:10**. God had 'held back the rain' in order to bring about their repentance. If they were obedient in bringing their tithes, then God would bring forth the rain, **Malachi 3:10**.

God says He will prevent pests from devouring their crops, and the vines in their fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe, **Malachi 3:11**. Despite their poverty, they were to show their obedience to God's Law in reference to tithing. It wasn't the principle that God would first bless them with rain for their crops, and then they would give out of their abundance. The lesson was that they must give out of their poverty and then God would send the abundance, **Haggai 2:19 / Zechariah 8:9-13 / Luke 21:1-4**.

IN WHAT WAY WILL ALL THE NATIONS CALL THEM BLESSED?

The prosperity of the land would be the signal to the nations around them that God was blessing His people because of their obedience to His will, **Malachi 3:12**. We must keep in mind that the bringing of the tithe in order that Israel prosper was a promise that God had made in His covenant with Israel as a nation.

The promise of prosperity as a result of obedience isn't a promise to the church or any individual member of the church, as some groups claim today. God prospered Israel in order to preserve the nation for the coming of the Saviour.

The Christian lives under a covenant wherein the Saviour has already come, and our real prosperity will come at the end when Jesus comes again. Someone's poor condition as a Christian isn't directly the result of some sin in their life because poverty is more often the result of our economic environment. However, if a nation lives according to the principles of the Bible, these principles will lead to the development of the country.

ISRAEL SPEAKS ARROGANTLY AGAINST GOD

‘You have spoken arrogantly against me,’ says the LORD. “Yet you ask, ‘What have we said against you?’ “You have said, ‘It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly, evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it.’ Malachi 3:13-15

God tells them that they have spoken arrogantly against Him, and yet they ask, what have we said against you? **Malachi 3:13**. Because of their struggles in poverty, the people seem to have become sceptical concerning the presence of God's help among them.

The people had been talking among themselves, speaking arrogantly about their circumstances and in their arrogance, they were actually murmuring against God, **Exodus 16:7-8 / Matthew 20:1-20**.

As they compared their struggle in poverty with the surrounding nations, they wondered if God was working among them. It seemed that the nations were blessed in their unrighteous idolatry, while they suffered as God's people in poverty. And so, they came to the conclusion that there wasn't any benefit in being faithful to God, for God wasn't bringing blessings into their lives.

They were mourning, **Malachi 3:14**, instead of rejoicing, but the reason for feeling this way was simply because they had ceremonially performed the outward appearance of keeping the ordinances of God, but inside, they were grumbling against God because He hadn't prospered them.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning **Malachi 3:14**.

‘They strove to destroy the Divine worship; they asserted that it was vanity, that, if they performed acts of worship, they should be nothing the better and if they abstained, they should be nothing the worse. This was their teaching to the people.’

At the same time, they saw the pride of the nations around them go unpunished by the Lord, and so they thought if the other nations can get away with idolatry and still be wealthy, why can't we? **Malachi 3:15**. Whilst they refused to repent, they were, in effect, throwing themselves a pity party.

THE FAITHFUL REMNANT

‘Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honoured his name. “On the day when I act,” says the LORD Almighty, “they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.’ Malachi 3:16-18

Those who feared the Lord are a different group of people from those who grumbled against God. This godly group listened to the words of Malachi, understanding that their situation was caused by their unrepentant behaviour, **Malachi 3:16**. They turned from their wayward ways in obedience to God.

The confidence that was revealed by Malachi was that they would be remembered by God in His book of remembrance, **Malachi 3:16**. It wasn't that God would forget, but the thought is that when God remembers, He is taking action to bless and protect. His remembrance isn't simply a recollection of one's existence and identity, **Genesis 8:1**.

Notice again God says, 'they will be my treasured possession, **Malachi 3:17** / **Exodus 19:5-6**. God treasures those who serve Him. It is for this reason that the church of God's people is His unique possession, **1 Peter 2:5-10**.

God says He will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him, **Malachi 3:17**. He says that they will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not, **Malachi 3:18**.

Not only is the promise to preserve those who fear Him valid in this life, but also in the eternal life to come. Once the godly applied themselves to repentance and a change in their behaviour, they would be blessed by God. The blessing of the formerly promised rains would be an indication that they had turned to God.

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION

'Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,' says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act," says the LORD Almighty.' **Malachi 4:1-3**

JUDGMENT AND COVENANT RENEWAL

As we enter the final chapter, which in turn means the final prophecy given to the Jews in the Old Testament, we need to keep a couple of things in mind.

1. The prophecy was to a people whom God had used since the days they were delivered from Egyptian captivity in order to preserve the promises made to the fathers, **Genesis 12:1-3**.

National Israel was the vehicle through which God would bring into the world the Blessing, the Redeemer, and the Saviour. The Old Testament prophets were sent to preserve national Israel as long as possible until the Assyrian, 722/21 B.C. and Babylonian, 586 B.C., captivities.

The prophets who came after the return of the captives, beginning in 536 B.C., were sent in order to move Israel to re-establish herself in the land of Palestine. Israel, as God's people, had to be re-established in order to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah in fulfilment of the prophecies.

2. Once the purpose for which Israel was called as a nation was fulfilled, the purpose would cease, and they would cease to be a peculiar people that was in a unique covenant relationship with God.

This happened in A.D. 70 with the end of the nation of Israel in Palestine when the Roman Empire, the fourth kingdom of Daniel's prophecies, destroyed Jerusalem, [Daniel 2](#) / [Daniel 7](#).

Before the fall of the Northern Kingdom, God would send forth the Redeemer in order to call out of Israel those who feared God. Once those who feared God were called out of national Israel, then God ended national Israel.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning [Malachi 4:1](#).

'The Lord now elaborated on the day to which He had just referred, [Malachi 3:17](#). There is no chapter division in the Hebrew Bible; all of chapter 4 appears as the end of chapter 3. This day of the Lord would be a day of judgment.'

God says, 'Surely the day is coming, it will burn like a furnace, and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble and the day that is coming will set them on fire', [Malachi 4:1](#).

Some commentators suggest that this day is referring to Judgment Day, while others suggest that this day is speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem. Other commentators suggest it's speaking about both.

Unabridged Bible Commentary says the following.

'Primarily, it is meant the judgment coming on Jerusalem, but as this will not exhaust the meaning, without supposing what is inadmissible in Scripture, exaggeration, the final and full accomplishment, of which the former was the earnest, is the day of general judgment. This principle of interpretation is not double but successive fulfilment.'

Gill, in his commentary, says the following.

'Not the day of judgment, as Kimchi and other interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, think but the day of Christ's coming in his kingdom and power, to take vengeance on the Jewish nation, which burned like an oven, both figuratively and literally; when the wrath of God, which is compared to fire, came upon that people to the uttermost; and when their city and temple were burnt about their ears, and they were surrounded with fire, as if they had been in a burning oven and this being so terrible, as can hardly be conceived and expressed, the word 'behold' is prefixed to it, not only to excite attention, but horror and terror at so dreadful a calamity, which though future, when the prophet wrote, was certain.'

In the destruction of Jerusalem, those who had rejected Jesus were consumed, [Matthew 24:1-35](#). The words, not a root or a branch, will be left to them, [Malachi 4:1](#), are a metaphor of complete destruction, meaning no one shall escape, [Amos 2:9](#) / [Isaiah 11:1](#) / [Matthew 3:14](#). All the Jewish genealogical family records were destroyed in the burning of the city and the temple, [Matthew 24:1-35](#).

THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Those of Israel who would be living at the time the Sun of Righteousness, [Malachi 4:2](#), would come and be called out of national Israel through the preaching of the Gospel, [1 Thessalonians 2:12](#) / [2 Thessalonians 2:14](#).

Jesus was the rising light that brought hope to those who feared God and were living at the time of His coming, [Malachi 4:2](#) / [2 Samuel 23:4](#) / [Psalms 84:11](#) / [John 1:4-9](#) / [John 3:19-21](#) / [John 8:12](#) / [Luke 1:78](#) / [Ephesians 5:14](#) / [2 Peter 1:19](#).

Gill, in his commentary, says the following concerning the sun of righteousness, [Malachi 4:2](#).

‘Here is one of the most picturesque descriptions of the Messiah to be found in the Old Testament. To dissect it is to destroy it. Suffice it to say that as the sun is the light and source of life to all the earth, so the Christ is the light and giver of life to the true worshipper.’

And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves, Malachi 4:2.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is an agricultural metaphor from the care and feeding of livestock. Such carefully protected and cared-for animals exhibit a quality of playful happiness that appears most desirable.’

The new spiritual Israel would grow exceedingly, Malachi 4:2, as a result of both men and women accepting Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, Mark 16:15-20 / Acts 6:7 / Acts 8:4, and Jesus and his disciples would crush the head of Satan by the preaching of the Gospel, Genesis 3:15 / Romans 16:20.

The righteous will trample on the ungodly as on the ash-heaps outside their homes, Malachi 4:3. The wine press is metaphorically used for the righteous finally overcoming in victory, Isaiah 26:5-6.

Gill, in his commentary, says the following concerning Malachi 4:3.

‘As grapes in the winepress, as Christ did before them, Isaiah 63:2, and they by virtue of him who makes them more than conquerors through himself, over all their enemies, spiritual and temporal.’

Wesley, in his commentary, says the following concerning Malachi 4:3.

‘When believers by faith overcome the world, when they suppress their corrupt appetites and passions, and when the God of peace bruises Satan under their feet, then they indeed tread down the wicked.’

‘Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees, and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. “See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.” Malachi 4:4-6

The statement to remember the law of Moses, Malachi 4:4, forces us to remember what Moses told the Israelites, Deuteronomy 4:1-2 / Deuteronomy 4:5 / Deuteronomy 4:8 / Deuteronomy 4:14.

Remember Moses spoke to the Israelites not Christians, Galatians 3:24. The encouragement here was that Israel will continue to remain in the statutes of the Old Testament law in order that Israel are preserved unto the coming of the Messiah at the end of national Israel.

Those who feared God continued in the law, Ecclesiastes 12:13, but those who rejected the Word of God by the time of the coming of the Messiah were consumed in the oven of the destruction of Jerusalem, Mark 13:1-9 / Matthew 24.

God says, ‘He will send the prophet Elijah’, Malachi 4:5 / Malachi 3:1. This statement refers to John the Baptist, Matthew 11:14 / Luke 1:17. It clearly identifies the time of the historical fulfilment of this prophecy. John the Baptist, as the forerunner of the Messiah, went forth in the power and spirit of Elijah.

This coming of the Lord in the prophecy was a clear reference to the coming of the incarnate Son of God. His coming was a ‘terrible day’ for those who rejected Him, Malachi 4:5 / John 12:48.

Those who rejected Him would be burned in the furnace, and so, the great and terrible day of the Lord was the terrible day of the end of national Israel, Matthew 24 / 1 Peter 3.

God will turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents, or else He will come and strike the land with total destruction, Malachi 4:6 / Luke 1:17 / Matthew 3:2.

Gill, in his commentary, says the following concerning Malachi 4:6.

‘John the Baptist should be an instrument of converting many of the Jews, both fathers and children, and bringing them to the knowledge and faith of the true Messiah and reconcile them together who were divided by the schools of Hillel and Shammai, and by the sects of the Sadducees and Pharisees, and bring them to be of one mind, judgment, and faith, and to have a hearty love to one another, and the Lord Christ, Matthew 3:5.’

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following.

There are three remarkable predictions in this chapter.

1. The advent of John the Baptist, in the spirit and authority of Elijah.
2. The manifestation of Christ in the flesh, under the emblem of the Sun of righteousness.
3. The final destruction of Jerusalem, represented under the emblem of a burning oven, consuming everything cast into it.

It wouldn't be contextually consistent to assume that the period of time between the coming of Elijah and the day of the Lord would be over two thousand years. The fulfilment of the events of this prophecy must be in the first century with the coming of the messenger and forerunner of the Son of God and the actual coming in the flesh of the Son of God, John 1:1-14. It was a coming of the Lord in time, not at the end of time.

The coming of Jesus at the end of time will not be a coming and a call for repentance. It will be a coming of finality and destruction, 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. It will be a coming to call God's people out of this world, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

However, at the end of the purpose for which God called Israel, Jesus came to call those of Israel unto repentance, Luke 13:3. It was a time in history when God was about to end national Israel, and so, Jesus came to call those who feared God out of Israel.

When Jesus comes in His final coming, He will strike the earth with destruction but the striking in this context was to be a striking of drought and suffering, as the curse, KJV, that was delivered to the Jews who had insincerely offered their sacrifices and robbed God during the ministry of Malachi, Malachi 4:6. It was a striking in the destruction of Jerusalem. The curse that was to come in the history of the nation of Israel was termination.

Henry, in his commentary, says the following concerning the word 'curse'. Malachi 4:6.

'The Jewish nation, by wickedness, laid themselves open to the curse. God was ready to bring ruin upon them, but he will once more try whether they will repent and return, therefore he sent John the Baptist to preach repentance to them.'

Jesus came to the Jews, but the majority at the time of His coming didn't accept Him, John 1:11. God's blessing was forever taken from them because they rejected the Blessing of all the world that was promised to and came from Abraham, Genesis 12:1-3.

This is the last message the Jews heard from God for four hundred years until John the Baptist stood on the banks of the river Jordan and proclaimed, 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand', Matthew 3:2.