

MALACHI

**An Explanation
with Notes and Quotes,
illustrations and Applications**

G. Michael Cocoris

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PREFACE

The purpose of this commentary is to provide a practical explanation of Malachi. The objective is a balanced exposition—explaining the passage in context and applying its truths to life with illustrations. Some commentaries are, by design, of a technical nature, delving into the meanings of words and phrases even outside their use in the book under consideration. Those commentaries tend to ignore the context of the book and its application. Other commentaries go to the other extreme and concentrate on the application, often not fully expounding the passage. Commentaries should do both. They should offer a contextual exposition of the book and apply the truths of that book to life. Adding illustrations facilitates clarity.

First and foremost, this is a contextual exposition. The context is not just the paragraph or the chapter but the whole book. In studying any book of the Bible, the first question that should be asked is: “What is the subject of this book?” Each natural literary unit, whether a paragraph or a narrative, develops a subject. A legitimate exposition will show how the author develops his subject. That, and only that, is contextual Bible study. All details in a book must be explained in light of the message and structure of the entire book. Words only have meaning in a context. A detailed explanation of words and phrases ripped from their sentence and the broader context is not exposition. The flow of the thought of the passage in the context of the book is the message the author intends to convey.

The Bible was written for living (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Even the most brilliant explanation that stops short of the applications is an abortion of what God intended. Thus, the practical ramifications of every passage must always be considered.

The procedure of study I use is to first divide the biblical book into its natural literary units (narratives or paragraphs). Then, I analyze each unit. The analysis includes an outline of the development of thought in that unit (major points and sub-points), an explanation of each sentence, and a summary statement. After I have personally analyzed each unit, I read commentaries, deliberately reading commentaries from different theological perspectives. I credit commentators’ comments by putting their names in parenthesis, even if I had seen that point in the text during my study before I read their comments. Thus, each chapter of this material expounds a natural literary unit of the book of Malachi.

In the process of study, I also wrote a tentative title, introduction, and conclusion as if what I was working on was a sermon. If I stumble across an illustration, I include it, but, at this point, I do not search for illustrations. I write all of this for each literary unit in the book before preaching the first sermon in the book. As a result, when I begin speaking through the book, I have the whole book in mind.

As I prepare to preach each literary unit, I may change the tentative title, introduction, and/or conclusion. I rarely change the explanation of the text. It is as I preach each unit that I search for illustrations. Again, having studied the whole book first is helpful here. I sometimes found an illustration I knew would fit better later in the book.

The introduction of each chapter briefly relates that section to life and/or the context. The captions throughout the chapters are divisions of that portion of Scripture and correspond to the main points of a sermon. The italicized headings correspond to the sub-points of a sermon. Rather than footnotes, the author’s name is in parenthesis in the text. While applications are made throughout the exposition, the passage as a whole is summarized and applied at the end.

May the Lord be pleased to use this approach to the Scripture to enlighten, encourage, and edify believers, thus glorifying His Son.

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INTRODUCTION

Malachi has been called “notable for its dialogue style” (Lee) and “the last of the prophets” (Lee). The name of the book is taken from the author of the book.

Author

Malachi 1:1 says the author was Malachi. The only Old Testament mention of him is in this verse, and it tells us nothing, not even his father’s name. All we know is that Jewish tradition says he was a member of the great synagogue. Malachi is attested by the New Testament (cf. Mal. 4:5, 6 with Matt. 11:10, 14, 17:11, 12; Mk. 9:10, 11; Lk. 1:17. Also cf. Mal. 3:1 with Matt. 11:10, Mk. 1:2 and Mal. 2:3 with Rom. 9:13).

Recipients

Malachi 1:1 does not give any information at all concerning Malachi. It does not mention his father, hometown, king, or kings who reigned during his ministry. Therefore, an exact date cannot be established. However, internal clues can help fix an approximate date.

1. The Edomites had been driven from Mt. Seir but had not returned, necessitating a date after 585 BC (1:3-4).

2. The remnant had returned, rebuilt the Temple and were offering sacrifices (1:7-10, 3:8). The Temple was complete in 516 BC, so the book must have been written after that.

3. Many years had passed since the offerings were instituted because the priest had grown tired of them and corruption had crept into the system.

4. The moral and religious problems in Malachi are quite similar to those faced by Ezra and Nehemiah.

5. The Persian term for governor (*pechah*) is used in 1:8. By itself, all this indicates is that the book was written during the Persian domination of Israel (539-333 BC), but the verb indicates that this governor might be bribed, hardly Nehemiah.

Nehemiah returned to Persia in 432 BC but came back to Palestine around 425 BC and dealt with the sins described in Malachi. Therefore, it is likely that Malachi proclaimed his message while Nehemiah was absent, almost a century after Haggai and Zechariah began their ministries (520 BC). All this leads to a date of 430 BC.

According to the book itself, the recipients were the people of Israel (1:1; 2:11; 3:6-7), the priests (1:6; 2:1) and a faithful group (4:2, 3). The remnant had returned to Jerusalem and the temple had been rebuilt, but the people had become selfish and sensual. They had grown careless and neglectful in their spiritual duties. Perhaps their interpretation of the glowing prophecies of the exilic and pre-exilic prophets had led them to expect the messianic kingdom immediately upon their return. Therefore, they were discouraged and skeptical (2:17). This doubt of divine justice had caused them to neglect vital religion and true piety and had given place to mere formality. They had not relapsed into idolatry, but a spirit of worldliness had crept in and they were guilty of many vices.

Subject

The subject of Malachi is God's charges against His people.

Structure

There was a style of argumentation practiced in Jewish literature in the fifth century BC, which was characterized by three basic elements: an abrasive statement, an anticipated objection or question and an elaboration of the original theme combined with the answering of the specific objections (Charles D. Isbell. *Malachi, a Study Guide Commentary*). This basic rhetorical question-answer format was Malachi's method. Consequently, some scholars have called him the Hebrew Socrates.

Malachi contains a series of God's accusations against Israel: 1) You have doubted My love (1:2). 2) You have despised My name (1:6). 3) You have disobeyed My law (2:14). 4) You have discredited My promise (2:17). 5) You have defrauded My storehouse (3:7, 8). 6) You have denied My blessings (3:13). These are followed by questions supposedly asked by the audience but actually stated by the author. These questions are then answered. Seven of these dot the landscape of Malachi; two are used in the same charge. Of the fifty-five verses in Malachi, twenty-seven are spoken by God, the highest proportion of all the prophets.

I. Introduction	1:1
II. The Charge against the Nation	1:2-5
III. The Charge against the Priests	1:6-2:9
IV. The Charge against the People	2:10-4:3
V. Conclusion	4:4-6

Purpose

The purpose of Malachi is to rebuke the sins of the priests and the people so that they would return to the Lord. To understand and appreciate the purpose of Malachi, it must be kept in mind that Israel had been, in the past, in idolatry. The exile had cured that. They were back in the land and the Temple had been rebuilt. The problem now was lethargy and stagnation. The priests and people, leaders, and laymen were callous spiritually. Malachi denounces the indifference and hypocrisy of the priests, impure marriages, Sabbath-breaking, the lack of personal godliness, their failure to pay their tithes and their skepticism. The critical point is that they had outward religious form (the Temple) but lacked inward heart-felt righteousness. They were indifferent and insensitive to their indifference. Haggai and Zechariah rebuked the people for their failure to rebuild the Temple. Malachi rebuked them for neglecting the Temple.

Summary: Malachi rebukes the sin of the priests and the people so that they would return to the Lord (3:7).

Malachi is the only prophet who ends his book with judgment, which is a fitting conclusion to the Old Testament because it underscores God's solution in the work of the coming Messiah.

God rebukes sin to get us to turn to Him.

YOU HAVE DOUBTED MY LOVE

Saints sin. We know that doctrinally; we are aware that no one is perfect, not even saints. As the bumper sticker says, “I am not perfect; I am just forgiven. Having said that, what are the sins of the saints? The list is long. What would the *Lord* say are the sins of the saints? That would, no doubt, depend on who He was addressing. The sins of the saints change from group to group and from time to time. In one case, the Lord laid out His list to a group of His children. He thought so much about that list that He had one of His prophets write them up in a book He put in the Bible.

Malachi contains a series of God’s accusations against Israel. These accusations follow a pattern. First, there is the accusation. Then, there is an objection or question followed by an answer.

Accusation

Introduction “The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi” (1:1). The book of Malachi is described as the “burden” of the word of the Lord. It is a heavy message (Barnes; JFB; Constable). “The ‘burden’ which weighs on the prophet is meant to weigh on men’s consciences till they prepare for ‘that day’” (Baldwin; see note on the burden of the word of the Lord, Baldwin, p. 174).

The word “Lord” is God’s covenant name. The message is to Israel. In other words, this message is to God’s people. This message for the Lord to His people was given through Malachi. The name Malachi means “my Messenger.”

As pointed out in the Introduction, it is likely that Malachi proclaimed his message while Nehemiah was absent (He was in Persia from 432-425 BC), almost a century after Haggai and Zechariah began their ministries (520 BC). All this leads to a date of 430 BC.

Assertion “I have loved you,’ says the LORD” (1:2a). This sound as if it is in the past tense (“have”), but “would not God speak, unless He still loved. ‘I have loved and do love you,’ is the force of the words” (Barnes). This is not an assertion of God’s love to all mankind but an affirmation of God’s love for Israel (1:1). The Lord says, “I love *you*.”

God loves His children. Throughout their history, God told Israel He loved them (Deut. 4:32-40; 7:7-11; 10:12-22; 15:16; 23:5; 33:2-5; Isa. 43:4; Hos. 11:1, 3-4, 8-9). Throughout their history, God demonstrated that He loved Israel. Just look at what he did for them. He delivered them from Egypt, provided for them in the wilderness, and gave them the land. Those were the material blessings. Paul lists the spiritual blessings. He gave them the covenants, law, the service of *God*, and the promises (Rom. 9:4).

God loves His children. God tells us He loves us and He has demonstrated that love. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn. 4:9-10). The Bible is His valentine card to us.

One of the men who most influenced D. L. Moody was a young preacher named Henry Moorehouse. He once preached for Moody for an entire week using the same text every night—John 3:16. The preaching of Moorehouse, according to Moody, was much different from his

own. Instead of preaching that God was behind people with a double-edged sword to hie them down, he told them God wanted every person to be saved because He loved them. Moody said of his preaching: “I didn’t know God thought so much of me. It was wonderful to hear the way he brought out Scripture. He went from Genesis to Revelation and preached that in all ages, God loved the sinner.” Believers and even leaders cannot understand the depth of God’s love.

Accusation This is an assertion, but as the context shows, it is also an accusation. They had doubted God’s Love.

Question

Question “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’” (1:2b). Israel questioned God’s Love. Israel doubted His love despite all of God’s past indications of His love. The Psalmist says, “They soon forgot His works” (Ps. 106:13).

Explanation Maybe the problem was that there was no evidence of God’s love in their minds. He had promised them “a golden age of blessing, but they still struggled under Gentile oppression and generally hard times (cf. v. 8; 2:2; 3:9, 11)” (Constable).

“Perhaps Israel thought her complaint was legitimate. After all, about 100 years had passed since the people had returned from the Exile; yet the kingdom predicted by God’s prophets had still not come. Instead, the people continued to be dominated by foreign governors (Mal. 1:8) and experienced hard times economically (Mal. 2:2; Mal. 3:9, Mal. 3:11). If they had carefully read the covenant in Deuteronomy, they would have known that such misfortunes were the *result*—not the *cause*—of their disobedience. While Malachi later indicated that a righteous remnant, which feared God, did exist at that time (Mal. 3:16-18), the nation as a whole needed to repent from the sin of unbelief and fall in love wholeheartedly with the Lord” (Blaising).

When things do not go the way we think they should, we question God’s love. “We must not infer God does not love us because He afflicts us. Men, instead of referring their sufferings to their proper cause, their own sin, impiously accuse God of indifference to their welfare [Moore]” (JFB).

Have you ever doubted God’s love? Have you ever looked at your life and didn’t see what you expected to see and upon reflection concluded the problem was that God did not love you. That is what happened in ancient Israel.

Sometimes, we’re like the little girl who wrote to her pastor, “Dear Pastor, I know God loves me, but I wish He would give me an ‘A’ on my report card so I could be sure. Love, Theresa (Age 8, Milwaukee). “The scourges by which God chastises his children are testimonies of his love” (John Calvin). Vance Havner used to say, “God’s chastening originates in His love.” One day C. H. Spurgeon was walking through the English countryside with a friend. As they strolled along, the evangelist noticed a barn with a weather vane on its roof. At the top of the vane were these words: GOD IS LOVE. Spurgeon remarked to his companion that he thought this was a rather inappropriate place for such a message. “Weather vanes are changeable,” he said, “but God’s love is constant.” “I don’t agree with you about those words, Charles,” replied his friend. “You misunderstood the meaning. That sign indicates a truth: God is love Regardless of which way the wind blows.”

Answer

The Lord answers their question by pointing to the rejection of Esau and the judgment of Edom.

Esau ““Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” says the LORD. “Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated” (1:2c-3a). To bring up Jacob and Esau is to go to the very origin of the nation of Israel. Isaac had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob had twelve sons, who became the twelve tribes of Israel. In other words, the children of Israel were the descendants of Jacob. The Lord points to the fact that He chose Jacob and rejected Esau to inherit the promise. This was contrary to the common practice of the day. The custom was to choose the eldest son. God chose the second. While the twins were still in the womb, God said, the older shall serve the younger (Gen. 25:23). Thus, the point is that the Lord freely chose Jacob and his descendants, including this generation that had questioned Him, to inherit the promise (Blaising). God’s choice was by “gratuitous favor” (JFB; see Rom. 9:13-16).

The way this is expressed is a problem for some. Did God love Jacob and *hate* Esau? No. In the Bible, hate is a “lesser love” (Barnes; Gen. 29:31; cf. Lk. 14:26 with Mt. 10:37). Blaising explains, “The Hebrew words for loved and hated refer not to God’s emotions but to His choice of one over the other for a covenant relationship (cf. Gen. 29:31-35; Deut. 21:15, 21:17; Lk. 14:26). To hate someone meant to reject him and to disavow any loving association with him (Ps. 139:21). Nor do these words by themselves indicate the eternal destinations of Jacob and Esau. The verbs refer to God’s acts in history toward both of the two nations which descended from the two brothers.”

Barnes puts it like this, “He does not speak directly of predestination, but of pre-election to temporal goods.” Clarke says that this is not a word about the eternal state of either Jacob or Esau, that what is spoken concerns merely their earthly possessions, and that it does not concern the two brothers at all but the posterity of each.

Constable says, “It is remarkable that God loved Jacob in view of the person Jacob was, and it is equally remarkable that God hated Esau because, in many ways, he was a more likable individual than his brother” (Constable). Someone said to A. C. Gaebelein, “I have a serious problem with Malachi 1:3, where God says, ‘Esau I have hated.’” Gaebelein replied, “I have a greater problem with Malachi 1:2, where God says, ‘Jacob, I have loved’” (Wiersbe, cited by Constable).

Edom The Lord not only rejected Esau, He judged Edom, the descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:1). Malachi continues, “and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness” (1:3b). The laying waste of Edom’s mountain is not a reference to them being assigned a barren land, but when this devastation took place is disputed (Keil). Edom has been utterly destroyed, either by Nebuchadnezzar (see JFB) or by the neighboring peoples, Egypt, Ammon, and Moab (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 10.9, 7). The expression “the jackals of the wilderness” is a reference to the Chaldeans, who conquered Jerusalem in 586 BC. They also desolated Edom (Jer. 25:9, 21; Unger). Edom was still in ruins (Keil).

“Even though Edom has said, ‘We have been impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places,’ Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘They may build, but I will throw down; they shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, and the people against whom the LORD will have indignation forever’ (1:4). The Edomites might return and rebuild, but the Lord says He would overthrow them, because they are a “Territory of Wickedness” and they will experience the Lord’s wrath forever. “The threat that if Edom attempts to rebuild its ruins, the Lord will again

destroy that which is built is equivalent to a declaration that Edom will never recover its former prosperity and power” (Keil).

The Nabatean Arabs permanently ousted the Edomites from their mountain (Unger). The land of the Edomites was made an “eternal desert, especially from the times of the Maccabees onwards” (Keil). “The permanent devastation and the failure of every attempt on the part of the nation to rise up again (is) a practical proof that the wrath of God is resting forever upon both people and land on account of Edom’s sins” (Keil).

“The Lord stated that the fate of Edom to illustrate His gratuitous love for Israel rather than Edom and to impress upon the people through the restoration community had difficulties and hardships, their lot was a demonstration of God’s love for them in contrast to the Edom’s destruction as a nation and the empty rock houses of Petra” (Unger).

Blaising says, “Perhaps Israel thought her complaint was legitimate. After all, about 100 years had passed since the people had returned from the Exile, yet the kingdom predicted by God’s prophets had still not come. Instead, the people continued to be dominated by foreign governors (Mal. 1:8) and experienced hard times economically (Mal. 2:2; Mal. 3:9, Mal. 3:11). If they had carefully read the covenant in Deuteronomy, they would have known that such misfortunes were the *result*—not the *cause*—of their disobedience. While Malachi later indicated that a righteous remnant, which feared God, did exist at that time (Mal. 3:16-18), the nation as a whole needed to repent from the sin of unbelief and fall in love wholeheartedly with the Lord.”

“Your eyes shall see, and you shall say, ‘The LORD is magnified beyond the border of Israel’” (1:5). Speaking to Israel, the Lord says that when the unrestored remnant sees the irreparable ruin of Edom and the restored Jerusalem, they will recognize God’s love (Unger). “He did not choose to bless Esau as He chose to bless Jacob, namely, with a covenant relationship with Himself. Similarly, a man might love several different women, including his mother, sisters, daughters, and aunts. But when he enters into the covenant of marriage and sets his love on his wife, his love for her might make it seem like he hated the others, relatively speaking” (Constable).

Lucy told Charlie that she loved him. Charlie Brown answers, “No, you don’t.” This goes back and forth a few times, but each time, Lucy says it louder: “I REALLY LOVE YOU, CHARLIE BROWN!” But because he’s been rejected so many times, he dares to dispute her affection. In the last frame, Lucy has reached the limit of her patience as she screams out in a loud voice, “Hey, stupid, I love you!”

Summary: The Lord charged His people with doubting His love when He had declared and demonstrated it to them.

“The root of their sin was insensibility to God’s *love* and to their own wickedness. Having had prosperity taken from them, they imply they have no tokens of God’s love; they look at what God had taken, not at what God had left. God’s love is often the least acknowledged where it is most manifested. We must not infer God does not love us because He afflicts us. Men, instead of referring their sufferings to their proper cause, their own sin, impiously accuse God of indifference to their welfare [Moore]” (JFB).

The point of this section was to get the Jews of the restoration community, who were thinking that God had abandoned them and forgotten His promises to them, to think again. Even though they seemed to be experiencing the same fate as their ancient enemy, the Edomites, God would restore them because He had entered into a covenant relationship with them. He would keep His promises, both to the Israelites and the Edomites, for better and worse, respectively.

This reminder of the Lord's love provided positive motivation for the priests to return to the Lord, and it should have the same effect on all God's people who read these verses" (Constable).

God loves His children. God loves you. If your mother left you and your father deserted you, God loves you. If your friends have betrayed you, God loves you. Look at what He has done for you. (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 1:3-14). We need to understand God's love (Eph. 3:14-19). This is important because doubting God's love is the root of temptation and sin. That, in essence, is what Satan tried to get Eve to do. Your concept of God determines your behavior. Allah, the God of Islam, is powerful and authoritative. Consequently, the Islamic fundamentalist used power. Is your God a cop, a judge, a prosecuting attorney, or a God of love?

Janice L. Hansen wrote, "It was a beautiful day. As I headed home at the end of it, I heard two young girls giggling. They were sprawled on the lawn, pulling petals from a daisy and chanting. He loves me ... he loves me not ... he loves me ... *Silly game*, I said to myself. *Someday they'll know that true love isn't ruled by chance*. But you know, old as I am, I'm often just as foolish when it comes to God's love for me. I get a raise at work; God loves me. My hours get cut back; He loves me not. I got a good grade on my test; God loves me. I can't get into a class I want; He loves me not. How silly of me! Why don't I remember that God loves me all the time, that even my disappointments are part of the love? I don't need a daisy to tell me that!" Janice adds, "Pull the petals off a flower and with each one declares, "He loves me, He loves me, He loves me" ("When You Doubt God's Love" by Janice L. Hansen, an excerpted from *Time Out for the Spirit*." <http://www.guideposts.org/daily-devotionals/when-you-doubt-gods-love>, accessed 7/15/ 2015).

YOU HAVE DESPISED MY NAME

One of the dangers of serving the Lord is serving the Lord becomes commonplace. When that happens, servants of the Lord get sloppy in serving the Lord. We get adjusted to it. What does God think about that? He tells us in Malachi 1.

Accusation

The Address “A son honors *his* father, and a servant *his* master. If then I am the Father, where *is* My honor? And if I *am* a Master, where *is* My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name” (1:6a). Notice, this accusation is addressed to the priest. “From a New Testament point of view, all believers are priests (1 Pet. 2:9). “This charge is doubly sad because after the return from the Exile, the priests were responsible for teaching the people God’s covenant and turning their hearts to God (Neh. 9:38-10:39; cf. Ezra 6:16-22; Ezra 7:10). If the *priests* failed to honor God, what could be expected of the people?” (Blaising). It starts at the top. The attitude in the pulpit is reflected in the pew.

The Accusation It is natural for a son to honor his human father and a servant to honor his master, but the priest had not honored their heavenly Father and Master. This is a serious charge. Children were to honor their parents (Ex. 20:12). “Since Israel was supposed to love God wholeheartedly (Deut. 6:5) and to fear Him (Deut. 6:3), the seriousness of her condition was clear.... Disobedient children who rebelled against discipline were to be stoned (Deut. 21:18-21)” (Blaising). “The theme of honoring or fearing the Lord appears several times in Malachi, making it one of the major themes in this book (cf. 1:11, 14; 2:2, 5; 3:5, 16; 4:2)” (Constable).

They not only did not honor and reverence the Lord, but they also despised His name. The Hebrew word translated “despised” means “to despise, regard with contempt, disdain, to be despicable, to be vile, worthless.”

“The first disputation (1:2-5) is the simplest, and this one (1:6—2:9) is the most complex” (Constable).

Question

Question “Yet you say, ‘In what way have we despised Your name?’” (1:6b). The priest responds to God’s charge by asking how they had despised His name. “They ask for evidence of their profane behavior” (MacDonald).

Meaning The name of God was a common substitute for the person of God (Ex. 23:21; Deut. 12:5, 11, 21; 16:2, 6), which is clearly the case here because in the next verse, they say, “defiled you.” They were unaware that they had despised God (Blaising). “They are blind alike to God’s love and their own guilt” (JFB).

Answer

Their Sacrifices “You offer defiled food on My altar, but say, ‘In what way have we defiled You?’ By saying, ‘The table of the LORD is contemptible’” (1:7). The Lord answers the question of the priest (1:6) by telling them that they have despised Him by offering defiled food on His altar and saying the table is contemptible, which is the same Hebrew word translated despised in verse 6. Using the food figure on a table, the Lord says they offered a defiled sacrifice and despised the altar. Since the Lord uses the words “food” (Hebrew: “food, bread”) and “table,” some commentators have concluded this is a reference to the Table of Showbread in the Temple (*NKJV Study Bible*, which says they treated holy things, the bread and the table, as ordinary things). Other commentators claim that the Lord is talking about the sacrifices offered on the altar, pictured as food on the table (Lev. 21:6; Ez. 44:7; Barnes; JFB; Clarke; Blaising). The next verse indicates this is the correct interpretation.

The Mosaic Law required that they bring a clean sacrifice (Lev. 22:25) and that if they brought the wrong kind of sacrifice, they would profane God’s holy name (Lev. 22:2). The Mosaic Law also referred to the sacrifices as food for God (Lev. 21:6), although God obviously did not eat what was offered. In short, the priest despised the Lord by presenting defiled sacrifices to Him, that is, ritually unclean sacrifices according to the Mosaic Law (Constable).

Imagine inviting a guest to your home for dinner and serving stale bread and cold coffee. The guest could legitimately say that you were despising *him*.

“And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, *is it* not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, *is it* not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?” says the LORD of hosts” (1:8). Instead of offering a lamb without spot or blemish as a sacrifice (Lev. 22:19), the priest offered lambs that were blind, lame, and sick, which were unacceptable according to the Mosaic Law (Lev. 22:20-24). The Lord says that sacrifices are evil and asks if they offered such a gift to the governor, would he be pleased with you and accept you favorably? What they were doing was like serving leftovers to the governor, who was your guest.

“The governor in view would have been one of the Persian officials who ruled over the territory occupied by Judah. Nehemiah held this position for a while, but others preceded and followed him in it. The Book of Malachi seems to date from Nehemiah’s leadership of Israel, but Nehemiah refused to receive offerings from the people (Neh. 5:14, 18). So, the governor here probably did not have Nehemiah. Elnathan, Yeho’ezer, and Ahzai were evidently the governors of Judah between Zerubbabel and Nehemiah” (Constable, who refers to Avigad).

“Certainly, the governor (a Persian title) would not have been pleased with the meat of blind, crippled, or diseased animals; in fact, he would not have accepted it. How much more absurd it was to expect the favor of the Lord Almighty (cf. Mal. 1:4) with such offerings. He did not accept such sacrifices, nor did He accept (Mal. 1:8-9) the priests” (Blaising).

This was a deeply *personal* issue. God was not just unhappy with their sacrifice; he was displeased with them personally.

The Rejection “But now entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us. *While your hands are doing this, will He accept you favorably?*” says the LORD of hosts” (1:9). This is irony (Barnes). Malachi tells the priest to entreat God’s favor and be gracious to all of us, asking if God will do that while they despise Him. If God is not pleased with their unacceptable animal sacrifices, how much more absurd is it to expect his favor (Blaising)? “How foolish it was to

pray for God to bestow His favor on the priests when they were despising Him in these ways” (Constable).

“Who *is there* even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘nor will I accept an offering from your hands” (1:10). The Lord tells the priest that they might as well shut the door of the Temple than light the fire on his altar in vain because he has no pleasure in them nor will he accept an offering from them.

“To emphasize this point, Malachi said the whole temple service might as well be shut down. It was even useless to light the fires on the altar of burnt offerings. God was not pleased; He would accept no offerings from them” (Blaising; MacDonald). “God prefers no worship to contemptible worship” (Ryrie). “‘I am not pleased with you’ is the opposite of ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’ (Mt. 25:21)” (Constable; Rev. 2:5). When I told a friend I had been invited to speak at the American Mission For Opening Close Churches, he said what we need is an American Mission For Closing Open Churches. God would say, “Amen.”

The Reason “For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name *shall be* great among the Gentiles; in every place incense *shall be* offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name *shall be* great among the nations,” says the LORD of hosts” (1:11). God explains to the priest that the reason (“for;” Blaising) they should shut down the Temple and cease offering sacrifices is the time will come when His name will be great among the Gentiles all the time in every place and they will offer incense and pure sacrifices. “This refers to worship in the Millennium (cf. 3:1-4; Isa. 11:3-4, 9; Dan. 7:13-14, 27-28; Zeph. 2:11; 3:8-11; Zech. 14:9, 16)” (Constable).

Blaising gives more details. “The prophets predicted a time when Gentiles will see the light and become worshipers of the Lord (Isa. 45:22-25; Isa. 49:5-7; Isa. 59:19). The Messiah will become King over the entire earth. Believers in all nations will worship Him (Isa. 11:3-4, 11:9; Dan. 7:13-14, 7:27-28; Zeph. 2:11; 3:8-11; Zech. 14:9, 14:16). Malachi also spoke of the coming of the future day when the Lord will return and will bring about pure worship in Israel (Mal. 3:1-4). It seems preferable then to associate the ‘pure’ Gentile worship mentioned in Mal. 1:11 with Israel’s pure worship. But will Gentiles in the kingdom give offerings ‘in every place? No. This problem is alleviated if the preposition *b^e* (usually meaning “in”) before ‘every place’ is rendered ‘from,’ as in Isa. 21:1 (cf. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980, s.v. ‘*b^e*,’ 1:87)” (Blaising).

Blaising explains, “Scholars differ on whether the Hebrew passive participle *mūggāš* should be rendered will be brought (future tense, as in the KJV, NASB, NIV) or “is brought” (pres. tense as in RSV and many commentaries). If the present tense is followed, then Malachi was referring to practices in his day. In that case, the offerings refer either to those brought by Jews who were still dispersed among the nations or to offerings made by Gentiles. The first of these is rejected because the phrases from the rising to the setting of the sun and in every place indicate a practice more universal than the limited extent of the Jewish dispersion. Also, the sacrifices given by Jews in the Dispersion could not be called pure offerings since they could be made only in Jerusalem. (Furthermore, there is no evidence that Jews in the Dispersion offered any sacrifices.)

“Those who accept a present-tense rendering of the verb *mūggāš* usually choose the second of the options just described. In this view, God was endorsing pagan worship. However, this view must be rejected for several reasons. If it were adopted, it would be the only place in the Bible where pagan worship is considered legitimate, which would directly contradict numerous

references that specifically condemn such worship (e.g., Ex. 23:24, 23:32-33; Deut. 13:6-11; 29:17; 1 Kings 18:19-46; Ps. 96:5; Isa. 48:5; 66:3; Hab. 2:18-20). Not even Paul's reference to the Athenian worship of an unknown god (Acts 17:22-31) supports this interpretation that pagans worship God's 'name' with 'pure offerings.' Also, such an interpretation does not accord with the rest of Malachi, which strongly emphasizes strict obedience to the Mosaic Covenant" (Blaising).

The Rebuke "But you profane it, in that you say, 'The table of the LORD is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible'" (1:12). The Lord rebukes the priest for profaning (Hebrew: "profane, defile, pollute, desecrate) His name in that they say His table (altar; Barnes) is defiled and the food (sacrifices; Barnes) on it is contemptible (Hebrew: "to despise, regard with contempt, disdain, to be despicable, to be vile, worthless;" see verses 6 and 7). He has returned to the charge He made in verses 6 and 7). Blaising says, "In Mal. 1:7-8, the *actions* of the priests were condemned; here their *attitude* was condemned. Their attitude was one of contempt. Apparently, the priests recognized that these sacrificial practices were irregular, for they said that the Lord's table (cf. Mal. 1:7) is defiled and that its food ... is contemptible. But they did not care to take the trouble to set things straight. Being involved in offering the sacrifices was just a burden. Such a response was a form of contempt" (Blaising, italics his).

The problem was not a lack of service but the quality of service! "Anything second-rate that we offer to God is inappropriate in view of who He is. This includes our worship, our ministries, our studies, physical objects, and anything. The Lord is worthy of our very best offerings to Him, and we should give Him nothing less. To give Him less than our best is to despise Him. Shoddiness is an insult to God. Shoddy holy is still shoddy" (Constable). We give God our leftovers. We give Him our leftover time, our leftover money, and our leftover energy. Then we wonder why God doesn't bless our lives. Are you giving the Lord your best or your leftovers?

Their Attitude "You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it, says the LORD of hosts. 'And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?' says the LORD" (1:13). The Lord reminds the priest that they complain that serving the Lord is weariness (Hebrew: "toil, hardship, weariness; Constable: "tiresome"), they sneer (Ryrie: belittle) at the altar, and they bring stolen, lame, sick sacrifices (see 2 Sam. 24:24). "Being involved in offering the sacrifices was just a burden. Such a response was a form of contempt (cf. Jas. 4:17)" That the priests brought unacceptable animals was repeated in Mal. 1:13 (cf. Mal. 1:8), and God's refusal to accept them was repeated from Mal. 1:8-10" (Blaising).

"Their worship should have been passionate and joyful instead of boring and burdensome (cf. Col. 3:16-17)" (Constable). "The service of God is its own reward. If not, it becomes a greater toil, with less reward from this earth, than the things of this earth. Our only choice is between love and weariness" (Barnes).

"But cursed *be* the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and takes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished—for I *am* a great King,' Says the LORD of hosts, 'and My name *is to be feared among the nations*'" (1:14). The Lord pronounces a curse on the deceiver (Hebrew: "deceitful, crafty"), that is, the crafty fellow who makes a vow, which was voluntary (but if he made it, he was required to pay it, Deut. 23:21-23), and instead of bringing one of his unblemished lambs (Lev. 22:17-25), he brings a blemished one (Ryrie: "A blemished female animal, in place of the more valuable male animal").

They were "playing the old bait and switch game and swindling God. 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” (Constable). They “brought their blemished odds and ends” (MacDonald). They were cheating the Great king (Ryrie).

What they were doing was “totally inappropriate” because the Lord is the great King who is to be feared among all the nations, “yet His own people and their spiritual leaders were treating it with contempt” (Constable). “Certainly no one would try to cheat a king or governor, for fear of being punished by that authority. Nor should one try to cheat *the* great King, the One whose name is to be feared among the nations” (Blaising).

Simply put, they should have selected the best, most valuable, most prized lamb from their flock for your offering to God, but instead of doing that, they chose that sick, blind, lame lamb leaning against the fence, ready to keel over! They grab that one and race for the altar before it dies, thinking, “It’ll suffice. It’s only for God.” God says. “Don’t even bother building a fire. Don’t waste your time. I don’t want the sick, lame, blind, almost-dead lamb. What a mockery to me! Either bring me the prized lamb or bring me nothing at all!”

Their Ruin “And now, O priests, this commandment is for you” (2:1). At this point, the discussion shifts from the sins of the priest to their possible fate and from their Temple sacrifices to their teaching.

“If you will not hear, and if you will not take *it* to heart, to give glory to My name,” says the LORD of hosts, “I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take *it* to heart” (2:2). The Lord tells the priest that if they do not start paying attention to give glory to His name (that is “to Him;” see 1:6), He will curse their blessings. In fact, He has already done that. “How they were to honor Him is clear from the ways they had failed Him (1:6-14) and from the portrayal of a true priest (2:7)” (Blaising).

Heart is not a reference to emotions. “The word ‘heart’ (*leb/lebab*) denotes in Hebrew what may be called the command center of a person’s life, where knowledge is collected and considered and where decisions and plans are made that determine the direction of one’s life. In view of the 814 occurrences of the word in the Old Testament about the human ‘heart’ (‘the commonest of all anthropological terms’ [Wolff]) and the common usage of ‘heart’ in English of emotions, it is important to differentiate the Hebrew meaning from the English and so to ‘guard against the false impression that biblical man is determined more by feeling than by reason.’ [Wolff][Clendenen]“ (Constable cites these quotes).

What does curse your blessings mean? Ryrie says, “Dry up the supply from which the priests received their portions of meat, grain, and so on.” Constable says their blessing was their business, and by cursing their blessings, the Lord would render their pronounced blessings vain, and trouble would plague their lives, spiritually and materially (see Lev. 26:14-39; Deut. 27:11-26; 28:15-57). Blaising says the curse was hardship and adds, “The Mosaic Covenant had included curses for those who disobeyed the Law (see Deut. 27:15-26; 28:15-68). These curses were concerned with the people’s physical, mental, and material welfare. The curse Malachi referred to would affect the priests’ blessings, either their own blessings (as income from people’s tithes and offerings) or blessings they pronounced on the people (Num. 6:22-27).”

“No single prophetic book contains all twenty-seven types of curses or all ten types of restoration blessings. The shorter books normally contain few of either. Malachi, on the other hand, contains a fairly high proportion of both types relative to its length, confirming what readers of the book have long noticed: the Book of Malachi is closely concerned with fidelity to the covenant and the consequences (thus curses and blessings) of keeping or breaking the law of Moses” (Stuart, cited by Constable).

“Behold, I will rebuke your descendants and spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your solemn feasts; and *one* will take you away with it” (2:3). The Lord tells the priest that He would also rebuke their descendants. The Hebrew word translated “descendants” means “seed, sowing, offspring.” Thus, Ryrie says, “The word may refer to the priests’ descendants who would be removed from the priesthood. The word may also refer to the seed for the crops. Barnes takes it as seed, but Blaising says the threat of removing the priests from office makes physical descendants more probable. The Lord says He will spread refuse on their faces, that is, the refuse of their feast (Zech. 3:3-4). Constable explains that the refuse is the “internal waste of the sacrificial animals.”

As a result, both the offering and the priest will be thrown out. “As are the offerings, so shall it be with the offerers” (Barnes). “Both sacrifices and priests would have to be taken outside (‘taken away,’ thrown out with the garbage, picturing excommunication) for disposal. This play on words communicates a double curse (cf. v. 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” (Blaising).

The Result ““Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant with Levi may continue,” says the LORD of hosts” (2:4). The Lord tells the priest that when He has thrown them and their descendants out, they will know this warning came from Him and that He did it to continue His covenant with Levi. The covenant with Levi was “the arrangement with Levi and his descendants to set up the priesthood (Numbers 1:50)” (Ryrie). “Its intent was to purify the priests so God’s ‘covenant with Levi’ could ‘continue’ (cf. 3:3)” (Constable; Blaising). Then they would realize that the Lord was speaking to them” (Blaising).

“God willed to punish those who at that time rebelled against Him, that He might spare those who should come after them. He chastened the fathers, who showed their contempt toward Him, that their sons, taking warning thereby, might not be cut off. He continues to say, what the covenant was, which He willed still to be, if they would repent” (Barnes).

“This is the first of six explicit references to ‘covenant’ in Malachi. The covenants in view are God’s covenant with Levi (vv. 4-5, 8), the Mosaic Covenant (v. 10), the marriage covenant (v. 14), and the New Covenant (3:1). God had promised a continuing line of priests from Levi’s branch of the Chosen People (Deut. 33:8-11; cf. Exod. 32:25-29; Num. 3:12; 25:10-13; Neh. 13:29; Jer. 33:21-22)” (Constable).

The Reminder “My covenant was with him, *one* of life and peace, and I gave them to him that he might fear Me; so he feared Me and was reverent before My name” (2:5). The Lord reminds the priest that the covenant He gave to Levi resulted in life and peace for them and fear and reverence for Him. Constable says, “God gave them these blessings because they respected Yahweh and feared His name (Num. 18:7-8, 19-21; 25:10-13).”

Barnes points out that “The covenant was not with Levi himself, but with Aaron, his representative, with whom the covenant was made in the desert, as is indeed here expressed; and, in him, with all his race after him, who succeeded him in his office; as, when it is said, that 1 Ch. 6:49, ‘Aaron and his sons offered upon the altar of burnt-offering,’ it must needs be understood, not of Aaron in person alone and his sons then living, but of any of his race that succeeded in his and their room. So our Lord promised to be with His Apostles Mat. 28:20, ‘always to the end of the world,’ i. e., with them and those whom they should appoint in their stead, and these others, until He should Himself come.”

“The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity, and turned many away from iniquity” (2:6). The Lord also reminds the priest that Levi spoke the truth, not injustice, walked with the Lord in peace and equity (Hebrew: “uprightness”), and turned many away from sin. Levi was faithful to fulfill his ministry by walking with the Lord and teaching the people (Lev. 10:11; Deut. 33:10). His teaching was true; his conduct was in uprightness (Blaising).

“For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and *people* should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts” (2:7). The Lord explains (“for”) that the priest was to teach so people would keep the Law; they were messengers—messengers of the Lord of host. “Ezra was the great example of a faithful priest in postexilic Judaism (cf. Ezra 7:10, 25; Neh. 8:9)” (Constable).

“As the life of a community depends upon the keeper of its water supply to guard that supply from loss or contamination, so the life of Israel depended upon its priests to preserve God’s written word and effectively to dispense it when ‘men should seek’ it” (Clendenen, cited by Constable).

“‘But you have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi,’ says the LORD of hosts” (2:8). The Lord tells the current batch of messengers that instead of walking in the way of the Law, they have personally departed from it and have caused others to disobey it. They have corrupted the covenant He made with Levi (see Neh. 13:29). “Their teaching... caused many to stumble because they themselves had turned from the way. Saying that defiled sacrifices were accepted violated God’s covenant with Levi (see Num. 18:19, 18:21)” (Blaising).

“To cause the people to ‘stumble in the Torah’ is to so mislead them in its meaning that they fail to understand and keep its requirements. There can be no more serious indictment against the man of God” (Merrill, cited by Constable). “To have an ill-prepared minister, an incompetent pastor, a hireling for a shepherd was bad enough; much worse was it to have a deceiver, a schemer, a wolf in sheep’s clothing for a leader” (Alden, cited by Constable).

“Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people, because you have not kept My ways but have shown partiality in the law” (2:9). The Lord tells these wayward messengers that because they have not kept His ways and because they have been partial in teaching the Law (Deut. 1:17; 16:19), He has made them contemptible and base before the all the people. The Hebrew word translated “contemptible” is the same one that has been rendered “despised” earlier in this passage (see 1:6, 7). “Since the priests had despised the Lord, the Lord had made them ‘despised’ in the eyes of ‘all the people.’ They did not obey His will but told the people what they wanted to hear. Their penalty should have been death (Num. 18:32)” (Constable). Thus, this was a light sentence (Blaising).

“Thus ends the first hortatory discourse in Malachi. This one, addressed specifically to Israel’s unfaithful priests, should challenge all God’s servants to serve Him with heartfelt gratitude for His grace and with the awareness that He will punish unfaithful workmen” (Constable).

Summary: The Lord charged the priest with despising Him by offering unacceptable sacrifices and, as a result, He rejected them (because His name will be great among the Gentiles), rebuked them, warned them, reminded them that they had departed from His way (whereas Levi had not), and judged them (made the people despised them).

The New Testament parallel to this is what the Corinthian church did at the Lord's table (1 Cor. 11:17-34).

There is a cultural dimension to this. Years ago, people had an entirely different attitude toward going to church than they do today. In the days when people didn't take a bath every day, they waited till Saturday night to take a bath so they could be their best on Sunday morning at church. That was before my day, but I remember when people washed the car on Saturday in preparation for Sunday and put on their best clothes on Sunday morning to come to church. We live in different days and in different cultures. Today, instead of dressing up, people dress down. A few years ago, a girl visiting the White House with a group being recognized by the president wore flip-flops. Casual Friday has become casual Sunday. This is not a plea for men to return to coats and ties. It is simply to point out that the casual, cavalier attitude has affected us on Sunday morning.

There is a personal issue here. For many believers, serving the Lord is an option, not a priority. When they consider what they're going to do on the weekend, church is not the priority; it's one of the options, along with watching football on television or going to the beach. Those who do manage to make it and even have some responsibility are weary in the work of the Lord. It becomes a burden. Consequently, their performance is average; it is mediocre. What most people want is comfort and convenience. They certainly don't want anything that will cost them or demand effort.

David Livingstone was one of the greatest missionaries who ever lived. He moved to Africa, married his wife Mary in Africa in 1845, and never stopped pursuing excellence for the Kingdom of God during his lifetime. There was a time when Dr. Livingstone was approached about the possibility of a missionary society sending some more men to help him in his efforts to reach the people of Africa. They wrote him a letter that read, "Have you found a good road to where you are? If so, we want to know how to send other men to join you." Livingstone wrote back, "If you have men who will come only if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all."

YOU HAVE DISREGARD MY WILL

Years ago, a pastor gave me an insight into people. It's simple, yet it is deeply profound. He said, "People do what they want to do." Most people do what they want, sometimes disregarding what others want them to do. Children do what they want, disregarding the will of their parents. Likewise, the children of God disregard their heavenly Father's will.

At this point in Malachi, instead of the Lord speaking to the priest (1:6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14; 2:2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9), Malachi asks the people questions. Thus, this marks the beginning of a third oracle (Blaising; Constable). "The style of the third oracle [according to the 'disputation speeches' division of Malachi] differs from the others. Instead of an initial statement or charge followed by a question of feigned innocence, this oracle begins with three questions asked by the prophet. However, as at the beginning of each of the other oracles, the point is presented at the outset" (Blaising). "The Lord's command, which lies in the center of the section (as in the first and third exhortations), was for the people to stop their treachery toward one another (2:15b-16)" (Constable).

This section begins with Malachi 2:10 and extends through verse 16, as indicated by the use of "treacherous" in verses 10, 14, and 16.

Marriage

The Accusation "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers?" (2:10). Malachi asks the people (see verse 11) three questions. (Barnes says these questions are addressed to the priests.)

1. Do not all Israelites ("we") have the same Father? Some suggest that "Father" refers to Abraham (Baldwin), but the parallel to one God indicates that the reference is to God as Father (Blaising, who adds Israel was God's firstborn son; Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1). That means that all Israelites are brothers and sisters. "He was not saying that God is the father of all human beings in the modern 'universal fatherhood of God' sense" (Constable).

2. Did not the same God create all Israelites? "One true God had created all of them. Israel belonged to God because He had created the nation and had adopted it as His son" (Constable).

3. Then why do the Israelites deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers? "In view of their common brotherhood in the family of God, it was inappropriate for the Israelites to treat each other as enemies and 'deal treacherously' with each other. The Hebrew word translated "treacherously" means "treacherously, deceitfully;" NIV: "being unfaithful;" ESV: "faithless"). They should have treated each other as brothers and supported one another (Lev. 19:18). By dealing treacherously with each other, they had made the covenant that God had made with their ancestors virtually worthless; they could not enjoy the blessings of the Mosaic Covenant" (Constable).

"The Mosaic covenant was by Malachi's time understood as a quaint, archaic document too restrictive to be taken seriously and inapplicable to a 'modern' age—virtually the same way that most people in modern Western societies view the Bible today" (Stuart, cited by Constable).

“Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the LORD’s holy *institution* which He loves: He has married the daughter of a foreign god” (2:11). The word “institution” is in italics, indicating it is not in the Hebrew text, meaning “the Lord’s holy” refers either to the Temple or to God’s people (Constable). Thus, some take “the Lord’s holy” as a reference to the sanctuary (NASB; NIV; ESV). If that is the case, as Blaising explains, “the profanation referred to the involvement of these women in temple worship” (Blaising, but not his view). Others say that holy is a reference to Israel’s holiness (Barnes; Blaising). Another interpretation is that “the holiness of the Lord” means His holy ordinance and covenant (Deut. 7:3). But ‘which He loved,’ seems to refer to *the holy people*, Israel, whom God so gratuitously loved (Mal. 1:2)” (JFB, italics theirs).

Malachi explains that the way the people dealt treacherously with each other and committed an abomination (Blaising: “something abhorrent to God”) against the Lord was they profaned (Constable: “making common”) the Lord’s people, whom He loves. Contrary to God’s will, they married pagan wives (Ex. 34:14-16; Deut. 7:3). “Daughter of a foreign god refers to pagan women who worshiped false gods” (Blaising). These pagan wives said in effect, “Marry me, marry my religion” (Ryrie, who says see Ezra 9:1-2; Neh. 13:23-28).

“Such marriages had been expressly forbidden because they would lead the people into idolatry (Ex. 34:11-16; Deut. 7:3-4; Jos. 23:12-13). Intermarrying was a big problem after the return from the Exile (cf. Ezra 9:1-2, 9:10-12; Neh. 13:23-27). The Jews were supposed to marry within their own nation. Failures to do so were acts of unfaithfulness among themselves as well as to God. They involved both a disregard for the nation’s corporate nature and disobedience to God” (Blaising).

The Consequence “May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this, being awake and aware, yet who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts!” (2:12). Malachi pronounces judgment on the Israelites who marry pagans. The judgment would be is that he would die or his line would die out (Constable).

The expression “being awake and aware is “a proverbial expression for all living people” (Ryrie). The idea is “whoever he may be” (NIV), even if he brings an offering to the Lord. “One is shocked to read that despite the abomination such a person committed, he still brought offerings to seek the Lord’s favor” (Blaising). “Worshipping God did not insulate covenant violators from divine punishment then, and it does not now” (Constable).

A believer should not marry an unbeliever. Paul says, “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39). The reason believers are not to marry unbelievers is because of the pagan influence on the believer and the children.

Evidently, Mark Twain was not a Christian, nor did he claim to be, when he began dating Olivia Langdon. In Mark Twain’s day, a man had to get permission from her parents to marry a woman. Mark Twain had a problem, however. Olivia Langdon came from a Christian family that would not allow their daughter to marry an unbeliever. To overcome this obstacle, Twain took on the guise of a spiritual seeker who needed the support and prayers of Olivia’s family to clean up his life.

Twain, influenced by Olivia’s prodding, presumably converted. Convinced Mark Twain was a Christian, Olivia’s parents permitted the marriage. After their wedding, Twain ridiculed Olivia’s beliefs and devotion. Soon, her optimism began to wane, and her fervent faith cooled. Eventually, she forsook her religion altogether. Mark Twain loved her and never meant to hurt her, but he had broken her spirit. He said, “Livy, if it comforts you to lean on your faith, do so.”

She replied, “I cannot. I do not have any faith left.” Twain often wished he could restore Olivia’s faith, hope, and optimism, but it was too late (Susan K. Harris, *The Courtship of Olivia Langdon and Mark Twain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Divorce

The Consequence “And this is the second thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands” (2:13). Blaising points out that there are “two lines of evidence in this oracle (that) are arranged chiasmatically so that the sin-consequence structure in the foregoing (2:12) is reversed here. The consequence or symptom of the sin is presented first (2:13); then, the sin is stated (2:14-16).

Malachi adds a second accusation. They not only married pagan wives, but they also wept and wailed at the altar because the Lord did not answer their prayers (Constable). These were “the tears of the men who (after divorcing their Israelite wives to marry pagans, 2:14) found that the Lord no longer received their offerings” (Blaising). God was not impressed. He did not accept their tears or their offering.

Their Divorce “Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant” (2:14). The people respond by asking for the reason the Lord rejected their offering. Malachi answers that The Lord was a witness at their wedding when they were young, but now, even though they were connected to their wives by companionship and covenant, they have dealt treacherously with them, meaning they had divorced them (2:16). In short, the reason is “because the LORD had been a witness at their marriages, which they were now breaking so readily” (MacDonald). The word “covenant” underscores the fact that the wife was not “a mere possession to be disposed of at will” (Clendenen, cited by Constable). Moreover, she was a companion.

According to the Bible, marriage is a covenant. It says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). This statement describes an arrangement that could be called a social arrangement whereby a man and a woman agree to live together as husband and wife. It is social in that it involves more than the two individuals; it involves families, his family, and her family, and, no doubt, their friends and society. Our term for this is a legal contract. Marriage, then, among other things, is a legal contract. This “legal contract” aspect of the essence of marriage is implied in Genesis 2:24, As stated in Malachi. Malachi says that a man’s wife was so “by covenant” (Mal. 2:14). The Hebrew word translated “covenant” means “pact, treaty, alliance.” In other words, marriage is a legal relationship with legal responsibilities and ramifications. What constitutes the legal aspects varies from society to society. In America, it is a marriage license. That is the legal contract aspect of marriage.

According to the Bible, marriage is cohabitation. Marriage is more than a legal contract. It is the union of two people like no other union or relationship in life. Genesis 2:24 speaks of a man and his wife becoming “one flesh.” Marriage, then, is not only a legal contract; it is cohabitation, sexual cohabitation. Whatever else “one flesh” may mean, it at least means the physical union (1 Cor. 6:16).

According to the Bible, marriage is companionship. The Hebrew word translated “cleave” in Genesis 2:24 means “to cling, keep close.” It is used in the Old Testament of the bones cleaving

to the skin (Job 19:20) and of the hand clinging to a sword (2 Sam. 23:10). Physical proximity is a prominent and perhaps even a predominant idea in the Word. Figuratively, it is used of loyalty, affection, and companionship. In this sense, clinging is not just physical. The context of Genesis 2 clearly indicates that God intended marriage to be companionship. God created Adam, observed him working in the garden, and commented, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). God then created Eve to be Adam’s companion and helper. Malachi confirms this conclusion. He says a wife is a “companion ... by covenant” (Mal. 2:14). The Hebrew word translated “companion” means “an associate, a partner.” The essence of marriage is not just a contract or even cohabitation but a covenant of companionship.

“The marriage relationship is a covenant relationship (Prov. 2:17; Ezek. 16:8, 59-62; Hos. 2:16-20), and those who break their vows should not expect God to bless them. God Himself acted as ‘a witness’ when the couple made their ‘covenant’ of marriage in their ‘youth.’ This sin may have in view, particularly the Israelite men who were divorcing their Jewish wives to marry pagan women (cf. v. 12), or divorce, in general, may be all that is in view” (Constable).

The Problem “But did He not make *them* one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth” (2:15). Malachi goes on to argue that God made them one, having a remnant of the Spirit. Blaising says, “This is the most difficult verse in Malachi to translate.”

The first phrase (He made them one) has been taken to mean 1) one God (NIV: “Has not the one God made you?”), 2) one nation (MacDonald: “one pure people”), 3) Adam (Calvin; Gill; Meyer; Barnes; Clarke; Ryrie) 4) Abraham (Calvin says this is the Rabbinic view: “Has not one done this?” that is, has not Abraham”), 5) one individual (Cambridge Bible; NASB: “But not one has done so;” Constable: “No individual Israelite”), 6) one flesh, that is, man and women were made one in marriage (Jonathan Edwards; Ryrie: “maybe;” ESV: “Did he not make them one”).

Malachi 2:10 seems to support the one-nation view. Blaising says Malachi is “contrasting the Lord’s faithfulness to Israel (His one covenant people) with the marital unfaithfulness of individual Israelites. This contrast had already been drawn in Mal. 2:10 and was involved in the discussion of the sin of intermarriage (Mal. 2:11). In this view, the one in the first clause in Mal. 2:15 refers to Israel as one people. The stress on oneness would have special significance in the postexilic period, as the former division between Israel and Judah was removed. (In Mal. 2:11 ‘Judah’ and ‘Israel’ are used interchangeably.) Therefore, the first phrase might have an intended double reference: “Has He not made one person?” *and* “Has He not made the people one?”

The phrase “having a remnant of the Spirit?” is “even more difficult” (Blaising). The Hebrew word translated “remnant” means “rest, residue, remnant, remainder.” Blaising says, “Literally it reads, ‘and a remnant of the Spirit [or spirit] to him.’” Some interpret “spirit” as the human spirit (KJV). For example, those who take the first phrase as a reference to Adam say this means God breathed into him the breath of life. Constable says, “No individual Israelite, who benefited from even a small amount of the Holy Spirit’s influence, would break such a covenant as the marriage contract.” The other possibility is that “spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit (ASV; NKJV; NASB; ESV).

The reason God made Israel one nation is He wanted Godly offspring. “He had intended them to be one pure people, producing godly offspring and separated from the corruptions of the heathen” (MacDonald).

Malachi concludes that they should not deal treacherously with the wife of their youth, that is, divorce the wife they married when they were young (Constable). “So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth” (ESV). “Have the same

desire for covenant unity that the Holy Spirit seeks, which would mean not violating the marriage covenant. Because the nation is one, no husband, Malachi said, should break faith (2:10-11, 2:14, 2:16) with the wife of his youth (2:14) by divorcing her (2:16)” (Blaising).

The Explanation “For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,” says the LORD of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously” (2:16). According to the NKJV, Malachi explains (“for”) that *the Lord* hates divorce (see also KJV; NASB; Geneva Bible; Gill; Wesley; Clarke; Barnes; Keil; *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*; Lange; *Pulpit Commentary*; Blaising; *Ryrie Study Bible*).

Some (for example, Luther) claim that the literal translation of the Hebrew text reads: “If [or ‘for’] he hates sending away [i.e., divorce], says Yahweh God of Israel, then [or ‘and’] violence covers [or ‘he covers/will cover with violence’] his garment, says Yahweh of hosts” (Constable; NIV: “the man who hates and divorces his wife;” ESV: “for the man who does not love his wife but divorces her; see Joe M. Sprinkle, “Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, 1997:539, cited by Constable).

Lange points out, “The LXX., Vulgate, and Luther construe this very differently as permission of divorce; If thou hate her, put her away. But this is inconsistent with the context, which condemns divorce; it is in opposition to the law which permits divorce only for some great misconduct, “some unclean thing,” and which (Deut. 21:15) requires the husband to maintain a hated wife. In favor of the translation adopted by Köhler, Keil, and Henderson, I hate divorce, may be urged that the form may be considered as a participle, that the first person is often understood before participles, that, saith Jehovah, God of Israel, which follows in the Hebrew, implies that Jehovah is speaking directly in his own person.”

Divorce covers one’s garments with violence. The Hebrew word rendered “violence” means “violence, wrong, cruelty, injustice.” Since covering with a garment was a Hebrew euphemism for marriage (Ruth 3:9; Ez. 16:8), this has been taken to mean “divorce removed the wife’s protection and treated her cruelly” (Ryrie), but it probably means he who divorces his wife “covers his garment with wrong,” that is, brings disgrace on himself (Constable). It is “a figurative expression for all kinds of gross injustice which, like the blood of a murdered victim, leave their mark for all to see” (Baldwin).

Malachi concludes that those who have not yet divorced their wives to married pagan women should take heed not to do that. “By guarding their spirits, they would be acting in accord with God’s purpose and would help preserve the unity of the nation as well as their individual marriages” (Blaising). “The prophet’s concluding exhortation, ‘So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith,’ is a strong warning to every husband that he must be constantly on his guard against developing a negative attitude toward his wife” (Clendenen, cited by Constable).

This passage does not mean that all divorce is wrong. The Lord divorced the Northern Kingdom of Israel because of her adulteries (Jer. 3:8; Hosea 2:2). Under the Mosaic Law, He allowed it, but that was because of people’s hardness of heart (Deut. 24:1; Mt. 19:8). In the church age, God allows divorce for fornication (Mt. 19:9) and the desertion of an unsaved mate (1 Cor. 7:12-15). Malachi is “addressing the specific situation of Jewish men divorcing their Jewish wives *in order to* marry pagan women” (Constable, italics his).

Summary: The Lord charged His people with disregarding His will by marrying pagan wives and by divorcing their wives to marry pagan women.

For singles, the message in this passage is not to marry an unbeliever.

For married people, the message here is not to get a divorce.

For all of us, the message here is to beware of hatred in any relationship (2:16). It is possible for a love relationship to heat turned into a hate relationship, even in marriage. “Then Amnon hated her exceedingly so that the hatred with which he hated her *was* greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, ‘Arise, be gone!’” (2 Sam. 13:15). If that can happen in a marriage relationship, it can happen in any relationship. It starts with a hard heart. A hard heart can happen in marriage (Mk. 10:5) and a hard heart can happen in your spiritual life (Mk. 16:14). So make sure you maintain a tender heart toward the Lord and toward each other (Eph. 4:31-32). “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23).

Broken relationships are made out of bricks. Something happens in the relationship. You get hurt; you are offended. That something becomes a brick. On the side of the brick, you inscribe what happened, where, and when. You keep that brick. You think about that brick. Then something else happens. Then something else happens. Again, you inscribe on that brick what happened, where it happened, and when it happened. You keep that brick. Think about that brick. Then something else happens. You get the drift. The point is with those bricks, you build a wall. Then, one day, you hit the wall in that relationship and that relationship is over.

Don’t keep bricks. Don’t build walls. Be forgiving, kind, so that you can keep a tender heart between you and the Lord and between you and other people.

YOU HAVE DISCREDITED MY PROMISE

Have you ever questioned God's justice? When you see the wicked get away with it, you can't help but ask, "Where is God's justice?"

"That another disputation is in view is clear from the question and answer format that begins this pericope, as it does the others. Verse 17 contains the question and answer, and the discussion follows in 3:1-6. The Israelites' changeability (2:17) contrasts with Yahweh's constancy (3:6)" (Constable).

Accusation

The Accusation "You have wearied the LORD with your words" (2:17a). Malachi accuses the people of wearying the Lord with their words. "He was tired of hearing them repeat certain phrases" (Constable). "He speaks of God, after the manner of men, as a man afflicted by the ills of others" (Barnes; Isa. 1:14; 43:24; Eph. 4:30).

The Problem "This is another place where Scripture seems to contradict itself. On the one hand, God said He does *not grow weary* (Isa. 40:28), but on the other hand, He said He *was weary* (here). The solution, I think, is that in the first case, He was speaking about His essential character; He does not tire out like human beings do. In the second case, He meant that He was tired of the Israelites speaking as they did. In this second case, He used anthropomorphic language to describe how He felt—as though He were a human being, which, of course, He is not" (Constable).

Question

"Yet you say, 'In what way have we wearied Him?'" (2:17b). The people responded to the accusation by asking a question, wanting to know how they had done that. "Their response was again hypocritical incredulity. They believed He could hardly be tired of listening to them since He had committed Himself to them as their covenant Lord (cf. Isa. 40:28)" (Constable). "Again, the people were portrayed as being oblivious to their sin (1:6-7; 2:14)" (Blaising).

Answer

Their Complaint "In that you say, 'Everyone who does evil *is* good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,' or, 'Where *is* the God of justice?'" (2:17c). The answer to their question is that they wearied the Lord by saying those who do evil are good in God's sight; He even delights in them! So, they want to know where God's justice is. Why does He not punish the evildoers? "Not only had they tried to do evil ... good, but they implied that God delighted in evil because He did not dispense immediate justice" (Ryrie).

Constable explains, "The prophet explained that Yahweh was tired of the Israelites saying that He delighted in them, all the while saying that 'everyone who' did 'evil' was acceptable to Him. They seem to have lost their conscience for right and wrong and assumed that because God

did not intervene, He, therefore, approved of their sin. In fact, their question amounted to a challenge of God's justice. If they were breaking His law and He was just, He surely must punish them. Their return to the land indicated to them that He was blessing them, and He promised to bless the godly in the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28:1-14)."

"The apparent prosperity of the wicked (all who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord) and the suffering of the righteous is an age-old problem. In the Old Testament, the problem was more pronounced than it is today because God promised Israel material prosperity as a reward for obedience to His Law (Deut. 28:1-68). However, many of these promises were intended for the entire nation, and in a society in which the righteous and wicked were mixed, there was an opportunity for confusion and misunderstanding in individual cases. Added to this is the fact that God in His providence, blesses the wicked as well as the righteous as a testimony to Himself (Mat. 5:45; Acts 14:17). Also, the righteous, as well as the wicked, suffer because of the Fall (Gen. 3:16-19; Eccl. 2:17-23). The Book of Job adds to the dilemma of human suffering the extra dimension of God's dealing with Satan. All of this makes it difficult, apart from known sin in one's life, to determine why a righteous person suffers.

"The prosperity of the wicked was equally perplexing and was discussed by at least five biblical writers (Job 21:7-26; Job 24:1-17; Ps. 73:1-14; Eccl. 8:14; Jer. 12:1-4; Hab. 1:1-17). Though answers to this problem are not given in these passages, in each case, questions about God's justice are removed by a futuristic perspective: God will come in judgment and punish the wicked (Job 24:22-24; Job 27:13-23; Ps. 73:16-20; Eccl. 8:12-13; Jer. 12:7-17; Hab. 2:3; Hab. 3:2-19) and establish the righteous in His kingdom forever.

"The Jews in Malachi's day had failed to learn such hope from the Scriptures. They questioned God's justice by saying that He delights in evil people and by asking, where is the God of justice? Yet *they* were the guilty ones; they were the ones who were unfaithful to Him. Here too, God responded by referring to His forthcoming judgment (Mal. 3:1-5). However, unlike the answers by the righteous biblical writers mentioned earlier, the judgment which Malachi referred to was to be against the hypocritical questioners as well" (Blaising).

"Contemporary people say the same thing. 'If there is a just God, why doesn't He do something about all the suffering in the world?' 'If God is just, why do the wicked prosper?' Scripture reveals that God blesses the wicked as well as the righteous—because He is good (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17); and the righteous suffer as well as the wicked—because of the Fall and sin (Gen. 3:16-19; Eccles. 2:17-23). Moreover, God allows Satan to afflict the righteous as well as the wicked (Job 1—2). God will eventually punish the wicked and bless the righteous, but not necessarily in this life (cf. Job 21:7-26; 24:1-17; Ps. 73:1-14; Eccles. 8:14; Jer. 12:1-4; Hab. 1). Malachi's audience had forgotten part of what God had revealed on this subject, and, of course, they had not yet received New Testament revelation about it" (Constable).

God's Promise "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts" (3:1). The Lord reminds those questioning His justice (2:17) that He will send His messenger to prepare the way before He Himself comes (Isa. 40:3-5). Jesus identified the messenger as John the Baptist (Mt. 11:10; Mk. 1:2; Lk. 7:27). John the Baptist partially fulfilled this promise; it will be completely fulfilled when Elijah prepares the way of the Lord (4:5; MacDonald).

The Lord will come to His Temple. "The coming of the Lord in His day is a much-discussed theme among the prophets. Zechariah said He will come to Zion and dwell there (Zech. 8:3). Ezekiel predicted the return of the glory of God to the temple (Ez. 43:1-5). Malachi's two

preceding oracles identified serious problems in the practice of temple worship, so the coming of the Lord to His temple would answer the questions about His justice (Mal. 2:17) and would have an ominous significance for the priests” (Blaising).

The Lord will come suddenly to His Temple. The fact that the Lord would come to His Temple is the basis for Jesus’ claim that He was exempt from the temple tax (Matthew 17:24-27; Ryrie). “The fact that he will come suddenly is ominous, for suddenness was usually associated with a calamitous event (e.g., Is. 47:11; 48:3; Je. 4:20, etc.)” (Baldwin). “Though Jesus entered the temple in Jerusalem many times during His earthly ministry, this sudden coming was not fulfilled then (cf. vv. 2-5). It will occur when He returns to set up His messianic kingdom” (Constable).

The Lord, the One who will come to the Temple, is called the “Messenger of the covenant.” “‘Messenger’ means ‘angel,’ and the Angel of the Lord is in view here” (Constable). “the Angel of the Lord, a manifestation of God Himself, had been quite active in Israel’s earlier history (cf. Gen. 16:10; Gen. 22:15-18; Ex. 3:2; Ex. 33:14 with Isa. 63:9; and Jdg. 13:21-22)” (Blaising). “We dare not miss the three undeniable proofs of the deity of the Messiah given here: (1) he is identified with the Lord: ‘he shall prepare the way before Me... saith the Lord of hosts; (2) He is indicated as the owner of the temple: ‘to his temple’; and (3) He is called ‘the Lord’ whom they sought” (Feinberg, cited by Constable).

Some commentators say that the covenant is the Mosaic Covenant and, behind it, the Abraham Covenant (Clendenen, cited by Constable). It is, however, the New Covenant (Ryrie; Constable).

The Lord is the One they seek and the One in Whom they delight. “The Jews delighted in this Messenger because His ‘coming’ had been a subject of messianic prophecy and an object of eager anticipation from early in Israel’s history” (Constable). The parallel phrases, the Lord you are seeking and whom you desire, reflect the general expectation of the Lord’s coming, as predicted by many other prophets. But these phrases also carry a note of sarcasm. That Israel’s hope was superficial was indicated by her question (Mal. 2:17). However, though their hope was superficial, He will come” (Blaising).

“The Jews had been expressing disbelief that God would intervene and establish justice in the world (2:17), but God promised He would” (Constable).

“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap” (3:2). When the Lord Himself suddenly comes to His Temple, no one will be able to endure His appearance, nor stand in His presence, because He will be like a refiner’s fire and a launderers’ soap (Ps. 130:3). The refiner’s fire will purify and the launderer’s soap will cleanse (Ryrie). When He comes, He will purify the priesthood, the sons of Levi (3:3). “This purifying will occur at Christ’s second coming” (Ryrie).

“As ‘a refiner’s fire’ purifies ‘gold and silver,’ so He would burn up the impurities of the priests, and as a laundryman’s ‘soap,’ He would wash them clean (cf. Deut. 4:29; Isa. 1:25; Jer. 6:29-30; Ezek. 22:17-22; Zech. 3:5). The Levitical priests would then be able to offer sacrifices to Yahweh in a righteous condition, rather than a defiled one, as they were in Malachi’s day (cf. 1:6—2:9; Isa. 56:7; 66:20-23; Jer. 33:18; Ezek. 40:38-43; 43:13-27; 45:9-25; Zech. 14:16-21). The multiple cleansing figures and the repetition of terms for cleansing stress the thoroughness of the change that the Lord’s Messenger would produce” (Constable).

“He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness” (3:3). When He comes the Lord will sit as a refiner, purifier, and purger of all the impurities in the

priesthood so that they will offer sacrifices to the Lord in righteousness. “As Zacharias prophesied, ‘that we might serve Him in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life’” (Barnes).

“Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the LORD, as in the days of old, as in former years” (3:4). Offering sacrifices to the Lord in righteousness will be pleasant to the Lord in the future as it was in the past. “After this cleansing of the priests, ‘Judah and Jerusalem’ (i.e., all Israel) would be able to offer sacrifices that would please the Lord, in contrast to the present ones that did not (cf. 1:13-14). They would be acceptable, like the priests’ offerings earlier in Israel’s history, before the priesthood had become corrupt” (Constable). “This will contrast with Israel’s unacceptable offerings of which Malachi wrote (Mal. 2:12-13)” (Blaising).

“‘And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien— because they do not fear Me,’ says the LORD of hosts” (3:5). To be specific, when the Lord comes, He will quickly judge sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, who do not fear Him. “Specific violations of the law included sorcery (cf. Exodus 22:18), adultery (cf. Exodus 20:14), false swearing (cf. Leviticus 19:12), withholding wages (cf. Leviticus 19:13), oppressing the widow and orphan (cf. Exodus 22:22-24), and injustice to a stranger (cf. Deut. 24:17)” (Ryrie). “He would judge them for all types of activity forbidden for His people: sorcery; adultery; lying; oppression of employees, widows, and orphans; mistreatment of aliens; even all forms of irreverence for, and unbelief in, Him. This was His answer to their claim that He was unjust (2:17)” (Constable). “All these crimes were prohibited in the Mosaic Law. God’s removing these sinners from Israel will be His answer to the nation’s question about His justice (Mal. 2:17)” (Blaising).

“For I *am* the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob” (3:6). The Lord explains (“for”) that He is the Lord who does not change and, therefore, He does not consume Israel. “Because God does not change but is faithful to His covenant, Israel survives” (Ryrie).

“He was faithful to His covenant promises in the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants; He would never destroy them completely but would chasten them and finally bless them. By calling the Jews ‘sons of Jacob,’ the Lord was connecting their behavior with that of their notorious patriarch. Promises are only as good as the person who makes them, so the fact that Yahweh does not change strengthens the certainty of their fulfillment (cf. Deut. 4:31; Ezek. 36:22-32). The Apostle Paul gave the same reason for expecting Israel to have a future (Rom. 3:3-4; 9:6; 11:1-5, 25-29)” (Constable).

“But will this judgment bring about the end of Israel? Will the people be consumed by the refiner’s fire? No, for as other prophets had predicted, Malachi stated that Israel would be delivered in the day of the Lord. The descendants of Jacob will not be destroyed. This is because of God’s covenant promise. A promise is only as good as the person who makes it. God will keep His promise to the nation of Israel—it will not change—because His Word, like Himself, is immutable. This is the basis for Israel’s hope (cf. Deut. 4:31; Ezek. 36:22-32). Significantly the Apostle Paul gives the same reason for expecting a future for national Israel (Rom. 3:3-4; Rom. 9:6; Rom. 11:1-5, Rom. 11:25-29)” (Blaising).

“The statement that Yahweh does not change (cf. 1 Sam. 15:29; Heb. 13:8) may seem to contradict other statements that the Lord changed His mind (e.g., Exod. 32:14). This statement that He does not change refers to the essential character of God. He is always holy, loving, just,

faithful, gracious, merciful, etc. The other statements that He changes refer to His changing from one course of action to another. They involve His choices, not His character. If He did not change His choices, He would be unresponsive; if He changed His character, He would be unreliable” (Constable).

Summary: The Lord charged His people with discrediting His promise by wearying Him with complaints that He was not judging sin as He promised He would.

“Like the first address (1:2—2:9), this one ends with more motivation. Unpleasant things would happen if the people failed to change in their dealings with one another” (Constable).

Believers who complain about injustice discredit the judgment promise of God. James 5 speaks of believers who were being treated unjustly. Evidently, as a result, they were impatient and complaining. James tells them: 1) be patient until the coming of the Lord (Jas. 5:7a). Since God will punish the oppressors, patiently wait for Him to do it. Two different Greek words are translated “patience” in the New Testament. One means “endurance” and the other “patience.” This one is properly translated “patience.” It means “long-tempered.” It is the opposite of being short-tempered. It is self-restraint, which does not hastily retaliate. 2) Fix your heart (Jas. 5:7b). Patience is not a grin-and-bear-it stance. The Greek word translated “establish” means “to fix, make fast.” 3) Don’t Grumble (Jas. 5:9). The Greek word translated “grumble” means “to groan.” This verse has the idea of complaining, criticizing, and fault-finding. 4) Do not swear (5:12). “Beware of impatient discontent readily expressing itself in the criticism of others.” Swearing often results from our impatience at the circumstances under which we labor. Mark Twain says, “When angry, count to four. When very angry, swear.” Most of us don’t have to have Mark Twain tell us that. That is what we naturally do. James says, “Don’t.”

Believers who doubt their salvation discredit the salvation promise of God. Salvation is a promise. God’s promise of salvation is that if you believe, you have eternal life (Jn. 3:36). Abraham is an illustration. “He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief” (Rom. 4:20). The Greek word translated, “waver” means “to be divided into one’s mind, to hesitate.” A doubt may have entered his mind, but he did not choose to entertain it to the point of not believing God’s promise part of the time and, thus, being divided within himself. Rather, as Paul says, “but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform” (Rom. 4:20-21). Instead of doubting, debating, and being divided, Abraham, empowered by faith, was convinced, persuaded, and assured that God was able to do what He promised, and he gave glory to God. Paul concludes, “And therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness’” (Rom. 4:22). It was precisely because of such a faith as Paul just described that God declared Abraham righteous. The issue is not the amount of faith but the object of faith. Abraham did not look at himself, but he looked at God. If he had looked at himself and his wife, he would have no doubt been filled with doubt, but by focusing on God, he was able to trust God and not doubt or debate His promises. Abraham’s faith was not in human possibilities but in the divine promise. If you have trusted Christ and doubt your salvation, you are discrediting the salvation promise of God.

Believers who worry discredit the peace promise of God. Peace is a promise. Paul urges “Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6). Rather than worry, the believer should talk to the Lord with “prayer” (a general word for prayer) and “supplication” (a word which underscores need). Believers should let God know what they need. This should be done with thanksgiving for God’s fatherly care (1 Pet. 5:7) and past provisions. Such a grateful prayer is an expression of

faith. Don't worry about *anything*, but pray about *everything*. In short, trust God. Paul adds, "And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). As believers trust (4:6) the God of peace (4:9), they experience the peace of God (4:7), that is, the peace that comes from God and is beyond human comprehension. This peace guards the heart and the mind, the emotions and thoughts, the feelings and thinking. The word "guard" is a military term.

The Lord wants to refine and purify us (3:3). An Ancient artisan sat beside a vat filled with molten silver or gold. It was his job to apply the right amount of heat, not too much nor too little. Then, at the precise moment, he would skim off the dross, taking great care that none of the metal was lost. He knew the gold was pure when he could see his image mirrored in it. Likewise, the Lord refines us and He knows the job is getting done when He can see his image in us.

YOU HAVE DEFRAUDED MY STOREHOUSE

Suppose I told you that there is a thief in this church. To make matters worse, the thief in this church is not shoplifting or robbing banks. There is a thief in this church who is stealing *from the church*. If I told you such a thing, you no doubt would want to know who it is. The answer will shock you. It may be you. Consider Malachi 3. Notice the command to return to the Lord and a promise that if they did, He would return to them (see 3:7 and 4:6).

Accusation

The Accusation “Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them” (3:7a). The Lord accuses Israel of being like their earlier history in that they have done astray and not kept His ordinances of the Mosaic Covenant. He had just said that in the former years, the priest and the people had pleased Him (3:4). “Now He said that those early days were short-lived (cf. Exod. 32:7-9). In contrast to His faithfulness (v. 6), they had been unfaithful” (Constable). “This calls to mind God’s comments about Israel’s stubbornness at Sinai (Ex. 32:7-9), which Moses repeated before the nation entered Canaan (Deut. 9:6-8, Deut. 9:13, Deut. 9:23-24; Deut. 31:27-29)” (Blaising).

The Appeal “Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of hosts” (3:7b). The Lord commands them to return to Him and promises them that if they do, He will return to them (Deut. 4:30-31; 30:1-10; see Jas. 4:8).

Question

“But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’” (3:7c). The people respond by asking in what way they need to return to Him. “The Mosaic Covenant specified how they were to return—by trusting and obeying Yahweh—so their question indicated a reluctance to change their ways” (Constable). “‘How should we return?’ is not an earnest entreaty for information but a self-serving declaration of innocence. The people, in effect, are saying, ‘What need do we have to return since we never turned away to begin with?’” (Merrill, cited by (Constable). “They deny having gone away, asking hypocritically, ‘In what way shall we return?’” (MacDonald). “Only one who is aware of the path he has taken can retrace his steps. But Israel pretended to be ignorant of her waywardness” (Blaising).

Backslidden believer’s do not always know they need to return!

Answer

The Explanation “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me!” (3:8a). The Lord answers their question by asking one of His own, “Will a man rob God?” Then He answers His own question, informing them that they have robbed Him. “How absurd it is for human beings to ‘rob God.’ To rob Him, one has to be stronger and smarter than He. Yet that is what the Israelites

were doing because God was allowing it. They were thieves of the worst kind: robbers of God” (Constable).

“But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings” (3:8b). When they respond by asking in what way they had robbed Him, He tells them in tithes and offerings. “They brazenly asked how they had robbed Him. They had withheld the tithes (Lev. 27:30, 32; Deut. 12:5-18; 14:22-29) and offerings (Num. 18:21-32) that the Law commanded them to bring to God” (Constable).

There was more than one tithe in the Mosaic system. Jewish tradition has named these the first tithe, the second tithe, and the poor tithe, also known as the third tithe. The first tithe was a tenth of the crops and the livestock (Lev. 27:30-34). If a man desired to keep part of the tithe, he could do that, but there was a penalty, a 20% surcharge of the value of the amount he kept (Lev. 27:31). This tithe was given to the Levites, who in turn tithed the tithe to the priest (Numbers 18:20-28). This tithe sustained the ministry of the Tabernacle.

The second tithe was a tenth of the crops and animals to be eaten at the place of worship (Deut. 12:5-6, 17-18). A provision was made that if the journey was too long so that they were not able to carry a tithe of their production, they could sell it, go to the designated place of worship, purchase food with the money and eat it before the Lord (Deut. 14:22-27). The fact that the tithe was to be eaten and not given to the Levites indicates that this is a second tithe, which is what it has been called throughout Jewish history. Since it was to be eaten at the designated place of worship, which later became Jerusalem, it is sometimes referred to as the festival tithe.

The third tithe was given every third year to the poor (Deut. 14:28-29). Some have suggested this was the second tithe under a different description. For example, Unger says, “Maimonides says the third and sixth year’s second tithe was shared between the poor and the Levites, i. e., that there was no third tithe. Of these opinions, that which maintains three separate and complete tithes seems impossible (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, p. 1103). Ryrie says, “Two tithes were required: an annual tithe for the maintenance of the Levites (Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:21) and a second tithe brought to Jerusalem for the Lord’s feast (Deut. 14:22). Every third year, however, the second tithe was kept at home and used for the poor (Deut. 14:28).” On the other hand, Jewish tradition and practice, as well as Josephus, are distinctively on the side which claims that there was a third tithe (Tob. 1:7-8; Josephus, *Antiquities* IV, IV, 3; VIII, 8; VIII, 20). Tithing was compulsory and amounted to 23% of one’s annual income. Tithing in the Old Testament sense of the term was not 10%; it was 23%! Granted, 3 $\frac{1}{3}$ % of that went to the poor, etc., but nonetheless, it was “owed.”

Blaising sums it up: “A tithe was to be given to the Levites who in turn were to give a tithe of the tithe to the priests (Num. 18:21-32). The Israelites were also to bring a tithe of their produce and animals and eat it with the Levites before the Lord in Jerusalem as an act of festal worship (Deut. 12:5-18; 14:22-26). Also, every third year, a tithe was to be stored in the towns for Levites, strangers, widows, and orphans (Deut. 14:27-29).”

Constable explains the offerings, “‘offerings’ may refer to the tithe of the tithe that went to the priests (cf. Exod. 29:27-28; Lev. 7:32; Num. 5:9)... Another possibility is that Malachi was distinguishing the mandatory ‘tithes’ from the voluntary ‘offerings’ that the Israelites brought. Or perhaps any other offerings besides the tithes are in view.”

“Since God owned the land and its produce in the first place (cf. 1:12-14; Lev. 25:23), withholding tithes when He commanded the Israelites to give them amounted to robbing Him. Earlier, the Lord criticized the priests for offering an inferior quality of sacrifices (1:7-14), and now He criticized the people for offering an insufficient quantity of sacrifices (cf. v. 10). Failure

to adequately support the priests and Levites resulted in the breakdown of priestly service (cf. Neh. 10:32-39; 13:10)” (Constable).

How much of this 23 1/3% is to be given to the church today? That question will be answered at the end of this passage.

The Curse “You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, *even* this whole nation” (3:9). The Lord tells the people that they are cursed because by not paying their tithes, the people were depriving the Levites and priest and robbing God. This sin was widespread among the people. “The nature of the curse on the nation can be determined from Mal. 3:11: famine due to pests (locusts) eating the vegetation, and vines without grapes (cf. Deut. 28:38-40)” (Blaising).

The Blessing “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you *such* blessing that *there will not be room enough to receive it*” (3:10). The Lord tells the people to bring their *all* their tithes (not just part of it) to the storehouse so the Levites and the priest can have food to eat (Neh. 13:10-23). “The sacrifices were, in a figurative sense, food for the Lord (cf. 1:7)” (Constable).

“From the time of King Hezekiah on (2 Chron. 31:11), special storehouses held grain brought in payment of tithes. These may have been special rooms in the Temple or a kind of lean-to against a side of the Temple” (Ryrie). Constable says, “There were special rooms in the temple devoted to storing the gifts the Israelites brought (cf. 1 Kings 7:51; Neh. 10:38; 13:12).” “‘Storehouse’ refers to a special room or rooms in the temple for keeping tithed grain (cf. 1 K 7:51; Neh. 10:38; Neh. 13:12)” (Blaising).

He also invites them to test Him. If they do what He told them to do, He would open the windows of heaven (rain) and pour out a blessing that would result in a blessing they could not contain. “The blessing was such an abundance of crops that the storehouses would overflow” (Ryrie). “There are several references to people tempting God in the New Testament that discourage this practice (e.g., Acts 5:9; 15:10; 1 Cor. 10:9; Heb. 3:9). It is always wrong to test God’s patience by sinning and presuming on His grace. It is another thing to hold Him accountable to His promises, and so test His faithfulness, which God asked His people to do here” (Constable).

“And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” says the LORD of hosts” (3:11). The Lord tells the people He is going to accomplish this by sending rain (3:10) and by rebuking the devourer of their produce. The devourer is “any pest that destroys crops” (Ryrie). “He will deliver them from drought, plague, enemies, and locusts, and make them a blessing in the earth” (MacDonald). “The Israelites’ grapes would also develop fully on their vines rather than dropping off prematurely” (Constable).

Barnes says this refers to “the locust, caterpillar, or any like scourge of God. It might be that when the rain watered the fields, the locust or caterpillar etc., might destroy the grain so that the labors of man should perish; wherefore he adds, ‘I will rebuke the devourer. Neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time,’ holding out a fair promise, but cut off by the frost-wind or the hail; the blossoms or the unripe fruit strewing the earth, as a token of God’s displeasure.”

“These blessings would include agricultural prosperity—good crops not destroyed by pests, and undamaged vines (Mal. 3:11)—and a good reputation among all the nations (Mal. 3:12)” (Blaising).

“And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land,” says the LORD of hosts” (3:12). The Lord tells the people that the blessing is going to be so great that all the nations will call the blessed because their land will be such a delightful place.

Summary: The Lord charged His people with defrauding Him by not paying their tithes and offering and said they were cursed for disobedience and would be blessed for obedience.

The applicable *principle* of this passage is that God punishes disobedience and blesses obedience. “This promise reaffirmed the obedience-blessing relationship specified in the Mosaic Law (Deut. 28:1-14). What the people were experiencing was the disobedience-curse arrangement also given in that covenant (Deut. 28:15-68). This covenant was a gracious provision for Israel. No other nation had such promises from God. Since the Word of God is sure, God’s part of the covenant arrangement would definitely be carried out. Israel could attest to this because she was experiencing certain curses in return for her disobedience to God’s Law about the tithe” (Blaising).

“The issue in Mal. 3:7-12 is not tithing but apostasy. Judah is charged here with abandoning the God who had chosen and blessed them and turning away from the statutes he had given them to test their loyalty and to mark the path of life he would bless. By retaining for themselves the tithes and other offerings they owed to God, the people showed their idolatrous hearts in placing themselves before God, and they showed their callous hearts in leaving the Levites and landless poor to fend for themselves” (Clendenen, cited by Constable).

This passage has been greatly misunderstood and greatly misapplied. Thus, several things need to be clarified.

1. Believers are not under the Mosaic Law (Rom. 6:14). Tithing is conspicuous by its absence from the New Testament. So the question is, “What does the New Testament teach about giving?”

2. Believers are to give cheerfully. “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity. For God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). The Greek word translated “cheerful” is the Greek word from which we get the English word hilarious. A wealthy man sent a check for \$5,000 to his future son-in-law as a wedding present. He had someone hand-deliver the check to the young man. When the courier returned, the wealthy man asked, “What did he say when you gave him the check?” “He didn’t say anything, but when he looked at it he began to cry” was the report. “How long did he cry?” asked the rich father-in-law. “Oh, about a minute,” was the response. “Only a minute?” roared the disappointed giver. “Why I cried for an hour after I signed that check.

How much should you give? That is strictly up to you. Here are some things you should consider.

3. Tithing existed before the Mosaic Law. Abram tithed (Gen. 14:18-20; Heb. 7:4). Apparently, Jacob tithed (Gen. 28:16-22). So, some argue that tithing is a good place to start. “The NT teaches believers to give systematically, liberally, cheerfully, and as the Lord has prospered them, that is, proportionately. But no mention is made of tithing. Rather, the suggestion is that if a Jew living under law gave a tenth, how much more should a Christian living under grace give? (MacDonald).

4. Paul says, “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6). Giving is like sowing seed. If the sower only plants a small seed, he will harvest only a small crop. On the other hand, if he sows a great deal of seed, he will reap an abundant crop. It is the law of the harvest. The amount of the seed

sown determines the amount of the harvest. Giving is in the highest interest of the donor (Tasker). Knowing the law of the harvest, you decide what you want to give. Just remember, “The reward for faithful tithing in the OT was material wealth; the reward for faithful stewardship in the present age is spiritual riches” (MacDonald).

The teaching concerning the blessing it needs to be clarified. “The Mosaic Covenant, with its promises of material blessing for obedience, is no longer in force (Rom. 10:4; Heb. 8:13). Obedience to God’s will does not necessarily result in material prosperity now (Phil 1:29; 4:11-13). However, we do have promises that God will reward those who trust and obey Him in the next stage of our lives, after death, if not before (Acts 4:31-35; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; 9:6-12; Gal. 6:6-9; Phil. 4:14-19). And we enjoy many spiritual blessings now (cf. Rom. 5:1-11; Eph. 1:3-14)” (Constable).

“This verse (3:10) has often been used to urge Christians to tithe. However, the New Covenant under which Christians live never specified the amount or percentage that we should give back to God of what He has given to us. Rather it teaches that we should regularly give, sacrificially, as the Lord has prospered us, and joyfully (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8—9; Phil. 4). In harmony with the principle of grace that marks the present dispensation, the Lord leaves the amount we give back to Him unspecified and up to us. Christians who sit under a steady diet of preaching that majors on God’s grace often give far more than 10 percent. Since tithing preceded the giving of the Mosaic Covenant (Gen. 14:20; 28:22), many Christians regard giving 10 percent as our minimal responsibility. However, the examples of tithing that appear before the Mosaic Law are just that: examples, not commands (e.g., Gen. 14:20; 28:22). Examples are not binding on believers, but precepts (commands) are. Another example of this is the early Jerusalem Christians practicing communal living (Acts 2:44). Few people would say that this practice is binding on all Christians today” (Constable).

5. It is more blessed to give than receive (Acts 20:35). By working, Paul not only had money to support himself and those who were with him, he also had money to give to those in need. Supporting the weak includes those who are sick in body, scrupulous in my mind, and sinful in spirit. Paul urges them to remember that Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” a statement of Jesus nowhere else recorded (Jn. 21:25). Barclay says there are two main objectives in work: personal independence and the ability to give generously.

Dr. Earl V. Pierce used to call this “the supreme beatitude” because, unlike the other beatitudes, it tells us how to be *more* blessed! (Pierce, cited by Wiersbe). Wiersbe says, “This beatitude does not suggest that people who receive are “less blessed” than people who give (the beggar in Acts 3 would argue about that). It could be paraphrased, ‘It’s better to share with others than to keep what you have and collect more.’ In other words, the blessing does not come from accumulating wealth but from sharing it. After all, Jesus became poor so that we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). One of the best commentaries on this statement is Luke 12:16-31.”

Paul exhorted the elders to give themselves to the ministry of others and reminded them that giving is more blessed than receiving. When you get a piece of pie, you eat it, and that’s the end of it. When you give a piece of pie, there is a satisfaction that lasts a long time.

YOU HAVE DENIED MY BLESSINGS

Does it bother you that the wicked win? Does it bother you that a guilty criminal gets off on a technicality? Does it bother you that a crooked politician wins the election? Does it bother you that crooks get rich? Does it bother you that believers get put down and persecuted? Does it bother you when you hear that a believer lost his job because he refused to cheat to meet the monthly quota? Does it bother you that the wicked win and the righteous lose? If you think about it long enough, you might even conclude that if the wicked win and the righteous lose, why bother?

In the book of Malachi, one of the accusations the Lord had against His children at the time was just that. In essence, they denied His blessing. What was his answer to such a situation?

Accusation

“Your words have been harsh against Me,” says the LORD” (3:13a). The Lord accuses the people of speaking harsh words against Him. The Hebrew word translated “harsh” means “strengthen, harden, be courageous, be firm, be resolute, be sore” (NASB: “arrogant;” NIV: “spoken arrogantly;” ESV: “hard against me”).

Question

“Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’” (3:13b). The people responded to the Lord’s accusation by asking what they had spoken against Him. “They had criticized God and knew it not” (Barnes). “When faced with their disrespect, they asked for proof” (Constable). “Again, typical of Malachi’s style, the spiritually insensitive people were portrayed as ignorant of the sin....This was more than a contrast in tone, for the people’s harsh words contradicted the promises reaffirmed in Mal. 3:10-12” (Blaising).

Answer

The Deniers **“You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God; what profit *is it* that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts?’” (3:14).** The Lord answers their question by telling them they had said it was useless to serve God. The Hebrew word translated “useless” means “emptiness, vanity, worthless.” They had said there was no profit in keeping God’s law and mourning their sins. “Some wrongly maintained that if material prosperity did not result, there was no point in serving the Lord” (Ryrie). They were saying that it does not paid to serve the Lord or obey Him (MacDonald).

“So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free” (3:15). The Lord had promised to bless them (3:12), but what they saw was the proud were blessed; the wicked prosper; they tempt God and go free. Their case against God was that He had declared that all nations should “call them blessed” (3:12), if they would obey. Using His words, they say it is the proud who are blessed, not us (Barnes). “The proud, the

wicked, and those who tempt God, not only prosper but got away with it scot-free” (MacDonald). Israel was still concerned that sinners were not punished” (Blaising). “It was those who practiced ‘wickedness’ who got ahead (were ‘built up’) and grew stronger materially (cf. 2:17). For them, life was all about material prosperity, so it seemed better to be wicked than righteous” (Constable). They looked at the situation and denied that God was blessing them.

“The people who returned from Babylon seemed to have a knowledge of God, and to observe the law, and to understand their sin, and to offer sacrifices for sin; to pay tithes, to observe the Sabbath, and the rest, commanded in the law of God, and seeing all the nations around them abounding in all things, and that they themselves were in penury, hunger and misery, was scandalized and said, ‘What does it benefit me, that I worship the One True God, abominate idols, and, pricked with the consciousness of sin, walk mournfully before God?’” (Barnes).

Those who Fear the Lord Meditate “Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard *them*; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name” (3:16). “The word then is emphatic, indicating that the action described in this verse was a consequence of the preceding confrontation” (Blaising). The Lord adds that those who feared Him spoke, and He listened, heard them, and wrote in a book the names of those who feared Him and meditated on His name.

Some fear the Lord. The Hebrew word translated “fear” means 1) to be afraid, terrified, 2) to stand in awe, 3) to reverence, and 4) to honor. The issue is not the meaning of the word “fear;” it is the meaning of the phrase “the fear of the Lord.” The way the phrase “the fear of the Lord” is used in the Bible, it is apparent that a number of concepts are involved: to know the Lord, to reverence the Lord, and to be afraid of the Lord (from my note on Prov. 1:7).

Those who fear the Lord meditate on the name of the Lord. The Hebrew word translated “meditate” means “to think, plan, esteem, calculate.” Barnes says they “esteemed, prized” the Lord in contrast with those who “despised” Him (1:6).

Those who fear the Lord speak to one another (Jos. 1:8). “What they said to each other is unknown, but it probably concerned a renewed perspective of God’s faithfulness as was true in other similar struggles over these issues (cf. Ps. 73:1-28; Eccl. 12:13-14)” (Blaising). “They ‘spoke among themselves,’ strengthening each other against the ungodly sayings of the ungodly” (Barnes). “Upon hearing the Lord’s rebuke through His prophet, some of Malachi’s hearers who genuinely ‘feared the Lord’ got together. Evidently, they discussed Malachi’s message and agreed among themselves that they needed to repent” (Constable).

Those who fear the Lord speak to the Lord. What they said to the Lord is not recorded. Perhaps, they praised the Lord for His goodness and thanked Him for His blessings.

The Lord listened and heard them. The deniers mourned and did not think that the Lord heard them (3:14-15). “Yahweh paid attention to their heart attitude and heard what they said” (Constable).

The Lord remembered them. “Not all were defected, and God remembered their faithfulness to Him” (Ryrie; Constable thinks that the faithful wrote in the book of remembrance). “The scroll of remembrance means that a permanent remembrance of their faithful and reverent response is kept in heaven. This provides assurance that when God deals with these individuals, He will not forget their submission to Him” (Blaising).

“How can an individual remain faithful to God in a faithless world? Malachi gave three tips for developing a lifestyle of faithfulness. Vow to be faithful to God, even if those around you are not. Consider writing your own ‘scroll of remembrance.’ Surround yourself with a group of like-minded individuals for encouragement. This group ‘talked with each other’ (Mal. 3:16) as they

encouraged each other to remain faithful (see Heb. 10:25). Remember that God's day of reckoning will come someday. Keep a long-range perspective (1 Cor. 3:12-15)" (Dyer, cited by Constable).

Those who Fear the Lord will be Treasured "“They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, ‘On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him’" (3:17). The Lord says those who fear Him will be His, that is, His “special, valued treasure” (Ryrie). There is coming a day, when He will make them His jewels and spare (Hebrew: “to spare, pity, have compassion on”) them as a father spares a son who serves him.

“In the day of judgment, those who fear Me and believe and maintain My providence shall be to Me a special treasure, i. e., a people uniquely belonging and precious to Me” (Barnes). “The day” (also mentioned in 3:2 and 4:1; cf. “that... day” in 4:5) is the day of the Lord. It will be a day of judgment on the wicked and of deliverance for the righteous” (Blaising). “This probably refers to ‘the day of the Lord’ (cf. v. 2; 4:1, 3), when He will resurrect Old Testament saints and judge them (cf. Dan. 12:2). This will be when Jesus Christ returns to rule and reign on the earth. The faithful will receive a reward in His kingdom for their submission (Dan. 12:3). He also promised to ‘spare them as a man spares his own son.’ When Jesus Christ judges Old Testament saints, He will separate the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25:31-46). Here God described the sheep as His sons. He will spare them the humiliation and punishment that will be the lot of those who did not honor Him (vv. 14-15)” (Constable).

“Many years ago, one of the most magnificent diamonds ever seen was discovered in an African mine. It was decided that it would be presented to the king of England to be put into the royal crown. Because it was still in a rough, uncut state it was sent to an expert in Amsterdam, who studied it for weeks under a microscope and made drawings of it, and created a model of it to discern the lines of cleavage in minute detail. Then, cutting and notching it, he struck it several times with a special instrument. The result was two lovely diamonds. These were put under the grinding wheel and further prepared until two perfectly radiant stones emerged. These fit into the king's crown. The hard blow and the buffeting process were all planned and skillfully executed to make them superbly beautiful. That is the process the Lord takes His children through to make them His jewels. Only in the case of His children do they have to respond properly to the process for it to work.

One of His blessings is the suffering He allows us to go through (Phil. 1:29). C. S. Lewis said pain is God's “megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” Pain demolishes our self-sufficiency, our illusion of earthly security; pain makes us drop what we're holding so that we might embrace the love of God.

“Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him” (3:18). In the Day of Judgment, they will be able to discern the difference between the righteous and the wicked.

“In that day, it will be clear who behaved righteously and who behaved wickedly because Jesus Christ will reward the righteous and not reward the wicked among the Israelites. Then the true and the false servants of the Lord will be clearly known. In Malachi's day, and in ours, the true motives of God's people are not obvious, but in the future, they will become clear for many to see” (Constable).

“In previous times, Israel had seen God intervene decisively in judgment and deliverance (e.g., the Exodus, the Exile, and the Return). Those events pointed to a distinction between the righteous and the wicked. The future day of the Lord, however, will bring about a much more

extensive judgment on the wicked, and through physical deliverance and bodily resurrection, the righteous will be His “treasured possession” in the kingdom, fulfilling God’s original intention for Israel (Ex. 19:5-6; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4). This hope renews the righteous and strengthens their fear of God” (Blaising).

“The Day of Judgment will make a great change in earthly judgment. Last shall be first and first last; this world’s sorrow shall end in joy, and worldly joy in sorrow; afflictions shall be seen to be God’s love.... The picture of the surprise of the wicked in the Day of Judgment, in the Wisdom of Solomon, is a comment on the prophet (Wisdom 5:1-5), ‘Then shall the righteous man stand in great boldness before the face of such as have afflicted him, and made no account of his labors; when they see it, they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed with the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all they looked for: and they, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, This was he whom we had sometimes in derision and a proverb of reproach: we fools counted his life madness and his end to be without honor: how is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints!’” (Barnes).

The Wicked will be Judged “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the LORD of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch” (4:1). The Lord now explains (“for”) the day He spoke about in the previous verse (3:18). He elaborates on it (Constable). The day of which He speaks is the Day of the Lord (Ryrie; Zeph. 1:13-18), which is a day of judgment (Constable).

The Lord compares the Day of the Lord to a fiery furnace in which all of the proud and the wicked (Constable: “arrogant” and “every evildoer” is a hendiadys, meaning every arrogant evildoer) will be burned up like stubble. So completely is the destruction that neither root nor branch will be left. “Unlike Mal. 3:2-3, which emphasized the purification of Israel (in particular, the Levites), this passage emphasizes the destruction of the wicked (cf. Isa. 66:15; Zeph. 1:18; 3:8)” (Blaising).

“They shall have no hope of shooting up again to life; that life, I mean, which is worthy of love, and in glory with God, in holiness and bliss. For when the root has not been wholly cut away, nor the shoot torn up as from the depth, some hope is retained that it may again shoot up. For, as it is written in Job 10:4; 7, ‘There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease.’ But if it be wholly torn up from below and from its very roots, and its shoots be fiercely cut away all hope that it can again shoot up to life, will perish also. So, he saith, will all hope of the lovers of sin perish. For so, the divine Isaiah clearly announces Isa. 66:24, ‘their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring to all flesh.’

“He will so thoroughly purge them, that they will be entirely consumed, like a shrub thrown into a hot fire is totally burned up: from ‘root’ to ‘branch’” (a merism of totality). The judgment of wicked unbelievers is in view (cf. Matt. 25:46). Later revelation clarified the time of this judgment, namely, the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:11-15). Because God will deal with the unsaved wicked so severely, His people needed to repent—remembering that He will deal with *all* sinners (unbelievers) severely. ‘This verse gives no basis for the error of annihilationism. It describes physical death, not the state of the soul after death. The unsaved are in conscious eternal woe (Rev. 14:10-11; 20:11-15), as the saved are in conscious eternal bliss (Rev. 21:1-7)’ (*New Scofield Reference Bible*, cited by Constable).

“So complete will be the judgment that the wicked (the arrogant and every evildoer; cf. Mal. 3:15), compared to stubble, will not have a root or a branch remaining. This does not mean annihilation in the sense of cessation of being (the wicked will be resurrected, Dan. 12:2), but rather the complete exclusion of the wicked from God’s kingdom (cf. Mt. 25:46)” (Blaising).

The Discerners will be Blessed “But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves” (4:2). In contrast to the wicked (“but”), those who fear the Lord (3:16) will experience the rising of the sun of righteousness. Some expositors understand the “sun of righteousness” is a messianic title (Calvin; Barnes; Fienberg), but the New Testament never refers to Jesus Christ as “the sun of righteousness.” Ryrie says righteousness rising like the sun is a reference to righteousness spreading throughout the entire earth in the coming millennial kingdom (also Blaising; Constable).

Those who fear the Lord will experience healing. The sun can blister, but it can also bless. The sun’s rays are pictured as the “wings” of a bird flying over the earth (Constable). “God’s people will be spiritually restored and renewed” (Blaising).

Those who fear the Lord should go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves, “like calves set free from their stalls” (Ryrie). This is a picture of the “joy and freedom that the righteous will enjoy in that day (cf. Isa. 65:17-25; Hos. 14:4-7; Amos 9:13-15; Zeph. 3:19-20)” (Constable). “As from a prison-house, from the miseries of this lifeless life, and grow up, or perhaps more probably, bound as the animal, which has been confined, exults in its regained freedom, itself full of life and exuberance of delight” (Barnes).

“You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do *this*,” says the LORD of hosts” (4:3). The Lord tells Israel that in the Day of the Lord, they will trample the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of Israel’s feet (see “burning” in verse 1). This was the opposite of what was happening in Malachi’s day (Constable). “This not only indicates the finality of the judgment on the wicked, but it also brings to a sharp conclusion the answer in this oracle to the cynical question asked by the unfaithful Israelites, ‘What do we gain by carrying out His requirements?’ (3:14)” (Constable).

“Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments” (4:4). The Lord reminds Israel to remember to keep all He commanded them through Moses in Horeb (Sinai; Deut. 5:2). “The Israelites had forgotten and disregarded God’s law” (Constable). The Lord concludes by telling them to be prepared (Blaising).

“Moses’ last words to the Israelites in Deuteronomy contain about 14 exhortations to remember the Law that God had given them. Malachi closed his book, and God closed the Old Testament with the same exhortation. One writer identified nine connections between Malachi and the Book of Deuteronomy (Hugenberger). Although the Hebrew canon ends with Chronicles rather than Malachi, Malachi concludes the Prophets section of the Hebrew Bible. The Jews regarded ‘the Law and the Prophets’ as comprising their entire Scriptures (cf. Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 24:14; 28:23; Rom. 3:21)” (Constable).

Blaising says. “The verb remember (*zākar*) is used 14 times in Deuteronomy as an exhortation to Israel concerning this covenant Law. This command can refer to: (a) mental acts of remembering or paying attention to something, or to (b) mental acts combined with appropriate external actions (in other words, recalling and obeying), or to (c) acts of reciting or repeating something verbally (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. ‘*zākar*,’ 1:241).

In light of Malachi's insistence on obedience, meaning (b) seems to be the force of this command: 'Recall it to mind and do it!'"

Barnes says, "They had asked, 'Where is the God of judgment? What profit have we made from keeping the ordinance?' He tells them of the judgment to come and bids them take heed, that they did indeed keep them, for there was a day of account to be held for all."

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD" (4:5). The Lord promises to send Elijah before the great judgment of the Day of the Lord. In this case, the expression "the Day of the Lord" is a reference to the Second Coming of Christ (Renald Showers, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View*, p. 165).

"An angel later told John the Baptist's parents that their son would minister in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). Yet John denied that he was Elijah (John 1:21-23). Jesus said that John would have been the Elijah who was to come if the people of his day had accepted Jesus as their Messiah (Matt. 11:14). Since they did not, John did not fulfill this prophecy about Elijah coming, though he did fulfill the prophecy about Messiah's forerunner (3:1). This interpretation has in its favor Jesus' words following the Transfiguration, which occurred after John the Baptist's death. Jesus said that Elijah would come and restore all things (Matt. 17:11). Whether the original Elijah will appear before the day of the Lord (Feinberg), or if an Elijah-like figure, similar to John the Baptist, will appear—remains to be seen. Since Jesus went on to say that Elijah had come and that the Jews had failed to recognize him—speaking about John (Matt. 17:12-13)—I prefer the view that an Elijah-like person will come. What John did for Jesus at His first coming, preparing the hearts of people to receive Him, this latter-day 'Elijah' will do for Him at His second coming. Evidently, the two witnesses in the Tribulation will carry out this ministry (Rev. 11:1-13). Who the witnesses will be is a mystery? Evidently, one of them will be an Elijah-like person. These men will do miracles as Elijah and Elisha did" (Constable; Barnes gives a number of explanations from ancient authors).

"And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse" (4:6). The Lord adds that Elijah will restore the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the father, lest He strike the earth with a curse.

Constable explains, "At His first coming, Jesus said that because of Him, families would experience division. Some fathers would believe on Him, but their sons would not, and daughters would disagree with their mothers over Him (Matt. 10:35-36; Luke 12:49-53; cf. Mic. 7:6). When *this* 'Elijah' comes, he will cause the Jews to believe on their Messiah, as many did in Elijah's day. They will unite over belief in Him. If the Lord will not send *this* 'Elijah,' and if *he* did not turn the hearts of the Jews back to God, the Lord would have to come (in the person of Messiah) and strike the earth 'with a curse.' Because the Jews will turn to Jesus Christ in faith (Zech. 12:10), blessing will come to the earth, not a curse (vv. 2-3; cf. Zech. 14:11; Rom. 11:26). This is another reference to millennial conditions.... "Moses established the theocracy on earth, but Elijah restored it when it almost passed out of existence.... Elijah was a very significant person in Israel's history because he turned the Israelites back to God at the time of their worst apostasy—when Ahab and Jezebel had made Baal worship the official religion of Israel. Similarly, the eschatological Elijah will unite the hearts of the Jews to turn back and worship Yahweh" (Constable).

Blaising says, "As a result of the ministry of the two witnesses, many people will repent, thus uniting the hearts of ... fathers with their children. This repentance will mean that they will not experience God's judgment in the day of the Lord."

“In reading Malachi in the synagogue, the Jews repeat verse 5 after verse 6 so that the book will not end with a curse” (MacDonald). “The warning that ends the Old Testament is not absent at the end of the New (Rev. 22:10-15), but the difference is that their grace has the last word (verse 21)” (Baldwin).

Summary: The Lord charged His people with denying His blessings by saying it was useless to serve God (because the proud were blessed and the wicked prosper) and told them there is coming a day when those who fear the Lord will be treasured and the wicked will be judged.

The Lord charged His people with doubting His love when He had declared and demonstrated it to them.

The Lord charged the priest with despising Him by offering unacceptable sacrifices and, as a result, He rejected them (because His name will be great among the Gentiles), rebuked them, warned them, reminded them that they had departed from His way (whereas Levi had not), and judged them (made the people despised them).

The Lord charged His people with disregarding His will by divorcing their wives to marry pagan women.

The Lord charged His people with discrediting His promise by wearying Him with complaints that He was not judging sin, when He promised He would come to judge them!

The Lord charged His people of defrauding Him by not paying their tithes and offering and pronounced a curse on those who did not and a blessing on those who did.

The Lord charged His people with denying His blessings by saying it was useless to serve God (because the proud were blessed and the wicked prosper) and told them that since the faithful will be rewarded and the wicked will be judged, they should prepare for the coming judgment.

As was mentioned earlier (2:17), the prosperity of the wicked was discussed by at least five biblical writers (Job 21:7-26; Job 24:1-17; Ps. 73:1-14; Eccl. 8:14; Jer. 12:1-4; Hab. 1:1-17). “Though answers to this problem are not given in these passages, in each case, questions about God’s justice are removed by a futuristic perspective: God will come in judgment and punish the wicked (Job 24:22-24; Job 27:13-23; Ps. 73:16-20; Eccl. 8:12-13; Jer. 12:7-17; Hab. 2:3; Hab. 3:2-19) and establish the righteous in His kingdom forever” (Blaising).

Looking at the present situation, some saw the wicked prospering and their own suffering, so denying that the Lord was ever going to bless them as He promised, they concluded it was useless to serve the Lord. Others, however, who feared the Lord, meditated on Him and realized that they were blessed by Him making jewels of them, so they remained faithful to the Lord.

Like most people who read novels, my wife, Patricia, identifies with the characters. Because she has the gift of mercy, she takes that to a higher level than most. As she reads the book, she gets more and more concerned about her favorite people in the story. So before she gets to the end of the book, she reads the end of the story. Then satisfied that the people she cares about will come out alright in the end, she can read the novel in peace. Likewise, when the wicked are winning, remember the promises of God at the end of the story.

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