

Commentary on the Book of Malachi

Malachi 1

1The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.

Nothing is known of Malachi, though it is believed that he prophesied during the time of Nehemiah (or perhaps shortly thereafter) given that many of the issues he preached against were similar to those Nehemiah dealt with.

2"I have loved you," says the LORD But you say, "How have You loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD "Yet I have loved Jacob;

3but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness."

4Though Edom says, "We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins"; thus says the LORD of hosts, "They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the LORD is indignant forever."

5Your eyes will see this and you will say, "The LORD be magnified beyond the border of Israel!"

The people are in a difficult state, especially as compared to their glory days under Kings David and Solomon. As such, they are unable to see God's love and provision for them. They challenge God's goodness and love toward them, despite the fact that God has made an everlasting covenant with them (Genesis 12:1-3). God reminds them that they are children of Jacob who was loved by God while his brother Esau was hated. Even when Edom (Esau's descendants) tried to build their nation and advance, God did not bless the work of their hands such that they were laid ruin and made a desolation in the wilderness (cf. Obadiah). It would be clear to all that Edom was not blessed of God and that He was angry with them. The nation of Israel, on the other hand, did have God's hand on them given that they still existed and were sent back to their land. God didn't wipe them out or make their land a wilderness. This itself was evidence of God's mercy to them even though they had been very wicked and disobedient toward Him. One day they will perceive and understand God's mercy, praising Him and declaring that His glory would spread to the nations. They will be so overtaken by God's goodness that they will want to tell others about Him. But now they are complaining and doubting His love toward them.

6" 'A son honors his father, and a servant his master Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?' says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, 'How have we despised Your name?'

7" You are presenting defiled food upon My altar But you say, 'How have we defiled You?' In that you say, 'The table of the LORD is to be despised.'

8"But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts.

9"But now will you not entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts.

10"Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you.

11"For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations," says the LORD of hosts.

12"But you are profaning it, in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised.'

13"You also say, 'My, how tiresome it is!' And you disdainfully sniff at it," says the LORD of hosts, "and you bring what was taken by robbery and what is lame or sick; so you bring the offering! Should I receive that from your hand?" says the LORD.

14"But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King," says the LORD of hosts, "and My name is feared among the nations."

This rebuke is directed primarily at the priests who offer up defiled offerings when God's requirement was that unblemished animals be offered. These priests didn't bother to shut the gates and cease performing the offerings as honor and respect for a father or master would involve. God was being disrespected and His Word violated. Yet the priests didn't perceive their error and questioned God about it. God mercifully pointed out specifically where their sin was in that they offered blemished offerings and despised the table of God. Rather than give their best animals, the people were offering the lame, the sick, and the blind. This wouldn't be suitable for any human authority, let alone God. The ridiculous part is that the priests who disdained God's table and sacrifices tried to plead with God for favor and blessing. God's message to them is that the blessing is missing because of the sin of offering poor sacrifices. God didn't accept these sacrifices, and He was refusing to answer prayer from a rebellious and hard-hearted people. God says that one day in the future His name will be praised throughout the entire world. Incense and pure offerings will be given such that honor His name. Yet the people of Nehemiah's day profaned and despised the offering even though it is clearly important to God, important enough that He will see that it is done right in the future. The priests took animals that were stolen or blemished and offered them to God, disdainful of the entire process. There was no honor or worship in the entire process even though these were the servants of God. Their religion was shallow, empty, thankless, and worthless. God would have nothing to do with those who went through the motions, hating every minute of it. God would have none of this, and He cursed those who had a good lamb but took the lame one instead. This was a serious act of mistrust and rebellion against God. Rather than give the best and trust God to meet their needs, they gave God the leftovers

and wondered why He didn't bless them. God wants the first and the best because His name is Great, He is a great King, and He deserves what He ultimately owns.

Malachi 2

1" And now this commandment is for you, O priests.

2" If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the LORD of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart.

3" Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it.

4" Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi," says the LORD of hosts.

God continues to rebuke the priests who should have been the spiritual leaders of the people. If they do not listen to Malachi's rebuke and change their ways, even the blessings that remain will be cursed. Even as this threat is issued, God says that the curse is already going forward since He perceives the hardness of their hearts. Their offspring will be rebuked, and they will suffer greatly at the hands of other nations who will spread their own refuse on their faces. Choosing to eat a cursed lamb will lead to dealing with the refuse from it. This graphic picture is a severe curse and warning from God Who rightfully dealt with a people who consistently were hard of heart. When this happened, the people would know that God was the Lord and that His Word comes true. God wasn't going to give up on Levi, but He had to send His descendants a message that this careless, heartless leadership of the people would not be endured by a holy God.

5" My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him as an object of reverence; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name.

6" True instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity.

7" For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

8" But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts.

9" So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.

God had set the tribe of Levi apart to do the sacrifices before God. These priests were to be teachers of the precepts of God, providing sound instruction. God wanted to give them life and peace and the respect of the nation of Israel as they revered God and stood in awe of His name. Yet they were giving God none of the reverence due Him, disdaining the very task which He had appointed them to do. Their instruction was false, their example ill, and their walk one of rebellion. Formerly things had been different

with the priests teaching true things from a pure heart, keeping people from doing wrong as godly shepherds should do. But now they, rather than preserving knowledge and truth, were leading the people into rebellion and falsehood. Of all people, these should have been the ones to take a stand against the heartless, selfish sacrifices, but they did not. They turned aside from the truth and led many into error, corrupting the covenant God had made with the tribe of Levi. Since they didn't keep their end of the bargain, the result would be God making them despised and abased before all of the people. A godly leader should be impartial, but these priests showed partiality to people, telling each what they wanted to hear. Those whose calling it is to teach the truth must not give into people-pleasing whatsoever.

10"Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?

11"Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god.

12"As for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob everyone who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the LORD of hosts.

The people were treating one another poorly also. The root of this lack of brotherly love was a profaning of the sanctuary of God through intermarriage with pagan women. The women would turn their heart astray to foreign gods and lead the people in a myriad of directions. Sin would abound and thus division and destruction resulted. God says that all who continue in pagan intermarriage will be cut off from Israel.

13"This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.

14"Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

15"But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.

16"For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

In addition to marrying pagan women, the people were putting away (divorcing) their wives. They were supposed to put away the pagan women, but this was because it was the lesser of two evils. God's plan, however, was never for divorce because He hates it. Divorce is a treacherous act that has deep and serious consequences, and it greatly dishonors God. God desires that marriage bring forth godly offspring, and this may not happen if the marriage dissolves because of divorce. Those who had even a remnant of the Spirit leading them refused to divorce their wives, but many blatantly rejected God's

will. The people approached God's altar with tears, weeping, and groaning because it was clear that God didn't accept their offering. They were not blessed, and that they were cursed was clear. They knew that they didn't have God's favor. Despite the fact that they had divorced their spouses, they were confused as to why God wouldn't give them favor. Yet the reason was obvious as God explains to them. God had witnessed the marriage covenant and established the marriage bond, but these had lived as unmarried. Divorce was and is a serious breach of covenant and a horrific offense to God.

17 You have wearied the LORD with your words Yet you say, "How have we wearied Him?" 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?"

The Lord is worn out with the hardness of heart and the complaints of the people that God doesn't love them or give them favor. They are even unable to perceive how they have wearied God. There is a thing called "hidden faults" (Psalm 19:2) where we can be unaware of sin, but these sins so abounded and were so obvious that God had had enough. He didn't want to hear the complaints anymore about God blessing the wicked and not the righteous when the "righteous" were wicked themselves. They accused God of delighting in the wicked and being unjust. It is no light thing to attack God's character and promise, yet they did this. God had grown sick and tired of it, yet He still loved His people. That is not to say that there wouldn't be consequences for their rebellion, however.

Malachi 3

1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts.

2 "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 fullers' soap.

3 "He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.

Referring to the second coming of Christ, Jesus Himself will eventually purify the people of Israel and indwell both a millennial temple and ultimately the people of God, Who are the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19). The people are given credit for ultimately delighting in Christ, even though few showed evidence of it. Yet it is one thing to want a Messiah to come, and it is another to repent and receive Him on His terms. In the last days, however, the nation of Israel will be given a heart that will honor God. When Christ comes, none will stand except the elect. Like a refiner's fire which removes the impurities, so too will Christ purge the wicked from the land of the living and make all things new. Even the priests, the sons of Levi, will be purified so that they can present offerings to God in righteousness.

4"Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

5"Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts.

6"For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

7"From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts.

"But you say, 'How shall we return?'

There was a time when God was honored by the offerings of the land of Judah, and that time will come again. God will draw near in judgment which will be a blessing because it will deal righteously with all those who do evil. They will receive the penalty due them, and the righteous the rewards due them. God's mercy to Israel is because of His immutable character and His commitment to keeping His covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If God didn't love Israel, they would have been consumed a long time ago, but even still a faithful remnant remains. God reminds them that their history has been one of rebellion against Him, but He challenges them yet again to repent and return to Him. If they do, God promises to return to them in blessing and favor. Yet even here they do not see how they must repent. God yet again mercifully explains to them the details of their sin.

8"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings.

9"You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!

10"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test 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 a blessing until it overflows.

11"Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the LORD of hosts.

12"All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the LORD of hosts.

This time their sin was to not give God the proper tithes and offerings. In keeping back what God had required, they were robbing God of what was rightfully His. The entire nation had given into this practice. God asked them to put His goodness to the test by giving the right tithes and offerings and seeing if He would not pour out His blessing upon the nation. God's love was great toward them, and it was His desire to bless them if only they would honor Him. God wanted to see the priests cared for and the things of the temple service properly arranged and put in order. This required that the people give the money and possessions that they were supposed to give. If they did this, God promised overflowing blessing, including a removing of the "devourer" which was responsible for keeping the ground from producing fruit and the vine from growing grapes. This could have been some insect, drought or something else, but what is significant is that God was

orchestrating it. The lack of economic blessing and provision was a direct result of the rebellion of Israel and a resultant curse of God. Even after going into captivity and back and even despite all of the evil presently occurring, God offered them hope if only they would repent. He would restore the land to such an extent that even surrounding nations would call it a delight.

13"Your words have been arrogant against Me," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?'

14"You have said, 'It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts?

15'So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape.'"

Yet another sin had been their arrogance toward God. Again, they couldn't see their own sin, and God mercifully revealed it to them. They had spoken to one another about how it seemed vain to serve God because of all of the curses that they were experiencing. They thought that God was refusing to bless them even though they were honoring Him. The truth, of course, is that they had not honored Him, and this accusation against His righteous covenant-keeping character was only further rebellion. Their having to walk in mourning was their own fault. Again, they looked to the wicked who seemed to have things going well, and they accused God of not being fair to them, the "righteous." God doesn't appreciate it when we bear false witness against Him.

16Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name.

17"They will be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him."

18So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

There was a faithful remnant of those who listened to Malachi's rebukes and responded in repentance. They feared God, and God heard their confession and repentance. These who repented spoke to one another, and a record was made of those who repented and revered the name of God. These are the faithful ones who believed the revelation of God to them. These would be spared the wrath of God on the day of His judgment. That they served God was evidence of their righteous hearts. In the end, God will judge between the righteous and the wicked, the works of each revealing the state of their hearts. Only the righteous will receive eternal life and be made a possession of God.

Malachi 4

1"Behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."

There will come a day of judgment for the entire world. All who are evil will be like chaff in that they will not be able to withstand the judgment of God. Their punishment will be sure, and they will be put in a place of everlasting, fiery torment (Revelation 20:15). They will have nothing to brag about or put confidence in, for all that they have invested their lives in will be destroyed.

2"But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.

3"You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts.

Things will be different for those who fear the name of the Lord. They will be healed of their sin and infirmities, given new bodies and eternal life in a new heaven and earth. The place will be a place where only the righteous dwell and only righteousness is practiced. The imagery is of a calf skipping forth from a stall. We who are righteous in Christ will be set free into a new world of wonder to enjoy, explore, and rule over. We will be so excited we will skipping and dancing about like a young calf who has found his freedom and new home. Part of our job will be to tread down the wicked as the new kingdom is ushered in (Revelation 19:14).

4"Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

Speaking to Israel in this time and place, God is telling them to remember the Law of Moses. They are to honor God by honoring His precepts, being mindful all the while of the reason for the sacrifices- they needed the forgiveness of God to make them righteous by faith.

5"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

This prophesy of Elijah returning was fulfilled in John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ (Luke 1:17). The great and terrible day would come after this, which follows the time of the church.

6"He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

John the Baptist's mission was to call the people of Israel to repent, which he did. Where there was enmity amongst the nation of Israel, they were to exchange hate for love and thereby fulfill the law (Romans 13:8). If they repented, the land would not be cursed. Though some did repent, many of Israel did not. Their "curse" was that they rejected the Messiah. Yet the glory of the gospel is that the Messiah was cursed on our behalf so that we might receive the blessing in Christ (Galatians 3:13). Such is the love of God toward Jacob and toward His church.

By Brent Barnett of www.relevantbibleteaching.com