

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF MALACHI

\* \* \* THE FINAL PROPHETIC MESSENGER OF MESSIAH \* \* \*

S.L.H.  
Soli Deo Gloria!

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts."  
**Malachi 3:1**

AUTHOR: Malachi (c. 425 BC)

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE. Nothing is known of the prophet Malachi outside of his book. The name Malachi means *my messenger*, but it is probably an abbreviation of Malachiah, meaning *messenger of JEHOVAH*. Liberal critics have speculated that Malachi is a title rather than a proper name, and might refer to Ezra or another unnamed prophet; however, no other prophetic book of the O.T. is pseudepigraphal or anonymous, and for good reason<sup>1</sup>, so such a suggestion must be rejected. Malachi is a post-exilic prophet who writes after the construction of the second temple is complete and in full operation, so he must be dated after Haggai and Zechariah. Because Malachi prophesies to Israel at a time in which the "governor" required Jewish citizens to provide for his maintenance (Mal1:8), he must have ministered either after Nehemiah's governorship concluded or during his extended absence from Jerusalem (cf. Neh13:6-7), since Nehemiah refused such support (Neh5:14-15). Upon his return from Persia to govern Israel a second time (Neh13:7), Nehemiah immediately set about to correct the sins described by the prophet Malachi, including inadequate offerings made to the LORD (Cp., Mal1:7-10; Neh13:10), corruption within the priesthood (Cp., Mal1:7-2:9; Neh13:1-9), and inter-marriages with pagan peoples (Cp., Mal2:11-16; Neh13:23-28). For this reason, it is likely that Malachi ministered between Nehemiah's first and second terms as governor (c. 425 BC). If that is the case, it would make Nehemiah 13 the "last" chapter of the O.T. (chronologically) rather than Malachi 4.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT. Malachi is a prophet to post-exilic Israel under Persian rule. He is probably a contemporary with Nehemiah, although he likely prophesied during the interim between Nehemiah's first and second terms as governor in Jerusalem (see discussion under AUTHORSHIP AND DATE). The Temple in Jerusalem has been rebuilt and is fully operational, although it will later be greatly expanded during the rule of Herod. However, the spiritual revival under Haggai and Zechariah that led to the completion of the Temple has waned, and Malachi's generation of Israelites are lapsing into apathy/indifference toward the requirements of the Law of Moses by both the people and the priesthood (e.g., inappropriate sacrifices, neglect of tithing, divorces, re-/inter-marriages with pagan peoples, etc.). As the Hebrew scriptures come to a close, the messianic hope of the people of Israel has grown dim.

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<sup>1</sup> Authentic books of prophecy in the Bible were not written anonymously, since Deuteronomy 18:20-22 required Israel to hold a prophet personally accountable for the accuracy of his prophecies.

MESSAGE OF MALACHI. While the Babylonian captivity cured the nation of Israel of its tendencies toward outright idolatry, it was not long before the nation lapsed into spiritual apathy. Malachi's message is a reminder that  **blessing under the Mosaic covenant required faithfulness to JEHOVAH** and the stipulations of the nation's covenant with Him (i.e., the Law of Moses; cf. Lev26:3-13; Deut28:1-14). The spiritual apathy of the nation at the close of the O.T. is seemingly unchanged as the N.T. opens, where the Jews presume the blessing of God by virtue of being the descendants of Abraham (Luk3:8; Jn8:39) rather than covenant faithfulness.

STYLE OF MALACHI. Malachi employs a dialectical, question-and-answer methodology to progressively work through his issues of concern.

OUTLINE OF MALACHI. Much like Paul's organization of Romans 9-11, the Book of Malachi is structured around the past, present, and future of the nation of Israel.

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| I. Election of the Nation of Israel (PAST)     | <b>Malachi 1:1-5</b>    |
| II. Apostasy of the Nation of Israel (PRESENT) | <b>Malachi 1:6-3:15</b> |
| III. Promises to the Nation of Israel (FUTURE) | <b>Malachi 3:16-4:6</b> |

APPLICATION TO THE CHURCH AGE. While Malachi's message is to the nation of Israel in the waning days of the Dispensation of Law, there is an obvious application to the Church in the waning days of the Dispensation of Grace. For Israel, the spiritual fervor associated with returning to the Promised Land after exile in Babylon and rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple was followed by a return to spiritual apathy and apostasy, all on the eve of the first coming of Messiah. A similar condition currently plagues the Church. Having moved through the Philadelphian phase of the Church Age in which the Church was commended for having "kept [God's] word" and was given an "open door" for world-wide evangelism (Rev3:8,10), it has moved into the Laodicean phase marked by spiritual apathy and apostasy (Rev3:15-16), even as the rapture of the Church and the second coming of Christ draw near.

DISPENSATIONAL NOTE. The Book of Malachi is arguably the last book of the Hebrew scriptures (chronologically); this fact leads many to presume that Malachi was the final O.T. prophet. However, the Dispensation of the Law ends with the death of Christ (Heb9:16), not His birth; as such, the Gospels are a continuation of the record of the nation of Israel under the Law of Moses (i.e., the Old Covenant/Testament). John the Baptist is the final and greatest of the O.T. prophets (Matt11:11; Luk7:28); whereas all prophets before John prophesied the coming of Messiah, John was privileged to announce His arrival (Jnl:29-34). The message of Malachi is that the next prophet would be John, such that with the close of the Hebrew scriptures all that remains is to await the sudden appearance of Messiah (Mal3:1). More than four hundred years of silence (i.e., no prophet or word from the LORD) followed the close of Malachi's prophetic ministry as had been prophesied (cf. Amos8:11; Mic3:6-7).

## CHAPTER 1

### I. ELECTION OF THE NATION OF ISRAEL

The nation of Israel was/is the subject of God's election (i.e., the Jews are God's chosen people; cf. Rom3:1-2). Biblical election has nothing to do with individual salvation, and God's election of Israel does not mean every Jew will be saved (cf. Rom3:3; 9:6). Nevertheless, the nation of Israel was chosen for a special purpose in the plan of God<sup>2</sup>.

- [1] A "burden" is a prophetic oracle that includes a message of divine judgment; "Malachi", whose name means *my messenger*, is the messenger of "the LORD" to deliver this oracle to the nation of "Israel".
- [2] "The LORD" asserts that He "loved" Israel. The use of the past tense<sup>3</sup> does not suggest that He no longer loves Israel ("God forbid"; Rom11:1-2), but points to the past historical event in which God chose the nation of Israel to be His special people (cf. Gen12:1-3; Deut7:6-8; Jer31:1-3; Hos11:1). In answer to the question<sup>4</sup>, "In what way hast thou loved us?", the LORD points to the fact that His love for Israel led Him to make an unconditional, eternal covenant with "Jacob" that He did not make with Jacob's twin brother "Esau" (even though Esau was Isaac's favorite, firstborn son; Gen25:28; 27:32).
- [3] In contrast to Jacob, the LORD "hated Esau". The LORD's "hatred" of Esau must be viewed in two ways. First, it is used in a relative sense. Compared to His preeminent love for Jacob, God's lesser love for Esau appears as hatred (Cp., Matt10:37; Luk14:26). God's love for Esau is seen in the fact that he also was provided a blessing (albeit not the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant; cf. Gen27:34-40). Second, the evil works of Esau, especially his and his posterity's persecution of Israel (Obad10-14; cf. Gen12:3), result in God's righteous judgment of Edom (whereas Israel receives God's mercy; cf. Ps5:5; Obad15-18). Lastly, note that "dragons" (KJV) refer to serpents (cf. Deut32:33), and they are often used as a figurative expression for demons (Cp., Rev12:9; 20:2).

Note on Calvinism. The Apostle Paul quotes from Malachi 1:2-3 in Romans 9:13, "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated". Calvinists interpret Romans 9:11-13 as teaching that Jacob was elected/predestinated to salvation, whereas Esau was reprobated to damnation, both divine choices being made before either child was "born, neither having done any good or evil" (Rom9:11). This passage is used as one of Calvinism's primary supports for its doctrine of Unconditional Election. However, Romans 9:12 (not v13) controls the context of Romans 9:11. The context of Jacob's "election" was the prophecy, made before the twins were born, that "The elder shall serve the younger" (Rom9:12); and in the context of this prophecy as originally given, Jacob and Esau are viewed as "nations", not

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<sup>2</sup> The two chief purposes of Israel's national election are: 1) to receive, record, and preserve the revelation given by God (i.e., the Bible; Rom3:1-2), and 2) to bring forth the Messiah (Rom9:4-5; Gal4:4-5).

<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew verb translated "have loved" is in the perfect tense, signifying an action completed in the past with effects that endure in the present.

<sup>4</sup> The question suggests that Israel doubted the LORD's love for them; in this they mistakenly believed that chastisement from the LORD indicates a lack of love (Cp., Heb12:5-6).

individuals (Gen25:23). Malachi 1:2-3 and Romans 9:11-13 have nothing to do with individuals being elected/reprobated before the foundation of the world, as erroneously taught by Calvinists.

- [4] Where the will of "Edom" (i.e., the nation that descended from Esau; Gen25:30) and that of "the LORD" conflict, the LORD is sovereign (Cp., Prov27:1; Luk12:19-21; Jas4:13-15). Based on Edom's historical persecution of Israel (Obad10-14), they are "The people against whom the LORD hath indignation forever" (Obad15-18; cf. Gen12:3).
- [5] The fact that Israel will "see" with their own "eyes" Jerusalem and the Temple rebuilt, while all the cities of Edom will be "throw[n] down" and become "desolate places" (v4), will ultimately validate the LORD's assertion that He has loved Jacob, but hated Esau; and "The LORD will be magnified" (Ezek38:23).

## II. APOSTASY OF THE NATION OF ISRAEL

The fact of Israel's divine election does not preclude the LORD's discipline/chastisement of the nation for disobedience under the Mosaic covenant (Lev26:14-39; Deut28:15-68; Cp., Heb12:5-6); national blessing required faithfulness to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant (Lev26:3-13; Deut28:1-13). Malachi's prophetic ministry centered around preaching against Israel's spiritual apathy and flagrant violations of their covenant with JEHOVAH.

### PEOPLE/PRIESTS OFFERING UNACCEPTABLE SACRIFICES

Although the Temple had been rebuilt and was fully operational, its required rituals had devolved into a cold formalism, both on the part of the people and the priests. Even under the Law of Moses, faith on the part of the worshiper was required to please God (Heb11:6).

- [6] The LORD asserts that the "priests" in Israel "despise[d] [His] name". Whereas it is only natural that "a son on honoreth his father, and a servant his master", the nation of Israel has not so honored/feared JEHOVAH, who is both their "father" (Isa63:16; Hos11:1) and "master" (Cp., Jn13:14).
- [7] Here, "bread" is a euphemism for the sacrifices offered to the LORD (Cp., Lev21:6-8). By offering "polluted" sacrifices, they effectively expressed "contempt" for the LORD.
- [8] As prescribed by the Law, sacrificial offerings made to the LORD had to be perfect, "without blemish"<sup>5</sup> (cf. Lev1:3; 2:11; 3:1; 4:3,23,28,32; 5:18; 6:6). At this time, the Jews were apparently sacrificing animals that were "blind", "lame", and "sick". Whereas the LORD expected the people to offer Him their best, they were offering their worst. Such animals would not have been acceptable to provide for the required support of their Persian "governor", yet they were offering them to the LORD.

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<sup>5</sup> Sacrifices had to be "without blemish and without spot", since they all typified the sinless Lord Jesus Christ (1Pet1:18-19).

- [9] The request to "beseech God that he will be gracious unto us" seems to be a sarcastic admonition from Malachi to the priests. The point is, why would God bless them when they were not faithful to Him and His covenant with the nation? The answer to the question, "will [the LORD] regard your persons?", is NO (cf. Act10:34). The Mosaic covenant required obedience in order to receive blessing. The attitude of the nation at the close of the O.T. is seemingly unchanged as the N.T. opens, where the Jews presume the blessing of God by virtue of being the descendants of Abraham (Luk3:8; Jn8:39) rather than covenant faithfulness.
- [10] The LORD desires that a man zealous to honor/fear Him would "shut the doors" of the Temple so that these vain offerings would cease (Cp., Rev3:15-16). He has "no pleasure" in an "offering" made apart from love/devotion toward Him (i.e., external formalism apart from inward faith has no spiritual benefit; to presume so is nothing more than a religion of works). There was no sacrifice that covered willful disobedience (cf. 1Sam15:22; Isal:11-17; Heb10:26).
- [11] This verse is a **prophecy** that will ultimately be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom. Then, even "Gentiles" will honor the LORD by making "a pure offering" (Cp., Isa60:6; Zech14:16). This is a demonstration that God is not a "respector of persons" (i.e., even under the Law, there is no advantage of being a Jew over a Gentile apart from faith; cf. Act10:34).
- [12] In contrast to the "pure offering" to be made by the "Gentiles" (v11), Israel has "profaned" the "table of the LORD" (i.e., the altar) by offering "polluted" and "contemptible" sacrifices.
- [13] The spiritual apathy of the nation of Israel is seen in the fact that they find worshipping the LORD in the way He has prescribed to be "weariness" (Cp., Isa43:22). The answer to the rhetorical question as to whether "the LORD" should "accept" their polluted offerings is NO (Lev22:20).
- [14] The Jew offering a "corrupt thing" is a "deceiver". He wants it to appear to men that he is offering the LORD his best, yet the LORD knows he has an acceptable "male" in his "flock" that he keeps for himself (Cp., Act5:1-5).

## CHAPTER 2

### CONDEMNATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD

The LORD harshly condemns the priesthood for permitting contemptible worship to take place in His Temple. God honored the tribe of Levi, which had been historically zealous for the LORD (cf. Exod32:26-28; Num25:5-13; Deut33:8-9), with the privilege of the priesthood (Exod28:1; Jer33:18); however, with great privilege comes great responsibility (Cp., Luk12:47). For this reason, "judgment must begin at the house of God" (1Pet4:17).

- [1] Verses 1-9 are the LORD's rebuke of the priests for their disobedience to the requirements of the Mosaic covenant (Mal1:6-14).

- [2] The LORD's threat is to visit upon the priests the "curse[s]" of the Mosaic covenant (Lev26:14-39; Deut28:15-68). In fact, those curses upon the priests have begun "already".
- [3] The LORD would "corrupt [their] seed", probably referring to agricultural failure (cf. Deut28:18); He will compromise their food supply. Of the seven "feasts" of the LORD (Lev23:6-44), the last three<sup>6</sup> all occur in the seventh month and are known as the "solemn feasts". The stomach/entrails (KJV, "maw"; Deut18:3) from certain sacrifices were among the portion to be given to the priests, which often contained "dung". Since the priests had defiled the Lord's table with polluted offerings, He would defile them with the "dung" from the offerings made at the "solemn feasts".
- [4] The LORD announces these "curses" upon the priests in advance through His prophet Malachi, so that when they come to pass there can be no mistake that they are divine judgments. The reference to God's "covenant" made with "Levi" refers to His promises to forever entrust the priesthood and service of the tabernacle/temple to that tribe (cf. Num25:11-13; Deut33:8-11; Jer33:18).
- [5] The "covenant" made with Levi is referred to as "life and peace" (cf. Num25:12), since during the Dispensation of the Law it was the sacrificial system of the Mosaic covenant that provided "peace" with God and the atonement necessary to permit natural "life" of sinful people to continue (Cp., Gen2:17; 3:21). This "covenant" was made with Levi and his descendants (especially Phinehas) because of their renowned "fear" of the LORD and zealous defense of His "name" (cf. Exod32:26-28; Num25:13).
- [6] The "law of truth" is a metaphor for the Law of Moses (Cp., Ps119:160; Isa8:20). From the beginning, the tribe of Levi was entrusted with preserving, copying, and teaching the scriptures. Those who did so were known as **scribes**<sup>7</sup>.
- [7] The priests/scribes were charged with being experts in knowing the scriptures and teaching others (Deut17:8-12; 33:10), as well as ensuring they were faithfully copied (Deut17:18). As an example, Ezra was the ideal model for what a priest/scribe was to be (cf. Ezr7:1-6,10; Neh8:1-12).
- [8] As the N.T. opens, the scribes had become just as corrupt<sup>8</sup> as the rest of the priesthood and all the other sects within Judaism (cf. Matt23:2-36). This apostasy within the priesthood had already begun in the days of Malachi. Much worse than merely neglecting or forsaking their duty under the "covenant with Levi" to properly teach the scriptures, by their false teaching they had "caused many to stumble at the law".

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<sup>6</sup> The "solemn" Feasts of the LORD are: the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The prophetic fulfillment of these three feasts are associated with the Second Advent of Messiah.

<sup>7</sup> In the Gospels, "scribe" and "lawyer" are designations that are used interchangeably (Cp., Matt22:35; Mk12:28).

<sup>8</sup> For a contemporary example of how those whose profession is devoted to the study and preservation of the scriptures can become corrupt, note that modern text critics are virtually all unbelievers and apostates.

- [9] The charges against the priests/scribes were: 1) they had not "kept" the Law (i.e., personal hypocrisy; cf. Matt23:13,14,15,23,25,27), and 2) they were "partial" in the teaching of it (Cp., Act20:20,26-27; Jas2:10). For these reasons, God made them "contemptible and base before all the people" (i.e., they no longer commanded the respect of the people of God<sup>9</sup>).

#### ISRAEL'S DESTRUCTION OF THE FAMILY

The family is the most fundamental and important unit of society (not the State), established by God as a divine ordinance fifteen hundred years before He ordained human government. As an example of how important the family is, note that two of the Ten Commandments given to Israel are devoted to preservation of the family (Exod20:12,14; Deut5:16,18). If families disintegrate, no effort of the State will succeed in holding society together. After rebuking the priesthood for their corruption, the LORD turns to reproving the people for their sins (especially divorce) leading to the destruction of the family.

- [10] "All" have "one father" in two senses: 1) all men are descended from Adam (Act17:26), and 2) all Israelites are descended from Abraham (Rom4:1). Here, the second sense is in view. Having "one father", all Israelites are "brother[s]". However, the men of Israel were "profaning the [Mosaic] covenant" and "deal[ing] treacherously" by divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying foreign women.
- [11] "Judah" is used in two senses: 1) the house of "Judah" as the primary regathered remnant of the nation of Israel following the captivity in Babylon, and 2) the namesake of the patriarch who first sinned by taking a foreign wife (i.e., a Canaanite; Gen28:2). At this time, the sin of marrying "strange" (i.e., foreign) women was rampant (cf. Ezr9:1-2). This sin is characterized as an "abomination" and "profan[ing] the holiness of the LORD". The heart of this sin is not the mixing of races (i.e., ethnicities), but the embracing of "foreign god[s]" that inevitably results from such mixed marriages (i.e., the marriage of a believer and an unbeliever; cf. 1Kgs11:1-2; Neh13:23-27; 2Cor6:14-17). Because of this, idolatry is likened to spiritual adultery throughout the Bible.
- [12] For this sin, the "man that doeth this" should be "cut off". No partiality was to be shown in judgment, it was irrelevant whether the sinner was a "master" (i.e., teacher) or "scholar" (i.e., pupil). He was to be excluded from the "tabernacles of Jacob" (i.e., excommunicated from the nation of Israel); repentance was not possible, since under the Law of Moses no "offering" could atone for willful sin (cf. Heb10:26-28).
- [13] The "tears", "weeping", and "crying out" that "cover the altar of the LORD" are figurative expressions for the mourning and despair of the Jewish women who have been put away. As a result, the LORD will no longer receive an "offering" from a man who has divorced his wife (Cp., 1Pet3:7).

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<sup>9</sup> This is the state of most of Christendom today, where hypocritical pastors and Bible teachers who refuse to teach "all the counsel of God" (Act20:27) are rightly mocked by contemporary society.

[14] There are two sins in view: 1) the taking of a foreign wife (who worships a pagan "god"; v11), and 2) the divorcing of a Jewish "wife of thy youth". It is only here that marriage is referred to as a "covenant", and one in which "the LORD hath been witness". The implication is that marriage, a divine institution (Gen2:24), is an unconditional covenant made before God (cf. Matt19:3-6; Mk10:2-9), ended only by death (Rom7:2; 1Cor7:39), and having the purpose of typifying the relationship between "Christ and the church" (Eph5:22-32).

[15] In marriage, God makes a man and a woman "one" (i.e., "one flesh"; Gen2:24). The Hebrew word translated "one" is *echad*, which includes the idea of an indissoluble unity between multiple persons; it is used in this sense to speak of the oneness of the Persons of the Godhead (e.g., Deut6:4; Cp., Jn10:30). The preeminent purpose of marriage is to produce a "godly seed" (i.e., descendants who worship the one true God, which is why believers should never marry unbelievers; cf. Ezr9:2; 2Cor6:14-17), including the Messiah<sup>10</sup> (Luk1:31-35).

The Hebrew word translated in this verse as "residue" is the word translated elsewhere as **remnant**. The "godly seed" the LORD seeks is what the prophets refer to as the "remnant" within the nation of Israel that genuinely believe (Isa10:20-22; Cp., Rom9:6; 11:5).

The final clause, "let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth" is an imperative; the LORD commands that a man not divorce his wife (Cp., Mk10:11-12; Luk16:18).

[16] To be clear how "the LORD, the God of Israel" feels about divorce, He asserts unequivocally that "he hateth putting away"; is it ever acceptable to do that which God says He hates? The expression "covereth ... with his garment" is a Hebrew idiom for marriage (e.g., Ruth3:9; Ezek16:8).

[17] The context of this verse is Isaiah 5:20-23. Sinners in rebellion against the LORD juxtapose and invert "good" and "evil". They attempt to justify their sin as "good" and impugn the righteousness of the righteous as "evil" (Cp., Rom1:28-32). Their corrupted minds believe they can escape the "judgment" of "God".

### CHAPTER 3

#### (PARENTHETICAL) PROPHECY OF THE COMING OF JOHN/JESUS

God has entrusted all judgment to His Son/Messiah (cf. Ps2:1-12; Jn5:22,25-29). Although the coming of Messiah appears long-delayed (Cp., 2Pet3:3-4), it is certain. The final book of the O.T. prophetically reiterates the promise of Messiah's coming, and points to a future prophet who will prepare the way for Him.

[1] The Daniel 9:26 "gap" occurs between the first half and the second half of Malachi 3:1. The first half of the verse speaks of John the

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that although Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus (Luk1:34-35), nonetheless it was the righteous will of God that the Messiah would be born into a godly family (cf. Matt1:18-25).



Baptist as "my messenger" (i.e., the messenger of Messiah, a play on the name of the prophet Malachi) and applies to the first coming of Messiah (Matt11:10; Mk1:2; Luk7:27); the second half of the verse identifies Messiah as "Lord" (Heb., *Adonai*; Cp., Ps110:1) who is the "messenger of the covenant" and who "shall come", which applies to the second coming of Messiah (Hag2:9). Thus, right division must be exercised to properly understand this verse (2Tim2:5). That "the Lord" (i.e., Messiah) "shall suddenly come to his temple" is the response to the question of the preceding verse, "Where is the God of judgment?" (Mal2:17).

**John the Baptist.** John was the prophesied messenger of the LORD who would prepare the way for Messiah (Cp., Isa40:3; cf. Matt11:10; Mk1:2; Luk7:27). He was the final and greatest of the O.T. prophets (Matt11:11; Luk7:28); whereas all prophets before John prophesied the coming of Messiah, John was privileged to announce His arrival (Jn1:29-34). During John's ministry, the Jews asked if he was Elijah, who they expected in advance of Messiah's (second) coming (Mal4:5-6; Matt17:10-11), and John asserted that he was not Elijah (Jn1:21). However, Jesus taught that if the Jews had received Him, John could have fulfilled the prophecy concerning Elijah (cf. Matt11:13-14). This enigma is part of the mystery Dispensation of Grace (i.e., the Church Age) inserted between the first and second comings of Messiah after Israel rejected Him at His first coming (cf. Matt23:37-39), which was unrevealed in the O.T. and the Gospels (Eph3:2-5). The offer of the Kingdom to Israel at Messiah's first coming was legitimate (Mk1:14-15), and the nation could have genuinely accepted Messiah at that time, although God in His omniscience foresaw that they would not.

Textual Note. A quotation of Malachi 3:1 in Mark 1:2 is the subject of a textual variant in the extant Greek manuscripts of Mark 1:2. Some Greek manuscripts read, "As it is written in the prophets" (KJV), while others read "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet" (NIV, NASB, ESV). The KJV translators selected the proper variant for translation. However, by choosing the other reading, all translations based on the modern critical text of the N.T. introduce an error into the English text of Mark 1:2, since the verse it quotes is from Malachi 3:1.

- [2] The "day of [Messiah's] coming" that is in view is the one in which He brings judgment (i.e., the second coming of Christ). The rhetorical question, "who shall stand when he appeareth?", is that to which Revelation 6:17 alludes. The fact that the second coming is likened to a "refiner's fire" emphasizes separation; as a "refiner's fire" removes undesirable impurities in order to obtain a pure metal, so the judgment that takes place at the second coming of Christ will separate unbelievers and believers (Cp., Matt13:36-43,47-50; 25:31-46). Similarly, "fullers' soap" is used to remove dirt from laundry.
- [3] Here, Messiah's work as "refiner" is viewed in its application to "the sons of Levi" in order to "purify" the priesthood. The Messianic Kingdom will include a glorious Temple in which Zadokian priests "offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness" (cf. Ezek40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 44:11) in fulfillment of the covenant the LORD made with Levi (Num25:11-13; Cp., Mal2:4-5).

- [4] Unlike the polluted offerings made in the days of Malachi (Mal1:7-8), in which the LORD had no pleasure (Mal1:10), the offerings<sup>11</sup> made by "Judah" during the Kingdom will be "pleasant unto the LORD".
- [5] The sins to be subject to "judgment" from Messiah at His coming include: sorcery<sup>12</sup>; adultery (i.e., every form of sexual immorality; cf. 1Cor6:9); false testimony (i.e., every form of deception; cf. 2Cor4:4; Rev20:3); and oppression of workers, widows, orphans, and foreigners.
- [6] "I am the LORD, I change not" (Mal3:6) is often used as the preeminent proof text for God's attribute of immutability. "LORD" is the English rendering most often used for what in the Hebrew text is the Tetragrammaton (i.e., four letters; YHWH), or JEHOVAH<sup>13</sup>, which is the personal name of "the Most High" God (Ps83:18); it is derived from the Hebrew verb meaning *to be*, or *to exist* (cf. Exod3:14-15) and suggests both aseity and eternity.

The conclusion, "therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed", follows from the immutability of the LORD. The repeated rebellion of the Jews against Jehovah their God most assuredly warrants their judgment (e.g., Num14:11-12; Jn19:14-15), and the survival of the nation of Israel in light of the diabolical commitment of Satan to their utter destruction (cf. Zech12:3; 14:2; Rev12:13-17) is inexplicable from a human perspective; the fact that they have not/will not be "consumed" is a testimony to the unconditional covenant that God made with Abraham (Gen12:1-3), which consistent with the unchanging character of God cannot be changed (Rom11:28-29).

#### ISRAEL'S FAILURE TO TITHE

The Law of Moses required Israelites to give a tenth of their annual increase to the LORD, "that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest" (Deut14:22-29). Tithing was a spiritual act of worship on the part of the giver, but it was also the practical means for providing for the material support of the Levites who were totally devoted to serving the LORD (Num18:20-24). In the days of Malachi, the Israelites were failing to tithe (Neh13:10-12).

- [7] The LORD charges Israel with failing to keep "mine ordinances". "Return unto me, and I will return unto you" reflects the fact that the Mosaic covenant was conditional; Israel (as a nation) had to keep the Law of Moses in order to receive the promised blessings of God under that covenant (cf. Exod19:5; Lev26:3-13; Deut28:1-14).

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<sup>11</sup> Scripture clearly teaches that animal sacrifices will be performed during the Kingdom in the Millennial Temple (e.g., Isa56:7; Jer33:18; Ezek44:15; Zech14:21). Animal sacrifices were not propitiatory during the Dispensation of the Law (Heb10:3-4), and they will not be propitiatory during the Kingdom; thus, the finished work of Christ is in no way impugned by their reinstatement.

<sup>12</sup> The sin of "sorcery" is consistently listed first among sins to be removed/excluded from both the Millennial Kingdom and the new heavens/new earth (cf. Rev22:15). In the Bible, sorcery is a term that encompasses every form of occultism, which is nothing less than cobelligerency with Satan and his fallen angels in their war against God.

<sup>13</sup> The modern trend to view "Yahweh" as the proper rendering for the personal name of God has no support in Scripture; see the article, *The Name of the LORD*, available for download at <https://continueinmyword.net/textual-studies>.

- [8] More than merely breaking an arbitrary commandment, God viewed Israel's failure to "tithe" as robbery. The first tenth of their increase was the LORD's (cf. Lev27:30), not theirs, so a failure to tithe was equivalent to "rob[bing] God".
- [9] Israel's failure to tithe resulted in the "whole nation" being "cursed with a curse". The "curse" refers to the consequences that resulted from failure to keep the Law of Moses, as stipulated in the Mosaic covenant (Lev26:14-39; Deut28:15-68). Note that the Mosaic covenant was a national covenant, such that obedience was required from the "whole nation", and the "whole nation" suffered under its "curse[s]" (cf. Exod20:5; Jer31:29-30; Ezek18:2-3).
- [10] The "storehouse" were those warehouses (or "treasuries"; 1Chron26:20) associated with the Temple in which the "tithes" were stored upon receipt. The "tithes" are referred to as "meat" (i.e., food), since the majority of the "tithes" received were livestock and agricultural products (Cp., 2Chron31:5-6).

Tithing and Sabbath observance (i.e., cessation from working one day in seven; Deut5:12-14) were hallmark elements of the Mosaic covenant; by keeping these ordinances, Israel demonstrated their trust in the LORD to provide for their material needs. From a purely naturalistic perspective, it is tempting to believe that tithing simply reduces one's own income; however, under the Mosaic covenant the LORD promised Israel that in response to their faithfulness in tithing He would bless them with a vastly greater increase (indeed, He would "open for [Israel] the windows of heaven"), such that there would not only be no reduction on their part, but rather an even greater blessing for them than if they had not tithed at all (Prov3:9-10).

**Christian Giving.** Tithing was required for the nation of Israel under the Mosaic covenant. It was never required of any Gentile nation, nor is it required of the Church (the Body of Christ) during the Dispensation of Grace; during this dispensation, the believer is not under the Law of Moses (Rom6:14). Under grace, the believer is free to give "as he purposeth in his heart", "not grudgingly, or of necessity", but "cheerful[ly]" (2Cor9:7). Nevertheless, giving to support the work of the Lord is still expected to be proportionate to the increase the believer has received (2Cor8:12), and the principle that God's blessing will be proportionate to the believer's giving still holds true (2Cor9:6).

- [11] The "devourer" is "the devil" (1Pet5:8), whom God Himself promises to "rebuke" (Cp., Zech3:1-2) if Israel is faithful in tithing. Satan desires to destroy the people of God, whereas it is God's intention to bless His people (cf. Deut28:11-12). However, the spiritual apathy of the post-exilic nation of Israel, exhibited here by their neglect of the tithe, had resulted in widespread national want (cf. Hag1:5-6).
- [12] This verse, constructed in the future tense (i.e., "all nations shall call you blessed), is **prophetic**. It was the LORD's original purpose that the nation of Israel, established/functioning according to His righteous principles and prospering according to His abundant blessing, serve as the model nation for all other nations to observe

and emulate (Deut4:1-8). Israel failed under the Mosaic covenant, but it "shall" ultimately fulfill its divinely intended purpose in the Messianic Kingdom under the New covenant (Jer31:31-36; Ezek36:24-36).

[13] Finally, the LORD challenges the unbiblical thinking of the nation of Israel.

[14] Israel in its apostasy believed, "It is vain to serve the LORD", and asks "what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance?". First, it is never "vain" to serve the LORD (see 1Cor15:58); rather, a life lived apart from the LORD is characterized as "vanity of vanities" (i.e., the greatest of all vanities; Eccl1:2). Second, this thinking is grounded in a strawman argument; it implies that Israel had done everything the LORD had commanded of them, yet they are not blessed. However, the nation had not received the proffered blessings from the LORD because it had not kept the ordinances of the Mosaic covenant (Cp., Jer31:32). This charge borders on blasphemy, as it implicitly impugns the character of God.

Finally, in thinking like this, Israel appears guilty of the ancient charge that Satan directed against Job; namely, that Job only lived righteously and honored the LORD because of the blessings he received from Him (Cp., Job1:10-11; 2:4-5).

[15] This is God's *sarcastic* response to Israel's irreverent allegation. If He were to prosper the nation of Israel according to their expectations, He would have to make "happy" those who were "proud", "set up" (i.e., bless) those that "work wickedness", and "deliver" those who "tempt God"; but these are things the LORD has said He will not do (e.g., Prov11:5; 28:25; Deut6:16).

### III. PROMISES TO THE NATION OF ISRAEL

The apostasy of Israel will (again) lead to the ultimate curse of the Mosaic covenant being visited upon the nation (Lev26:32-39; Deut28:63-68), beginning with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD and the world-wide dispersion of Jews in 135 AD. Nevertheless, even this extreme chastisement of the nation does not represent a permanent casting away of the ancient people of God (see Romans 11). The promises God has made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are sure (Rom11:28-29) and will be fully and literally fulfilled in the future Messianic Kingdom.

[16] The O.T. prophets often spoke of the "remnant" (e.g., Isal:9; 10:20-22; Jer15:11; 23:3; 31:7; Ezek11:13; 14:22; Joel2:32; Amos5:15; Mic2:12; 5:7-8; Zeph2:9; 3:13; Hag1:12; Zech8:6,12), which was at any given time those relatively few individual Jews "that feared the LORD" within the (largely apostate) nation of Israel (Cp., Rom11:4-5). Apparently, the LORD keeps a "book of remembrance" (Cp., Ps56:8) which records the words and deeds of this faithful remnant, presumably for the purpose of future reward<sup>14</sup> (cf. Rev22:12). In this

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<sup>14</sup> The Lord Jesus Himself gave numerous parables in which servants were entrusted with responsibilities by their master, who went away for a long time. Upon the master's return, their service was evaluated and their good works rewarded (e.g., Matt24:45-51; 25:14-30; Luk12:41-48; 19:11-27). All of these parables were given

verse, it is the condition of the heart (i.e., "them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name") that is emphasized above good works (Cp., 2Tim4:8). This serves as a rebuttal to the allegation in Malachi 3:14 that there is no "profit" in serving the LORD.

**The Profit of Bible Study.** While 2 Timothy 2:15 is the only verse that explicitly commands the "study" of the Bible, an innumerable number of verses implicitly commend it. In the current Laodicean phase of the Church Age, Bible study is not only neglected, it is frequently disparaged. As an example, Rick Warren has asserted: "The *last* thing many believers need today is to go to another Bible study. They already know far more than they are putting into practice" [*The Purpose Driven Life* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 2002), p. 231]. The implication is that what you do for the Lord is more important than what you think about Him. However, Malachi 3:16 suggests that a believer's thoughts are as important, perhaps more so, than his actions.

- [17] The allusion to "in that day" is a reference to the day in which Israel, as a nation, is "saved" (Rom11:26). The "LORD of hosts" likens this remnant of Jewish believers who fear Him and think upon His name (v16) to "jewels"; that is, they are valued as His most precious possessions (cf. Exod19:5; Ps135:4; Matt13:44). The LORD likens the saved nation of Israel to "his own son that serveth him" (Cp., Exod4:22; Hos11:1; Jn1:11-12).
- [18] Only when Israel "shall return [to the LORD]" will they be able to "discern between the righteous and the wicked, and between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not". The allegation of Malachi 3:14 clearly indicates that the apostate generation of Israelites in Malachi's day could not properly exercise such spiritual discernment.

#### CHAPTER 4

##### THE DAY OF THE LORD AND THE COMING OF CHRIST

Malachi 4 closes the O.T. with a final message concerning the future Day of the Lord, which concludes with the coming of Christ.

- [1] The "day" that "cometh" is the Day of the LORD (i.e., the 7-year Tribulation period; Dan9:27; Rev6-19). This verse emphasizes that it is a period of divine judgment, for both Jews and Gentiles (cf. Ezek20:33-38; Matt25:31-46; Rev19:17-20:3). The Tribulation concludes with the coming of Christ to earth to establish His Millennial Kingdom, into which only saved (i.e., "born again") persons will enter (Jn3:3-7).
- [2] The believing remnant of Jews alive at the very end of the Tribulation, described as they "that fear [the LORD's] name" (Mal3:16), will be delivered by the physical arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ. His sudden appearance is likened to the dawning of a

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to the Jewish people during the Dispensation of Law, so these all relate to Israel (not the Church).

new day (i.e., "the Sun<sup>15</sup> of righteousness") that will be immediately visible to all on earth (Cp., Matt24:24:30; Mk13:26; Luk21:27).

The metaphorical reference to "healing in [Messiah's] wings" also had a very literal fulfillment. The corners of a Jewish man's mantle, to which were affixed tassels as required by the Law (Num15:38-39; Deut22:12), were called "wings" (translated "borders" in Num15:38 and "skirt" in Ruth3:9). It was this verse that led many in the Gospels to believe that the tassels (i.e., hem) of Jesus' mantle (i.e., garment) had healing power (cf. Matt9:20; 14:36; Mk6:56; Luk8:44).

- [3] The "ye" in this verse is the believing Jewish remnant alive at the end of the Tribulation when Christ returns. His coming will impart to them supernatural strength so that, fighting at the side of Messiah, they will "tread down the wicked" (cf. Zec12:6; 14:3).
- [4] The exhortation to "remember the law of Moses" is a call to "all Israel" to faithfulness under the obligations (i.e., "statutes and ordinances") of the Mosaic covenant, the chief of which was to enthrone as king he "whom the LORD thy God shall choose" (i.e., Messiah; Deut17:15; Luk1:31-33).
- [5] The "great and terrible day of the LORD" may be a reference to the second half of the Tribulation in particular (cf. Joel2:31; Matt24:21). This verse is a promise/prophecy that the LORD will send "Elijah the prophet" to the nation of Israel "before" that time. This promise<sup>16</sup> will be fulfilled by Elijah's appearance in Jerusalem as one of the two witnesses during the first half of the Tribulation (Rev11:3-6). The expectation that Elijah would return before the coming of Messiah is why the Jews asked John the Baptist if he was "Elijah" (cf. Jn1:21).

**Moses and Elijah.** Figuratively, Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets (i.e., the whole of God's revelation to the nation of Israel; cf. Matt5:17; 22:40). The closing verses of the O.T. include exhortations to remember Moses and expect Elijah. Moses and Elijah will return as the "two witnesses" during the first half of the Tribulation to prophesy from Jerusalem and oversee the rebuilding of the Temple (Rev11:3-12; Cp., Zech4:1-14).

- [6] The purpose of Elijah's return before the coming of Messiah will be to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (i.e., repentance). This was also the message of John the Baptist (cf. Matt3:2; Luk1:17), a type of Elijah at Christ's first coming (see comments on Mal3:1).

The last word in the O.T. is "curse"; in contrast, the final word in the N.T. is "Amen". Without the N.T., the O.T. would be a beginning without a victorious ending. The purpose of God to establish a

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<sup>15</sup> The O.T. closes with the promise of Messiah to appear as "the Sun of righteousness" to deliver the nation of Israel (Mal4:2). The N.T. closes with the promise of Jesus to appear as "the bright and morning star" to collect His Bride, the Church (Rev22:16). As the morning star precedes the dawning of the sun, so the Rapture of the Church precedes the Second Coming of Christ.

<sup>16</sup> The O.T. closes with the promise of Elijah's return (Mal4:5); the N.T. closes with the promise of Christ's return (Rev22:20).

righteous kingdom on earth would be unfulfilled. The N.T. takes up precisely where the O.T. leaves off and provides the expected conclusion of a one thousand year kingdom on earth over which Messiah personally reigns (Rev20:1-6), followed by "a new heaven and a new earth" in which God dwells with His people forever and into which sin and unrighteousness will never enter (Rev21:1-4).

--- S.D.G. ---

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