

Who May Abide The Day Of His Coming?

John Ullman

PREFACE

Among Yahweh's prophets, Malachi breathes forth the spirit of the truth in a style and manner that is essentially distinctive and compelling. To study this book is to become involved in a narrative that is gripping and demanding, and yet sublime and awesome in its revelation of vital divine principles which should be understood by all who would serve the Living God "in spirit and in truth".

In spite of the apparent conflict which existed between Yahweh and His people at that point in history, the message of the prophet is positive and forthright, designed to "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17; cp. Mal. 4:6); for, the theme of Malachi's ministry is constantly stated throughout the book in various expressions, but perhaps summarized effectively in his challenging question:

"Who may abide the day of His coming?" (3:2)

We were first drawn to a consideration of Malachi some fifteen years ago when requested to conduct a series of studies upon the subject for a Bible Class. We would like to acknowledge the help we received at that time from some study notes which had been prepared by brother H. P. Mansfield. We also benefited from a study of *Prophets After the Exile* by brother John Carter, and the various references made to Malachi in both *Eureka* and *Elpis Israel* by brother John Thomas.

Since that time we have been twice attracted to further detailed considerations of Malachi, and on each occasion we were increasingly impressed with the depth of wisdom and exhortation contained therein.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASV	American Standard Version 1901		
AV	Authorized (King James) Version 1769		
cp.	Compare		
Diag.	Emphatic Diaglott		
Ges.	Gesenius		
Heb.	Hebrew		
JB	Jerusalem Bible		
mg.	margin		
Moff.	Moffatt		
MSS.	Manuscript(s)		
RV	Revised Version		
RSV	Revised Standard Version		
Roth.	Rotherham, The Emphasized Bible		
LXX	Septuagint		
Str.	Strong's Exhaustive Concordance		
TCNT	Twentieth Century New Testament		
Young's	Young's Literal Translation		

Publisher's note: The author has chosen to capitalize pronouns which refer to God when quoting from the AV. He has also substituted Yahweh for LORD when quoting from Scripture.

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INTRODUCTION

The opening words of Malachi's prophecy contrast dramatically with the final pronouncement. The message of the book virtually begins with the statement: "I have loved you", and concludes with "a curse". This apparent paradox establishes the mode of expression which continues throughout the book; for it is a work of conflict and contrast: conflict between Yahweh and His people, and contrast between their opposing views and attitudes towards the subject of divine worship.

The contrast between the opening and closing words directs attention to the fact that God extends His love towards those who are called to become His people. His love is proffered unreservedly and with profound tenderness; but if His love is spurned there remains only the "curse" which faithless sons and daughters of God inevitably bring upon themselves.

There is, then, an atmosphere of urgency pervading the narrative of Malachi. Priests and people stood forth shamelessly to answer the challenge of their God and the demands which He had made upon them; and Yahweh stands firm, through the voice of His prophet, to repudiate all false worship and to warn that unless there is an honest attempt towards reform, judgment must inexorably come upon the nation.

The vivid confrontation between God and His people, as recounted by this prophet, would appear to contain a particularly important message for the Ecclesia of God existing among the nations at the epoch of Christ's return. Malachi warned of the manifestation of the Lord in glory, pointing out that such an appearance would be associated with a time of dreadful judgment. Sons and daughters of Yahweh are urged to prepare for that day; hence the theme of the book: "Who may abide the day of His coming?" (3:2). But this theme, relating the message so strongly to those who live at "the time of the end", is further strengthened by an appreciation of the typical significance of the times of Nehemiah and Malachi. There is evidence to suggest that Malachi prophesied during the time of Nehemiah, with the chronological setting of Malachi being placed between the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of Nehemiah. Nehemiah had been permitted, at his own request, to leave the court of the King of Persia and journey to Jerusalem and Judea that he might endeavour to continue the work of restoration there on behalf of his God and his people. But the King of Persia had set a time limit of twelve years during which Nehemiah

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might absent himself from the Court to become Governor of Judea (Neh. 5:14). With the expiry of that time, Nehemiah left Jerusalem and returned to the Court. This is the note upon which Nehemiah's twelfth chapter concludes. A further period of time passed, during which Nehemiah's strong influence for good was no longer experienced by the Jews. Men of error, determined to undermine Nehemiah's work, began to make their influence felt. The result was a rapid deterioration of spiritual standards and a development towards evil and apostate practices. It would appear that it was at this crucial period between Nehemiah's twelfth and thirteenth chapters that Malachi was raised up by Yahweh to proclaim His displeasure at the prevailing spiritual condition of His people.

It is at this point that consideration should be given to the marked similarities between the evidence set forth by Malachi as to the failing spiritual condition of the people and the state of affairs witnessed by Nehemiah upon his return to Jerusalem. There are four major points which would tend to identify Malachi with the period of Nehemiah's absence from Jerusalem:

- firstly, marriages between Jewish men and alien wives (Mal. 2:11, cp. Neh. 13:23);
- secondly, the withholding of tithes from the Levites (Mal. 3:8; cp. Neh. 13:10);
- thirdly, the neglect of the Temple, with Temple worship being generally dishonoured (Mal. 1:12–13, cp. Neh. 13:4, 5, 11);
- fourthly, Jewish men repudiating and casting aside their lawfully wedded wives (Mal. 2:15–16, cp. Neh. 13:23, 27).

It is surely no coincidence that Malachi spoke of these sins being practised in Judea; and Nehemiah upon his return found is necessary to rectify these very same sins.

The narrative of Malachi, then, would contain an added significance: Nehemiah would be clearly revealed as a type of Christ; and his *return* to Jerusalem as "the Lord" (*adon*) who has "suddenly come to his Temple" (3:1) would dramatically typify the second coming of Christ.

A further point of identification appears to draw together the beginning of Nehemiah's ministry and one of the highlights of Malachi's book; and it is the clearly stated need to "fear" the "name" of "Yahweh" (Neh. 1:11, cp. Mal. 3:16). In the Hebrew text, the words are identical.

Further evidence as to the historical setting of Malachi may be deduced from the narrative. For example, the conquest of Edom by the Nabateans had taken place during the Judaic exile; thus showing that Malachi's ministry was certainly post-exilic. Moreover, the Jews of Judea were now under a Persian Governor (1:8); and the Temple had obviously been completed and in use for at least a reasonable period of time (1:7–10).

At the beginning of the restoration, the Jews had returned from captivity with enthusiasm for the work of rebuilding the Temple and re-establishing the people (Ezra 1:5; 2:68–69; 3:10–11). It was the beginning of a new and arduous period in Jewish history.

Of the three prophets after the exile—Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi—the message of the latter prophet differs considerably from the words of his two predecessors. The first two wrote with a strongly Messianic fervour encouraging and comforting in an exhortationary manner, as needful for a people participating in what was in effect a political and spiritual rebirth of the nation.

But in Malachi's day the exile and restoration appears to have become almost forgotten. There is now little evidence of zeal and dedication. As the difficulties mounted and their initial enthusiasm began to wane, an atmosphere of despondency settled upon the people. Despondency, unless it is dissipated, inevitably leads God's people to weakness of faith, lack of interest in spiritual standards and development, and general apathy towards spiritual responsibilities and obligations.

At the time of Malachi's ministry, some time after Nehemiah had departed from Jerusalem, it would appear that the untrustworthy and compromising High Priest, Eliashib, together with his cohorts, gained control over affairs in Jerusalem. Eliashib had not shown any appreciable loyalty towards Nehemiah, so the standards established by Nehemiah would have been very quickly disregarded.

The prophet Malachi stood before the people, courageously and vigorously attacking the religious authorities and practices of that time. He condemned the people for remaining unmoved in the face of his forthright accusations, declaring that their unscrupulous attitude would cause continued alienation from their God.

The people of the restoration had become worldly, and had grown careless in spiritual matters. Carelessness and indifference ultimately led them to outright apostasy; and when Malachi challenged the poor spiritual standards of the people, they had become so lacking in

spiritual perception that they strongly defended their apostate attitudes and practices.

The priests were administering the Law in a most corrupt and unprincipled way so that little care was taken in meticulously preserving the demands of the Law; marriages with gentiles had become commonplace; the people were failing to render their tithes to the Levites, thus undermining the proper continuation of the Temple services. In dealing with these disastrous circumstances, Malachi reveals a strongly conservative approach. He endeavours to draw his people back to some of the fundamental elements of God's Law, basing the foundation of his exposition upon the book of Deuteronomy. His words pour forth, in a desperate attempt to move his people: There is a God in Israel... He has love for Israel, and has consistently demonstrated that love... He is their Father and their Master... He is a holy God, and demands that holiness be manifested in His people... His ancient ideals and instructions for the conduct of priests and people were still to be revered and upheld... He is a God of Judgment. and eventually His people must give account of their walk before Him...The wicked will surely be destroyed, but there is hope of a glorious future for those who will turn to Yahweh with their whole heart, and serve Him in the spirit of the truth.

In these fundamental matters, Malachi opposed any compromising attitude on the part of the nation. He was unwilling to adapt the principles of the truth to the particular circumstances and difficulties existing in his day. It was the people who would have to change, not the prophet or his message. No matter what their circumstances, they must honour the purity and truth of Yahweh's word, and alter their way of life to conform to the demands which God's word made upon them. True religious zeal had waned, and personal holiness was no longer considered an essential part of divine worship. Although the Temple services were being performed in some respects, mere ceremonial formalism and hypocrisy had invalidated the worship of the people. Only a remnant, it would appear, clung tenaciously to the true principles of divine worship, and waited humbly for the day when their God would vindicate them.

On the question of identifying the author, nothing is known of this prophet apart from the pages of the book which bear his name. The real author, as the prophet himself clearly affirms, was the God of Israel. Some commentators have suggested that Malachi is merely a pseudonym and that possibly the actual writer was Ezra or Nehemiah, or some other man. But this line of reasoning in not consistent with

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the rest of Scripture. No other book of the prophets has been anonymously written, so why should the book of Malachi be the one exception? No doubt a man of Yahweh, known by the name Malachi, existed at that epoch of history, and was raised up by God to declare His will and His purpose.

The name Malachi has particular significance so far as the revelations contained in the book are concerned. The name means "My Messenger" the word "my" obviously applying to Yahweh, whose messenger Malachi certainly was. And it is most interesting to discover that Malachi introduces a total of five "messengers" to his readers, all of whom would be sent by Yahweh, and thus each of them qualifying for the possessive title: "My Messenger". The first, needless to say, is Malachi himself (1:1); but then he writes of the Levitical priests (2:7); John the Baptist (3:1); The Lord Jesus Christ (3:1); and finally, Elijah (4:1). All five are termed "messenger" of Yahweh.

As the prophet speaks of the work of five messengers, so the book divides into five parts:

Part One: An unholy nation-Yahweh's love rejected and His

Name despised (1:1-14).

Part Two: A faithless priesthood—Levi's fine example ignored

(2:1-10).

Part Three: A treacherous people—"Take heed to your spirit!"

(2:11-16).

Part Four: A nation of robbers—Judgment will come (2:17–3:15).

Part Five: A faithful remnant to be vindicated—A message of hope

(3:16-4:6).

PART ONE: AN UNHOLY NATION

Yahweh's love rejected and His Name despised

1:1-5

On the testimony of Holy Writ, the question of the divine origin and authenticity of Scripture is never left in doubt. "Holy men of God", asserted Peter, himself an inspired writer, "spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). Such a man of God was the prophet Malachi. It is reasonable, therefore, that he should begin his book with a firm assurance that the words of his prophecy were not his own, but were from Yahweh.

The writer to the Hebrews affirmed that the word of God is "quick and powerful" or, "living and energetic" (Diag.); which is to say that the Bible is not "dead" literature. The word of God becomes "living" when it takes root within the intellect of a human being; and it becomes "energetic" when its principles become manifested in the life of the individual. This process reveals the word of God as a "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The word "discerner" has been rendered from the Greek kritikos, from which we have the English word "critic". The word in the Greek text defines one who is fit for, or skilled in, judging. Thus, sons and daughters of God must have minds which are receptive to the light of divine truth, which they acknowledge to be "living", for it must live within them; then the word becomes the motivating force in life, so that their thoughts, words and deeds become expressions of the living word, and are thus seen to be energetic. This process continues as the individual exercises the principles of the word of God as a "critic"; scrutinizing and examining their lives in the light of the word of God.

When the letter to the Hebrews was written the New Testament Scriptures were still uncompleted; so that reference to the word of God as being "living and energetic" must have directed special attention to the Old Testament. Upon this basis, the book of Malachi, as a part of the inspired word of God, became "living and energetic" when received and acted upon by men and women. On the testimony of the epistle to the Hebrews it must still be "living and energetic" in these times. So then, although primarily written to convey vital spiritual truths to a wayward people of long ago, the principles of truth set forth by Malachi are still powerful and compelling; and therefore the Ecclesia of God today should hearken intently and submissively to

the message of this prophet, an attitude which God desired from those people to whom the words were originally directed.

The prophet introduces himself abruptly and with a directness that is at once both brief and informative: "The oracle of the word of Yahweh unto Israel by the hand of Malachi" (v. 1, Roth.) Thus the opening words alluded to the prophet's name; he was "my messenger", according to Yahweh, sent to "Israel". And by this word is meant the remnant of the covenant people, from the various tribes, gathered from the nations and taken back to the land of their fathers under the direction and guiding hand of Yahweh.

This message was to be delivered to God's people "by the hand of" the prophet; wording which emphasizes the identity of the true author and illustrates that Malachi was merely the servant through whom God's words were to be delivered. Jeremiah uses this same expression, where in the AV margin it is more correctly rendered as "by the hand of" (Jer. 37:2; cp. Heb. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:21).

The message begins with a short statement which was intended to be tenderly appealing, and to evoke a humble response in the people. "I have loved you, saith Yahweh". In commencing the message with these words, the prophet lays down a thesis which he proceeds to press unwaveringly, presenting an unanswerable argument concerning the compassion and affection Yahweh had manifested towards His people, and yet they had constantly rejected His love, revealing scant respect for the One who was their God and deliverer. These simple words constitute a positive statement which Yahweh could prove by bringing to light the relative evidence.

This opening claim which the prophet sets before his people, is clearly taken from the book of Deuteronomy. Such passages as Deut. 7:7–8; 10:15; 33:3, should be carefully examined. The Law of Moses, for which these people had now lost so much of their zeal, established Yahweh's love for His people—and of that fact they should have been well aware. There existed indisputable proof of God's love for Israel, a distinctive love which was initially exhibited when Yahweh chose that particular nation from among all the nations of the earth to be the vehicle through which His grand purpose would be developed (Isa. 44:1; Amos 3:2). The hope of the gospel is termed "the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20), and it is only by becoming a member of the "commonwealth of Israel" that a gentile can be saved (Eph. 2:12). This requires an acceptance of "the covenants of promise" made to the fathers of Israel. All who remain unacquainted with the principles of

hope and righteousness embodied in those promises are said, by the apostle Paul, to be "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel."

Yahweh had proven His love for Israel, beyond all doubt, by the blessings and privileges He had extended to them throughout their history. But these blessings had been withdrawn many times when Israel had proven faithless to their covenant (3:10). The application of these principles to Israel "after the spirit" (i.e. the ecclesia) in these closing days of the gentiles should not be lightly laid aside. How richly God has revealed His love for His chosen spiritual Israel; how readily He has provided indisputable proof of that love. But how will those people respond to that love, in an epoch of history when the signs indicate that the great drama is shortly to become an accomplished fact, when "the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his Temple"? Do they doubt His love? Or is His love rejected, as in the days of this prophet? Surely these questions require searching self-examination by every individual who claims to have become a member of the spiritual "commonwealth of Israel" (1 John 4:10, 19; Heb. 13:15; 1 Thess. 2:13).

But, at this time, how did God's people react to His declaration of love? The prophet considers their reaction: "Yet ye say, Wherein hast Thou loved us?"

With the announcement of their negative response, an interesting and dramatic turn is now taken in the unfolding of the narrative; for there is now introduced a question and answer style of writing, which reveals much of the book as a dialogue of interrogation and reply, with Yahweh and His prophet on one side, and priests and people on the other. It is as though the two sides were standing apart from each other, facing one another in an attitude of debate over the issues which were under discussion.

This initial negative response from the nation represents the first of eight such challenges and answers, all of which revealed an astonishing lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of both priests and people (cp. 1:6–7; 2:14, 17; 3:7, 8, 13). It was ignorance of the truth which brought about their destruction (Hos. 4:6, 9; Isa. 1:3; 5:13). How sad and tragic was the evidence which the answers to these eight queries brought to light: they lacked a sound knowledge of the truth; they had little understanding of the element of faith and what it should produce in men and women; they failed to manifest love for their God, because they failed to understand Him or His

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ways, or the demands He made upon His people. So much was this the case that they now demanded a proof of Yahweh's love towards them.

"Wherein hast Thou loved us?" was the contentious reply from the people. Their contradictory words expressed disappointment and doubt, and issued from unspiritual minds like the cry of a sulking, chastised child. Because they did not have sufficient spiritual understanding they failed to recognize that their present troubles (3:10–11) were entirely of their own making. The question directed at Yahweh from His people represented the inward thoughts of the nation at that time. This was their true state of mind.

Their question did not remain unanswered by their God. "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith Yahweh: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau..."

The question here must refer not merely to the two men as individuals, but to their continuing posterity. What was the evidence of history? Had Esau received any special treatment from Yahweh, seeing he was, after all, Jacob's brother? The answer, as Israel well knew, was in the negative. God had chosen Jacob and rejected Esau. Use of the term "brother" makes the entire argument here more impressive, because, in fact, Esau was the elder of the two and normally would have received the birthright and all that it represented. God decreed that "the elder" should "serve the younger", and history had documented the truth of this proposition.

God's firm statement: "I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau" is a direct reference to the principle of divine selection (Gen. 12:1; Acts 15:4; 1 Pet. 1:2), and emphasizes the exalted position into which Israel had been raised in the eyes of their God. Paul quoted these words (Rom. 9:11–13) for the same reason that Malachi does: to show that "the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth"—or "...in order that God's electing purpose might stand, based not on their actions but on His calling them..." (Wey.)

The expression of hatred against Esau is a Hebraism to denote that "I have loved Jacob more than Esau." The extreme contrast between love and hate is used to define, in particular, the depth of the love (cp. Matt. 6:24; 10:37; Luke 14:26; Gen. 29:30–31; John 12:25).

The prophet does not attempt to outline the entire history of the two nations, but instead chooses to draw upon the Jacob-Esau relationship. Esau was the father of the Edomites, who had consistently manifested hostility towards Israel. The name Edom is derived from Adam, which signifies "red"; therefore Edom is iden-

tified with sin, and is often seen in the Scriptures to typify sin in political manifestation. The many centuries of antipathy between Israel and Edom should have readily touched a chord in the memory of the Israelites to whom Malachi addressed himself: for, the example of Edom was not only a well known one, but was also an up-to-date example of God's love for His people. Since the beginning of the exile the hostility between the two nations had become extreme. When the kingdom of Judah was being overthrown by the Babylonians and in process of being exiled from their land, the Edomites assisted the army of Nebuchadnezzar in cruelly plundering and persecuting the Jews at every opportunity (Psa. 137:7; Ezek. 25:12; Obad. v. 8, 10). They rejoiced in the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah, thereby arousing great bitterness among the Israelites. Retribution, however, fell upon the Edomites in due time, for while the Jews survived their captivity sufficiently to be able to return to their land and re-establish themselves, the Edomites were not so fortunate. They were strongly attacked by the Babylonians and later by the Nabateans and driven out of most of their important territories.

Was not this proof of God's love? And was it not a fact that, not only in recent history but down through the ages God had preserved Israel throughout the long history of antagonism which had existed between the descendants of Jacob and Esau? Those to whom the prophet addressed himself should have appreciated the truth of these words.

God had laid Edom's "mountains and heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness" (v. 3). But the hardy and resilient Edomites had said: "We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places". The Edomites resolved to uphold human will, the strong will of the flesh. But human will, no matter how great the degree of resolution, cannot frustrate divine will. The men of Edom had no understanding of a most important principle: "Except Yahweh build the house, they labour in vain that build it..." (Psa. 127:1).

Would Yahweh permit the strong will of the Edomites to counter and defeat His own counsel? "Thus saith Yahweh Sabaoth, they shall build, but I will throw down..." God had indeed determined that their purpose would be frustrated. He caused them to be dispossessed of their land; so that while Israel had returned and become re-settled in their land, having rebuilt and re-established a society, Edom had never recovered from the fierce onslaught which had cost them so dearly. They were removed from their land, and it was possessed by "dragons"; or, more correctly "jackals" (Roth.), those beasts of the

desert who move into areas which have been deserted by human beings.

Yahweh Sabaoth is the militant title of the Deity. It occurs twenty four times in Malachi. It signifies "He Who Will Be Armies". The constant repetition of this title would surely be a reminder to the men of Israel that their God was a "consuming fire", as the Law stated (Deut. 4:24); and that He therefore had the power and resources to fulfil His purpose. In due time the entire earth will feel, as did the Edomites at this time, the fire of His judgments (4:3); "for as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth" (Luke 21:35).

The Edomites never regained their power or position among the nations, subsequent to the times of Malachi. Although during the period of the Maccabees they occupied portion of the area of southern Judea, with Hebron as their capital, Judas Maccabaeus drove them out (circa 164 BC). Approximately 55 years later, John Hyrcanus conquered them totally and compelled them to face either death or conversion to Judaism.

A careful perusal of the prophetic word will reveal that the ancient nation of Edom typifies the gentile powers in their enmity against Israel through the ages. As with Edom, the gentiles must eventually face the prospect of either being proselyted into "the commonwealth of Israel" or being destroyed. The nations of the earth can only become united in the Kingdom age upon the basis of the true Israelitish religion (Isa. 2:2-4) and such must be accepted and acknowledged by all nations, or divine judgments will follow (Zech. 14:17).

Thus, Yahweh's final pronouncement upon Edom: "I will throw down; and they shall call them The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom Yahweh hath indignation for ever" (v. 4). Or: "men shall call them the territory of lawlessness" (Roth.). The wording is unmistakable: Yahweh will never compromise with the things which Edom represents; therefore there must be warfare between Yahweh and Edom until Edom is utterly destroyed and Yahweh and His Israel stand triumphant.

The opening section of the prophecy concludes with a special exhortation:

"And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, Yahweh will be magnified from the border of Israel" (v. 5).

The people of Israel were being addressed. They doubted the reality of God's love for them; but their eyes would verify the truth of Yahweh's claim. There would be two fulfilments to this prophetic verse: firstly, in the subduing and disintegration of the nation of Edom; and secondly, when God's Son takes up his kingdom to reign upon earth. In this latter time he will overcome all gentile powers, causing them to become submissive to his will. In due time, all nations will be brought into "the hope of Israel", having cast aside their gentile traditions and philosophies. Gentilism will be eradicated from the earth.

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Malachi avows that not only will Israel see the fulfilment of these things, but will confess them openly: "Ye shall say..." But in the days of this prophet they had neither the heart nor the understanding that would cause them to manifest such an attitude. Instead, they said: "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" The future will bring a change of spirit in Israel (3:18). Yahweh will give them "one heart and one way" that they may "fear" Him for ever (Jer. 32:39; cp. Jer. 31:31–34). Then they shall acknowledge the power and accomplishments of their God, self-styled Yahweh Sabaoth—"He Who Will Be Armies".

In that day they will declare: "Yahweh is mighty beyond the borders of Israel" (JB). The word "from" in the AV has been more correctly rendered "beyond" in a number of versions, including Moff., RV, RSV, and Roth. A primary fulfilment of this may be applied to the period of the Maccabees; but there can be no doubt that a more far-reaching fulfilment remains for the future. A remarkable prophecy is referred to in the book of Acts which makes it clear that the ancient nation of Edom typified the gentiles. James said: "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His Name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my Name is called..." (Acts 15:14–17). In quoting these words from Amos 9:11–12, James made a significant alteration to the Old Testament prophecy. The words "the residue of men" are substituted for Amos's words: "the remnant of Edom". Edom no longer existed as a nation at the time when James delivered the verdict recorded in Acts 15. It is therefore logical that he should use the prophecy of Amos in its typical sense; and this is clearly what James has done.

lished throughout the earth.

In view of the significance of Edom as a type, the coming destruction of gentile power in the day of Messiah's Kingdom gives greater force and purpose to these words. Israel, and all the nations of

the earth, will confess that "Yahweh is mighty beyond the borders of

Israel" as Christ extends his power and authority among the nations,

gradually subduing them until peace and unity and truth are estab-

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Yahweh now turns His attention to examining the reasons why Israel were expressing doubts about His love for them. Had they honoured Him as a son should his father, and had they revered Him as a servant should his master, they would not have questioned His love.

"A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?" (v. 6)

This challenge was directed primarily to the priests, as the men responsible for the wise guidance of Israel in spiritual matters (v. 6, cp. Lev. 10:11; Deut. 17:8-11). And who among them could argue against the foundation upon which these questions were based? The Law of Moses dealt with man's relationship to his God and to his fellow-men. And the Law spoke explicitly concerning the attitude which children should manifest towards parents: "Honour thy father and thy mother, as Yahweh thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may be well with thee, in the land which Yahweh thy God giveth thee." (Deut. 5:16; cp. Exod. 20:12). Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, emphasized the importance of this commandment, identifying it as "the first commandment with promise" (Eph. 6:2). Here was a law which was to be respected if the nation was to find lasting unity and peace after gaining an entrance into the land of promise. And surely it was a law which was designed to teach a spiritual lesson in addition to its practical meaning. First "that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual". The filial love which children in Israel were to show towards their parents was to be a type of the love they were to exhibit towards their heavenly parent, Yahweh Himself. And if they could not learn to respect and love their earthly parents, how would they ever learn to love their Heavenly Father?

Israel had been designated Yahweh's national "son" (Exod. 4:22; Hos. 11:1, 4). And being exalted to such a position placed obligations upon them. First and foremost, they were to be reflections of their Heavenly Father. Moses fully understood what this implied: "...ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He. They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of *His children*: they are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus requite Yahweh, O foolish people and unwise?

Is not He thy Father, that hath bought thee?..." (Deut. 32:3–6; cp. vv. 18–20). The Lord Jesus Christ similarly understood that if Israel claimed to be sons their claim was to be matched by character and action. In his confrontation with the Jews upon the question of their relationship to Abraham, they claimed to be "Abraham's seed", which the Lord did not dispute. But later in the debate, when they alleged that Abraham was their "father" he refused to concede the point. "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham" (John 8:33–40). The Lord was quite prepared to admit their literal descent from Abraham; but refused to accept that they were the children of Abraham, because they did not reflect the mind or character of Abraham.

The principle is beyond dispute: those who claim to have God for their Father can only substantiate that claim if they reflect His likeness, being manifestations of His character. Whenever servants of the Deity address Him in prayer as "Our Father" there is automatically presented to such an individual a challenge as to what manner of person they ought to be (Matt. 6:9–13; Isa. 63:16).

The Father-child relationship between God and His sons and daughters is constantly stressed in New Testament writings. "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven... If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" (Matt. 5:45; 7:11).

Continually in the four gospel records there are references to God as the Father of Christ's brethren. There are at least 43 such references in Matthew, 5 in Mark, 18 in Luke, and 113 in John. This makes a total of at least 179 such references to God as Father, in the four gospel records.

Sadly, Malachi has announced that Israel failed to grasp the truth of this matter, and failed to realize that sons and daughters must be a reflection of their Father. And having not understood, they had inevitably omitted to apply this principle in their lives. The people of God, in every age, should soberly consider what is required of them when they claim to be sons and daughters of Yahweh.

But the relationship between God and His people should not only have been one of Father and son, but also of Master and bond-slave.

"If I be a Master, where is my fear?" (v. 6)

Whereas use of the term "Father" spoke of the need to love God, with the respectful love of a son for his father—and also implies relationship to the privileges which would be associated with sonship—the term "Master" draws attention to quite different aspects of divine worship. The relationship between bond-slave and master is one based upon ownership, obedience, obligation, and duty.

It was a basic human weakness that Israel were always willing to accept the privileges of sonship, and to boast of their national relationship to Yahweh; but they were rarely prepared to accept the responsibilities and obligations which that relationship demanded. Seldom did they remember that they were bond-slaves to Yahweh as well as sons. "Yahweh shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants... He will avenge the blood of His servants..." (Deut. 32:36, 43; cp. Isa. 43:10; Neh. 1:10).

The Lord Jesus Christ, although the son of God in a literal as well as spiritual sense, "pleased not himself" (Rom. 15:3), thus signifying that he considered himself to be in bondage to Yahweh. He "took upon himself the form of a servant"—literally, "bond-slave" (Phil. 2:7)—and therefore confessed: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34).

In like manner, those who acknowledge that Christ has left them "an example" that they should "follow his steps" accept the fact that they are not their "own", and that they have been "bought with a price" (1 Pet. 2:21; 1 Cor. 6:19–20).

A servant or bond-slave must, above all else, reverence his master, and he must manifest his reverence in a real and practical way. He must exhibit the qualities of obedience and loyalty. He must be familiar with his obligations and fulfil them. He must understand his duties, and recognize the absolute authority of the one who is his owner.

But Israel had lost sight of these principles. Hence Yahweh's astute question: "Where is mine honour?" The question makes pointed reference to the fifth commandment.

How does one honour a father? By manifesting love and obedience. These are the first lessons any child will learn if they are the offspring of wise and intelligent parents. Children must be taught these things, as Yahweh had endeavoured to patiently and lovingly instruct Israel. Yet these qualities must be mutually shared. A child who receives love and respect from its parents will learn to reciprocate those same qualities. There will thus develop, as the child grows, a

warm understanding and kindred bond between parent and child, each knowing that they have the love and respect of the other.

The very basis upon which the Law of Moses had been established was in accordance with these wonderful ideals. "Know therefore that Yahweh thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments..." (Deut. 7:9).

No wonder Yahweh made this considerate appeal to His people. They had been constantly rebellious, more often than not failing to honour the demands that their God made upon them; denying Him the love and reverence which was His rightful due. Repeatedly they found themselves alienated from Yahweh through their rejection of His word. Yet, He loved them, desiring only their wellbeing. This statement was proof enough to that effect.

The priests were singled out, at this stage of Malachi's prophecy, for special indictment. They were, after all, required by divine law to lead the people in the way of righteousness. This could only be accomplished if their hearts were right in the eyes of Yahweh, and if their knowledge of the truth was sound and mature (2:7–8; cp. Jer. 2:8). It can really come as no surprise that the priests should be specially mentioned in this way at this time; for, as custodians of the truth, they must inevitably have become the root cause for Israel's spiritual successes or failures (Hos. 4:1, 6–9).

And because of the dilatory attitude of the priests towards their obligations, God says that they have "despised" His Name through their dereliction of duty.

The word more correctly signifies to "disesteem". Men will esteem someone if they love, honour, or respect them. The reverse will be the case if those feelings are absent. In the case of these priests they had come to disesteem their God through ignorance of the truth, indifference to their responsibilities, and pursuit of their own selfish aims. This means that they had lost their understanding concerning the two vital principles which will keep men and women in the way of righteousness: a clear knowledge concerning the holiness of Yahweh; and a realization of the sinfulness of men. Men come to despise or disesteem Yahweh when there is a lack of understanding upon these matters. True, effective understanding can only come through a clear knowledge of the word of God. There is no other way.

Perhaps the most compelling lesson which should be absorbed at this point is that these priests were going about their duties in the Temple services, quite indignant at the thought of any aspersions being cast upon either their worship or their integrity. Yet, God says that they have despised or disesteemed Him. This means that it is quite possible for men and women who claim to be worshippers of the Most High to be engaged in religious activities, but fail to manifest the qualities which would make them acceptable worshippers. There must, therefore, be a constant need to develop a more mature understanding of the word of God, with continual self-examination in the light of the word of Truth.

But the assertion that the priests had shown irreverence towards Yahweh did not bring forth a humble enquiry as to how they were offending their God. Instead, with an air of arrogant pretentiousness they challenged the veracity of God's allegation against them.

"Wherein have we despised Thy Name?" (v. 6)

This is the second of eight challenges directed against God. Their religious services for far too long had revolved around mere external formalism. They had become unconscious of the fact that true religion is dependent upon the state of the heart (2:2). A true worshipper must love Yahweh and love His truth—and desire to walk humbly before Him in the spirit of the truth. A proverb puts it succinctly: "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to Yahweh than sacrifice" (Prov. 21:3). Why? Because sacrifice—in the Mosaic definition of it—is a ritual; whereas justice and judgment represent a decision of the heart, and a subsequent walking in the way of the truth.

As with their first question, their second did not remain unanswered:

"Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar" (v. 7).

The word rendered "polluted" (AV) also represents the idea of something defiled or impure (Ges.). The word "bread" has been more correctly rendered "food" (Roth.). This latter word (Heb. *lechem*) has been used in a general sense to describe sacrifices offered upon the altar (Lev. 3:11; 21:17, 21, 22; Ezek. 44:7). As will be observed from these references, the word has been used for various offerings; and has been used to describe the flesh, the fat and the meal.

The answer, then, to the question as to how they had disesteemed the Name of Yahweh was that they offered Him impure or defiled sacrifices. A vital aspect of sacrifice under the Mosaic Law had been forgotten by these priests: the offering upon the altar was always intended to represent the offerer. This principle was carefully stressed in the very first reference in Scripture to the offering of sacrifices to God. "Yahweh had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect" (Gen. 4:4-5). The word is stating that God looked first at the offerer to examine his heart and his motive, and only then did He look to the actual offering. This principle must apply to every form of sacrifice or worship that men and women may engage upon. If the heart and the motive is not right in the eyes of the Creator, then the service is unacceptable. The wise counsel of Paul should be heeded: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5). Because of this necessity David prayed: "Examine me, O Yahweh, and prove me; try my reins and my heart" (Psa. 26:2). The Law of Moses required that every sacrifice be carefully examined for any imperfections-which surely emphasized the need for the offerer to examine himself for the same reason —hence, Paul's further counsel: "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Cor. 11:28).

But again, as on the two previous occasions, Yahweh's people rejected His words.

"Wherein have we polluted thee?" (v. 7)

Significantly, instead of replying concerning the "altar", which God had specifically mentioned, the priests refer to Yahweh personally: "Thee". In this they were quite correct because their reply indicates that they were by no means totally ignorant concerning the meaning of the symbolism of the Law.

It would appear that they correctly understood that the altar represented Yahweh Himself so that if they offered polluted or impure sacrifices upon the altar it was as though they polluted their God as well as His altar (Ezek. 13:19; 20:9; 39:7).

How had they polluted Yahweh and His altar? "Ye say, the table of Yahweh is contemptible." The altar was sometimes referred to as a "table" (Ezek. 44:16; Psa. 69:22).

The most holy action a person may take, in divine worship, is to approach Yahweh through His altar and His priest. For these priests, familiarity had bred a degree of contempt. They had become slovenly. They lacked sound knowledge; they did not walk by faith; they had forgotten the many proofs of Yahweh's past love for them; and they lacked a vision of the future glory which was in store for Israel.

For the believer in this present age, Christ is the altar and the priest (Heb. 13:10; 4:15). He is also the sacrifice (Heb. 7:27; 9:26; 10:26). It

is the duty of Christ's brethren to "offer up spiritual sacrifices" which are "acceptable to God" (I Pet. 2:5) through the means which God has provided. Therefore, the basic principle which Malachi has set forth in these verses has never altered. In the lives of God's servants there must be evidence of undivided loyalty to Yahweh's word and dedication to a way of life in keeping with the principles of God's truth. Men and women must realize that in dealing with the things of God they are touching sacred things—things which must not be taken lightly or treated with casual indifference.

Proof of the contempt which these priests showed towards Yahweh was now advanced:

"If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?" (v. 8)

This is a most significant statement. The Law stated categorically that every sacrifice offered to Yahweh was to be perfect, without spot and without blemish (Lev. 22:21, 22). There was only one exception to this otherwise inflexible rule and that was in the case of the freewill offering. The overriding principle in the offerings was that Yahweh demanded the best and anything less than that was an affront to His holiness. Why, then, was an exception made in the case of the freewill offering? Because it was an offering made voluntarily, from the heart. No man could approach Yahweh upon that basis without acknowledging his own imperfection and his imperfect walk before his God. Yet, there was something deeply touching about the freewill offering; for it encouraged the weak in faith and those who were hesitant due to a humble awareness of their own insufficiency.

Malachi's charge against the priests, however, asserts that they were offering "corrupt" animals for the vow offering (v. 14). Such conduct was strictly contrary to the demands of the Law, specific mention being made in the Law concerning the marked difference between vow and freewill offerings (Lev. 22:23). No doubt the priests had either been slovenly in their study of the Law's requirements in this matter; or else had adduced, with an attitude of careless indifference, that the two offerings were fairly similar and therefore it did not really matter. Surely the point that Malachi conveys is that God demands obedience to His declared will. The evidence submitted by the prophet in this instance therefore provided unassailable proof of the disregard these priests showed for that vital principle.

Disciples of Christ must also acknowledge the truth and necessity of this principle. All that the sacrificial code taught was embodied in the Lord's words: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). This concept of the truth becoming living and energetic in the hearts of men and women was taken up by the apostle Paul: "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, *perfecting holiness* in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). Peter appropriately summarizes the matter in a quotation from the Law itself: "Be ye holy as I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16).

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How vital it is that in every age God's servants should develop a mature understanding of the demands their Creator makes upon them. There has never been a time in history when a sound understanding of the principles of divine truth has not been necessary as an indispensable prerequisite to divine worship.

The apostles stressed this need on numerous occasions. For instance, in the epistle to the Hebrews: "Of this we have much to say (i.e., concerning the Melchisedec priesthood), and much that it would be difficult to make clear to you, since you have become so dull of apprehension. For although, considering the long time you have been believers, you ought now to be teachers of others, you really need someone to teach you over again the very rudiments of the truths of God, and you have come to require milk instead of solid food. By people who live on milk I mean those who are imperfectly acquainted with the doctrine of righteousness. Such persons are mere babes. But solid food is for adults—that is, for those who through constant practice have their spiritual faculties carefully trained to distinguish good from evil" (Heb. 5:11–14, Wey.).

Great dangers face those who would be God's servants. Those dangers are present in every age: that their knowledge might not be sound; that their intellectual perception of the truth might not be clear; that indifference and lethargy might sap their spiritual strength; that selfishness might replace the spirit of self-sacrifice; that religious worship might become little more than external formalism, practised mechanically and without real love for God or His truth.

Ignorance of divine truth can never be condoned, but may not necessarily prove fatal, because ignorant people can be taught if they are willing and of the right spirit. But when ignorance is accompanied by a general attitude of indifference, there is little hope. This was the tragic state of the priests in the times of Malachi.

In view of the priests offering imperfect sacrifices, Yahweh asked: "Is it not evil?" Or, "When ye bring near the blind as a sacrifice saying, no harm!" (Roth.)—or, "nothing wrong!" (Roth. mg.). This

alternative rendering represents the priests expressing their opinion. To them there was "no harm" in offering to Yahweh these polluted sacrifices. They could see "nothing wrong" in it; which would indicate that they had considered the matter and thereupon given this outrageous verdict.

When men desire to worship God they must always recognize that principles for divine worship are established by God and not by men. And once established by God they are unalterable, unless modified by Yahweh Himself. Moses taught Israel: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Yahweh your Elohim which I command you" (Deut. 4:2). The Bible concludes with this principle still not impaired: "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18–19).

In their attitude of indifference to the requirements of their God these priests displayed an irresponsible attitude. Through their dereliction of duty the nation had become alienated from Yahweh. Amos had asked the important question: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos. 3:3), while Isaiah had said: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:2).

Yahweh would not accept sacrifices that did not conform to His declared requirements. In proof of the reasonableness of His refusal He challenged the priests to present such offerings to their governor.

"Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith Yahweh Sabaoth." (v. 8)

The word "governor" has been rendered "pasha" (Roth.) from the Hebrew pechah. The word denotes a Persian official, and provides an apparent link with the book of Nehemiah; for, wherever the word "governor" occurs in Nehemiah it is always this same word.

This statement from the lips of the prophet was intended to be one of heavy irony. Let them take their imperfect sacrifices and offer them to their Persian governor. How would he react? Would he respond favourably to such an act of disrespect and indifference? To ask was to answer. The priests well knew the reaction they would receive. Surely they would understand the point of this utterance: while know-

ing that a mere mortal governor would reject blemished offerings, they expected the Most High God of heaven to accept them, and even expressed indignation at the suggestion that they were offending Him.

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Their attitude indicated that they thought God was not really particular, and that He was as indifferent as they were. How tragic that professing worshippers of the Most High should be reduced to such an apathetic state. The Law stated: "Thou shalt love Yahweh thy Elohim with *all* thine heart, and with *all* thy soul, and with *all* thy might" (Deut. 6:5, cp. Matt. 22:37). Which is to say: God requires of His sons and daughters that all their mental processes or intellect be devoted to His service; that the core of their inner being, their deepest affections, be offered to Him and that their actions of life be dedicated to fulfilling His will.

The heavy irony is continued into the next verse:

"Now therefore, pacify I pray you the face of God that He may grant us favour" (v. 9, Roth.).

The priests had already been made aware that this would be quite impossible, in view of their present attitude. This, then, was a rather caustic statement, appealing to the priests to examine their intercessory powers on behalf of the people. Such powers had virtually been withdrawn from them. Therefore, these words record Yahweh's strong displeasure at the attitude of His priests and the activities upon which they were engaged. In times past, when Israel had turned away from the true worship of their Creator, He had ironically called upon them to appeal to the gods they had chosen: "Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation" (Jud. 10:14). Needless to say, such an appeal on the part of Israel would be in vain. Now, what were they to do?

They were to understand that they had alienated themselves from their God through their own foolishness.

"This hath been by your means", said Yahweh. Or, "At your hands hath this come to pass" (Roth.). The priests were responsible to guide the people into the pathway of true worship, and therefore they were largely responsible for the laxness and indifference which Yahweh observed at this time.

Although they were carrying out a form of ritualistic worship in the Temple, Yahweh required above all else that both priests and people display an attitude of humble repentance and turn towards Him in the spirit of the truth. Jeremiah had to speak under similar circumstances:

"Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of Yahweh your God; and Yahweh will repent Him of the evil that He hath pronounced against you" (Jer. 26:13).

If their attitude was not right, should God recognize these priests, or their offerings? The question was asked: "Will He regard your persons, saith Yahweh Sabaoth?" (v. 9)

The priests were not only to represent the people, but also Yahweh. It was as though God asked them: "Do you really believe that you have standing and position in the eyes of God, and that He should acknowledge you as worthy representatives of God and man?" A deeper question is implied: "What sort of person will Yahweh regard?" Had they consulted their great prophet Isaiah, they would readily have found an answer to this question: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. 66:2).

What a person **is**, morally and spiritually, determines whether or not they are acceptable to God. This must inevitably be the deciding factor in Yahweh's acceptance or rejection of those who would wish to become His sons and daughters. Isaiah's words condemn the philosophy that "all men stand equal before God". They do not.

There is a certain class of humanity who will be received and acknowledged by the Most High and Isaiah describes them. They will be "poor and of a contrite spirit". The first of these words signifies "poor" or "lowly", while the second means "to be smitten". Such men and women are humbled by their sinful state and acknowledge their need of forgiveness and redemption. They are also aware that their sinful state is related to the Adamic nature which they bear, and which has been "smitten" to become death-stricken and corruptible. Because of this knowledge they "tremble" and "careth anxiously" (Roth.) for God's word. They look upon Yahweh as their Saviour, their one source of hope to bring about their redemption. "To this man will I look", said God, but not to any other. Hence the words of the Psalmist: "They that know Thy Name will put their trust in Thee: for Thou, Yahweh, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee" (Psa. 9:10).

"Will He regard your persons?" is a question which all worshippers of the Deity must ask themselves. "Examine yourselves", counselled the apostle Paul, "whether ye be in the faith..." (2 Cor. 13:5).

Only by a constant process of self-examination in the light of the Scriptures can a son or daughter of God discern whether they are walking in the way of the truth.

They who worship God "must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

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In view of the unsatisfactory outcome of the dialogue which has been described in the early verses of chapter one, Yahweh now made known to the priests that they would be removed from their office and the Temple doors would be closed against them.

But would this not mean that worshippers would be deprived of the avenue through which they should worship their God? By no means. On the contrary, God made it quite clear that He did not depend upon these Levitical priests to serve those who would worship Him. There would, in fact, come a time when Yahweh's Name would be "great among the Gentiles", and incense would be offered unto His Name "in every place".

Malachi conveyed Yahweh's final warning to the Levitical priests:

"Oh, is there no one among you who will shut the doors and stop you from lighting useless fires on my altar? I am not pleased with you, says Yahweh Sabaoth; from your hands I find no offerings acceptable" (JB). This rendering appears to largely follow the LXX, which reads: "Because even among you the doors shall be shut, and one will not kindle the fire of my altar for nothing, I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord Almighty, and I will not accept a sacrifice at your hands." Certainly, the AV is most difficult to follow, and it would appear that there are some grounds for accepting this alternative rendering. It is based upon an ancient MSS. which contains "ki" (surely) instead of "mi" (who), which alters the sense of the passage considerably.

It is certain that the verse is prophetic of the events of A.D. 70, when the Temple would be effectively shut against the Levitical priests with the total destruction of the Temple. Then, a new priesthood would arise, based upon the principles of faith. The priesthood was to be "changed" (Heb. 7:12). Disciples of Christ have become established as "an holy priesthood… a royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:5, 9); and as such they shall "reign on the earth" in the day of Messiah's Kingdom (Rev. 5:9–10).

Who was there among the priests, asked Yahweh, who would prevent the evil practices which were being perpetrated in the Temple services in the Name of Yahweh? In view of the silence with which the question was greeted, the answer appears to have been entirely negative; there were no priests prepared to listen to the exhortation of the prophet and begin urgent moves towards a spiritual reformation.

Therefore, it would be necessary for God to take action in the matter. He says, in effect: "I will shut you out of my Temple!"

All who have now been declared priests, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, should be warned by the reality of this prophecy and the terrible actuality of its eventual fulfilment. The same fate as befell these priests must surely await all priests of Yahweh who defile the temple of God with perverted or impure sacrifices. In this regard, believers in this present dispensation must remember that they have not been designated "priests" but also the temple in which God's glory must dwell (1 Cor. 3:16–17).

A grave responsibility rests upon those who would become servants of the Most High God. While rejoicing in "the hope of Israel" and the glorious promises which Yahweh has made concerning the future, they must be aware of their obligations and responsibilities as both sons and servants (1:6) of the living God. The priests of Malachi's day felt secure in their standing as sons of God, but failed to respect their responsibilities and obligations.

Inevitably, the "doors" of the Temple would be closed against them. Which meant that their entire concept of Temple services would cease and be swept away. With what horror might they be expected to receive such a warning! Yet the evidence would indicate that they remained unmoved.

No wonder Yahweh said: "I have no pleasure in you". What a dreadful verdict this was. Here was a tragic situation: a people who had been called to become sons and daughters of Yahweh were now informed that they had alienated themselves from their God. He had turned away from them. Their attempts at worship were in vain. "Neither will I accept an offering at your hand." Their sacrifices were rejected. What a powerful lesson they should have learned from this decision. Because sacrifices are offered to Yahweh it does not necessarily follow that He must accept them. Again the prophet is emphasizing that it is necessary to offer to Yahweh that which He has stipulated; and the offerings must be made in a manner which accords with His declared will.

"Yahweh taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy" (Psa. 147:11). These words beautifully describe a class of humanity who have absolute reverence for Yahweh, and what He represents; and like faithful, obedient children they have positive confidence in His ability to guide them and lead them to salvation.

But if those elements of faith and surrender are absent, Yahweh takes no pleasure in such offerings. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith Yahweh: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats... And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood" (Isa. 1:11, 15). Why did Isaiah describe Israel's state in such dreadful terms? Because they had "forsaken Yahweh" (Isa. 1:4). Therefore, in the days of Malachi, the divine pronouncement was made:

"Neither will I accept an offering at your hand" (v. 10).

An important aspect of Malachi's message is conveyed in this statement. The word rendered "offering" is the Hebrew *minchah*, which has been termed "a bloodless sacrifice" (Ges.). Whenever Malachi used the word "offering" it was, with only one exception, always the word *minchah*. The only exception is found in chapter 3, verse 8, where the word is *terumah*, and signifies the heave offering. *Minchah* means the meal offering. The heave offering was very similar to the meal offering, in symbolic significance.

The meal offering was compulsorily offered with the burnt offering and the peace offering; the first and last in the sacrificial code; and as such the *minchah* was an apt sacrifice to represent the entire sacrificial order, from beginning to end. The meal offering always symbolized the work of a man's hands; for he had to carefully and thoroughly prepare the offering, performing the labour himself, using those things which he had produced out of the ground by his personal efforts. The association of this sacrifice with the burnt and peace offerings was quite important in its symbolic teaching. The burnt offering symbolized a life dedicated to Yahweh—and such was not possible without the personal effort and sacrifices of the one who so desired to dedicate his life to his God. Similarly, the peace offering symbolized fellowship with God, and by including the *minchah*, or meal offering, a vital principle was established. In desiring fellowship with God, an individual must dedicate himself and his labours to that end.

Thus, on the question of offerings, the meal offering was the prime issue between the prophet and the priests. Not only were they abusing the demands of the Law, but there was a grave questioning on the part of Yahweh as to whether the spirit of the meal offering was being observed: were these priests—and by extension, the people—dedicating the fruits of their labours unto God? There was strong

evidence that they were failing to do so. They were offering only those animals which were of little value to themselves (v. 13), offerings which even their Persian governor would be certain to reject (v. 8). The meal offering taught that Yahweh required practical actions which would demonstrate personal sacrifice and self-denial on the part of those making their offerings to Him.

Moreover, the meal offering could never be offered in a raw state; it had always to be partially roasted—a reminder that fire is a processor and a purifier. Wheat, the very best of the harvest, was to be used; and used in its most select form: fine flour, which symbolized striving towards perfection of service to Yahweh. The offering was then to be anointed and permeated with oil; showing that all labours put forth in service to God must be influenced by God's spirit—the spirit-word.

There was no good reason why Yahweh should have accepted the meal offerings at this time; because the principle which they symbolized was being ignored or treated with casual indifference. The priests and people of Israel were not striving towards perfection in their service to God; nor were they earnestly endeavouring to direct their worship according to the guiding light of the spirit-word. This was why Yahweh's statement of rejection was so emphatic. "Neither will I accept an offering —minchah—at your hand."

But God's purpose would not fail because of the failure of men.

"For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my Name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my Name, and a pure offering: for my Name shall be great among the heathen, saith Yahweh Sabaoth" (v. 11).

These priests were to understand that Yahweh was not dependent upon them for the realization of His purpose. Some 400 years later John the Baptist was to press home the same lesson to leaders of the nation: "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matt. 3:9).

Malachi's words now attain extraordinary heights of beauty and embody the very essence of "the hope of Israel". The opening phrase: "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same..." speaks eloquently of the universality of divine worship in the age to come: a form of worship not restricted to those who could prove their fleshly descent from Abraham, but embracing men of goodwill

throughout all nations. There appears to be an allusion to Psalm 113: "From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same Yahweh's Name is to be praised. Yahweh is high above all nations, and His glory above the heavens" (vv. 3–4). Psalm 22 also conveys similarly majestic thoughts: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto Yahweh: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the kingdom is Yahweh's: and He is the governor among the nations" (vv. 27–28).

Every phrase in Malachi 1:11 is awe-inspiring: "My Name shall be great among the Gentiles". How would the priests receive such an announcement with their conception of Jewish exclusiveness? Yahweh was looked upon as exclusively a Jewish God. But Israel would eventually learn that His purpose would be extended far beyond "the borders of Israel" (v. 5; cp. Zech. 14:9; Psa. 72:18–19; Isa. 59:19; Mic. 5:4). The divine glory would be manifested in Israel (Isa. 44:21–23) and then in all the earth (Num. 14:21). The glory was to be manifested through the Lord Jesus Christ and his immortalized, spiritenergized saints; for in them shall be seen the divine likeness. They shall go forth to manifest the character and the power of Yahweh among all nations (Rev. 3:21; 5:10). All forms of false worship will be eradicated in that day. "For the nation and kingdom that will not serve Thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted..." (Isa. 60:12). "And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, Yahweh Sabaoth, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith Yahweh will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles" (Zech. 14:17–19).

Idolatry and false religion will be extirpated in the grand reforms to be initiated and established by Christ and his saints. Parents will take extreme action against sons who attempt to pervert truth: "I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land. And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him... shall thrust him through when he prophesieth. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed..." (Zech. 13:2–4). As incredible as these words might appear in the light of current standards, when words and deeds which are evil and corrupt and God-

dishonouring are either condoned or openly endorsed, Zechariah stressed the point that error, in all spiritual and moral matters, will be looked upon with utter abhorrence, and will be totally repudiated. There will be no "reappraisal" of prophecy in that day, nor will attempts to subvert the purity of the truth be tolerated. When the light of divine truth floods the earth, people will voluntarily surrender the follies and errors in which they had previously delighted, and they will voluntarily seek the way that leads to life. "Our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit... let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths..." (Jer. 16:19; Isa. 2:3).

What a contrast this would prove to be when compared with the type of religious worship offered to Yahweh in the days of Malachi! Surely these words were designed to make these priests carefully consider their own position at that time. But what effect did these words have upon the priests to whom Malachi addressed himself? Sadly, they remained unmoved. The message made no impression upon them. The word of God was not "living" and "energetic" within them; therefore it did not bring about the change which God sought to produce within them.

If only they had become moved by the word of Yahweh! What an awesome picture of the future was presented to these people; a future in which they could have hoped to take part. But they remained in a state of ignorance and indifference, pursuing their self-centred lives and following a religious life which they found convenient to their circumstances and desires.

There would, however, be men and women who would humbly respond to the teaching of Yahweh, and who would rejoice at the glorious future which God will eventually bring to pass.

"And in every place incense shall be offered unto my Name." (v. 11)

The first four words of this sentence should have stimulated these priests to an immediate response. They gloried in their possession of one place, and only one: the Temple at Jerusalem. To these Jews, it would have been unthinkable that God could manifest Himself in any other place. Yet, had they paused to consider the question, they might have recognized that Yahweh's glory had never been restricted to the four walls of one building. Stephen, in Acts chapter 7, expounded the Scriptures to establish that truth. There were numerous instances in

Israel's history which should have caused them to think deeply upon this matter. Yahweh's glory had not been restricted to the ark (1 Sam. 4); it had not been bound to one family of priests (1 Sam. 2); neither had it been restricted to the tabernacle (Psa. 78:59–64); and the divine presence had certainly not been limited to the Temple (Jer. 7).

The Temple in which these Jews placed their confidence was to be destroyed; the power and authority vested in the Aaronic priesthood was to be abolished; the people of Israel would be bereft of the means of worshipping Yahweh after the traditions which had been established for so long. Yahweh's glory would remain. His purpose would continue to unfold. Eventually His glory would be manifested in all the earth in a way far beyond the comprehension of these Jews.

Incense is a symbol for prayer emanating from a heart that is justified in God's eyes (Psa. 141:2; Luke 1:10; Rev. 5:8; 8:3–4). This provides a link with the opening expression of this verse, for incense was offered upon the altar morning and evening (Exod. 30:7–8). Significantly, it was the High Priest who offered the incense morning and evening: it is therefore implied that the day will come when a High Priest who is wholly acceptable to Yahweh will preside over the affairs of the world and over all religious observances, and that he will stand before Yahweh to offer incense in an acceptable manner. This High Priest will be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, said the prophet, a "pure offering" would be offered unto Yahweh. This term contrasts with the "polluted" offerings which God was now rejecting. Israel, rejuvenated and enlightened in spiritual truths, will make acceptable offerings during the Kingdom age. The prophet later says: "Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto Yahweh, as in the days of old, and as in former years" (3:4). Such offerings will not be restricted to Israel, but will ascend from men and women throughout the earth (Zech. 14:16; Isa. 56:7; 60:7).

Verse eleven of Malachi one then, foretells an astonishing change which will transform the world. Israel will be cleansed from their iniquities, and their blindness will be removed; gentiles everywhere will worship their Creator in spirit and in truth; prayer will ascend morning and evening through the intercessory powers of a High Priest in whom Yahweh delights and Yahweh's glory and His mighty works will be manifested throughout all the earth.

However, the priests of Malachi's day would not witness the ushering in of that glorious era. The opportunity to serve Yahweh in faith had been extended to them, but had been rejected.

"But", said the prophet, his thoughts wrested away from the glory of the future and back to the stark reality of the days in which he lived, "Ye have profaned it."

It was as though the prophet pointed his finger accusingly, and charged: "You have not brought glory to my Name, such as will be evidenced in the Kingdom age. Therefore I have no use for you." Disciples of Christ must not lightly dismiss these words as only applying to a generation and a people now long gone; because there is a divine principle involved in these matters, which has never changed. Consider, for instance, Christ's uncompromising warning to the ecclesia of Ephesus: "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick [i.e. lampstand] out of his place, except thou repent" (Rev. 2:5). God's purpose for those who have been "taken out of the world" during this present evil age, has been declared by Peter: They should "show forth the praises of Him or, declare the perfections of Him (Diag.)—who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). If men and women whom God has called for that purpose do not honour God's word and perform His will, why should it be thought that they should be worthy of any better reward than those of Malachi's day? These principles should be carefully deliberated upon by those who would be worshippers of Yahweh in this present age.

The words "ve have profaned it" are rendered in some ancient manuscripts as "ye have profaned me", according to Rotherham and the Companion Bible. Whether this is so or not, the point remains the same: in making impure offerings, not only is God's altar profaned, but God Himself is treated contemptuously. Such a situation creates a paradox wherein men actually profane the One whom they claim to worship (cp. Gen. 4:3–7; Lev. 10:1–3; Ezek. 36:22–26).

Principles for divine worship have been clearly defined by the Most High God of heaven—and they must be conscientiously observed if men and women are to be identified by God as acceptable worshippers.

In addition to the indifference displayed by these priests, they were also immersed in a euphoria of lethargy. "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it!" Or, "these services are troublesome" (LXX); or, "how tiresome it all is" (JB).

The word rendered "weariness" (AV) is derived from a Hebrew word meaning "distress". The root word has elsewhere been rendered "travail", "trouble", etc. It was as though they were suggesting that they inconvenienced themselves to the point of personal trouble and distress and found it all very wearying. They could see little purpose in such exercises. Yahweh, however, had already shown them, they had not really been longsuffering in worshipping their God (vv. 6-8,

Yahweh was telling them that their hearts were not in what they were offering Him. In fact, their disposition of mind was such that they looked upon divine worship as an almost intolerable burden. Therefore, their attempts at worship were merely mechanical. Their religious actions were not performed with any real zeal for truth or love for God or dedication to His cause. They deluded themselves tragically.

The dreadful indictment which had been levelled against the sons of Eli was now repeated upon a later generation: "And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore Yahweh Elohim of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now Yahweh saith, be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (1 Sam. 2:28–30; cp. Mic. 6:3; 2 Pet. 3:13–14).

"Ye have snuffed at it, saith Yahweh Sabaoth." Thus God censured the priests for the contempt they had exhibited towards Him. Rotherham claims that ancient manuscripts read: "at me" rather than "at it". He maintains that the original wording had been changed by the Sopherim because it had been too derogatory towards Yahweh! The word rendered "snuffed" more literally means "to puff; to blow hard; to scatter". Thus a further horrifying crime was added to the charges already levelled against the faithless priests: they had flouted Yahweh's goodness and mercy by churlishly "blowing" His kindnesses back into His face.

An intolerable situation existed, which God could not be expected to endure. In their state of laxity, they brought "the torn, and the lame, and the sick" (v. 13).

Again it should be remembered that when a man presented himself before Yahweh with an offering, the sacrifice was intended to be a token of the offerer. In Malachi's day, the state of these animals reflected accurately the spiritual state of the offerers: they offered the "torn", which symbolized their own spiritually blemished state; they offered the "lame", indicating that they were not walking uprightly in the way of the truth; and they offered the "sick", which inferred that the offerers were in an "unhealthy" spiritual state. Every servant of the Living God needs to constantly examine his or her life in the light of the sober lessons taught in these verses.

In view of these circumstances, it should come as no surprise that Yahweh should ask: "Should I accept this of your hand?"

The Law answered in the negative (Lev. 22:20); and even the exercise of basic common logic would produce a similar answer. This probing question from God requires careful pondering. Men and women expect a great deal from their Creator: the forgiveness of their sins; His constant care and protection; and eternal life in His Kingdom. But should He not be entitled to expect something in return? He asks that His sons and daughters dedicate their lives to Him which is not unreasonable. It is, in fact "your reasonable service", says the apostle Paul (Rom. 12:1).

The first chapter of Malachi concludes with a final pronouncement against those who misused or abused the sacrificial code, and contains a final word concerning the majesty of God. "But accursed is he that defraudeth, who when there is in his flock a male yet voweth and sacrificeth a corrupt thing to the Lord" (Roth.).

The reference is to the vow offering: a sacrifice made in fulfilment of a pledge. It was one of the peace offerings, and therefore represented the offerer as seeking fellowship with Yahweh (Lev. 7:16; 22:23; Num. 30:2, cp. Ecc. 5:4). The vow offering, like other sacrifices, was not to be treated lightly: "When thou shalt vow a vow unto Yahweh thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for Yahweh thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee" (Deut. 23:21).

Christ's brethren have vowed a vow (Rom. 6:16; Luke 16:13) to serve their God and to walk in the way of the truth. God always remains faithful and true to His word, and He requires the same attitude

in His sons and daughters. One of the great lessons of the vow offering was that it was not sufficient for a man to desire to make such an offering: he had to offer only that which Yahweh had stipulated (Lev. 22:17–23).

The prophet cited the case of a man who had a male animal in his flock, yet offered a female—which, in this case, would have been an inferior sacrifice and was therefore termed "corrupt" or blemished. Some authorities render "a corrupt female". The LXX gives "cursed is he who was able and had in his flock a male".

The spirit in the Law cried out to every Israelite: "This is the way! Walk ye in it!" It is a spirit that has never changed (Rom. 2:7–8; 2 Cor. 10:5; Ecc. 12:13).

All it requires is that men and women bow themselves in humble submission to Yahweh; that they acknowledge His superior ways and wisdom, and seek to imitate the direction of His character and His ways.

"For I am a great King, saith Yahweh Sabaoth, and my Name is dreadful among the heathen" (v. 14). Although an inspiring statement, it contains an element of irony; for while Israel would submit reverentially to the demands of a fleshly ruler (v. 8), they treated the Mighty One of the heavens with scant indifference. Yahweh should be revered above all. The time will come when men and women everywhere will conduct their lives according to that principle.

"Teach me Thy way, O Yahweh; I will walk in Thy truth: unite my heart to fear Thy Name. I will praise thee, O LORD my God with all my heart: and I will glorify Thy Name for evermore" (Psa. 86:11–12).

PART TWO: A FAITHLESS PRIESTHOOD

Levi's Fine Example Ignored

2:1-4

Having confronted the priests and pointed out some of the grave areas of contention which existed between Yahweh and His people, God proceeded to outline the remedial action which should be taken by the priests if they were to restore themselves and the people to divine favour.

"And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my Name, saith Yahweh Sabaoth, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart." (v. 1–2).

These words, while perhaps giving an impression of being blunt and harsh, are, in reality, words of great tenderness. For, Yahweh desired to save these people from their sins; and had He not been prepared to set about that task, the book of Malachi would never have been written. In the opening words of chapter two Yahweh pleaded with the priests to "give glory" to God's Name. He implored them to consider their position, and lovingly offered to guide them back to their God.

They were to "hear" the word of God, and "lay it to heart". Surely the inference is clear: it is not sufficient to "hear" the word, it must be received into the heart, into the inner being of the individual from whence it will become the motivating power to direct a person's life in a way that will "give glory" to the name of Yahweh. The words are based upon the Law (Deut. 28:1; Hos. 9:17; cp. Matt. 7:24–26). The Lord Jesus warned against a superficial, theoretical knowledge of the truth: "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Matt. 15:8; cp. Isa. 29:13).

Reference to God sending a "curse" if they failed to heed His warning, strengthens the allusion here to Deuteronomy (See 27:26; 28:15). The phrase is better rendered "then will I send *the* curse" (RV); or, "I will send among you *the* curse" (Roth.). That is, the curse promised in the Law, a curse which would be sent if Israel failed to honour the terms of their covenant with Yahweh.

In refusing to grant divine favour, God would "curse" their "blessings". No doubt the reference is to the "blessings" which the covenant promised, in return for faithfulness. But there may also be an allusion to the manner in which the priests, acting for Yahweh, were to pronounce a blessing upon the people (Lev. 9:22–23; Num. 6:22–27). To be blessed in the truth and watched over by Almighty God, is a wonderful state—a state known and experienced by God's faithful servants. Such blessings should be humbly appreciated. They should never be taken lightly; nor should it be assumed that blessings will continue to flow from God, irrespective of the spiritual and moral state of His people.

In fact, God had "cursed" their blessings "already". The prophet alludes to the fact that the land was in a state of drought and the people were experiencing great hardship (3:9; cp. Hag. 1:6–11; Deut. 28:38–39). Priests and people were to see that these difficult conditions had been brought about through their own faithlessness.

The remedy was within their grasp: "Lay it to heart..." Heed the message of the prophet; turn again unto Yahweh in spirit and in truth; put aside every evil way; love God and His truth; remember the terms of the covenant.

"I will corrupt your seed", said Yahweh.

In view of the reference to the curse which was already upon them, this was no doubt intended as a primary reference to the "seed" which was in the ground, and which was not productive because of the dreadful drought conditions. But the RV renders the word "corrupt" as "rebuke", so rendered by the AV in 3:11. The word occurs fourteen times in the Old Testament, and this is the only passage where it is rendered "corrupt". In all other places it is rendered "rebuke" or "rebuked", except in Jer. 29:27, where it has been rendered "reproved". Hence, the RSV renders: "I will rebuke your offspring". While Yahweh would "rebuke" the seed in the ground, preventing good harvests, He would direct the full force of His censure against the descendants of these priests, thus threatening the continuity of the priesthood.

God would take "the dung of [their] solemn feasts..." and spread it upon their faces.

As the prophet uttered these words, the priests would conjure up in their minds a horrifying picture of this actually happening. Such a situation would seem to them to be beyond belief. The dung of the sacrificial victims was to be taken outside the camp and burned, sym-

bolizing a repudiation of sin. These priests, however, had not repudiated sin; they were justifying themselves in their sinful state. Thus, it was as though God was saying: "If that is what you want, I will give it to you!"

It should be noted that Yahweh refers to "your" solemn feasts. They were not His feasts; He disclaimed any relationship to these evil practices.

If, then, the priests would not "hear" and "lay it to heart", God would see that a power would be manifested which would "take" them "away". This appears to be an extension of the earlier denunciation contained in 1:10. This fearful prophecy was fulfilled in AD 70 when the Temple was destroyed, thus dismissing the priests from their office. They were taken "away" by the Romans, in fulfilment of this dire warning which had gone unheeded. They had defiled Yahweh's Temple and His altar; therefore they would be treated as the offal and refuse left over from the sacrifices. They would be taken "away", out of the camp, and burned with the fire of divine judgment.

"And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you", said Yahweh. They would "know" by personal and bitter experience—a dreadful and calamitous experience which they need not have known, had they humbled themselves in response to the pleading of their God (cp. Deut. 18:22; Isa. 26:11; Ezek. 33:33). Let all sons and daughters of the Living God heed the spirit of this warning: there will come a day of reckoning. "But who may abide the day of His coming?" (3:2). That day which will "burn as an oven..." (4:1).

The wise will hearken submissively to the voice of their God, and walk in the way that will lead them to oneness and peace with Yahweh and His Son. "That they all may be one", was the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The prophet then spoke of the covenant which God had made with Levi. In earlier times, the priesthood had been vested in the firstborn of each family (Exod. 13:1–16). But because of the faithfulness displayed by the tribe of Levi at a grave time for Israel, when the other tribes failed to remain faithful, the privilege of priesthood passed from the firstborn and became the exclusive prerogative of the tribe of Levi (Exod. 32:26–28; Num. 3:12–13,41–45; 8:13–18; 25:5–13).

Levi means "joining", and they had "joined" themselves to Yahweh by remaining faithful and dedicated to His cause. Thus they were allotted the lofty office of "joining" the people to God (Lev. 10:11; Deut. 17:8–11).

The reason for this reference to Yahweh's covenant with Levi is clear: the prophet draws attention to the incredible contrast between the state of the Levitical tribe in the days of Moses and the state of that tribe at the time of Malachi. The deterioration was marked. There could be no dispute about it. Here is the evidence of what happens when a people no longer love the truth; no longer prize the truth; when standards of knowledge and practice are permitted to change; when indifference replaces dedication; when self-righteousness supplants humble obedience.

When men and women love God's truth, they will prize it. But when they are no longer moved by the power of God's word, even though they may continue to offer a form of worship to their Creator, they will not be concerned to maintain the standards of His truth, and a tragic state of degeneracy will result.

Yahweh desired to be served by a community of priests who would remain loyal to their priestly covenant, and who would maintain their integrity and fulfil their responsibilities. Every priest of God is to be a priest of truth; and the failings of irreverence, slovenliness, indifference, ignorance, and selfishness will rapidly sap the spirit of that divine standard.

These priests were now asked by Yahweh's prophet to let their minds return to the past; to dwell upon the characteristics of faithfulness which had resulted in the tribe of Levi being raised to the high status of priestly tribe. Levi, in the past, had been a fine example to all God's people. They could be so again, if they would heed the pleading of the prophet: "And now, O ye priests...hear...and lay it to heart...".

2:5-10

These verses eloquently describe Yahweh's great love for His priests when they are honouring Him and fulfilling His purpose. And not only so, there is set forth a most beautiful description of the characteristics which had been evidenced in the Levitical tribe, resulting in their being granted the rights of the priesthood.

"My covenant was with him", said Yahweh.

Use of the singular pronoun is not without purpose; for it indicates that, in an hour of crisis for Israel, the tribe of Levi stood up to be counted with Moses, acting as one man, with one mind and purpose. In a sense, they could have been described as "the one Body" of Levi. Similar language has been used to describe the unity between Christ and his disciples.

A covenant is a mutual agreement between two or more parties, and it implies that obligations and responsibilities are incumbent upon the parties involved. Israel had been taught by Moses that if they honoured the terms of their covenant with Yahweh, He would respond by continuing to bless the nation. In regard to Yahweh's covenant with Levi, they had commenced their priestly role with a sense of responsibility and dedication, and therefore God looked back upon that period of Levi's history and spoke warmly of their loyalty and spiritual characteristics.

God had made a covenant "of life and peace" with Levi. "My covenant was with him: it stood for life and peace" (JB). The language is that of Numbers chapter 25. But these words of Malachi also appear to allude to the incident at Sinai when Israel made the golden calf when only the tribe of Levi ("all the sons of Levi") responded to Moses' cry: "Who is on Yahweh's side? let him come unto me..." (Exod. 32:26).

Levi's faithfulness at that time was indelibly memorialized in Moses' final prophetic blessing to the nation:

"And of Levi he said, Give to Levi thy Thummim, and thy Urim to thy godly one, whom thou didst test at Massah, with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah: who said of his father and mother, 'I regard them not'; he disowned his brothers,

and ignored his children. For they observed thy word. and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy ordinances, and Israel thy law; they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt offering upon thy altar. Bless, O LORD, his substance. and accept the work of his hands; crush the loins of his adversaries. of those that hate him, that they rise not again."

(Deut. 33:8–11, RSV)

The priestly covenant between God and Levi was a type of the covenant which God makes with men and women through their baptism into Christ. It typified the most exalted calling, and embodied the same promise concerning "life" and "peace"-"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life... For he (Christ) is our peace... having abolished in his flesh the enmity... so making peace" (Rev. 2:10; Eph. 2:14–15).

There is no power on earth which can offer to mankind a covenant to compare with that which Yahweh has offered. How will sons and daughters of the Living God respond to such a lofty calling? In every age and generation this question must be considered, and should act as a stimulant to serious self-examination.

Levi was granted this special covenant relationship with God because he "feared" Yahweh—a word which signifies "fear, dread, awe or reverence". It is certainly true that God's servants should love Him and have an implicit, childlike faith in His ability to save and redeem them; but it is also true that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God" and that "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 10:31; Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29).

Such deep and awesome reverence was one of the characteristics of the Levitical tribe which had brought Yahweh's commendation.

"He feared me, and was afraid before my Name."

"He respected me, and stood in awe of my Name" (JB); or, more literally: "And he did revere me, and before my Name dismayed was he" (Roth.). The latter rendering emphasizes the extent of humility which the men of Levi had manifested before their God. They were "dismayed" at their own sinful state and their utter inability to deliver themselves from sin and death. They were "dismayed" at their own comparative nothingness when they considered the holiness and

righteousness and majesty of their great God. The first principle of all priestly duties must be the attitude displayed towards Yahweh.

Thus, with an attitude of genuine humility towards their God, the tribe of Levi had "the law of truth" in "his mouth" (v. 6). The Hebrew word Torah is derived from a root meaning "to teach" or "to flow forth as water", and therefore means "instruction, doctrine, law" (Ges.). Hence: "the teaching of truth was in his mouth" (JB). This statement appears to be a direct reference to Deuteronomy: "And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near; for them Yahweh thy God hath chosen to minister unto Him, and to bless in the Name of Yahweh; and by their mouth (see mg.) shall every controversy and every stroke be tried" (21:5).

Yahweh's law "is truth" (Psa. 119:142, omit the article). But Levi had demonstrated, both at Mt. Sinai and in the plains of Moab, that God's law was not merely truth which must be known and intellectually understood, it "is truth" to be actively and faithfully manifested in the daily affairs of life. Levi had been commanded to teach these principles to Israel (Lev. 10:8-11), however God's contention in the days of Malachi was that these priests had failed to do this. The problem was partly due to their general lethargy and indifference, but also to their ignorance of divine truth.

The question arises: 'What happens when Yahweh appoints individuals to represent His voice to the people, and they fail to honour that obligation?' The answer is that truth languishes. Or, as Isaiah says: "truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil is accounted mad" (59:15, mg.).

People "perish" because they have "no vision" (Prov. 29:18). And that was happening in the days of Malachi.

In an attempt to reconcile these priests to a true and proper relationship with their God, Levi's fine example in the past was stressed.

"...Iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with Me in peace and equity..." (v. 6).

The men of Levi had spoken about the truth, without fear or favour. The word of their lips had not been the "smooth things" (Isa. 30:10) which appeal to the flesh, but the pure words of divine truth. By this means, the people of Israel would have been led to a correct understanding of the truth. "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment" (Psa. 37:30).

Iniquity, or "perverseness" (Roth.), had not been in evidence in the character of Levi when Yahweh chose them to become the priestly tribe (Deut. 17:8-11; 19:16-20); therefore they "walked" in unity with God. This is the same Hebrew word used of Enoch and Noah, when the Scriptures testify that those two worthies of old had "walked" with God. When used in this context, the idea is presented of those who are at one with God, who walk in close harmony with Him and are constantly aware of His continuing presence. Thus Malachi asserted that the priestly tribe, in a period of history now long past, had not only defended and taught the truth in its purity, but had exhibited a way of life which was in harmony with their God. The principle set forth in these words finds an echo in the prayer of Zacharias, when he expressed the hope that God's servants might "serve" God "in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life" (Luke 1:75). Surely a wonderful definition of the aim and attitude of a true priest.

Levi's tribe had served God "in peace and equity". Or, "in welldoing and uprightness" (Roth.). The complete phrase speaks of fellowship with Yahweh through knowing and walking in the truth. What more wonderful verdict could be pronounced upon men of faith?

Because of the faithfulness described in these words, Levi "did turn many away from iniquity". This is a statement worthy of careful meditation. It should be remembered that at Sinai, when the moment of decision came, Levi "put every man his sword by his side" and went "throughout the camp" slaying those responsible for the apostasy and depravity which Yahweh had condemned. They slew 3,000 men (Exod. 32:27-28). Later, in the plains of Moab, a total of 24,000 Israelites perished for their folly. However, Phinehas turned Yahweh's wrath away by thrusting through, with a javelin, a man of Israel and one of the daughters of Moab. The words now quoted must be considered in the light of those events: Levi "did turn many away from iniquity". If it be asked: how did he do so? The answer comes readily from the word of God: by taking immediate action of which Yahweh fully approved. It should be observed that although the action taken by the Levites may have appeared to be harsh and hard, in fact the action represented a total and uncompromising loyalty to the things of Almighty God. Would "smooth things" have saved the day for Israel in those two tragic incidents? The principle set forth by John applied most aptly to Levi: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). In Isaiah's 50

time, as in the days of Malachi, the people of God were inclined to say: "Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (Isa. 30:11). But Levi had rejected such philosophy and had stood steadfastly in defence of the standards of Yahweh.

Malachi 2:5–6 contain six wonderful attributes which were manifested by the tribe of Levi:

- 1. They held Yahweh in great reverence.
- 2. They glorified Yahweh's Name in proper and appropriate ways.
- 3. They kept the law of truth in their mouths.
- 4. Perverseness of spirit or iniquity was not found in their lips.
- 5. They walked with Yahweh in peace and equity, or "in well-doing and uprightness" (Roth.).
- 6. By their own faithfulness and the standards they maintained, they caused many to turn away from iniquity and follow an example of faithfulness.

The tribe of Levi, from those far-off days, remains engraven upon the tablets of history as a shining example of the characteristics which God delights to see manifested in those who have been called to serve Him.

Having set before the faithless priests of Malachi's day these outstanding qualities which had previously been manifested by their forefathers, Yahweh now pointed out the primary responsibility which rested upon His priests: "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge..." (v. 7, Roth.)

The priests were to study the Law carefully and meticulously, and then to teach it to others, faithfully and without compromise. Without sound knowledge the priests could never worship Yahweh as He required, nor would they be able to lead the people towards fellowship with their God.

These challenging words illustrate the need, in every generation, for sound and faithful shepherds to lead the flock of God. "It is required in stewards that a man be faithful", counselled the apostle Paul; a requirement of God which must be unequivocally acknowledged. "For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ..." (1 Cor. 4:2; Gal. 1:10).

Under such circumstances, the people of God have little to fear providing their own hearts are right with God.

"They should seek the law at his mouth..." (v. 7).

This is a reference to Deuteronomy 17:9–11. The people could have every confidence in the direction and guidance they would receive, when led by faithful men who correctly understood the word of God and courageously upheld its teaching.

It should be observed, however, that this statement placed an obligation not only upon the priests but also upon the people: "they should seek the law at his mouth..." Malachi was here setting forth the ideal that there should be priests who were knowledgeable, loyal, and dedicated; and Yahweh's flock should respond by honouring such faithful leaders, learning the truth under their guidance, and endorsing the principles of faith which such priests would uphold.

These responsibilities were to be realized by both priests and people because Levi was "the messenger of Yahweh Sabaoth".

They were the direct representatives of God, therefore a tremendous weight of responsibility rested upon them.

What of the priests of Malachi's day? They were no longer meditating or acting according to these principles. Because of ignorance and indifference they had lapsed into a form of religious service which they felt suited their times and circumstances. They no longer prized the word of God, therefore they no longer loved it. There is surely a compelling lesson to be absorbed from the disastrous spiritual conditions which existed in God's ecclesia (Acts 7:38) in the days of Malachi.

Now, the priests were again informed concerning their true condition:

"Ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith Yahweh Sabaoth" (v. 8).

This was a terrible indictment. The prophet indicates in this verse that they were without excuse. The word "way" signifies "a road trodden" and means that the path in which they should have walked was already established and stretched out before them. "Stand ye in the ways!" cried Jeremiah, "and see and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein..." (Jer. 6:16). The word of God was always there, to guide and direct them. "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isa. 30:21). Faithful men have ever been conscious of their needs in this regard. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if

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there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa 139 23–24)

However, this was not the spirit of the priests in the days of Malachi Because of their own waywardness they had "caused many to stumble at the law"

When the people came face-to-face with the Law, so to speak, the lethargy and ignorance of the priests resulted in capricious reasoning which led the people to sin Therefore, these priests had "corrupted the covenant of Levi" A word is used here which has the additional meaning of "to cause or bring about ruin, through decay". It is the same word as used in Genesis 6.12, to state that, in the days of Noah, "all flesh had corrupted" God's "way" upon the earth. The way of the truth had been brought to ruination because it had "decayed" in the hearts of men

The correct spirit is again apparent in the Psalms "I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep Thy word I have not departed from Thy judgments for Thou hast taught me How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Thy precepts I get understanding therefore I hate every false way" (Psa 119 101–104)

How wretchedly these priests had failed to honour these wonderful, life-giving principles. They had been called upon to blend together the elements of faith and obedience to God's commands, and to call upon the people to follow in their steps. They had not done so Is it any wonder, then, that God should tell them.

"Therefore have I also made you contemptible, and base before all the people " (v 9)?

"Contemptible" is the same word which appears in chapter one, verse seven, and is, in effect, a play on words "As you have made my altar contemptible, so I will cause you to be looked upon in the same light" This judgment, in its full measure, came upon the nation in fulfilment of the terms provided in the Sinaitic covenant (Deut 28 64–67), although Yahweh here speaks of it as though it were an accomplished fact (cp. Rom. 4 17)

The priests were to be made "base before all the people" Thus the priesthood would be humiliated instead of honoured—the same treatment that these priests had meted out to their God

During the ministry of Micah the same charge was laid against the leading men in Israel "The heads thereof judge for reward, and the

priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money yet will they lean upon Yahweh, and say, Is not Yahweh among us? none evil can come upon us" (Mic 3 11)

Malachi said that judgment would come upon them because they had not "kept" God's "ways" and they had been "partial in the law" (29) Or, "have had respect of persons in the law" (RV), "have shown partiality in your administration" (JB) This is a reference to Deut 117, which said "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment." James took up these words, and added a comment to describe the inevitable outcome when justice and judgment is perverted. "Is it not plain that in your hearts, you have little faith, seeing that you have become judges full of wrong thoughts?" (Jas 21–4, Wey)

An imperative call had gone forth from the lips of Malachi "O ye priests, this command is for you!" (2.1) It was a call for spiritual and moral reformation in which the priests were reminded that the life of a true priest is to walk in harmony with Yahweh If that call was not heeded, a corrupting process would continue and grow, until eventually the very survival of the truth would be endangered. The curse of God would become effective, and ripen until the judgments of God came upon an ignorant and indifferent people.

Part two of the prophecy concludes with an impassioned plea from the prophet, who entreated the entire nation

"Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?" (v 10)

Thus this man of God, agonizing at the state of his people, called upon them to recognize and honour their relationship to Yahweh and one another. He implored them to become joined together in the unity of the spirit (cp. Eph. 4 l-13)

For the first time he used the all-embracing "we" He thus identified himself with the Jewish nation, confessing that they were his brethren. He acknowledged that virtually the entire nation, apart from a remnant (3 16–17), were guilty of crimes against Yahweh. They had corrupted the covenant and were openly committing acts of evil and vice which were abhorrent to their God. The words of this verse appear almost as though wrung from the heart of the prophet in an anguished, tortured outburst of pent-up agony as the full impact of the true state of the nation was impressed upon him "Have we not all one father?" he cried

Again, there was a reference to the book of Deuteronomy (32:5–6, 15–20) and also a reminder of what Yahweh had already said through Malachi (1:6). If only the nation had been prepared to hear the words of the prophets: "For Thou art our Father, though Abraham knew us not, and Israel could not acknowledge us, —Thou O Yahweh art our Father, Our Redeemer from the Age-past time is Thy Name. Wherefore shouldest Thou suffer us to wander, O Yahweh, from Thy ways? Wherefore shouldest Thou let us harden our heart past revering Thee?" (Isa. 63:16–17, Roth.).

Isaiah's words were reverentially reminding Yahweh of the way in which children were dependent upon their parent, and that a loving father has the special care and interest of his children always in mind. Such a father has a warm and tender interest in the welfare of his offspring.

Malachi was not speaking of all mankind, but of the nation of Israel. They were the national son of God (Exod. 4:22; Hos. 11:1). As such each member of the nation was to become, individually, a son of God by reflecting the moral and spiritual likeness of his heavenly parent. Yahweh is a wise and loving Father, and He will continue to show love and tenderness towards His children up to the point where He can no longer achieve anything with them.

How, then, does a loving parent feel when he sees his children treading more and more resolutely in a path that will lead them to certain disaster? Does he not cry out to them? Does he not plead with them, until they are no longer listening?

A special bond exists between a loving father and his children. It is sometimes said that the love of a mother for her children is greater than that of a father; and perhaps this is so in some respects, especially in relation to emotional ties. But a loving father feels a special kind of close attachment to his children, such as he feels for no other creatures.

Yahweh is such a Father and Malachi implored his brethren to grasp the importance of this.

"Hath not one God created us?" argued the prophet. Yahweh had created them, not only in a literal and physical sense, but also in a spiritual sense. David, aware that he had marred the likeness of Yahweh's character within himself, through sin, pleaded: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psa. 51:10). The Hebrew word, *bara*, translated as "create" in the psalm, is the same as that used by Malachi. Isaiah declared that God's purpose

would be to "create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind". A reference back to Isaiah 1:2 clearly shows that "heavens" and "earth" are used in a symbolic sense. So that which will be created will be a multitude of spiritually minded men and women, fit to rule the earth with God's Son (Isa. 65:17). A literal heaven and earth was not what Isaiah had in mind, in these verses.

Bara has other meanings beside that of "create". The primary meaning is "to cut, to carve out, to form by cutting..." Hence, similar ideas, by extension: "To make smooth, to polish, hence to fashion, to create..." (Ges.). These meanings should be understood in terms of God's purpose to "create" in a spiritual sense. The initial type is found in Gen. 2:7, where it is said that God "formed man of the dust of the ground..." The word rendered "formed" is better understood as "moulded", and having moulded the shape of the man, as it were, God breathed "into his nostrils the breath of life". The typical significance of this was emphasized by Christ when he "breathed" on his disciples and sent them forth to teach and manifest the truth (John 20:22). The type, based unquestionably upon Genesis 2:7, was taken up by the prophet Jeremiah in his parabolic teaching concerning "the potter" and "the clay" (Jer. 18). The prophets made the point that, as God had physically formed and moulded man, so He desired to further that work in a spiritual sense. Yahweh strives to "cut, to carve out, to make smooth, to polish, to create" men and women into His own spiritual and moral likeness.

The nation of Israel had been chosen for this special spiritual purpose. They discerned that they had been "chosen" in a national sense, but very few understood that God had chosen them to know, understand, and imitate the divine character, so that they would become "sons" of God in the fullest possible sense.

This is surely the real impact that the prophet's question was designed to make: "Hath not one God created us?"

How many would thoughtfully meditate upon the significance of the prophet's question?

In the light of the fact that they all had one Father and that one God had created them—in a spiritual as well as a physical sense—the prophet found it difficult to understand why his people should so disregard the principles involved: "Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?" (v. 10)

Not only were they lacking in faithfulness towards God, they also showed little fidelity among themselves. The nation should have been united. The Fatherhood of Yahweh was not merely assertive of His Lordship and authority but should also have constituted the people of Israel as the one "family" of God. Malachi's fellow Israelites had moral and spiritual obligations towards one another. But such were not being honoured. Their lack of understanding concerning the demands which the truth made upon them was of a broad and general nature. They were not only ignorant of their responsibilities to their God, but also of their duties towards one another. The prophet now proceeded to show that the men of Israel were largely dominated by self-interest and the pursuit of selfish desires.

If they were indifferent in their attitude towards their God, would they not also be of a similar mind in their dealings with one another?

Such weaknesses of character are common in communities where the restraining power and guidance of God's word is not in evidence. Micah strongly condemned the same attitude: "The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among man: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net. That they may do evil with both hands...and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire...For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter in law against her mother in law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house" (Mic. 7:2–3, 6).

God's servants are required not only to honour their Creator, but to exhibit qualities of love and mercy towards one another. The Law of Moses set down clear guidelines on these matters: "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am Yahweh. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am Yahweh" (Lev. 19:16–18; cp. Matt. 19:19; Eph. 4:25; 1 Thess. 4:6).

These misdemeanours resulted in the "profaning" of "the covenant". In a sense, this is an extension of the indictment of Mal. 1:12, for the Hebrew word for "profane" is the same in both places. Priests and people were therefore guilty of breaking the covenant on two grounds: failure to honour their responsibilities to Yahweh, and failure to respect their duties towards one another.

The Fatherhood of Yahweh and His creative powers must never be forgotten by God's servants. Retention of this knowledge enables men and women to remain constantly aware of the holiness and righteousness of their God, and their own sinful state from which they require to be redeemed.

With such thoughts in mind, sons and daughters of Yahweh will continually be aware of their responsibilities towards one another. Such a grand ideal is delightful to contemplate: a community or "family" of people, serving their God and one another, in the spirit of the truth.



PART THREE: A TREACHEROUS PEOPLE

Take heed to your spirit!

2:11-13

The terms of Israel's covenant with Yahweh required that they repudiate all association with gentiles (Deut. 7:1–6). The Law placed particular emphasis upon the question of marriage between Israelites and gentiles, a practice which was strictly forbidden. The only exception was when the "stranger" became proselytized into Israel.

When Israel rejected this explicit teaching of the Law it was termed "treachery".

"Judah hath dealt treacherously, And an abomination hath been wrought in Israel and in Jerusalem,—for Judah had profaned the holy place of Yahweh which He had loved, and hath taken to himself the daughter of a foreign god" (v. 11, Roth.).

There were many in Israel who had divorced their legitimate Jewish wives and married gentiles (v. 14). They had not only failed to honour the Law in this regard, but had missed the spirit of the Law because marriage between men and women in Israel was a type of the union which should have existed between Yahweh and His people. He was their husband. The relationship should have been one of mutual love and loyalty and devotion (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; 31:32). But, like a wife whose love for her husband had grown cold, Israel was manifesting a hypocritical and specious attitude towards Yahweh. Their spiritual posturing was reflected in their moral standards towards one another in that they had broken the laws concerning marriage (cp. Eph. 5:25–33). Casting aside their lawful wives, without feeling or remorse, the men of Israel were forming marriage alliances with gentile women.

This conduct was an "abomination" in God's eyes, a word which means something disgusting or abhorrent. God's servants should always give careful consideration to the way in which He will react to their behaviour. These men of Israel, confident of their standing in the eyes of Yahweh, were unaware that He was so utterly revolted and repelled by their actions. They, for their part, had not maturely examined themselves in the light of the teaching of God's word; thus, their failure was inevitable.

By their conduct they had "profaned the holiness of Yahweh".

The principle is clear: holiness means to be separate, to be sanctified, to be clean. Yahweh is all of those things and requires the same qualities in His people: "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation..." (Exod. 19:6). "Ye shall be holy men unto me..." (Exod. 22:31). "Ye shall...sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy..." (Lev. 11:44). This principle, defining the qualities of character which God desires to see in His people, has not changed since the beginning of the creation. To Cain, God said: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" (Gen. 4:7).

Malachi lamented that Israel had "profaned the holiness of Yahweh". But is there not perhaps a more personal and intimate way in which that had been done? Was it not something more than merely a national crime which had been committed? Other renderings of this phrase would indicate that such was the case. The phrase has been rendered: "Judah has profaned the sanctuary that Yahweh loves" (JB). "Judah hath profaned the holy place of Yahweh" (Roth.). These renderings place emphasis upon the fact that, by their flagrant evil conduct, Israel had defiled the Temple. The issue may be pursued further. What was the real "sanctuary" of Yahweh? Was it the building? In a certain sense, the literal Temple was to be the abidingplace of Yahweh's glory—but the glory had departed in the days of Ezekiel. Scripture makes it clear that a spiritually minded Israelite was to understand that God regarded the Tabernacle, or the Temple, as a type of every individual Israelite. As the divine glory dwelt in the Temple so the glory of His perfect character should be manifested in every Israelite (Lev. 26:11-12; cp. John 1:14). The apostle taught quite clearly that the terms used in the Law were to be understood as applying to every individual in covenant relationship with God: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?... If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy... ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them..." (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:16). Thus, as a father, Yahweh desires to see His own character manifested in His children. When such holiness is not apparent, the "holiness of Yahweh" is "profaned".

An appalling tragedy had been compounded: not only had the literal Temple become "profaned" because of faithless and corrupt actions; but in the performance of such degenerate deeds the Israelites had "defiled" the temple of God within their own hearts.

In view of such corrupt behaviour there was but one action open to them: to "take heed" to their "spirit" (vv. 15–16) by making a complete reappraisal of their lives. Every individual was called upon

to consider his waywardness, and return to walking in the light of God's word.

In speaking of the "sanctuary" being "profaned", the prophet said that God "had loved" His Temple (See Roth.). The Hebrew is in the past tense. How could He continue to love those who, though proclaiming themselves to be worshippers, did not really love Him and had turned away from Him in their hearts?

It had become a common practice for the men of Israel to marry "the daughter of a strange god". There is a play-on-words in this statement. The word rendered "married" is the Hebrew *baal*, meaning "to be master". It is almost identical to the title "Baal". The word in Malachi's text also carries the idea of "a master". So it may be implied not only that such marriages were taking place, but that the men of Israel were being dominated by their gentile wives. Such actions were being perpetrated in blatant defiance of the Law (Deut. 7:3; cp. Ezra 9:12; Neh. 13:23–28).

As has already been shown, Israel were to regard their God as a father., and the gentiles treated their gods similarly. Thus, the gentile wives chosen by men of Israel were not proselytized into the Mosaic covenant, but remained loyal to "foreign" gods (Roth.) or "alien" gods (JB).

The Scriptures abound with warnings against mixed marriages between servants of Yahweh and unconverted gentiles (Gen. 6:2; Exod. 34:16; Josh. 23:12–13). Disciples of Christ were not exempt from such warnings (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14), and must appreciate that this is a divine principle which has remained unchanged.

There can be no compromise in divine worship: "Yahweh will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar..."

According to Rotherham, this statement is an inescapable sentence which will come upon the guilty: "May Yahweh cut off from the man that doeth it..." Or: "May Yahweh cut him off..." (JB). Such a judgment must be regarded as inevitable upon all those who disregard the pathway of the truth in which they should be walking.

Again, the Law dealt explicitly with the punishment which would come upon those who taught or walked in the way of error: "As for the person who acteth with a high hand, of the native born or of the sojourners, Yahweh himself he reproacheth,—therefore shall that person be cut off out of the midst of his people. Because the word of Yahweh hath he despised, and His commandment hath he broken; that

person shall be surely cut off, his iniquity is in himself" (Num. 15:30–31, Roth.).

The "man" who did those things alleged by Malachi would be "cut off". The word for "man" is not *adam*, but *ish*, meaning "a great man; one of high degree". These guilty men of Israel may have thought themselves "great" and of "high degree" in the eyes of their God, but it was not so. It mattered not to Yahweh whether it was the "master" who taught such wrongful disregard for God's word or whether it was the "scholar" who willingly learned and practised such ungodliness. The AV margin conveys a better idea of the Hebrew phrase, but literally it should be rendered "watcher and waker" (Roth. mg.). The idiom is that of one waking another from the slumber of ignorance by the loudness of his voice. Thus, the "witness and respondent" (JB mg. cp. Isa. 9:13–16; Matt. 15:14; 2 Tim. 3:13).

How careful the people of God must be to "rightly" divide "the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Such warnings by New Testament writers are frequent—especially towards the end of the apostolic age, when the activities of false teachers were gaining momentum (see 2 Peter and Jude, in particular). Those who become teachers must ensure that they do not pervert the truth of God's word. Also those who desire to learn the truth must carefully examine all that they are taught in the light of Yahweh's word. "If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

"Masters" and "scholars" who perverted the truth of God's word would be cut off "out of the tabernacles of Jacob". This is an unusual expression to occur at this point, other than for one reason: Israel had long dwelt in "tents" (Heb., ohel), and during those times, whether in the days of the patriarchs or later when they came out of Egypt, they had been totally dependent upon their God. Yahweh had led them, and had always cared for them and provided for all their needs, so long as they remained faithful to Him. They were now being reminded of these past blessings and favours.

God would cut off false worshippers, not only because of what they taught and what they learned, but their acts of worship in themselves were abhorrent to Him: "Yahweh will cut off...him that offereth an offering unto Yahweh Sabaoth".

Once again the reference was to the meal offering. Men of Israel were coming before Yahweh's altar to present their meal offerings, yet they were not offering the fruit of their labours to their God. In effect, this was the sin of Cain who brought a "sacrifice" but not the

minchah (Gen. 4:3–5). He had been prepared to make some attempt at worship, because it was expected of him. He was not totally irreligious. However, he was not sufficiently dedicated to offer Yahweh that which He required, nor in the spirit which would have been pleasing to Him. In the days of Malachi it was the same. Lacking in a true understanding of the truth, and having embraced false teachers who tolerated a more liberal approach to divine worship, their standards of doctrine and practice had fallen disastrously.

Malachi endeavoured to establish the axiom that a merely ritualistic form of worship was not acceptable to Yahweh, because it brought no glory to Him and no spiritual growth or development in the character of the offerer. Mechanical worship is of no advantage to either God or man. Yahweh will be worshipped by those who love Him, who approach Him in a correct spirit, who honour His word with reverence and humility; and who desire to imitate the characteristics of their Heavenly Father. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect", was the standard the Lord Jesus Christ set for himself and those who would follow him (Matt. 5:48).

Having established that Yahweh had rejected their offerings, the prophet now focussed attention upon one of the major transgressions which had caused them to become alienated from God: abuse of the laws regarding marriage and family life.

"And this ye have done again, covering the altar of Yahweh with tears, with weeping and with crying out..." (v. 13).

The Hebrew is more explicit: "And this a second time will ye do" (Roth., cp. RV mg.). The reference appears to be to a repetition of these crimes from the beginning of the post-exilic restoration. The men of Israel had been quite blatant in their pursuit of these evil objectives during the time of Ezra. It had been a major issue which had culminated in an open confrontation between Ezra and his contemporaries (Ezra 10)—and although Ezra had disputed strongly upon the matter, he had not been totally successful in eradicating such violations of God's law. These practices had reappeared some years later and had to be challenged by Malachi and Nehemiah (Neh. 13:23–26).

The priests saw the altar covered with sacrifices which, they believed, showed Yahweh that Israel was religious. But Yahweh did not look upon their offerings; instead, He saw His altar covered with the tears of cast-off and rejected wives. In circumstances of dire tragedy, the women presented themselves before God, distraught and

weeping, calling upon Him to uphold their cause. Wives and children had been harshly and callously discarded. The voice of their crying and the sight of their tears were vividly real in the eyes and ears of Yahweh.

If the terminology was to be understood literally, there would be presented a picture of the priests piously going about their activities, to the accompaniment of the melodious voices of the Temple singers; while at the same time, and in stark contrast, the altar overflowed with tears, and the voices of the Temple singers would be merged with the shrieking and wailing of the heartbroken women.

Such was the drama that Malachi presented; a situation which was, in all respects, a dreadful affront to the righteousness and holiness of Yahweh. How could God possibly be expected to recognize and receive offerings which had been made under such circumstances?

Thus, Malachi stated unequivocally: "He regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with goodwill at your hand" (v. 13). Speaking as the voice of Yahweh, he was on sound, Scriptural grounds. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to Yahweh: but the prayer of the upright is His delight... The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?" (Prov. 15:8; 21:27).

How could it be otherwise? Priests and people were ignorant of the truth; they flagrantly defied divine Law; they practised injustice and treachery against one another; they remained indifferent to the pleading of God's faithful prophet.

Yahweh is not cold and aloof. He is not a God who makes impossible demands upon His people and then delights to punish them for their sins. Theologians have been known to claim that the God of the Old Testament was the harsh and vindictive "tribal God" of the ancient Hebrews; whereas the God of the New Testament is a God of love. Through Malachi, God has said: "I am Yahweh, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (3:6). The New Testament writers were in total agreement with this principle: for they describe the Deity as "The Father... who knows no change of rising and setting, who casts no shadow on the earth..." (Jas. 1:17, Moff.). God does not change. His character does not change. Malachi has soundly established that if Yahweh had not felt a tender love for His people, this wise and wonderful book of Malachi would never have been written. Yahweh is "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, for-

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giving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty..." (Exod. 34:6–7).

With all those wonderful attributes of character, He has called upon those who would be His sons and daughters to respond to His love, goodness and mercy. They are required to respect and honour His word, to love Him as a child would love a kindly, trustworthy father, and to walk before Him in the spirit of His declared truth.

When men and women fail to venerate these grand and lofty ideals, there remains only one applicable sentence: "I never knew you: depart from me..." (Matt. 7:23).

2:14-16

In rejecting the words of Yahweh, the men of Israel now crowned their infamy by continuing to justify themselves and their Goddishonouring conduct: "Yet ye say, Wherefore?" (v. 14)

This was the fourth of their eight challenges to Yahweh. Indignantly they questioned the prophet: 'Why are our offerings not acceptable? Why should Yahweh be displeased with us? Why shouldn't we divorce and remarry?' Malachi would have been astounded at such a reaction to the truth he had set before them. Jeremiah aptly described such a situation: "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall... thou refusest to be ashamed..." (Jer. 8:12; 3:3).

This fourth challenge, like the earlier ones, did not remain unanswered:

"Yahweh hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant" (v. 14).

God had closely observed the immoral and unscrupulous way of life which had been manifested by those who now audaciously challenged their God. "The eyes of Yahweh run to and fro throughout the whole earth" (2 Chron. 16:9) is a divine truth often forgotten by those who are immersed in the folly of their evil doings. "Yahweh seeth us not", they say. "Yahweh hath forsaken the earth" (Ezek. 8:12). For those who live under such strong delusion there will come a day "that shall burn as an oven" when foolishness and indifference to God's word will have its reward.

Yahweh had not overlooked the evidence: men who claimed to be sons of God had not matched their claim with performance. God had witnessed them bringing their offerings before His altar; but then He had looked away from the altar to observe their conduct. There was incontrovertible evidence of gross inconsistency.

The wives who had been so unfeelingly discarded were described now as "the wife of thy youth". This expression was intended to take them back in thought to the days when they had experienced feelings of love and tenderness towards their wives; when the full bloom of their youthful love was sweet and joyful. There is a proverb which

says: "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth..." (Prov. 5:18); but it makes no mention of time. It does not say: "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth in thy youth..." It therefore implies that throughout the whole of life after marriage, it is a good thing for a man to continue to rejoice warmly and lovingly with the woman whom he had taken for his wife at the time of his youth—remembering, even in later life, that he had chosen her for her beauty and freshness and because he had loved her. When a marriage alliance is based upon spiritual foundations as well as mutual attraction, such a marriage should develop and grow as the years pass. The couple should grow closer, and feel a deeper awareness of the importance of their marriage. Their mutual love should mature, and their compatibility be more appreciated. "Spend your life with the woman you love, through all the fleeting days of the life that God has given you under the sun; for this is the lot assigned to you in life and in the efforts you exert under the sun" (Ecc. 9:9. JB).

Wonderful principles for sound marriage had been established in God's word; but now the prophet Malachi looked upon a scene of domestic disorder and chaos which had become an accepted way of life. No wonder the prophet charged that these men had "dealt treacherously" against their wives. "The wife with whom you have broken faith" (JB).

Marriage is a binding covenant among God's people. It is not an alliance to be entered into lightly. It involves taking the rough passages of life with the smooth, sharing the joys and delights as well as the setbacks and sorrows.

Remember, urged the prophet, that your wife should also be your "companion". Companionship is one of the most vital and rewarding aspects of marriage. The affectionate ties which had been formed at the time of their youth should have continued and the bond should have been forged more permanently with the passing years. The result should have been a long and intimate association between husband and wife—and the more so as their marriage should have been based, above all else, upon a mutual love for Yahweh and His word.

"She was your partner, and your wife by covenant" (JB).

Again, the point was made: marriage is a binding contract and therefore a union which should be treated with solemn respect. In addition to the gravity of these principles, it should have been commonly understood that marriage was a type of the union between Yahweh and His people. "For thy Maker is thine husband; Yahweh

Sabaoth is His Name..." (Isa. 54:5). "I am married unto you..." (Jer. 3:14).

Should not these men of Israel have remembered that their respective marriages constituted a spiritual type? If they desired to maintain a close and harmonious relationship with their God, should they not have desired to maintain that same spirit in their marriages?

"And did not He make one?" asked the prophet. The question demanded an answer. Only one answer could be given. In instituting the marriage relationship, God had decreed that man and wife should be one flesh (Gen. 2:24; cp. Matt. 19:5)—and such a union was to be typical of the accord which was to exist between Christ and his Ecclesia (Eph. 5:23–33).

"Yet had He the residue of the spirit", added the prophet. All power resides in the One Eternal Spirit, and divine power has been directed towards providing a creation and an environment which will eventually produce a perfected creation. Thus will "all the earth" be "filled with the glory of Yahweh" (Num. 14:21).

True and lasting marriage between servants of the Living God plays an important and significant part in the unfolding of that purpose. That aspect was dealt with in the following question:

"And wherefore one?" What was the purpose in causing two people to become one? "That He might seek a godly seed" (v. 15).

The grand and lofty purpose in marriage had always been that of God-manifestation in the flesh. God desired that a multitude of men and women might be produced, generation after generation, whom He would recognize as "a godly seed". Such people would learn to reflect the likeness of the divine character and would inculcate these principles into the lives of their children.

Malachi was stressing the tremendous responsibility which rests upon parents in the truth. They are accountable for the spiritual growth and development of their children. This is a duty which must be undertaken in three ways. Children must learn the principles of

- education
- separation
- · dedication.

Parents must teach their children to become students of God's word, with the objective of learning to think in harmony with the divine mind. They must become **educated** in the truth, so that they

know the answer to the question: "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).

Children must learn that it is necessary to **separate** from that which is evil in God's eyes, and that the truth must be manifested in a holy way of life. Of Christ's character it was written: "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness..." (Psa. 45:7). The character of David also typified the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ: "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes..." (Psa. 101:3). Workers of iniquity will find no place in God's Kingdom (Matt. 7:23).

Upon the basis of education and separation, children must be taught to love Yahweh and His word and His ways; and thereby they will learn to **dedicate** their lives to His service and His purpose. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matt. 22:37–38).

This three-fold method of developing children in the truth has been aptly summarized by Paul: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4, RSV). Every marriage among God's servants should be so ordered to produce this fruit for the honour and glory of God's Name. Every family should be united in love and fellowship upon the basis of these principles.

As Malachi looked upon his people he was saddened by the evidence that these ideals had not been implemented. Perhaps the greatest tragedy of all was that these men who now so boldly confronted Yahweh's prophet had themselves, as children, not been brought up in accordance with these objectives. Although it might be assumed that they had earlier been more mature in the truth and had subsequently drifted therefrom, it is doubtful that this would have been so. The scriptures affirm: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). Of the word rendered "train", Gesenius says: "To put something into the mouth, to give to be tasted; then, by a common metaphor in which taste is applied to understanding." From the time they are able to comprehend the most simple things, children must be "fed" on a diet of the truth. "Thou shalt teach them (God's words) diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:7).

It is more than likely that these men who now confronted God's prophet were ignorant of the truth, indifferent to its demands, and more concerned with selfish, personal interests, because they had not been trained up in "the way" they should go.

So far as the women were concerned, the spiritually minded among them would have looked at the question of a "godly seed" from a singular as well as a multitudinous point of view. For they would have known that God had promised a particular, individual seed—the "seed of the woman"—who would overcome sin and provide the means for reconciliation between God and men. Eve thought that Cain would prove to be the promised seed (Gen. 4:1); and godly women down through the ages, knowing that One was to come for that divinely appointed purpose, desired to preserve a faithful line of descent from Eve until the Redeemer should be born.

In view of these declared ideals concerning the marriage state, no student of Malachi would wonder that God should say that "He hateth putting away..." If that is God's view of divorce and remarriage, it should also be the view of those called to be His sons and daughters. Divorce produces the opposite result to that which Yahweh requires from the marriage union. It nullifies the divine purpose and destroys the type.

It is sometimes claimed that the Law of Moses upheld divorce. If that were so, Malachi would be contradicting the spirit of the Law. The law of Moses set clear-cut limits upon such practices. Divorce was only permitted under certain circumstances because of the "hardness" of the hearts of the men of Israel, and not because of divine approval (Matt. 19:8). Yahweh would have preferred the "hardness" of their hearts to be removed and the true spirit of the marriage union correctly understood and respected.

It was not simply that Yahweh disapproved of His laws being disregarded or perverted; He was deeply offended at the blatant way in which evil was being openly perpetrated:

"For one covereth violence with his garment..." (v. 16). Or, "I hate people to parade their sins on their cloaks" (JB).

Therefore, a final warning was issued to the nation: "Take heed to your spirit..."

The word rendered "spirit", both here and in the previous verse, is the Hebrew *ruach*, commonly understood as meaning "breath" or "spirit" or "wind". But sometimes the context indicates that the word



carries the idea of "mind". This same word has been so rendered in the AV of Gen. 26:35; Dan. 5:20; Hab. 1:11. Above all else, it was the attitude of mind which was at fault among the people of Israel at this time. People may be ignorant of the truth, but with the correct attitude of mind they can be taught the truth. People may have become indifferent to the truth, but by humbly receiving sound, virile exhortation such a frame of mind can be dissipated. But it is not possible to reason upon the Scriptures with people whose basic attitude of mind is contrary to the spirit of the truth. Such an attitude must be changed before any virtue can be produced.

This forthright statement from the prophet was therefore a call to self-examination: it was as though Malachi was saying: "Scrutinize your hearts, in the light of the word; examine your motives; look closely at your thoughts and your way of life; compare what you are doing with the divine principles which you are so ready to reject out of hand..." Perhaps some may have been moved to cogitate upon the Proverbs: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life... Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil" (Prov. 4:23–27).

This plea to the nation is set against the background of the prophet's urgent, anguished appeal: "hear...lay it to heart...give glory unto my Name!" (2:2).

Those who worship God "must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Therefore religious services are valueless when practised in association with immorality and hypocrisy. The Son of God indicted men of such a disposition: "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).

Finally in this section came the last word of warning: "deal not treacherously". In other words, let each man of Israel remember their solemn marriage contract with its many attendant responsibilities. As husbands, let them prove faithful to their wives, even as they expected Yahweh—as their "Husband"—to be faithful to them (Isa. 54:5).

Family obligations are very much associated with the worship of Yahweh. Any Ecclesia will only be as sound and firmly established in the faith as the families that form the Ecclesia. The truth begins in the individual; then in the home; then in the Ecclesia. If the home is united under the loving guidance and dedication of faithful parents; if

the truth permeates the family from the father down to the youngest child; if the way of the truth sets the atmosphere in which the family lives and develops; if the truth becomes the focal point of all family life—then, such a family will have something worthwhile to contribute to the stability and development of the Ecclesia. Family obligations must be understood, they must be appreciated and accepted, and they must be honoured and maintained.

Let every husband consider his solemn responsibilities to his wife and family. Let every wife consider the need to support her husband and be at one with him in setting a wise and loving example to other members of the family. Let all children, whether young or old, be taught that they are not without their responsibilities. They must learn to observe the example of their parents; to submit to the guiding influence of God's word upon their lives; to help to weld the family into one united body, growing closer together in the bonds of the truth, and in an atmosphere of warm mutual love for one another.

With such families Yahweh is well pleased. He will delight to honour them in the day of Messiah's glory.

"Blessed is every one that feareth Yahweh; that walketh in His ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth Yahweh. Yahweh shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psa. 128).

PART FOUR: A NATION OF ROBBERS

Judgment will come

2:17-3:4

The prophet Malachi now appeared ready to bring his dialogue with the people to an end.

"Ye have wearied Yahweh with your words..." (v. 17).

It is a definite and decisive statement. God was no longer prepared to continue an unprofitable discussion with people who were averse to hearing the wise counsel of their God, and unwilling to attempt to correctly discern the purpose of God in their lives.

Throughout this discourse, Yahweh had been revealed as patient, loving and tender—though at times admonishing and commanding. Time and again He had directed His prophet to strive, in a spirit of forbearance, to draw the priests and the people back to the way of the truth. All such attempts had not only been resisted, but openly challenged. What could be done for people who took such an unyielding, pretentious stand?

Yahweh was neither blind nor deaf to the true state of His people, and now His patience had run its full course. The people, however, were not prepared to cease from contention:

"Wherein have we wearied Him?" they asked..

This was the fifth challenge they had uttered, revealing ignorance and lack of comprehension. It was expressed in a manner which showed an element of petulant discontent: upon what grounds could God have possibly been wearied by their words? Why should He endeavour to confine them within certain bounds of religious worship which they neither understood nor appreciated? Why was He not pleased at the worship which they offered Him?

The reason why Yahweh was now ready to reject these people was made patently clear:

"Ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of Yahweh, and He delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" (v. 17)

They openly justified sin and sinners. They saw sin as something which was approved by God, and which resulted in a successful way of life. "Any evil doer is good as far as Yahweh is concerned; indeed He likes them best..." (JB). The wicked appeared to prosper, while those who strove to manifest righteousness did not seem to benefit from serving Yahweh in a spirit of holiness.

As in the days of Isaiah, many of the people had little idea of true moral and spiritual values. "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" (Isa. 5:20–21).

These words present a tremendous and awesome challenge to the Ecclesia of God in every generation. What happens when the truth is not clearly and soundly understood? When there is an absence of dedicated and mature leadership? When right values are replaced with wrong ones? The truth begins to die, firstly within individuals, then within the communities of which the individuals are members. The light begins to go out, and finally Christ will "remove" the "lampstand" from out of the midst of the Ecclesia, and only darkness will remain (Rev. 2:5).

Malachi has revealed such a process of deterioration. Perhaps the process had been slow; perhaps it had happened insidiously and deceptively. But it had happened. Here was the inevitable result: a people who claimed to be sons and daughters of the Living God, and yet who failed to understand and practise even elementary forms of divine worship.

The final indignity which they heaped upon their God was to challenge the fact as to whether He would ever act to bring judgment upon them:

"Where is the God of judgment?" (v. 17)

This is one of the key statements of the book; for the rest of Malachi's words are devoted to answering this question.

The question lays bare one of the greatest of human weaknesses: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc. 8:11). "...There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Pet. 3:3–4).

The answer to the question is, of course, that the God of judgment will surely come. The question which these faithless men were called upon to consider involved each one of them: "Who shall stand when He appeareth?" (3:2). Subsequently Malachi answered this question: those who would "abide the day of His coming" would be those who "feared Yahweh, and that thought upon His Name" (3:16).

"Where is the God of judgment?" was the question levelled at Yahweh. The first word in reply was in the form of a short, dramatic command: "Behold!" The prophet, now thoroughly fired with the zeal of the spirit of Yahweh, broke forth into a startling revelation of what the future would bring. The first word of his reply carried an unmistakable ring of authority which has the sense of:: 'Do not remain blind! Open your eyes! Listen to this answer to your question! Become filled with awe and prostrate yourselves before the Mighty Majesty of Yahweh, and the works He will perform!'

"I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me!" (3:1).

The second phrase is a direct quotation from Isaiah 40:3, thus unmistakably pointing to John the Baptist. This prophecy from Isaiah must rate as one of the most important in Scripture, for it is quoted in all four gospel narratives (Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 1:76; John 1:6). The word rendered "messenger" is the Hebrew *malak*, from which the prophet's name was derived.

John was "a man *sent* from God" (John 1:6) and therefore was, in a special sense, the "messenger" of Yahweh, in direct fulfilment of this prophecy. It would, therefore, be advantageous to consider the way in which John the Baptist "prepared the way" for God to be manifested to His people in the personage of His Son. John "prepared the way" by proclaiming that Christ was coming, but his message was much more than that. He condemned moral decadence and religious hypocrisy. His basic message was that men and women must repudiate sin and forsake ways of wickedness. By this means he prepared "the way" for God's Son. John's message was not based upon political considerations but was related to the question of individual responsibility before God. "Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt. 3:10). John took up the work of Malachi, and became, in effect, an extension of the last of the Old Testament prophets.

Malachi's interrogative query: "who shall stand when he appeareth?" (v. 2) was expressed by John in similar fashion: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand... Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:2, 8).

"All flesh is grass", was John's basic message, "but the word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isa. 40:6, 8). A realization of this principle, and a humble acceptance of what it implies, is the only form of reasoning that is acceptable with God. As a proposition, it clearly

declares the sinfulness of man and that death comes upon all, even as the grass withers and dies. The state of man contrasts with the holiness and perfection of God. Man must therefore accept the reality of his own state, and desire to attain to the perfection of divine nature. To achieve this "the word of our God" must become living and energetic within the individual. He must know it, understand it, revere it and walk in its ways.

Malachi's purpose was to "prepare" people's minds to receive the truth of God's word. John's objective was to prepare the minds of men and women to receive the word of God manifested in His Son.

Therefore, "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple" (3:1).

"Lord" does not speak of Yahweh. The word here is rendered from the Hebrew *adon*, which simply means "a lord, or ruler". It would appear that this was primarily a warning that Nehemiah would suddenly return, as was pointed out in the *Introduction*. After the events described in the twelfth chapter of Nehemiah, he returned to the King's court because his twelve year period as Governor of Judea had expired. However, the thirteenth chapter of Nehemiah indicates that something was responsible for his sudden and dramatic return to Jerusalem.

News of a startling and worrying nature reached Nehemiah, causing him to respond. From whom did the message come? Surely, from Yahweh's "messenger"—the prophet Malachi. Returning to Jerusalem, he found that the people had reverted to a state of lethargy and indifference, and that the religious worship of the nation had been corrupted—a state of affairs described by Malachi. It would therefore appear that this statement, which was both a threat and a warning, promised that Nehemiah, the last great Old Testament leader of the Jewish people, would return to correct the errors which were now so strongly in evidence. That he did return and immediately set about the task of cleansing the nation there can be no doubt, for the thirteenth chapter of his book describes the problems he faced and the action he took. In that regard, the second coming of Nehemiah would have been typical of the return of Christ to the earth, particularly in regard to Christ's future work of cleansing the priesthood and the people of Israel, and restoring them "as in the days of old, and as in former vears" (3:4).

There is strong irony in this statement: "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come..." In the days of Malachi the people did not

really "seek" the Lord—but they had asked, with an air of challenge and doubt: "Where is the God of judgment?" A faithful remnant longed for that day (3:16–17); but obviously the majority did not; and they were really indifferent to this answer given by the prophet. Similarly, when "the Lord" did come among them—the Lord Jesus Christ—the majority of the people did not "seek" him. But when he comes a second time, as Malachi proceeds to show in some of the most dramatic language found anywhere within the Scriptures, they will indeed seek him and acknowledge him.

PART FOUR: A NATION OF ROBBERS 2:17-3:4

God's Son would "suddenly" come to his Temple—after the manner of the surprising and unexpected return of Nehemiah. The Lord Jesus came "suddenly" to his Temple at his first advent (Luke 2:22); and so shall he also at his return (Rev. 22:12).

Who would be ready and prepared to receive him? The men of Malachi's day, who so rashly queried whether God would ever manifest Himself for the purpose of judging His people, should have asked themselves whether they were ready for His appearance. Of course, as verse 5 so clearly indicates, they were not.

That this dramatic statement refers to both the first and second advents of the Lord Jesus there can be no doubt. Therefore it is necessary for every son and daughter of God, no matter in what age or dispensation they may live, to realize that "the Lord" whom they seek "shall suddenly come to his temple". They must be aware that such a dramatic event may take place at any time, and endeavour, in humility and dedication, to be prepared for that momentous event.

The Temple was designed to be the dwelling place for Yahweh upon the earth; not in a literal sense, but through a manifestation of His presence, as in the Shekinah glory. That principle has not changed. The Lord Jesus Christ came to his Temple literally (Luke 19:47), and figuratively (John 1:11). Men and women who loved God and His truth became his temple (1 Cor. 3:16; Heb. 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:5)—and he will come to them suddenly, when he returns to earth (Rev. 16:15). Similarly, there will be a glorious future fulfilment of these words when a House of Prayer for all nations is erected as a literal Temple upon Mount Zion (Ezek. 43:2; Hag. 2:7–9; Isa. 56:7).

The Lord Jesus Christ will then be revealed to all men as "the messenger of the covenant" (3:1). The Lord, at his first advent, came in such a capacity, "to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" and as "the mediator of the new testament" [or covenant] (Heb. 9:15; 12:24). He was never widely or generally accepted as "the messenger

of the covenant" at his first coming, but his acceptance as such will be worldwide after his triumphant return (Mal. 1:5, 11; Psa. 72).

The work of the Lord Jesus Christ—and here particular emphasis is placed upon his work with Israel—will remain uncompleted until his second manifestation upon earth. "Behold, the days come, saith Yahweh, that I will make a **new** covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah..." (Jer. 31:31–34; cp. Ezek. 20:35–38).

The "messenger of the covenant" would be one in whom they would learn to "delight". They did not delight in any revelation of God's word, nor did they take delight in His "messenger" in the days of Malachi. There is, once again, some irony in the statement. The day will come, however, when Israel will "discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not" (3:18) and then they will "delight" in the messenger of the Abrahamic covenant.

The prophet now asked: "Who may abide the day of his coming?" (3:2)

That the God of judgment would come, there could be no doubt, argued Malachi. Therefore, instead of debating whether He will come or not, let every son and daughter of the Living God humbly prepare for that occurrence, that they might "stand, when he appeareth".

The word "abide" has been rendered "endure" (Roth., RSV). The Lord will be "like a refiner's fire"; and, as fire is a symbol for divine judgment, it was a question as to who would "endure" the fire of his judgment and still remain unconsumed.

Sons and daughters of God must continually "examine" themselves (1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 13:5). Self-examination in the light of the word of God, and in comparison with the perfect Son of God, must become a consistent exercise. The likeness of God's righteous Son must be seen to be developing in all other sons and daughters of the Most High (2 Cor. 3:18).

Who, then, "shall stand when he appeareth?" (3:2)

The people of Israel, whom this faithful prophet addressed, should have carefully pondered this important question. Having little knowledge and understanding of the truth, practising a form of religious worship which suited themselves rather than God, walking in a way which was contrary to the terms of their covenant with Yahweh, where would they stand in that day? "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous... The

foolish shall not stand in Thy sight: Thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Psa. 1:5; 5:5).

This question was not merely to be considered negatively, it was to be received with positive joy and exhilaration. For Malachi was to appreciate that, even in the midst of such widespread declension from the truth as he had witnessed, there was a faithful remnant who would be numbered among the "jewels" which would be revealed in glory at the "great and dreadful day of Yahweh" (3:16–17; 4:5). Down through the ages, since the days of Abel, there have existed faithful men and women who have loved God and His truth, and who have endeavoured to walk faithfully before Him in the integrity of their heart. It is not merely an act of justice that Yahweh will reward them with eternal life, it is that He will delight to honour and vindicate them before all the nations. "So will He bring forth as the light thy righteousness, and thy vindication as the noonday" (Psa. 37:6, Roth.).

Men and women who remain faithful to the truth, accepting the necessary trials of life which come upon them, will eventually be justified for their faithfulness. If they have made their sacrifices to God willingly and joyfully, denying themselves that they might serve their God and their brethren, the weight of self-discipline which the truth will have placed upon them will dissipate in the glory of divine nature, which will be granted to them in the day of Christ's Kingdom.

When the time comes for the Lord to "suddenly come to his temple" he will "sit as a refiner and purifier of silver..."

The symbology is that of the refiner, sitting before his fire, his attention fully centred upon his work. Carefully and skillfully he watches over the development of the process which he has begun. The purpose of his work is to use the heat from his fire to remove all dross and unwanted matter, leaving only the pure metal.

This form of judgment will come firstly upon the Ecclesia (1 Cor. 3:13; 1 Pet. 4:17), then upon Israel and the nations of the earth (4:1; Psa. 21:9; Heb. 12:29). Thus the fires of divine judgment will pour forth, to sift individuals and nations (Zech. 13:9; Isa. 1:25).

Silver is a Biblical symbol for redemption (Exod. 30:14–16; 38:25–28). In this instance, the word is especially applied to Israel in a national sense, in view of Israel's coming restoration. But while Israel must pass through the fire of judgment, let those who today comprise the Ecclesia of God remember that "judgment must begin at the house of God..." (1 Pet. 4:17).

Israel's Messiah, the messenger of the covenant, will appear also with the qualities of "fuller's soap", or "fuller's alkali" (Roth.). Two Hebrew words here are most significant. The first is *kabac*, meaning 'to wash, to trample', and has been rendered "wash" in all other 47 places where the word appears. "Soap" has been rendered from *boriyth*, which means 'a vegetable alkali'. The word occurs only here and in Jer. 2:22. The phrase in this context thus represents the idea of cleansing from spiritual and moral defilement (cp. Isa. 1:16; 4:3–4). Christ will effect the cleansing of the nation of Israel at his second coming (Zech. 13:1), although he had provided the means for such cleansing at his first advent (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11).

The picture thus presented is a most dramatic one—the Lord Jesus represented as a refiner, sitting before his cauldron, increasing the heat of the fire beneath by use of bellows. It is the nation of Israel which will be purged and purified in that way, but what of today? The Ecclesia of God in this present dispensation must be firmly exhorted: for, what the Lord Jesus will do to Israel in that day, he is endeavouring to perform for his Ecclesia at this present time. Unless the individuals who make up his Ecclesia permit him to exercise that purging and purifying influence upon them, through the trial of their faith, they will be unfit for an eternal inheritance in the day of Christ's Kingdom. Only the cleansing power of God's word operating upon those who are His sons and daughters in this present age will enable them to stand when he appeareth (cp. Eph. 5:26).

Thus the messenger of the covenant, the Son of God, will "purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver..." (3:3)

Although silver speaks of redemption, gold symbolizes the means by which redemption is attained: faith. In that day, the tribe of Levi will once again know the meaning of faith. This is one of the most important and powerful verses in the Old Testament to teach that there will be a literal restoration of the people of Israel, under the guidance of the messenger of the covenant (cp. Isa. 61:6; Jer. 33:18; Isa. 66:21).

The great Redeemer will "purge them as gold", or "smelt" them (Roth.). Israel after the flesh can only be redeemed upon the same principle as Israel after the spirit (Zech. 13:8–9; Rom. 11:23; cp. Rom. 5:1–4). "Smelting" as "gold" represents faith manifested under the fire of trial; a process which spiritual Israel is now experiencing, and the principles of which they shall teach Israel after the flesh in the Kingdom age (Jer. 3:14–17).

In the future age the Levites shall learn to make offerings unto Yahweh "in righteousness". Here, with compelling directness, Malachi contrasts the priesthood of his own day—who were unable to sacrifice "in righteousness" because they did not walk in the way of the truth—with the restored Levites of Messiah's Kingdom. In the future they will offer "in righteousness" because they will have learned the way of righteousness, and in sincerity and love they will learn to walk in that way.

Thus will the nation of Israel be restored to their past glory but, in fact, it will be a glory which shall far exceed that established in the past under the rulership of David and Solomon (Psa. 72, Isa. 2:2–4; Amos 9:11–15).

"Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto Yahweh, as in the days of old, and as in former years." (3:4)

When the Scriptures speak of a person making an offering to Yahweh "in righteousness" it refers to the moral character of the offerer. The essence of these words should have moved the priests to respond. Malachi was demonstrating to them that before an offering could be acceptable to Yahweh the offerer must exhibit qualities of righteousness. Therefore, an offering must be representative of righteous principles at work in the life of the one making the offering, and not merely the mechanical fulfilment of the requirements of a law (cp. Gen. 4:3–5). Hence the teaching of David: "Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in Yahweh" (Psa. 4:5).

Such offerings can only be acceptable to God when sins are forgiven. When Israel has been grafted in on the basis of faith, these attainments will become possible for them (Mic. 7:18–20; Ezek. 37:25–27; Deut. 30:6; Rom. 11:23–26). Upon this basis, men who are descended from the tribe of Levi will serve, in a limited capacity, in the Temple of the future age (Ezek. 44:10–11).

Those who have, in this present dispensation, been designated "priests" by Yahweh must now be devoted to making offerings "in righteousness" that they might be accepted by their Lord in the day when he "suddenly" comes "to his temple" (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15–16; 1 Pet. 2:5). Saints of God in this present age must learn to do what Israel will learn in the future. How can God's saints hope to teach others the way of the truth in the future, unless they know and walk in that way now? They must become fit to lead and guide others in the Kingdom age.

When the nation of Israel has been restored to the way of the truth "the offering of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasant..." Noah was a man who made a pure offering to Yahweh because he was a man of integrity in God's eyes. After the flood, Noah offered a sacrifice and Yahweh "smelled a sweet savour" (Gen. 8:21)—which is another way of saying that Noah's sacrifice was "pleasant" to the Creator because He felt Himself to be at one with the offerer. Noah was a man who "walked with God" (Gen. 6:9); but such was not the attitude of the priests of Malachi's day. Their offerings were repudiated by Yahweh because there was no oneness and fellowship between them.

The test of every offering made to Yahweh is simple: will He be pleased with it? God Himself set the seal upon this principle when speaking of His own Son: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" The Most High was stressing that no sacrifice is acceptable to Him unless it truly represents the offerer surrendering his heart and his will to Yahweh.

In the age of Messiah's glory the nation of Israel will learn the true meaning of acceptable sacrifice. They will be re-established as a nation upon sound principles of truth. It will be "as in the days of old, and as in former years", or, "as in the ancient years" (Roth.).

Many modern theologians look upon the "days of old" as years of darkness and ignorance. Yet how remarkably New Testament writers have endorsed Malachi's statement concerning the future in store for Israel. The Lord Jesus spoke of that time as "the regeneration"—which, literally, means 'the rebirth' (Matt. 19:28). The apostle Peter described the Kingdom age as "the times of restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21). The word "restitution" has been rendered "restoration" (ASV, TCNT, Moff.); "reconstitution" (Wey.). Although the Greek word is different to that found in Matt. 19:28, the similarity of thought is readily apparent. The ancient kingdom of Israel will be reborn, to be ruled over by "the Lord" who shall "suddenly come to his temple".

"And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof: they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith Yahweh thy God... And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness" (Amos 9:11; Isa. 1:26–27).

3:5-7

Although the dominant theme of the book remains "Who may abide the day of his coming?" it has now been directed towards answering the question: "Where is the God of judgment?" (2:17).

The first four verses of chapter three provided the beginning of Yahweh's answer. In verse five His reply is expanded and elaborated upon:

"I will come near to you to judgment!" said Yahweh, in a clear and direct answer to their question.

The statement is one of firm and blunt assurance. Additionally, the phrase "come near" has been used to describe the priests approaching the altar to offer sacrifices (Exod. 40:32). It is implied that, as the Levitical priests had failed in their duty, Yahweh would take possession of the office through the personage of "the messenger of the covenant"—and the sacrificial victims would be the wicked (4:1; cp. Zeph. 1:7–8; Ezek. 39:17).

The certainty of the expression "I will come near" should have brought some response from the people. Divine judgment is an inevitability which has been stressed time and again throughout Scripture (cp. Psa. 50:3; 96:12–13; Jas. 5:8–9; Jude vv. 14–15). Although the acceptance of such an inescapable reality should inspire reverence and fear in the heart of every man and woman, yet it should also generate a joyous anticipation among all who strive to maintain their integrity before God. For, when Yahweh does come near for "judgment" it will mean not only the rejection and punishment of the wicked, but the acceptance and vindication of the faithful. Although the day of judgment will be one which shall "burn as an oven" (4:1) it will also be the day when Yahweh says, of a certain class of humanity: "They shall be mine!" (3:17).

Although a divine promise of judgment to come should instill fear in the hearts of the wicked, it should breathe hope and consolation and renewed spiritual energy into those who struggle towards the perfection which is seen in the Lord Jesus Christ. "Yahweh is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him" (Nah. 1:6–7; cp. 1 Cor. 3:12–16; 2 Tim. 2:19). But for those who departed out of the way of the truth, there could be only "a certain fearful looking for of judgment..." (Heb. 10:27).

"And I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith Yahweh Sabaoth." (3:5)

All these charges are based upon the teaching of the Law, and Yahweh would act as both judge and witness against those who defied His word.

These various forms of transgression will be found condemned in the following passages:

Sorcerers	Exod. 22:18
Adulterers	
False swearers	Exod. 20:16
Affliction of widows and fatherless	Exod. 22:22
Denying the stranger his right	Exod. 22:21
Oppressors of hirelings	Deut. 24:14.

When Yahweh becomes both judge and witness against those who walk in the way of evil, His evidence and judgment will be beyond dispute (Psa. 50:7; Jer. 29:23). The unambiguous teaching of this verse in Malachi is that Yahweh will judge His people with a perfect balance of justice and mercy.

As disciples of Christ ponder these words, they may be led to believe that the breaches of divine law referred to here can only be applied to a people who were bound by the terms of the Mosaic law. Such an assumption would be inaccurate in that it would deny the principles set forth in the Law.

For example, does not "sorcery" speak of religious deception? And is it not a practice which might be performed by men and women in any day and age? Does not the mention of adultery place emphasis upon moral weaknesses, especially as it affects the breakdown of marriage and family life? Did not the Lord teach: "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28)? Does not the mention of false swearers relate to untrustworthiness, whether in private or business or Ecclesial life? And what of oppressing the hireling? Is not such a charge descriptive of selfishness and meanness; the placing of self first, at the expense of others? What of the question of afflicting the widows and fatherless? Can such a charge be related only to those who lived under the Mosaic dispensation? Is it not a charge which might apply to anyone who takes advantage of those who cannot help themselves?

Does it not indicate a disregard for the needs of those who are relatively helpless?

Consider the matter of turning aside the stranger from his right. Is this not simply a case of denying the legitimate rights of others, whoever they might be, that personal selfishness might predominate?

And what of those who "fear not" Yahweh? Would not this definition apply to those who fail to manifest humility and reverence for God? Would such a charge be restricted to those under the Mosaic Law?

The last of these sins is the root cause of all the evil that man might perpetrate. A careful analysis of these sins will reveal that seven are listed: the Bible number for completeness or perfection. In other words, all sins are, in some way or another, represented among these seven.

They are sins which might be manifested by the sons and daughters of Yahweh in any day or age. These are, in fact, the very sins which are corrupting and destroying modern civilization. They are sins which aptly and adequately summarize all the problems of daily living in the modern world. In these closing days of the gentiles, are the servants of God influenced and corrupted by these same moral and spiritual evils? Here are seven sins which represent, in the broadest sense, a manifestation of the evil characteristics of the flesh; characteristics which are based upon selfishness and self-indulgence.

Malachi has already asserted that God requires His sons and daughters to manifest the qualities of His own righteous character. These seven sins constitute the very antithesis of the attributes which constitute God's character.

Herein is a sober warning for the Ecclesia of God in every age: there are weaknesses of the flesh which will predominate when the disciplining influence of the word of God is not in evidence. They are influences which are capable of destroying sons and daughters of God and depriving them of inheritance in God's Kingdom. Is it any wonder that Yahweh pleaded with His people to realize the seriousness of their departure from the way of the truth? These words were not directed to Israel that God might justify Himself in destroying them, but that they might hearken to the wise and loving counsel that He set before them; and that they might respond to His call as a son to a loving father and as a servant to a faithful master (1:6). Or, as Jeremiah said: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place" (Jer. 7:3).

To impress upon Israel the gravity of their situation, they were now reminded that their God was not a capricious, vindictive, inconsistent Deity:

"I am Yahweh, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." (3:6)

Use of the covenant Name was most significant. This Name set Israel's God apart from all others, and reminded Israel that their covenant relationship was with this God and no other. The fact that the divine Name was associated with the covenant provided positive proof of Yahweh's own fidelity (Exod. 20:2). He would always be faithful, and would never fail to keep His covenant.

What of the people of Israel? How faithful were they?

Evil comes from the heart of man. Many of man's crimes against God having been catalogued in the fifth verse of this chapter. Man's tendency to be selfish, and therefore changeable and unreliable in matters of divine import, has been stressed. Now the words of verse six are set forth as a sharp and dramatic contrast between the perfection of God's character and the weaknesses inherent in man.

A further stage in the answer to the question: "Where is the God of judgement?" was now delivered. If Yahweh said that He would certainly judge His people and that He changes not, His people can be quite assured that judgment will come. The fact that Yahweh changes not places particular emphasis upon the reliable attributes of His character and purpose. These are unchangeable. "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall He not make it good?" (Num. 23:19; cp. Lam. 3:22–23; Tit. 1:2).

Indeed, Yahweh has remained unchangeable. This fact provides a powerful and compelling lesson for all who would be numbered among His sons and daughters. Having learned and embraced the truth of His word, they too must remain unchanging. If they are to remain in harmony with the character and the will of their God they must be imitators of Him. If they change, by departing from basic elements of His truth, either in doctrine or practice, they will become immediately endangered.

Yahweh does not change; therefore neither should His sons and daughters. God remains constant in all respects. Such a reality provides tremendous comfort for all who struggle towards the perfection of the divine character. He will remain absolutely faithful to all that

He has promised—the very Name itself, meaning: "He Who Will Be" is a perfect guarantee of that. Therein is embodied the divine purpose for the ages. God is now taking out of the gentiles "a people for His Name" (Acts 15:14). The comforting reality of this purpose was clearly understood by faithful sons and daughters of God in the days of Malachi, for the prophet says that they "thought upon" the Name of Yahweh (3:16). They considered the meaning and importance of the Name, and saw revealed therein the purpose of their God. From such knowledge they took courage and drew strength, and so might His faithful servants in every age.

The people of Israel were asked to consider the proposition that it was because of the unchangeableness of Yahweh—and for no other reason—that they had not been destroyed as a nation. The word "therefore" in the context is quite significant: in other words, because Yahweh does not change, they still survived as a nation.

"He hath remembered His covenant for ever...Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan..." (Psa.105:8–11).

"Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." (3:6)

Jacob's name had been mentioned at the beginning of the book; and now it must be apparent that the use of Jacob's name was intended to act as a reminder that Yahweh had declared His faithfulness and His purpose for Israel before they had even been formed into a nation. The fidelity of Yahweh was beyond question. How could His people doubt His word?

The word "consumed" has been rendered "utterly consumed" (Roth.), no doubt because the primary idea of the Hebrew word is 'to destroy completely'. As a nation they had often suffered great affliction, yet the nation had endured and they remain unto this very day as an unchallengeable proof of God's faithfulness.

The fact that the nation had continued to survive was proof enough that the honesty and integrity of Yahweh was beyond question. They were worthy of death and national destruction in view of their many sins against God. Therefore, as they continued to survive nationally, they should have long since appreciated that it is "by grace" that men are "saved" or preserved. Grace, or favour, is not something that can be produced by mankind to effect their deliverance and preservation. Only Yahweh can extend such saving mercy (Eph. 2:8).

Could the Jews of Malachi's day claim that they had not been "consumed" because they had kept God's Law? By no means. In that

respect, they had failed lamentably. That was the message of Malachi. These people, like all others, could never be saved through the works of Law; they were totally dependent upon the "grace" of Yahweh. Such knowledge should engender humility in the hearts of men and women, rather than the pride which was so evident among the majority of Malachi's contemporaries.

It was necessary to remind them that the spiritual weaknesses then so apparent in virtually every aspect of life were no new thing so far as Israel was concerned:

"Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them." (3:7)

The statement should have served to remind the people of the inherent weakness in the flesh (cp. Deut. 9:7; Psa. 78:8–10; Ezek. 20:8; Luke 11:48–50). Flesh has a bias towards constant rebellion against the will of God. In the flesh dwells "no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). Goodness emanates only from the One Eternal Spirit. Men and women can only hope to manifest that goodness when they discover the will of Yahweh through a knowledge and understanding of His word. But these wonderful and wise principles were understood and acknowledged by very few in the times of Malachi.

They had "gone away" or "turned aside" (RV) from the way of truth because knowledge and understanding had not been maintained as a standard for daily living, and responsibilities and obligations to Yahweh had been "lightly esteemed" (Deut. 32:15). Thus, they had not kept God's "ordinances" - which was a further reminder that God had placed laws and commandments before Israel that they might be observed. It is true to acknowledge that men can never be saved upon the principle of keeping law, and that only through the mercy of God can salvation be attained. It is equally true that God's commandments, or the commandments of Christ, have been given to His sons and daughters as a guide for their daily living, and that those commandments should be respected and obeyed as a way of life. It would, for instance, be ludicrous to suggest that Christ has left on record numerous commandments for his disciples, on the understanding that such commandments might be treated with contempt. Who would be so foolish as to suggest such a thing? Yet, that is the logical progression of argument if it be argued that it is not necessary to strive to walk in the way of Christ's commandments. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 14:15; 15:14).

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To follow these words requires a spirit of love, devotion, and dedication. The man or woman who establishes their integrity before God will be granted eternal life if they follow Christ in the spirit of the truth. They would be aware that, though they strive to be obedient, the weakness of their flesh will make them dependent upon the grace of God for their ultimate deliverance (cp. Matt. 7:21–23).

This spirit was lacking among the Israelites in the day of Malachi. Hence the further loving and tender pleading of their God:

"Return unto me, and I will return unto you..." (3:7)

The wording appears to be primarily a reference to Zechariah 1:3–4, where a similar warning and an identical call had gone forth, at the time of the post-exilic restoration. Now it was necessary to repeat that requirement. The appeal was a touching and moving one, yet it fell largely upon deaf ears.

Man must move towards God as a sign that he desires to receive divine mercy, and as an acknowledgment that he remains without hope so long as he is alienated from his Creator. If a person will turn towards God and reach out towards Him in humility, God will respond to such a gesture: "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you" (Jas. 4:8). James placed the sequence of action in the same order as Malachi. Let man acknowledge his need of God and God will not spurn such a spirit.

Only the influence of the word of God can cause a person to effectively turn to his Creator—thus, these words represent a call for a spiritual and moral reformation based entirely upon the word of truth. These people had turned from Yahweh to other gods and other influences, including the undisciplined desires of the flesh (v. 5). God now called upon them to return to Him in the spirit of the truth.

The Mighty One of Israel had continued to entreat His people in this way through Moses and the prophets, and later through His Son and the apostles (Lev. 26:40; Deut. 30:1–4; Isa. 55:6–7; Matt. 5:3–8; Jas. 4:8). Could it ever be suggested that Yahweh had been uncaring toward His people, or indifferent to their spiritual welfare? The book of Malachi reveals the God of the Hebrews as a tender and loving God, ardent for the good of those who have been called to the glory of His Name.

What response did the prophet Malachi receive to these warm and appealing words?

"Wherein shall we return?" was the reply of this degenerate people. Simply, they did not understand. This is the sixth of eight challenges which they directed against their God. Again there is clear evidence that they were ignorant of the principles of the truth and indifferent to the demands that God made upon them.

From the beginning of this chapter they had been soundly and vigorously exhorted concerning not only their shortcomings, but that their God would manifest Himself in judgement to call them to account for their evil doings. Yet they continued to reveal that they were blind to their sins and transgressions.

Such is the inevitably sad and tragic result when Yahweh appeals to His people but they have absorbed so little of the teaching of His word that they are unable to respond to Him. So said Isaiah: "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts" (Isa. 65:2).

The existence of a condition such as this among the people of God is not restricted to ancient times. Such circumstances might apply in any generation (see especially 2 Peter, 2 John, and Jude). The people of Israel to whom Malachi addressed himself were unable to appreciate the significance of the prophet's call for them to return to God. Their reply: "Wherein shall we return?" showed that they were utterly lacking in spiritual perception. It was as though they said: 'How can we return when we have never turned away from Him? You imply that there is something lacking in our religious observances. Why should not Yahweh be pleased with us and accept us as we are?'

These people met the prophet's reproof with an injured air of pious self justification. Those who are self satisfied generally remain immune to any appeals of this nature. They practised a form of religion which salved their consciences, and with which they were contented. That their religious theories and practices did not conform to God's requirements, or the spirit of the truth, did not worry them at all. They had established a satisfactory, formal, undemanding religious system, and were not prepared to have anyone such as Malachi upsetting their indifference and complacency. Tragically, they remained sullenly unaware of their true spiritual state.

The final picture which emerges from this verse does not so much feature the people of Israel as it does their God: He spread out His hands to a rebellious people, imploring them to return to Him. In spite of their many offences against Him, He was still prepared to extend God of judgement".

mercy. He had made it clear that He would not change (v. 6). Under no circumstances would He compromise His own position or His own standards of righteousness and holiness. Instead, He waited patiently

for them to change. He exhibited an outstanding example of one of

His great characteristics: He was longsuffering. However, in due time

His patience would come to an end. Then would be manifested "the

3:8-12

Yahweh had been challenged by the people that He was striving to redeem: 'How can you ask us to return to You when we have never really turned away?' It was a challenge, like those which had already been uttered, which could not remain unanswered.

"Will a man rob God?" (3:8) asked Yahweh, through His prophet.

The primary meaning of the word conveys the idea of "hiding... and hence it is figuratively to deceive, to defraud anyone..." (Ges.). The implication of the word in this context is that of covering up or hiding away something which rightly belongs to God and thereby robbing Him of His due respect.

This is a sin which was committed almost at the dawn of history, far outdating the Law of Moses. Cain was found guilty of this crime. He offered God only a portion of the sacrifice He had required, and therefore had "robbed" God. Abel offered "a fuller sacrifice" (Heb. 11:4, Roth.), therefore Cain had kept back that which he should have offered.

It is a human weakness to deny God the fulfilment of His rightful claims upon mankind. Flesh does not readily conform to the discipline of the words of the Spirit. Yet, God's servants must face the reality of what it means to "rob" God. When there is no longer a strong and loving desire to please Yahweh, His will no longer directs the way of life of the individual, and the worship of Self will begin to predominate over the worship of Yahweh. Let sons and daughters of the Most High echo the words of faithful Jeremiah: "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to Yahweh. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens" (Lam. 3:40-41). Jeremiah presented the idea of men and women tearing their hearts from their bodies and offering them up to God. This somewhat macabre picture graphically demonstrated an attitude of absolute love and humility before God. Jeremiah called upon individuals to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to Yahweh (cp. Rom. 12:1)—and this they would do by denying their own will, and offering their hearts to God.

If men rob God, it will almost certainly be due to one or more of three reasons: ignorance of the truth; selfishness; or sheer criminal negligence—in other words, a knowledge of what is required, but a stubborn rejection of it. These were the three major weaknesses which were apparent among the people of Yahweh in the times of Malachi the prophet.

It is no wonder that they could not understand why they should be charged with robbing God: "Wherein have we robbed Thee?" (3:8)

This was the seventh of eight challenges they issued to Yahweh. Their challenge was answered: "In tithes and offerings."

Perhaps there is an allusion to Deuteronomy 12:11 where tithes and offerings are spoken of together, as in this verse.

This was identical to the confrontation between Nehemiah and the people when he returned the second time to Jerusalem. He wrote: "I perceived that the portion of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field. Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken?" (Neh. 13:10–11).

Tithing was a necessary part of the Mosaic law to teach the spirit of self-denial, and that in any event all things belonged to Yahweh. Obviously such laws were intimately related to the proper performance of Levitical duties, and therefore the correct functioning of Temple services.

This is the only place in Malachi where the word rendered "offering" is not *minchah*. Here, the Hebrew word is *terumah*, and it has been better rendered "heave offerings" (RV mg.). The symbolic meaning is similar to that of the *minchah*, the meal offering. The heave offering was a part of the peace offering (as was the meal offering), and therefore encouraged man to seek fellowship with God. But it taught (like the *minchah*) that such fellowship would be attained upon the basis of man surrendering himself and his works to the will of God (Exod. 25:2). The right leg and the breast of the animal were offered—the choicest and strongest parts of the animal—thereby representing the offerer as devoting all his strength and giving his best to the service of Yahweh.

The heave offering was a form of tithe, in that it was presented to the priest as his rightful portion. The animal was eaten by both the priest and offerer, symbolizing fellowship between man and God. Thus the symbolic association between the heave offering and the meal offering was so clearly marked as to require no further elucidation at this point (Exod. 29:27–28; Lev. 7:14, 32–34).

Thus it becomes apparent why tithes and heave offerings are spoken of as though related, in Deut. 12:11 and in this passage in Malachi.

The word *terumah* has also been used for freewill gifts, gifts of the firstfruits, and the half shekel sanctuary tax, as well as for portions of sacrifices reserved for the priests (Exod. 30:13; Lev. 7:14; Num. 15:19–21; 18:26–29).

It will be observed that in this context Malachi makes special allusion to the harvest (v. 10). He was no doubt alluding to a special heave offering which was offered after the harvest had been brought in. A cake was offered (Num. 15:17–21). It was of coarse meal, not fine flour, thus representing the staple diet of the people. With the ingathering of the harvest, this special heave offering taught that the daily working life of the Israelite was to be dedicated to Yahweh. It conveyed the same symbology as that of the right leg of the animal, reminding all Israel that even the lowliest and humblest of them were part of a nation which was to be dedicated to their God.

As the heave offering was a form of tithe, so the tithe was a form of heave offering (Num. 18:21–24). In tithing, Israel only gave back to Yahweh that which was rightfully His to begin with. The heave offering also conveyed that idea.

In the days of Malachi the people were withholding their tithes. This was a breach of their covenant relationship with God and resulted in the failure of the Temple services. For if the priests were not provided for as the Law required through tithes and heave offerings, then the priests found it necessary to desert the Temple work to labour in the fields to provide for themselves and their families. A breakdown in tithing and heave offerings thus effected a breakdown in the entire process of religious life within the nation. Such a situation, needless to say, was looked upon with strong disfavour by Yahweh.

It is implied that the tithes and heave offerings were being withheld because of the severe drought conditions which were being experienced at that time (3:10–11). However, with this attitude the people of Israel had reversed the divine order: the covenant required that **first** they should give to Yahweh that which was owing to Him (v. 7), then He would bless them in accordance with their needs (Deut. 28; Prov. 3:9–10).

They did not consider that their actions constituted "robbery" because they did not understand the implication of their actions. Once again Malachi stressed the grave dangers which face servants of God when they do not have a sound and mature understanding of the truth. Such men and women fail to understand how they must serve Yahweh and in what spirit they should come before Him.

Perhaps, too, many of them had ceased paying their tithes and heave offerings through some feeling of disillusionment. They may have come to the conclusion that they had been making offerings to Yahweh, yet they had not been blessed, therefore it was all a great waste of time and effort (2:13; 3:14). In this they were quite wrong. Malachi had already demonstrated that their sacrifices to Yahweh constituted a perversion of the Law, and he had also shown clearly that their spirit was wrong: "take heed to your spirit" (2:16). It was not simply that they were failing in their legal obligations as required by the Law, they were failing in their moral approach to divine worship.

It is no wonder that the prophet called for a better spirit from his brethren. A correct spirit in the truth should be reflected in a proper respect for the terms and conditions of divine worship. Had the Israelites of Malachi's time been exhibiting a good spirit, they would have joyfully and gladly sought out ways to please their Heavenly Father; they would have solemnly and reverently endeavoured to fulfil those things which God had asked of them. They would have willingly and freely worshipped Yahweh in the spirit of the truth.

It is necessary to strive diligently to serve God in the way that He requires, but it is even more necessary that such thoughts and actions should be developed in a spirit of loving and compliant devotion. The study of the word, loyalty and support for Ecclesial meetings and activities, helpful encouragement and assistance towards brethren and sisters, self-sacrifice in various ways; all these and other aspects of life in the truth will be more profitable and give greater pleasure to Yahweh when engaged in with a spirit of eager and willing service, based upon a love and reverence for God.

The prophet was endeavouring to engender in the people an attitude of careful self-examination. The essence of this verse is that mere outward ritual is of little value in the worship of Yahweh; and yet, when the spirit of the truth is working within an individual, they will strive to perform the will of God.

In the days of Malachi, both the spirit and the performance were lacking among the majority of those who called themselves sons and daughters of God. When God's servants neglect the claims He makes upon them, they "rob" God.

Because the terms of the covenant had been dishonoured, the curse provided in the Law had come upon Israel (Deut. 27–28).

"Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." (3:9)

Earlier they had been reminded that the curse of the Law was heavy upon them because of their indifference to the terms of their covenant with Yahweh (2:2). But the people had been unable to grasp the reality of those words. They suffered, individually and collectively, for rejecting God's way thereby bringing upon the nation divine displeasure.

"Even this whole nation" was guilty. "Nation" is an impersonal term, in contrast to "my people", a phrase often used in Scripture. The wording is indicative of the fact that these people had forfeited their personal and intimate relationship with Yahweh. The vast majority were culpable, and only a faithful minority responded to the pleading of the prophet (vv. 16–17).

Again Yahweh demonstrated His loving concern for His people:

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith Yahweh Sabaoth, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (3:10)

The key word is "all". The prophet's entreaty was that the people should render unto Yahweh all that is due to Him. In other words, give fairly and justly to God, no matter how difficult the conditions might be, for He will always reward faithful and loving service.

The spirit embodied in many aspects of the Law of Moses was amplified by the Son of God: "Seek ye *first* the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

The "storehouse" referred to by Malachi was the Temple treasury. (In 1 Chron. 28:12 the same word has been rendered "treasuries"). Tithes were to be brought to the Temple and stored in special chambers which had been erected for that purpose in the days of Hezekiah (2 Chron. 31:11–12; Neh. 10:38–39; 13:5, 12, 13).

Israel was invited to put Yahweh to the test and see if He would prove faithful: "prove me now herewith, saith Yahweh Sabaoth." This statement is virtually an extension of the idea expressed in v. 7: "Return unto me, and I will return unto you". Yahweh had told His people, generation after generation, that they would never find Him faithless. He had always provided proof to that effect, but Israel had always found it hard to believe (cp. 1 Kings 17:13, 16; Psa. 37:3; Hag. 2:19). If they would be faithful, as He was, they would find blessings poured out upon them far exceeding their needs.

There is a direct reference here to the terms of the covenant: "Yahweh shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and He shall bless thee in the land which Yahweh thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 28:8). The implication is that no good thing whatever would be withheld from the nation if they walked diligently and reverently in the way of their God.

These words will have a wonderful fulfilment in Messiah's Kingdom, when the nation of Israel will have learned to "discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not" (v. 18). Zechariah promised a fulfilment of these ideals: "the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things" (Zech. 8:12).

Yahweh promised that He would "rebuke the devourer" (3:11)—a reference to Deut. 28:38—thus preventing the locusts from destroying the crops (see Deut. 28:18; Lev. 26:20). The fruit of the vine would ripen fully, rather than fall undeveloped and useless to the ground (see Deut. 28:40).

Israel should have been familiar with all the terms used by Malachi in vv. 9–11, for every phrase has allusions to Deut. 28 and Lev. 26. Had they responded to the tender pleading of their loving Heavenly Father, He would have elevated them to great heights among the nations.

"And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith Yahweh Sabaoth." (3:12)

It is implied that such a happy and desirable state of affairs could have been established there and then, had they obeyed the voice of God's prophet. In view of the fact that there was no response to the prophet's message on a national scale, it is evident that this promise is clearly related to the future "restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21) at Christ's return to earth.

When Israel as a nation learns to be holy and faithful they will become an example to all other nations. They will be looked upon with respect and the gentiles will honour Israel when they become "the head" of the nations and not "the tail" (Deut. 28:13; cp. Deut. 4:6–7; Jer. 33:6–9; Zeph. 3:19–20; Zech. 8:23).

Israel shall become known as a "delightsome land". This had been true in the past (Deut. 8:7–10). Certainly it will become a reality again in the future: "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for Yahweh delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married" (Isa. 62:4). The land promised to the patriarchs of Israel shall become a place of beauty and glory, bringing delight and pleasure to both God and man.

Such was the future promised to the people of Israel by the prophet Malachi—a picture which should have thrilled and encouraged them. Yet, his words fell mainly upon deaf ears. It should not have been so. Such, however, is the inevitable reaction when men and women remain unresponsive to the goodness and mercy of Almighty God. It goes without saying that when men and women remain unresponsive to the word of God, they remain without hope.

In the future, Israel will become "a delightsome land". What of these faithless men and women in that day? They will be unable to "abide the day of his coming".

3:13-15

Malachi's audience had listened to his message in comparative silence, contenting themselves with interjecting on seven occasions to voice their rejection of God's words, and to challenge Him to substantiate the truth of His statements.

Malachi was probably deeply shocked at the reaction to his words on the part of the majority, and turned the interrogatory style of dialogue back upon his contemporaries:

"You say harsh things about me, says Yahweh" (3:13, JB). The word rendered "stout" (AV) is so translated only in this passage. The Hebrew word means "bold" or "strong". Thus, the people—as clearly seen from Malachi's narrative—had openly and boldly spoken out against the principles of the truth, and therefore they had defamed their God and spoken harshly against Him.

These challenging words of the prophet speak volumes concerning the deep-rooted malaise which had sapped the spiritual comprehension of both priests and people. They lacked humility and reverence. They exhibited an easy familiarity when dealing with their God and His word. They felt confident in their standing before Yahweh, yet refused to walk in the way He had set before them.

Therefore, due to their lack of understanding and indifference towards the truth, faith had become nullified and the word of God no longer moved them.

As on every previous occasion when faced with the evidence of their sins, they refused to acknowledge their true state and claimed they were guiltless:

"What have we spoken ... against Thee?" (3:13) they demanded.

This is the eighth and final challenge which the people issued to Yahweh. From this point on they were given no further opportunity to speak—for the prophet begins an answer which continues on to contrast the rebellious with the faithful, and then sweeps on majestically to speak of "the great and dreadful day of Yahweh".

Those who opposed Malachi denied having spoken against Yahweh. Yet, when men repudiate His word, or pervert it to suit themselves, they are doing precisely that.

In many respects, the spiritual state of the nation at this time was almost identical to that of the period of the Judges, when "in those days there was no king in Israel"—a phrase which occurs four times

in the book of Judges—and "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 17:6). There was "no king in Israel" for only one reason: Yahweh had been dethroned in the hearts of His people. Was there not a similar situation in the days of Malachi? Men who had been moved by selfish motives had seized control in God's land and had influenced the people against Yahweh and His word.

Jeremiah faced a comparably critical state of affairs: "How dare you say: we are wise, and we possess the Law of Yahweh? But look how it has been falsified by the lying pen of the scribes! The wise shall be shamed, caught out, confounded. Look how they have rejected the word of Yahweh! So what use is their wisdom to them?" (Jer. 8:8–9, JB). Many of the words of Jeremiah, like those of Malachi, might be considered to be harsh and acrimonious. But in all such cases there is the evidence of a despairing God striving to restore His people to the way of truth because He would rather deliver them than destroy them.

Without the influence of the word of truth to encourage spiritual development, there will be no growth; only a steady decline. The descent into spiritual oblivion will have plumbed the depths when people begin to claim that "it is vain to serve God" (Mal. 3:14).

In such a state it is impossible to see any good purpose in maintaining the way of the truth. It was alleged that serving God had become "useless" (JB). It was argued that sacrifices may be made to Yahweh, but the individual receives nothing in return. God, it is suggested, neither acknowledges the faithfulness of His servants, nor concerns Himself with their welfare.

People who would argue in this way do not understand the principles of divine worship. They look upon service to God in much the same way as they would examine the day-to-day balance sheet of a business enterprise. Personal profit and loss is all that matters. Therefore such an attitude is basically selfish and reveals a form of religion which is based upon materialism.

It is not possible to serve Yahweh acceptably in the spirit of a hireling. The Lord Jesus made that abundantly clear (John 10:11–13). The Son of God taught men to worship their Heavenly Father in the spirit of self-sacrifice: "whosoever will save his life shall lose it..." (Luke 9:24).

These people asked, "What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance...".

The statement, of course, was manifestly false. It is difficult to charge them with hypocrisy, because the narrative would lead the reader to believe that Malachi's audience really had convinced themselves that Yahweh should be very pleased with the services they offered to Him. Their attitude was somewhat similar to that of the twentieth-century church goer who feels that a life of service to God is fulfilled in attending a religious meeting once weekly.

They had not kept God's ordinances. They had, on the contrary, described religious service as a "weariness" (1:13). They looked for profit from serving God, because their concept of spiritual reward was based upon a selfish motive. Although it is quite true that God is "a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6), He must first be diligently sought. Any claim that these faithless men made to such service could not be sustained. Faithful servants of Yahweh do not question whether He will or will not reward them; for that is accepted in the affirmative. However, their sole objective in worshipping God is that He might be glorified. They have no other motive. "All the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh" (Num. 14:21), not with the glory of flesh.

"We have kept His ordinance" and "we have walked mournfully before Yahweh Sabaoth" claimed the people of Israel.

The tragedy of this claim was that their notion of religious worship did not expand beyond mere outward ritual. This form of religion was regarded as keeping God's ordinance—and they had found it all a waste of time because no blessings had descended upon them from on high!

They "walked mournfully" ("gloomily", Roth.) as a mere outward show to impress one another (cp. Matt. 6:16; 23:25, 28). So far as any deep religious conviction was concerned, they were hollow pretenders. Their hearts were far from Yahweh; therefore "in vain" did they worship God (Matt. 15:8–9). In this respect they were quite correct. It was vain for them to worship Yahweh, though not for the reasons they had established in their own minds. Their religion was vain because they had not surrendered their hearts to God.

The prophet had demonstrated Yahweh's attitude toward such a form of religion: "take heed to your spirit" (2:15, 16 cp. Isa. 58:3–11). Yahweh desired that His people might manifest integrity before Him. "They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Mere formalism is a mechanical form of religion which

brings no honour to God and does nothing to effect a transformation in the characters of men and women.

The distorted sense of values which now permeated the nation had been proclaimed shamelessly:

"And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea they that tempt God are even delivered ..."

"Now we have reached the point when we call the arrogant blessed..." (JB). The word "proud" is better rendered as "arrogant" (cp. Psa. 10:1–6; 1 Pet. 5:5)—a term which denotes a complete lack of humility, and an attitude of bold aggression against divine principles. The end in store for those of such a disposition is shown in 4:1, "The proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up..."

Those who flagrantly walked in a way contrary to the truth appeared to become solidly established. "We deem the arrogant blessed; evildoers not only prosper, but when they put God to the test they escape" (RSV). It may have appeared to be so, but the message of these chapters was that the God of judgment would inevitably come and call to account the evildoers.

They tempted God by blatantly defying divine instruction and the spirit of the truth (cp. Deut. 6:16; Matt. 4:7). They believed that they had nothing to fear. But therein they exhibited a long-standing human weakness which was based upon a false premise: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc. 8:11).

So far as the truth was concerned, many of the people in Israel were uneducated and lacking in any sense of spiritual perception. They did not understand the truth and therefore they had not come to either know or love their God. Being "ignorant of God's righteousness" they had endeavoured to "establish their own righteousness", refusing to submit themselves "unto the righteousness of God". Thus they were rightly described as "a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Rom. 10:3, 21).

The principles taught by Malachi become more meaningful when considered in the light of words penned by brother Robert Roberts as an introduction to *The Bible Reading Companion*:

"Salvation depends upon the assimilation of the mind to the divine ideas, principles and affections, exhibited in the Scriptures. This process commences with a belief of the gospel, but it is by no means completed thereby; it takes a lifetime for its scope, and untiring diligence for its accomplishment. The mind is naturally alien from God and all His ideas (Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14), and cannot be brought at once to the divine likeness. This is a work of slow development, and can only be achieved by the industrious application of the individual to the means which God has given for the purpose; viz, the expression of His mind in the Scriptures of truth. Spiritual-minded-ness, or a state of mind in accordance with the mind of the Spirit as displayed in these writings, can only grow within a man by daily intercourse with that mind, there unfolded. Away from this, the mind will revert to its original emptiness. The infallible advice then to every man and woman anxious about their salvation is—READ THE SCRIPTURES DAILY. It is only in proportion as this is done, that success may be looked for..."

Malachi understood these principles clearly. And so did those who "feared Yahweh, and thought upon His Name..." It was a monumental tragedy that others in the nation did not.

PART FIVE: A FAITHFUL REMNANT TO BE VINDICATED

A message of hope

3:16-18

Malachi's message had largely fallen upon deaf ears. Throughout the course of the narrative there had been no record of any favourable reaction to his words from either the priests or people.

However, some had been listening carefully and reverentially. From the words of wisdom which the prophet had uttered they identified him as a man sent from God.

"Then they that feared Yahweh spake often one to another: and Yahweh hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared Yahweh, and that thought upon His Name." (3:16)

Several dramatic aspects of this verse are worthy of contemplation. There is the sudden introduction into the narrative of reference to the existence of a faithful, responsive minority. There is also set forth the incredible contrast in outlook and attitude between this minority and the other class in Israel. A further dramatic feature of the verse is the obvious link with chapter 2:5–6, where the Godly attributes of a faithful priesthood has been set forth. There remained in Israel, therefore, a class of people—whether of Levi's tribe or others—who recognized those qualities and endeavoured to imitate them.

Perhaps the most dramatic aspect of the verse is the revelation that the faithful remnant "spake often one to another". There is a pointed allusion to the fact that they did not speak to the others. Why should that be so? If there were those who loved the truth and walked humbly before their God, would it not be a Scriptural principle for them to try to persuade their brethren, who were not like-minded with them, to return to the way of the truth? Obviously such would be the correct course of action. Why, then, is this wording so apparently contrary to that ideal? There can be only one answer: the faithful remnant had attempted to restore their erring brethren, but to no avail. Eventually the gulf between them had widened to the point where there was no longer any affinity whatever. The door of utterance had been closed upon the faithful brethren. They were left, then, to speak only "one to another" because others were not prepared to listen.

They "feared Yahweh" in that they had learned the childlike characteristics of awe and respect for their Heavenly Father, and they "feared" Him with the reverence that a faithful servant would demonstrate towards his Master. In other words, they practised the attributes of chapter 1:6. They were true sons and true servants of the living God.

A genuine fear of Yahweh, in the Scriptural sense, acts as a cleansing influence upon men and women: "The fear of Yahweh is *clean*, enduring for ever..." (Psa. 19:9). "The *fear* of Yahweh is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death..." (Prov. 14:27).

To know the true meaning of "fear" for Yahweh is to understand the fundamentals of His truth, to revere and love Him, and to walk in the way of life. "In the *fear* of Yahweh is strong confidence: and His children shall have a place of refuge" (Prov. 14:26).

The Levites, so long ago, had separated from evil and the influence of evil, and had dedicated their lives to their God. Malachi was now deeply moved to realize that those attributes of character were not entirely dead within the nation as there were those who were prepared to emulate the example of these faithful Levites.

The faithful brethren "conversed with one another" (Roth.) because they remained of one mind on the wonder of God's truth. Their influence was now so minimal that they could no longer expect to change things for the better within the nation. Malachi had tried, and had received no better reaction than they. The faithful could not hope to eradicate the doctrinal and moral corruption which had eaten into God's nation; it would take the second coming of Nehemiah—a type of Christ!—to achieve success in that direction.

Nevertheless, the true sons and daughters of God remained undaunted. In spite of most difficult conditions they endeavoured to maintain their own integrity before Yahweh; and struggled to manifest lives of holiness, of which He would approve. They were devoted to the precious things of divine truth because they wholeheartedly loved their God and His word.

History provides stark testimony to the fact that it is extremely difficult for God's sons and daughters to maintain a sound, clear state of integrity and devotion toward Him, when the environment is so utterly in contrast to that which God would desire to see—when faithlessness, ungodliness and moral perversion abound on every hand. Those who do not hold firmly and zealously to the things of the truth, under such conditions, will be gravely endangered. The Lord

Jesus Christ taught: "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold..." (Matt. 24:12).

The true believers of Malachi's day "spake often one to another" in fulfilment of the Law: "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou...shalt *talk* of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:6–7). And, needless to say, they would have taught these things "diligently" unto their "children".

Those who adhered to the truth found themselves drawn together. They delighted mutually in the wonders of the word of God. They enjoyed a oneness of mind that was a great joy to them. They encouraged one another at a time when the love of many had waxed cold.

Doubtless this faithful minority was looked upon with open hostility by those whose words had been bold against Yahweh (v. 13). It is likely that the errorists charged their faithful brethren with many crimes: why were they so hard? Why were they so narrow-minded? Why were they so lacking in love and charity? Yet, what would Yahweh say?

Are not men hard when they speak contrary to the word of God? (v. 13; cp. Jude v. 15). Are not men narrow minded when they close their minds to the requirements of God's word? Are they not lacking in love when they refuse to honour Yahweh or His word?

Sons and daughters of the Living God must certainly know and understand what it means to "fear Yahweh". David, who had learned to totally trust his God in all things, gently taught his people: "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the *fear* of Yahweh" (Psa. 34:11).

Yahweh will respond, totally and unreservedly, when He observes such loving and submissive qualities in His people:

"Yahweh hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared Yahweh, and that thought upon His Name" (3:16).

These must surely rate among the most thrilling and comforting words ever written.

God is neither deaf nor blind to the faithfulness of His servants. He has permanently recorded the constancy of His saints when they have conformed to His truth. "Yahweh's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear" (Isa. 59:1).

"For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers..." (1 Pet. 3:12).

Those who learn to fear Yahweh and think upon His Name are aware that, so long as they cling firmly to divine truth their God watches over them intently. He sees all and He hears all. He will fully justify all who stand uncompromisingly in defence of His truth, as had been demonstrated in the case of the tribe of Levi in earlier times (Exod. 32:25-35). The analogy of a "book of remembrance" being written has been taken from the ancient custom of keeping meticulous records of all national events of day-by-day importance (cp. 1 Kings 11:41; Ezra 4:15; 6:1; Est. 6:1). In the usage of this term there is a further allusion to the days when the tribe of Levi had proved faithful: "Moses returned unto Yahweh, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written. And Yahweh said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Exod. 32:31– 33). It is implied that the Levites who had proven faithful under trial would have their names recorded in "the book" of "remembrance".

The Scriptures speak of two such "books": one is termed "a book of life"—the other is called "the book of life". The former is represented as a Day Book, recording a day-to-day account of the lives of all who are known to the Deity (Psa. 69:28; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 22:19). The latter of the two books is rather like a Ledger, in which will be recorded the 'final balance', as it were (Dan. 12:1; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27). In the New Testament verses the Greek text has "the scroll of the life" 1. In the day of judgment, when Yahweh will make up His "jewels" (3:17), the names of those who have been proven faithful will be transferred from the Day Book to the Ledger.

Needless to say, there is no suggestion that the language is anything other than allegorical. There are no such books in a literal sense, for the Spirit is the remembrancer (John 14:26).

So far as the faithful ones of Malachi's day were concerned, the prophet explicitly states that they not only "feared Yahweh" but also "thought upon His Name".

The Name of God is pronounced from the Hebrew tetragrammaton: YHWH, Yahweh. It means: 'He Who will be' or 'He Who will become'. Certainly the Name of God is important in that He might be vocally or verbally identified, but by far the most significant aspect of the Name is its meaning; for it embodies the divine purpose for the ages: that the One Eternal Spirit might eventually be manifested in a multitude of glorified and immortalized men and women—creatures of His own creation—who would become reflections and manifestations of what Yahweh Himself is and always has been.

Is it any wonder, then, that true servants of God should have "thought" upon His Name? Of the Hebrew word which has been rendered "thought", it is said to mean "to think, to meditate; the primary idea seems to be that of computing, reckoning..." (Ges.).

When the believers of Malachi's day "spake often one to another" and "thought upon His Name" they were, in effect, computing or reckoning up the attributes and purpose associated with the Name. They took comfort from the Name, seeing therein a promise of their ultimate deliverance from sin and death, and their elevation to a state of divine nature.

God's people have been separated from the world for His Name (Acts 15:14). "Even every one that is *called by my Name*: for I have created him *for my glory*, I have formed him..." (Isa. 43:7).

The Scriptures abound with instructions for the servants of God concerning what they should learn about the Name of their God:

The Name is a strong tower	Prov. 18:20
It is holy	
Love the Name	
Remember the Name	Psa. 20:7
Fear the Name	Psa. 86:11–12
Glorify the Name	Psa. 86:12
There is a reward for those who fear it	Psa. 61:5–8
Praise the Name	Psa. 44:8
Extol Him by His Name, YAH	
Exalt His Name	Psa. 34:3-4
Bless the Name	
Call upon the Name	Psa. 80:18
Call upon the Name	1 Chron. 16:8
Think upon the Name	
It is a source of confidence	Psa. 9:10

¹ For an enlightening exposition of this particular subject, the reader is directed to *Eureka*, Vol. 1 p. 360, and Vol. 3, pp. 290–293.

Do not despise it	Mal. 1:6
It is vocally important, for identification	
Know the Name	
False teachers will teach men to forget the Name	

The Name of God is not honoured simply by mouthing it, as the fine example of Levi adequately illustrates. It is necessary to think upon the Name; to study the beautiful Scriptures which deal with the subject; to learn the purpose of the Name; and to strive to manifest the wonderful attributes of character which are associated with the Name.

The subject of God manifestation is the foundation doctrine of the Bible. The reader is recommended to a consideration of two fine expository works upon this vital subject: *Phanerosis* and *Eureka*.

Those who fear Yahweh and think upon His Name have an assured future—one which is awesome to contemplate:

"They shall be mine, saith Yahweh Sabaoth, in that day when I make up my jewels" (3:17)

The sublime reality of these words will result in mere mortals, men and women who have suffered from the weaknesses and frailties of the flesh, becoming elevated to the supreme heights of divine nature.

In the midst of an evil environment, dominated by every form of sin and lawlessness, by every manner of God dishonouring moral and spiritual perversion, a class of men and women are being prepared for an eternal inheritance in God's Kingdom. This is a work of God which He commenced at the dawn of history. It is a work which will continue unabated until the day when His handiwork will be revealed in the "jewels" that He has formed through the influence of His word. Of such men and women the great Creator has said: "They shall be mine." He will delight to call them His own, to honour them, and to elevate them to glory before all the nations. Because they have "thought" upon His Name they will become a part of that Name: "He who will be"—"They shall be mine..."

The Lord Jesus Christ, in prayer to his Father, spoke of these majestic ideals: "all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them...That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me" (John 17:10, 21).

This mighty work will be performed by "Yahweh Sabaoth", He Who will be armies—the militant title of Deity. Use of the Name with this particular title is surely intended to remind the servants of

Yahweh that He has the power and the means to fulfil what He has promised. "Not by might, nor by power" (of the flesh), "but by my Spirit saith Yahweh Sabaoth" (Zech. 4:6). In that day, Yahweh will "make up" His "jewels".

A more literal translation tends to emphasize the superlative development of the divine purpose down through the ages: "in the day for which I am preparing treasure..." (Roth.); "on the day which I am preparing..." (JB).

What greater encouragement could Yahweh have given to the faithful remnant in the days of Malachi? Looked upon with scorn by their brethren, isolated because of their stand in defence of the truth, struggling to walk in the way of the truth at a time when large-scale apostasy had sapped the spiritual strength of the nation—these brethren were spurred on to renewed faithfulness and dedication through the message contained in the Name. In the midst of all the trials and difficulties which those men and women faced, Yahweh was, even at that time, "preparing" faithful Believers for His Kingdom, and for the glory which would be revealed at that time. Down through the ages He has been "preparing" for that day—and no power can frustrate or withstand Him.

Those who remained faithful would become His "jewels".

The phrase has been variously rendered "a peculiar treasure" (Young's, RV); "my own special possession" (JB). The Hebrew primarily conveys the idea of "property, wealth, private property" (Ges.). The notion of "private property" could be extended to indicate "treasure" or "valuables" which have been kept shut away or hidden from the world at large—a "treasure" of which the world generally has known nothing, but which will be revealed in splendour and glory when "the day cometh" (4:1).

The Hebrew word is feminine, passive; and beautifully symbolizes the Bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7). She is represented as having passively and willingly surrendered up her will to become submissive to her Husband (cp. Isa. 54:5).

Thus those who would remain faithful to Yahweh acknowledge that they cannot change themselves to become fit vessels for His glory. It is a work which only He can perform; therefore they permit Him to shape and mould their lives and their characters to conform to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28–29).

There can be no doubt that the use of this word is a direct reference to God's covenant with Israel, for the same word occurs in Exod. 19:5, where Yahweh promised that Israel would become a "peculiar treasure" unto Him. Malachi's wording appears to be in the form of a commentary on Exod. 19:5, "If ye will obey my voice...then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me..." Malachi's wording is too similar to be unintentional: "They shall be mine...in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure..." (RV).

The One Eternal Spirit, as the embodiment of absolute moral perfection, could be expected to take supreme delight in only one type of "jewel" or "treasure": His own moral excellence reflected in creatures who are the work of His hands. To Yahweh, such people are precious. "Such as are upright in their way are His delight..." They that deal truly are His delight... The prayer of the upright is His delight..." (Prov. 11:20; 12:22; 15:8).

Although Israel, nationally, dishonoured the terms of the covenant made at Sinai, there would be those who, while not seeking salvation upon the principle of Law, would capture in their hearts the spirit of those words (Exod. 19:5), and strive to serve their God "in spirit and in truth" upon the basis of faith in what He had promised.

"I will spare them", said Yahweh. A simple and yet emphatic statement. The phrase has been rendered: "I have had pity on them" (Young's); "I will deal tenderly with them" (Roth.). Of the key word here, Gesenius says: "to be mild, gentle...The primary idea is that of softness...Hence, to pity, to have compassion..."

Yahweh has tremendous feelings of love and compassion for His faithful servants. He will vindicate them and shower upon them all the love and tenderness that a loving Father will manifest towards the children whom He loves.

He will "spare them" as "a man spareth his own son that serveth him".

And with these words, the reader is taken back to the commencement of the book: "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?" (1:6).

Now, as his message drew towards its conclusion, the prophet acknowledged that the "messenger" of Yahweh would not be rejected by all; that there would be a class of humanity who would respond to the word of Almighty God. Such a class of people existed in the time

of Malachi, and they have existed down through the ages, since faithful Abel. They will have manifested the love due from respectful children towards a loving Father; they will have rendered faithful obedience such as is exhibited by loyal servants towards their masters.

Such is the spirit of those who "fear Yahweh" and think "upon His Name".

From expressing the feeling of warmth and tenderness which Yahweh feels for his faithful sons and daughters, the prophet now turned his attention back to those who constituted Israel after the flesh:

"Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not." (v. 18).

When "the great and dreadful day of Yahweh" has become a reality, the "regeneration" of the nation of Israel will commence (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21). With the redemption and vindication of spiritual Israel, the restoration of natural Israel will follow.

Yahweh has promised to give them "shepherds" who will be in accord with Yahweh's "heart"—and they will "feed" Israel with "knowledge and understanding" (Jer. 3:15). This work will be primarily under the control of the prophet Elijah (4:5). Hence, ultimately the people of Israel will learn something which was beyond them in the days of Malachi: they will "discern" the truth. They will "see the difference" (Roth.) between what is right and what is wrong, spiritually and morally.

Down through the ages, false teachers and underminers of the faith have been responsible for encouraging apostasy and declension from the truth. But without doubt, one of the greatest factors which has resulted in defection from the truth and abandonment of sound doctrine and practice, has been the inability of the flock at large to "discern" the truth, when having to make a decision between truth and error; and thereupon to act uncompromisingly in defence of the truth.

The Lord Jesus Christ, in observing this failing among the people of Israel, made a telling quotation from the prophet Isaiah: "In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive" (Matt. 13:14; cp. Isa. 6:9). The indictment is unmistakable: it is possible to both "hear" and "see" the truth, and still not be able to discern truth from error.

The "solid food" of the word, said the apostle Paul, "is for adults—that is, for those who through constant practice have their spiritual faculties carefully trained to *distinguish* good from evil" (Heb. 5:14, Wey.). The word in the Greek text, *diakrisis*, means "a distinguishing, a clear discrimination, discerning, judging". Of the verb, *diakrino*, W. E. Vine says it means "to separate, to discriminate; then, to learn by discriminating, to determine, to decide..." The noun, which occurs in Heb. 5:14, is significantly preceded by the prefix pros, ("towards"), which means that the apostle was writing of mature brethren and sisters who had moved "towards" a better understanding of the word of God, and were thus able to "distinguish" ("discern" AV) between right and wrong.

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). The word here is *anakrino*, of which W. E. Vine has written: "to examine, scrutinize, question, to hold a preliminary judicial examination, preceding the trial proper"—implying a further and deeper investigation to follow.

The true spiritual Israelites in Malachi's day were not lacking in this quality. It was because they were able to "discern" that they understood what it meant to "fear Yahweh" and think "upon His Name".

This same attribute must be apparent in true spiritual Israelites of every age. However, if they cannot learn to discern truth from error, how will they ever learn to walk in the way of the truth?

The majority of the Israelites in the days of Malachi were unable to discern. They had, in fact, challenged their God upon eight different grounds; and had received direct answers to each of their challenges. But still they failed to distinguish truth from error.

Why did Malachi record eight challenges from the people? Eight is a Biblical number associated with cutting off the flesh (Gen. 17:12). The time will come when the nation of Israel will accept the eight answers to these questions, and will thereby discover the means by which they might walk after the spirit and not after the flesh. They will discern that:

1.	God love	s them	 	 	 (1:2)
_			 -	 	

2.				honoured			
	reverence	ed as th	eir N	Aaster	 	 	. (1:6)

3.	Neither God nor His altar are to be polluted, as is the case when His people are morally and spiritually defiled(1:7)
4.	They will understand that they must keep covenant with Yahweh and man, having especial respect for God and for family life
5.	Claims to be sons and servants of God must be matched by performance(2:17)
6.	It is necessary to remain faithful to the ordinances of Yahweh(3:7)
7.	God must not be robbed of things which rightly belong to Him; and His claims upon man must not be ignored(3:8)
8.	Words uttered and propounded by God's servants must always express truth, and never be directed against Yahweh(3:13)
	hus, as true sons and servants, Israel will learn to serve Yahweh pirit and in truth".

"And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in: for God is able to graff them in again" (Rom. 11:23; cp. Jer. 31:31–34).

4:1-3

As in chapter three, this section begins with the dramatic command: "Behold!" The prophet now provides the final aspect of Yahweh's answer to the question: "Where is the God of judgment?" The language is both majestic and awesome. The prophet appears to be impelled by a compelling sense of urgency—permitting no opportunity for interruption to his final summary. The words pour forth with reverential fervour, and reach inspiring heights of vividness and drama.

The two sides to Yahweh's character are graphically portrayed in the first two verses. In the first, there is demonstrated God's *justice* in the punishment of the wicked; in the second there is represented His *mercy*, which will be seen in the deliverance and justification of the faithful. There will be revealed in that day a full manifestation of the divine character (Exod. 34:5–7). Of that time, the Deity has said: "I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am Yahweh" (Ezek. 38:23).

"Behold", spoke the prophet compellingly, "the day cometh that shall burn as an oven..."

It will be the day explicitly referred to in 3:2, "the day of his coming"—the second coming of "the messenger of the covenant". "For He cometh to judge the earth: He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth" (Psa. 96:13; cp. Acts 17:31). That day will burn "as a furnace" (Roth.), which is a vivid reminder that "our God is a consuming fire" (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29).

Yahweh has been described as both a "sun" and a "shield"; the former for burning up the wicked, and the latter for defending and preserving the righteous.

Fire is associated with divine judgment and purification; thus, as a result of the judgments which will sweep the earth the human race will undergo a purifying process that will provide an environment of a moral rectitude suitable for the establishment of the Kingdom of God. To indicate the effect and extent of the judgment, the allegory of a "furnace" has been used. Fire burns with a much greater intensity in a furnace than in the open.

In the days of Malachi they called "the proud happy" because they appeared to prosper (3:15). But none will envy the proud in the day of judgment. Israel, and then the gentile nations, will learn that true happiness and well-being can only be attained through worshipping

Yahweh in accordance with His word (John 4:23–24; Isa. 2:3,12,17; 40:23–24).

The "proud" and "all that do wickedly, shall be stubble" (4:1) in the day of judgment. The word "stubble" is another word for "straw" (Str.) and it is "so called from its being collected" (Ges.). In other words, Yahweh will *gather together* the wicked for judgment. They will be unable to escape. "For as a snare shall it come on *all them* that dwell on the face of the whole earth" (Luke 21:35; cp. Exod. 15:7; Joel 2:5; Nah. 1:10; Isa. 40:24; 47:14, see especially Isa. 5:20–24, from which Malachi has almost certainly drawn this allegory).

The men of Israel would readily understand the implication of this language; for it was their custom to gather straw in preference to wood because it burned more quickly and fiercely. Such would be the heat of the fire of divine judgment that it would leave the wicked "neither root nor stalk" (JB). The metaphor is that of a tree or shrub entirely consumed in a raging fire so that nothing is left to indicate that such a tree or shrub had ever existed. The idea is that of total and permanent annihilation (cp. Matt. 3:10). Thus, those who had belligerently thrown out the challenge: "Where is the God of judgment?" received their answer.

They were to understand that "the God of judgment" would manifest Himself in power, not only to destroy the wicked but also to redeem His faithful sons and daughters:

"But unto you that fear my Name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings..." (v. 2).

Yahweh now specifically addresses Himself to those of 3:16, and others down through the ages who have been like-minded with those faithful ones of Malachi's day.

From the figure of a fiery furnace, burning with such intense heat that it destroys everything drawn into it, the metaphor now changes to that of the sun rising above the rim of the earth and ascending into the heavens to dispel the darkness and gloom of night. The word sun is used here as a figure for the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall appear in the full glory of divine nature and power to dissipate the fear and misery and spiritual darkness which has enshrouded the earth.

The warming rays which shall emanate from him will heal those who have "feared" the Name of Yahweh, and he will free them totally from the shackles of mortality.

He will be revealed as "the Sun of Righteousness", for the term indicates that he will dispense light after darkness; spiritual warmth to replace the coldness of the gentile night; healing for the sufferers of death stricken Adamic nature. To those who have "feared Yahweh and thought upon His Name" he will bring joy, warmth and relief.

As the "Sun of Righteousness" he will fulfil Jeremiah's prophecy, and will be revealed as **Yahweh our Righteousness** (Jer. 23:6). As such, he will bring sanity, judgment, justice, righteousness and mercy into a world which has, for far too long, remained largely blind to its own desperate needs.

Upon those who "stand firm to the end" (Matt. 24:13, Wey.) and have humbly and diligently looked forward to his coming (2 Tim. 4:8; 2 Pet. 3:13-14) "the sun of righteousness will shine out with healing in its rays" (JB). The word rendered "wings" in the AV literally means "extremities". A sun does not have wings but it does have rays which shine forth disseminating light and warmth. The Lord Jesus Christ will justify and vindicate all who have served Yahweh faithfully down through the ages. The darkness of gentile night will be driven back before his advancing light, until finally the whole earth will be filled with light rather than darkness (Isa. 60:1–3; Num. 14:21; Hos. 6:1; Matt. 6:10).

This will indeed be "the day of his coming" (3:2) when the Lord Jesus "shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe..." (2 Thess. 1:10).

Malachi now particularly addresses those who have "feared Yahweh and thought upon His Name":

"And ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall."

Thus their eternal future and well-being was assured. They would "leap for joy like calves let loose from the stall" (Roth.) in the day of Christ's coming. They would "leap like calves going out to pasture" (JB). The metaphor is that of calves which have been restrained within their stalls during the darkness of night, and are given their freedom and release with the rising of the sun.

They will "go forth" for the purpose of manifesting Yahweh's glory to Israel and the nations, and to subdue the earth under Christ's rule. "He that overcometh and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers..." (Rev. 2:26–27). The immortalized, multitudinous Christ-body will become

the vehicle in which divine power and judgments will be manifested (Psa. 149; 58:10–11; Isa. 26:5–6; Dan. 7:18; John 18:36; Heb. 2:5; Rev. 3:21; 5:9–10; 17:14; 19:11–18).

Calves of the stall were among the most highly prized of animals. They were healthy and strong and well cared for (Amos 6:4; Prov. 15:17). To state that "there shall be no herd in the stall" was to denote calamity and disaster (Hab. 3:17). Generally, these animals had their hoofs shod with metal plates for threshing out the corn at harvest time (Mic. 4:13). Thus shall the redeemed "tread down the wicked" in the day when the God of judgment will be manifested to the world.

Those who will constitute the multitudinous Christ-body in that day, and who will therefore become Yahweh Sabaoth—He Who Will Be Armies—will go forth to "tread down the lawless" (Roth.), for it will only be when God's judgments are in the earth that "the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9). This glorified multitude will be the meek who will have inherited "the earth" (Psa. 37:11; Matt. 5:5). The word rendered "meek" (Heb.) has been more correctly translated as "the patient, oppressed ones" (Roth.). The word signifies to be "afflicted, miserable...commonly with the added notion of a lowly, pious and modest mind, which prefers to bear injuries rather than return them" (Ges.).

The meek are those those who will have awaited the coming of the Lord; suffering patiently, enduring oppression in the spirit of Christ; bowed down with the weaknesses of the flesh, and yet remaining steadfast through the power of their faith. They will have faithfully combatted an environment hostile to the truth, and will have continued to war against the evil propensities within their own nature. Now, released and rewarded, vindicated and justified, they will go forth in the company of their glorious Lord to subjugate the world.

Finally in this section, there is a beautiful allusion to the doctrine of God-manifestation: "Ye shall tread down the wicked...in the day that I shall do this, saith Yahweh Sabaoth".

This would be the work of the One Eternal Spirit, not flesh. The One I would be manifested in the many ye. Isaiah wrote similarly of Yahweh being manifested in a host in the day when His glory would be manifested in the earth: "I Who Will Be the first one and the last ones" (Isa. 41:4, lit. Heb.). Yet, though Yahweh will be revealed in a glorified multitude of the redeemed, the oneness and singular essence of the One Eternal Spirit will be preserved: "I, the first one, and the last one" (Isa. 44:6, lit. Heb.). This concept of the unity and oneness

of the Creator, even when manifested in a multitude, is carried forward into the Apocalypse, where the above verse from Isaiah has been quoted: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending... I am the first and the last" (Rev. 1:8, 17; cp. 21:6).

Isaiah foretold this future manifestation of the One Eternal Spirit, and entreated his hearers to gaze, in faith, into the future: "See, the name of Yahweh comes from afar, blazing is His anger, heavy His exaction. His lips brim with fury, His tongue is like a devouring fire. His breath is like a river in spate coming up to the neck. He comes to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction, to put the bit of His bridle between the jaws of the nations. Yahweh will make His majestic voice be heard and display His arm falling to strike, in the ferocity of His anger, in the glare of a devouring fire, in cloudburst, downpour, hailstones" (Isa. 30:27–30, JB).

Through His prophet, Malachi, Yahweh Sabaoth had said: "I shall do this".

Until the divine purpose becomes a reality in the earth, God's true servants will wait patiently and in faith for the fulfilment of those awesome and momentous events. For they "reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

4:4-6

The final section of the book opens with a last, clear reminder of the obligations which were incumbent upon men and women who were in covenant relationship with Israel's God:

"Remember ye the law of Moses..."

Attention was being directly drawn to Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28—the chapters which defined the terms of the covenant made at Mt. Sinai between Yahweh and His people. Such a reminder was also intended to act as a warning. The terms of the covenant provided blessings from God in return for faithfulness from the people. But the conditions also provided cursings which would be sent from God if the nation proved faithless.

Malachi was virtually reminding the nation of the principle evoked by Isaiah: "Here is the way, walk ye in it..." (Isa. 30:21).

Thus, fittingly, the last Old Testament writer endorsed the first: Moses.

Although called "the law of Moses" it had come from God, Moses being merely the medium through whom the Law had been delivered to Israel. Therefore, respect for the Law would also constitute reverence for Yahweh—a necessary element in divine worship which was obviously lacking in the days of Malachi.

This final appeal went forth as a call to the entire nation to remember that Yahweh must be worshipped "in spirit and in truth" with due respect being shown for His commandments. Sons and daughters of God should desire to honour Him by having reverence for His person and His character and His will. "I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart." This was the spirit which motivated David and the Lord Jesus Christ (Psa. 40:8; cp. Luke 24:44; Heb. 10:7). It should also be the basic attitude of all who would become sons and daughters of God through the Lord Jesus Christ—"Doing the will of God from the heart" (1 Pet. 2:21; Eph. 6:6).

It should be borne in mind that, at this point in history, apart from "the law and the prophets" Israel were without divine light; therefore the Law would continue to serve as their "schoolmaster" and as a guard against anarchy until Christ should come (Isa. 8:20; Gal. 3:19, 24).

It is quite clear from Moses and the prophets that a modified form of the Law of Moses will be reinstituted during the Kingdom Age, to become a basis for teaching the spirit of the truth and to preserve law-abiding communities throughout the world (Deut. 30:6–8; Isa. 2:3; 42:21; 56:6–7; 66:23; Jer. 33:7, 14–18; Ezek. 43:27).

However, until Messiah appeared as "the messenger of the covenant" to rectify the wrongs in Israel and, ultimately, give them a "new covenant" which would become written in their "hearts" (Jer. 31:31–34), they were to continue to be guided by their schoolmaster: "the law which I commanded him..." said Yahweh. The wording appears to be a reference to the words of Moses: "Ye that did cleave unto Yahweh your God are alive every one of you this day. Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as Yahweh my God commanded me that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people... And Yahweh commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it" (Deut. 4:4-6,14). The principles of divine worship which are to be seen in these words of Moses will be taught by Elijah when he comes again to work for the restoration of the nation of Israel (v. 5).

Appropriately, Moses has been especially referred to here as "my servant". It is not, of course, an uncommon Scriptural expression; so why should its usage here be significant? Because of the challenging words recorded early in the book: "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master..." Moses had been such a man, in contrast to the general spirit which was being manifested in the nation at the time of Malachi: "Ye have said, it is vain to *serve* God..." (13:14). Moses appears in the Scriptures as one of the most faithful of God's servants, despite his failures and imperfections (Num. 12:7; Heb. 3:1–6); and as a reward for his faithfulness he will certainly find an eternal inheritance in the Kingdom of God (Heb. 11:23–29, 39–40).

In using the term "Moses my servant" there was a final reminder to Israel to consider once again the qualities of service Yahweh was asking of them; and that they might remember the fine example not only of Levi in the past, but of the one through whom the Law had been delivered to them. They, too, could become faithful servants of Yahweh, if they reverenced His word, and learned from the fine examples of faithful men of the past.

The Law had been given "in Horeb"—a term to cause Israel to recall the awesome spectacle and manifestation of divine power which had been witnessed by the nation at that time. They had seen an incredible display of Yahweh's mighty power, sufficient to fill the people with terror—a manifestation which will be repeated on an even more dreadful scale in that day which shall "burn as an oven...The great and dreadful day of Yahweh". Could they not recapture a spirit of awe and reverence for their God, when reminded of these momentous truths?

And now, for the last time, comes the commanding word: "Behold!" (v. 5).

"I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Yahweh." The first phrase can be rendered: "I am sending unto you Elijah the prophet..." (Roth.). The words constitute a further development of that which had been said earlier: "In the day for which *I am* preparing..." (3:17). Yahweh was, in the days of Malachi—and is, in these present times—guiding the destiny of the nations to bring about the fulfilment of His purpose with the earth.

It is surely both majestic and sublime that the last two persons to be named in the Old Testament should be Moses and Elijah—the two who were to be chosen by Yahweh to appear with Christ on the Mount of transfiguration. They represented the law and the prophets joined together as one to acknowledge the supremacy and the glory of the Son of God. Both Moses and Elijah were ready to humbly concede that Christ would be revealed to the world as having the preeminence above all creatures—in heaven and upon earth—with the sole exception of the Father Himself. It will become Elijah's task to instill such a spirit of acceptance and acknowledgment within the nation of Israel.

That the prophecy refers literally to Elijah the prophet, there can be no doubt. To avoid any misunderstanding upon the point, the LXX has rendered the phrase: "I will send you Elias the Thesbite" (i.e., Elijah the Tishbite). New Testament references to this verse clearly identify the Old Testament prophet as the subject of this prophecy.

John the Baptist—sometimes alleged to have fulfilled this prophecy—came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17)—but he was not *the* Elijah of this prophecy, and clearly said so. The Lord Jesus Christ indicated to the Jews that John the Baptist *could have become* the one to fulfil the prophecy, had Israel received John wholeheartedly, in a national sense—as the prophecy requires (Matt. 11:12—

18). But the Jews did not receive John in that way. Only a minority paid any heed to the power of his message (Mark 6:18–29).

John, when bluntly questioned as to his true identity, unequivocally denied that he was Elijah (John 1:21), being fully aware of the prophecy to which his questioners referred.

Later, after John had been put to death and buried, the Lord Jesus Christ made it quite clear that this prophecy in Malachi was still to be fulfilled in the future: "Elijah indeed comes, and will restore all things" (Matt. 17:11, Diag.)—or: "Elijah is to come to see that everything is once more as it should be" (JB).

Elijah's work to the ten tribes remained unfinished. Prophetically, the "ten tribes" represent that portion of the nation who will still be scattered among the nations at Christ's coming (Zech. 12:7; Jer. 31:22–27; Joel 3:1, 16; Zech. 14:14)—therefore, Elijah's primary work will be to minister to those Israelites dwelling among the gentile nations, to prepare them for "the regeneration".

Elijah will go forth, doubtless in the company of a great multitude of resurrected and glorified prophets who, in the past, had been associated with the prophetic ministry-men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. They will go into every nation on earth where Jews will be residing. Their message will be simple and yet demanding: "Jesus of Nazareth, whom your fathers crucified, was-and is-truly the Messiah and Redeemer promised by Moses and the prophets. He is once again in the earth, having descended from the right hand of the Father in the heavens. He has raised his faithful servants from the dead, and rewarded them with eternal life. They will live and reign with him upon the earth. He has come to fulfil all the prophecies of God's word concerning the restoration of Israel and the establishment of Yahweh's Kingdom on earth. He will shortly announce to the world his presence in Jerusalem. He calls upon every Jew to acknowledge and accept him, and to return to the ancient land of their fathers to join in the work of restitution, and to assist in the work of establishing the Kingdom. Great and dreadful judgments are about to break forth upon all nations; but if you return in faith, and in accordance with the principles that we will teach you, you need have no fear. You will return safely to the land, and Yahweh's blessing will be upon you" (cp. Isa. 40:1–11; Jer. 3:14–18; 33:6–9; Ezek. 20:33–38; 36:21–29; Psa. 110:1–3; Rom. 11:1, 23–28).

These activities will be instituted "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Yahweh"—which indicates two important factors

in relation to the actual timing of these events: firstly, if Elijah and his fellow-workers are to go forth as "Yahweh Sabaoth" (4:2–3), they must be clothed upon with divine nature before manifesting themselves to Jewry scattered among the nations; secondly, the outpouring of divine judgment upon all the earth will be pending, but will not have commenced at that time. Thus the Scriptures indicate the following order of events:

- 1. The return of Christ to the earth, unbeknown to the nations. The resurrection of all who are responsible to judgment (Dan. 12:2; 1 Pet. 4:17; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 16:15).
- 2. The gathering together, of those resurrected from the dead together with the responsible living, to judgment seat. The judgment probably will take place at Sinai (Rom. 14:10; Deut. 33:2; Psa. 68:17; Hab. 3:3).
- 3. The marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7; 2 Cor. 11:1–2; cp. Deut. 24:5).
- 4. Elijah and the prophets sent forth to Israel dwelling among the gentile nations (Mal. 4:5–6; Isa. 40:1–11; Jer. 3:14–17; 33:6–9; Ezek. 20:33–38; 36:21–29; Psa. 110:1–3; Rom. 11:1, 23–28).
- 5. Christ and the immortalized saints—those not earlier sent out with Elijah and his company—begin to march forth from Sinai as the Rainbowed Angel of Rev. 10 (Hab. 3; Psa. 68).
- 6. They discipline the Arabs and move into Egypt; from thence they move to attack the nations led by Gog—Russia and her confederate nations—assembled against Jerusalem (Hab. 3:7; Isa. 21:16; 60:6–7; Isa. 19:1; Ezek. 38; Dan. 11:45; Zech. 14:2–4; Psa. 149; Mal. 4:2–3).
- 7. The invading armies of Gog destroyed by Christ and the saints (Ezek. 38–39; Joel 3:1–17).
- 8. Christ and his immortalized saints enter Jerusalem to become accepted by Judah (Psa. 24; Zech. 12:7–14; 13:9).
- 9. A proclamation goes forth to world Jews to return to the land of their fathers, and for all nations to acknowledge that Christ is King in Jerusalem and will become King over all the earth (Isa. 18:3; 27:13; Zech. 8:3; Rev. 14:6–7).
- 10. The work of guiding Israelites back to the land of the covenant will begin—they will, in many instances, have to fight their way through hostile gentile forces (Ezek. 20:33–38; Isa. 43:5–7; Zech. 9:15; Mic. 5:8).
- 11. Over a forty-year period Israel will be restored. The work of subjugating the nations will continue. A period of fifty years will pass from the return of Christ to the dedication of the Temple (Mic. 7:14–17; Ezek. 40:1; Rev. 5:9–13).

12. Peace on earth for one thousand years (Dan. 7:12; Rev. 20:4–6).

The going forth of Elijah will represent a supreme effort on the part of Yahweh to restore His nation—an effort which will be crowned with success. Elijah and his co-workers, all immortalized, will undertake this work possessing the full energy of divine nature. It will become a campaign of national restoration unparalleled in human history.

Israel will be regathered to their land from all the nations whence Yahweh has scattered them. They must manifest faith as the condition for their regathering. All rebels will be purged out. A reinvigorated, spiritually zealous nation of Abraham's seed will thus become settled in the land of the covenant, in the presence of the resurrected patriarchs of Israel (Ezek. 48). The tribes will be ruled over by Christ's apostles (Matt. 19:28).

These momentous future events, insofar as they concern the nation of Israel, will be fulfilled during "the great and dreadful day of Yahweh"—the day when He will magnify Himself and sanctify Himself, so that He will become "known in the eyes of many nations" (Ezek. 38:23). Yahweh Sabaoth, through medium of the multitudinous and glorified Christ-body, will be revealed as "a man of war" for the purpose of vindicating His Name, His Word, and His saints (Exod. 15:3; Isa. 42:14; Rev. 19:11; Isa. 2:11).

As the consequential events of those days begin to unfold—a series of events which will establish Christ and his saints as undisputed rulers of the earth—Elijah will continue his work among the ten tribes. "He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children". The preposition "to" can equally well be rendered as "with" (RV mg.)—thus, Elijah will "turn the hearts of the fathers with the children..." Whether rendered as "to" or "with" there again appears to be a clear allusion to the writings of Moses: "Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart...but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons...Yahweh said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children" (Deut. 4:9–10; cp. 6:7).

This instruction, needless to say, Israel had largely failed to follow. The conditions which were in evidence in the days of Malachi and his fellow-prophets provided stark and tragic testimony to that fact. However, in the day when Elijah shall go forth, those omissions and

failures will be rectified. He will unite the nation, the young with the old, teaching them to manifest one mind upon the things of God's truth.

Elijah will turn their "hearts". To the Israelites, the "heart" was the seat of the intellect (2:2)—thus the nation will learn to "discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not" (3:18). Such discernment can only be effectively manifested through an understanding of divine truth.

The final words are explicit in their appeal to the nation: when Elijah came, he would set about the work of uniting fathers and children in the one hope of Israel, but if the people failed to respond to his efforts, Yahweh would smite them with the curse provided in the law. John the Baptist came "in the spirit and power of Elijah"—although he disclaimed identification as Elijah. The nation did not respond to John's preaching, resulting in the rejection of their Saviour, followed by the fires of judgment in 70 A.D. The Jewish "earth" (Isa. 24:1) was thus smitten "with a curse". However, as has been shown by the prophets, the second appearance of Elijah to the nation will not result in a similar outcome.

The final words—"Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (4:6)—are significant for several reasons.

Herein is obviously a last reminder concerning the terms of the covenant which Israel had agreed to honour (2:2; 3:9–11; Deut. 28), and a reiteration of the truth that people who are in covenant relationship with Yahweh cannot treat with indifference the way of life they have covenanted to manifest.

Surely there is also a veiled reference to the futility of believing that salvation could ever come through the law of Moses (cp. Gal. 2:20; Heb. 7:11). A misguided form of blind allegiance to the ideals of law would not bring about human redemption (3:14). Rather, "the just shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). In the days of Malachi—as at all other times in history since the beginning of creation—faith in Yahweh and in what He had promised was the basic requirement, and a disposition towards His word based upon such faith (3:16).

The closing words of the book provide a dramatic and tragic contrast to the opening words. "I have loved you", was Malachi's initial entreaty to the nation—while it ends with the words: "a curse". Yahweh had loved them in the past, and had amply provided proof of His love. He was prepared to renew that love: "Return unto me, and I

will return unto you" (3:7). But the majority in Israel rejected God's moving appeal. They remained indifferent, lacking in true understanding, and content to pursue their own selfish interests.

The apostle Paul, pondering the failures of Israel in the past, offered an especial warning to all disciples of Christ, in every age: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the Living God...Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it" (Heb. 3:12; 4:1).

It is clear from the message of Malachi, that those who heed the wise counsel of Paul will be those who fear Yahweh and think upon His Name. Men and women of such humble and faithful disposition will surely abide the day of his coming.

"They that know Thy Name will put their trust in Thee: for Thou, Yahweh, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee...Great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable" (Psa. 9:10; 145:3).

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