

MALACHI

“A Messenger With A Message”

>> MALACHI <<

THE MESSENGER WITH THE MESSAGE

THEME - WHO MAY ABIDE WHEN HE COMES?

MALACHI - MY MESSENGER.

Nothing is revealed of private life. This is probably by design. It is not the **man** but the **message** that is important. He that planteth is nothing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase (1 Corinthians 3:7).

DATE Thought to be about the time of Nehemiah's second visit to Jerusalem. The only certainty is that he prophesied after the return from the Babylonian captivity soon after the ministrations of Haggai and Zechariah. His message closes the ministry of the Old Testament prophets. John the Baptist would break the silence announcing the presence of Jesus among Jewry in the next message.

HISTORIC SETTING For a full and edifying consideration of the message it is essential that we have some appreciation of the circumstances prevailing at the time.

The return from their captivity was accompanied with great exhilaration, hope, and expectation. They saw in it the returning favour of their God and the fulfillment of the prophetic message concerning the coming glory of Israel and the re-establishment of David's Kingdom at the hands of "David's greater Son". This high expectation gave place to bitter disappointment. Instead of the expected blessings, indicating that this was God's "time to favour Zion", difficulties and hardships beset the people. They interpreted these as evidence that God's love for his people had cooled, that for some unpredictable cause God had failed them in all He had promised. For a full account of their demoralisation and disappointment, the Book of Haggai should be studied. Sufficient to say here, "they looked for much, but it came to little". They "sowed much but brought in little". Their wages were inadequate to support a reasonable standard of living. The "heaven was stayed from rain" and "the earth from fruit" (Haggai chapter 1).

Haggai's portrait of the people, the land, and their circumstances is a picture of gloom and hardship. To profit from our consideration of Malachi we must allow ourselves to be drawn into the drama. We must make a conscious effort to identify with them and to feel their disappointment and the hardship of the occasion. They were people "of like passions with ourselves." They were not creatures of another species determinedly committed to perpetrating all the evil of which they were capable. All things being equal, what they did we would do also. We do ourselves a great disservice and God a dishonour if we stand aloof in our glass tower and, like the Pharisees, proclaim that we would "not have been guilty of the deeds of the fathers". Our own situation in the gospel has some similarities.

It is the same unchangeable God whose message came via Malachi that calls today in the gospel. The subjects of that message were of the same flesh and blood as we. Their faults and weaknesses are common to us too. Even their circumstances have some parallel with our own. There has been a revival of God's work. So, it is with us. Their pioneers, Zerubbabel, Joshua, and Ezra began with great zeal and hope of great things. Time had proved their anticipations somewhat premature. Our situation is not dissimilar. Do we, as they, cool in our zeal because of apparent delay? Then, as now, victory depended upon faith. Faith comes only by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Malachi provided this word as the antidote to their problem. The message was living and powerful and sharper than the sword (Hebrews. 4:12) and has lost none of this power through passage of time.

MALACHI Chapter 1

V1 "The burden of the Lord" - Oracle (Dr. Young)

"I have loved you saith Yahweh" - If Israel interpreted 'the day of small things' as the very commonplace nature that their return proved to be, that God had lost His favour and affection for His people, Malachi sets about to put the record straight and dispel this wrong conclusion.

"Wherein hast thou loved us?" - The people pointed to their sorry plight as evidence of God's failure to love and care for them. This same attitude has its devotees to this day. A father who "loves his son chasteneth him betimes" (Proverbs 3:11). The record of God's relationship with men should dispel the false conclusion that God's love is evidenced in affluence and joy (see Hosea 13:6-9). The experiences of men like David and Job must be our guide. "Whom the Lord loves He chastens" (Hebrews 12:6).

"Was not Esau Jacob's brother...yet I loved Jacob" Even though a full brother and firstborn to Isaac, (Genesis 25:31), Esau's history contrasts sharply with that of Israel. Israel's very special place in God's affections is in evidence throughout their history - not only in their blessings but also in their woes. The very naming of the two sons of Isaac was a prophecy of their place in the divine plan.

- Esau: Edom
 - In Hebrew "Red Earth"
 - Red - Sin (Isaiah 1:18)
 - Earth - Death (Genesis 3:19)
- Jacob: Israel
 - In Hebrew "A Prince with God"

These names give a clear indication of the contrasting destinies envisaged by God. The choice and appointment of Jacob (or Israel) was not "of him that willeth nor of him that runneth but of God who showed mercy" (Romans 9:16).

V3 "I hated Esau..." Edom was overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar but, unlike Israel, were never permitted to restore their Kingdom. As a distinct nation they have disappeared from the earth, but God will never make a full end of Israel because he loves Israel (Jeremiah 30:11 and 31:3).

V4 "Edom saith, we will return and build..." The prophet Obadiah had decreed only ruin and destruction for Edom at the hands of God. Esau's very predicament was because of God's love for Israel. "For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off forever" (Obadiah v.10). Israel's trials and humiliations were not for destruction but correction. The chastening was evidence of divine love and not abandonment as they interpreted it (Jeremiah 46:28). Israel should have sought other causes for their woes. Says Paul "If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). If we do not discipline ourselves God may have to do it for us (Hosea 13:7-9).

The total destruction of Edom was evidence of divine intention and purpose. Had it been only the coincidence of fortune something would have remained. Human vengeance would have wearied before the point of annihilation. In what sense was this contributing to God's contention that He "loved Israel? Israel's response to God's care had been nothing better than that of the nations among whom they dwelt (2 Chronicles 33:9). They deserved no more favourable treatment at the hands of God than Edom. That they did fare better was proof of divine love. Their existence back in Palestine was a contrasting spectacle to the Edomite nation that had ceased to be.

V5 "Ye shall see and say the Lord will be magnified from the border of Israel" Love may be deferred in manifestation, but it cannot be quenched. (Song of Solomon 8:7). The day will come that God will exhibit that intense love for Israel that has been existent throughout her history. In "all their afflictions He (God) was afflicted" (Isaiah 63:9). Israel will respond to that love by magnifying God's name. They will be brought to the realisation that the fault was on their side. It was they who failed to respond in love. Saved by the one they scorned and murdered, they will behold the wounds in his hands inflicted by their hatred and mourn for him in repentance and shame. He shall return good for evil, love for hate, salvation for crucifixion (see Zechariah 12:10).

V6 "A son honoureth his father..." It was not God who had failed Israel, but Israel who had failed God. The crux of the problem lies here. Malachi drives home the point of his sword to Israel's heart. God had kept His promise to restore the nation. Not, however, because of their attitude to him as their Saviour and Lord but in spite of it. Their service merited them no favour. What they were and what they had, so far from indicating God's lack of love for them was indeed directly attributable to His unquenchable love. It was of the Lord's mercy they were not destroyed and not of their merit (Lamentations 3:22). Israel had become Laodicean, "neither hot nor cold". They did not deny God's existence, but neither did the serpent in Eden. Having a form of Godliness but denying the power (authority) thereof is common among men. Jeremiah reprov'd Israel for swearing falsely saying "The Lord liveth" (Jeremiah 5:2). What was false in this? Nothing could be truer. The falsity was not in the assertion but in their lives. After affirming the living existence of God, they lived as though He didn't exist at all! To cry "Lord, Lord" and do not the things He has commanded is to lie in our living or live in our lying. So, it was incongruous for Israel to address God as their "Father" and deny him the honour that rightly belongs to a father. Honour of earthly father and mother was the first command with a promise attached (Exodus 20:12). The Fatherhood of God was of much greater significance. He is Father in that all is "of Him" and "for Him" (1 Corinthians 8:6). Israel was his son by begetting from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 4:22, Hosea 11:1-4). This relationship should have been honoured by obedience and subjection. This had been withheld. They, and men in general would treat God as if He were privileged to have them for His people. Wisdom says we are privileged to have Him for our Father.

It was common for Jews to address themselves to God as "His servants." Moses as a servant "was faithful in all his house". Israel as a nation were servant only in words, but in deeds they denied him. This attitude was prevalent in Jesus' day among them. They "drew near with their mouths but their hearts were far from him" (Matthew 15:8). Nothing is more obnoxious to God than this form of hypocrisy. Servants in Malachi's day were slaves and the property of their masters. Israel had affirmed their willingness to surrender themselves to God at Sinai "All that the Lord hath said we will do" (Exodus 19:8). They said but did not. To "worship God with all the heart, mind, soul and strength" is to put God where He should be; first in the affections, first in the thoughts, first in our lives, and first in our works. "Do all to the glory of God" is the commitment of all servants. To do less is to despise God's name and dishonour His person (1 Corinthians 6:20).

V7 "Ye offer polluted bread..." To offer God anything less than the best we can give is to pollute Him in our hearts. All offerings were to be "without blemish". The meal was to be of "fine flour". The oil beaten from the olive. All was indicative of the need to put God first and above all else in our lives and service. To put him in second place in any way will be fatal in the end. We, like Israel, have sold ourselves and possessions. To withhold either is theft on our part (1 Corinthians 6:20).

V8 "If ye offer the blind, the lame, the sick..." When we consider the significance of these faults it is not difficult to see why they are singled out as particularly offensive qualities. The animals represented the people who offered them. Jesus was the "spotless lamb" sent to take away "the sins of the world". He "offered himself without spot or blemish".

Blindness then is ignorance concerning the will of God (see John 9:41). Men are "alienated from God" through ignorance (Ephesians 4:18). Men must "know God" (John 17:3) if they are to please Him. Those "who know not God" are among the subjects of His "everlasting destruction" (see 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

Lameness indicates the lack of ability to walk correctly or with an unsteady and weary gait. Men are to make "straight paths for their feet" and walk in the steps of their Lord (1 Peter 2:21). Staggering and hesitating will not do. Speaking of the immortals Ezekiel says, "they go straight forward" (Ezekiel 1:7,12).

Sickness is defined by Jesus. "He that is whole needs not a physician but he that is sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17). By nature, then, men are morally sick (Isaiah 1:4-6). Since God has provided the cure for all these spiritual ailments He is displeased when men refuse His spiritual therapy (Romans 2:8). He asks if, in the different social strata among men, the lesser would be prepared to treat the greater as Israel thought to treat him. The difference between the least and greatest men is infinitesimal as compared to the difference between God and man. To this day men will reveal a deference for human Masters and Rulers that will be lacking in their service to God. Fear of retribution governs human relationships. Men ought not to forget that there is retribution with God too; not immediate but more terrible in the ultimate. Our God is a consuming fire, and it will be terrifying to fall into his hands.

V9 "Beseech God that He will be gracious" - Apparently, they considered God had been ungracious to them. Perhaps He had, but not without just cause. Grace is not without conditions. It had "been by their means" that is, through their own faults (Hosea 13:9).

Both in Leviticus 26 and in Deuteronomy 28 the conditions for God's grace were clearly delineated. They were "without excuse". God is never at fault. He cannot be gracious when it is considered an obligation for Him to be so. God is gracious to the humble but the proud He knows afar off.

V10 "Who would shut the temple doors for naught?" Freewill offering figured prominently in the Law (Leviticus 22). Paul was ready "to spend and be spent" in God's service. The Levitical priesthood had degenerated into mere employees of the nation when they should have regarded themselves as the privileged servants of God and have looked for their reward and honour from this source. They had not changed by Jesus' day and sought "the honour that came from men". They "feared the people" but not God. They did their service "to be seen of men". Jesus said they had received their reward and could expect nothing from God. In this state of mind, they sought material recompense for their services, forgetting:

1. All that God had done "without money and without price" for them and
2. That God is not unjust to forget a labour of love.

God's service always has the quality of freewill offering. "Filthy lucre" is forbidden as the object of desire, God must be served "in Spirit and Truth" without any greedy desire for temporal gain. It is only the apostates who will "run greedily after the error of Baalam for reward". He "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (Jude 11). Sin will pay wages for services rendered. God's reward is a gift not to be compared with the service that merited it (see Romans 6:23).

V11 "My name shall be great among the Gentiles". Israel's failure: our failure, will in no way thwart God's intention to fill the earth with all knowledge and glory of Himself. "Though all the world resists Him, God will realise His plan". Because they (as a nation) refused the admonition of God and "judged themselves unworthy of eternal life" they as fruitless branches, were broken from the good olive tree (see Romans 11). The parable of the husbandman and his vineyard is a true epitome of the history of Israel (Matthew 21:33-41). They climaxed their resistance to their God in the crucifixion of God's son. At Pentecost they were offered repentance yet once more. Their national (not individual) refusal spelt the end of their special relationship with God's grace and covenant.

It is interesting that the call of the Gentiles is associated with the offering of incense rather than bullocks or lambs. Incense is symbolic of prayer (Psalm 141:2, Revelation 5:8). Prayer is an individual exercise. It needs no temple, no brazen altar, no Levitical priesthood. How fittingly this points to the gospel call. No longer answered by a nation but individuals from nations. They come before God, not with blood of bulls and goats, but with the sweet incense of personal prayer emanating not from a brazen censor but from the heart.

V12 "Ye have profaned my name" Had Israel measured up to their commitment of the covenant they would have been the advertisement of God's glory to the world. Other nations would say what people is like this great people? What nation hath a God like this nation? What nation hath wise and good laws like this people? (Deuteronomy 4:6-7). They should have been as a city set upon a hill. Their schoolmaster law (Galatians 3:24) should have been an education to all nations. It was a vital element in the choice of Israel that it was the beginning of a wall that must finally involve the reconciliation of all creation. God cannot possibly be forever estranged from His creation. Israel was "the Firstborn Son" clearly indicating other sons were yet to come. All are to "know the Lord from the least to the greatest". "Goodwill to men" not only to Israel is the breadth of God's work. "Reconciling the world unto himself" is the breadth of the final work begun in Israel (Colossians 1:20). Israel's history did little to advance this work.

They "made common" His name. In the sight of the nations, Yahweh became just another of the many gods. His many and glorious attributes were concealed by Israel's failure to act as a mirror reflecting them.

"The table of the Lord is contemptible, even the food there on" It was the portion of the priesthood to "eat of the altar" (Leviticus 7:6-16, 1 Corinthians 10:18,). They were to depend upon the sacrifices for sustenance rather than be landowners and producers of food (Numbers 18:20-24). With the prevailing apathy, coupled with the drought, the offerings were of very inferior quality, the poorest of the flock and of the field. Their spiritual malady became "a vicious circle". God chastised them for their indolence but they "were not exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11). Instead, they blamed God for their predicament and grew worse. The Priests, who were largely responsible, as spiritual physicians for the religious health, were grumbling about a fault of their own causing.

V13 "What a weariness it is" When men are "spiritually minded" nothing is more exhilarating than work for God and the Truth. They find satisfaction in this service as in nothing else. To the natural man, however, nothing could be more wearisome and boring. There are no immediate rewards. No personal glory is involved. It is everything the flesh hates and purposely so "that no flesh should glory" (1 Corinthians 1:29).

In these verses we have a portrait of the incompatibility of flesh and spirit (Galatians 5:17-19). A self-accelerating vortex of problems results in their combination. The serpent tried it in Eden with disastrous results (Genesis 3:1-5). To remedy the situation the change must first come from them. God had done His part in restoring them. It was theirs to serve, offering themselves "a living sacrifice". Snuffing at God's service was only compounding the problem. The cure was in their (as in our) own hands. Men are to serve God to obtain His favour; not serve God because of it. (see Malachi. 3:10).

V14 - "Cursed be the deceiver ..." - Not being mixed with faith (Hebrews 4:2) the people "could not see afar off". The priests could not know that better animals and meals had been left behind. The "carnal mind" is shockingly illogical in things pertaining to God. The natural man cannot discern the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). The "things which can be seen are temporal". It was not the priesthood and the material temple they served or should have served; it was God. His eyes run to and fro throughout the earth to behold the ways of men. Nothing is hidden from His sight. They were deceiving the Levites but not God. Fear should be, not to them that can destroy the body, but to him that can destroy both

body and life. Fear him! (Matthew 10:28). Be not deceived; God is not mocked. We may deceive each other but God we cannot deceive. He knows even our thoughts. His curse is upon those whose heart is like their sacrifices: corrupt.

"His name is dreadful among the nations (heathen)" "is" see Romans 4:17. As a great King, God deserves the best man can give. He will not receive the 'fag ends' and leftovers of men's lives. If Israel failed to render their dues God would find people who would. After refusing the gospel Paul shook his raiment saying "ye condemn yourselves. Lo we turn to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6)". The fall of Israel has been our gain. "Let us be not high minded but fear, for if God spared not the natural branches, we must take heed lest he spare not us. He that thinketh he standeth should take heed lest he fall (Romans 11:12-21)".

MALACHI Chapter 2

There are five messengers alluded to by Malachi:

1. Himself
2. The Levitical priests
3. John the Baptist
4. The Lord Jesus
5. Elijah

Chapter 2 deals largely with the Levitical priesthood. Their appointment as navigators of the people gave them great responsibility. The letters to the seven ecclesias of Asia indicate the same principle in this Christian era. "Like priests, like people" (Hosea 4:9). The failure of leadership always means total failure. "My people love to have it so" (Ezekiel 11:2-3, Jeremiah 2:8, 5:31, 6:13).

This chapter should be seen against a background of disappointment (Zechariah 8:10). Ezra was a priest. He inspired Israel, now returned from Babylon, to see in it the wonderful hand of their God acting in mercy toward his people (Ezra 7:6). Joshua, the great High Priest of the time, had been the center of Zechariah's prophetic message concerning the Messiah (Zechariah 6:11-15). Instead of the expected exaltation, the entire project settled down to what appeared to be a very "humdrum" and ordinary affair (Haggai chapter 1).

The priests had lost prestige in the sight of the people. The return had been engineered by priests but nothing great had become of it. As God's messengers they should not have succumbed to the pressure of the people. Their job was to lead, not to please. Weak leaders bend to the people, strong leaders bend the people to God. Their job was to instruct the people that the failure and fault was on the human side. What they were experiencing could not be interpreted as God's lack of loving care.

Many such experiences of woe had characterised the history of the nation before such as the sojourn in Egypt. The history of the Judges should have educated the people that national troubles were God's way of indicating his displeasure at their ways (see Judges 10:9-14).

V1 "This message for the priests" - Reformation must begin at the top. The importance of leadership is portrayed in the history of the good and bad Kings that ruled in Israel (Judges 21:25). The priesthood was largely responsible for Israel's woes (Malachi 2:7).

V2 "If ye will not hear" - No greater offence could be offered to God, or man, than to refuse to listen (Nehemiah 9:16 and Jeremiah 25:3-7). We refuse to listen when we consider the speaker has nothing worth listening to, or that we know more than he does! Man's greatest faults have their roots in this refusal to hear. God "rose early sending His prophets but they (the people) would not hear" (Jeremiah 25:7). Both Deuteronomy 28:15 and Leviticus 26:14 are based upon the dire warning "If ye will not hearken" etc. "Faith comes by hearing" and without it, God cannot be pleased (Romans 10:17, Hebrews 11:6).

"And lay it to heart"; Man is commanded to worship God "with all the heart, mind, soul and strength" True religion must be of the heart as well as the head. A mere technical assent is worthless. The message must be translated into feeling, affection and action. The man who heard only is likened by Jesus to a man who built upon the sand (Matthew 7:26). "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20,26). Men must be "doers of the word". Doing comes when knowledge is converted to heartfelt faith (see Zechariah 7:4-6).

"Give glory to God's name" (Deuteronomy 28:58). Paul complains that some while "knowing God glorified Him not as God" (Romans 1:21). Yahweh is the God of glory (1 Chronicles 16:10). Jesus' model prayer incorporates this attribute of the Eternal Father (Matthew 6:13). To treat him as though he were not the glorious creator and sustainer and therefore not Lord and Master is to "profane" Him. Creature and Creator are the relative status of man and God. Jesus is the great example to us all. He glorified the Father as none else ever has (John 17:4-5, 22). He did this by living, speaking, thinking and acting as though standing in the very presence of the Blessed Potentate who only hath immortality (2 Timothy 6:15). He did always those things that pleased the Father. God's glorious attributes were mirrored and reflected in Jesus. He was the brightness of God's glory, first morally, now both morally and physically (Hebrews 1:3).

Jesus' portrait in the gospels contrasts sharply with the cold formality of ritualistic religion practiced by the priests. The sample prayer enunciated by Jesus to depict the mentality of Israel's leaders is revealing "I thank God I am not as other men..." "he prayed thus with himself" **not with God** (Luke 18:10). The 'I' occurred five times in as many lines. He glorified himself with God. This type of man God knows only "afar off".

"I will send a curse upon you" It was part of the covenant law that the man who continued not in all things of that law was cursed (Galatians 3:10). The blessings were contingent upon conformity with the law (Deuteronomy 28:2). Between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim Israel were to hear both the blessing and cursing of the law as a solemn warning that disobedience would not go unpunished nor obedience unrewarded (Deuteronomy 11:26-29). Speaking for God, Moses declared he had set before them "life or death, blessing or cursing" (Deuteronomy 30:15). In the exercise of freewill the people could choose their lot (Joshua 24:15).

"I will curse your blessings" It is human nature to take everything for granted; to be desirous of things we have not got, rather than to be grateful for what we have.

It has been said of Israel that the only time they appreciated their land and law was when they lost it! May we always be conscious that we are of the same flesh and blood as they. We are not studying a people with proclivities different from our own. In Malachi's portrait of Jewry, we have a picture of ourselves. If their faults are not apparent in us it is not because we have not got them but because we have overcome them, or perhaps, we are oblivious of them (Romans 11:21). Their blessings that God would curse consisted in their privileged position as his people. "Ye only of all families have I known" (Amos 3:2). This great privilege has a corresponding responsibility. To accept the former and neglect the latter was, and is, disastrous. Through disobedience they would forfeit their special relationship with Yahweh (Joshua 23:15). Their return from Babylon was a blessing manipulated by the unseen hand of God. Disobedience would only reverse this blessing and they would once again be driven into exile. (Luke 21:24). Their greatest blessing was the presence of God's own Son in their very midst (though future to Malachi's day). Like their other blessings this one too became a curse to the disobedient priesthood and nation.

God expects His "goodness to lead men to repentance" (Romans 2:4) and reciprocate in loving subjection to His will. Our blessings taken lightly will likewise become our curse (1 Peter 4:17 and 2 Peter 2:21).

"I have cursed them already" Many of the problems that beset the remnant returned from Babylon were not, as they supposed, evidence that God did not love them, or was indifferent to their plight, but quite the reverse. It was His chastening hand upon them to bring them to a realisation of their need of, and responsibility to, God.

If men would judge themselves, they would not need to be judged this way by God (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). If we will not chasten ourselves then God may do it for us. Regarding their problems Malachi says, "they did not lay it to heart". Men may go through all the motions and ritual of religious exercise but never "lay it to heart"; "our motives read, our thoughts explored, our hearts revealed to thee the Lord" (Hymn 45). We should always be conscious of these facts when approaching God. He searches the heart and reins (Revelations 2:23; Psalms 7:9). Where there should be a glowing warmth of response to God's grace, there may be a chilling frigidity of heart that denies the very essence of the high calling (Micah 6: 6-8). Jesus and the Pharisees represent the two extremes. Jesus exhibits spontaneous love and warmth with intuitive compassion. The leaders moved within cast iron walls of cold formality and chilling traditionalism. God's curses had already begun to fall upon them for this (see Deuteronomy 28:15-20). "Cursed shalt thou be in basket and store". This had already begun (see Zechariah 8:10).

V3 "Behold I will corrupt your seed". Behold = Consider. Sometimes God defers "judgment until the 3rd and 4th generation of those who hate him"; gracefully awaiting repentance. The complete fulfillment of this threat awaited the rejection of Jesus when all the blood shed from Abel to Zacharias was charged against the nation (Matthew 23:35). The rejection of God's special 'Seed' spelt the end of their own seed (Deuteronomy 28:32). The Levitical priesthood was discontinued because of the unprofitableness thereof (Hebrews 7:18).

"Spread dung upon your faces" This contrasts sharply with God's treatment of Moses' face which shone so brightly he was compelled to put a veil upon it (2 Corinthians 3:13). God here threatens to desecrate the Priesthood. The priests were punctilious about physical cleanliness (see Luke 11:39). This threat of external pollution was to be a portrait of their inward filthiness, said Jesus "within they were full of wickedness and ravening" (Mark 7:21-23).

"Take you away with it" They were to be taken away with their uncleanness. If men are made "clean through Jesus' word" the Levite priesthood must remain filthy. They rejected the cleansing word (John 15:3). They were "taken away" A.D. 70. Today Jewry is returned but the guilt of the murder invoked upon their own heads and those of their children (seed) still abides (Matthew 27:25). They will be cleansed only after recognition of their evil deed (Zechariah 12:10). Both sacrifice and priesthood finished together (Hebrews 7:12).

V4 "This commandment, my covenant, Levi" The disobedience of the Mosaic commandments ended the entire religious system and the covenant of Sinai. Levitical priesthood was an integral part of that system and could not continue independently of it. With a change of law there was also a change of priesthood. The rending of the temple veil symbolised the ending of one system and the beginning of another.

V5 "My covenant was with Levi" Firstborn sons were very special in God's religious system (Exodus 13:2, 11-16). Jesus was God's firstborn, not in order of birth so much as in order of merit (Psalm 89:27). He is the firstborn from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20). Being first to destroy the power of death, he became the beginning of God's (new) creation (Revelation 3:14). Many who were firstborn in order, forfeited their privilege through lack of merit such as Cain, Ishmael, Esau, and Reuben. When Moses descended Mt Sinai, he found the Israelites involved in an orgy of idolatry and immorality. Moses invited as many as would, to separate from this abomination and come to his side taking their stand for Yahweh (Exodus 32:26-29). Levi responded in great numbers. This faithful action appears to have qualified them for special favour. They took the place of the national firstborn. The arrangement simplified the priestly system too (see Numbers 3:12, 45-51).

Levi means 'joining'. As mediators they were to assist the 'joining of the people with God. Like all things human imperfection and finally total failure characterised the appointment. God appointed a better Priest, Jesus, to be mediator of a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6). The common or lower priests have been replaced by Jesus' brethren (1 Peter 2:9). The object of Levi's appointment was to establish "life and peace" through obedience to the covenant. This work finally fell to Jesus too (Deuteronomy 30:15). "The law through Moses' service came but life and truth by Jesus' name".

V6 and 7 "The law of truth in the mouth of Levi" These verses are an elaboration of the previous verses. There is reference to the faithful action of the tribe as recorded in Exodus 32:26-29. Another incident that called for God's mention was the faithful and courageous action by Phinehas. This incident was said to have saved Israel (Numbers 25:7-11). Eleazar was righthand man to Joshua (Joshua 14:1, 17:4, 19:51, 21:1). The first generation of the priesthood were commendable and did much to uphold the "Law of truth".

To "walk with God" is to sustain fellowship with him. "Walking in the light" is the recipe for this wonderful relationship (1 John 1:7). The priest's lips were to "keep knowledge", to educate the flock. This can only be accomplished by men who have first educated themselves (Hebrews 5:12-14).

What was true of Levi is true of Ecclesial elders today, they must be of sound speech, apt to teach.

V8 "Ye have departed..." The priesthood had degenerated from their excellent debut referred to in the previous verses. Having not "that faith that over comes the world" (1 John 5:4), they were themselves overcome by the world (Zechariah 1:4). There is nothing new or surprising in this. Humans have never sustained a horizontal faith. On a graph, Israel's record was like saw teeth which rose and fell but never remained static for long. All the rises were attributable to divine intervention and good leaders. Decline was as natural as the law of gravity. The same is true of Ecclesial history. Paul foresaw what we read in Revelations 2:4 & 16. This was attributable to, and blamed upon, poor leaders. "Teachers having itching ears", leaders greedy of filthy lucre (see Micah 3:11). The priests as God's appointed leaders, had a very special responsibility. Failure on their part would ultimately lead to the failure of the entire nation. It did. The nation "stumbled at the law". The crucifixion of Jesus instigated by the priesthood, was the 'top brick' on a history of disobedience. There is a warning here for all who would aspire to leadership. It is not the service of flesh and blood but of Jesus Christ. Shall He find the faith? There will be a repetition of the failure here charged against Israel's priesthood. As it was in the days of Noah! There is no place for complacency. Already the pioneer spirit is waning.

V9 "Contemptible and base..." Failing to provoke in the people "love and good works", failing to inspire, by word and example, with faith and zeal, they lost the respect and reverence of the people. (see Nehemiah 13:5-9). God did this in establishing principles that would denigrate the faithless priesthood in the sight of a faithless people. We see this same principle at work between kings and their subjects. For good king Josiah they "mourned many days". Compare this with "All the people rejoiced when they had slain Athaliah with the sword" (2 Chronicles 23:21). Good leaders earn the respect of subjects. Bad ones, scorn and contempt. A complete fulfillment came only after A.D.70. With the destruction of the temple, the whole priestly system was overturned. There was no further place for their ritualism or traditions. They disappeared as a special people and became just one of the "wandering Jews", subjects of contempt and scorn.

"Been partial in the law" This is a heinous sin (James 2:1-8). Judgement by the priests was to be absolutely just without favour to, or fear of, the rich or great (see Deuteronomy 24:17, 25:1, Leviticus 19:15). Without this quality of impartiality, the law became farcical (James 2:9). The priests, like most men, failed to be impartial. They condemned Jesus when he had "done nothing worthy of death" and sought the release of Barabas who was guilty of murder, an offence punishable by death. They decreed that it was better to kill Jesus "that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:49-50). While currying favour

with the traitor Judas, they excommunicated the man born blind "who had told them all the truth". Christadelphians are not blameless in this error. In the event of division many seek the company of the multitude rather than the truth, irrespective of people. Numbers will not save. The Truth will.

V10 "Have we not all one father?" Hath not one God created us? Addressed only to Israel, God's purchased people, this message lays a potent foundation for the rule of justice and impartiality. Job averred that he had not oppressed his servants because "He that formed him in the womb also formed me" (Job 31:13-17). What a statement of towering perception! John states that "he who loves him who begets, loves him also who is begotten" (1 John 5:1). Love of God must generate love also for His people. It cannot be otherwise. Hereby shall a man know he loves Jesus if he loves also the brotherhood (1 John 4:20). James complained of the practice of blessing God in word and with the same mouth "cursing men made in the image of God" (James 3:10).

All men are part of God's creation and must be treated with the mercy and grace God Himself has extended to them in this age of forbearance. Paul brings home a sober warning in 1 Corinthians 8:8-13. Indiscretion toward a brother might destroy one "for whom Christ died". Jesus "endured the cross despising the shame" to save men. How utterly inconsistent that we should reverse Christ's work and help destroy those for whom he suffered!

"Profaning the covenant" The priests were harnessed with the responsibility of shepherding God's flock. Failing to uphold the spirit of the law they profaned (made common or profane) the covenant. In this they destroyed the very means by which the nation's good relationship depended. Thus, they violated the very name Levi, that is, joining. The priests did not judge between the profane and the holy (see Ezekiel 22:26). This principle stands tall in the apostle's statement "by whom the way of truth is evilly spoken of".

All who serve God have a great responsibility in this direction. When David erred, God said he had given occasion for men to speak against God Himself (2 Samuel 12:14). This is what the priesthood had done. If Jesus "magnified the law and made it honorable" the priests did just the very reverse of this and profaned it.

V11 "Judah hath dealt treacherously" Judah, that is, the returned remnant. That Judah had "fallen from grace" is largely chargeable against the priests. "Like priests, like people". This apostacy was attributable to the priestly failure to "feed the flock with the sincere milk of the word" (2 Peter 5:1-2). The priests, trying to gain favour by pleasing the people, had become the servants of men rather than of God (see Galatians 1:10). Seeking the honour of men, they forfeited God's honour (John 4:44). The faithless condition of Judah was the fruit of priestly failure. Malachi appears to be pointing the finger at the priests and remonstrating as a parent does a disobedient child. "Look at the mess you have made; the fault is yours".

"Judah hath profaned God's holiness" Holiness is a state of being, not only separate, but superior and higher, pure and special. In setting up the idols in their heart they profaned the one true God. He became not special, but one of the many gods of the heathen. It was envisaged that all the nations would behold Israel and proclaim, "What nation hath a God like the God of Israel?" (Deuteronomy 4:6-7). Instead, we have the reverse picture. Rabshakeh taunted Judah saying no god had been able to deliver any nation from his hand, and that Israel's God shall be like them (see 2 Kings 19:10-12). God asks "what more could He have done for His vineyard?" He persevered till there was no remedy (Isaiah 5:4, 2 Chronicles 36:16). God's work with Israel should have been a beginning to fill the earth with His glory. Their apostacy did little for this cause. It was left to Jesus to make "God's name great among the heathen". Disobedience may defer God's plan but frustrate it never (Romans 3:3).

“Married the daughter of a strange god” To marry is to join oneself to, or to merge one’s life with and become “one flesh” with another (Matthew 19:4-5). Religious systems are symbolically referred to as female in life and marriage. The bride of Christ is termed a chaste virgin in 2 Corinthians 11:1. The Roman system is likened to a drunken harlot in Revelations 17:3-6. The protestant churches are called daughters of the Roman harlot. When Israel and Judah departed from their God, they were likened to two prostitutes in Ezekiel 23:1-5.

In “marrying a strange god” Judah was indicted for idol worship. This was a prostitution of their vowed covenant to serve only Yahweh and keep His laws (Exodus 19:8, and 20:5). God expressed Himself as a Jealous God. He will not share his favours with other objects of desire (Exodus 34:14). His jealousy is not for Himself, but for the people He is jealous for. He only can provide the correct education to shape the character development and make ready a people prepared to show forth His glory. Idol worship was destructive of this purpose because it was essentially "of the flesh". The flesh was always exalted in idol service to the dishonour of the principles of God who decreed that no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Corinthians 1:29). The ego must be crucified. With God it is "all or nothing". Joshua exhibits the true type "choose you this day whom ye shall serve. As for me and my house we will serve Yahweh" (Joshua 24:15).

V12 "The Lord will cut off all such..." The terms of the covenant required that Israel acknowledge and obey only their one God. Failure would bring an end to their occupation of the promised land and their fellowship with God (see Deuteronomy 28:63).

"Master and scholar" Neither priest nor people would be spared. The covenant was national, and its punishments were of a national character. Even the righteous individuals suffered the national fate such as Daniel and his friends (see Ezekiel 21: 4). Even those who attempted to worship would be cut off. God will not compromise His honour. "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. Let not that man think he shall receive anything of the Lord" (James 1:8). As humans would rather no spouse than to share one with another so God will "cut off" rather than share.

V13 "And this have ye done again" All through their history they “halted between two opinions” (1 Kings 18:21) and mixed their worship with Gentile gods. Their captivity from which they had recently been delivered was because of this proclivity. Now back in the land they were repeating the sins of their fathers (Zechariah 1:4).

"Covering the altar with tears and crying out" This indicated the influence of the idol worship of the heathen about them. The prophets of Baal did this (see 1 Kings 18:27-39, Exodus 32:17-19). In Ezekiel's day the women were "weeping for Tamuz" (Ezekiel 8:14). This contrasts with the quiet, dignified, sober and reverent approach of Jesus. "He shall not cry nor lift up his voice" (Isaiah 42:2-3). Outward gesticulations may influence the "carnal mind" but not God.

Elijah's approach was just the reverse of the Baal priests who danced, cried and cut themselves. His was a "still small voice". It was all that God required. He is not asleep or on a journey! We will not be heard for our much speaking but for our sincerity (John 4:23). God calls for "heart, mind, soul and strength" not noise and show. It was a feature of Pharisaic ritual that "outward show" would attract the attention of the people. They "made broad" their phylacteries that people might see (Matthew 23:5).

V14 "Ye say wherefore?" Why, they enquired, did God not accept this worship. God had not asked for noise, tears and show. He called for a "broken and contrite heart" (Psalm 51:17). He called for men to "love mercy, do justly and walk humbly before God." These qualities were lacking as their lives loudly proclaimed (Micah 6:8). Both Ezra and Nehemiah had remonstrated with them regarding the acquisition of foreign wives. Like the Jews of Jeremiah's day, they rendered a very temporary obedience and then returned to their old ways (Jeremiah 34:10-11). It is apparent that many divorced their Jewish

wives to take younger Gentile spouses (see Nehemiah 13:23-27).

"God was witness to their evils" God was fully cognisant of their hard-hearted treachery. To love one's neighbour as oneself must begin with our nearest neighbour, or the "wife of youth" (This term indicates the lust for younger wives after the "wife of youth" had aged). They were guilty of breaking the two great commandments upon which "all the law and prophets hung" (Matthew 22:40). Not only had they broken the terms of the Sinaitic covenant but now they had also breached the human covenant of marriage (Genesis 2:23-24). Even a human covenant must be honoured (see Joshua 9:19). "Covenant breaking" is one of the evils of the last perilous days (2 Timothy 3:1).

V15 "Did not he make one?" When Eve was presented to Adam it was that God, man, and woman might all rejoice (Genesis 2:23, Matthew 19:6). Bro Robert Roberts rightly said, "A good wife is God's greatest gift to (mortal) man". Eve, as all Godly wives, was to be supportive of Adam's life in God's service. She was an "help, meet" and very suitable for man (Genesis 2:20). In marriage the two were to be fused together in a "one flesh" bond. Their lives were to merge in one common objective. True marriage is a real caring and sharing of body, mind and wealth (1 Corinthians 7:4-5). Infidelity is a reversal of God's appointment in marriage.

"Yet had he the residue of the spirit" This statement has always been regarded as obscure in meaning. It is related to the previous statements. Man and wife were to become "one and no more twain" (Matthew 19:5). This might seem to have overruled the fact that "Adam was first formed then Eve", and "the woman was made for the man and not the man for the woman" (1 Corinthians 11:3-9). This was not intended at all. Eve was to be a "suitable help". She was not appointed to lead or rule over the man. Paul "suffered not the woman to usurp authority over the man but to be in subjection as also saith the law" (1 Timothy 2:12). Excluded from public speaking and ecclesial teaching appointments it was natural she should ask "Where do I serve?" Paul answers "She shall be saved in childbearing". Turning a 'house' into a 'home' and raising children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord must be rated as work of supreme importance. Without it the ecclesia cannot survive. Without it there would soon be no ecclesia in which the brother may minister. It is a work of honour and dignity calling for the highest virtues in the sister of Jesus. This work can do for the sister in way of character development what public work can do for the brother. It is a selfless service calling for the utmost patience, tolerance, understanding, humility and love; all those qualities of character that will fit people for God's Kingdom. Homemaking may not merit men's praise but the virtuous woman, faithful in her appointed role shall receive honour and praise from God (see Proverbs 31:30). Adam was delegated "the residue of the spirit", that is, he was given the privilege and responsibility of being "head of the wife". The "balance of power" was his. How would he use this "residue?" This is the problem in these verses. It was intended that he exercise this "residue" of power with the utmost love and care for his spouse. As Jesus loved the ecclesia and gave himself for it so the husband is exhorted to love his wife as his own flesh and give himself to assist in her salvation (Ephesians 4:22-29) No Godly sister will take advantage of this affection to "usurp authority".

"That he might seek a godly seed" Marriage, while bringing great benefit to man, had also a divine content within it which should not be lost sight of. He seeks, through the marriage institution, a godly seed for Himself. He has decreed that He will fill the earth with His glory. This is to be accomplished by the "seed" of marriage (Isaiah 11:9). God would accomplish this by using the resources of His creation (Isaiah 45:18). Adam and Eve in sin might defer the program but thwart it never. A special 'Seed' was to spearhead the whole program (Genesis 3:15). Abraham (through Sarah his wife) was promised a "Seed" who would make possible the everlasting covenant by "possessing the gate of his enemies" that is, sin and death (see Genesis 22:17 and Galatians 3:16). David was promised a "Seed who would restore his kingdom everlastingly. David would rise to see this and share its glory because the "Seed" would be chastened with the stripes of men because of sin, to remove its sting (see Isaiah 53:10, 1 Corinthians 15:56-57, and 2 Samuel 7:12-16). David had committed heinous sins. These would have excluded him

from the Kingdom. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). The "Seed" made possible man's salvation without compromise of God's Holiness. He "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

It is then through marriage, firstly natural between man and wife and secondly the marriage of Christ and his bride, that God will accomplish His great and wonderful scheme (Revelations 19:6-9). To "deal treacherously" with one's wife is to desecrate God's wise and beneficent appointment of marriage.

V16 "God hates putting away" How could it be otherwise? "What God has joined together let not man put asunder" (Matthew 5:32). To put away the wife was to reverse the wisdom and goodness of God who joined them. Jesus allows divorce only after the union has been sundered by unchastity. "Hardness of heart" is no excuse (1 Corinthians 6:15-16).

"Covereth violence with a garment" Probably a reference to Adam's feeble attempt to cover his transgression with fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). The Jews tried to cover their "violence" against their helpless wives as with a garment in that they attempted to justify their heartless action by legal argument. Josephus, a typical Jew, put away his wives on the score that they "lacked spiritual mindedness". This he interpreted to be the "uncleanness" of Deuteronomy 24:1. Because man was given "the residue of the spirit" it did not follow that he could exercise this authority as he wished. God certainly had a greater "residue of spirit" over the man and was in turn his 'head' (1 Corinthians 11:3). If man exercised his privilege to the detriment and grief of his wife God could do the same to him. He must beware. To the froward God will show himself froward". We must do to others as we would they should do to us. He who shows no mercy will receive none.

V17 "Ye have wearied God with words" As men we all know what it is to be wearied with words. Some people think they shall be "heard for their much speaking". To this God says no. "Ye are on earth and God is in heaven therefore let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:2). A fool is known for his much speaking (Ecclesiastes 10:14). Christ has warned that crying "Lord, Lord" will avail nothing.

Words without parallel actions are worse than worthless. The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to God (Proverbs 15:8). God is not honoured by mere lip service but by heart service. The Pharisees drew near with their mouths (words) but their hearts were far from God (Mark 7:6).

"Everyone that doeth evil is good..." When men are evil they love their own kind. These heartless husbands had no condemnation for their fellows who had put away their wives simply because they were no longer a "wife of youth". Measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves they were not wise but heartless and ruthless. (2 Corinthians 10:12). Sinners love sinners because it makes them feel good when they find others happy to be like themselves. It is a feature of the Kingdom age that men will be known for what they are and not for what they would like to be seen for. The vile person shall no more be called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful (Isaiah 32:5) as they are in this age of fleshy thinking when light is confused with darkness (Isaiah 5:20). Men may deceive their fellows and cover their evil motives, but God is not deceived. He will tear the veneer from men's masquerade and expose them in all their naked unholiness (Hosea 2:3).

"Where is the God of judgment?" Because judgment against an evil work is not executed speedily therefore the hearts of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Some thought "God will not see neither will He regard" (Job 35:12-13). Nothing could be further from the truth. Not a sparrow can fall from the air without God's knowledge. Men tend to feel that God does not care or is not cognisant of their evil ways simply because they seem to "get away with it". They see wicked men prospering (Psalm 73:11) and wrongly conclude that God doesn't really care. "Be not deceived. God is not mocked". Judgment may be deferred but it is not abandoned.

MALACHI Chapter 3 A Messenger with a message of warning.

V1 "Behold" Definition: consider, take heed, or be warned.

"I will send my 'Messenger'" - The Levitical priesthood had failed to 'join' Israel with their God. They had not measured up to their responsibilities as God's 'Messengers' to His people. As God had rejected Saul and appointed David to rule Israel, so now He announces His determination to bypass the priesthood in favour of a more effective 'Messenger'.

The 'Messenger' in this case was John Baptist. At the appointed time nature's silence was broken with a thunderous warning. The hills and valleys of the Jordan area echoed with the clarion call to repentance. His 'message' contrasted sharply with Levitical euphemisms. It was stern, sharp and forthright. It wasn't turned to the temperament of the people. It wasn't calculated to appeal to popular favour. It was the fearless voice of a man prepared and tempered by a life of the utmost austerity, living in the deserts and sustained by nature's unrefined fruits (Mark 1:2-8). His whole aspect, clothing, voice, physical appearance and demeanor were all harmonious. This stern gaunt unsophisticated man was in no mood for trivialities or human vanities. There was no time for mincing words. The message was far too momentous and urgent to admit of any human entertainment. What was the substance of his message? Nothing less than the momentous fact that Israel's Messiah was among them and about to show himself to the nation (John 1:26). There was not a greater prophet born of women. All others announced the coming of God's appointed representative. John announced, not his coming, but his actual presence. His task was "to turn the hearts of the children to the fathers". As a nation they bore very little resemblance to the fathers of the nation, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jesus warned that the children of Abraham must portray similar moral characteristics (John 8:39). If the people could be converted to Patriarchal faith, they would be quite ready for the Messiah's presence. Some hearkened and obeyed. Others, notably the Levitical priests and Pharisees resisted the council of God (Luke 7:30).

"The Lord whom ye seek" The returned remnant were looking for the Kingdom of God. The restored Kingdom of David would end their national woes. The blessing of Abraham's promises would find fulfillment in the exaltation of Israel over all nations. Material wealth and political supremacy had a ready appeal to their human hearts. Jesus did not come as the one whom they sought. There was no royal beauty that they should desire. His countenance was more marred than any man. Instead of royal mightiness and pompous glamour he was a worm and no man (Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2).

"Shall suddenly come" The turn of events unfolded in the history between Malachi and John were anything but propitious of the expected glory and exaltation. If they expected an ascending level of national favour in preparation for the coming Messiah, they would soon be completely disillusioned. They lost much of their political freedom to the Grecian Power. Added to this they came under severe religious persecution. The Asmonean family fought back and acquired religious liberty, but political subservience remained until A.D.70. The word 'suddenly' carries the idea of unexpectedly; "lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping". Jesus came very unexpectedly. Like his Kingdom message he came "without observation" of the sort they expected (Luke 17:20).

"To his temple" Jesus came to His Father's house and cleared it of thieves and robbers. Under the care and charge of the Levitical priesthood it had "become a den of thieves". The real temple or dwelling place of God that Jesus came to, was the good and honest hearts of believing men and women, those whose house we are (Hebrews 3:6, 1 Timothy 3:15). Jesus made a place in men's lives and affections for God. He continues to stand and knock at this kind of door and if any will open to him both he and his Father will come in (Revelations 3:20). It was essential, as witness to his Messiahship, that he also cast out the demons from the Jerusalem temple as he does in the human temple of men's hearts. His aggressive activities using "scourge of cords" and physical force to overturn the tables called for comment and explanation. It was the "zeal of thine House" that had eaten him up (John 2:14-17). It was

a zeal ahead of time, a display of the power that will accompany the second coming to God's House. An earnest of his great mission. However, his last week, mostly in his Father's house teaching and healing, sealed his doom among those people and they received him not. Their action in condemning him also sealed their doom. "Not one stone was left upon another" of the Father's house. The Father continued to dwell only in fulness in Jesus bodily (Colossians 2:9). If we would seek the Father, we must find him in Jesus now.

"The messenger of the covenant" not the Mosaic covenant which had begun to wax old and was preparing to vanish away (Hebrews 1:11). This covenant was but a schoolmaster to educate men and women for Christ (Galatians 3:24). Christ was the messenger of the "everlasting" covenant (Hebrews 13:20) The wine, symbolising his blood, he described as the memorial of "the new covenant in his blood". What did he mean? Had not God already made His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Not finally. This

covenant was not firm until the death of the testator (Hebrews 9:16-17). Abraham and all who share his faith are sinners and therefore must receive 'King Sin's' wages, that is, **death** (Romans 6:23). Death hath passed upon all men for all have sinned (Romans 5:12). How could the covenant grant Abraham or anyone else everlasting possession of the land when they are not themselves everlasting? The land could inherit their dust everlastingly but how could it be reversed? Flesh and blood cannot inherit God's Kingdom because corruption cannot inherit incorruption (1 Corinthians 15:50). It is essential then that "this corruptible put on incorruption and this mortal put on immortality and death be swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54).

Jesus as "the messenger of the covenant" is the adequate answer to the enigma. He destroyed the power of death. He joined battle with King Sin enthroned erstwhile in human flesh, including his own flesh. It warred against the law of his mind but to no avail. When his lifeblood was poured out in total obedience to God his body lost its life and in it the law of sin died too. The covenant in his blood was thereby virtue of his appointment as Abraham's Seed and "David's greater Son" as well as "God's Son and heir" (Psalm 2). He made the covenant sure to all the seed when he died sinless and blameless. The life is in the blood. The wine then is a symbol of life surrendered to God. This is the principle upon which God receives sinners; an acknowledgment that sin is intolerable and incompatible with his holiness (Habakkuk 1:13). God could not grant eternal life without the complete eradication and repudiation of sin without destroying his impeccable righteousness.

V2 "But who may abide the day of his coming" It was one thing to desire the messenger of the covenant and quite another to be ready to meet him. Amos had warned that "the day of the Lord" for which they longed, would prove more terrible than the evils from which they hoped to be delivered (see Amos 5:18-20). The "day of the Lord" will be good only for those who have prepared themselves for it (Luke 12:47). A "fearful looking for of judgement" abides those who have not "patiently continued in well doing" (Romans 2:7-8). The call then, as now, is "to consider our ways". God is just and merciful. Every man shall receive according to his ways. Sow to the flesh and we receive the reward of flesh. Sow to the spirit and we will receive accordingly. Unfortunately, Judah "sowed to the flesh" and did not abide or stand when Jesus came (Galatians 6:8). He was not the sort of leader they desired, and they were not the sort of people he wanted. Their desire for "the messenger of the covenant" turned to hate. Their expected exaltation turned to destruction in A.D.70. The qualifications to "abide the day of the Lord" are clearly stated in Psalms 24:3-5.

"He is like a refiners fire and fullers' soap" The refiner used fire for two purposes:

1. It made liquid the metal so that the refiner could shape the article which he was seeking.
2. Any ingredients that were inferior were oxidised and taken away as dross.

Fuller's soap was an alkaline oil that was added to water and used to remove contaminants from garments. Water and fire are symbols of the word and chastisement (Ephesians 5:26; 1 Peter 1:7). The

symbolic reference to the work of Jesus is clear. No man is born ready for God's use. If Jesus himself must be "made perfect by the things he suffered" how much more must we need a special refinement? Peter says our faith must be tried as by fire. Think it not strange when we are subjected to a fiery trial says he. Chastisement by God's word, which crucifies our natures, makes us plastic and allows of our reshaping into the image of him who begat us (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18). When the angels said "let us make man in our image" the work was not complete when Adam stood erect before them. He must stand erect morally also if he will continue to be part of God's creation.

Jesus was the express image of the Father and is the pattern of all who will follow (Hebrews 1:3). There is much in human character that is only rubbish to God. Paul delineates these ingredients in Galatians 5:17. They must be purged out. Christ's word is living and powerful and can readily divide between soul (natural man) and spirit (the new man) and discern between right thoughts and evil thoughts in the heart of man (see Hebrews 4:12). Fullers soap is the divine manipulation of human life. Water is the symbol of the word of God. Jesus will purge us that we might bring forth more fruit (John 15:2). The word he spoke has a unique cleansing action on the human heart (John 15:3). The purging of chastisement removes the stains. The two together will produce a "garment unspotted by the flesh".

V3 "He shall sit as a refiner..." The ultimate fulfillment of this will await the second coming of Jesus when he shall 'sit' upon the throne of David (Luke 1:32). Unlike the lamb-like first coming the second shall see him revealed in flaming fire taking vengeance on the ungodly (2 Thessalonians 1:8). When the Lord's judgments are in the earth then and not before shall the inhabitants learn righteousness (Isaiah 26:9). "Giving the King thy righteousness and thy judgments unto the King's Son" shall no longer be a thing of futurity (Psalm 72:1). He shall dispense judgment and haste justice. Men shall creep afraid and ashamed into the holes of the rocks and caves of the earth when Jesus arises to shake terribly the earth (Isaiah 2:19-22). He will refine mankind as they have never been refined. Peace and goodwill among men will replace the fear hate and violence that distinguishes this age.

"That they might offer in righteousness" Christ's judgments will teach men to "know themselves but flesh". The arrogant pride of men will be humbled into dust. We see the contrasting difference to the present temperament in Isaiah's description of the new age. The people then will say "let us go up and learn of God's ways that we might walk in his paths" (Isaiah 2:3). The world's populations will hasten to Jerusalem to keep the feast of tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16). Without Christ's refining judgments they will hasten only to hotels, sports meetings, or other places catering for human pleasure.

V4 - "Then shall the offering of Judah be pleasant" Levi as God's messenger of righteousness had failed to "deliver the goods". The great work of "bringing in everlasting righteousness" belongs to "the Messenger of the Covenant", or Jesus. If the work of Jesus "begins at the house (hold) of God" (1 Peter 4:17) it will next be occupied in "turning away ungodliness from Jacob and taking away their sins (Romans 11:26-27). They must first look upon him whom they have pierced and wail because of him (Zechariah 12:10). The imprecation of his blood upon their heads (Matthew 27:25) must be removed by the acknowledgement of their great crime.

The stony heart of Israel shall then be substituted for a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26) and all Israel shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest. The twelve apostles have been delegated the particular task of bringing Israel to know God (Matthew 19:28). In the great temple of Ezekiel's prophecy Israel shall offer their sacrifices in righteousness.

"As in the former days" There are a number of bright spots in Israel's history. Under men like Joshua, Samuel, David, Hezekiah and others, the nation attained favour through faith and obedience. This will be restored and surpassed under the beneficial navigation of Jesus and his co-rulers.

V5 "I will come near to you in judgment" Levi (joining) did no maintain a close relationship between

Israel and God. "Your sins have separated between you and your God" (Isaiah 59:2). Jesus will "turn away ungodliness from Jacob" and join them to God. Then he will be sanctified in him before all nations (Ezekiel 39:27). God will be 'near' Israel as no other nation. They shall occupy the "first dominion" (see Micah 4:8). The headquarters of the Kingdom shall be situated in the midst of the nation (Jeremiah 3:17). They shall hear the word behind them, this is the way, walk ye in it (Isaiah 30:21). While they are yet speaking, he will answer them. This is the time when Israel will be "the head and not the tail" of nations. Men will say "what nation hath God so near to them" (Deuteronomy 4:7).

"I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers" A sorceress is a female bewitcher whose ploy is to deceive the people. Isaiah after speaking of the removal of God's people from the world turns, attention to the judgements of the sorceress (see Isaiah 57:3). The book of Revelation details the Sort of "Witness" God will execute against this bewitching system which has made drunken and stupefied the world (Revelation 18). The "Man of Sin" will be hurled without mercy from his "temple of God". He will not be able to masquerade any more as a god. He will be exposed for what he is, a murderer of the people. He is a destroyer by turning away their ears from the gospel of salvation to bewitching fables (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12, 2 Timothy 4:4). There will be no longer any place for darkness, nor will men be able to wear a garment to deceive. Religious leaders will attempt to hide their previous occupation (see Zechariah 13:4-5).

"False swearers, oppressors of hirelings, strangers..." It was not so much the widows, the fatherless, the hireling and such who had been denied. God had been denied. God could do more for these unfortunates than man. The men who withheld their bounty had denied themselves a wonderful opportunity to show their love for God.

God is against all forms of injustice and deception. All unrighteousness has its roots in inadequate religious systems. A false Christianity has paved the way for the gross immorality of today's world. (see Deuteronomy 24:14, Exodus 22:22, James 1:27).

"And fear not me" The religious leaders "feared the people", but alas, feared not God. The ire of the people was threatening but what of God's ire? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31). The fear of man brings a snare because it invariably turns men away from God (Proverbs 29:25). How many times did God exhort to "hear and fear"? Time without number, at least 22 times in Deuteronomy alone. 'Fear' is not to be terrified by, but to reverence. "There is forgiveness with God that He may be feared" (Psalm 130:4). The conventional meaning of 'fear' does not fit here. God would be more to be terrified if there were no forgiveness. 'Reverence' is more appropriate. Perfect love casts out fear (terror) (1 John 4:18).

V6 "I am Yahweh, I change not" All creation, natural and spiritual, rests upon this great quality of God's character. All "Faith, Hope and Love" is based upon the recognition of God's unchangeableness. God's absolute immutability contrasts with the "unfaithful friend in time of trouble" who is like a broken tooth or a foot out of joint, terrible and painful disappointment just when they are most needed (Proverbs 25:19).

All the foregoing sections indicating the conversion of Israel back to God, his acceptance of their offerings and the banishment of the harlot system from among men are not predicated upon Israel's faithfulness or goodness at all. God's promises rest solely upon his own unchangeableness, "Though all the world resist him, God will realise his plan" (Hymn 110). His promises are "sure to all the seed"; "not one jot or tittle shall fail till all is fulfilled". He shall not fail nor be discouraged till He has set judgment in the earth (Isaiah 42). The word He has spoken shall accomplish that to which He has sent it. It shall not return to Him void (Isaiah 55). Men may forget or neglect, lie or deceive. We may deny Him, but He will not deny Himself. He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:81).

"Therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" "Sons of Jacob" is meaningful. It was because of this relationship, and not national merit, that goodness was assured. God had made "exceeding great and precious promises" to Jacob. These included the natural seed. "All Israel must be saved" in spite of themselves (Romans 11:26). Beloved "for the **Father's sake**" is the power behind their promised exaltation. The promises are totally independent of Israel's merit. Though they "make a covenant with death" God will make the nation to live (Ezekiel 37:9-10). It is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth but of God that sheweth mercy" (Romans 9:16). This mercy endures forever because God is unchangeable. If God had the temperament of man, he would long since have destroyed man from the face of the earth (Malachi 3:6).

V7 "From the days of your fathers ye are gone away..." Notwithstanding God's care in "rising early and sending prophets" to His people, their entire history was a monotonous repetition of apostasy and reformation; apostasy when left to their own devices and reformation resulting from divine intervention (see Psalms 106:10-13). We must realise that what they did was not because of some special diabolical determination to do evil. They did what they did simply because they were human, just as we are human. It took no more than the nature we all bear to leave a trail of woe through history. The New Testament portrait of Rome drunken with the blood of God's people and steeped in crime and immorality is a picture of the same nature at work in a different era (Revelation 17). Paul warns if any man thinketh he standeth let him take heed lest he fall (1 Corinthians 10:12). What they did we will do if nature is permitted to take its course. It is only by being "a peculiar people" and not a normal people that we shall be different. We have all the potential to be the same. Malachi is a mirror reflecting human nature and its ways.

"Return to me and I will return to you" It is a divine principle that "God will draw near to those who draw near to Him, but He will deny those who deny Him". To the froward He will show Himself froward. To the merciful, He will show Himself merciful. If a man turn from his wickedness and do that which is right all his wickedness shall not be remembered (Ezekiel 33:14-15). Zechariah had appealed to the remnant that they be not as their fathers unto whom God's prophets had appealed...but they did not hearken. Your fathers, where are they (Zechariah 1:4-5). They had been carried into Babylon and died there exactly as God had threatened. What gain was there in resisting the council of God against themselves? Would not the same fate befall them for the same reason? The greatest lesson of history is that men will not learn by it!

"Wherein have we robbed thee?" To withhold that which we have promised is bad but to refuse to acknowledge the wrong is ten times worse. The question above indicates both evils. It amounted to "presumptuous sin" for which there was no sacrifice (Numbers 15:30). God can only forgive when sins are acknowledged and repudiated. Repentance is the key to forgiveness and forgiveness is the key to God's favour and salvation (Acts 2:38).

"In tithes and offerings" We, as Israel, have sold ourselves and all we have to God (1 Corinthians 6:20). Nothing we have, or own, is any longer our own. To withhold from God that which we have sold to him, amounts to theft (Romans 12:1). Israel were required, upon their settlement in the promised land to bring a tenth of their produce to God. The Levites received this as part of their inheritance. They had no land of their own and needed this support (Deuteronomy 15:27-29). A tenth of the tenth they received was to be offered to God. It was God's way of reminding all Israel that everything was of God and for God. All their harvests were by His goodness in giving them the land and then rain.

There is little doubt that they excused themselves of their lack of service on the ground that their harvests were so bad. They were in poverty and hardship (like we do when we say we are just too busy to do this or that). If God wanted tithes, He could send rain and make their harvests plenteous! God just does not work that way. Abraham had only one son and heir to the promises. God asked for that only son in sacrifice. To give God only our surplus is an offence to him. The widow's mite is a 'mighty' lesson.

She "gave all her living".

"They looked for much, but it came to little". Instead of being a good reason for withholding tithes, withholding tithes was a good reason for their poverty. God challenges them to try the experiment (Malachi 3:10). To "get the message" we must become part of the act. We must struggle to see ourselves as part of the drama. Little profit there will be to us if we stand aloof and feel none of their pressures or poverty. Little profit there will be if we only criticise and condemn them or if we think of them as some sort of 'Hobbits' of a different age and world. Our profit will come when we become one of them and feel their hardships and griefs in our own very hearts. Drawing our own mental picture of the scene with our own persons in the foreground is the task we have in hand. Armchair condemnation is easy but of no value to us.

V9 "Ye are cursed with a curse" Cursed is everyone who continueth not in all things written in the law. It was an element of the covenant that they would obey God and He would bless them or alternatively they would disobey, and He would curse them. (The Christian era knows no new principle either).

In denying God, He in turn was denying them. It is a trait of the carnal mind to blame God; the woman **thou** gavest, she caused it, and they excuse self. Cause and effect are usually invented by men. Because harvests were poor, they concluded God did not love them. (Malachi 1:2). They then concluded that because God did not love them, they need not bring tithes! Job was of a different mind. He refused to "curse God and die" even when inexplicably inundated with evil. Giving to God is supposed to hurt. To "cast in of our abundance" is little worth. Lack of blessing was no argument for disobedience, but disobedience was a good argument for lack of blessing.

This was the burden of Malachi's message. It was they who were in the wrong. God, even in the curse was keeping the terms of the covenant.

V10 "Bring your tithes and prove me" The blind man might have argued that Jesus should first give him sight and then he would wash in Siloam. Naaman might think it appropriate if Elisha would cure his leprosy first and then he would not hesitate to dip in the Jordan. God has never worked that way. "Seeing is believing" but the blessing is reserved for those "who have believed without first seeing".

Before the crown is the cross. Obedience must precede the blessing. The lesson is transparent. Do what is right regardless of present appearances of circumstances. God will care and share of His bounty. Who knows whether apparent difficulties are not purposely manipulated to try our faith? The woman, seeking the living water of Jesus, was asked to "first call her husband". In this Jesus purposely put an impossible stumbling block right in her path. She attempted to sidestep the impediment only to find a worse obstacle confronting her. The sins of her life are laid naked before her feet. You have a man but not a husband! Would she fade under the barrage? Her faith rode out the storm of trial. Jesus abode in that place two days. Faith had won the greatest guest ever to sit at a table. Israel are challenged to prove God's goodness by first surrendering some of their own.

V11 "I will rebuke the devourer" Do our part and God will never fail to do His. The blessings may not descend just where, when, or how we expect them but descend they will. "Rivers of pleasures", "everlasting joy" and eternal 'youth' await those who await God's blessing in obedience and faith. God had promised temporal blessings in the terms of the covenant. "Blessed in basket and store", "kine and sheep", "city and field" etc. (see Leviticus 26:3-13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14). Under the "better covenant" with "better promises" the greater 'destroyer' shall be rebuked also. The ground of this blessing was laid when Jesus destroyed in himself the power of death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (Hebrews 2:14-17 and 2 Timothy 1:10). In this great work Jesus led captivity captive. The day abides when men will turn to the grave and victoriously ask "O death where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory? (1 Corinthians 15:55). Jesus was dead but is alive for evermore and

holds the key of death and the grave (Rev.1:18) Prove him by faith and love and he will turn the lock on our prison too

The "day of small things" will give place to a day of things so great and wonderful that eye could not see, nor heart conceive in this mortal state (Isaiah 64:4).

V12 "All nations shall call you blessed" It was an element of the covenant of Sinai that obedience would exalt Israel to be head and not tail of all nations (Deuteronomy 28:13). But there is little doubt that Malachi by the spirit is looking beyond the Hagar (or bondage) covenant to that greater covenant represented by Sarah (the free wife) (Galatians 4:24-26). Under the terms of this covenant the 'Seed' shall "possess the gate of his enemies" and all nations, tongues, and people shall serve and obey him (Daniel 7:13-14). As Israel's King He shall bless all families and all families shalt call Him blessed (Psalm 72:17-19). Instead of being a people despised and scorned, strong nations shall come to Jerusalem and ten men of all languages shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew saying we will go with you for we have heard that God is with you (Zechariah 8:22-23).

V13 "Your words have been stout against me" Impoverished and despondent, destitute of the zeal and passion that belong to faith, the people excused themselves and justified their disobedience on the score that "the time was not yet" (Haggai 1:2). It would appear that they blamed God for the situation arguing that when He sent His blessings they would then respond in tithes and service.' To blame God for anything is not only stout (bold) but blasphemous. As Creator He has every right to expect reverence and submission from His creatures. Men may know God' in a technical sense but "glory him not as God" (Romans 1:21).

The very first lesson of the Law concerned the relative status of man and God. Man has no rights whatever. All he is and all he has, is of God. God as Creator has all rights. To argue that He had wronged His people in withholding rain and prosperity and therefore they did no wrong in withholding their sacrifices was to speak "stoutly" or proudly against Him. We see a different character in Job. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

V14 "Ye have said it is vain to serve God" These were the "stout" words of the previous verse. They concluded that it was profitless to serve God because there was no obvious and immediate response on His part. They pointed to the national poverty as evidence for their attitude. This fault is universal among men. If there was immediate reward and obvious response to service; men would clamor to serve God.

God does not seek the service of men who do it for material gain. He seeks men who render service in love. God wants men who are motivated by "sincerity and truth", not greed and selfishness. He has so designed approach to Himself that "no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:29). It is for this very reason, so few are found seeking to serve.

The Jewish people should have seen their folly mirrored in their national history. Abraham was invited to leave prosperous Ur for a land God would give him in return. When he reached the promised land, it was in the grip of a devastating drought. He was compelled to retire into Egypt. Lesser men would have been annihilated. Where was God? Had he come all this way and given up so much just for this? Abraham endured the hardship. God would send His blessing in His own good time and way. God must know best though mortal man cannot always discern why He acts so.

The wilderness era was a time of grumbling and murmuring like Malachi's day. Where, they complained, is all the goodness of God? There is no flesh, no garlic, onion or fish here. Would to God we had died in Egypt! These were 'stout' words too. Stout words of human ingratitude and arrogance. No man will serve God in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). Reward will come in God's good time and way. The child who will only

obey when Mum promises a sweet demonstrates the sort of persons we are not to be. "Let us not murmur as some of them murmured and were destroyed of serpents". No need to fear that God will fail to reward. The need to fear is that we may fail to serve.

V15 "Now we call the proud happy ..." Again, we have a situation which then, as now, calls for inspection and resolution. It always appears, in the short term, that the wicked prosper. They are the ones that appear to receive God's blessing. Job, David, and Jeremiah all felt the sharp point of this sword (Psalm 73:3). Short sighted women remonstrated with Jeremiah claiming that all was well when they "served the Queen of Heaven" (see Jeremiah 44:17-19). Even David must go into the House of God and look from those windows to see long-term. The view from them changed his thinking. How foolish he had been to think as he had done. The feet of the wicked are set in slippery places. In a moment they are gone forever (Psalm 73:17-18).

It is fatal to try and keep up with the Jones. Let them have their ways and wealth now. Soon all will be transferred for Jesus and his people while the abusers of this world have their place among the worms.

A child may differ nothing from a servant (slave) in the formative years. He is disciplined and trained under tutors and governors (Galatians 4:1-3). Mortal life, amidst hardship, is the training and testing ground for God's children. "Wait on the Lord and He will exalt you in **due** time". Better to weep with those who weep than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a moment. The laughter of the fool is like the crackling of thorns under the pot: soon extinguished in fiery heat. Should these people be called happy? Are they not rather to be pitied for their folly? Envy of the wicked in their affluence is foolishness. They have not stolen a march upon God at all. He "sends His rain upon the just and unjust" alike, but for very different reasons. Let the proud revel in their folly. God will resist them and send them to their dreadful destiny. To the humble He gives grace and love (1 Peter 5:5). To "call them happy" is to secretly wish to be like them. Beware, the wish may become a reality. Condescend to men of low estate is the Spirit's advice.

V16 "Then they that feared the Lord spake..." This verse is like a light shining out of the darkness. When the prophets speak of the nation as a whole the scene is dark and depressing. Elijah was despondent because of the national portrait. God remonstrated with him. The work had not been in vain at all. There were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 13:19). And so, it was in Malachi's day. There were those individuals visible to God, like gold among the stones: if Sodom would have been worth preserving for ten righteous, then the same was true of this remnant. What was true then is true of our day. The world scene is dark and fearful but here we are speaking one to another.

Although the history of Israel is cast as a national portrait, God's great concern and salvation is for individuals from within the multitude. What topic would occupy their tongues as they spoke one to another? To ask is to answer. They exhorted one another as they anticipated the day of Messiah approaching. They verbally wrestled with the problems of their times, finding answers in similar situations of past history. What did Joseph do when he could have concluded God had forsaken him? His darkest hour was just God's way of preparing him for exaltation (Psalm 105:17-18). God changes not. The same would be true of then. Where there are good and honest hearts it is inevitable that they will speak one to another. The topic of conversation will always be a good indicator of the spiritual or carnal state of those who speak. The assembling of ourselves together incorporates the inevitability that we will speak one to another too.

"The Lord hearkened" He who made the ear shall He not hear? God's ear is never heavy that it cannot hear nor His eye dull that He cannot see (Isaiah 59:1). On the contrary, His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those who fear Him. If a sparrow cannot fall from the sky without God knowing it, how much less that He should forget his people? Even the very hairs of their heads are all numbered.

Jesus put the relationship between God and His children on a plane that exceeds the most intimate relationship between humans. Beware, says he, lest we offend one of these little ones because their angel doth always behold the face of God. The angel is apparently appointed to act as their solicitor and may seek an injunction against the offender! He hears our prayers; he knows our hearts. Says Paul of his friends, their names are written "in the book of life". Daniel restricts deliverance in the terrible time of trouble to those whose names are found written in the books (Daniel.12:1). Jesus promises the faithful their names shall not be blotted out of the book of life (Revelation 3:5). Back in Malachi's day, as now, names were being added to the list for glory, honour, and immortality at the great day of God's elect.

V17 "They shall be mine..." God is taking out of the nations a people for His name (Acts 15:14). They are being developed and shaped for a great future. Each one must conform to the image of His son who was himself thy image of the invisible God. (Romans 8:29). When the angels announced their intention to make man in their own image, they did not intend the work was complete when Adam stood erect before them and physically like them. Man is to be developed in character to an equality with the angels too (Luke 20:36). Of the redeemed, John says, they shall be sons and Yahweh shall be their God and they shall inherit all things (as promised) (Revelations 21:7).

"Make up my jewels" The symbology here employed is beautiful. Jewels are valuable because they reflect light and display beauty. They are also permanent. How better could God's saints be symbolised? They are described as being "all glorious within" that is, their characters have been perfected. They will fill the earth with the knowledge and glory of God by reflecting His glorious attributes of character to all the world (Isaiah 11:9). They, as world leaders, will portray the beauty of holiness in contrast with the ugliness of sin as exhibited in mere human rulers.

Jewels are hewn from a rough aggregate. Rocks are crushed, rivers are dredged and so on. The history of the human race is very much the work of God crushing the valueless aggregate to expose the valuable jewels. Jewels in natural form are dull and unimpressive. They must be cut and polished. The trials that were offending the undiscerning were the very abrasives that were polishing the jewels of God. Jewels are an important item in bridal attire. When the bride hath "made herself ready" (Revelations 21:2) she will be sparkling with the reflecting light of her Lord and husband.

V18 "Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked". In Malachi's days, there was no discernment between the righteous and wicked. The proud were called happy (or blessed) and the wicked "set up". How much like our own days! The wicked are in high places. The world bows and scrapes to undisguised folly and stupidity. It will not always be so.

This is the day when tares and wheat must grow together. There is to be no uprooting of tares till God decrees it. The righteous, instead of being in high places, are mostly asleep in the dust. This is only a temporary situation. The earth is to cast out her sleeping saints (Isaiah 26:19). They shall **return** to the land of the living and come with singing unto Zion; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads (Isaiah 51:11). The saints whose names are inscribed in the book of life must return. God has sworn to bring again His sleeping children. He cannot lie or fail. When they 'return' it will not be to poverty and hardship as in Malachi's day. It will not be to unrecognised concealment as it has been "in the day of small things". Indeed no. They shall be Kings and Priests to live and reign with Christ over a subdued world. Their task shall be to "discern between the righteous and the wicked"; to judge the world in righteousness. No longer shall the vile be exalted as liberal nor the churl said to be bountiful (Isaiah 32:5). Under the spotlight of immortal justice all evil will be seen and exposed for what it really is.

This is an age when light is put for darkness and darkness for light. Bitter is confused with sweetness and sweetness with bitterness (Isaiah 5:20). If it is trying to behold, if pride and folly are in high places, take courage. There will be a "swift witness" against all such as promote it (see Isaiah 2:11-12).

MALACHI Chapter 4**The final message of the messengers.**

V. 1 - "The day cometh that shall burn as an oven" – The countdown has begun. The exaltation of God's people and the suppression of evil is already programmed on the great timeclock. Nothing can prevent or defer it. Habakkuk, impatient of the rule of evil, was told to "wait for it" because "at the appointed time the vision will speak and not tarry, it will surely come" (Habakkuk 2:3). This 'day' is longer than the diurnal revolution of this earth. God has "appointed a day in which He shall judge (rule) the world" (Acts 17:31). This is the same 'day'. It is as a thousand years (2 Peter 3:8). This is the evil day, but its duration is nearing its end. The "morning without clouds is about to dawn" (2 Samuel 23:4).

There can be no fellowship between light and darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14). This world with its social, religious and political systems as contrived by sin's flesh in unenlightened leaders must be extinguished completely before the blessing of all families can come through Jesus.

"Burning as an oven" signifies sterilisation from contamination. The earth is defiled under the inhabitants (Isaiah 24:5). Jesus will be revealed in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who know not God (1 Thessalonians 1:8). The political and religious heavens shall pass away with a great noise and melt with fervent heat and the works thereof be burned up (2 Peter 3:10).

There will be no old wine in the new bottles. The fire of judgment will incinerate the present systems to make a clear site for rebuilding. Daniel saw these systems ground to powder and blown away like chaff before the wind (Daniel 2:35). Isaiah likened God's judgments to a broom (besom) sweeping clean the dust from the site (Isaiah 14:23).

Jesus and his friends are to inherit the earth and nations (Psalms 2:8, Matthew 5:5). The earth is polluted, and the nations crazed by sin's rule. A complete rebuilding from the bottom up is envisaged in this and other verses. No patches on the old rotten garment will suffice. The rubbish heap is the only place for human systems.

What manner of persons ought we to be, asks Peter? (2 Peter 3:11). Certainly, separate from a system that God is going to destroy (2 Corinthians 6:17). Love not the world nor the things in the world. If we do, then we are loving what God hates and making ourselves His enemies (James 4:4).

"Neither root nor branch" shall survive. The root was germinated from the sin in Eden. It is "the root of bitterness" founded upon human nature (Galatians 5:17). This root was planted among men in the rebellion of Nimrod, and his son Asshur who "went forth" from Noah's family and laid the foundations of man's political systems (Genesis 10:9). God did not destroy the enterprise but dispersed it. For a time, it would serve His grand purpose to provide a testing ground for the development of His sons and daughters. When the number of these "jewels are made up" the rubbish must be completely removed from the site to prepare for rebuilding the Kingdom of God. The serpent must be "bruised on the head". Rome contains the religious brain. The Kremlin houses the political brain. Both will be struck a blow that will destroy their power to think and direct. It is only after a thousand years that their consciousness returns and prompts them to attempt another rebellion (Revelation 20:7-9).

V2 "To ye that fear my name" The woman's seed (Genesis 3:15) have always been a despised and downtrodden minority. Being not of the world the world does not hear them (1 John 4:6). Seeking the honour that comes from God they forget the honour of the world. Theirs has been "a day of small things". Their waiting will not have been in vain. Vexed by the evil conversation of the wicked they have been polished by its abrasive friction (2 Peter 2:7). The time has come when they shall be removed from the polishing barrel and washed by a change of nature to the likeness of Jesus' glorious body (Philemon

3:21) and placed in relation to God's light. They will then be the divine jewels reflecting and sparkling God's glory among men.

"Shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing" Like Paul, all God's children have born the image of the earthy (1 Corinthians 15:49) and in this body have languished under its evil influences, O wretched man that I am who shall free me from this body of sin and death has been their cry (Romans 7:24). If David complained of a loathsome disease and no soundness in his flesh (Psalm 38:7) all like him have likewise ailed. It is not forever. 'All the days will I wait till my change come" said Job (Job 14:14). "He shall change our vile body" (Philemon 3:21). "This corruptible must put on incorruption, this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:54). Then will the saints be clothed upon with their house from heaven. There shall be no more death, sorrow, pain or tears (Revelation 21:4) but everlasting joy. Jesus shall be "the health of their countenance".

As the **sun** is the source of all blessing in light warmth and gravitational control of our earth so Jesus is to his people. He it is who shall heal their bodies in which they "now groan and travail awaiting' the redemption" (Romans 7:22,23). He will change their vile bodies to an equality with angelic health and strength (Luke 20:36). As the rising sun disperses the darkness of night and exposes the sparkling dew drops so the coming of Jesus will expose the sparkling saints begotten in the long dark night of trial and affliction (see 2 Samuel 23:4).

"And ye shall grow up as calves" The saints shall go forth from their obscurity. Hitherto, unknown and Conceal-ed in the darkness of Gentile night they shall "go forth" for all the world to behold and honour (Isaiah 63:16, and 66:12-14). They shall "grow up". As children they have differed nothing from a servant (Galatians 4:1-2). They have learned the discipline and etiquette of God's Royal House.

Before man will be permitted to be "Kings and Priests" to rule over men they must first demonstrate the power to rule and control themselves. Having endured faithfully to the end they are ready for exaltation. Sown in weakness they shall be raised to power. The dead shall be raised from their sleep and with the living raised to incorruption (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). They will then be appointed as God's ministers to "sit on the high places of the earth" as Kings and Priests living and reigning with Christ (Revelations 20:4-6, 5:9-10), No "growing up" will ever have compared with it.

"Calves of the stall" The calf was a clean animal dividing the hoof and chewing the cud. In both respects a fitting symbol of God's children. They are morally clean (John 15:3). They walk in the way having Jesus for example. "The wicked are in slippery places, their feet are not in sure places" (Psalms 17:5 and 73:18). The saints have always been a cud chewing or contemplating people. "Think on these things" counsils Paul. "Meditating on the law of God, day and night" is David's description of them.

"Of the stall" The saints are symbolised here as being restricted in their ambitions. They are at present 'locked up' having neither the freedom nor the power to take political or religious authority in the world. From this stall they are to be released. The joy expressed by a calf released from captivity is expressive of the everlasting joy of the saints when released from their long captivity.

Other prophets express the same idea of captivity followed by release such as "Prisoners of the pit" in Zechariah 9:11-12. "Growing up" is first mental and moral. We must grow up unto him (Zechariah 6:12 and Ephesians 4:15). This prepares the way for physical "growing up" to the status of Kings and Priests (Revelations 5:9-10 and 20:4-6).

V3 "Tread down the wicked" Up to this time the "Holy City" (God's people) has been "trodden down" (Revelation 11:2). In Malachi's day as in the Christian era, the saints were as "lambs among wolves". Their preparation and polishing was in progress unknown to their contemporaries. With the jewels "made up" the time comes for their glory to be exposed. Calves "grown up" took their place in "treading

out the corn". Paul interprets this to mean the spreading of God's word among men, and consequently the separation of them into "wheat and chaff" (1 Corinthians 9:9).

The earth cannot be filled with God's knowledge and glory while the wicked are in high places. They must vacate their seats (Luke 1:52). This they will be asked to do. The age lasting gospel (Revelations 14:6) or Millennial announcement will be first proclaimed to all people. This will invite all in authority to hand over their positions to Jesus and his people because the time has come for the Kingdoms of this world to become the Kingdom of God and His people (Revelations 11:15). Some will hearken, most will refuse. This is the basis for "the discernment between the righteous and the wicked" (Malachi 2:18). Resistance will be met with resistance; Psalm 49 gives a running commentary of this time:

- **Verse 1** The saints praise God in their "new song" expressive of their new experience and life with Jesus.
- **Verses 2-3** Israel acknowledge their great King and rejoice.
- **Verse 4** God expresses His pleasure in His people by beautifying them with salvation.
- **Verse 5** They celebrate with the bridegroom in a period of rejoicing.
- **Verse 6** Appointed with power over the nations to rule them with a rod of iron (Revelations 2:26) they are armed to fulfill their appointment.
- **Verses 7-8** They execute vengeance upon the heathen and punishments upon the people, binding their kings with chains and nobles with fetters of iron.
- **Verse 9** This honour have all His saints.

Malachi describes the outcome of the conflict. The wicked are incinerated by the "flaming fire" (Isaiah 66:15-16) the political "heavens pass away in fervent heat" and all that is left of sin's kingdom is the ashes. Upon these ruins the God of heaven (as distinct from, the god of the earth as hitherto) (2 Thessalonians 2:4) shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.

V4 "Remember the law of Moses..." The message now turns back again to the nation of Israel. Malachi had digressed from the national scene to the central purpose of God's work: the preparation of individuals and their exaltation.

The nation must now prepare for the next great event: the coming of their Messiah. There will not be a succession of prophets to guide the way. They are exhorted to remember Moses' law and covenant. This "schoolmaster" was capable to educating them to meet him (Galatians 3:24). It could be "life or death" to them. It was the basis of good or evil (Deuteronomy 30:15-19). Not one jot or tittle would fail till Jesus had fulfilled all. The law was "holy, just and good" (Romans 7:12) and could produce men and women of this stamp when observed in spirit and letter.

V5 "I will send you Elijah" Elijah was sent to the ten tribed kingdom. He was to restore them to God from whom they had departed under "Jeroboam the son of Nebat". He lamented that he was not equal to the task and wished to die because of his failure (1 Kings 19:4). God assured him the work had done what He wanted at that time. Seven thousand had remained faithful (probably a symbolic number like the 144,000 of Revelations 7:14) (1 Kings 19:18). Nor would his request to die be granted. The work would one day be completed and "all Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:26). Elijah was taken away without dying expressive of God's intention that he must return and finish the task.

"Before the dreadful day of the Lord" - We get the sense of the word 'before' from the work of John the Baptist. In "The spirit and power" of Elijah he was ambassador to Jesus' first coming. Although he came "before" and announced that there "cometh one after me" who is preferred before me, his coming "before" was in the sense of manifestation to the nation. Jesus was actually there all the time. As John said there "standeth one among you". He is here and about to be manifested to you (see John 1:21,

1:15, 26-27). The same will be true of Elijah. Jesus will be back on earth. His angels will have gathered the elect (Matthew 24:31). Israel will be ignorant of this presence. It is Elijah who will be deputed again to go to the "tribes scattered abroad" that is, those who have not returned to the land. He will gather them, no doubt with signs and wonders like Moses did in Egypt (Micah 7:15).

Many have confused the work of John with that of Elijah. John came in the "spirit" of Elijah but was not Elijah (John 1:21). Jesus said "Elijah shall first come" after John had died. John said he was not Elijah.

"The great and dreadful day" The second coming of Jesus will be great and dreadful" in a sense that his first was not. He came as a lamb. He will come as a lion (Revelation 5:5). He came to invite. He will come to command. He was refused and rejected of men (Isaiah 53:3). His it will be to refuse and reject (Luke 19:27). Resistance to his command will mean death. He is terrible to the kings of the earth (Isaiah 24:21-22). The manifestation of his power and might will fill the world with dread. Man will creep into the holes and caves of the earth for fear of him and because of the glory of his majesty. Lofty looks shall be bowed down and haughtiness made low when he arises to shake terribly the earth (Isaiah 2:19).

"He (Elijah) shall turn hearts of the fathers to their children" A fundamental of the gospel is that natural Israel shall be brought back to their God (Romans 11:28 and Jeremiah 31:36-37). This must involve a great ' change of heart and mind (Ezekiel 36:26). This great work is not for their righteousness but because of God's love for, and covenant with, the Fathers (Ezekiel 36:22). Nothing could be more calculated to turn the hearts of Israel to the Fathers of the nation than the realisation that their national salvation has been because of them.

Their love for their fathers expressed in subservience to them as leaders will be reciprocated by the fathers who will love their natural seed in "father son" relationship. Both will be united in the one great covenant of Abraham and David (Jeremiah 33:21).

"Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" It shall be as it was in the days of Noah. At that time, it grieved God that He had made man (Genesis 6:6). It will be the same again so far as the world is concerned. God would wipe man from the face of His earth were it not for His promises and covenant with His chosen. The world of man deserves no better destiny than to be cursed with destruction.

The work of Jesus in his saints and in particular the work of Elijah is all that prevents the unleashing of eternal power in the destruction of mankind. The curse began in Eden with man's rebellion (Genesis 3:17). It will take its course till this earth is cleansed of all that caused it, that is, rebellion against God.

There shall be no more curse (Revelation 22:3)

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