

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: MALACHI

MALACHI

PREFACE

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Duncan Heaster

MALACHI CHAPTER 1

Malachi Chapter 1

Malachi 1:1 *An oracle: the word of Yahweh to Israel by Malachi*- "Malachi" is a form of *malak*, the word usually used for messenger or Angel. The appeal of the prophecy is to the priests, who are described in Mal. 2:7 as "the messenger of Yahweh of Armies". So it would seem that Malachi [s.w. "messenger"] was himself a priest who was modelling what a priest should be like by giving his prophecy. So we have here a priest rebuking priests; and this is always the most powerful way to preach, teach and pastor, when the teacher or pastor has commonality with the audience. It was and is why the Lord Jesus fully had our human nature. The priests were to 'turn' [s.w. 'convert'] believers away from the life of sin and behind the way of God (Mal. 2:6 LXX); the priestly mission was to bring about the conversion which was required before the revelation of Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom. As explained on Haggai and Zechariah, the exiles who returned could have experienced Joshua and / or Zerubbabel as their Messianic rulers in God's restored Kingdom in Judah. But they didn't 'return' to Yahweh spiritually, and most of them preferred to remain in exile anyway. It could be that 'Malachi' was an appeal for repentance by a priest who was attempting to prepare the way for Messiah's coming. But still Judah refused to respond, and his fellow priests, perhaps his own relatives, refused to prepare that way; and Malachi as the messenger of the covenant was rejected by his

people. And so Malachi's mission failed, but it would come true in the work of the future Elijah prophet. Hence he concludes by speaking about this. John the Baptist was the primary fulfilment of it, and the latter day Elijah prophet will be the main fulfilment. John the Baptist felt that the Elijah ministry was about being "a voice crying", and he gives no direct answer to the question "Who are you?". He was just a voice, he felt his name was irrelevant. This might explain why 'Malachi' is anonymous, simply the messenger- of a possible new covenant. LXX reads "The words of the Lord to Israel by the hand of His messenger", asking us to connect with the message about the messenger of the covenant in Mal. 3:1.

Malachi 1:2 *I have loved you, says Yahweh. Yet you say, How have you loved us? Wasn't Esau Jacob's brother? says Yahweh, Yet I loved Jacob-*

This repeats the language of the new covenant: "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3). But Judah had rejected that offer of a new covenant made to them by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and tried to return to the old covenant- which Zechariah had explained was now broken. They shied away from God's pure love, just as many do today. They like spoilt children wanted to think that "love" means the gift of material prosperity here and now. Although they had rejected the new covenant, God's love for them was unchangeable (Mal. 3:6). The gifts and calling of God to Israel were unchangeable (Rom. 11:29) and as such, a parade example of His grace. For Israel were chosen as God's beloved child not because of their goodness, but simply because He loved them- and no real explanation is given for that choice of love. "For the fathers' sakes" still only throws the question one stage further back. And certainly with our calling and predestination likewise.

And yet for all the focus of the returnees upon separation from others, the temple and the ritualism of the old covenant, they are presented here as not really believing God loved them and offering Him the cheapest of their sacrifices. Their words are not what they actually said, but how their attitudes were read by God. And so it can be with us today. It's why Paul prayed on his knees that the converts would know the love of Christ that passes knowledge. It's quite possible to have a religious approach to faith that leaves us not feeling the love of God, and therefore uninfluenced by it. For we love only because He first loved us; as loved children we also walk in love (Eph. 5:1,2).

Isaiah speaks of this same inability of Judah to believe in God's love. "The LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me" . Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me" (Is. 49:14-16). And the marks on God's palms look ahead to the marks left in the Lord's palms by the nails of the cross. So often the exiles were dejected because the restoration prophecies hadn't worked out as they had hoped- because of their wrong attitudes. They returned to the land expecting personal material blessing, and turned against God when that didn't happen. Just as so many turn away from God today after coming to Him with wrong expectations of immediate blessing. God doesn't just shrug and make no further response. He appeals to them on the basis that His love for Israel is eternal and is shown by how He has chosen, taken hold of and called them: "But you, Israel My servant, Jacob whom I have *chosen*, the seed of Abraham My friend, you whom I have *taken hold of* from the ends of the earth and *called* from its corners and said to you, 'You are My servant, I have *chosen* you and not cast you away'; don't you be afraid, for I am with you" (Is. 41:8-10). We too cannot surely deny that we have been chosen, taken hold of and called. We find the same in Jer. 33:24-26: "Don't consider what this people has spoken saying, The two families which Yahweh chose, has He not cast them off? Thus do they despise My people, that they should be no more a nation before them. Thus says Yahweh: If My covenant of day and night fails, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth;

then will I also cast away the seed of Jacob". This was in response to the feeling of the dry bones of Judah in captivity: "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are totally cut off" (Ez. 37:11). So God appeals to them, that He has not and will not cut them off. At the beginning of the exile, they felt that "My strength is perished, and my expectation from Yahweh" (Lam. 3:18). And the same mentality continued in Malachi's time.

A sense that 'nobody loves me' is at the root of so much sin, addictions etc. It may quite possibly be true in this world, but the pain of being humanly unloved too easily leads people to believe that therefore, not even God loves them. Or at least, not very much. If our heart is melted by the love of another, then we are so hugely empowered. And we have that love... from God and the Lord Jesus. The New Testament defines the love of God and the love of Christ as specifically referring to the Lord's death on the cross. But we are too often up against the problem Malachi addressed- of religious people, believers in God, who feel somehow distant from God's love. Like them, we might never say in so many words "Wherein have You loved me?" but that is too often effectively our position.

Paul cites predestination as a parade example of God's grace. God's love of Jacob over Esau was not because Jacob was better; in secular terms, he was not such a nice guy as Esau. But God's love was for Jacob, to demonstrate His grace and to thereby elicit the response of faith and devotion. But Jacob / Israel refused. In Malachi's time, Israel had greatly slacked in keeping the Law: "What a weariness is it!", they grumbled to each other. They divorced faithful wives so they could marry Gentiles, they practiced sorcery and sexual perversion (Mal. 2:14-16; Mal. 3:5). But the *first* problem which the Spirit addresses is their lack of appreciation that God really did love them deeply (Mal. 1:2). All the other immorality flowed from this. We need to constantly remind ourselves never to feel "Nobody loves me". God loves us, in His Son. Let us never ever forget that.

The clear parallel between the historical man Jacob and the people of Israel is brought out here. Had Israel appreciated God's love for the man Jacob, and perceived that he was typical of them, then they would never have doubted God's love for them. And the same is true of us, whom Jacob likewise represents. It can be demonstrated that the weakness of Jacob, morally and even doctrinally, runs far deeper than may be apparent on the surface. Even at the end, despite the level of spiritual maturity which Jacob doubtless achieved, he still had serious aspects of incompleteness in his character. And yet he is held up as a spiritual hero, a victor in the struggle against the flesh. This was (and is) all possible on account of the phenomenal imputation of righteousness which God gave to His Jacob. He was saved by grace, not works; and Malachi appeals to God's people to see in Jacob's salvation an eternal reminder of God's grace (Mal. 1:2; 3:6). Very often, the name Jacob is associated with the way that God sees His people of Jacob / Israel as righteous when in fact they are not (Num. 23:7,10,21; 24:5; Ps. 47:4; 105:6; 135:4; Is. 41:8).

The various questions and statements put into Judah's mouth in Malachi, such as "How have you loved us?", are unlikely citations of what they actually said. Rather do we see here how God perceives the thought as the word, and how He sees and traces to the end the implications of our positions. We note that these same people who questioned whether God loved them were at the same time intensely religious and emotional in their apparent devotions to Him, covering His altar with tears (Mal. 2:13). In this we see a challenge; we can very seriously go through the motions of religious devotion, and yet disbelieve the simple love of God toward us.

Malachi 1:3 *But Esau I hated-*

We may ponder why God says He loves Israel but "hates" Esau. It has been truly said that 'hate' might be understood as meaning 'to love less'. But all the same, the Hebrew word translated "hate" means just that. It is used of how God hates child sacrifice (Dt. 12:31); idolatry

(Dt. 16:22); of how a woman felt her husband "Hates me and doesn't love me" (Jud. 14:16); of how Amnon hated his rape victim more than he had once loved her (2 Sam. 13:15); of how Haman hated the Jews (throughout Esther this word is used). Love and this "hate" are presented as polar opposites (e.g. 2 Sam. 19:6; 2 Chron. 19:2); the "hate" is not simply a lower level of "love". I suggest God says that He loves sinful Jacob and hates Esau in order to shake Judah from their lethargy, from their sense that God just treats them like any other nation. His love for Jacob was so strong that anything other than that love looked like hatred. This statement of extreme love prefaces the forthcoming message that God notices and feels their disregard of Him and has emotions appropriate to that; but they are overarched by this eternal love for Israel.

But it is true that "Hated" effectively means 'loved less' (as in Lk. 14:26 cp. Mt. 10:37; and Gen. 29:30,31 cp. Dt. 21:15,16). We read that Rebekah loved Jacob, but Isaac loved Esau; this isn't to say that each parent hated the other child, but that they loved them less. God seems to be saying that He too had (as it were) this kind of favouritism- by grace. And "Jacob" was to be awed by that grace; but they were not. In wrath God had said of Israel: "I hated them" (Hos. 9:15). Yet God loves Israel with an eternal love, and hates their enemies Esau (Mal. 1:3). He will "love them freely" ultimately (Hos. 14:14). These windows into God's internal struggles reveal that His love is far from cheap.

And made his mountains a desolation- Esau was judged for his sins; whereas so often, God didn't judge Jacob as he deserved.

And gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness- God gave Esau and inheritance and then took it away, giving it to the jackals. Jacob / Israel sinned even worse; their mountains were also made desolate, their heritage given to others- but despite a dearth of repentance, God had still restored them to their land in Malachi's time. This restoration was by grace alone; and Israel ought to have responded more and not questioned God's love. The destruction of Edom / Esau was by the Babylonians, who also destroyed Judah (Jer. 49:17-22). But Judah simply bemoaned their lot whereas Edom rebuilt their ruins (:4).

Malachi 1:4 *Whereas Edom says, We are beaten down, but we will return and build the waste places; thus says Yahweh of Armies, They shall build, but I will throw down-* God challenges Judah's indolence to rebuild the temple by drawing their attention to how zealously Edom had rebuilt their "desolate places". If Edom can do it... why can't you, Judah, with all God's prophecies and support behind you? God threw down what the Edomites tried to rebuild, but was eager to confirm and magnify every stone laid by Judah. We too are challenged by the devotion and commitment of secular people to causes which are unspiritual and not Godly. If they can do so much for their causes; how much more should we devote every atom of our being to the things of the Kingdom.

And men will call them 'The Wicked Land', even the people against whom Yahweh shows wrath forever- Judah at this time were also "wicked"; the same word is used of them at Malachi's time 'working wickedness' (Mal. 3:15); 'doing wickedly' (Mal. 4:1). Just as the land was full of wickedness a generation before in the time of Zech. 5:8. The curses against Judah and Edom were similar (Is. 34:5); but God never lifted the curse upon Edom, whereas by grace He had done so upon Judah. Petra remains desolate to this day. The surrounding peoples throughout the generations were persuaded that Edom was a "Wicked land" and would not rebuild it. We see here how God can act directly upon the perceptions and hearts of people; and He can do so positively through His Spirit with us. God's wrath with Israel is described as eternal, but His grace to them was such that it was not.

Malachi 1:5 *Your eyes will see, and you will say, Yahweh is great- even beyond the border of Israel/-* "See" is s.w. "discern" in Mal. 3:18 ["you will again discern the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not"]; as

explained there and on Mal. 2:4, all too late, the rejected will perceive spiritual truths. The connection with Mal. 3:18 suggests the "Your eyes" in view are those of rejected Israel. They oppressed Gentiles (Mal. 3:5) and considered *eretz* Israel the sole dominion of God's kingship or kingdom. But they would realize all too late that His Kingdom included Gentiles. The context is God's grace poured out to Jacob but not to Esau; the Jews of Malachi's time who refused and despised that grace would be resurrected to judgment and then see Gentiles such as Edom glorifying the God of Israel. Just as the Lord says that the unbelieving Jews of His generation would "see" Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom and themselves thrust out; they would not see Him again until they did see Him at the resurrection and would say, all too late, "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord".

"Beyond the border of Israel" can as well be rendered "up until", right up to the Biblical definitions of "Israel" from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean. This would be the same idea as Mic. 5:4 "for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth" / land promised to Abraham. It would continue the theme of Zech. 14:9: "the Lord will become king over all the earth" / land. And note that Malachi follows straight on from Zechariah in 'the book of the twelve' minor prophets. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are all on the same physical scroll.

Malachi 1:6 *A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, then where is my honour?*- Just as Judah questioned in their hearts whether God loved them (:2), so they acted as if they weren't the children of God, and therefore didn't need to give Him the response which a son does to a father.

And if I am a master, where is the respect due me?- One doesn't give sub-standard service to their employer. One didn't bring him a defective animal as a gift. And yet Israel gave their God the lame and the blind animals, they only served Him as far as it didn't hurt them (Mal. 1:6-9). They gave Him what cost them nothing. And yet they should not only have served Him *as* they served their earthly masters; but, because He is the "great God", they should have given Him even more. And so we must ask: the time we give to our careers and development in them, the *thought* we give to our secular lives, the respect we pay it... how does this compare to our attitude to Divine things?

Says Yahweh of Armies to you, priests- The appeal to the priests is made explicit in Mal. 2:1, but it begins here. As noted on :1, Malachi was a priest, and he was appealing to the priests, possibly his own family members. The criticism of the priests for offering defective animals was really a criticism of their keeping the best sacrifices for themselves, and also allowing the people to offer defective animals. This is why the mass of society were as culpable as the priests.

Who despise My name- To know the name of Yahweh is an imperative to serve Him (1 Chron. 28:9). The greatness of the Name should have led to full and costly sacrifices (Mal. 1:6-8,9-11,14; 2:2). Thinking upon the Name led the faithful to pay their tithes and fellowship with each other (Mal. 3:6,10). Giving unto Yahweh the glory due to His Name is articulated through giving sacrifice (Ps. 96:8). If we know God, we will act and judge as He does (Jer. 22:16). To perceive that Yahweh is indeed so righteous results in us humbling ourselves (2 Chron. 12:6), just as the declaration of the Name made Moses hide in the cleft of the rock, and as it will make men in the last days throw away all their vestige of human pride (Is. 2).

You say, 'How have we despised Your name?' - The priests perhaps excused themselves by reasoning that it was the people bringing defective offerings. The fact is, God demands our all, our total best. Anything less than that is an excuse. The Hebrew for "despised" is used of Esau (Gen. 25:34). In the context we have just read of how Esau was worse than Jacob but God saved Jacob by grace. This ought to have elicited in Jacob / Israel a desire not to act as Esau, but to be transformed by that grace. But instead they acted like and even worse than Esau, also

despising spiritual things. To despise the Name was the presumptuous sin (Num. 15:31). It was because of despising God that they had broken the covenant and gone into captivity (s.w. 2 Chron. 36:16; Ez. 16:59; 22:8). Now they had been restored by grace, but they were behaving the same way. They didn't deserve to be in the land, but rather to be sent away again into another captivity.

The priests despised Yahweh's Name (Mal. 1:6), unlike their ancestor Levi, who "revered Me and stood in awe of My Name" (Lev. 2:5). But it seems that some of the ordinary people did respond, and feared the Name: "Those who feared Yahweh spoke frequently one with another; and Yahweh listened, and heard, and a book of memory was written before Him, for those who feared Yahweh, and who honoured His name" (Mal. 3:16). And for them, God promised the Messianic "sun of righteousness" to arise for them "who revere My Name" (Mal. 4:2). Despite the bad example of their priests / religious leaders, individuals can still respond.

Malachi 1:7 *You offer polluted bread on My altar-*

As teachers of God's law (Mal. 2:7), the priests ought to have refused such offerings from the people. But they didn't, and offered them on the altar. We note the love of Judah for the altar; it was the first thing they restored on return from exile and they covered it with tears (Mal. 2:13). But they offered sub-standard offerings upon it. This is typical of a religious approach to God, where the altar rather than the offering is seen as paramount.

The abuses against "My altar" of Mal. 1:7,10 refer to the much-mentioned altar of Ez. 40-48, which was to be used in a way unlike the previous abuses of the pre-captivity period. Judah had made no difference between clean and unclean, and therefore had gone into captivity (Ez. 22:26); and therefore the temple was a command / prophecy to divide the clean from the unclean in the whole way the building was designed and was to be built and operated (Ez. 42:20). It was a "law" that the top of the house be "holy" (Ez. 43:12). See on :8. Malachi is primarily addressing the priesthood; they were already "polluted", unable to prove their genealogy as the records had been destroyed when Jerusalem was sacked, and were only allowed to serve by grace (Neh. 7:64). But they didn't respond to that grace; they themselves polluted God's service.

God had sworn not to allow His Name to be polluted or profaned, e.g. Is. 48:11 "For My own sake, for My own sake, will I do it; for how should My name be profaned? I will not give My glory to another"; also in Ez. 20:9. But He never forces, and so He 'allowed' Judah at this time to pollute it. God invites us to see His efforts to stop His Name being polluted as somehow defeated by the extent of Israel's pollutions. This theme comes out clearly in Ezekiel: they polluted Him, but He strove lest His Name should be polluted. Here is the extent of freewill which God gives man to sin- and also the extent of the hopefulness of God. It's as if He didn't imagine they would pollute Him as much as they did.

You say, 'How have we polluted You?' In that you say, 'Yahweh's table contemptible'- "They shall come near to my table" (Ez. 44:16) in the restored temple. They did, but they despised it (Mal. 1:7,12), they found it such a weariness. Yet they covered the altar with tears of religious devotion (Mal. 2:13), when in reality they despised it. For God's table was His altar, He ate in fellowship with the offerers. We have here a powerful challenge to mere religiosity. "Contemptible" is s.w. despise" in :6. They despised God's Name by despising His table. Our attitude to His table, which in our day could refer to the breaking of bread service, is our attitude to His Name. If we treat it as mere religion, a weapon to control others with, a sign of local club membership, then we like Judah are despising His Name.

Whilst the "table" refers to the altar, we note how Ez. 40:39-43 labours how there were to be tables for the offerings to be laid on and slaughtered. It was presumably on these stone tables that the animals were examined for defects. It seems that they were intended to construct eight

stone tables for the sacrifices to be laid on. But we read here in Malachi of a singular "table", which they had despised and polluted with their stolen or substandard sacrifices. The priests laid the animal on the table, saw it was defective, but shrugged and accepted it anyway. Always the point is being made that this was all so far from the glorious temple scenario which Ezekiel had taught them and commanded them whilst in exile.

Malachi 1:8 *When you offer the blind for sacrifice, isn't that evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, isn't that evil?*- The idea is that the people presented or offered a sick animal to the priests, and the priests accepted it; this is not the word for "offer" in :7. "Isn't that evil?" is as RV "It is no evil!", ironically, or quoting their words. The offering of defective animals was likely encouraged by the poor harvests, poverty and blight on animals which the returned exiles faced, as detailed in Haggai. Indeed the economic situation was so bad by the time of Neh. 5:1-5 that they were selling their children as slaves just to get food to eat. But that was a result of their own sins and wrong attitudes. The excuse of the priests would have been that it was the people who offered these defective animals. But they were judged as responsible, as their acceptance of them encouraged the masses in their disrespect.

They offered blemished sacrifices, when it had been prophesied / commanded in the Ezekiel prophecies of the restored temple that Israel were not to do this (Ez. 43:23). Those prophecies were command more than prediction, and only conditional upon Israel's obedience-which was not forthcoming. So much prophetic potential was wasted, as it is in human life today. See on Mal. 1:7,10; 2:14; 3:8.

They offered the blemished sacrifices which Israel presented to them (:8,14). Thus they failed to speak out against the low spiritual standards of their flock, but instead went along with them. So the masses got the spiritual leadership they wanted, even if they despised them (:9). For this reason, both society and priesthood were equally to be condemned.

Present it now to your governor!- A Persian term is here used, suggesting Malachi was speaking not long after the restoration, when the Jews were still influenced by Persian language.

Will he be pleased with you? Or will he accept your person? says Yahweh of Armies- Heb. "accept your face". Sitting at God's table / altar with acceptable sacrifice would have resulted in them meeting God face to face as it were, over the table.

Malachi 1:9 *Now, please entreat the favour of God, that He may be gracious to us-*

Zech. 7:13 had clearly stated that God was not open to hearing their prayers until they changed: "Just as, when I called, they would not hear, so, when they call, I will not hear, says the LORD". Despite the potential being that the rebuilt temple would be a "house of prayer for all nations" (Is. 56:7). Perhaps that's why prayer isn't ever really mentioned in Malachi, apart from here. And yet here Malachi still urges them to pray. He knew God's grace. And this is not the only time when Godly men have prayed when it appeared God had turned off. Jeremiah is a classic example.

It appears that a minority did respond to Malachi's words. But as religious people tend to, they asked the priest [Malachi] to pray for them, rather than wanting to engage personally with God. They are perhaps alluding to the intercession of Moses for a faithless Israel.

With this, will He accept any of you? says Yahweh of Armies- The problem was that the nature of the failures was such that the whole society was implicated. The priests offered the defective sacrifices which the people brought. And yet despite this, God as it were changes His mind and does accept that minority in Mal. 3:16. Such was and is His enthusiasm to save at least some.

Malachi 1:10 *Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on My altar in vain!*-

"Oh that there were one..." suggests that there was not a single faithful priest. The idea seems to be that God felt it were better to close the temple, to shut the doors, than keep them open to offer sacrifices like these. We see how far the glorious potential for the restored temple had failed. As the Lord would later put it, better hot or cold than lukewarm.

God's desire for the temple to be closed down stands in sharp contrast to the glorious prophecies of the temple's restoration. He is moving towards a way of relating to people without the temple; as we will note on :11.

There were to be gate openers in the restored temple (Ez. 46:12). There were gate openers, but they demanded to be paid for their services (AV); or [LXX] the gate openers were nowhere to be found. The difference in the translations reflects the Hebraism: if you won't serve for nothing, then you haven't served.

An indication that Nehemiah could have been a Messiah figure is to be found in Mal. 1:10 RV, which laments that even if *one* man could be found to shut the temple doors properly, then God's pleasure would have returned to Israel. It was Nehemiah who shut the doors (Neh. 13:19- i.e. organized the temple services?), but presumably the implication is that he didn't continue as required. See on Hag. 1:1; 2:7; Zech. 8:22.

The AV offers: "Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought". If this is legitimate, then we have an allusion to the book of Job, which appears to have been rewritten under inspiration with relevance to the return from exile. The satan in the book of Job expresses his serious doubt that any man would serve God for no prospect of reward in this life (Job 1:9). One of the themes of the book of Job is to show how a real believer *will* serve God for nothing. In fact, Job went beyond this. He says that he will still serve God even if he gets nothing from Him in this life *and even if there is no future reward either*, and even if God treats Him unfairly; 'Even if', Job speculates, 'God *slays me* (not just 'kills' me)' (consider Job 13:15; 14:7,14; 19:10). This was love of God, this was devotion to ones' creator, despite not understanding His ways. In Malachi's time, the Jews were expecting a reward from God for every little thing they did. They are rebuked in language which is full of allusion back to Job, and his willingness to serve God "for nought" (Mal. 1:10 AV).

I have no pleasure in you, says Yahweh of Armies, neither will I accept an offering at your hand- The glory of Yahweh as described at the end of Ezekiel could have appeared in Haggai's time- but this wonderful possibility was held back by Israel's petty minded, self-satisficing laziness. The same word is used in Ez. 43:27- *then*, when the temple of Ezekiel was built, Yahweh would "accept / take pleasure in" His people and temple. But because they built and served Him with such a mean spirit, He did not "accept" them at that time (Mal. 1:10,13 s.w.).

Malachi 1:11 *For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, My name is great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to My name, and a pure offering: for My name is great among the nations, says Yahweh of Armies*- Note the conflict of tenses; His Name will be glorified, because it is right now great. The implication is that we glorify that Name now, and thereby live the Kingdom life now. This is the sense of the Lord's repeated offers of "life eternal" to be experienced right now. The exiles despised Gentiles (Mal. 3:5), but ultimately it was Gentiles who were to offer a more pure sacrifice than the Jews. Their "pure offering" contrasts with the defective offerings of the Jews at this time. And the Jews of that generation would be resurrected to see this, and then be condemned (see on :5). "Every place" uses *maqom*, the word for a holy place; the whole earth was to be full of such holy places, where incense could be offered acceptably; which meant that the Jerusalem temple

would no longer be the only sacred space- a lesson the exiles ought to have learnt through their relationship with God in Babylon.

The Gentiles are understood in Mal. 1:11 as being able to offer a pure offering "in every place". The Jerusalem temple was not required to make an acceptable offering. That had been the initial plan, as Ez. 48 had envisaged the Yahweh Name would be "there"; but the Jews had despised God's Name. So anyone who did make His Name "great" could offer an acceptable, pure offering- from wherever they are. And yet in Mal. 3:4 another scenario is given- the Levitical priesthood will be purged and "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to Yahweh, as in the days of old" (Mal. 3:4). It never was purged. But Malachi's generation were still being given the opportunity to have that scenario. Mal. 1:11 makes it clear that He foresaw that their spurning of His holiness would actually lead to a situation where He was glorified by far more people over a far greater area.

The idea could be: "I will no longer accept the local and polluted offering, for I will substitute for it a pure and universal offering". This looked forward to the Lord's sacrifice. And possibly the readjustment of these things would come to its fulfilment in the "spiritual sacrifices" of prayer and praise (Heb. 13:15), generous deeds (Heb. 13:16; Phil. 4:18) and self-dedication (Rom. 12:1).

Another option is that the present tenses could lead us to read this as speaking of the Jews and Israelites who had not returned to the land. They were offering acceptable incense without the temple, throughout the Persian empire. And this was acceptable, whereas the offerings made at the temple weren't. We recall how Ezekiel established a "little sanctuary" in exile and there likely were others. There are records of Jewish sacrifices being made in the Elephantine colony in Egypt, in Babylonia, and at the Jewish temple in Leontopolis in Lower Egypt. These and other sanctuaries may have been the referent of how "in every place [the Hebrew often refers to a holy place]" amongst the Gentiles in the territory of the land promised to Abraham, incense was being offered acceptably to Yahweh.

We see a number of different potential movements within God's purpose. Jeremiah and Ezekiel had offered the captives a return from exile, a new covenant and a restored Kingdom, with a new temple and a Messianic "Prince" and conditions of great blessing in the land, with the Gentiles becoming proselytes. But this was conditional upon their repentance. They didn't repent and only a relatively few returned from exile. They didn't build the temple as commanded by Ezekiel and sought to return to the [now broken] old covenant. They didn't repent and were only interested in their own properties and material betterment. Haggai and Zechariah appealed for repentance, but it was only done on a surface level. Through Zechariah, God offered them a new version of things- a priest [Joshua] and a king [Zerubbabel], and offers to cleanse the Levitical priesthood. And offered the blessings of the old covenant in return for obedience to the old covenant. Jeremiah's prophecies of the new covenant are alluded to in Zechariah 1-8 and parts of them are mixed in with the new deal God was offering a people who still wanted the old covenant, for reasons of preserving tradition. But even that wasn't acceptable to them. God condemns them as "unclean" (Haggai) and unacceptable (Malachi). After Zechariah 8, Zechariah refocuses the possible futures upon the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. Yet Mal. 1: 11 is clear that God enjoyed fellowship and worship from a faithful remnant of exiles still in captivity, quite without a temple and sanctuary. And quite possibly without a Levitical priesthood. Yet their offerings were "pure" and they glorified Yahweh's Name, unlike those offered in the rebuilt temple. Zech. 8:20-23 and other restoration prophecies speak of a pilgrimage of nations to worship at the restored temple in Jerusalem. But Malachi sees the possibility of individual Jews [initially] acceptably worshipping God from a distance. And this merges with the wider vision of individual Gentiles worldwide glorifying Him, without the temple and restored Kingdom in the specific form envisaged by the restoration prophets. This is confirmed by the way these words of Mal. 1:11 are quoted in 1

Tim. 2:8 and applied to Christians praying to God: "I desire then that men pray in every place". This would explain the clear feeling of personal relationship with God which is so marked in Malachi: "Out of a total of 55 verses in the book, 47 contain the first person address of Yahweh to Israel". In all this we see God's earnest desire to somehow work with men, on whatever level.

Malachi 1:12 *But you profane it*- The purpose of building the temple system was so that Yahweh's Name would no longer be profaned by His people in that temple (Ez. 36:23; 44:7); but they had profaned it (also Mal. 1:12), in that they saw it all as mere religion, and the fire of a true relationship with the Almighty was smothered. Judah profaned the Sabbath too (Neh. 13:17,18). The potential kingdom situation of Ez. 40-48 was therefore precluded by their disobedience to it.

In that you say, 'Yahweh's table is polluted, and its fruit, even its food, is contemptible'- This is typical of the prophets- to perceive the real implication of attitudes. For the Jews probably didn't actually say those words. But because those words didn't pass their lips and weren't formed by their tongue... this didn't mean that they didn't think that. The Lord brought all this into simple truth when He stated that the thought is the action and the words.

According to the LXX titles, there were certain Psalms which were written for the dedication of the rebuilt temple, and others written by Haggai and Zechariah. They include: Psalms 96,138,147,148. These all seem to speak as if the time of a glorious temple was to be the time of God's Kingdom; this was the possibility, and it was the prevailing hope in the minds of the faithful minority. But the Psalms had to remain prophecies of the future day of Zion's glory. Psalms 96 is very clear: "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name [i.e.] bring an offering, and come into his courts" (:8). But Judah did *not* bring the right offerings, although the glory of Yahweh's Name ought to have elicited them (Mal. 1:11-16).

They are accused here of blaspheming God's Name, faithlessness (2:10-17), wearying the Lord with their words (2:17), failing to return to the Lord Almighty (3:6-7), saying "it is futile to serve God" and robbing God (3:8,13). Yet they covered the altar with tears (Mal. 2:13), such was their religious devotion. But still God assures them that He loves them.

Malachi 1:13 *You say also, 'Behold, what a weariness it is!'*-

They considered serving God a "weariness" because they felt there weren't getting anything immediate and material out of it. The same word is used in Is. 43:22: "You have become weary of me, O Israel!". There was a mutuality here: "Your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them" (Is. 1:14). God was wearied with their weariness, and so it is in the breakdown of relationship between God and men today. And yet despite this, God reaches out to them again and again.

What a contrast with David! The whole of Ps. 119 describes how he rejoiced at God's law, staying up late at night, straining his eyes into the candlelight to read it, getting up first thing in the morning to read some more (Ps. 119:147,148). "Travail" is the same word translated "weariness" here, used by Nehemiah as a summary of all the trouble that had come upon Judah in their history (Neh. 9:32). This is the mindset of so many- they have travail in the world, and they consider relationship with God to likewise be "travail". Anything apart from total commitment to God will result in this miserable mindset.

And you have sniffed at it, says Yahweh of Armies- "Sniffed" alludes to an animal snorting or 'breathing back' at food they don't like. It is the word used about how Yahweh "sniffed" or 'blew away' the harvest reaped by the exiles (Hag. 1:9). As noted on *What a weariness it is*, Judah had slumped to a situation where they sniffed or blew away at the idea of giving God the best, and He sniffed or blew away what they harvested. Only total devotion to Him of our very best will bring us out of this mire of mediocrity which grips unbelieving society.

And you have brought that which was taken by violence, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring the offering- The returned exiles were stealing cattle from each other, and then quickly using them as offerings before the theft would be discovered. And by so doing, they robbed God (Mal. 3:8). The Hebrew for "sick" is literally 'that which is worn away', and it is also one of the Hebrew words translated "prayer". It is used in :9; to pray to God with entreaty is as it were to wear Him down, as in the parable of the insistent widow. The play on words here is to reflect how God would not be 'worn down' by their prayers if their sacrifices were of worn down animals. The timeless message is that we are not to sacrifice to God that which costs us nothing, that which is in any case superfluous to our personal needs. And we need to examine all our giving to God in this light.

Should I accept this at your hand? says Yahweh- The prophetic intention was that God would "accept" the offerings of the restored exiles in the rebuilt temple (s.w. Ez. 20:41; 43:27). But He is saying that they were precluding the fulfilment of those prophecies by offering that which was clearly unacceptable. Again we see the open ended nature of God's purpose, and the extreme importance thereby attached to human freewill decisions.

Malachi 1:14 *But the deceiver is cursed, who has in his flock a male, and vows, and sacrifices to the Lord a blemished thing-*

The cruel tragedy here is that a vow meant that you promised to make a sacrifice to God if He did something for you. God had answered their prayers, He came through for them as asked- but their gratitude was in offering a blemished animal even when it was in their power to offer Him what they had promised.

"Blemished thing" is feminine. Freewill vow offerings were to be male. We may ask, 'Who were the offerers deceiving?'. Not the priests, because they knew the blemishes of the animals they sacrificed. Like Ananias and Sapphira, the offerers were deceiving God. And they thought they could get away with it. They would naturally have recoiled at this being stated in such bald terms, but this is effectively what we are doing if we don't offer the best according to our potential. The law required male offerings (Lev. 1:3,10); the offerer was claiming that he had only a flock of females and hence couldn't offer a male. This was obviously untrue, but they thought they could thus deceive God, as if He wouldn't notice.

For I am a great King, says Yahweh of Armies- "The great king" is the title beloved by the kings of Assyria, Greece and Babylon (2 Kings 18:19,28; Jer. 25:14; Dan. 8:21). The emphasis is therefore upon "I". The restored exiles still felt that their imperial rulers were their great king, rather than throwing off the yoke of tribute and tithing to them and accepting Yahweh as the one and only "great king". We too can so easily fear man's greatness rather than God's.

And My name is awesome among the nations- It is a continual theme of Malachi that the Gentiles would ultimately serve God acceptably and better than Judah (see on :11). We note the present tense, "is awesome", as if this potential was already being developed.

MALACHI CHAPTER 2

Malachi Chapter 2

Malachi 2:1 *Now, you priests, this commandment is for you-* The idea would be that the following is specifically for the priests, although Mal. 1 is largely directed at them also. I suggested on Mal. 1:1 that the priesthood was to specifically be the messenger of the new covenant heralding the potential arising of a Messiah figure. But Judah refused, and so the potential was rescheduled and reapplied to John the Baptist, and then to the latter day Elijah prophet.

Malachi 2:2 *If you will not listen-* Heb. "hear". This was the epitome of God's covenant:

"Hear, O Israel". To not even hear meant that all the rest of the covenant principles were lost on them. To hear God, to respect His word, is essential. This is why the Bible must have paramount place in all our thinking about God.

And if you will not lay it to heart- Judah had gone into captivity because they did not "lay it to heart" (Jer. 12:11 s.w.). The restoration from captivity was to involve setting or laying to heart the new covenant (Jer. 31:21). They had returned from captivity, but were still not laying to heart their relationship with God. This lack of mental focus is one of the most common diseases of the soul, and affects many who would otherwise consider themselves religious Christians. They covered the altar with tears (:13) but didn't lay God's word to their heart. For all time we see demonstrated that mere religion and emotionalism isn't the same as a heart response to God.

To give glory to My name, says Yahweh of Armies- The exiles developed such an obsession with the Name that they even forbade the pronunciation of it. But this was typical mere religiosity, seeing that their root problem was a refusal to glorify the characteristics of God's Name.

Then will I send the curse on you- The curse with the article suggests the specific curse for disobedience to the covenant (Dt. 27:15-26; Dt. 28).

And I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have cursed them already, because you do not lay it to heart- This may refer to how as recorded in Hag. 1, there was famine and none of the covenant blessings which they had been promised for obedience. Or the idea may be that what apparent blessings they had were already cursed from God's viewpoint, but there was a gap between the curse and its fulfilment; note the future sense of :3. This explains the apparent contradiction: "I will curse... I have already cursed". In that gap, they could have repented and changed God's intention. We too live within that gap, and it should impart an intensity to our living, repentance and self-examination. God had already cursed the priests, He had made that statement. But the whole point of Malachi's appeal was that the priests would repent, and thus the curse that had "already" been pronounced would not come into operation. Note that God isn't saying: 'If you don't repent, beware, I will curse you'. He had already cursed them, but at that late stage, even then, He was willing to change His word- if they repented. It was exactly the same with Nineveh. Indeed, many of the OT appeals to repentance and outlines of judgment to come are of this nature. That judgment had already been decreed. But the power of the repentance appeals is that even so, God is so sensitive to genuine repentance that He is willing to go back on His own word. It's a great encouragement not only to personal penitence, but to perceiving the deep significance of the repentance of others, and accordingly framing our personal attitudes and judgments concerning them.

"Already" translates a Hebrew term which could mean "I have cursed them severally", taking the grammar distributively- as if to say, "I have cursed each one of your blessings". This would mean that there were a whole list of blessings potentially prepared, which one by one were now cursed. The amount of potential lost was tragic, and it continues in so many lives today as so many possible futures simply don't come about.

We must remember that it is specifically the priests who are being cursed; their specific blessings were to be cursed. What were their blessings? As discussed on :14, the priests were not trusting in the blessing promised to faithfully teaching God's word and arranging Israel's worship. The promise of blessing to the tribe of Levi was clear: "Yahweh, *bless* his substance [s.w. "wealth"]. Accept the work of his hands" (Dt.

33:11). Possibly this general 'blessing' of the Levites is implied in Num. 6:27: "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them" (RSV). Somehow everything will work out if we go God's way. But they didn't trust that, and divorced their wives and married Gentile pagans to try to ensure their own wealth.

Malachi 2:3 *Behold, I will rebuke your seed-* The reference could be to literal seed, but more likely to their children. The most common excuse for lack of devotion to God is that resources are needed for our children. This was the reason given by faithless Israel for not entering Canaan. But it was their children who would suffer. GNB "I will punish your children". The priests married Gentile women and divorced their Jewish wives, and as such decided themselves that their seed would not be a "Godly seed" (:14,15). So they worked out this curse by their own decisions and actions, just as Jeremiah had said of them: "Your ways and your doings have brought this upon you. This is your doom" (Jer. 4:18). Their descendants would cease from being Levites if their mothers were pagan Gentiles. They would be taken away from the altar just like dung was taken away from it, and dumped outside the camp (Ex. 29:14; Lev. 4:11; 16:27). But this was their own choice. God didn't want this to happen- "I have sent this commandment to you, that my covenant may continue with Levi" (2:4, NASB).

And will spread dung on your faces, even the dung of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it- This is one of the harshest, crudest condemnations of the priesthood in the whole Bible. And yet it is prefaced by the statement of God's amazing love for all Israel in Mal. 1. It is the wrath of love. The allusion is to the taking of the dung of the sacrifices "without the camp" to an unclean place of destruction (Ex. 29:14; Lev. 8:17 etc.). Judah were being told that without repentance, they would again be cast out from God's holy space. "Spread" is the same word used for God's scattering of His people into exile (Lev. 26:33). They didn't repent, but this didn't happen for centuries, until AD70. Such was God's amazing patience, setting us a powerful challenge whenever we think we have been patient enough with lack of human response to His word. But finally, God did end their feasts by destroying the temple and ending the Mosaic law, and expelling Israel. The language is crude and shocking, purposefully so, in order to get over to these religious people who wept tears over God's altar in apparent devotion (:13)... that they were so deeply unclean and their devotions and blemished animal sacrifices so abominable.

Malachi 2:4 *You will know that I have sent this commandment to you-* This continues the theme discussed on Mal. 1:5 and Mal. 3:18, that all too late when resurrected to judgment, that generation would know the truth of all these things. This explains why condemnation is described as the mental anguish which leads to gnashing of teeth. Or we can read this as NASB, as a continued begging for the priests to return to the covenant: "I have sent this commandment to you, that my covenant may continue with Levi" (2:4, NASB). And yet God had offered His people a new covenant, indeed the old covenant was broken. But they wanted to still stick with the old covenant and so He goes along with that desire. The Lord likewise spoke of how He appealed to Israel by all means, offering to play weddings, then funerals- but the just didn't want to play ball.

That My covenant may be with Levi, says Yahweh of Armies- God wanted to make a new covenant with the priests who are here addressed (:1) as "Levi". I will suggested on :5 that this was not the same as the Mosaic law, and was a separate although similar covenant to that made with Phinehas in Num. 25:12,13.

On a general level, all those in true covenant relationship with God will realize the fullness of commitment to us which He has entered into, and will likewise make a

whole-hearted response and sacrifice (Mal. 2:4,5). Ps. 103:18 parallels "such as keep his covenant" with "those that remember His commandments to do them". Covenant relationship brings a natural desire to live within the atmosphere of God's spirituality. For Israel in covenant with God, absolutely nothing- not sex, menstruation, the content of clothing fabric, diet- could fall outside the scope of their covenant relationship. And so in principle it is with us under the new covenant.

Malachi 2:5 *My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him that he might be reverent toward Me; and he was reverent toward Me, and stood in awe of My name-* The old covenant could not give life (Gal. 3:21), nor peace with God because there was a remembrance made of personal sins each year because of the inadequacy of the animal sacrifices alone to deal with personal sin (Heb. 10:3). As noted throughout Zechariah, God in Jeremiah and Ezekiel had offered the returning exiles a new covenant, which did offer life and peace: "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant" (Ez. 37:26; Is. 54:10). But they had refused it. This surely is the covenant in view rather than the old covenant. But the statement here is that this covenant had already been given and accepted. The priest who first accepted it was I suggest not the historical Levi, but Joshua the high priest who could have become a Messianic ruler. He initially accepted it but didn't continue in that covenant, neither did the priesthood after him; see on Hag. 1:1; 2:4; Zech. 3:1,3,6,8,9; 6:11. See on :7. The allusions to Phinehas are also clear: "'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace: and it shall be to him, and to his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel" (Num. 25:12,13). This was itself an incipient form of the new covenant, which was repeated to the priesthood at the time of the restoration as part of the new covenant offered to all Judah who returned to the land.

Malachi 2:6 *The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips. He walked with Me in peace and uprightness-* The man in view was "Levi" but this means surely an individual, specific priest, rather than Levi personally. As suggested on :5, it may not so much be Phinehas in view, but rather Joshua the intended high priest who began well but then fell away. God's law was to be taught in truth, whereas as explained on :8, the priesthood in Malachi's time had begun to twist the law in an untruthful way. Is. 59:3 uses the same words in condemning Judah after the restoration for having unrighteous lips. They influenced the priesthood, and the priesthood influenced them. And thus the entire community was guilty. The particular unrighteousness on the lips of the priesthood would have been in teaching unrighteousness as righteousness, thereby making their audience "stumble at the law" (:8). "Uprightness" is the word translated "straight" in explaining how the priestly messenger of the covenant would make the way "straight" for Messiah's coming (Is. 40:4; 42:16). This was what was required of the priesthood and high priest in order to prepare the way for Messiah's coming. But the priest [Joshua?] failed in this, and so did the priesthood subsequently.

And turned many away from iniquity- "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God" (Lk. 1:16) was alluding back to Malachi's message and prophecies of Messiah's forerunner; and it also referred to this definition of the ideal priest as one who "did turn many away from iniquity". The high priest Joshua and the priesthood at Malachi's time failed to prepare the way for Messiah's coming; and so it was reapplied to John the Baptist, and again to the Elijah prophet of the last days. "Turned away" is the usual word used for Judah's "return" from exile. They had been

intended to return to God as well as literally to the land. They had failed to do so, and so they were given by grace the messenger of the covenant to prepare them. This appears to have been a priest, maybe Joshua, or the figure presented as 'Malachi', but the priesthood generally were not fulfilling this role as intended. And so it was rescheduled for fulfilment in John the Baptist and the Elijah prophet of the last days.

There is clearly a connection with Dan. 12:3 promising blessing for those who turn many away from iniquity. Daniel's prophecy that there would be a time of trouble for Israel, followed by a resurrection and judgment, may have had a potential fulfilment in Haman's persecution. The LXX of Esther 5 includes her prayer, in which she says that Haman was seeking to hinder the work of the temple. This would explain why initially the Samaritans persuaded the Persians to make the work cease, but then (humanly inexplicably) another edict is given for it to resume. The people were delivered (Dan. 12:1), as they were by Michael the Angel manipulating Esther. But the resurrection, judgment and Kingdom didn't follow, because Israel weren't ready for it. Then those who turned many to righteousness- i.e. the priesthood, in the primary context- would be rewarded (Dan. 12:3). But Malachi and Haggai repeatedly criticized the priesthood at the time of the restoration for being selfish and not teaching Israel. Daniel and Jeremiah were heartbroken that there had to be such a delay to the full fulfilment of the Messianic restoration of the Kingdom.

As noted on :7, all Israel were to be priests in spirit. The priests were to 'turn' [s.w. 'convert'] believers away from the life of sin and behind the way of God (Mal. 2:6 LXX), but this is applied to all of us in James 5:19.

Malachi 2:7 *For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth-*

Dt. 33:10 had stated that Levi "shall teach judgments to Jacob" i.e. the rest of Israel. But this was command more than prediction, because Mal. 2:7 says that therefore the priest's lips should keep knowledge. They didn't, but they ought to have done. Again we see how "shall" is so often command rather than prediction of how things shall be in the future.

As noted on :5, the priests had entered a new covenant on returning from exile. This new covenant required Judah to have God's law written on their hearts, so that they each had the knowledge of God (Jer. 31:34); and yet Mal. 2:5-7 laments that the priests were more interested in divorcing their wives than teaching God's law to the people; their lips didn't keep nor teach the knowledge of God. The priests of the new temple system were to teach Judah and to make others *discern* between good and evil (Ez. 44:23). But they did the opposite, and therefore the huge potential predicted for them in Ez. 40-48 didn't come about.

Although there was a special priesthood, it was clearly God's intention that all Israel should be like priests; they were to be a "*Kingdom of priests*" (Ex. 19:6). "The priests lips should keep knowledge"; but the average Israelite was encouraged to study the Law for himself, "that your lips may keep knowledge" (Prov. 5:2 s.w.).

For he is the messenger of Yahweh of Armies- As suggested on Mal. 1:1, Malachi [s.w. "messenger"] was himself a priest who was modelling what a priest should be like by giving his prophecy. The messenger of the covenant (Mal. 3:1) was therefore a priest or priesthood which would prepare the people to accept the new covenant in Messiah. The implication is that Malachi and the priesthood of his time could and should have been doing this; but the priests refused. So we have here a priest rebuking priests; and this is always the most powerful way to preach, teach and pastor, when the teacher or pastor has commonality with the audience. It was and is why the Lord Jesus fully had

our human nature. The prophecy was reapplied to John the Baptist, who was also a priest; and seeing Israel generally failed to respond, again to the latter day Elijah prophet.

Malachi 2:8 *But you have turned aside out of the way-* I suggested on :5 that initially at the return from Babylon, the priest did teach God's ways. Certainly Nehemiah and Ezra did. But the subsequent priesthood didn't.

You have caused many to stumble in the law- This was the effect of their not rejecting the law, but finding all manner of ways of twisting it to allow female animals to be offered instead of the males stipulated (Mal. 1:14), and crippled animals to be accepted instead of unblemished ones. Finding ways around God's requirements only makes others stumble; again, a timeless warning.

You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says Yahweh of Armies- As explained on :5, that covenant was not the old covenant, but a new covenant offered to the returning exiles, as detailed in Jer. 31 and Ez. 37, which they initially accepted, but now the next generation had corrupted it. There is clearly also an allusion to the covenant with Phinehas. The priests "corrupted the covenant of Levi", in that they married out of the Faith (Neh. 13:29), thus violating the Spirit of the Phinehas covenant- which was given in recognition of zealous action against relationships with Gentile women (Num. 25:12,13).

Malachi 2:9 *Therefore I have also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according to the way you have not kept My ways, but have had respect for persons in the law-* By letting the people 'get away with' things like offering sick animals, the priests became despised by the people. As will be explained on :11, the people came to despise the priests just as they had done at the time of the young Samuel. But because of this, the people were driven to idolatry. This is what happens when the leadership of God's communities drive people away and make them simply not want to have anything to do with the community any more; those driven away rarely keep the faith, but rather drift off to various forms of idolatry. By respecting persons, showing favouritism to some, the priesthood became despised before all the people. They were unable to have a platform of respect from which to teach the people, and what they taught anyway was a corruption of the law.

Malachi 2:10 *Don't we all have one father? Hasn't one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother-*

It could be argued that Malachi is quoting their words of justification for marrying Gentiles: "Don't we all have one father? Hasn't one God created us?". They reasoned that seeing all men are created by God and descend from Adam, we are a brotherhood of man and so we can intermarry. This was totally different to God's insistence in Mal. 1 that He has a unique and special love and purpose for Israel, which He doesn't have with any other nation. But the returned exiles considered themselves rejected by Yahweh, and used this as an excuse to divorce their Jewish wives and marry Gentiles.

The treachery in :14 was against their wives. But here it is against their own brethren, and often elsewhere the word is used of treachery / unfaithfulness to the covenant with God. Unfaithfulness in personal relationships inevitably leads to breakdown in relationships with ones' brethren. And tearing up your covenant with your wife was related to tearing up your covenant with God/ You won't be unfaithful in one aspect of your life without it affecting other aspects; spirituality is "the whole man". On

Mal. 4:6 we will see how reconcillation with God is related to reconcillation within human relationships.

The covenant in view is that explained on :5. Remember that Malachi is addressing the priests (:1), and he himself was a priest (:7), probably a family relative of the priests he was addressing. Therefore the reference to brothers and having one father is to be understood in that context; the "one father" Malachi shared with his audience would then have been Levi. But the wider principle remains; the unity of God and our common relationship with Him should mean that we do not at treacherously against our brother, who also has God as Father.

Profaning the covenant of our fathers?- The purpose of building the temple system was so that Yahweh's Name and covenant would no longer be 'profaned' by His people (Ez. 36:23; 44:7); but they had profaned it (also Mal. 1:12), in that they saw it all as mere religion, and the fire of a true relationship with the Almighty was smothered.

Breaking covenant with God was related to breaking covenant with their wives and marrying Gentiles. Thus those who 'married out' in Ezra's time admitted: "We have broken covenant with our God ("have broken faith with our God" , RSV) and have taken strange (i.e. Gentile) wives of the people of the land... now let us make a covenant with our God, to put away all these wives" (Ezra 10:2 LXX). Ezra confirms the truth of what they said: "You have broken covenant and taken strange wives" (Ezra 10:10 LXX). Some years later, Nehemiah stridently criticized Israel for yet again marrying Gentiles. He described their action as "breaking covenant with our God and marrying strange wives" (Neh. 13:27 LXX); the Levites likewise "defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood" (Neh. 13:29) by their marriages. Notice how the repentant Jews in Ezra's time realized that they had broken the covenant, and sought to rectify things by re-entering the covenant, through serious repentance. Marriage with unbelievers needs to be assessed in the light of these words. In nearly every reference to marriage to Gentiles, there is the comment that this would surely lead to adopting the religious views of the Gentile partner; views which inevitably take a man away from the one and only Divine Truth, as revealed in the covenants of the Gospel. Turn through the following passages, which all make the connection between marriage out of the covenant, and adopting idolatry: Ex. 34:12-16; Dt. 7:2-9; Jud. 3:6,7; 1 Kings 11:2,3; Mal. 2:11; 2 Cor. 6:14.

Malachi 2:11 *Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the holiness of Yahweh which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god-*

The context is of the priests being criticized, that is the theme throughout this chapter. We enquire why they are addressed here as "Judah". Perhaps because the original Judah married the daughter of a Canaanite (Gen. 38:2) and his first two sons by this marriage were slain by God (Gen. 38:7,10). Just as God would curse the seed of the priests who married Gentiles (:2,3). "Judah has profaned the sanctuary of Yahweh" (Heb.) was something which the priests specifically are made guilty of doing in Malachi's criticisms of them. The priests were not to marry a "profane" woman (Lev. 21:7), and here the same word is used of becoming profane by marrying a pagan, who was "profane".

The treachery was therefore marital unfaithfulness. This is the great burden of Hosea; that Judah were in covenant relationship with God but were unfaithful. And yet there was never a time when Judah stated in so many words that they were through with Yahweh and were remarrying idols. The prophets so often perceive the true implication of human actions and attitudes. They had effectively divorced God and remarried. We

recall that Malachi was speaking at the time of the restoration. The common impression that they left their idols in Babylon when they returned to Judah is incorrect. It's true that under the Maccabees they did reject idolatry, but not for a few generations. All the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem was therefore done against this background of idolatry. Remember that it is the priests being addressed here (:1). They had made Judah stumble (:8); they are being blamed for Judah effectively divorcing Yahweh. They had effectively taught idolatry, although they would have strongly denied this. But by driving people away from Yahweh worship by their corruption and theft from the people, which led to the people despising them (:9), they had driven the people to idolatry. There is a religious need and instinct within people; if we or our church leadership make others stumble away from serving God, putting them in a position where they feel they can't come to meetings or remain within the believing community... then they will stumble off to other faiths. And it will be our fault.

The people were warned that the temple had been destroyed because of their previous "abominations", and that the rebuilt temple was not to feature any such abominations (Ez. 43:8; 44:6,7,13). "Let it suffice you of your abominations" they were told- and were commanded not to allow the uncircumcised into the temple, as they had been doing (Ez. 44:6,9). This sounds as if the prophecy of Ezekiel was more command than prediction- to those of his own day. But they returned, and committed the abominations [s.w.] of the Gentiles (Ezra 9:1,11,14) and married their daughters. Judah did not 'separate' themselves from the surrounding tribes but instead married them and worshipped their idols (s.w. Ezra 9:1 "The people of Israel... have not separated themselves from the people of the land, doing according to their *abominations*... for they have taken of their daughters for themselves"). The same word for "abominations" occurs here; they had "dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel". Yet it had been emphasized that the temple system Ezekiel described was to be free of all the "abominations" [s.w.] previously committed by Israel (Ez. 43:8; 44:6,7,13).

Malachi 2:12 *May Yahweh cut off of the tents of Jacob the man who does this, and his descendant; may he not offer an offering to Yahweh of Armies-* As explained on :11, God is furious with those who cause others to stumble by effectively driving them away from the community of His children. Those who uphold disfellowship, excommunication, a closed table etc. must take this challenge very seriously. "May he not offer..." confirms that we are reading specifically about the priests, who offered the sacrifices. But by divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying into the families of idolatrous Gentiles, the Levites were themselves bringing this curse about- for their children would not be able to serve in the temple.

The AV has "The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar". Yahweh cut off the "master" ['the stirred up one', s.w. about how their spirit was 'stirred up' to achieve the work of the Kingdom at the restoration (Ezra 1:5)] because they divorced their wives and married Gentiles (Mal. 2:12). The potential work of God on men's hearts was frustrated by their hardness of heart. "The scholar" would refer to those taught by the "master" priest; perhaps Joshua the potential high priest is in view.

Malachi 2:13 *This again you do: you cover the altar of Yahweh with tears, with weeping, and with sighing, because He doesn't regard the offering any more, neither receives it with good will at your hand-*

"This again..." begs the question as to what is the force of "again". It may well just mean 'And further...'. Although it's tempting to make a connection with Ez. 8:14, where

Judah went into captivity because Jewish women entered the temple of Yahweh and wept for Tammuz [perhaps ritual weeping, a form of worship]. But the context requires that those who wept at the altar because their offerings weren't accepted are those of :14-16, who are given as a reason that they had divorced their wives. Access to the altar suggests that this is addressed to the priests, who have in the previous verses been convicted of making the people stumble into idolatry. Covering an altar with tears and emotional behaviour recalls the priests of Baal on Carmel (1 Kings 18:28). They professed such loyalty to Yahweh when effectively they had divorced Him. This is all proof enough that emotionalism in religious worship is not necessarily reflective of true spirituality. Their semblance of Yahweh worship was no better than Baal worship. Going through the motions and emotions of worship may in fact be no more than idolatry. This is an incisive challenge. They covered the altar with tears of apparent devotion whilst in their hearts doubting God loved them (Mal. 1:2) and robbing and attempting to deceive God.

Malachi 2:14 *Yet you say, 'Why?'* - They were somehow aware that God didn't accept their offerings. Perhaps it was simply because Malachi was telling them so. Or maybe the absence of the shekinah glory in the temple was the evidence of this; for the restored temple scenario of Ez. 40-48 featured the glory and visible presence of God returning to the temple.

Because Yahweh has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion, and the wife of your covenant- see on Jer. 31:32; Mal. 1:8. The priests married Gentile women (Mal. 2:11,14-16), even though Ez. 44 commanded they should not do this: "they shall take virgins of the seed of the house of Israel" (Ez. 44:22). They thereby precluded the possibility of the prophecies of Ez. 40-48 being fulfilled. I suggested on :5 that the covenant in view is that which the priests entered on returning from captivity. This is why that generation are being charged with departing from a covenant which they personally entered. Their broken covenant relationship with God and their breaking of the covenant with Levi was reflected in their breaking covenant with their wives. As they had divorced God and married Gentile gods (:11), so they had divorced their Jewish wives to marry Gentiles. That is the implication of the parallels. Yet their Jewish wives remained their "companion", some kind of concubine. This again reflects how Judah had effectively divorced Yahweh and married Gentile idolatry, and yet they still professed devotion and commitment to Him. The Hosea - Gomer situation expresses just the same.

We naturally enquire why the priests were divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying Gentile women. We must remember the extreme poverty of the times, caused by the plagues and bad harvests brought by Yahweh. The Jews were even selling their children into slavery for bread (Neh. 5:1-5). It seems that these Gentile women were from wealthy local land owning families who had been moved into Judea during the exile. Land was needed in order to grow food, and the landless Levites were tempted to do anything in order to get access to land- seeing they weren't being paid tithes, as Malachi later laments. Neh. 13:10 confirms that: "the portions of the Levites had not been given to them; so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field". There was therefore financial advantage in such marriage as it gave access to land; and that was why they divorced their Jewish wives. They didn't have to financially support them after divorce, and the families they married into likely demanded this too. To simply take another wife would have been economically difficult

for them- polygamy was only for the wealthy. And the priests particularly did this because they had no land inheritance, tithes weren't being paid to them and therefore they were desperate. And so they were tempted to marry into pagan families that owned land. But they were guilty of not being faithful to the covenant with Levi; for in return for the tribe of Levi focusing on teaching God's word and arranging His worship, He had promised to always take care of them: "Yahweh, bless his substance [s.w. "wealth"]. Accept the work of his hands" (Dt. 33:11). This promised blessing was not being experienced by them because they didn't trust it (see on :2). Somehow everything will work out if we go God's way. But they didn't trust that, and divorced their wives and married Gentile pagans to try to ensure their own wealth. And yet they covered Yahweh's altar with tears, as if trying to demonstrate that they actually were still close to Yahweh despite their unconscionable actions. Such demonstrations of zeal for God, when the heart and body are far from Him, are psychologically credible and seen amongst us today.

Malachi 2:15 *Did He not make you one, although He had the residue of the Spirit? Why one? He sought a godly seed-* Possibly "Although He had the residue of the Spirit" might mean that God made one man and one woman- although He could have used His Spirit to create more than one wife for Adam. But He didn't. Because He saw that one man : one woman was the best basis for them raising "A Godly seed". Or perhaps God 'made you one' in allusion to how He would make man and woman "one flesh" in marriage (Gen. 2:24). He cements the relationship over the years, and divorce for the reasons they were divorcing was breaking apart what He had tried to joint together. This was the Lord's perspective on divorce (Mt. 19:4-6) and Paul's perspective on extramarital sex (1 Cor. 6:15-17). Certainly a father divorcing his wife and taking a Gentile unbelieving wife was not going to easily raise a Godly seed. And how many divorces and second relationships have simply not taken into account the negative spiritual effect upon the children...

The wife of youth whom they had divorced was primarily Yahweh (:11). But as so often happened, a man's relationship with God is reflected in his relationship with others. Their divorce with God was connected to their literal divorcing of their wives and taking others, from pagan backgrounds. Just as they had divorced Yahweh and married the daughters of strange gods (:11). The Levites were not to marry divorcees or Gentiles (Ez. 44:22), so they precluded the fulfilment of that potential scenario of Ez. 40-48.

The Hebrew is difficult and the GNB is of some help: "Didn't God make you one body and spirit with her? What was his purpose in this? It was that you should have children who are truly God's people". The basic point is clear; their remarriages to Gentiles were not going to produce "a Godly seed", and that is one of the reasons why marriage with unbelievers is wrong.

If husband and wife are one spirit, psychologically joined by the marriage bonding which God applies to married couples not just at the wedding but throughout their relationship, then breaking that apart is undoing His work. Our spirit is thereby working against God's Spirit. The Lord's teaching about marriage and divorce in Mt. 19:6 seems based on His reflections upon this verse. If we have the Spirit of God we will not act in marriage as they were acting- hence we could translate "No one has acted like that if he has a remnant of the spirit".

Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of his youth- Typical of the prophets, the appeal to repentance is on the most personal level- an appeal to watch their mind and thinking, "your spirit". And this

appeal to the spirit is repeated in :17. This appeal for repentance had been made in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, and there had been response, to the point of those who had married Gentile wives divorcing them. And yet very quickly, the very same failure was committed again. No matter how intense the repentance of a moment, this is not guarantee that we can drift on acceptably to God. That is the lesson.

Malachi 2:16 *For I hate divorce, says Yahweh, the God of Israel-* Malachi began by speaking of God 'hating' Esau in the sense of loving him less. Perhaps this idea is present here too; for God and Israel divorced. God is perhaps saying that He 'loves less' divorce, it is the least preferred option. But in the next sentence, He will state that He equally hates the use of the institution of marriage to cover violence. It could be that we are to conclude that in such a case, then the open separation of divorce is preferable, although God 'loves it less' or 'hates' it.

But the LXX and ESV offer a translation to the effect "But if thou shouldest hate thy wife and put her away, saith the Lord God of Israel, then ungodliness shall cover thy thoughts...". This makes better sense of the connection between the words "hate" and "putting / sending away" ['divorce'] which is to be found in Gen. 26:27 and Dt. 24:3. "Divorce is hatred" is a fair interpretation- for in their context, they were hating their wives and divorcing them for no good reason. Without changing any of the consonants, the Hebrew can be read with different vowels to give as LXX "if anyone hates, let him divorce". Or we may consider the NIV: "The man who hates and divorces his wife... does violence to the one he should protect".

And him who covers his garment with violence! says Yahweh of Armies- The garment refers to the metaphor of a man casting his garment over his wife as a sign of protection and acceptance in marriage (Dt. 22:30; Ruth 3:9; Ez. 16:8). The idea could be that the man was using the garment of marriage to cover violence. On one hand God hates divorce, but He balances this by saying that He equally hates those who do not formally divorce but use the institution of marriage to conceal violence. Or we can understand this as meaning "divorce is like a garment that covers wrongdoing / violence". As if the divorce and remarriage somehow obviated them from moral responsibility for how they had behaved to their first wives. "I hate divorce" can be understood as God saying He considers divorce, in this case, as hateful. Rashi renders "For injustice shall cover his garment". Instead of covering their wife with a garment, they were being 'violent' to her. Possibly they were being literally violent to their Jewish wives to make them leave them and return to their parents, in which case the husband was free from financial responsibility towards her.

Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you don't deal treacherously- For all their gross immorality, the appeal was to take heed to how they thought, their spirit. For this is the root of our behaviour. This is twice repeated (:15). Divorce and all marital failure begins in the mind, in the spirit. The LXX makes the connection clearer: "But if thou shouldest hate thy wife and put her away, saith the Lord God of Israel, then ungodliness shall cover thy thoughts, saith the Lord Almighty: therefore take ye heed to your spirit".

Malachi 2:17 *You have wearied Yahweh with your words-* Several times we read of God being wearied by Israel's sins (Is. 7:13; Jer. 15:6; Ez. 24:12; Mal. 2:17). Even though God does not "grow weary" (Is. 40:28) by nature, it seems to me that in His full entering into His people's situation, He does allow Himself to grow weary with the sins of those with whom He is in covenant relationship. He as it were limits Himself, in order to enter into meaningful relationship with us. It was this kind of capacity which God has which was supremely revealed in His 'sharing in' the crucifixion of His Son.

Yet you say, 'How have we wearied Him?' In that you say, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of Yahweh, and He delights in them;' or 'Where is the God of judgment?' - Again, it is doubtful if their lips framed these actual words. But the prophets perceive the real implication of positions. And God does the same with us today. The priests are being addressed here (:1), and perhaps their false teaching was to the effect that judgment was now past and whatever the people did would not come into judgment; and that God delighted in sinners. God had given them the land because He "delighted" in them (Num. 14:8 s.w.). Perhaps the priests were wrongly teaching that the mere fact they were physically within the land showed that God delighted in them, even though they were doing evil.

Evidence of God's judgment was all around them. Not least the drought, leading to them even selling their children for food (Neh. 5:1-5). But they acted as if all this was either bad luck or God being unreasonable and unjust to them- remembering that the Hebrew for "judgment" also has the idea of justice. Like many today, they had blanked out in their minds the possibility that they needed to deeply repent- and then things would be so different.

Or we can read this with GNB "Where is the God who is supposed to be just?". They expected a materially blessed life from God despite their selfishness and lack of devotion to Him. And they ended up saying He was unjust, because He didn't come through for them materially. Just as many do today. The Judeans were living in a world of broken dreams [the restoration prophecies hadn't come true, and they were impoverished not wealthy], lost hopes, sadness, religious and political cynicism. Exactly as so many do today. Isaiah gives more background: "'(Why) do we humble ourselves, if you do not take note of it? (Is. 58:3) ... We await justice, but there is none, salvation, but it is far away from us" (Is. 59:11). Malachi elsewhere reports their claim that God didn't love them (Mal. 1:2), and that "It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping his charge and walking in abject awe of the Lord of Hosts?" (Mal. 3:14). But they refused to accept the reason for all this which Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi gave them- they had not repented, were disobedient to the commands for the restored Kingdom, and were looking solely for their own immediate material benefit rather than God's glory.

MALACHI CHAPTER 3

Malachi Chapter 3

Malachi 3:1 *Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me-* We are accustomed to the application that was given to John the Baptist preparing the way for the Lord Jesus (Mk. 1:2; Mt. 11:10; Lk. 7:27). But surely the initial potential was that an Angel / messenger / priest (Mal. 2:7) would be sent to clear the way before a triumphant Israel, just as an Angel went ahead of Israel to clear the nations from the promised land and lead them in to the Kingdom of God. The "you" who would be sent the messenger is the same "you" as addressed throughout Malachi- his generation. The messenger of Yahweh was also a prophet (Hag. 1:13). An Angel controlled prophet / priest was to come, for in the post exilic prophets, this is the usage of 'messenger'. Joshua may have fitted this, but he failed. Possibly Malachi himself, whose name means 'messenger', was the potential fulfilment. And so the prophecy was reapplied to John the Baptist, who was a prophet in the priestly line and the last prophet. The prophets were until John. The preparation of the way is the scene of Is. 40:3 which is specifically applied to John; and Mk. 1:2,3 seems to mix quotation of Is. 40:3 and Mal. 3:1 as if

they refer to the same event in John the Baptist. But there is some flexibility in interpretation allowed for in Mt. 11:14: "if you are willing to receive [it], this is Elijah, the one about to come". The Elijah prophecy of Mal. 4 could be understood to have the same fulfilment in view as the "Messenger" prophecy of Mal. 3:1. But the flexibility in interpretation is because there were and are various potential fulfillments. John presented himself as an Elijah prophet, wearing camel's hair and a leather girdle (as Elijah in 2 Kings 1:8), locating his ministry in the wilderness with its associations with Elijah.

Israel didn't as a whole accept John's message- because they killed their Messiah. Neither the Malachi prophet nor John succeeded in purging the priesthood as required here. Malachi has specifically criticized the corrupt priesthood. And so it will have a latter day fulfilment in another "Elijah" prophet, which is the burden of Mal. 4. Although the prophecy will be readjusted as there is no literal priesthood to cleanse. Just as the prophecy could have had an immediate fulfilment in Malachi's time, but didn't. This open ended nature of prophecy is actually seen in our own lives; we are given potential futures which we may preclude from fulfilment, and so the prophetic intention becomes reinterpreted and reapplied.

This prophecy of preparing the way of the Lord, in readiness for His glory to ride over it to Zion, is based on similar prophecies in Is. 40:3; 57:14; 62:10. But although these Isaianic prophecies use similar language, they are commands to servants in the plural to prepare the way: "Prepare you the way of Yahweh in the wilderness!... Cast up, cast up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of My people... Prepare the way of the people! Cast up, cast up the highway! Gather out the stones!". Malachi calls these servants "the messenger". They not only do the work of removing the stones from the path, but give a message of repentance at the same time. The latter day "Elijah" may well be a group of preachers doing this work. And the stone of stumbling to Israel is defined by Paul as Israel's refusal to accept Jesus as their Messiah. The mission of the latter day Elijah ministry will be to take this stone out of the way, by converting them to accept Jesus as Christ and Him crucified.

See on Is. 40:4. As explained on Mal. 2:7, the messenger of the covenant was a priest or priesthood which would prepare the people to accept the new covenant in Messiah; for the priests were to be "the messenger" (Mal. 2:7). The implication is that Malachi and the priesthood of his time could and should have been doing this; but the priests refused. The prophecy was reapplied to John the Baptist, who was also a priest; and seeing Israel generally failed to respond, again to the latter day Elijah prophet. The restored community are accused of turning to or 'preparing' [s.w. "prepare"] their *own* way rather than the way of the Lord (Is. 53:6; 56:11 cp. Is. 40:3). But the Messianic prophecy of Is. 53:6 claims that this turning to their own way would be resolved and corrected by the coming of Messiah. But for Him to come, there must first be a messenger who prepared that way (s.w. Is. 40:3; 57:14; 62:10). The priesthood and high priest of Malachi's time failed in this, and so the work was rescheduled for John the Baptist, and later the Elijah prophet of the last days. The same words for "prepare the way" are found in Ez. 43:1; 44:1; 47:2 about "the way" that is 'prepared' or 'looks' eastward. This was the way or road over which the glory was to re-enter the restored temple. But Judah didn't rebuild that temple as specified and as Malachi often demonstrates, the priests failed to act as commanded in Ez. 40-48. And so the messenger who was to prepare that way likewise failed; but finally the essence of the prophecies will come true through the work of the Elijah prophet and John the Baptist [also a priest] preparing the way of the Lord Jesus, so that His glory and Spirit could enter a spiritual temple of restored people.

Isaiah begins his section on the restoration with a bold prophecy that the restoration of Zion was to be associated with a way being prepared for Israel's God to come to them (Is. 40:1-3). These words are repeated here in Mal. 3:1-3, where the messenger was to prepare the way of Yahweh's coming. It seems that in some sense they could have come true in the first return of the exiles along the wilderness way back to Zion, under Ezra. But over 100 years later, in Malachi's time, the prophecy was still capable of fulfilment, if the priesthood would be purged. But finally it was all deferred in fulfilment until the coming of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus

"Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" is how Mk. 1:2 quotes Mal. 3:1; but "before thy face" is added, as if to create a reference to the Angel sent before Israel in the wilderness, to find a resting place (Ex. 23:20). The parallel is set up between John and the Angel, and therefore between Jesus and the people of Israel. The Lord Jesus *is* His people. He personally is the vine, the one body- symbols of the whole community. He isn't the trunk, and we the branches. We are the branches, and He is the whole vine. We are Him to this world.

And the Lord, whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple- The Lord will return to Zion to find a repentant remnant there, converted by our preaching. When the way has been prepared, then "the Lord... shall suddenly [Heb. 'immediately'] come to his temple". It seems that He comes as soon as, almost to the moment, that the way is prepared. Is it going too far to imagine that when the last Jews are baptized in Jerusalem, perhaps literally on the Temple Mount, then the Lord will immediately return there, "to his temple"? Then the Lord shall "come down to fight for mount Zion and for the hill thereof" (Is. 31:4).

But we can also understand the sudden coming of "the Lord whom you seek" as a warning of judgment to Malachi's generation of impenitent Jews. Am. 5:18 and Mal. 3:1,2 warn that just 'seeking' or desiring the coming of the Lord isn't enough; for what end will it be, if we don't *truly* love His appearing? Yet Amos goes on to say that Israel "put far away" the reality of the day of the Lord, in their minds (Am. 6:3). And yet they desired or sought it. We can study prophecy, but not really love His appearing in seriously preparing ourselves for that day. Indeed, we can subconsciously put it far from us. When we grasp for a fleeting moment how *very near* is the second coming for us; can we dwell upon it, retain that intensity? Or would we rather put it "far away"? This is surely why the Lord brings the list of signs of His coming to a close with some chilling parables concerning the need for personal watchfulness.

And the messenger of the covenant whom you desire, behold, He comes! says Yahweh of Armies- As noted above, Judah 'desired' the coming of the day of the Lord and the "messenger" which was to prepare the way for Him; they even 'delighted' in these things [AV]. But they didn't morally respond, so the way was not prepared. Yet He would come, ultimately, to their judgment and condemnation. "Behold, he comes" could be read as a request for them to "look" for him to come. This fits with the Lord teaching that John the Baptist was Elijah if they would receive it. Likewise, this "messenger" could have come and prepared the way for Messiah in Malachi's time. For it is Malachi who is telling his generation to behold / look.

Malachi 3:2 *But who can endure the day of His coming? And who will stand when He appears?-*

One answer is: Nobody. Ps. 130:3 is clear: "If Thou, Lord, wilt mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?". Joel likewise: "The day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?". The implication is that the only one who can stand before the

Lord is the one justified by faith in His grace. This was a call to repentance and trust in Him, rather than a bland foretelling of their condemnation. These words are quoted in Rev. 6:17 about the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

The implication is that Malachi's generation would not stand but fall, they would not abide the day of His coming in that they would be resurrected to condemnation in that day (cp. Joel 2:11). Knowledge of the coming of judgment leads to self-examination: "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come... But who may abide the day of his coming?" (Mal. 3:2 AV cp. Rev. 6:17). Belief in the second coming must provoke the question: "What manner of persons ought (we) to be...", as we hasten towards the day of judgment? "Wherefore, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of Him... without spot, and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:11,14).

For He is like a refiner's fire, and like launderer's soap- The implication is that the priests of Malachi's generation would be resurrected at "the day of His coming" to pass through this refining process; and would not abide it. In Malachi's time, they could have responded to the day of the messenger by allowing themselves to be refined. But they refused to respond to Malachi ['messenger']. The appropriacy of the imagery of soap and laundry is because this would cleanse dirty priestly garments. This is the picture presented in Zech. 3, of the Jewish priesthood of that time being dressed in "filthy garments". They could have been reformed and cleansed by responding to Malachi's message; but they didn't.

Ultimately for us too, the day of judgment is to purify us- not ultimately, for that has been done by the Lord's blood and our lives of faithful acceptance of this. But the fire of judgment reveals the dross of our lives *to us* and in this sense purges us of those sins. The judgment seat is for our benefit, not God's- He knows our lives and spiritual position already. Without the judgment, we would drift into the Kingdom with no real appreciation of our own sinfulness or the height of God's grace. The trials of our faith are like fire which purifies us (1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12). And yet this is the language of the last judgment. In our response to trials, we have the outcome of our judgment. We must rejoice *now* in our tribulations with the same joy which we will have when we are accepted by the Lord at the last day (1 Pet. 4:13). Job felt that his calamities were God entering into judgment with him (Job 14:3). If we react properly to trials, we thereby receive now "the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:9). Thus the question of the degree to which we now are 'saved' is connected with the fact that to some degree, the judgment process is also going on now.

The soap was to totally remove the stain. This came to ultimate term in the Lord's sacrifice cleansing and deep cleaning the conscience. Possibly the idea is that the only one who can stand before God's judgment is the man totally cleansed by this soap.

Malachi 3:3 *And He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them as gold and silver; and they shall offer to Yahweh offerings in righteousness-* The implication of :2 is that the priests of Malachi's generation would be resurrected at "the day of His coming" to pass through this refining process; and would not abide it. Once they are destroyed, then there will be left a remnant who will be able to serve Yahweh acceptably. All these prophecies could have had a fulfilment at Malachi's time or at the time in the first century when John the Baptist was the "messenger" and could have reformed the priesthood. But they resisted. And so the essence of the prophecies will come true in the last days. But that is not to say that every literal detail will; and so the refined Levites will not necessarily offer literal sacrifices. The offering of sacrifice will perhaps be spiritually interpreted, as it is in the New Testament (Heb. 13:15). The "He" who refines the Levites is not necessarily Yahweh;

it could be the messenger of the covenant, which initially referred to Malachi and later John the Baptist in their attempts to reform the priesthood.

The Levites of the restoration had been taken from among the many nations that comprised Babylon / Persia; they were brought, as many as could be bothered to go, to their own land. They were cleansed there (s.w. Ezra 6:20; Neh. 12:30 "The priests and the Levites purified themselves"). But they became un-cleansed or defiled through allowing Tobiah into the temple chambers, by trading on the Sabbath, and by marrying Gentiles (Neh. 13:9,22,30). The priesthood needed to be "cleansed" again (Mal. 3:3 s.w.). The promise of Ezekiel 36 sounds unconditional- as if, whoosh, God would make His sinful people righteous regardless of their own will; but they still needed to respond: "For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ez. 36:24-29). Israel were to return from captivity, destroy all the Gentile abominations and idols from their land, and then receive a new heart and a new covenant (Ez. 11:18,19). But they didn't do so, and now at Malachi's time they needed cleansing again. But they refused it, and so that cleansing will ultimately only be at the Lord's return.

Malachi 3:4 *Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to Yahweh, as in the days of old, and as in ancient years-* The restored kingdom of God in Israel and the restoration of the Davidic king "as in the days of old" could have come about in Malachi's time. If the priesthood had responded to the purging, they would again have offered acceptable offerings. But Mal. 1 explains that they offered blemished sacrifices which were not "pleasant to Yahweh". And so this possible scenario was precluded. But as explained on :1-3, the essence of the prophecies will come true in the last days. The offering of sacrifice will perhaps be spiritually interpreted, as it is in the New Testament (Heb. 13:15).

The Gentiles are understood in Mal. 1:11 as being able to offer a pure offering "in every place". The Jerusalem temple was not required to make an acceptable offering. That had been the initial plan, as Ez. 48 had envisaged the Yahweh Name would be "there"; but the Jews had despised God's Name. So anyone who did make His Name "great" could offer an acceptable, pure offering- from wherever they are. And yet in Mal. 3:4 another scenario is given- the Levitical priesthood will be purged and "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to Yahweh, as in the days of old" (Mal. 3:4). It never was purged. But Malachi's generation were still being given the opportunity to have that scenario. Mal. 1:11 makes it clear that He foresaw that their spurning of His holiness would actually lead to a situation where He was glorified by far more people over a far greater area.

Malachi 3:5 *I will come near to you in judgment-* This is the answer to the complaint in the previous chapter, "Where is the God of judgment?". 'He is coming', is the answer. In the immediate context, God was going to judge the priesthood of Malachi's time. He was going to charge them with theft from Him, and He would be a witness in their court case, as well as their judge. But that generation did not have judgment executed upon them. This was deferred, by grace, until AD70 when the messenger in the form of John the Baptist had again come to them, and God's own Son had appeared as their Messiah. Such is God's amazing patience.

God's Son was by His coming alone the manifestation of "the God of judgment", the supreme judge of men by His very being (Mal. 2:17; 3:1). In His coming, God "visited His people" (Lk. 7:16); but the OT image of Yahweh visiting His people was one of visiting in judgment (Ez. 32:34; Jer. 23:2; Hos. 2:13; 9:9). By His very being amongst men He would convict them of their sinfulness. His light would show up the shadows of their sins. Mark begins his Gospel by quoting this Malachi passage, as if to say that the appearance of Jesus was the coming of judgment for men (Mk. 1:2). This judgment-coming of Jesus at His revelation to Israel 2000 years ago is then described as God coming near to men in judgment (Mal. 3:5). This is why a consideration of the Lord Jesus in bread and wine inevitably and naturally leads to self-examination; for He is, by His very being, our immediate and insistent judge.

And I will be an alert witness- Or, "swift". Swift in the sense of 'I come quickly' or suddenly. God is presented as both judge and witness. For He alone is judge, and yet as omniscient, He is also the ultimate witness. And yet He is also presented as pleading as an advocate for His sinful people before His own judgment. God can both maintain our cause [as an advocate] and forgive, as a judge (2 Chron. 6:39). God is the one who will both plead our cause as an advocate, and take vengeance, i.e. order the sentence, as judge (Jer. 51:36). Micah 7:9 speaks of how Micah has sinned against Yahweh, and yet He will plead his cause and also execute judgment. Likewise with Israel, "the Lord standeth up to plead, and (also) standeth up to judge his people" (Is. 3:13); even though He is also the witness against them. David understood this when he asked that God would "judge [RV "give sentence"] between me and thee, and see [i.e. be the witness], and plead my cause [i.e. be the advocate]" (1 Sam. 24:15). These are Old Testament anticipations of the Lord Jesus as witness, advocate and judge. All these things are simply metaphors to try to expose to us the various balanced aspects within God's view and final judgment of men.

Against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against the perjurers, and against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and who deprive the foreigner of justice, and don't fear Me, says Yahweh of Armies- All this was going on in the restored community in Malachi's time. It was why the mass of the people came to despise the priests and avoided Yahweh worship, leading them to stumble into idolatry (see on Mal. 2:9,11).

In the restored temple, the princes would not oppress the people (Ez. 45:8); "Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession" (Ez. 46:18). But the priests did just this (also Neh. 5:1-5; Zech. 7:10).

"The [Gentile] people of the land" were to have a part in the new system of things (Ez. 45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God's intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel's temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. And yet Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress the stranger / Gentile. Israel would not. Is. 56:6 defines what is meant by "a house of prayer for all nations"- it is for those of all nations who "join themselves to the Lord, to serve him and to love the name of the Lord... every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and *taketh hold of my covenant*". But Judah herself had polluted the sabbath and broken the covenant, as Malachi makes clear. The word for "foreigner" means literally a guest, a sojourner-

surely referring to the Gentiles who had immigrated to the land during the Babylonian and Persian reigns. But these people had now been settled for a few generations. Yet still the Jews called them immigrants- when it was they, born in Babylon, who were more like immigrants to the land. Whilst still in exile, the Jewish returnees had been specifically told to share the land inheritance with such people. The same word is used in Ez. 47:22,23: "You shall divide it by lot for an inheritance to you and to the aliens who live among you, who shall father children among you; and they shall be to you as the native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. It shall happen, that in what tribe the foreigner lives, there you shall give him his inheritance, says the Lord". Yet the fulfilment of this was precluded by the way the returned exiles treated such foreigners.

Oppression of the widow and fatherless was because the Law explained that tithes were in order to benefit these people. Malachi will go on to lament that the Jews weren't paying their tithes as required- and these groups therefore suffered. Man is held responsible by God for the indirect outcomes of his sins of omission. And that's a principle that has huge implications.

Malachi 3:6 *For I, Yahweh, don't change; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed-* The unchanging nature of God's loyalty and love for Israel is contrasted with how they have not changed in their disloyalty to Him: "From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My ordinances" (:7). The promised restoration of the Kingdom hadn't happened as prophesied, for the reasons given in Haggai and Zechariah. But the Jews liked to think that this was because God had changed; He protests that He hasn't. Hence LXX "I have not changed". Yahweh does change, as witnessed multiple times. Such is His grace. We think of the way He changed His purpose of destroying Israel and making a new Israel from Moses, of destroying Nineveh after 40 days etc. What is unchanging is His grace in not destroying His sinful people. This verse should not therefore be used to support the wrong idea that Yahweh is like the gods of the pagans, who were characterized by stone faced immutability.

Because of the sins listed in :5, the sons of Jacob should have been consumed. Those same sins are those listed in Zech. 5:4, and there God uses the same word to say that He will "consume [the house of Jacob] with the timber and stones thereof". But this judgment was not in fact brought upon the exiles. It was deferred, by grace alone; although it finally came true in the destruction of the temple in AD70.

Malachi 3:7 *From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My ordinances, and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you, says Yahweh of Armies. But you say, 'How shall we return?'* - The returned exiles being addressed had physically returned from captivity. But they had not returned to God. He had even taken the initiative of returning to them when they had not returned spiritually to Him (see on Zech. 8:3 "I have returned to Zion"). But all the initiative of His grace had been spurned by them; it had not elicited repentance [s.w. "return"]. Because they refused to accept the need for personal repentance, as many do today. "How shall we return?" is not a question about the method or path, but rather carries the sense of 'Since when do we need to return / repent?'. See on Zech. 1:3. Time and again in the context of the restoration it is emphasized that God would return to His people if they returned to Him (Zech. 1:3). And they didn't return to Him- most chose not to return to the land, and those who did for the most part did not return to their God in their hearts. The whole basis of Israel's covenant relationship with God was that if they were exiled from the land for their sins, they must repent and *then* God would return to them (Dt. 30:1-10).

Yet God graciously states to the exiles: "I am returned unto you" (Zech. 1:16; 8:3). Here was grace indeed. Passages like Ez. 36:24-31 therefore speak as if God's grace to the exiles was effectively a new covenant- which has in essence been extended to us. Having stated the conditionality of His 'returning' to His people, and recognizing they hadn't fulfilled their part of the conditions- God all the same returns to them, such was and is His almost desperate desire for relationship with His beloved people. This is a lesson for us in our relationships with others- to continue our acceptance and 'return' to them, even if they don't fulfill their part of the deal. For this, day by day, is how our God deals not only with us but with His weak and wayward people as a whole.

The implication of Hag. 2:17 is that they had not totally turned to Yahweh. They had responded to Haggai's call to resume work in Hag. 1:12,13 and God had been as it were much enthused by it. But after a month's work they needed more appeal. They still hadn't turned completely and permanently to Him, with a 'repentance not to be repented of' as Paul would say. Zechariah's prophecy came two months after Haggai (Zech. 1:1). And he appeals again for the people to turn to God (Zech. 1:3). And even after Zechariah's time, the people still didn't really return to Yahweh in repentance, despite their focus on legalism and xenophobic hatred of Gentiles: "Return to Me, and I will return to you, says Yahweh of Armies. But you say, 'How shall we return?'" (Mal. 3:7). Clearly their turning to Him had been only temporary. But still God was enthusiastic over their even very temporal response. Despite surely foreknowing how they would very quickly flag. He so wanted the Kingdom to be restored and His people to live in all joy and peace of relationship with Him. And that desire is unabated to this day, despite having been frustrated by His people so often, so deeply and for so long.

Malachi 3:8 *Will a man rob God? Yet you rob Me!*- The fact God owns everything means that there can be no distinction between what is ours and what is God's. To think like that is to steal from Him. And hence the power and force of the argument here: "Will a man rob God?". Have we robbed God in this way, especially in our attitudes and perceptions? To take for ourselves what is God's is to play God. Materialism and selfishness are in this sense playing God. This was Achan's sin- to take what was devoted to God for himself. And this was why he is described as having 'stolen'. But from whom? From God (Josh. 6:18; 7:11).

But you say, 'How have we robbed You?'. In tithes and offerings- In the restored temple, they were to use just measures (Ez. 45:9-14), unlike what they had previously done. But they robbed God in their sacrifices in the restored temple (Mal. 3:8). See on Mal. 1:8. Tithes were to be paid to the Levites (Ez. 44:30). But Nehemiah's record and Mal. 3:8 make it clear that this didn't happen, due to petty selfishness. But we must remember that Malachi is largely addressing the priests; the tithes given to them should have been tithed in turn by them to God, but they didn't do this. Offerings intended for sacrifice were kept by them. Only in :9 are "this whole nation" addressed.

Malachi 3:9 *You are cursed with the curse; for you rob Me, even this whole nation-* The Hebrew stresses "Me... Me you have robbed". They robbed God Almighty... The Hebrew for 'robbed' here is *qaba*, the last part of the name 'Jacob'. Despite the similarity with the cheating, materialistic, deceitful Jacob, Malachi began by explaining that "Jacob have I loved". God's love for them wasn't in doubt, despite calling out their deceit. "This whole nation" may be a reference to how they were all Jacob / Israel. And yet we will soon read that a minority did speak to one another and Yahweh noted them for future salvation. "This whole nation" would suggest this minority repented at this

point, until then they were in the "whole nation" who were cursed for deceiving God; which makes their humility to Malachi's word even more impressive.

Although it seems Malachi the priest (see on Mal. 1:1) is addressing the priests primarily after Mal. 2:1, "this whole nation" are charged with robbing God, and are cursed. They had been driven away from Yahweh worship by the priests (see on Mal. 2:11), but they were still guilty. If someone is made to stumble, the one who caused it is guilty; but so are they who stumbled. We cannot come to the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus and explain that we were indifferent to His love, His death for us, the offer of eternity... because he did this and she said that.

"*The curse*" presumably refers to the curse for disobedience to the covenant of Dt. 28. God cursed them with that curse; but there is no particular evidence that it was carried out until AD70. They were not sent again into captivity until then, and they had many years of good harvests. So again we marvel at God's grace and longsuffering. At Malachi's time, the curse was pronounced, but there was a gap of many generations until it was carried out. In a sense we too live within such a gap, heightening the sense of intensity and urgency in responding to God's offer to cancel the curse and instead bless us.

Malachi 3:10 *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house-* The initial reference is to the way Hag. 1:9 laments that the returnees had brought their harvests to their own houses rather than to God's house. See on Hag. 1:9. "The storehouse" references the "great chamber" which surrounded the temple on three sides, of three stories, each containing several rooms (1 Kings 6:5,6). Hezekiah used these chambers to store the tithes (2 Chron. 31:11,12). But these were the very rooms given to the enemy of the Jews, Tobiah, in the time of Neh. 10:38; 13:5-9, 12,13.

"*The whole tithe*" suggests they were tithing but incompletely. Just as they made offerings, but offered only the lame or blind animals. It is this partial commitment which God finds so offensive. They thought they were testing God by doing this, and getting away with it: "they put God to the test and escape" (:15). Hence God's response, challenging them to "test" Him by giving the whole tithe, and to receive immediate blessing and amazing fecundity- which is all the language of the restored kingdom of God coming on earth. "The windows of heaven" that would open in response refer to the gift of rain (as in Gen. 7:11), which would miraculously come down and cause immediate growth and fruitfulness. This is perhaps the reference of Joel 2:23,24: "He gives you the former rains in just measure, and He causes the rain to come down for you, the former rains and the latter rains, as before. The threshing floors will be full of wheat, and the vats will overflow with new wine and oil". This test was not therefore a principle for all time, but related specifically to the exiles at that point. The Jews at this time were poor, some had to borrow money and sell their children into slavery just to buy food and pay taxes (Neh. 5:14,15). Their poverty was related to drought and plague which was their own fault, as Haggai and Malachi made clear. All the same, they were poor- and were being challenged to still give the tithes. The lack of tithes meant that the Levites weren't supported and therefore weren't around much to teach them God's law and encourage them. We see here how once God's people slip into a downward spiral, obedience gets harder and harder- although God still appeals for it.

The criticism of their position on tithing was not so much because God *per se* wanted or needed their tithes. Tithing was a common practice, and was a sign of devotion to the one tithed to. Mal. 2:11 has said that the people divorced Yahweh and married the daughter of another god. Their tithes were therefore being paid to idols; it was because of this that Yahweh asked for their tithes to be paid to *His* house and not

to the idol temples. And we must remember that the priesthood is being addressed by Malachi; they were to tithe to God the tithe which they received from the people. But they gave only a part of it and not the "whole" which was due. "That there may be food in My house" implies they were as it were starving God. They put very little on the altar, His "table" at which He ate with the worshippers, and in any case only placed upon it the lowest grade "food", the blind and sick animals. Entertainment and hospitality culture was paramount to the Middle Eastern mind. Yet they are accused of giving God low grade and small portions. As we sit at His table, we must ask ourselves this same question, as to what we are putting before Him.

And test Me now in this, says Yahweh of Armies- The Lord's first temptation- to turn stones into bread- would not in itself have been a sin if He had agreed to it. But it would have been choosing a lower level, by breaking His fast. But the next temptations were to actually sin. If He had agreed to the first suggestion, obedience to the next ones would have been harder. It could even be argued that to put the Lord to the test was permissible on a lower level- for passages like Ps. 34:8 and Mal. 3:10 almost encourage it for those with a weak faith. Gideon likewise put the Lord to the test and was answered. But the Lord chose the higher level: and He knew Scripture which could support it.

However we must give full weight to the fact that only five verses later, this same word for "test" is used; the people complained that those who "put God to the test... escape" (:15). We could conclude that God didn't actually intend for Him to be put to the test, and rather is He here using irony. This would take away the mainstay from beneath all Pentecostal appeals for tithes to be paid in order for the givers to receive more personal wealth. Or it could be that some did test God as invited to, and "escaped" or 'were saved' (s.w. Dan. 12:1; Joel 2:32).

If I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough for- See on Hag 1:9. Hag. 1 notes that there was a famine in the land at the restoration. In response to this, the priests and the people were giving God small portions and deficient animals. The covenant blessings of fertility were not experienced. If they returned to covenant with God, as symbolized by giving their tithes to Him and not to the idols, then they would receive the covenant blessings. This is significantly different to interpreting these passages as meaning that if you give tithes to God, then you will get material blessing.

We shouldn't underestimate the seriousness of the famine conditions in Judah as described in Neh. 5. The sheer lack of food led the Jews to sell their children and land to their richer brethren just to get something to eat. Mal. 3:5-15 says that this was directly a result of their lack of zeal to rebuild and care for God's house. What a far cry from the prophecies of plenty and huge harvests which had been made. So much potential was wasted. Neh. 5:8 records Nehemiah's comment that the wealthy Jews were victimizing the poorer Jews just as Babylon once had, and now Nehemiah needed to redeem them from slavery just as God had redeemed His people from servitude in Babylon. God's deliverance of His people simply hadn't been responded to. Tragically, it would appear from Neh. 5:15 that Zerubbabel, the potential Messiah of Israel, had acted in this oppressive way too. There could even be the implication in the Hebrew of Neh. 1:3 that the majority of those who initially returned to Judah then returned back to Babylon- for Nehemiah speaks of "The remnant that are left of the captives there in the province" [of Judah].

But we need to enquire whether the "blessing" promised for proper tithing was in fact material blessing. The "blessing" of fundamental importance was the blessing promised to Abraham, of relationship with God and the coming of the saviour seed.

The idea of pouring out blessing upon the restored Jews of this time is repeated in Zech. 8:13 and Is. 44:3: "I will pour My Spirit on your seed, and My blessing on your offspring". The poured out blessing was undoubtedly spiritual rather than material- the gift of the Spirit to the seed of Abraham. And this is how the New Testament understands the poured out "blessing"- of the Spirit, of forgiveness (Acts 3:25,26).

Malachi 3:11 *I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground-* The immediate context is of material, agricultural blessings of the covenant. The second half of the verse speaks of the vines yielding fruit at the right time. Here, "rebuke" is literally "corrupt", and is used in Mal. 2:3 of how God corrupted the seed they sowed. "The devourer", tiny rodents and lice that devoured, corrupted and ruined their seed before it sprung up, would be in turn corrupted by God, so that the crop brought forth fruit.

This sounds as if there was an Angel called "the devourer" at the time of the restoration, as there was one called "the destroyer" at the Exodus. He was given command to destroy Judah's harvests due to their lack of commitment to God's house; yet He could be rebuked or restrained by God, implying the Angel focused on fulfilling what He was told to do without taking into account any other factors- until God overrode or restrained Him.

But Malachi 3 is specifically about the final cleansing of Judah when the messenger of the covenant comes, and this has reference to the last days. Then, there will be a "devourer" in the form of a beast like invader devouring the land, which will be "rebuked".

Neither shall your vine cast its fruit before its time in the field, says Yahweh of Armies- The Kingdom prophecies about agricultural fecundity and bumper harvests produced miraculously would have come true had Judah tithed at this time. In the context of the restoration from Babylon, Zech. 8:12 prophesied: "For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things". But we know that in reality, Judah were not obedient to the heavenly vision of Ezekiel, and therefore Judah's agriculture was *not* blessed in this way; the vines cast their fruit, and the fruit of the ground was destroyed (Hag. 1:6,11; Mal. 3:10,11). The reason was that Zech. 8:12 was conditional- upon Zech. 8:16,17: "These are the things that ye shall do [i.e. to bring these prophecies about]; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD". But Judah abused each other, and didn't fulfil the conditions for the prophecy.

They were gathered back [although they resisted this in that many preferred to stay in the soft life of Babylon], but they hardly dwelt safely or confidently in their land. They planted vineyards, but received a poor harvest due to their lack of attention to God's house; their enemies destroyed their fruits, and their vine "cast her fruit before the time" (Hag. 1:6; Mal. 3:10,11). Haggai and Malachi criticized Israel for this, saying it could be rectified by their obedience to the tithing principle (:10). Yet in Nehemiah's time, Judah refused to pay tithes properly; but even then, if they had thoroughly repented, the Kingdom conditions were still possible. Such was God's desire to continue working with His hopeless people.

The withholding of agricultural blessing occurred several times- in Neh. 5:2,3 (as prophesied in Is. 5:9), in Haggai's time, and now later in Malachi's time; when the

restored Zion could have been as the garden of Eden, i.e. paradise restored on earth (Is. 51:3). Here we see frightening similarities with ourselves. We know, but often don't do. We sense this cycle of failure, crying out for mercy, receiving it, failing again, crying for mercy, receiving it, failing again... we see it in Israel, in our brethren and those around us, and in ourselves. We can expound it, lament it, feel the shame and tragedy of it all... and yet continue to have a part in it. Eventually, the people stayed in this groove so long that they degenerated into how they were at the time of Malachi-self-righteous, with no sense of failure any more, living self-centred lives of petty materialism, earning wages as they did in Haggai's time, to put into pockets with holes in, life without satisfaction, achieving nothing, passively angry. This is what Malachi clearly portrays. It's a terrible picture, and one which we can sail dangerously close to identifying with. We too easily conclude that life is tough and unfair, it's all the fault of others and an unreasonable, distant God- rather than our lack of repentance.

I discuss on Neh. 5:14 how Persian taxation rates had risen to about 50%. The famine meant they had borrowed money from the wealthy Jews and they were charging abusive interest rates. And yet Mal. 3:8-11 says that the famine at the time was because the Jews hadn't paid a tithe to the priests: "You rob Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?'. In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with the curse... Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says Yahweh of Armies, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough for. I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast its fruit before its time in the field". The temptation to not give that 10% tithe was strong. Seeing they were being so heavily taxed by the Persians, with Nehemiah as the governor being the chief tax collector. But because they didn't put God first, the drought came and they had collapsed into this unbearable situation.

Malachi 3:12 *All nations shall call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land, says Yahweh of Armies-* The allusion is to the promises to Abraham being fulfilled- if the people at that time tithed and returned to God. The willingness of Yahweh to work with His people and bring about His Kingdom with them is really amazing. They had failed to live the Kingdom life for well over 100 years since Ezra first returned from Babylon. All sorts of potential Kingdom opportunities had slipped through their fingers. Finally Malachi appealed for their repentance, for them to pay the tithes, and then their land would be "delightful" and all nations would call them blessed; Messiah would come and purge a corrupt priesthood, so that "then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old" (Mal. 3:1-4). But only a remnant "hearkened and heard" (Mal. 3:16), their future salvation was guaranteed, but "the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven" to judge the heedless majority. He had offered them the Gospel of His Kingdom, had maneuvered and manipulated the greatest nations of the day to enable them to take up the offer, affecting the lives of millions of people throughout the Middle East... but they were more worried about their little farm and storing up their crops for themselves, too mean spirited to look out of themselves, too self-satisfied with their own religion, too sure of their own righteousness. Instead of subduing the nations around them with the victory of Israel's God, they brought their own brethren into subjection unto them, that they might gain out of them (Zech. 9:15 s.w. Neh. 5:5). It could've been the Kingdom, Israel could have become the joy of the whole earth and her people a joy. But instead, they were obsessed with their petty, miserable little kingdoms, and the next few centuries had nothing of the joy which Isaiah had repeatedly prophesied as being possible for them. And so with Malachi, the

sun went down over the prophets, and the Father's appeal to His wayward sons came to an end, until the coming of His Son.

Malachi 3:13 *Your words have been stout against Me, says Yahweh. Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?' - 'Stout words' is the same phrase translated "... words prevailed against..." (1 Chron. 21:4). God is sensitive to words and the thoughts behind them. He reads thoughts as words and sees the implications of our positions as if they are words. For Judah protested they had never actually framed such words against God, when their thoughts and attitudes had in fact done so. We have highlighted the paramount importance of spiritual mindedness, emphasized heavily in the teaching of the Lord Jesus.*

Malachi 3:14 *You have said, 'It is vain to serve God;' and 'What profit is it that we have followed His instructions, and that we have walked mournfully before Yahweh of Armies?'*

The drought, leading to them even selling their children for food (Neh. 5:1-5), resulted in their conclusion that there was a huge gap between the glorious prophecies of temple restoration and what they were experiencing. Hag. 2:18,19 had prophesied that the economic woes could be gloriously reversed; but it hadn't happened, because they didn't repent. And so they concluded that the temple services were pointless. Because they were 'in it' only for their immediate material blessing, and refused to accept the words of Haggai and Zechariah pointing out how the whole situation was their fault. Malachi likewise points out that there would be blessings for obedience to God (Mal. 3:10-12,20) and curses otherwise (Mal. 2:2,3; 3:19).

Nehemiah, seeking for Israel's obedience to Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 40:46; 44:8,14-16), tried to get them to "keep the charges" (s.w. Nehemiah 7:3; 12:9,45; 13:20). But soon, Judah complained that there was no benefit to them from having kept the charges (Mal. 3:14 s.w. "instructions"). Partial obedience discouraged them from any further effort, because the fullness of blessing can only come from a way of life conformed to God's Kingdom vision and life. This is why people get disillusioned with religion and lose even the true faith- because they seek for immediate benefit as a result of keeping a few highly specific aspects of God's law, rather than willingly devoting their way of life to the realization of His vision.

They had "walked mournfully", they were bowing their heads in mock grief like a bulrush (Is. 58:5); establishing at least three annual fasts to mourn the events of the fall of Jerusalem (Zech. 7:3,5; 8:19), covering His altar with tears (Mal. 2:13), whilst placing upon it miserly portions of inferior meat, as Malachi has just pointed out. They considered that this external appearance of religious devotion ought to be enough to get His full blessing; and this is a lesson so many religious people have to learn. And they rightly concluded that their religious devotions were "vain"; they had effectively taken His Name in vain (Ex. 20:7). Before the captivity their religious devotions had been "vain" (s.w. Is. 1:13); and the restored exiles were doing just the same. And so the day would come when it would become openly apparent who served God and who didn't, in that their service of Him was in fact nothing of the sort (:18).

Time and again, Haggai and Zechariah had appealed for repentance. This is what would stop the bad harvests and failed expectations about the restoration of the Kingdom. The response of the people had been to perform ritual mourning, as a token sign of repentance. This is the "mourning" that they now consider to have been pointless. We

readers see the obvious point- that their 'repentance' was not for real. And the challenge of genuine repentance echoes down to us.

Malachi 3:15 *Now we call the proud happy; yes, those who work wickedness are built up-* The "we" may mean that Malachi is identifying himself with his sinful people as did Ezra and Nehemiah. Likewise today there is a tendency to think that the proud and sinful are somehow truly prosperous and "built up", established well. But pride and happiness don't go together; the pride is really a reflection of their internal unhappiness. And those who work wickedness rarely keep the results of it; they are not "built up" in the medium or longer term of their lives. But the people then as now looked at the apparent success of a man at one moment, and assumed that 'this is the way to go, the life to live, the man to be'.

Yes, they put God to the test and escape'- Only five verses earlier (:10), this same word for "test" was used when the people were invited to test God by tithing properly and receiving blessing. Now we read that they complained that those who "put God to the test... escape". We could conclude that God didn't actually intend for Him to be put to the test, and rather is He here using irony. This would take away the mainstay from beneath all Pentecostal appeals for tithes to be paid in order for the givers to receive more personal wealth. Or it could be that some did test God as invited to, and "escaped" or 'were saved' (s.w. Dan. 12:1; Joel 2:32). Overall, putting God to the test is condemned in Scripture. We are to believe in Him rather than cynically testing Him out. Israel were condemned for putting God to the test in the desert.

Malachi 3:16 *Then those who feared Yahweh spoke frequently one with another; and Yahweh listened, and heard-* "This whole nation" had been cursed; so we assume that the "then" means that at this point, some were struck with fear of God and repented, and took strength in talking of their repentance to each other. There was response to Malachi's preaching and appeal, even if only amongst a minority. We shouldn't get the impression that the prophets were totally ignored; in many of their writings there is the hint that a very few did respond. And it has always been that way, as God's word never returns fruitless. The repentant minority spoke to each other about the truth of Malachi's challenges and confessed their sins to each other. And God was so thrilled with their words that He as it were wrote them down for eternity. This is the significance of our words; we shall be judged by the words we speak now (Mt. 12:37). They will as it were be played back to us at judgment day. We could wish for no stronger encouragement to watch our words, and to enquire as to the real content of our discussions with one another in this life.

And a book of memory was written before Him, for those who feared Yahweh, and who honoured His name- Their faithful words to each other contrast with the unfaithful words of :14,15. The words of the faithful were written in God's book and will form the basis for His final judgement of them. We see the huge importance of words. For by our words shall we be condemned or saved. The allusion is to how the Persians kept a diary of events, of good and bad deeds done to them by their servants, and then at a later point remembered them and rewarded or punished them- as seen in the book of Esther. This "book" (singular) therefore contains a record of our individual works, or good words in the Malachi context. We aren't saved by works, but our works will be reflected in the nature of the eternity which we experience. There are other indications that the book contains a record of our individual works and ways: "The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works"

(Rev. 20:12). "I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the Gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life" (Phil. 4:3). Notice how being in the book of life is associated with certain works committed by those in it. This "book of life" was written from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8; 17:8), although it contains the records of our individual works. "The works were finished from the foundation of the world" (Heb. 4:3)- the works and actions that comprise each saint were finished from the beginning, written by the Angels in God's book. The statement in Gen. 1:31 that at the end of the natural creation "God saw everything that He had made..." may imply that He saw then everything He would ever make- "the works were finished from the foundation (creation?) of the world". Notice again how the unfathomable system of predestination and foreknowledge is in the hands of the Angels. The Angel wrote the book initially- Moses pleaded with the Angel on Sinai in Ex. 32:32 "Blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book (of life), which Thou hast written" (from the foundation of the world).

Nehemiah several times asks God to "remember unto me" the good deeds he had done for Judah (Neh. 5:19 RV), and to likewise "remember" the bad works of the wicked (Neh. 6:14 RV- the bad words of the false prophetess Noadiah were to be remembered by God). He clearly perceived judgment day as featuring the good deeds of the righteous being as it were listed, and the sins of the wicked being likewise recounted. Perhaps his prayer was heard in that in a restoration context, Mal. 3:16 comments that a book of remembrance was written by God to record the good deeds of the faithful at that time.

The priests despised Yahweh's Name (Mal. 1:6), unlike their ancestor Levi, who "revered Me and stood in awe of My Name" (Lev. 2:5). But it seems that some of the ordinary people did respond, and feared the Name: "Those who feared Yahweh spoke frequently one with another; and Yahweh listened, and heard, and a book of memory was written before Him, for those who feared Yahweh, and who honoured His name" (Mal. 3:16). And for them, God promised the Messianic "sun of righteousness" to arise for them "who revere My Name" (Mal. 4:2). Despite the bad example of their priests / religious leaders, individuals can still respond.

"Honoured" is as in AV "thought upon". Thinking upon God's Name is the same idea as in Phil. 4:8 "Think on these things".

Malachi 3:17 *They shall be Mine, says Yahweh of Armies, My very own possession in the day when I make up My jewels-* "They shall be Mine" is a phrase that naturally invites comparison with the fact Yahweh owns all things. Likewise "My very own", the same idea used by a child in wanting an object "of my very own". We are personally and quintessentially "His" because we repent, because we thereby honour His Name, because He becomes all for us, because He so loves how we speak together with other believers. And that is a huge challenge to the nature of our communications and conversations with each other. And looked at this way, God is not so wealthy. He is as the poor widow woman who only has ten coins and therefore the loss of one is significant. Or the man who only has two sons and nearly loses both of them.

This faithful minority who spoke well were a minority of a minority [the Jews who returned] of a minority [the Jews were God's people but a minority of earth's population]. The term for "jewels" is that used of how God's obedient covenant people would be His "peculiar treasure"(s.w. Ex. 19:5; Dt. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). They were to be His very own personal wealth, just as personal as the peasant woman had her dowry of coins around her forehead, the only thing in the world that was truly hers. And to lose

one of them was to lose part of herself, knowing that not even her body was her own, only those few coins. This is how thrilled God will be with those who responded to Malachi's words, and we can respond likewise. But the emphasis is upon total obedience to the covenant as the basis upon which they were His "peculiar treasure". And the next sentence indicates that this was lacking; for they needed to be "spared" by grace. But their words of repentance to each other, their spiritual conversations, their desire for relationship with Him, were enough for God to note that eternally and spare them. And so they shall eternally be some of the jewels in His eternal collection.

And I will spare them, as a man spares his own son who serves him- That is, undeservedly, only because of his parental feelings and mercy toward the child. Even the faithful will only be accepted because they are 'spared'. Those who enter the Kingdom will genuinely, from the very depth of their being, feel that they shouldn't be there. They will cast their crowns before the enthroned Lord, as if to resign their reward as inappropriate for them (Rev. 4:10). Indeed, they shouldn't be in the Kingdom. The righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18). The righteous remnant who spoke often to one another about Yahweh will only be "spared" by God's grace (Mal. 3:17). The accepted will feel so certain of this that they will almost argue with the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment that he hasn't made the right decision concerning them (Mt. 25:37-40). It's only a highly convicted man who would dare do that.

Malachi 3:18 *Then you shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him who serves God and him who doesn't serve Him-* This is spoken to the "you" of Malachi 3 (e.g. :14) who refused to repent. God had asked them to repent, but their response was: "Wherein shall we return?" (3:7). In the last day, they would realize that they had not really served God, whereas their humble brethren of :16,17 had done so. In their final rejection, they would repent, all too late, and appreciate the basis of the Lord's condemnation: they will discern the crucial chasm between the righteous and the wicked, just as "then shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins..." (Mt. 25:1). Then, the wicked will understand the judgments of God. But it is our wisdom to learn and appreciate them now. *Then* they will go through the sensation of conversion ['returning'], realising with crystal clarity the separation between the ways of the flesh and spirit which they ought to have grasped in their day of opportunity. Then they will "discern", just as Christ will "appear" [s.w. 'discern'] at the judgment; they will then see things through His eyes, from the perspective which He will have at the judgment (Mal. 3:2). Malachi begins by saying that at the day of judgment, Edom's eyes "shall see [s.w. 'discern']", and ye shall say, the Lord will be magnified" (Mal. 1:5 AV)- although they refused to make this recognition now.

We will come to know and share the mind of our Lord as we watch Him judge, as He discerns between the sheep and the goats. Knowing God's present judgment should have a powerful practical effect upon us. If we know the judgment of God against certain types of behaviour, we will keep away from them totally. It is only the rejected who refuse to know "the judgment of their God" (Jer. 5:4).

When they are appointed their portion with the hypocrites and there is wailing and gnashing of teeth, *then* shall the Kingdom be likened unto the five wise and five foolish virgins. *Then* the rejected will understand the principles of that parable, crystal clearly. Members of the ecclesia of Israel will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"- but be rejected (how else to understand Mt. 23:39?). Likewise the Egyptians, fleeing in the mud from Yahweh as they vainly hoped against hope that the returning waters wouldn't somehow reach them... they came to know Yahweh (Ex. 14:18).

MALACHI CHAPTER 4

Malachi Chapter 4

Malachi 4:1 *For, behold, the day comes, it burns as a furnace; and all the proud, and all who work wickedness-* The day or the sun comes, in judgment for these people. Yet the sun of righteousness will arise for the faithful. This is the day of final judgment just spoken of in Mal. 3:16-18. Note that pride is the epitome of wickedness. Likewise to the Lord, humility was the very epitome of righteousness (Mt. 5:5 cp. Ps. 37:29).

Will be stubble; and the day that comes will burn them up, says Yahweh of Armies- The burning of straw (s.w. stubble) is the language of condemnation at the harvest of the last day in Is. 10:17; 25:10; 1 Cor. 3:12.

That it shall leave them neither root nor branch- Root nor branch may mean 'son or grandson'. Malachi is joined to the Hebrew scroll of Zechariah as if as an appendix. So we should be guided by Zechariah for the meaning of "root" and "branch". Root and branch were both words used of the Messianic shoot and branch who could have arisen at the restoration; see on Zech. 3:8; 6:12, the root and branch of David (Rev. 5:5). These possibilities **would be removed, but** were finally fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, but His salvation will not be available for the proud and wicked who shall be burnt up in the last day.

Malachi 4:2 *But to you who fear My name-* The imperfect but repentant minority of Malachi's time of Mal. 3:16,17. It seems Malachi is addressing them directly as his audience at this point. They feared God's Name whereas the priests, their religious leadership, are condemned for despising that Name. They had come to their relationship with God quite without the teaching or example of their religious leaders; their relationship was based solely on having heard and responded to God's word personally. The priesthood had failed. There was now nobody standing between God and man. Only a minority of the ordinary people, who responded to God's word directly, were ready for the arising of the sun of righteousness. And that is the situation we are in today. Organized religious structures have failed. The church and its leadership are, summing up and generalizing, a failure. We who await the Lord's coming are the spiritual descendants of that small minority who repented at Malachi's preaching.

Shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his rays- We noted on :1 that the salvation of the Lord Jesus will not be available for the wicked at the last day; but "to you", the faithful minority responding to Malachi, the coming of Messiah would be a time of healing and salvation [the two ideas are combined in the same Hebrew word]. We note that He returns to those in Israel who already fear the Name. Israelite repentance is a condition for the Lord's return. He is the sun of righteousness in that He is the basis for the righteousness imputed to them; for we noted on Mal. 3:17 that even the repentant remnant are "spared" by grace, they are treated as totally obedient to the covenant (see on Mal. 3:17) when in fact they were not. We note that even at the Lord's coming, we will require 'healing'. This is tacit recognition that we die imperfect and "we shall be changed" at His coming.

But the healing in His rays or wings of His garment (Heb.) is of course true now. Understanding that leads to faith in His healing. The *faith* of the sick woman who grabbed the hem or wings of His garment is commended by the Lord (Mk. 5:34; Mt. 9:20)- when it was due to her *understanding* of the significance of the *hem* of the Lord's robe that she had touched Him. She had perceived the connection with the High Priest's

hem; perhaps too she had added Job's comment about our touching but the hem of God's garment into the equation. And certainly she perceived that the sun of righteousness of Mal. 4 had healing in his hems / wings of his garment.

Zacharias clearly understood the Elijah prophet to be his son, John the Baptist; and he interprets this arising of the sun of righteousness as the giving of knowledge of salvation in Jesus right now: "You will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the sunrise from on high shall visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Lk. 1:76-79). The sun of righteousness is for "the righteous" (Mal. 3:18). They already spread the rays of that sun. "Jesus Christ the righteous", "the righteous judge" may allude here (1 Jn. 2:1; 2 Tim. 4:8).

The "healing" of the sun of righteousness in Mal. 4:2 is that spoken of in the promise of the new covenant: "I will cure them [s.w.], and reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth" through knowing the Lord Jesus (Jer. 30:17; 33:6). Malachi's generation had refused that new covenant offered to them whilst still in exile. But the work of Elijah would lead a later generation to accept it. The Jews in exile had "looked for the time of healing, but behold, trouble" (Jer. 8:15; 14:19- this is twice emphasized)- because they didn't repent and accept the new covenant. "Healing" [s.w.] is a result of repentance (Is. 6:10; 57:19; Jer. 3:22; Hos. 6:1). This is why there was "no remedy", literally 'no healing', for the generation who went into exile (2 Chron. 36:16), and why Jeremiah's prophecies often lament the lack of healing for Judah's wounds; they had broken the old covenant, for which one of the curses was that there would be no healing (Dt. 28:27,35). Ultimately, "by his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5). It will only be by repentantly coming to the crucified Jesus as Lord and Saviour that He can be as the sun of righteousness giving healing. The priesthood had failed to heal (Zech. 11:16 and often in the prophets).

You will go out, and leap like calves of the stall- As we struggle in our daily battle with the flesh, it is necessary to keep our eye on that split-second moment of total acceptance by our Lord. We will burst out, mentally and physically, like stalled calves given freedom for the first time. Currently we have changed masters, from sin to the Lord. But we are still slaves. There awaits what Paul calls the "glorious liberty of God's dear children". The slave who traded his master's talents well shall be given that which is his very own. Seeing he was faithful in that which was another man's. Ps. 68:1-3 speak of how the rejected will be chased away, but the righteous will "be glad" and "exult before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice", after the pattern of Israel's ecstasy after their deliverance at the Red Sea.

"Then shall thy light break forth as the morning [i.e. you'll have a part in the Lord's glory, Mal. 4:2], and thine health shall spring forth [cp. Mal. 4:2 springing forth as stalled calves]... and thy righteousness shall go before thee [our good deeds recited by the Judge]... then [at the judgment seat of Christ] thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am" (Is. 58:6-9). If we show mercy to the desperate now, we won't necessarily have our prayers automatically heard in this life. But in the poverty and desperate need of the judgment, our cries will be heard on account of our generous, forgiving response in this life.

Malachi 4:3 *You shall tread down the wicked-* This is the language of God's treading upon the wicked Egyptians (Hab. 3:13). But "the wicked" in the context are the wicked amongst God's people (:1; Mal. 3:18). The faithful will then discern them for who they are (Mal. 3:18), whereas in this life, and particularly at Malachi's time, it must have been difficult to perceive who were genuine and who were not. Just as we cannot discern now between wheat and weeds. The destruction of the wicked abusers of God's people seems to be part of the same process as the destruction of the wicked amongst God's people. They will be "condemned with the world". This is one of the passages which imply that the rejected will be physically annihilated by the Lord. Given the terrible descriptions of the mental anguish of the condemned, this would essentially be a merciful act. It may be that many will die in the judgments which come upon the world. But it could be that others are simply put out of their agony by the Lord. Some now in the ecclesia will be dashed to pieces by Him (Rev. 2:27), and Malachi implies that the faithful will play a part in the destruction of their wicked brethren.

For they will be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I make, says Yahweh of Armies- The idea of burning feet turning the wicked to ashes is precisely that of the cherubim (s.w. Ez. 1:7). As often intimated in Zechariah, the faithful are to become identified with the cherubim.

Malachi 4:4 *Remember the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded to him in Horeb for all Israel, even statutes and ordinances-* This was so that the curse for disobedience to the law would not come upon them (:7). The faithful minority of Mal. 3:16,17 are bidden remember the actual law, because the priests were teaching it wrongly (see on Mal. 2:8). It was "for all Israel", not just for an enthusiastic minority. And all of that law was still binding upon Malachi's generation, every statute and ordinance; whereas the priests were teaching that only some parts needed to be attended to.

Usually we read of 'observing' or 'obeying' the law. Perhaps the idea of 'remembering' it is in the context of the way they have offered lame animals, paid only part of the tithes- they had kept the law of Moses as lip service, on a surface level. They were to "remember" what the law actually said and do it. Again we see the possibility of fulfilment of these words in Malachi's own time and in the lives of his immediate audience.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel had given the exiles the opportunity of accepting a new covenant. The old covenant was broken. But the people still hankered for that old covenant. And it seems God went along with that by still offering those in Malachi's time some future with Him even on the basis of the old covenant.

Malachi 4:5 *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes-* As explained on Mal. 3:1, the restored community could still have seen a Messiah figure arise if they had responded to the messenger of the covenant preparing His way. 'Malachi' was that messenger, as was the priesthood. But they failed to respond, and so the prophecies were rescheduled and reapplied to another priest, John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the true and full Messiah. So if Israel would receive it, John the Baptist was the Elijah prophet. The course of fulfilment of prophecy was conditional upon whether John succeeded in turning the hearts of Israel back to the fathers or not; on preparing them for the great and terrible day of the Lord. Brethren as varied as John Knowles and Harry Whittaker have all recognized in their expositions that the Kingdom could have come in the first century had Israel received John as Elijah.

But they would not. And so another Elijah prophet is to come in the last days and prepare Israel for her Messiah. "If ye are willing to receive him, this is Elijah which is to come" (Mt. 11:14 RVmg.) says it all. More details about him are noted on Rev. 11. He need not be the literal resurrected Elijah, although that is possible; recall how the Lord Jesus is called "David", when He is not David but in the spirit and line of David (Hos. 3:5; Ez. 34:23 etc.). The Elijah prophet who was to herald the Messianic Kingdom *could have been* John the Baptist- if Israel had received him. But they didn't, and so the prophecy went down another avenue of fulfilment. It could be that :6 implies that there is still the possibility that even the latter day Elijah mission could fail. But ultimately it will succeed, for the great and dreadful day of Yahweh is that of the Lord's final return (Joel 2:31). I suggest this approach is what explains the apparent contradiction between John's denial that he was Elijah (Jn. 1:21,25), and the Lord's statement that for those who received it, John was the Elijah prophet. He says "Elijah has come" [in John] in Mk 9:12; and yet at the same time, "Elijah is coming / will come" (Mt. 17:11). Seeing that Greek NT tenses are specific, I suggest He said both: "Elijah is coming, Elijah has come". John's denial that he was the Elijah prophet was tantamount to his acceptance that he had not succeeded in being the Elijah prophet- even though his choice of clothing clearly consciously imitated that of Elijah.

As discussed on Mal. 3:1, the Elijah prophet is "the messenger" who is the servants of Yahweh of the Isaianic prophecies about a way being prepared. They are both servants, doing the work of removing the stumbling stones [= rejection of Jesus as crucified Christ / Messiah], and also a messenger giving a message of Him. They will be the Elijah prophet. Hence the Hebrew here is strictly "the Elijah the prophet". "The Elijah" is a strange way of expression if Elijah personally is meant.

But Elijah failed in his mission because he failed to act as a prophet, and God effectively fired him. He didn't achieve renewal of the covenant between Yahweh and His people; the implication is that the latter day Elijah will achieve this. The duty of a prophet was not only to return the people to God. It was to defend the people before God in prayer, praying to God on their behalf (Gen. 20:7,17; Ex. 32:31–35; Num. 14:11–25; 1 Sam. 7:5–9; Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; Ps. 99:6). The role of the Elijah prophet was therefore also to mediate for the people that they might receive God's grace. This is also part of the latter day Elijah ministry.

Malachi 4:6 *He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers-*

The tragedy of "You didn't turn to Me" in Hag. 2:17 is that God has repeatedly tried to comfort the returned exiles that "I am with you" (Hag. 2:4; 1:13)... "My Spirit dwelt [and dwells] among you" (Hag. 2:5). But they didn't want to be with Him, to realize the presence of His Spirit amongst them, just as the Corinthians were not spiritual although they had been richly given the Spirit. The returnees were preoccupied by the immediate, and their desire to live their petty dreams. And so it is oftentimes with man. Haggai's call echoes to us- not to be preoccupied with life and material things. The final restoration prophet concluded with the promise that God would have to send the Elijah prophet to turn their hearts to God: "He will turn the hearts..." (Mal. 4:6). Literally, to return [s.w. 'repent'] their hearts. He would bring about their repentance; in the latter day context, this would refer to their repentance for crucifying their Messiah.

Despite the religious system developed by the returnees and their exclusion of others, they didn't obey Haggai's call to turn their hearts to their God. And so through the Elijah prophet it was God's plan to almost forcibly turn their hearts to Him. But even the fulfilment in John the Baptist and the appearance of God's Son only achieved

this in a minority. The problem was [and still is] preoccupation with man's immediate agendas, be they religious or secular.

Mal. 3:7 offered a "return" of God to the people if they returned / repented to Him. But they argued they had nothing to repent of, no distance over which to return to Him. Now God says, as He does in the offers of the new covenant in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, that He will make them return to Him- so desperate is He for continued relationship with them. No longer is His return to them contingent upon their freewill return to Him. He will force them back to Him.

Reconcillation with God will produce or be associated with reconcillation within personal relationships. The LXX speaks of this involving also turning the hearts of the people to their neighbours. As discussed on Mal. 2:10, breaking covenant with others was related to breaking covenant with God. They were all at sixes and sevens with each other because their relationship with God was broken. This was now to be forcibly ended. And we discussed on Mal. 2:14-16 how the priests had abandoned their children and Hebrew wives. The results of this would potentially be undone by the Elijah prophet, the messenger of the covenant of Mal. 3:1. But he failed... so it was reapplied to John the Baptist, who likewise failed to convert all Israel. And so the success of the latter day Elijah ministry, in removing the stumbling stone of Christ crucified, will result in restored and enhanced human relationships. For that has to be the result of no longer stumbling over the Lord Jesus.

"The hearts of the children to the fathers" is interpreted for us in Lk. 1:17, at least insofar as John the Baptist was a fulfilment of the Elijah prophet: "And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous [GNB "back to the way of thinking of the righteous"]; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord". "The children" are "the disobedient" and their fathers are "the righteous". The question is how these righteous fathers are turned towards the children, thanks to the work of the Elijah prophet. The account of John's 'Elijah' ministry in Mt. 3:7-12 is full of allusion to Malachi 4; and one of those connections is with the comment that that generation could not truly say that Abraham was their father (Mt. 3:9). This leads us to understand the righteous fathers as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That would have been the natural interpretation of "the fathers" in first century Israelite society. It could be that in the latter day, ultimate fulfilment, the Lord Jesus returns, resurrects the dead, including the Jewish fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and there is then a process of work by the Elijah prophet which brings about repentance in Israel, whereby the resurrected Jewish fathers turn towards the children of that last generation, and those children likewise turn to those fathers. The righteous fathers are turned to the once disobedient children- by the work of "Elijah". But how and when this happens is a stubborn exegetical problem.

One possibility is that the language of fathers and children forms an inclusion with how Malachi opens: "Children honour their parents... I am your father— why don't you honour Me?" (Mal. 1:6). In this case, the "fathers" would be an intensive plural referring to their great Father, God. Just as the plural *elohim* is used for the one singular God; and just as in fact Mal. 1:6 uses the plural for "master" with reference to God, as if "masters", the one great master, God. And His heart would be turned to His children by the Elijah prophet converting the "children" to Him in repentance. Is. 63:16 speaks of the repentant remnant saying "Doubtless You are our father". Thus the children are reconciled to God. Most references to the people 'returning', especially in Malachi, Haggai and Zechariah, are to the children of Israel returning / repenting to God, and His returning to them. "Return unto Me ... and I will return unto you" (Mal. 3:7; Zech.

1:3). Another possibility is to accept the interpretation of Rashi and the rabbis, that the hearts of the fathers are turned "onto" the children and vice versa- meaning that fathers and children are united in heart by their common experience of repentance before God. This message would then be relevant to Malachi's earlier observations of social and family breakdown amongst the returned exiles. And he closes his prophecy with this thought, because it is the reconciliation between people, as a result of their individual reconciliation with God, which is the ultimate achievement of God's grace in practice.

Through the preaching of John, he turned men's hearts- the idea of repentance, being brought about by the preacher (Mal. 4:6). Such is the power of our preaching, the possibility which our words of witness give to our hearers. We have such power invested in us! If we are slack to use it, the Lord's glory is limited, and the salvation of others disabled.

Israel were out of step with their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jacob, Levi, Moses and "Elijah" have just been mentioned (Mal. 1:2; 2:4,6; 3:3-4). The appeal of the latter day Elijah is to return to the promises made to the fathers, which are the essence of the new covenant. The turning of the fathers' hearts to the children need not imply that the fathers are still alive; the idiom of the passage means that the hearts of the children and the fathers will be at one with each other. Lk. 1:16,17 interprets "the heart of the children to the fathers" as meaning "the disobedient to the wisdom of the just".

Elijah was only interested in demonstrating Yahweh's superiority over Baal, but it is questionable whether he made any lasting converts from Baal worship to Yahweh. Because he wasn't interested in people- at least initially. He was removed from his post after his shameful intercession *against* Israel in 1 Kings 19. But we must square this against Malachi's apparently strange comment that Elijah in future will turn the heart of the fathers to the children and vice versa. This makes sense once we understand that Baal worship involved child sacrifice, as the preceding section in 1 Kings 16 makes clear. This created tension and no "heart" between fathers and children, and vice versa. After his demotion, Elijah carried on believing- and we can assume that he "got it". His future work will therefore involve caring for people, and turning fathers and children towards each other in that they have quit Baal. Elijah will finally learn from his immaturity, and become people focused. LXX has "(who shall turn again) the heart of a man to his neighbour".

Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse- The ultimate salvation of the earth / land of Israel and its people is still conditional, upon their response to the Elijah prophet. There is no automatic salvation just because a day on the calendar has arrived. Salvation is intensely personal and human response is absolutely essential; and that is the appropriate finale of the prophecy. And yet if the last word of the Old Testament is "curse", the first recorded word of the Lord Jesus is "Blessed". But that blessing was upon individuals who responded to Him. It could be argued that the work of John the Baptist as the Elijah prophet failed to reform Israel [as did Elijah and Malachi]- and so in AD70 the land was indeed struck with a curse, "with a decree of utter destruction" (ESV). Is. 43:28 had said the same: "Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary; and I will make Jacob a curse". But Zech. 14:11 had foreseen this, and yet prophesied that through the return of the Lord Jesus, "Men will dwell therein, and there will be no more curse [s.w. Mal. 4:6]; but Jerusalem will dwell safely". This suggests that indeed all but the final Elijah ministry would fail. The land would be cursed. But this will be lifted at the Lord's return.