

LESSON TEXT: Malachi 1:1---2:17
Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

“Malachi” means, “My messenger.” The book was written ca. 445-432 B.C., during the time of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem to purify and fortify the new Jewish commonwealth which had formerly been in exile in Babylon. God had restored a remnant in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah (Christ). The Messiah would be none other the *Lord* God-in-the-flesh (Micah 5:2; Malachi 3:1). God wanted this remnant to prepare itself and its posterity in holiness and humility so that it would honor him when he came!

This remnant, led and influenced by a corrupt priesthood, had fallen back into many of the sins of its forefathers. It had purged itself of the worship of graven-images, but it had replaced the images with the idolatry of “mammon.” Its principle sin against God was its contemptuous attitude and practice in its giving to God. Priests and people were dishonoring God with their offerings!

Several years ago a city newspaper reported: “Mrs. Johnson entertained eight intimate friends at a dinner at the Country Club yesterday after which she took the party to the Majestic Theater to see, ‘An American Tragedy.’” The item went on to note that “Mrs. Johnson always contributes \$5 a year to the missionary society of her church. She has been a deeply interested member of the organization for 18 years.”

In the Christian dispensation the church of God’s “Israel” and every member of the church is a priest. What if God sent his new “Israel” a “messenger” saying that one day he was going to send his Messiah to “do an audit” on the incomes and offerings of every one of its members (i.e., “priests”) HE HAS! Did you know the New Testament says more about the use or misuse of the material blessings people have than it does about baptism and the Lord’s Supper combined?

We cannot serve God *and* mammon; but we can serve God *with* mammon.

QUESTIONS:

1. What has God’s loving Jacob rather than Esau to do with reprimanding the Jews for their polluted offerings? 1:1-5
2. Why were these Jews shocked that their offerings were an abomination to God? 1:6-7
3. How would their governor have reacted to the kind of offerings they were giving God? 1:8-9
4. Why does Malachi keep mentioning the nations (Heb. *Goyim*) as he reproaches the Jews for their polluted offerings
5. Why would God threaten to spread dung upon the faces of the unfaithful priests? 2:3
6. What is the primary responsibility of a priest of God? 2:6-9
7. Why would marring the daughter of a foreign god be an abomination? 2:10-12
8. Why does God hate divorce? 2:13-16
9. Does God get “weary”? From what? 1:17

He said he wouldn’t make a pledge
Unto the church at all.
That he would give just when he felt
The urgency—the call.
But still he bought a car and pledge
To pay it off some day.
And then a house in which to live
And each month he would pay.
He pledged to pay his telephone,
Electric and his gas;
He pledged to pay his water bill—
He never let it pass.
He pledged to pay his taxes, too,
Upon his house and sod,
But not one cent he’d ever pledge
To the house of God.

—Anon

LESSON TEXT: Malachi 3:1---4:6

Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Dr. John Hall, in *Westminster Teacher*, told of an incident illustrating the shocking divergence between precept and practice in some cases. A devout-appearing worshiper joined heartily in the singing of an old hymn while the offering plates were being passed. The song was: "Were the whole realm of nature mine. That were a present far too small." While he sang so vigorously the man was fumbling around in his pocket, trying to find the smallest coin there to drop in the offering.

Robert C. Shannon relates an observation in his book, *1000 Windows*: "You expect to see statues of saints or famous people in European churches. And it is something of a surprise to see a statue of a humble fish seller in a church in England's Nottinghamshire. Her story is reminiscent of the gospel story of the widow who gave two mites. Her statue is there, beautifully carved in wood, because that humble woman gave half of her earnings to the church!"

What *is* the appropriate or required amount for a Christian to give? How much of one's income or possessions should a disciple of Jesus be expected to offer to the Lord's work (the church)? Should it be a tithe (i.e. 10%) as Malachi expected of the Jews of his day (Malachi 3:8-10) and which the law of Moses in the OT required?

A tithe of one's wages or salary might be a good place for a Christian to **start**, but ten per cent is a long way from Christian stewardship as taught in the New Testament. Actually, when one counts up all the tithes and offerings the Jews gave in obedience to the law of Moses, it amounts to somewhere around 30% of their possessions.

Search the NT from beginning to end and you will not find any law about specific amounts for a Christian to give. The NT teaches that stewardship involves 100% of a believer's resources are to be dedicated, one way or another, to serving the Lord! The seminal NT teaching on Christian stewardship is found in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 & 9.

QUESTIONS:

1. Who is the messenger to prepare the way of the Lord? 3:1 (4:5-6)
2. Who is the Lord coming suddenly to his temple? 3:1
3. What kind of refining is this Lord going to do to Judah? 3:2-5
4. Doesn't the Lord **ever** change? 3:6 What has his immutability to do with our giving?
5. Can a human being really **rob** God? How? 3:7-9
6. Would God go **hungry** without our offerings? 3:10 (cf. Psa. 10:1-13; Acts 17:25).
7. What kind of blessings should we expect from God if we give according to the principles of the NT? 3:10-18
8. What is the sun of righteousness? How will it heal? 4:1-4
9. Who is this Elijah that was to precede the great and terrible day of the Lord? 4:5-6

**The world is full of two kinds of people, the givers and the takers.
The takers eat well---but the givers sleep well.** --Modern Maturity

You make a living by what you accumulate—
you make a life by what you give