



PT Butler

Bible Study Notebooks

Study of Malachi

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MALACHI

INTRODUCTION

The name “Malachi” is not found in this form anywhere else in the Bible. The word means in Hebrew, “My messenger.” It may be an abbreviation of the Hebrew word, Malakhiyah which means, “Messenger of Jehovah.” Since no other prophet spoke or wrote anonymously, it is highly reasonable to conclude that this is the name of Jehovah’s last literary prophet who is God’s final Old Testament messenger to the covenant people. We know nothing about this prophet except what may be inferred from the book by his name.

The content of the prophecy fits appropriately into the conditions described by Nehemiah in the period 445-432 B.C. The first contingent of exiles had returned during 536 B.C., under Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest. Encouraged by the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the people rebuilt the temple between 520 and 516 B.C. Ezra had returned with a second group of exiles in 458 B.C., and it is thought that Zechariah had encouraged the remnant with the message of Zechariah 9—14 sometime between these two dates. Ezra’s work had been to restore knowledge of the law and respect for it. Artaxerxes I (Ahasureus) (465-425 B.C.) had permitted Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city. Nehemiah’s first governorship in Jerusalem was during the years 444-433 B.C. and a second term was in 430-425 B.C.. For a full picture of the conditions in Judea during this period one should read Ezra chapters 7 through 10 and the complete Book of Nehemiah.

In the book of Malachi we find a new style of address known as didactic-dialectic method of speaking. In this type of teaching an assertion or charge is made, a fancied objection is raised by the hearers, and a refutation to the objection is presented by the speaker. In the style of Malachi we have the beginning of a method of teaching that later became universal in the Jewish schools and in the synagogues. Malachi uses the phrase, “saith Jehovah of hosts” 21 times, thus leaving no doubt that the writer was claiming divine, inerrant inspiration for his writing!

There are four basic messages in Malachi: (1) Indifference to both the moral and ceremonial aspects of the divine law now characterized the people of God. The exiles had been back in Judea from Babylon for over 100 years; but instead of becoming better, they had become worse. The people were saying that the promises of Jehovah to his people before and since the captivity were not being fulfilled. Why? The answer is first, the promises were primarily spiritual and to be fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah, and second, the promises had been conditional and the people were not living up to the conditions stipulated. God had fulfilled his part of the promises; he had done all the could at that time. He had chastened them by the captivity; he had brought back a “remnant” and had settled them in their land; he had graciously forgiven their sins; he had shown his ability and disposition to keep his glorious promises to them. There was nothing more to be done or said by the Lord until they would show a different disposition toward him. Therefore, with the close of the Book of Malachi no word more could be

said until the coming of him (Messiah) whom God had promised and through whom God's final word would be spoken; (2) Worship was in a state of decay; the priesthood had allowed it to degenerate to the point of accepting the refuse of the flocks and herds as sacrifices. Further, the people had failed to bring in the tithes, thus robbing God. Malachi teaches that although ritual may be important in religion, it is not an end in itself. Ritual is only of value when it expresses a deep and sincere spiritual worship unto God; (3) The Jews were divorcing their wives and marrying heathen women. The prophet makes it clear that such flagrant disregard for God's law can only result in thwarting the divine purpose in securing a pure people unto Jehovah; (4) The book teaches "that there is eternal discipline in the law."

Malachi's central concern is for fidelity to the covenant. The priests have corrupted the worship which was designed to perpetuate covenant consciousness among the people. In refuting this evil, Malachi rises to one of the heights of Old Testament prophecy in describing the purpose of the covenant in the ultimate worship of God among the Gentiles. His references to God as Father, the ideal priest, and the blessings of true obedience are equally striking in the Messianic overtones. He further clarifies, "the Day of the Lord," and points to the forerunner of the Messiah. For these reasons Malachi was chosen to immediately precede the New Testament in our English versions of the bible. The next word from Jehovah to his people is the preaching of John the Baptist!

The book of Malachi is authenticated by its quotations and references in the New Testament (Matt. 11:10; 17:12; Mark 1:2; 9:11-12; Luke 1:17; Romans 9:13).

MALACHI 1:1—2:17

Malachi charges these Jews of being insensitive to the love God has shown her. Their contempt (1:13) stands in sharp contrast for the grace God bestowed upon her. Why did God choose Jacob over Esau to be the Messianic family? Not because Jacob was perfect or because his descendants would be perfect. GOD, BY HIS SOVEREIGN GRACE (see Rom. 9:6-18) chose Jacob rather than Esau because Jacob and his descendants, as wicked as some of them might be, would produce a faithful “remnant” dedicated to the Messianic destiny. The Jews were prone to think of themselves as superior to other races. So, through Malachi, God reminds them he has shown preference to the descendants of Jacob, even though Jacob was younger than Esau and had no “legal” right to the birthright! Jacob got the birthright, in fact, by deceit! But because Esau contemptuously “sold” his birthright for a bowl of beans, God decided Jacob, though he got it by deceit, wanted it with all his heart, so God gave it to Jacob (after putting Jacob through a “furnace of affliction”). God does not extend his grace to human beings according to outward appearances, but according to the heart! The point of Malachi’s “introduction” (1:1-5) is to try to strike the consciences of these Jews with their INGRATITUDE and lack of DEVOTION to the COVENANT God entered into on their behalf—and remind them that God faithfully kept his part of the covenant! God made Israel prosper and Edom (which represents all Gentiles) come under his often judgments. The POINT is: How can these Jews be so cheap, so crass and disrespectful in their love toward God by giving him “polluted offerings.” Surely, the love of God extended in the grace of Christ’s perfect atonement for our sins should lead us to say with the apostle Paul, “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!” (2 Cor. 9:15). GOD HAS EXTENDED HIS COVENANT LOVE ONLY TO THE CHURCH TODAY! God is wanting to love the rest of the world through and in his church. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only unique (the only one of his kind) Son....” Love and grace extended deserves love and grace returned. “And from his fulness have we all received, grace and grace returned” (John 1:16). Giving to the Lord is a “gracious” work on our part (2 Cor. 8:7-15), Even our right and capacity to return grace to God is a gift bestowed upon us by God—if he didn’t give us the opportunity and the capacity, we couldn’t even begin to return grace to him. HOW COULD ANY CHRISTIAN TODAY BE SO CRASS AS TO “CHEAT AND ROB GOD” BY A HALF-HEARTED, MISERLY, PENNY-PINCHING OFFERING? The love of Christ must control and constrain us (2 Cor. 5:14).

The Jews pretend to be shocked and totally unaware that they have “despised” God’s name (1:6). They were like their ancestors in the days of Isaiah (Isa. 1:12-20) who “tramp-tramp-tramped” God’s courts with offerings but their hearts were in rebellion. Their offerings were less than they should have been, and their offerings were in violation of the law of God that specified the “first of their flocks” and the “best” of their goods. But why were they shocked and unaware of their contempt of God? Did they not know what their offerings should be? That may have been part of the problem! Clearly the priesthood (2:1-9) was held responsible for part of the irreverence being demonstrated by their “lame and sick” offerings. But no honest and good-hearted Israelite could lay all the blame on the priesthood. Every Israelite with a brain and a

heart should have known God the Creator and Redeemer and Beneficent One would feel despised and hurt by “second rate” offerings! After all God had told them how hurt he was by their former idolatries and contempt toward him (read the book of Hosea). These Jews had become arrogant and self-righteous. They had become callous and bored (1:13—see Isa. 43:22; 30:9-11) and complacent. Their attitude was that God would just have to accept whatever they decided to give as an offering to him! And they probably rationalized (as so many do today) that since God didn’t really need anything to keep him alive and prosperous, they didn’t need to give him their best and most! They believed they needed the best and most for themselves! **CHRISTIANS TODAY DARE NOT PRETEND TO BE UNAWARE OF WHAT GOD DESERVES CONCERNING THEIR OFFERINGS TO HIM!** Christians cannot put all the blame on their “preachers” or their “elders” if they are “robbing” God of what he deserves of their possessions! The New Testament says more about the attitude and actions of disciples of Jesus toward their responsibilities of “giving” back to God than any other requirement of a disciple! **IN FACT, THE APOSTLE PAUL POINTEDLY SAYS THAT OUR GIVING IS A “PROOF” OF OUR LOVE AND OBEDIENCE TO GOD (2 Cor. 8:24; 9:13).**

Their governors would have **TAKEN** by force any amount one of their subjects had tried to rob or cheat from the government in taxes and honors. Malachi tells these Jews, “Try giving your political governor anything short of what he requires (taxes, and honors) and see what happens!” The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes warned every Jew to be extremely careful about giving honor and taxes due their governing authorities. The New Testament is plain about this also (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). Samuel warned the ancient Israelites when they cried, “Give us a king like the nations” that a “king” would demand a certain amount of their possessions and they had better pay-up (1 Sam. 8:10-27). The Jews of Malachi’s day (ca. 450-400 B.C.) were under heavy tax burdens. They were being taxed by their own corrupt leaders as well as by their Persian overlords. They had complained to Nehemiah (Neh. 5). They were mortgaging their property, selling their children into indentured servitude, just to meet the requirements of their “governors.” **WHEN A CIVIL GOVERNMENT DEMANDS CERTAIN TAXES AND HONORS, IT WILL SETTLE FOR NOTHING LESS THAN IT DEMANDS!** The Jews knew this. They came under the “heel” of oppressive rulers (even of their own) from the day they demanded a “king” from Samuel until Malachi’s day and beyond! In addition to the taxes and honors they were required to bring to the tabernacle and later the temple, they had to pay civil taxes to their own “rulers” and their “overlords” (Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome). **THE JEWS WOULD NOT DARE SLIGHT THEIR CIVIL RULERS, BUT THEY THOUGHT SINCE GOD WAS “NOT AROUND” (INVISIBLE) THEY COULD GET BY WITH SLIGHTING HIM!** Every American Christian (as well as non-Christian) knows that if he/she tries to cheat or rob the U.S. government of what is owed in “income tax” or any other tax, he/she is in deep trouble! Just let an American try to pay the dollar amount of his “income tax” with Afghan dollars (it takes about \$1,000,000 Afghan dollars to make \$28 U.S. dollars). Before long, when the IRS caught up with such a “cheat,” he/she would be brought to court, convicted of “evasion,” fined and incarcerated! “Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he reap” (Gal. 6:7-10; 2 Cor. 9:6-9). **GOD DOES NOT (NOW) TAKE BY FORCE WHAT WE OWE HIM IN OFFERINGS AND HONORS!** He wants those who profess to be his to give to him what is his due out of love and graciousness—because he wants their hearts in obedient gratitude. If they will not give it in this probationary life on earth, he will take it by force in the next (Phil. 2:9-11).

According to ancient ritual, one priest was stationed at the doors of the court of burnt offerings for the express purpose of keeping out animals unfit for sacrifice. In 1:10 God cries out in anguish for just one priest whose concern for God's law would cause him to shut the door against such blemished sacrifices as were being offered daily! No worship at all is better than one that rejects the divine honor and insults God with contempt. The repeated mention of the "nations" (or Heb. goyim, i.e., Gentiles) is prophetic! Of course, the Gentiles in their worship of idols were not offering "pure offerings" (1:11) (see Rom. 1:18-32). This is a prophecy that looks forward to that time when, under the Messiah, not in any one locality, but from one end of the earth to the other, God's name would be great among Gentiles ("nations") and they would offer "pure" offerings in their prayers ("incense" Rev. 5:8) and their words and holy lives (Heb. 13:15-16). These Jews, the covenant people of God, in the midst of the heathen nations, who should have been a living example of faith in Jehovah and of devotion to him in worship, were actually making a mockery and scandal of their exalted responsibility. This was their reaction to God's love; they held both the altar and offerings in contempt. The Hebrew word nophach is translated "sniff" (RSV & NIV) and "snuff" (KJV) means "to snort at in contempt." The Hebrew word matlah translated "weariness" means, "vexation, nuisance, pain, aggravation." So these Jews had come to look upon their offerings to the Lord as an aggravation. They were "fed up" with God's high standards for offerings and made up their minds they would give whatever they decided—never mind what his word (the law) said! They were, like most of their descendants in Paul's day, giving the Gentiles around them occasion to blaspheme the name of Jehovah (see Rom. 2:17-24). AND AS WE READ THE SURVEYS AND POLLS TELLING US THAT OFFERINGS TO THE CHURCHES AVERAGE FAR LESS THAN 10% OF MEMBERSHIP INCOMES WHAT DO WE SUPPOSE NON-CHRISTIANS THINK ABOUT THAT?! According to an IRS analysis, Americans who itemize their deductions give less than 3% of their adjusted gross incomes to church and charity. One survey indicates that 30% of the members of the church carry 80% of the financial load of the average U.S. church. WHAT WOULD MALACHI SAY TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH TODAY! Could it be possible that there are some non-Christians giving more to "charity" (proportionate to income) than some Christians? DO NON-CHRISTIANS KNOW ABOUT THE MISERLINESS OF MOST OF CHRISTENDOM? What do they think?

God was turning the "blessings" of the priests into curses because they were not giving glory to the Lord. They were also not giving "true instruction" or "guarding knowledge." "Spreading dung upon the faces" of the unfaithful priests was another way of saying he was going to EXCOMMUNICATE or "DEFROCK" them as priests. According to the law of Moses (Ex. 29:14; Lev. 4:11-12; 16:27) the dung of sacrifices was to be "burned without the camp." God was going to take severe measures with these unfaithful priests because they had made a mockery of their calling! What he would do to them would be an ignominious humiliation in which the priests themselves would be treated as the "dung" of offerings—fit only to be carried away outside the camp away from the presence of the Lord. God had made the covenant or agreement with the tribe of Levi that they should minister at his altar and to his holy service. God expected this covenant to be respected and observed by them so that it could continue with them. But it could do so only if they kept themselves fit for the service. The unfaithful priests of Malachi's time have left off the righteous practices of their faithful predecessors. The principles underlying God's denunciation of the priests through

Malachi merit our attention. We, as Christians, are all priests of God (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 20:6). As such we enjoy blessings those outside of Christ never dream of. We, too, are charged to offer sacrifices to God, holy and acceptable (Rom. 12:1-2). To do less is to make a mockery of his name before the world. If we do not offer ourselves and what we have as holy and acceptable sacrifices to God, we may be assured that our relationship to him will become a curse rather than a blessing. Non-Christians will point to us and say they have more fear of God than we do. We shall then be stumbling blocks, leading them deeper into sin rather than teaching them God's truth, for they will not heed the words of "priests" whose lives do not match their doctrines.

The primary responsibility of a "priest" of God is "TRUE INSTRUCTION" and "GUARDING KNOWLEDGE." If every Christian is a "priest" of God (and every Christian IS) then the Christian's primary responsibility is "true instructions and guarding knowledge" to "keep the ways of God" in his life and not present the word of God (i.e., the law of God) as if it were partial to anyone because of who they are! In all of this the "priest" of God is to render awe to the name (person and presence) of God! "Priests" are under special covenant with God and are expected to be faithful to the covenant they enjoy. THAT SPECIFICALLY APPLIES IN THIS CONTEXT WITH WHAT IS "OFFERED" TO GOD IN GIFTS AND OFFERINGS! Unfaithfulness in giving false instruction and showing "respect of persons" about tithes and offerings constituted unfaithfulness and contempt for God and the covenant with him! Paul exhorted the Corinthians to "excel" in the "gracious work" of giving offerings just as they had "excelled" in other Christian matters (2 Cor. 8:7). Jesus called his disciples to the highest level of "giving" when he said, "So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33). We teach more by what we do than by what we say! So, what do our offerings say to others (our children, our friends, our Christian brethren)?

First, God is speaking through Malachi to covenant people—not those outside the covenant. The Jew, in marrying a "foreign" (non-covenant) woman (Gentile, idolater) was committing an "abomination" comparable to witchcraft, idolatry and other grievous sins (cf. Deut. 18:9-14). Jews were strictly prohibited from marrying "daughters of a foreign god" (Ex. 34:16) because to do so opened the door for idolatry to enter into the holy people of God (1 Kings 11:1-2; Neh. 13:23-27). The practice of inter-marriage with foreign women (e.g., Ahab marrying Jezebel and Jehoram (Joram) marrying Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel) had brought in the worship of Baal among the people of Israel and Judah and it was this which brought about the destruction of both Israel and Judah. "Wise king Solomon" was the major culprit in "marrying daughters of a foreign god." He went so far as to build temples for the worship of the "gods" (idols) of these foreign wives. The introduction of idolatry by such blatant disregard for the warnings of God resulted, in one generation, in civil war in Israel that eventuated in a divided kingdom. Israel, the northern 10 tribes, immediately built temples and altars and worshiped a golden calf. Judah became so depraved and idolatrous as to put up a statue of the Assyrian god "Tammuz" in the very court of the temple of God (Ezek. 8:14-15). Jeremiah was blunt to say that Judah had become worse than the heathen in idolatry (Jer. 2:10-13; 18:13-17). Is there a lesson here for Christians? YES! Is it possible for the N.T. church to slip into idolatry? YES! (Acts 15:20,29; 21:25; 1 Cor. Chs. 8-10; 1 John 5:21; Rev. 2:14,20). On an individual level,

Christians must be warned against marrying non-Christians. There is a very real danger that the Christian, in such a marriage, will “back-slide” rather than that the non-Christian will be converted. Idolatry, in any form (it doesn’t have to be worship of a statue) is an abomination to God. **IDOLATRY IS, ESSENTIALLY, PUTTING ANYTHING OR ANYONE BEFORE GOD IN ONE’S LIFE!**

God hates divorce because of the human devastation and carnage it causes in both children and adults. Divorce destroys what God created—one man for one woman until death parts one or the other. Divorce destroys the home which is the basic foundation of all society—civic, national and religious. The church of Christ, right along with society in general, suffers from divorce. In addition to the heart-break, psychological trauma, social confusion, and degradation of faith, love, trust, and security destroyed by divorce, there is the great financial burden that must be carried by all society one way or another from divorce. The trauma in the psyche of a child caused by divorce is carried, either consciously or sub-consciously, all the life of a child thus victimized. Both the Bible and history verifies all we have said here. **MOST OF ALL, DIVORCE DOES, IN EFFECT, CALL GOD A “LIAR”!** God, from the time of creation, said marriage of one man to one woman for the life of either or both was “good” and binding (e.g., Gen. 2:18; Matt. 19:3-9; Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:1-16, etc. etc.). God had repeated his will about divorce and marriage in every age and dispensation of the Bible. **ANY OTHER VIEWPOINT CONTRADICTS GOD!** A society that treats marriage with contempt and disregards God’s will about it will eventually “come apart at the seams.” Marriage is the thread that holds all the social fiber together! When will human beings ever learn that what God says about divorce is **RIGHT?**

The Hebrew words in 2:17 are hogaaenu from the root word yagaa which means, basically, “fatigued with labor, exhausted, troubled.” Of course, God never tires, like human beings, but he does get exasperated, troubled, and “fed-up” with human intransigence and impertinence! Remember, even Jesus “looked” at people with “anger” for their unbelief and hardness of heart (Mark 3:5). Many times it is apparent that Jesus was exasperated with the “little” faith of the chosen 12 apostles (e.g., Matt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). And how often did the fleshly-minded multitudes burden Jesus’ heart with their carnality and unbelief? Jesus said once, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?” (Matt. 17:17; Mark 9:19; Luke 9:41). The OT prophets represented God as being wearied with the impenitence of human beings (e.g. Isa. 1:14; 7:13; 43:24). One sin of one human being is such a burden to God that he sent his beloved Son to bear that sin. That perfect divinely-incarnated human being, that Son of man, “who knew no sin, became sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Cor. 5:21). God is patient and longsuffering (2 Pet. 3:8-18). **BUT HIS PATIENCE AGAINST A DOOMED WORLD WILL NOT LAST FOREVER.** Remember the Flood in Noah’s time! Remember Sodom and Gomorrah! Remember the two times God destroyed and exiled the Jewish nation! There comes a point where mankind’s impertinence and impenitence is more “weariness” than God will bear—**THEN HE SENDS JUDGMENTS UPON NATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS!** The Bible and secular history records one account after another of this fact!

MALACHI 3:1—4:6

The first “messenger” goes BEFORE the “Lord.” The first “messenger” can be none other than John the Baptist. John the Baptist’s coming as a “messenger” (i.e., “voice crying in the wilderness”) is based on Isaiah 40:3-5. This first “messenger” is the Elijah of Malachi 4:5. There is no prophecy more clearly established than that the “voice” of Isaiah 40:5 and the “Elijah” of Malachi 4:5 is John the Baptist; all four Gospel accounts affirm this (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). The angel of the Lord verified it to Zechariah, John the Baptist’s father (Luke 1:17). Finally, there is the testimony of Jesus’s own words as recorded in Matt. 11:10; 11:14; 17:12ff to authenticate that this prophecy was of John the Baptist. And John the Baptist fulfilled his ministry of “preparing the way” for the Messiah by winning a number of “disciples” some of whom would later become “disciples” and “apostles” of Jesus. Through John the Baptist’s ministry Jesus was able to call to himself a small cadre of believers who would stick with him until his death, resurrection and ascension and they would be instruments of the Lord to establish God’s eternal kingdom, the church, on the earth! John the Baptist fulfilled his ministry in another way, also—he was more than willing to be just a “voice” a “messenger” and give Jesus the “spotlight” when Jesus came to begin his Messianic ministry!

The second “messenger” IS THE LORD (Heb. Adonai). The second “Messenger” is the “messenger of the covenant.” This can be none other than the Messiah, Jesus Christ! To “come suddenly” did not mean immediately, but “at once, instantaneously, unannounced.” The ancient rabbis interpreted this passage to mean that the Jewish Messiah would come in some dramatic, explosive visitation by which he would announce his presence. That is why the Jewish authorities kept asking Jesus for a “sign” to back up his claims for Messianic authority (Matt. 12:38; 16:1; Mark 8:11-12; Luke 11:16; 29; 12:54-56; John 2:18; 6:30; 1 Cor. 1:22). This second “messenger” (the Messiah) was to come to his temple (not the temples built by Solomon, Zerubbabel and Herod) but the church—Christ would “dwell” in the hearts of human beings (see John 14:1-3; Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Cor. 3:9,16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 3:17). God does not dwell in “houses made with hands” (Isa. 66:1-2; Acts 7:48-50). This second “messenger” (the Messiah) was not only the “messenger” of the covenant, HE WAS THE COVENANT. Malachi is predicting that this second “messenger” who was to come would BE none other than Jehovah-God in the flesh—the author, originator, and source of the covenant. That was also predicted in Isa. 42:6 and 49:8. GOD’S COVENANT WITH MAN IS A PERSON—JESUS CHRIST, GOD-IN-THE-FLESH! The Messiah was a personal bond between Jehovah and those would accept Jesus as their “Mediator,” (Heb. 9:15; 10:5-10; 13:20). Any individual in all mankind who wishes to come into covenant relationship with Almighty God MUST DO SO THROUGH FAITH AND OBEDIENCE TO JESUS CHRIST. Jesus is the “Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no one comes to the Father except by him” (John 14:6)—that includes Jews, Arabs, Indians, Orientals, Africans, Caucasians—no matter what their race, culture, or ancient “religion.”

When the Messiah (the second “messenger”/Jehovah-God-in-the-flesh/the Creator of the covenant) comes it will not be as most of the Jews expected. They

expected him to come (and this would be his “first” coming, not his “second coming” since the Jewish prophets said nothing about his “second-coming”) to lead them in conquering and ruling over the Gentiles here on earth. If you don’t believe this, read the Jewish apocryphal writings. They did not expect the Messiah to come in “judgment” upon their Jewish nation, traditions, and hypocrisies! But, according to Malachi here, and many other Messianic prophecies in the OT, that was God’s purpose for the ministry of the Messiah to the Jews—a “refiner’s fire” and “fuller’s soap.” The Messiah was to purge the Jewish nation of its ungodliness and hypocrisy and its idolatry of the rabbinic traditions which they had placed ABOVE the law of Moses (Matt. 15, etc.). The Messiah was to come and “sift” the Jewish nation until he formed a faithful, obedient remnant through which he could establish the true kingdom of God on earth—the church! The Messiah would “purify” the “priesthood” of God so as to produce a spiritual “priesthood” under the New Covenant (1 Pet. 2:5,9) that would repent of the sins listed—sorcery, adultery, swearing falsely, oppression of the working-man in his wages, oppression of the widows and orphan, refusing compassion to the “sojourner,” and disrespect for the majesty of the Lord. In other words, the Messiah was going to “filter” the Jewish nation by a process of teaching and eventual physical judgment until he produced a doctrinally-pure, obedient, reverent, moral, trustworthy, compassionate, GIVING, “priesthood of believers.” THEN THE OFFERING OF GOD’S COVENANT (NEW) WILL BE PLEASING TO THE LORD! This prophecy of Malachi about the coming Messiah’s “judgment” is not about Christ’s second coming—it is about his first coming! The question for the church today is: Is our “offering” (of all that we are and have) pleasing to the Lord! I remind you, it is the Lord we are to please, not human beings! Whatever we think, say, or do must be measured, not by how it may please or displease another human being, but by how it pleases the Lord! Needless to say, if we please the Lord in everything we think, say or do, we are not going to please the majority of intransigent, impertinent, wicked, impenitent, ignorant people in the world! “Beware when all men speak well of you.” Just copy Jesus and see how many people you can please! Just copy the apostle Paul and see how many people you can please. Paul even had to write to the Christians in Galatia, “Have I then become your enemy for telling you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16). Doubtless, some Christians being taught from these notes about their giving to the church will not be pleased!

NO! The Lord NEVER changes—not his mind or his will or his love or his faithfulness! That is the point of this statement in this context! These Jews, to whom Malachi was writing, thought that the Lord changed. They thought God was capricious, vacillating, impervious to their attitudes and actions, no matter what they did. They believed they could give “polluted” offerings, rob God, commit adultery, divorce their wives, dabble in sorcery, oppress their “hired” people, oppress the widows and orphans and be indifferent toward sojourners—AND GOD WOULDN’T DO WHAT HE SAID ABOUT THAT IN THE LAW OF MOSES! God does not “repent” of any decision, edict, law, or creation he makes (Num. 23:19; James 1:17). God does “change” his actions toward human beings WHEN human beings change their minds and actions toward him and his immutable, inviolable will! It is an immutable principle upon which man can depend in all ages and generations—“I, Jehovah, change not.” What kind of God would we have if he changed his mind about everything, just because we prayed or gave, or worshiped. God’s unchangeableness is for the very purpose of changing us (i.e., “conforming us to the image of his Son” Rom. 8:29). God’s unchangeableness is the very cornerstone-reason that we may indeed pray to him and give to him and worship

him and do what he says! WE CAN TRUST HIM TO KEEP HIS WORD—IN EVERYTHING, EVERY TIME, EVERYWHERE, ALWAYS! That was the point in Malachi's promise that if the Jews would quit robbing God and bring into God's storehouse what his law required, then God would keep his promises to bless them with fruitful fields, and protect them from their enemies! Now, read 2 Corinthians 9:8-12 in light of God's "unchangeableness."

YES! God owns everything (Ex. 19:5-6; Deut. 10:14; Psa. 24:1-10; 50:10-15). Everything lives and moves and has its being in God (Psa. 104:1-35; Acts 17:25-31). EVERYTHING AND EVERYBODY BELONGS TO GOD—BY RIGHT OF CREATION AND BY RIGHT OF REDEMPTION. EVERYTHING AND EVERYBODY IS "BOUGHT AND PAID FOR" BY GOD ALMIGHTY WITH THE MOST PRECIOUS PRICE IMAGINABLE—HIS BELOVED SON! Therefore, to express one's gratitude to one's Creator and Redeemer with anything less than a faithful stewardship of ALL one has or is—is an insulting, violating, robbery of God! Let's put it in "cold, hard, cash" terms! Let's say your total income (husband and wife) is \$36,000 per year (that's very close to the U.S. Commerce estimate of the "median income" for a U.S. male in 1998). Well, "Uncle Sam" is going to put you in, at least, the 15% tax bracket. That means you pay about \$7,600 in taxes every year (including "income" and Social Security). That leaves you with \$28,400. Let's say you give 10% of the \$28,400 to the church (\$2,840), that leaves you with \$25,560 to live on—think you could do that? What if you gave 15% of 28,400 (or \$4,260) to the Lord—after all "Uncle Sam" wouldn't be satisfied with only 10% of your gross income, would he? You wouldn't try to rob Uncle Sam, would you? If you gave 15% of your salary after taxes to the Lord, you'd still have \$24,140 to live on—think you could do that? SURE YOU COULD IF YOU REALLY TRIED! (Remember, what we "give" to the Lord of our possessions includes giving food, clothing, transportation, "time" (helping others), all kinds of benevolence). When you add all that up (the cold-hard cash one gives plus all the benevolent things one does that cost time and money, the Christian would be giving to the Lord more than 20% of his possessions and time. The Jews, according to the law of Moses, paid three tithes (look it up—the first one is in Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:26-28; the second tithe is in Deut. 12:18; the third tithe was every third year for the poor; Deut. 14:28). And there were offerings, in addition to the three tithes. It has been estimated that the total tithes of the Jews amounted annually (according to the law) to approximately 27% of one's gross income! In addition, the Jews after the exile had to pay taxes to their foreign "overlords" (Babylonians, Persians and Romans). There's no "law" in the NT telling you as a Christian how much of your gross income you have to give to the church. AND THIS LESSON IS NOT INTENDED TO DO THAT! What we give to the church is not to be an "exaction, not given reluctantly or under compulsion" (2 Cor. 9:5-7). Now, what about your "time." Every person has 168 hours per week. If we use 56 hours per week for sleep (8 hours each night)—21 hours a week to eat meals—40 hours a week at our job—21 hours per week watching TV—6 hours per week driving to church, school, work, doctors, shopping, etc—8 hours for "odd-jobs" around the house—2-3 hours at church per week—2 hours with care-group per week—have 11 hours left over. What do we do with those precious hours? Do we read and study the Bible? Do we do evangelism? Do we pray? We should be doing "all of the above." Even the Bible tells us to "redeem" (i.e., make good use of) the time! Tempus fugit—"time flies." "The night comes when no man can work." What we give to the service of God is everything we are and have! God has given us the privilege and serious responsibility as Christians under the New

Covenant to give and use our time “as each has made up his mind” to do (2 Cor. 8:10-15; 9:7). This lesson is designed to prod our consciences and minds to search the Scriptures (the New Testament, especially) to see if we are in danger of trying to “rob” God!—like Fox News, “We report—you decide!” No Christian has the authority or right to legislate for another Christian in these matters. Each “servant” of Christ is put “in charge” of his “own” work (Mark 13:34) and each will ultimately give his own account to the Master we he comes for it.

NO, of course not! God would not go hungry without our offerings (Psa. 50:12, etc). Would his church survive without our offerings? Yes, of course it would! Not even the gates of Hades (death) will be able to prevail against Christ’s church! Whatever we give doesn’t belong to us anyway—it belongs to God (1 Chron. 29:14). The point is, we will go “hungry” if we do not give of our “possessions” and “time” to God! I do not mean, primarily, that we will be physically hungry for not giving to God—and neither does Malachi here in this text! What is much more significant and eternally crucial—we shall starve to death spiritually if we do not make everything we are and have available to God! That’s easy to verify by just reading Jesus’s great sermon on the “Bread of Life” in John 6:25-63. If we do not “eat his flesh and drink his blood” (i.e., if we do not assimilate his words into our souls, Jn. 6:63), we have no spiritual life in us. Do you remember how Christ evaluated the church at Laodicea which, because it was rich and prosperous, said it had need of nothing? Christ said that church was “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked (and we might add, hungry). Jesus said to that church, “Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” Remember the 4th “Beatitude”? “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6). When Jesus commanded Peter, “Feed my sheep...” (Jn. 21:15-17), Jesus was not talking about literal “fodder” and “sheep.” When Peter wrote, “Feed the flock of God which is among you...” (1 Pet. 5:2) he was not talking about literal “soup-kitchens.” The only Biblical way to feed one’s soul and the souls of others is to give of possessions and time! **WHEN WE GIVE TO THE CHURCH (TO GOD AND CHRIST) OF OUR POSSESSIONS AND TIME WE ARE REALLY “GIVING” TO OURSELVES—GOD DOESN’T NEED IT—WE DO!** The way to become “spiritual” is to “do spiritual things”—and there are only two things we can really DO—(1) give of our “possessions.” (2) give of our time!

Did you know that the word “bless” occurs in no other language besides English, and originally meant, “mark with blood in order to sanctify or set apart”? “Bless” probably goes back to an ancient Saxon (Germanic) formation *blothisojan*, a derivative of *blotham* or “blood.” In Hebrew OT the root word *borak* means, literally, “to bend the knee, to kneel, to bestow praise” and is essentially the word used by Malachi in 3:10. In Greek NT there are two nouns translated “blessed or blessing.” One is *eulogia*, literally, “good speaking, giving of thanks, a benefit bestowed.” The other is *makarismos*, literally, “gratulation, gratuity, benefaction, endowment.” Now, Malachi tells his Jewish readers that if they will quit robbing God and bring to his “storehouse” from their possessions—to feed the Levites in their work for the Lord—God will open the windows of heaven and pour down an overflowing blessing. God promised to so “bless”s the Jews that “all nations would call them ‘blessed.’” Does any Christian really think this was

fulfilled in physical crops and vineyards? Was the physical things to sustain the bodies of the Jews the ultimate goal of God's "heavenly blessing"? One only has to read the rest of Malachi's book to its end to know that God's ultimate "blessing" was to be the Messianic blessing for which the "Elijah" to come would prepare them—THE ATONING BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST ("BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD THAT TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD)! This "challenge" of Malachi to the Jews was not intended to tell the Jews, and certainly not Christians today, that "nine-tenths, with God's blessing equal's more" in the way of physical prosperity. Jesus held up for an example to his disciples (Christians) the widow who gave two "mites" which was all her living into the treasury of God (Mark 12:41-44; Lk. 21:1-4). Paul spent many a "sleepless night, hungry, often without food, in cold and exposure" (2 Cor. 11:26-29). Paul learned in whatever state he was, to be content—plenty or hunger (Phil. 4:11-12). Jesus even said, "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied." (Luke 6:20-21; see James 2:5). I believe it is Scripturally misleading for people to give "testimonies" to others that because they "tithed" God gave them more than they had before, implying that God will do that to anyone who "tithes." Remember, the Son of man had not where to lay his head! And the "servant" is not above his "Master." IF GOD HAS BLESSED YOU WITH THE "BLESSED-BLOOD" OF CHRIST AS AN ATONEMENT FOR YOUR SINS HOW CAN YOU DARE THINK HE OWES YOU ANYTHING ELSE? What God does promise the Christian in the NT is that he will "always have enough of everything...and be enriched in every way for great generosity..." (2 Cor. 9:8-12). Clinton Gill says in his commentary on Malachi, pub. College Press, p. 402, "God has never promised wealth to the faithful or poverty to the unjust. We manifest a gross ignorance of His nature and His love when we judge the worth of service to Him on such basis."

The term, "sun of righteousness" must be interpreted in the light of the whole context of Malachi 4:1-6. The coming judgment will result in arrogant and evil doers becoming "stubble" and the Lord of hosts will leave them neither "root nor branch." This judgment may very well be the "Jewish holocaust" in the days of Antioch IV some of which is recorded in 1 & 2 Maccabees and Josephus. God certainly brought this Syrian oppression upon the Jews (300-164 B.C.) as a result of their inordinate rejection of the spiritual in favor of the material and physical (see the prophets Haggai and Zechariah who prophesied a generation or so before Malachi). The impending judgment is also in connection with the "Elijah" who is to come. Remember that John the Baptist told the ungodly Jews (especially Pharisees and Sadducees) who went out to hear him preach, "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matt. 3:10). John the Baptist preached to get people to repent and thus be healed of their rebellion and guilt. John the Baptist even immersed people in water "unto the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). While it is certainly true that Christ came bringing the perfect righteousness of God by grace through his atoning death, it is doubtful that Malachi here speaks of the Messiah in person. It is interesting that the Hebrew compound word bikenaphyah, translated, "in its wings" has a feminine suffix—making it even more doubtful that Malachi is predicting the person of the Messiah. Instead, the thought is that righteousness itself is the "sun" that will arise with healing in its rays or beams. This divine righteousness will be as accessible to all as is the light from the rays of the sun. Those, even in Malachi's own time, who feared Jehovah and repented of their "robbing" of God and "adulteries," etc., would bask in the light of God's imputed righteousness and would go forth from their

guilt and frolic as calves turned out of a stall into the green pasture. Being right with God (i.e., being “righteous”) in any age or dispensation brings “healing” to the guilty heart! It did for the people of the OT (e.g., David in the Psalms), and it will do so for the people of the NT. Of course, it takes the perfect, gracious righteousness in the redemption accomplished by Christ to make anyone completely guiltless before God—however, doing righteousness is what heals the sinful heart! John said it this way, “If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that every one who does right is born of him.” (1 John 2:29; see also 1 John 3:1-24). “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous.” (1 John 3:7). Doing right, even in submitting to being baptized in the name of Christ, is for “an appeal to God for a clear conscience” (1 Pet. 3:21). For some Christians, doing right in what they are giving of possessions and time to the Lord would bring the “sun of righteousness with healing in its wings.

Out of that Syrian holocaust under the idolatrous and merciless persecution of Antiochus IV, God would save a righteous remnant. It appeared during those dreadful years of the Syrian oppression that Antiochus IV would accomplish his goal of genocide and eradicate the whole Jewish race and burn all their Scriptures. But God perpetuated a faithful few (Malachi 3:16-18) like Simeon the aged prophet (Lk. 2:25-35) and Anna, the prophetess (Lk. 2:36-38) and numerous others Mary, Joseph, Peter, Andrew, James & John, etc. A remnant survived, made up of those who individually feared Jehovah (Malachi 4:2) and thought upon his name. These who were “looking for the redemption of Israel” would become God’s true “Israel.” These would be there when the “Elijah” who was to come appeared on the scene—none other than John the Baptist as we have pointed out in question #1 of this lesson. “The great and terrible day of the Lord” was to come after this “Elijah” (John the Baptist) came. I believe the “great and terrible day of the Lord” in this case was the coming into the world of the Messiah the first time. JESUS SAID PLAINLY THAT HE CAME INTO THIS WORLD FOR “JUDGMENT” (John 9:39; see also John 3:19,36; 12:31; 16:11; 1 Pet. 4:17). Jesus came the first time to separate the wheat from the chaff! That’s what “Elijah” (John the Baptist) preached (Matt. 3:7-12; Luke 3:7-22). The old Elijah of 1 Kings 17ff, more than any other prophet of the pre-exilic period, tried to turn the hearts of the “fathers and children” of God’s people to the pure worship of Jehovah as revealed in the law of Moses. The second “Elijah” (John the Baptist) was uniquely sent just ahead of the coming of God’s Messiah (“Anointed One”) to turn the tiny remnant of godly Jews of the first century A.D. back to the spiritual essence of God’s law so they would be prepared to receive in faith and obedience the Savior and Redeemer of mankind. Malachi uses the Hebrew word *shoov*, translated “turn” to describe John the Baptist’s mission. It is often translated in the OT “repent” (see 1 Kings 8:47-48; Ezek. 8:6; 18:30; 24:14). IT MEANS, “CHANGE YOUR WAYS.” Some Jews gave heed to the second “Elijah” (John the Baptist). Most did not. Consequently, Jehovah destroyed their city and their land. When Jesus left their temple “desolate and forsaken” (Matt. 23:38), it was left a carcass, fit only for the cultures (Matt. 24:28). The vultures or eagles (Roman army) came and the carcass was devoured, A.D. 70.

The book of Malachi serves as a fitting close to God’s ancient revelation to his people. A final appeal is made to the people to purge out the wickedness found among them and to render to Jehovah an acceptable service. A final warning is given of

inevitable judgment upon the wicked. And a final promise is made of Jehovah's righteousness to be provided in the Messiah who would be the personal bond ("covenant") of unity between Jehovah and his people. There was no more that Jehovah could say or do; therefore no word was heard from God for 400 years until the silence was broken by the "messenger" who would introduce the Messiah. This "messenger's" ("Elijah") call to repent was followed by the words of grace spoken by the Messiah in whom God would do his work of redemption and reveal himself and his will for mankind. It was during this 400-year-gap between the OT and the NT that some of the most severe testing of the Jewish people occurred (the Syrian holocaust and the corruption of Jewish leadership under the Hasmoneans, i.e., Maccabees). WHEN JOHN THE BAPTIST ("ELIJAH") CAME ON THE SCENE TO END THE 400-YEAR-SILENCE OF GOD, THE ORDINARY JEWISH PEOPLE WERE MORE THAN READY TO HEAR SOME "GOOD NEWS" ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD! The problem was, the Jewish people had become so materialistic and worldly-minded about the nature of the "kingdom of God" on earth, they clamored for political and economic revolution but thought little about the spiritual revolution that the Messiah was to bring! That is why, after all the oppression the Jews had been subjected to in the 600 years since their exile in Babylon, the majority of the Jews rejected the Messiah when He came and crucified him (John 1:11).

Introduction to Paul T. Butler Th.D

Paul was born in Springfield Missouri and graduated from Conway High School prior to enlistment in the US Navy. He began serious bible study with correspondence courses from San Jose Bible College. He later enrolled in Ozark Bible College and acquired his Bachelor of Theology degree June of 1961. He received a Master of Biblical Literature degree from Ozark in May of 1973. He received a Doctorate of Theology from The Theological University of America in October of 1990.

Paul taught at Ozark Christian College from 1960 to 1997. He also served many years as registrar for the college.

Introduction to the Sound Bible Study project.

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