

Session 7:

Malachi

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Session 7: Malachi

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Malachi 1

Malachi 1:1: "The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi."

THE BOOK OF MALACHI is the last book in the Old Testament. Although the book has very little to say about the person who wrote it or the time it was written, Malachi's ministry appears to have taken place late in Israel's history. By this time Israel had returned from Babylon, rebuilt the Temple, and offered sacrifices for so long that they had come to despise the entire sacrificial system. Their initial desire to obey God and do what was right was gone, and they had stopped caring. This means that Malachi prophesied long after the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. In fact, he may have been the last Old Testament prophet (aside from John the Baptist, whose ministry took place while the Mosaic Law was still in place, but he's something of a special case).

After Malachi there were 400 years of silence from God. No more prophets arose and no more books of the Bible were given. Nothing else happened until the birth of John the Baptist (who was born before Christ) and the advent of the New Testament. Malachi represents the end – and it is full of condemnation of Israel.

The Burden of Prophecy

Before we go any further, do you see how this prophecy is called “the burden of the word of the Lord”? That's not as

unusual as you might think. Prophecies were often called burdens in the Old Testament. For example:

Isaiah 13:1: “The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see.”

Isaiah 17:1: “The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap.”

Isaiah 19:1: “The burden of Egypt. Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it.”

Isaiah 21:11: “The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?”

You might be thinking that it's a bit strange to call a prophecy a burden, but you have to remember that being a prophet was not a fun job. Yes, prophets did receive words from the Lord, but those messages were not appreciated by the Israelites. Israel had a long history of hating God's prophets. They persecuted them, imprisoned them, and even put them to death. Israel didn't honor God's prophets; they despised them. Because of this, being a prophet was a one-way ticket to being hated for your entire life. In fact, things got so bad for Jeremiah that he decided to quit – but then found out that he couldn't:

Jeremiah 20:7: "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me.

8 For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily.

9 Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay."

Jeremiah knew that continuing to tell people what God had to say would only cause them to hate him more. He desperately wanted to stop, but he couldn't stop. The Word of the Lord was like a fire burning inside him. He *had* to speak, despite the terrible consequences. So he did – and he was hated and imprisoned for it. Other prophets were actually murdered.

So you can see that these prophecies really were burdens. They made life terrible for the prophets who received them. However, they were also burdens in another way. This is what God once told Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 3:16: "And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,

17 Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.

18 When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

19 Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way,

he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.”

As you can see, these prophecies were serious business. If God gave a prophet a message and he failed to deliver it, God would hold *the prophet* responsible for the death of those people. At that point it wasn't just the fault of the wicked anymore; it was the prophet's fault as well for failing to warn them about God's coming judgment. The only way the prophet would be spared is if he faithfully delivered the messages that God gave him. And who was he delivering them to? Why, to a people who hated him and wanted to kill him for relaying what God had to say.

So the prophets were in a terrible bind. If they did nothing then God would hold them responsible for the death of others. If they did their job then the people would hate them and kill them. These prophecies really *were* burdens. Being a prophet meant that you were destined to a life of suffering and pain. The fact that so many prophets were faithful and did what God required is truly remarkable. It testifies to their faithfulness in the face of persecution. They set amazing examples.

The Edomites

Malachi begins by talking about Esau's descendents, the Edomites:

Malachi 1:2: “I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob,
3 And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and

his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.

4 Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the Lord of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever.”

To understand what Malachi is talking about we need to back up a bit and study some history. As you might recall, Abraham had two sons: Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman Hagar, and Isaac, the son of his wife Sarah. Even though Ishmael was the firstborn, God rejected him. God chose Isaac because he was the son that fulfilled God's promise, and He blessed Isaac's line. Ishmael was rejected and Isaac was chosen. Isaac, in turn, had two sons: Jacob and Esau. Once again God chose one of these sons and rejected the other. He chose to bless Jacob and use him to create the twelve tribes of Israel – but He rejected Esau.

Even though God rejected Ishmael, He still blessed him (because he was Abraham's son) and Ishmael became the father of 12 princes (Genesis 17:20). Likewise, even though God rejected Esau he still blessed him as well, and Esau became the father of the Edomites. (Edom, by the way, comes from a word that means “red”. Esau got that name because he traded his birthright for some red pottage [Genesis 25:30]). Genesis 36 lists the descendents of Esau, and tells us about the dukes and kings that came from his line. The Edomites lived in Mount Seir.

Now, the Edomites were not friends of Israel. When God delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh and they were going through the wilderness, Moses asked for permission to go through their land. The Edomites refused them passage:

Numbers 20:17: “Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king's high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders.

18 And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword.

19 And the children of Israel said unto him, We will go by the high way: and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it: I will only, without doing anything else, go through on my feet.

20 And he said, Thou shalt not go through. And Edom came out against him with much people, and with a strong hand.

21 Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him.”

Yet, despite this, God said that Israel was not allowed to abhor the Edomites:

Deuteronomy 23:7: “Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother: thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian; because thou wast a stranger in his land.”

When God gave the land of Canaan to Israel as a possession, He did not give them the territory of the Edomites. Israel's land bordered upon Edom (Joshua 15:1) but they were not allowed to take it. The Edomites were given a possession of

their own.

However, the Edomites continued to cause trouble for Israel. During the days of Saul, Doeg the Edomite betrayed David and told Saul that the priest Ahimelech had helped him. Saul responded by slaughtering all of the priests (85 of them) and the entire town of Nob – including the men, women, and children. (You can find the whole story in 1 Samuel 22). When David became king and ruled over Israel, he put garrisons in Edom and forced them to become his servants:

2 Samuel 8:14: “And he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David’s servants. And the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went.”

This temporarily ended Edom's war against Israel, but that peace did not last. When Solomon's son David abandoned God and served false gods, the Lord raised up an enemy against him – Hadad the Edomite (1 Kings 11:14). In the years that followed there was war between Israel and the Edomites. Edom would revolt against Israel (2 Kings 8:22), and Israel would fight against Edom (2 Kings 14:7). When the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and took Israel hostage, the Edomites rejoiced and wanted to see the entire city razed to the ground:

Psalms 137:7: “Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.”

Although God was patient with the Edomites for a long time, His patience did not last forever. God commanded Jeremiah to prophecy judgment against the Edomites. The Lord was going to utterly destroy them:

Jeremiah 49:17: “Also Edom shall be a desolation: every one that goeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss at all the plagues thereof.

18 As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbour cities thereof, saith the Lord, no man shall abide there, neither shall a son of man dwell in it.”

Why did God do this? Because Edom took revenge against Israel:

Ezekiel 25:12: “Thus saith the Lord God; Because that Edom hath dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and hath greatly offended, and revenged himself upon them;

13 Therefore thus saith the Lord God; I will also stretch out mine hand upon Edom, and will cut off man and beast from it; and I will make it desolate from Teman; and they of Dedan shall fall by the sword.

14 And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel: and they shall do in Edom according to mine anger and according to my fury; and they shall know my vengeance, saith the Lord God.”

The prophet Joel said the same thing. Edom had shed innocent blood and God was going to judge them for it:

Joel 3:19: “Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land.”

The prophet Amos tells us that Edom was angry with Israel “for ever” and cast off all pity – and because of their unrelenting hatred they would face the wrath of God:

Amos 1:11: “Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever:
12 But I will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah.”

So what were Edom's sins? He shed innocent blood; he pursued Israel with the sword; he cast off all pity; he was eternally angry with Israel; and he rejoiced to see Jerusalem destroyed and thirsted for even more Jewish blood to be spilled. In other words, Edom was Israel's remorseless and eternal enemy – and because of that, God promised to destroy them just as thoroughly as He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

The entire book of Obadiah is a prophecy against Edom. As we saw earlier, God was angry with Edom over what they did the day God removed Israel from the land and sent them into captivity. The Edomites not only took part in that terrible event, but they made things even worse by cutting off those who tried to escape and by delivering the survivors over to their enemies:

Obadiah 1:11: “In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them.
12 But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither shouldest thou have rejoiced

over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress.

13 Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea, thou shouldest not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity;

14 Neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress.”

When Israel's day of judgment came, the Edomites not only rejoiced over it and boasted about it, but they entered the city, helped plunder it, and then took the survivors and handed them over to their enemies. Edom was glad to see Israel judged and they reveled in it.

Therefore, God said that He would treat Edom the way they treated Israel:

Obadiah 1:15: “For the day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.”

What was going to happen to Edom? They were going to be utterly wiped out, down to the last man – and God was going to use the nation of Israel to do it:

Obadiah 1:18: “And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not

be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the Lord hath spoken it.

19 And they of the south shall possess the mount of Esau; and they of the plain the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead.”

Not only was Israel going to utterly annihilate all of the Edomites, but God was going to give them Edom's land. The consequence of Edom's many sins was going to be total and complete destruction.

So what happened to Edom? Well, that's where things get interesting. The Edomites ultimately were removed from their land, but Israel played no role in it. Instead in the 5th century BC a people called the Nabateans defeated them. They were forced to leave their land and moved to Idumea.¹

However, do you remember what the prophecy foretold? God specifically said that *Israel* was going to destroy the Edomites. He didn't say that some other random group of people would make them leave their homes and then they would gradually disappear over time. God said He would destroy them the way He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah; that He would use Israel to burn as a fire and utterly wipe them all out – and *that did not happen*. Yet we know that God always keeps His Word. This *must* mean that despite what people claim, the Edomites were not “lost to history” but have survived – and that their judgment, prophesied long ago in the book of Obadiah, is still in the future.

In the book *Israelestine* by Bill Salus the author spends an entire chapter making the argument that the Palestinians are actually the descendents of the Edomites:

¹ <http://www.gotquestions.org/Edom-Obadiah.html>

Palestinian is the ethnic label tossed about loosely in modern times to identify three primary predominately Arab groups of people: the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip, the Palestinians of the West Bank, and the Palestinian Refugees. These groups inhabit the territories that most closely approach the borders of modern-day Israel, with pocket communities in the surrounding Arab nations. We generally understand that these three groups are comprised of a mixture of peoples who descend from various origins, one of these bring traceable back to Esau, father of the Edomites.

Unlike the Jewish people, who all share a common lineage traceable to the biblical patriarchs of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Palestinians have no such common historical lineage specifically linking them biologically to any distinct ethnicity. Their genealogies can be traced back to the Edomites, Egyptians, Assyrians, Philistines, Sidonians, Ammonites, Moabites, Yemenites, Saudi Arabians, Moroccans, Christians from Greece, Muslim Sherkas from Russia, and Muslims from Bosnia, just to name a few. (Israelestine, p89)

The Bible tells us that the Edomites will play a role in the end-times wars against Israel (Psalm 83:6), and that in that day God will fulfill His promise to utterly wipe them out. In fact, we are told that the battle between Jesus Christ and the Antichrist will occur in the ancient land of Edom:

Isaiah 63:1: “Who is this that cometh from

Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.

2 Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?

3 I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.

4 For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.”

The day will come when the Lord Jesus Christ will return to Earth to battle the armies of the Antichrist. In that day He will utterly wipe them out, and His garments will be stained with the blood of His enemies.

There is a lot more that can be said about all of this, but since it doesn't have a lot to do with the book of Malachi we should probably return to the subject at hand. The point I want to make is that in Malachi's day, Israel was saying “We're nothing special. Sure, God loves us, but God loves Esau's descendents too.” Now that you've seen Edom's history and what God had to say about them, it should be obvious that Israel's claim was pure insanity. By the time of Malachi God had already sent prophet after prophet to proclaim judgment against Edom for their great acts of wickedness. In fact, God had already told Israel that He was planning to *completely annihilate* the Edomites and give Israel their land! For Israel to say “Well, God loves Edom too” was simply ridiculous. As Malachi pointed out in verse 4, God had plans for Edom all right – plans to utterly ruin anything they attempted:

Malachi 1:4: “Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the Lord of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever.

5 And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The Lord will be magnified from the border of Israel.”

Since Edom was perpetually angry with Israel, God would be perpetually angry with Edom. The Lord would treat them as they treated others. In fact, God's judgment against them would be so spectacular that when it happened people would realize God was responsible and would magnify Him.

What is God saying here? That *Israel* was God's chosen people, not the Edomites. God had a unique relationship with Israel, and Israel needed to start taking that seriously.

A Lack of Honor

The problem was that Israel refused to take God seriously. They had lost all interest in honoring Him:

Malachi 1:6: “A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?”

Israel no longer feared God; instead they treated Him with bland indifference. They no longer honored Him; instead they did as they pleased. Israel was back in the land and had what they wanted, so they had grown lazy and indifferent. They *stopped caring*, and this greatly offended God.

The Lord was particularly unhappy with the priests, who He accused of despising His name. Since the priests were called to honor the name of God, that was a very serious charge. The Israelites were so concerned about honoring God's name that they wouldn't even say God's name out loud. Many Jews to this day write the word God as G-d in order to not accidentally profane it.

Yet for all that outward show they were *still* profaning the name of God. What God cared about was not their flowery words but their *actions* – and their actions were terrible. This is how Jesus later described them:

Matthew 15:7: “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,

8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

Sadly, things are no different today – and it is not just the Jews who are guilty of this. It astonishes me how people who are clearly not Christians come to church and sing songs of praise to God, and then go home and live lives of depraved wickedness. They say one thing in church and then they go home and do something else. God *hates* this! Hypocrisy greatly offends Him. If you praise God on Sunday and then live like the devil the rest of the week, God will utterly reject you.

The problem is not that your sins somehow cause you to

lose your salvation. After all, we are saved by grace, not by works. No, the problem is that *your actions reveal what is really in your heart*. You can say whatever you want, but the truth comes out in the way you live your life. Genuine Christians will live a life that honors God. Yes, they may fall into sin and do terrible things (as Peter did, who once denied Christ three times), but they still have a heart for holiness and they long to be more like Christ. The reason genuine believers hate their sin and seek to live holy lives isn't because they are trying to earn their salvation; it's because Christ has changed them and given them a different heart. The good works are a *result* of their salvation.

However, if the good works are missing then the salvation is missing as well. If you are living like the devil then that means Christ hasn't changed you, and if Christ hasn't changed you then you haven't been saved. It doesn't matter how many songs you sing on Sunday and it doesn't matter if you say all the right words; *if your life does not back it up then it is all for nothing*. As Jesus said, "in vain do they worship me".

These priests of Malachi's day may have been saying all the right words, but their heart was far from God. We know this because of their actions – and their actions were particularly terrible:

Malachi 1:7: "Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible.

8 And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts."

In order to understand this complaint we need a little bit

of background. Under the Levitical system the sacrifices that were offered to God had to be perfect. There are a lot of verses that say this, but I'll quote just a few of them:

Leviticus 1:10: "And if his offering be of the flocks, namely, of the sheep, or of the goats, for a burnt sacrifice; he shall bring it a male without blemish."

Leviticus 3:1: "And if his oblation be a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offer it of the herd; whether it be a male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the Lord."

Leviticus 4:3: "If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the Lord for a sin offering."

Leviticus 4:32: "And if he bring a lamb for a sin offering, he shall bring it a female without blemish."

Leviticus 6:6: "And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the Lord, a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest:"

Leviticus 9:2: "And he said unto Aaron, Take thee a young calf for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before the Lord."

These are by no means the only verses that command

this. Any priest who had even a passing knowledge of Leviticus (and priests were required to have *far more* than just a “passing knowledge”!) would know that it was *absolutely forbidden* to offer God anything other than perfect sacrifices.

The reason for this is because the sacrificial system looked forward to the coming of Christ. Since God is just, He could not simply sweep our sins under the rug and pretend that they never happened. In order for us to be forgiven our debt had to be paid, and that meant someone had to face the wrath of God on our behalf. If someone else suffered and died in our place then we could be set free, but that person would have to be sinless – otherwise they would be suffering for their own sins. We could only be forgiven if a perfect sacrifice was offered in our place.

That is exactly what Christ did. He was the perfect Lamb of God – the flawless sacrifice. He came to Earth, led a sinless life, and then suffered and died for our sins. We can be saved because He took upon Himself the punishment that we deserved. In fact, since Christ alone paid our debt, no one can be saved apart from Him. Our sins must be paid in order to avoid the wrath of God, and only the death of Christ can pay for our sins.

The priests of Malachi's day were committing a great sin when they offered polluted sacrifices, and this should have been obvious to them. To illustrate their sin God told them to take the diseased animals they had been offering to Him and try serving them to their ruler for dinner. After all, if it's good enough for God then it ought to be good enough for their ruler, right? Now, obviously, if the priests tried that their governor would become quite upset, because who would want to eat something that was riddled with disease? *Yet that was what they were offering their holy God.*

As you can imagine, God was *very* unhappy about this. He made it clear that He would not accept such offensive offerings:

Malachi 1:9: “And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the Lord of hosts.

10 Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.”

God had utterly rejected them. It didn't matter that the priests were saying all the right things and were singing all the right songs. Their actions made it clear that they had no love of God. The sacrifices that they were offering were utterly disgusting, and God made it clear that He would not accept them. They were wasting their time; all those offerings were for nothing. God was *not* pleased with them, and He demanded that they treat Him with the honor He was due.

My Name Shall Be Great Among The Gentiles

In fact, God went even further than that. He told them something utterly shocking:

Malachi 1:11: “For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.

12 But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the Lord is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible.”

Now, remember, Israel thought that the Gentiles were worthless dogs. They believed that they alone were God's holy people, and everyone else was just human trash. To this day many Jews believe that they are saved simply because they are Abraham's descendents. Jesus Himself rebuked them for that belief:

Luke 3:8: “Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”

Jesus told them that what He really wanted were people who would honor Him *with their lives*. He longed for individuals to serve Him with passion and reverence. God didn't want mere lip service; He wanted people to repent of their sins and live a holy life. He desired spiritual fruit.

Israel, though, wasn't interested in doing that. Instead of honoring God they boasted about their ancestor Abraham and put their faith in their genetic lineage. Instead of giving God perfect sacrifices they offered Him diseased animals that even *they* were unwilling to eat. They refused to honor God.

So God told them that He was going to go to the Gentiles – to the very people Israel had rejected – and that the *Gentiles* would honor God. The Lord's name may have been despised among the Israelites, but it would be great among the heathen. Jesus later repeated this same message to Israel:

Matthew 8:10: “When Jesus heard it, he

marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Whose faith had greatly impressed Jesus? The faith of the *Roman centurion*. Jesus said that He had not seen faith like that among any of the Jews. In fact, Jesus constantly criticized His own disciples as *people of little faith!* He urged them to repent so that one day they might have faith the size of a tiny mustard seed, because their faith was even tinier than that. The disciples were a long, *long* way from having "great faith".

Jesus went on to say that because the Gentiles would hear the Word and believe it, they would enter into Heaven and be with Abraham. However, since Israel rejected the Word and refused to believe it, they would be cast out. God's Word may have been despised in Israel, but it would be great among the Gentiles.

Now, this does not mean that God has rejected Israel; rather, it means that Israel has rejected God. Yet for all that God has still not abandoned His people. The apostle Paul talked about this in his letter to the Romans:

Romans 11:1: "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.
2 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew..."

Not only has God *not* cast away His people, but one day He would give them a different heart and save them:

Romans 11:25: “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

28 As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the father's sakes.”

Israel is still God's beloved people, and God has not forgotten them. As you can see, the Bible tells us in Romans 11:26 that one day “all Israel shall be saved”. At the end of the Tribulation period the armies of the Antichrist will come against the Jews to wipe them all out. When that happens Israel will repent of her sins and cry out for their Messiah to return and save them. In that day there will be great repentance:

Zechariah 12:8: “In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them.

9 And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and

upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

11 In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.”

When the whole world has gathered against the surviving Jews and are about to annihilate them, the Jews will repent of their rejection of their Messiah and will mourn for Him. When they do that Jesus will return and defend Israel *in person*. He will destroy all the nations that came against Jerusalem and will kill the Antichrist and his armies.

So all Israel *will* be saved – at the last possible moment. But from that day on they will be a different people. Their sin will be behind them forever and they will never again go astray.

Cursed Be The Deceiver

The first chapter of Malachi ends on a note of rebuke:

Malachi 1:13: “Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord.

14 But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto

the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.”

The attitude of the priests of Malachi's day was utterly deplorable. They were actually complaining about what a weariness the whole sacrificial system was! They hated serving God; they thought it was tiring and dumb. They couldn't be bothered to give God their best; instead they offer Him their worst. Then, after all that, they acted surprised that God was unhappy with them!

Notice in verse 14 how gracious the Lord is. Even though the Mosaic Law strictly forbade giving sacrifices that were not perfect, God was willing to make allowances. If the person was so poor that all that they had was an imperfect animal, God was willing to accept it. Since they were giving God everything they had, He would not demand something they did not have to give. We see this same thing in the New Testament where Jesus honored the widow who gave her two mites. Although the amount of the offering was trivial to the disciples, it was not trivial to God because she was literally giving Him everything she owned. God found that highly acceptable.

But as we can see, that's not what was going on. People weren't offering flawed animals out of poverty and dire need. Instead, people were keeping the best animals for themselves and were giving God the *worst* that they had. They were taking animals that weren't even fit to be eaten and were offering them as burnt offerings! They were treating God in a way that they would never have treated their ruler. They were openly despising God, and God cursed them for it.

“I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts”. He is indeed a great King; in fact, He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. There has never been anyone greater, and there will never be for all the ages of eternity. God deserves our very best – but do we

give it to Him? Do we honor God as He demands to be honored, or do we instead keep the best for ourselves and give God trash that we don't even want to begin with? How are we treating the Most High God? Do we honor Him with our lips while our heart is far from Him?

Malachi 2

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER we saw that the Lord was angry with Israel's priests because they despised the offerings of the Lord. Instead of offering their best, the priests were sacrificing animals that were diseased and torn and weren't even fit to be eaten. The priests were making a mockery of the entire sacrificial system and God was not happy about it.

After the Lord condemned them for their terrible actions, He told the priests that if they did not change their ways He would curse them:

Malachi 2:1: “And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you.

2 If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.”

When God says that He will curse them, He is being quite serious about it. God has *very* little tolerance for priests who abuse the sacrificial system – which is something we can see if we go back and study Israel's history.

The Sins of Eli

For example, when Israel was in the wilderness in the

days of Moses, two of Aaron's sons offered strange fire before the Lord. God responded to this act of disobedience by immediately striking them both dead:

Leviticus 10:1: “And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not.

2 And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.

3 Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.”

Nadab and Abihu refused to honor the Lord and did something that God did not command. Since they were abusing the sacrificial system, God killed them both. Failing to glorify God cost them their life. The priests in Malachi's day were not glorifying God either, and God warned them that if they did not change their ways they would find themselves in a lot of trouble.

This is not the only time that priests abused the Lord's offerings. Several hundred years after Nadab and Abihu were killed, the sons of Eli did something even worse:

I Samuel 2:12: “Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord.

13 And the priest's custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand;

14 And he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in

Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither.

15 Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw.

16 And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not, I will take it by force.

17 Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord."

The priests were doing several things wrong here. First of all, the priests were taking whatever they wanted from the sacrifice. However, God said they were only allowed to take the right shoulder and the wave breast:

Leviticus 7:34: "For the wave breast and the heave shoulder have I taken of the children of Israel from off the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them unto Aaron the priest and unto his sons by a statute for ever from among the children of Israel."

This meant the priests were taking a part of the offering *that did not belong to them*. On top of that, the priests were not allowed to eat the fat. All of the fat of the offering belonged to the Lord:

Leviticus 3:16: "And the priest shall burn them upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire for a sweet savour: all the fat is the Lord's."

As you can see, instead of honoring God's offerings as a holy thing the priests were literally stealing from the Lord. They were treating the sacrifices as an all-you-can-eat barbeque. The people knew that what the priests were doing was wrong, but they didn't have a choice; if the people didn't give them what they wanted then the priests would take it by force.

God was very unhappy about this. He told Eli that what he was allowing his sons to do was wrong:

1 Samuel 2:27: “And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house?
28 And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel?
29 Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?
30 Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.”

As punishment, God was going to kill both of Eli's sons on the same day and make his descendents destitute forever:

1 Samuel 2:31: “Behold, the days come, that I

will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house.

32 And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever.

33 And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age.

34 And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them.

35 And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.

36 And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread."

Since Hophni and Phinehas despised the offerings of the Lord and literally stole from God, and since their father Eli refused to stop them, God was going to kill Hophni and Phinehas in one day. God was also going to kill *all of their descendents*, so that none of them would ever reach old age. On top of all that, God was going to curse those descendents so greatly that they would beg to be put in a priests office *in order to avoid starving to death*. As you can see, despising the sacrifices was a *really big deal*.

Did Eli repent after this? No. Did he restrain his sons and beg God for mercy and forgiveness? No. Eli did nothing – but God did everything He promised. The Lord killed Hophni, Phinehas, *and Eli* all on the same day:

1 Samuel 4:16: “And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son?

17 And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken.

18 And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.”

But that's not all. God promised to kill all of Eli's descendents, and that's exactly what He did. You see, Phinehas had a son named Ichabod, and Ichabod had a son named Ahitub:

1 Samuel 14:3: “And Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the Lord's priest in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people knew not that Jonathan was gone.”

Ahitub had a son named Ahimelech:

1 Samuel 22:11: “Then the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests that were in Nob:

and they came all of them to the king.”

Do you know what happened to Ahimelech, of the line of Eli? God used King Saul to slaughter him and all of his relatives:

1 Samuel 22:16: “And the king said, Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father's house.

17 And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the Lord: because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the Lord.

18 And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod.

19 And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.

20 And one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David.”

There was only one survivor to the massacre: Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech. Did his life have a happy ending? No. You see, Abiathar later helped Solomon's brother Adonijah launch a rebellion. After Solomon put down the rebellion he spared Abiathar's life but he removed him from the priesthood:

1 Kings 2:26: “And unto Abiathar the priest said

the king, Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou art worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted.

27 So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the Lord; that he might fulfil the word of the Lord, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.”

God promised to remove Eli's line from the priesthood and deal death and destruction to all of his descendents, and that is exactly what He did. Since Hophni and Phinehas stole from God and despised His offerings, God killed them both. Since Eli honored his sons above God and allowed them to defile people's offerings, God cursed all of his descendents to a life of pain and an early death. When God said He would curse those who despised His sacrifices, *He was not kidding.*

No Rest For The Wicked

As you can see, God takes His offerings *very seriously*. Those who despise them – as the priests in Malachi's day were doing – were taking their very lives into their hand. When God said that He would curse them, *this is what He was talking about*. If the priests had even a passing knowledge of their own history they would have known all about the terrible, awful things that God did to priests who despised His offerings. They should have remembered what God did to the house of Eli, but they simply didn't care.

God was very graphic when He told these corrupt priests

exactly what He thought of them:

Malachi 2:3: “Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.”

Not only did God utterly despise the sacrifices they were offering, but He considered them to be dung. He *hated* them. When it comes to His honor, God is very direct and does not mince words. Look at what Jesus told the Pharisees:

Matthew 23:15: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.”

Matthew 23:27: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

Matthew 23:33: “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”

All of these condemnations were given *in a single sermon!* These men were supposed to be the religious leaders of the day, but instead they were incredibly wicked men who were doing incredibly wicked things. Instead of leading the people to

God they were leading them to Hell – and Jesus had some *very* strong language for them.

People don't seem to take God very seriously – both back then and in our own day. We have the idea that God is a warm, loving God who only wishes the best for people and who would never hurt anyone. We seem to forget that while God does offer forgiveness and grace, God has promised to punish those who refuse to repent. He is merciful to those who seek His mercy, but He is full of wrath to those who hate Him.

There will come a day when the opportunity to be forgiven will close, and the day of the Lord's wrath will come. When God pours out His wrath upon the wicked He will do so without pity. In the days of Ezekiel God showed the prophet what people were doing in the Temple itself – worshiping a false God. The Lord was not happy about this:

Ezekiel 8:16: “And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east.

17 Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose.

18 Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.”

God said that since these people did such terrible things, He would utterly crush them and show them no pity whatsoever. Notice how God said in verse 18 that even though they would scream in pain and beg for mercy, God would refuse to hear them. In the book of Proverbs God said that He would actually *laugh* at them when the day of His wrath came:

Proverbs 1:24: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;

25 But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:

26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;

27 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you."

Since they rejected God and would not repent, God would show them no pity in day of their judgment. Instead He promised to crush them and actually *laugh* at their pain. God is merciful to those who seek His mercy, but He is utterly ruthless to those who reject it. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said that He would be merciful to those who showed mercy to others (Matthew 5:7). However, God also said that He would show no mercy to those who did not show mercy to others:

James 2:13: "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment."

In fact, God promised to pour out His wrath *forever* upon those who have rejected His mercy and refused His forgiveness. He will torment those wicked people for all of eternity in His presence, and they will spend all of eternity in unbearable pain.

Look at what God promised to do to those who took the Mark of the Beast:

Revelation 14:9:” And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,

10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.”

This is who God is. He will be merciful to those who repent and seek His mercy, and He will be unbearable to those who reject Him. Notice that God said He would pour out His wrath “without mixture”. In other words, He will not dilute His wrath in the slightest, or show the tiniest bit of mercy or compassion. God will torment these wicked men day and night for all of eternity, with no hope of release and no chance of anything other than unending, unbearable pain. Even though these people cannot bear the wrath of God and cannot endure the eternal pain, that will never change God's mind or persuade Him to back off. He will indeed torment them *forever*. People say that God is not in Hell, but that is a lie. As you can see in verse 10, these people will be tormented “in the presence of the Lamb”. God is quite present in Hell; in fact, *He is the one who is tormenting the wicked*.

Those who refuse to take God seriously are fools. Now is the day to repent; now is the day to seek His forgiveness. Once

the opportunity to be saved passes, there is no going back.

The Covenant With Levi

God reminded the wicked priests of Malachi's day that He had made a covenant with Levi and his descendents. They were to be the holy priests of God, who ministered righteousness and taught the people:

Malachi 2:4: “And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the Lord of hosts.

5 My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.

6 The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.”

The priests were supposed to turn people away from iniquity, not engage in it. They were supposed to be messengers of the Lord. They were supposed to fear the Lord and teach others to do the same. However, the priests were utterly failing at their job. They did not fear the Lord, nor did they honor His name. They ignored the wrath that God poured out on Hophni and Phinehas and despised the sacrifice of the Lord. Instead of teaching people to flee from sin, they engaged in sin and taught others to do the same:

Malachi 2:8: “But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts.”

This is a big deal to God. Do you know what God had to say about those who taught others to sin? He said they would be the least in the kingdom of Heaven:

Matthew 5:19: “Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

People like to claim that there are no ranks in Heaven and that everyone is the same as everyone else, but as you can see that is not the case. God cares about the actions of His people and He does put a difference between the faithful and the faithless. Those who spend their lives engaging in sin and encouraging others to do the same will be condemned for it, and they will be called the least in the kingdom of Heaven. However, those who obey God in all things and teach others to be obedient as well will be highly esteemed and called great. Therefore, if you want to be considered great in God's kingdom then obey God and teach others to be obedient as well. Disobedience will bring shame and disgrace – and you will have no excuse, for God told you all this in advance.

Since the priests despised God, God cursed the priests so that people would despise them:

Malachi 2:9: “Therefore have I also made you

contemptible and base before all the people,
according as ye have not kept my ways, but have
been partial in the law.”

This should not come as any surprise. After all, God honors those who honor Him and curses those who curse Him. He abases the proud and lifts up the humble. We have seen the same thing in our own day. Given all the wickedness and sin that's so prevalent in churches today, is it any wonder that the culture no longer views churches with the same respect that it once did? Given the constant scandals that pastors are getting into and the terrible things that so many of them do, is it any wonder that pastors are no longer held in high esteem? Do we really expect God to continue to honor those who refuse to honor Him?

Treachery

But God has more to talk about. The priests are not the only ones who are engaging in sin. God goes on to say that the people are also dealing treacherously with one another:

Malachi 2:10: “Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?

11 Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god.”

It isn't enough that Judah is despising the Lord's offerings; they are also going after strange gods. Idolatry is a violation of the very first commandment and is a very serious sin in the sight of God. In fact, it's so serious that God promised to cut off all who engaged in it:

Malachi 2:12: "The Lord will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the Lord of hosts."

God is no respecter of persons. It doesn't matter if the man who does this is rich or poor, small or great; He will cut them all off. They may be the wisest scholar in all the land, but it makes no difference. They may even continue to offer sacrifices to the Lord, but that will make no difference either. God demands that we worship and serve Him *alone*. He refuses to share His glory with anyone else:

Isaiah 42:8: "I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images."

It is not enough to say "Well, I am including God in the list of things I'm worshiping, so that should be fine." God demands to be the *only* thing that you worship. Those who start to worship other gods in addition to the Most High God are not honoring the Lord at all. They have fallen into sin and are engaging in paganism, and God is extremely unhappy with them. If you are serving other gods then the Lord doesn't want to have anything to do with your offerings:

Malachi 2:13: "And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the Lord with tears, with

weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand.”

A great example of this is Solomon. While he did build the Temple and serve God, he later started building temples to false gods and serving them as well:

1 Kings 11:4: “For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.

5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

6 And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father.

7 Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon.

8 And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.”

Solomon married women who worshiped false gods, and he followed them in their worship of these idols. Instead of continuing to worship God alone, he started building high places for idolatry. Because of this, God was extremely angry with him and took away the kingdom from his son:

1 Kings 11:11: “Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and

thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant.”

The people of Malachi's day should have learned from Solomon's example – but, sadly, they didn't.

Divorce

But that was not all. There was yet more evil being done by the Jews. Instead of being faithful, they were dealing treacherously with their wives and divorcing them:

Malachi 2:14: “Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

15 And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

16 For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.”

There is a very simple way to translate verse 16: *God hates divorce*. The people of Malachi's day were divorcing their

wives, and God hated that. God said it was a violation of the covenant they had made with their wives, and in divorcing them they were dealing treacherously with them. He commanded them to honor the covenant they had made and not get divorced.

Since there is so little teaching on divorce today, and since there is so much misunderstanding about it, I think it would be wise to take some time to look at what God actually has to say about divorce. The truth is that *God does not like divorce*, and divorce is almost always against His will. While there are valid grounds for getting a divorce, those grounds are very narrow and any divorce that is outside of those grounds is against His will. *Period*. Jesus Himself made it clear that you *cannot* get a divorce for any and every reason:

Matthew 19:3: “The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Notice what happened here. The Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful to get a divorce for any reason, and Jesus said *no*. He explained that marriage is not a man-made construct but is an institution that God Himself established (and that, according to the Most High God, is only between a *man* and a *woman*). When a man and a woman get married God joins them together,

and God does not want anyone to destroy that union. Let me repeat that: marriage is where *God joins two people together*.

This is important. One of the key reasons divorce and remarriage is a sin is because unless the divorce was done for a God-given reason, God does not recognize the divorce. This point is critical to understand. If your divorce was not done for the one reason that God allows, then in God's eyes you are not divorced at all. Remarriage after divorce is no different from having an affair with someone while you are still married to your original spouse. You may be divorced in the eyes of the law, but God does not recognize the separation. The divorce may seem “right” to you and it might make you happy, but God does not recognize it. You may have been living with your new spouse for many years, but God does not recognize the separation. In His eyes you are just cheating on your real spouse.

Jesus went on to explain the only valid grounds for divorce and remarriage:

Matthew 19:7: “They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.”

Jesus was very clear about this: the only valid grounds for divorce and remarriage is fornication. If you divorce your spouse for some other reason and then remarry, you are committing

adultery because *God does not recognize your divorce*. In His eyes you are cheating on your real spouse. If a man marries *someone else* who was divorced for a reason that was not fornication, he is committing adultery because in God's eyes *he is sleeping with someone else's wife*.

So what is fornication? It's very simple: it means you had sex with someone who was not your spouse. If one of the parties in the marriage has done this then the other party (and *only* the other party) may divorce and remarry, and it is not a sin. In that case – and in that case *only* – God recognizes the divorce.

Now, in our day people have invented all kinds of other reasons to justify divorce. People say that divorce is acceptable “if I'm unhappy”, or “if I just don't love my spouse anymore”, or “if we don't get along”, or a thousand other reasons. Practically any and all behavior has become grounds for divorce. But it is worth nothing that Jesus allowed exactly *one* reason for divorce and remarriage, and that is fornication. Jesus Himself said that if you divorced for *any* other reason then you *cannot* remarry.

The bottom line is that if you terminated your marriage *because* of fornication, God recognizes the divorce. If you did *not* terminate your marriage for that reason then God does not recognize the divorce. Any sexual union that happens after your unbiblical divorce is a very serious sin, because in God's eyes you are still married and you are just cheating on your spouse. What God wants you to do is *stop sinning* and get out of your sinful relationship with the other person. Remember, Jesus said in verse 9 that remarriage in that case was adultery – and *God does not want you to be committing adultery!* The whole reason it's adultery is because God still considers you to be married to your original partner *in spite* of what you are doing.

If your spouse has committed actual, physical adultery then God permits divorce and remarriage. If your spouse has *not* committed actual, physical adultery then God does not permit divorce and remarriage. In that case God considers each spouse

to be bound to the marriage as long as they live:

Romans 7:2: “For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.”

1 Corinthians 7:39: “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.”

Remarriage is only permissible *after the spouse dies*. As long as both parties to the marriage are alive, God considers them to be married. It doesn't matter if they are divorced in the eyes of the law; **God still considers them to be married**. Even though they are supposedly divorced and living with someone else, God still considers them to be married. That is why their new marriage is adultery. After all, if their new marriage justified things then *God wouldn't call it adultery in the first place*.

If you got a divorce for some reason other than adultery and then remarried, you are living in sin. It doesn't matter how long you have been remarried; you are still living in sin. If you got a divorce and remarried before you became a Christian and have since come to know the Lord, you are still living in sin. It doesn't matter if your original spouse was a Christian or not: God does not recognize your divorce, and in His eyes you are living in adultery. The reason we know this is because *that is what Jesus said every single time He was asked about this topic*.

So what happens if your spouse is the one who divorces you for a reason that is not fornication? Are you then free to remarry someone else, since you weren't the one who filed for divorce? Jesus actually addressed that question, and the answer is a resounding *no*:

Matthew 5:31: “It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.”

Notice what Jesus said in verse 32. If a man divorces his wife for an unbiblical reason and his wife marries someone else, *the person who marries her is guilty of adultery*. Why? Because *God has not recognized the divorce*. In God's eyes she is still married to her original husband. As you can see, Jesus Himself taught that if your spouse divorces you for an unbiblical reason, you *cannot* remarry. In God's eyes you are still married, and your new marriage is nothing more than an affair.

Some may say “But what if there are children involved?” Well, let me ask you a question: suppose that you cheat on your husband and get pregnant. Do you really think that in God's eyes the child justifies the affair and makes your adulterous union acceptable? Absolutely not! Divorcing your spouse, marrying someone else, and having children is *no different* in God's view from having an affair and getting pregnant. You are *not* actually married to this other person, and the fact that you are having children with someone who is *not* your spouse is an abomination in His sight. Continuing to stay with this new person is a *sin*, not a virtue. The child doesn't justify the situation; instead it makes things much worse.

If you divorced for a reason that was not fornication, you must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to your spouse. If you remarried after an unbiblical divorce, you are living in sin and are cheating on your actual spouse. It is God's will for you to

break off that sinful affair:

I Corinthians 7:10: "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:

11 But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife."

That is God's rule. The Lord was unhappy with the people of Malachi's day because they were violating His rules. They were dealing treacherously with their wives and divorcing them without a just cause. By doing so they were breaking the marriage covenant and profaning God's name, and *God wanted them to stop*.

I have to say that in our day things are not any better. Divorce rates within the Church are not that much better from divorce rates outside it. It is high time we stopped dealing treacherously with our spouses and started taking marriage more seriously.

Where is God?

There is one more topic that is covered in this chapter, and it is a very important one. It seems that the people have wearied the Lord:

Malachi 2:17: "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of

judgment?”

This is a very common complaint – both in Malachi's day and in our own day. People look around and see all the terrible things that wicked people get away with, and they begin to wonder why God is allowing it. Why doesn't God step in and stop it? Does He just not care, or does He actually approve of wickedness? After all, those wicked people are leading happy, healthy, and wealthy lives. That must mean that God likes what they're doing, right?

Even in Bible times people complained about this. Do you remember what Habakkuk said?

Habakkuk 1:1: “The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.

2 O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!

3 Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention.

4 Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.”

Habakkuk was deeply upset because the wicked were literally getting away with murder. Wicked men were oppressing the righteous and God was not stepping in to stop them. Instead of punishing the wicked for what they were doing, God was allowing wicked men to oppress the righteous. Habakkuk thought that was deeply unfair and was only encouraging the wicked to behave even more wickedly.

Asaph had a the very same problem:

Psalm 73:3: “For I was envious at the foolish,
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4 For there are no bands in their death: but their
strength is firm.

5 They are not in trouble as other men; neither
are they plagued like other men.

6 Therefore pride compasseth them about as a
chain; violence covereth them as a garment.

7 Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have
more than heart could wish.

8 They are corrupt, and speak wickedly
concerning oppression: they speak loftily.”

Asaph actually envied the wicked. They had more than heart could wish, and they did not have the problems that other men had. They were full of pride and violence and they led great lives. Not only did crime pay, but it had a great benefits package. These people mocked God and yet got great wealth:

Psalm 73:11: “And they say, How doth God
know? and is there knowledge in the most High?

12 Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper
in the world; they increase in riches.

13 Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and
washed my hands in innocency.

14 For all the day long have I been plagued, and
chastened every morning.”

Asaph pointed out that while the wicked were defying God and becoming extremely wealthy, he was trying to lead a righteous life and was suffering greatly for it. The righteous were in pain while the wicked prospered. It was extremely unfair.

Even Job was upset about this:

Job 21:7: “Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?

8 Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes.

9 Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them.

10 Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf.

11 They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance.”

Job pointed out that the wicked led fantastic lives. Their houses were safe, God was not chastising them, their lives went well, and their children danced. Life really could not be better for these people who hated God and violently oppressed the righteous.

Do you know what God has to say about all these complaints? *Stop it*. Stop suggesting that God approves of evil. Stop saying that God delights in wickedness and couldn't care less about the murder of His children. Stop saying that God doesn't judge sin and is indifferent. All of those things are blasphemous attacks on God's character, and we ought to know better.

After all, God has said repeatedly that He hates the wicked:

Psalm 5:5: “The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.”

Notice that God did not say “I hate the sin but I love the person”. Instead God actually said that *He hates the wicked*. God commands them to stop being wicked or else they will face His wrath for all of eternity. In fact, God even spelled this out in the Ten Commandments themselves:

Exodus 20:4: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.
5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;
6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.”

Did God say that He was indifferent to iniquity? No, He was quite clear that He would punish it. Will God acquit the wicked and let them off the hook? No, He will not:

Nahum 1:3: “The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.”

God hates sin and He hates iniquity. He will judge the wicked for their sins – every last wicked person for every last sin. The only ones who will escape are the righteous. The wicked are in a tremendous amount of trouble:

1 Peter 4:18: “And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

The righteous themselves are scarcely saved; only the blood of Christ separates them from the eternal wrath of God. Since the wicked don't have that, they will face the full force of

His wrath, which will be meted out without the slightest trace of pity.

Why does God delay His wrath? Why does He allow the wicked to do the things that they do? Well, the Bible says it is because He is longsuffering and kind. If God struck a person dead the first time they sinned, everyone who ever lived would have died at a very young age and mankind would have been wiped out. Since all of us have sinned, none of us would have been saved. God restrains His wrath in order to give men a chance to repent:

Romans 2:4: “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”

2 Peter 3:9: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

The Bible tells us to not despise the mercy and goodness of the Lord. Yes, God is merciful to people who do not deserve it; if He wasn't then *all of us would be in Hell right now*. None of us deserve His mercy and yet He gives it to us freely. God is longsuffering and gives people a chance to repent, and that is something we should not despise. The Lord is not slack concerning what He has promised; instead He is seeking to save that which is lost. His priorities are different from ours.

Yes, the wicked will have their day of judgment. The day will come when all men will stand before God and give an account of their life. No one will escape, and every knee will bow:

Philippians 2:9: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The great day of God's judgment is coming:

Revelation 20:11: “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”

Yes, it is true that sometimes in this life the wicked do lead rich and happy lives. But you have to realize that *that is all they get*. The moment their life ends – and their life *always* ends – they will be tormented day and night for all of eternity. When the rich man who was being tormented in Hell begged for a single drop of water, Abraham told him that his days of comfort were over:

Luke 16:23: “And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.”

The wicked get their “good things” in this life and are then tormented forever. The righteous, however, suffer in this life *and then receive good things for the rest of time*. Which deal would *you* rather have? Do you really envy the fate of the wicked?

So do not ask where the God of judgment is or what He is doing, because He is busy trying to seek and save that which is lost. The wicked will get what they deserve in due time. The question is, what are *you* doing? Are you really so short-sighted that you think the wicked are getting a better deal, or that they will somehow put one over on the all-powerful, all-knowing God?

What we *should* do is very simple: we ought to trust God. The Lord is not a fool, nor is He lazy or indifferent, nor does He love sin and smile upon iniquity. We know what God is like because He has told us in His Word; what we ought to do is trust Him. While we may not always understand why God does the things that He does, we must always trust His judgment. After all, He is far wiser than we are and His timing is never off.

Malachi 3

THE THIRD CHAPTER of Malachi begins with an interesting prophecy:

Malachi 3:1: “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.”

On the surface it looks like Malachi is talking about the appearance of John the Baptist. After all, John did appear on the scene before Jesus did, and he did prepare the way for the Lord. There's only one problem with that theory. Whenever John the Baptist explains who he is he always quotes *Isaiah*, not Malachi:

Matthew 3:1: “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,
2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.
3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

John 1:21: “And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.
22 Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us.

What sayest thou of thyself?

23 He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias."

John claimed to be the fulfillment of what *Isaiah* prophesied, not what Malachi prophesied. I think that's because Malachi wasn't prophesying about Christ's first coming; instead he was focused on His *second* coming!

The Messiah Is Coming To Judge The World

Notice how verse 1 says that the Messiah will "suddenly come to his temple". Yes, He will come, but His coming will be full of judgment. It will be difficult for anyone to endure:

Malachi 3:2: "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:"

In Christ's first coming He came as a humble servant. He was meek and mild, and He bore our sins and our iniquities. He had no place to lay His head and He was hated by His own people. The nation of Israel rejected Him, persecuted Him, and ultimately put Him to death. He went as a lamb to the slaughter, because that's what He came to do.

But Malachi sees a day when the Messiah will come suddenly and people will not be able to endure His appearance. He will defeat His enemies and crush all those who opposed Him.

He will act as a refiner's fire: He will seek out all dross and impurities and utterly destroy them. That's not talking about the First Coming, where Christ did none of those things; no, that looks forward to the Second Coming. He intends to purge the sons of Levi so that they stop offering polluted offerings:

Malachi 3:3: “And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.”

As if all that were not clear enough, Malachi specifically says that when the Messiah appears He will be there for the purposes of *judgment*:

Malachi 3:5: “And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts.”

None of those things happened in Christ's first coming – but all of them will happen in the Second Coming. When Christ returns to Earth He will appear very suddenly indeed. The book of Revelation tells us that He will return with the armies of Heaven and will destroy the forces that are arrayed against His people:

Revelation 19:11: “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”

When the Lord returns to Earth the second time He will not be coming back as a meek and mild baby in the manger. Instead He will be returning as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He will carry out the wrath of a very angry God, and will judge the sins of those who have opposed Him. None of the Antichrist's followers will survive:

Revelation 19:17: “And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God;

18 That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.

19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.

20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

21 And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.”

Verse 21 tells us that the birds will eat the flesh of the Antichrist's followers, because Jesus is going to kill them all. These will not be killed by the armies of Heaven that follow Christ; no, Jesus will execute all of them *personally*.

But He's not done. He will then gather the nations that survived the Tribulation and judge them for their wickedness:

Matthew 25:31: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. . .

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

This judgment will occur after the Tribulation is over but before the Millennial Kingdom begins. As you can see, Jesus will judge the nations and put to death all who did not serve Him. When Christ's Millennial reign begins, the only people left in the entire world will be Christians; everyone else will have been executed by Jesus. The nations of this world have until Jesus returns to get right with God; if they fail to do so then they will face His wrath.

Now, a lot of people have this idea that the God of the Old Testament was harsh and cruel and unforgiving, but then Jesus came along and He was completely different. Jesus was loving and kind and merciful and would never hurt anyone. They see a huge difference between the God of the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament.

Those who believe that are ignorant of their Bibles. Yes, God did destroy the Old World in the Flood because of their sins, but only after Noah spent *a hundred years* warning people to repent. All those who repented could have joined him on the Ark and been saved – but no one did. God made a way for people to save their lives, but no one took it. So, since people refused to be saved and rejected God's mercy, God killed them.

Yes, it is true that God judged Israel for her sins and carried them away to Babylon into captivity. But He only did that after spending *centuries* sending prophets to His people warning them to repent or else they would face judgment. The people could have repented, but instead they abused His prophets and refused to listen. So, since they rejected God's mercy, He judged them for their wickedness. It is not an evil thing for God to judge people for their sins – especially when a nation continues to sin for *centuries* and refuses all of God's warnings to repent of their evil deeds.

People seem to think that Jesus is a nice, harmless person, but that's not true. Although Jesus is fully man, He is also fully God – a part of the eternal Trinity. In the Old Testament God destroyed the whole world in the Flood. In the New Testament Jesus said He will return to Earth and slaughter all of the armies of the Antichrist *personally* and let birds eat their dead bodies. He then said He would gather all nations before Him and put to death all those who did not repent of their sins. As you can see, God has not changed. He has always been merciful to those who repent, and He has always been against those who continued in wickedness.

There are consequences for sin. Jesus commands all men to repent and be saved, but those who do not repent will suffer the eternal wrath of God. Jesus does offer to forgive you – a forgiveness He purchased with His own blood. If you do not take advantage of that forgiveness then *of course* you will experience God's wrath. As Jesus said, “depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire”. You could have been saved but you refused; your blood is on your own head.

In Jesus' Second Coming He will indeed be a refiner's fire who will purge away the dross and leave the Earth with only righteous people. All of the wicked will be utterly wiped out. As you can see, Malachi 3 is clearly talking about Christ's *Second* Coming, not the first.

God Never Changes

God has been incredibly patient with the Israelites:

Malachi 3:6: “For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

7 Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?”

The reason the nation of Israel has survived is because God never changes. This is an important theological point. God is utterly perfect and complete in every way, which means He is not growing or increasing in knowledge. He does not change over time; He is still exactly the same as He was before He created the world. God will always be who He is now. People think that God changed between the Old and New Testaments, but that is not the case. *God never changes*.

This is good news, because it's the only thing that has kept Israel alive. God made Israel a lot of promises, and since God does not change He is going to keep them. Israel, though, has been utterly faithless over the years. They have rejected God, killed His prophets, and refused to listen to the Messiah – choosing to put Him to death instead of believing on Him.

But despite all of their disobedience God has not changed. Even though Israel was not faithful, God will still keep His promises. He will not abandon His people. He will save them in the end and bring them to repentance – but that is a subject for another time.

The faithfulness of God should be a source of great comfort to us. Even though we may fail God, He will never fail us. We may not keep our promises but God will always keep His. God is faithful, and will always do everything that He promised. We can have full faith and confidence in God because He cannot fail and no one can stop Him. Nothing can keep God from doing exactly what He said He would do.

Tithing

However, Israel was failing to live up to the Mosaic Law. Not only had the Levites been despising the offerings of the Lord, but the nation of Israel had failed to pay their tithes. This was a serious matter, and God threatened to curse Israel if they did not repent.

The next few verses are probably some of the most misused verses in the entire Bible:

Malachi 3:8: “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

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

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

11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit

before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.

12 And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts.”

I have a great deal to say about the topic of tithing, but since I'm limited in both time and space I will keep it brief. (For the record, I have a much more detailed examination of this subject; what follows is an abbreviated version of that teaching.)

In order to understand what the problem is and why this passage has been so misused, we need to go back and study Israel's history. In Numbers 8 the Lord gave a series of ordinances that concern a group of people called the Levites. In case you're not familiar with them, the Levites were given the job of maintaining the tabernacle:

Numbers 8:19: “And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel: that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary.”

The reason the Levites were tasked with this job is because in the Old Testament, before Jesus came, the Israelites were not allowed to interact directly with God. You see, Israel (like everyone else) was sinful and unholy, and if they approached God in their unholiness they would die. In order to save their lives the Lord appointed the tribe of Levi to take care of the tabernacle, and taught them how to interact with God. The Levites approached God on behalf of the people, and the people's lives were spared.

When the land of Canaan was given to the Israelites, the tribe of Levi was not given a portion of the land (Numbers 18:20). Instead they were commanded to dwell in a series of cities that were set aside for them (Joshua 21). The tithe was given to them as their inheritance:

Numbers 18:21: “And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. ...

24 But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as a heave offering unto the Lord, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.”

However, the Levites did more than just maintain the Temple. God designed Israel to be a theocracy, and the Levites served as the nation's government. They were the judicial system: cases were brought to them and they issued judgments (Deuteronomy 17:9-12). The Levites also served as the nation's education system and were supposed to teach the people and guide the nation. They were not just holy men: *they were the government*. Even in the time of the kings they still functioned as judges and teachers.

Now, not all Levites were priests. The only Levites that were allowed to serve as priests were the descendents of Aaron. The priests operated the Temple and offered sacrifices. When Israel gave the Levites the tithe, the Levites were to give a tenth of what they received to the priests:

Numbers 18:25: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

26 Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto

them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the Lord, even a tenth part of the tithe.

27 And this your heave offering shall be reckoned unto you, as though it were the corn of the threshingfloor, and as the fulness of the winepress.

28 Thus ye also shall offer an heave offering unto the Lord of all your tithes, which ye receive of the children of Israel; and ye shall give thereof the Lord's heave offering to Aaron the priest."

It's interesting to note that the tithes were not given directly to the priests. Instead the tithes were given to the Levites, who gave a tenth of what they received to the priests. The priests themselves tithed to no one; they kept everything they received. In other words, the priests *only received 10% of the tithe!*

Another interesting fact is that every three years the entire tithe was given to the poor. In those years none of it went to the priests:

Deuteronomy 26:12: "When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled;"

As you can see, it was given to "the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow". It wasn't given to the priests – and remember, Levites were not priests. In the third year the

tithe was to be spent on feeding the poor and needy.

Also, do you notice how it says “of thine increase”? One important fact that is often overlooked is that the tithe was *not* an income tax. The Israelites were not required to keep detailed financial records of all their income so that at the end of the year (which is when tithes were paid) they knew how much to give God. Instead the tithe was calculated based on *the increase of their net worth*. If their net worth did not increase then they paid no tithe. This is how one person described it:

The ancient Israelite calculated and paid his tithes only once per year, after the harvest. During the year, he bought and sold, exchanged his labour for other men's goods, and his goods for other men's labours; on none of this income did he pay any tithes. All year long, he and his family ate of the increase of the land and of the livestock. What he consumed in the course of the year was not recorded and added to his total harvest for the purpose of calculating his tithes. If he went fishing and caught ten fish in the middle of the year, he ate them all; he didn't save one of them to the end of the year in order to pay tithes on his fish. If he received some gold or silver in an inheritance, he was not required to pay tithes on his inheritance. . . The Israelite was not commanded to tithe on everything he obtained and used throughout the year, but only on his increase at the end of the year. (apostasynow)

So let's stop and take a quick review. Because the Israelites were not holy enough to interact directly with God, the Lord took one of the tribes of Israel and dedicated them to serving in the tabernacle on behalf of the people. Since they

were dedicated to Temple service the Lord gave them no inheritance in the land; instead the Israelites were to give the Levites one tenth of their increase (*not* their income!), and the Levites were to live off of that. The Levites then gave a tenth of what they received to the priests so that they could operate the Temple and perform the sacrifices.

This tithe was very important because it was the priests' entire livelihood. If the priests didn't receive the tithe then they couldn't do their job, and that was bad news for the nation because in order to approach God in the Old Testament *you had to go through a priest! No one else could offer sacrifices* or enter into the Temple to inquire of God with the Urim and Thummim. When people neglected the tithe the priests were forced to abandon the Temple to find another means of survival, which that meant that the only people who were allowed to approach God were gone. This left the people with no way to inquire of God, or offer sacrifices, or obtain forgiveness for sins. That is why God became so angry when the tithe was neglected, and that is why Malachi 3:9 (which was quoted at the beginning of this chapter) says what it does.

Although the Levites as a whole received the full tithe, the priests only received 10% of it. However, every third year the entire tithe was given to the poor and the priests didn't receive anything.

So how does this compare to the modern practice of tithing? Do we still go through the tribe of Levi in order to approach God? Do Levites tithe to priests so that they can offer sacrifices on our behalf? The answer, of course, is *no*. The sacrificial death of Christ on the cross changed everything.

You see, when Jesus died and rose again He replaced the Levites as our bridge to God. We no longer need a High Priest to make atonement for our sins each year in the Holy of Holies, because Jesus has finished our salvation. Jesus is now our high priest. We no longer need to offer sacrifices because Jesus

offered Himself once and for all as the perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 9:11-26).

The reason Christians no longer need a class of Levites to interact with God on their behalf is because Christ's death has consecrated us as a nation of priests:

Hebrews 10:19: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

20 By a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh;”

Revelation 1:5: “And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the price of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

1 Peter 2:9: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that He should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light:”

It is important to realize that there is no longer a tribe of Levi ministering to God on behalf of His people, because Jesus bridged the gap between man's sinfulness and God's holiness. Christians are a royal priesthood and are able to boldly approach the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). In the past this would have brought instant death, but Jesus changed that forever.

In the Church Age pastors minister to the body of Christ,

but they are not Levites. In order to be a Levite and serve in the Temple you had to prove the purity of your lineage (that is, present documented evidence that all of your forefathers were from the tribe of Levi), you had to be ordained in a certain way, and you had to meet certain physical characteristics. Pastors today do not approach God once a year to atone for the sins of their congregations. They do not sacrifice animals on behalf of anybody. Their job is *completely different* from the Levites.

It's also worth noting that tithes were to be brought *into the Temple*. This can be seen in Malachi 3:10, in which the Lord says "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house". In the Old Testament God did not dwell within His people. Instead the glory of God resided in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. When the High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies once a year he was going before the *actual presence of God* to intercede on behalf of the nation. God Himself dwelt within the Temple, which can be seen passages such as 1 Kings 8:10-11. The reason the Jews no longer offer sacrifices is because they no longer have a Temple. Modern Jews also do not tithe, because tithes can *only* be given to the Levites *and there are no Levites today*.

As Christ prophesied when talking to the woman at the well (John 4:21-23), Christians do not gather at a single Temple in order to approach the presence of God. This is because Christians *are* temples of the Living God, for God dwells within us, not inside a building in the Middle East:

1 Corinthians 3:16: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."

In other words, things are different now. The sacrifice of Christ changed everything – including the way that giving works. What the apostles taught the Church about giving is quite different from the system of tithing in the Mosaic Law.

It should be apparent by now that it is *impossible* for Christians to tithe according to the Law of Moses. The tithe could only be given to the Levites (Numbers 18:24), and there are no Levites today because Christ fulfilled the sacrificial system and brought it to an end. Even if the Levites still existed it would still be impossible for Christians to bring tithes into the Temple because *there is no Temple*. Instead Christ dwells within us, making our bodies the temple of the Lord (1 Corinthians 3:16).

I want to emphasize this last point, because it is easily glazed over. It is *impossible* for Christians to offer the tithe that the Lord instituted in Numbers 18. It *cannot* be done. The only people who were allowed to receive the tithe were the Levites, not some random Gentiles from your local community (or even random Jews, for that matter). The job of Levites was to offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins, which is something that pastors do not and cannot do. Pastors are *not* the same thing as Levites.

The curse and blessing of Malachi 3 simply cannot be applied to modern Christians. God was concerned about providing *the Levites* with a livelihood, but that group of people no longer exists. God no longer has a Temple in which goods can be stored and given to a priestly class. *That entire system is gone*. Even if Christians wanted to bring food into the Temple, it isn't possible because *there is no Temple anymore*. The death and resurrection of Jesus changed everything.

To put it as plainly as possible, Christians today cannot tithe as instructed in the Law of Moses. It is not possible. They can give a portion of their income to their local church, yes, *but that is not tithing*. Tithing involved giving to Levites and there are no Levites. It involved bringing food into the Temple and there is

no Temple. Have you ever met *anyone* who gave a tenth of their increase to a Levite? The truth is that no one has tithed according to the Law of Moses since the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. You *cannot* simply swap out pastors for Levites and churches for the Temple and then say that it's all the same thing. The New Testament simply *does not allow this*.

There's also something else. If the Temple was too far away, you were allowed to spend the entire tithe on whatever you wanted:

Deuteronomy 14:22: “Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year.

23 And thou shalt eat before the Lord thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always.

24 And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the Lord thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the Lord thy God hath blessed thee:

25 Then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose:

26 And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household,

27 And the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor

inheritance with thee.”

Did you notice that verse 22 once again mentioned that the tithe was only *of their increase*, and not of their net income? Did you see how God said that if the one place that was allowed to receive the tithes (the Temple) was inaccessible or too far away, you were allowed to spend the money on whatever you wanted and literally eat it before the Lord? In other words, since there is no longer a Temple, people who *really* wanted to keep the Mosaic Law of tithing should spend their entire tithe on steaks and have a big barbeque. After all, *that is what the Mosaic Law commands!* But no pastor is *ever* going to say that, even though that is exactly what the Bible teaches.

So does the Mosaic Law *really* command Christians to give a tenth of their pre-tax income to their local church? It should be obvious by now that the modern practice of tithing is not in any way similar to the tithe specified in the Law of Moses. Pastors are not Levites, the local church is not the Temple, and 10% of your pre-tax income is not the same as 1% of the increase of your net worth.

Is there a commandment in the New Testament stating that all Christians must give ten percent of their income to support their local body of believers? The answer is *no*. As it turns out, the New Testament model of giving is actually quite different. If Christians truly are required to give a tenth of their income to the local church then you would expect that fact to be mentioned *somewhere* in the New Testament, but it's not. *There is not one verse anywhere in the New Testament that commands Christians to tithe*. Do you know how many people in the Bible followed the modern version of “tithing” and gave 10% of their pre-tax income to their local church? **Zero**. There is not a single case in the Bible of anyone ever doing that.

So what is going on? The answer to this riddle can be found here:

2 Corinthians 9:6: “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully,

7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

In the Old Testament the Israelites were *required* to give a tenth of the increase of their crops and herds to the Levites. Anything that they gave above the tithe was a freewill offering, but the tithe was required. If the tithe was given then God would send blessings, and if the tithe was withheld then God would send curses and famine. The tithe was *not* a gift.

In the New Testament things are completely different. God simply wants us to give as we have purposed in our heart, out of love. There is no fixed amount specified, nor does it say that a tenth must be given to the local church before anything can be given to other causes. God wants us to have a heart to meet the needs around us and to give cheerfully out of love. The real issue is the heart, not percentages.

The truth is that *everything* that we have belongs to God. We are stewards, not owners, and are commanded to use our possessions for the honor and glory of God. All of our wealth and energies and hopes and dreams are to be focused on advancing the Lord's kingdom. God doesn't want a tenth of us; He wants *all* of us.

Christians should look at the financial resources that God has given to them and use them wisely for the Lord's glory. This doesn't just encompass tithing, but everything – paying bills, raising children, investing in education, buying groceries, and so forth. Can't God be glorified when we pay our debts and raise our children? What about when we instruct others in wisdom or

provide for those in need? God made the oceans, the rivers, the trees, and the fields, but too often Christians view life as being mostly secular with a few religious moments here and there. Being a Christian isn't something that you just do at church; it's the way you live your entire life. It affects how you manage your money, what entertainment you choose, what you do with your free time, how you raise your children, and how you treat your neighbors. For the Christian there is nothing that is purely secular. The Lord has laid a claim to every facet of life, and there is a time for everything.

God wants us to love and enjoy Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to be passionately devoted to following Him and loving our neighbors. That is what life is all about, and that is what life will *always* be about for the rest of time. God does not want a tenth of us; He wants all of us, devoted completely to Him in every way.

It may be that some people can give more and others can give less; in Christ's parables some servants were given more talents than others. God is not nearly as concerned with the *amount* as He is with the *heart*. That is what it is really all about.

The great tragedy is that the New Testament actually has a lot to say about how Christians should give, but modern Christians have completely ignored its teachings in order to impose a system that has no Biblical foundation. The truth is that God doesn't want 1% of our net increase, or even 10% of our pre-tax income. Instead God wants us to see ourselves as His servants. He wants us to spend our life working for Him, using everything we have and everything we are for His glory. He wants us to think "I exist to glorify God and advance His kingdom, so how can I use my assets and talents to further that purpose?"

God has entrusted us with many things. What He really wants us to do is to realize that we are *managers*, not owners. Think of your assets as something that God has given to you so that you can invest it for His kingdom. What kind of a return are

you giving God? When you settle accounts with Him, is He going to be pleased with your decisions?

What Good Is Serving God?

God isn't done condemning the Jews – He has yet more things against them. It seems that the Jews are complaining that serving God is a bad deal:

Malachi 3:13: “Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?

14 Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?

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

We saw a similar problem back in Malachi 2, when the people were complaining that God didn't have a problem with sin, that God refused to judge sin, and that He delighted in wickedness. Here people are saying that it was a waste of time and effort to serve God. Those who served the Lord and mourned over their sins led difficult lives, while the wicked led fabulous lives and were delivered from their problems. It just wasn't fair! Why were the righteousness oppressed while the wicked flourished? If that's how it was going to be then why bother to serve God at all? After all, the wicked seemed to lead much better lives.

Since I've already discussed this entire issue in a previous

lesson I won't repeat it all here. Yes, it's true that the righteous suffer in this life. Do you know who told us *in advance* that this was going to be the case? It was Jesus Himself:

John 15:18: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me."

The reason the world hates the righteous is because the world is wicked. The world doesn't know God and it hates the One who condemns its sin. Instead of repenting, the world seeks to silence God's messengers. We live in a wicked world, so *of course* we are going to have a difficult time of things. Why would we expect otherwise? After all, Jesus Himself was persecuted, and we are certainly not greater than Him. Why would we expect His life to be full of pain and suffering and ours to be easy and pain-free?

Of course some wicked people will have easy lives in a world that is full of wickedness. The world isn't going to fight against the wicked because *the wicked are on their side!* Should we really find it strange if the devil decides not to torment people who are supporting his cause?

As long as the world is full of wickedness, the righteous who live in it will have difficult lives. As long as the world hates

Christ it will love those who hate Him and it will reward the wicked. That is just what this world is like – but it's not going to be this way forever.

God has made it quite clear that all men will stand before Him and be judged for their lives. On that day righteousness will make a *tremendous* difference. Those who are righteous will be spared the wrath of God and will go on to inherit eternal life and joy. Those who are not righteous, but who sided with the wicked world, will face the eternal wrath of God in a place of fiery torment – and they will be tormented *forever*.

In other words, our righteousness will matter for all of eternity. It may make our lives more difficult in the short run, but in the long run it will make all the difference. Do not envy the wicked: their destruction is coming, and you do not want to have any part of it.

The Book of Remembrance

Because people were complaining that God didn't care about the deeds of the righteous and was instead rewarding the wicked, God took action. What God did might surprise you: He decided to write a book. Take a look for yourself:

Malachi 3:16: “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.”

Now, all of us have heard about the Book of Life. The Book of Life contains the names of all those who are genuine

Christians:

Philippians 4:3: "And I intreat 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."

If your name is in the Book of Life then you will be spared the wrath of God and you will inherit eternal life and joy. However, if your name is *not* in the Book of Life then you will be cast into the Lake of Fire, where you will be tormented for the rest of eternity:

Revelation 20:15: "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

In fact, the only people who will set foot in the New Jerusalem (that famous Heavenly city with streets of gold) are those whose names are in the Book of Life:

Revelation 21:27: "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

As you can see, having your name in that book is of supreme importance.

Now, the Book of Remembrance is *not* the same thing as the Book of Life. The reason we know this is because they were written at different times. You see, the Book of Life was written when God created the world:

Revelation 17:8: “The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.”

People today have this idea that God writes your name in the Book of Life when you become a Christian, but that's not the case. If your name is in the Book of Life, it's because God put it there at the foundation of the world – long before you were born. The Book of Life is an old, old book.

But the Book of Remembrance is new. God wrote it after people started complaining that the deeds and sufferings of the righteous were being forgotten. Whereas the Book of Life records the *names* of the righteous, the Book of Remembrance records the *deeds* of the righteous. God wrote it so that the sufferings and trials of His people would not be forgotten.

You see, God cares about His children and He knows that they are suffering. God compares His saints to precious jewels:

Malachi 3:17: “And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”

The great and terrible day of God's wrath is coming, and in that day God will judge people for what they have done. Those whose sins are covered by the blood of Christ (and who, incidentally, have their names written in the Book of Life) will *not* face the wrath of God. They are precious jewels to the Lord; since they repented of their sins and served Him, He will spare them. On that day there will be a tremendous difference

between the righteous and the wicked: the righteous will be spared the wrath of God, and the wicked will not. When that day comes it will be obvious to everyone that there is a tremendous benefit in serving God:

Malachi 3:18: “Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.”

The wicked may get away with many things in this world, but that will not last forever. It is a foolish thing indeed to say that God favors the wicked and is against the righteous.

Malachi 4

THE FINAL CHAPTER of the book of Malachi is rather short. In fact, it continues directly from what God was saying in chapter 3.

The Rapture of the Wicked

In the last verse of chapter 3 God said that in the Day of Judgment it would be obvious to everyone that the Lord puts a difference between the righteous and the wicked. God continues to talk about this in the first verse of this chapter:

Malachi 4:1: “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.”

This chapter is talking about the Day of the Lord (just take a look at Malachi 4:5, which we'll get to later in this lesson). This period is known by several different names in the Bible; in the New Testament it is known as the Tribulation. It will be a seven-year period of unimaginable pain and suffering. In fact, Jesus said that the Tribulation will be so terrible that if He didn't put a stop to it, *every last living thing would die*:

Matthew 24:21: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning

of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.”

There is not enough time or space to go into an in-depth study of the Tribulation period, so I will try to be brief. Entire books have been written about that topic. It is enough to say that the Tribulation is a time when God will pour out His wrath upon an extremely wicked world and judge it for its sins. The judgments of the Tribulation are so severe that:

- War and starvation will kill 25% of the world's population (Revelation 6:7-8)
- An army of demons will wipe out 25% of whoever is still alive (Revelation 9:13-19)
- All life in the world's oceans will die (Revelation 16:3)
- All of the world's fresh water supply will be turned into blood (Revelation 16:4-6)
- An earthquake will occur that is so severe that it will ruin all the cities in the world (Revelation 16:17-20)

There are even more terrible things that happen, but you get the point. As you can imagine, when these judgments start to occur everyone will be terrified. Even the strongest and mightiest of men will quake in terror and try to hide themselves from God:

Revelation 6:15: “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;
16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth

on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:
17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and
who shall be able to stand?"

Despite the terrible, unbelievable horror of the Tribulation years, there will be some people who survive it and will still be alive when Jesus Christ returns to set up His earthly kingdom. However, any wicked who survive will soon find out that they only survived to be executed. A lot of people don't realize this, but there will actually be two Raptures. Before the Tribulation period begins, Jesus Christ will come to Earth and take the Church to Heaven with Him so they will not have to experience the horrors of the Tribulation. That is the Rapture of the righteous. However, when Jesus returns at the end of the Tribulation period there will be another Rapture. This one, though, is a rapture of the wicked. It is described in the book of Matthew:

Matthew 24:38: "For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,
39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.
40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.
41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.
42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."

Many people think that this is talking about the Rapture of the Church, but it's actually not. The people who are being taken are not righteous; they're the wicked. God is removing

them from the Earth so that He can judge them from their sins. This “taking” will take place after the Tribulation and after Jesus has returned to Earth with the armies of Heaven. At that time He will send out His angels to take all the wicked and cast them into Hell:

Matthew 13:40: “As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

As you can see, there will be two Raptures: one of the righteous that takes place *before* the Tribulation, and one of the wicked that will take place *after* the Tribulation. Malachi 4:1 said that *all* of the wicked will burn as stubble, and in Matthew 13 Jesus talks about the day that will happen. At this present time the wicked have great power and use it to do terrible things, but their days are numbered. Judgment is coming, and the only way to escape it is to repent and flee to Jesus for forgiveness. Those who fail to do so will not be spared.

The Reign of the Righteous

It is true that in this life the righteous are persecuted, hated, imprisoned, and executed. But one day that will all change:

Malachi 4:2: “But unto you that fear my name

shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts.”

When the Lord returns at the end of the Tribulation He will utterly wipe out every last wicked person. His Millennial Kingdom will begin without a single wicked person anywhere in the world; they will all have been put to death for their wickedness. During the Millennium Jesus will rule over the nations with a rod of iron:

Revelation 19:15: “And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”

Just in case you're wondering what that means, the book of Psalms expounds upon this idea:

Psalms 2:7: “I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

8 Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”

When Jesus sits on the throne in Jerusalem, wickedness will not be tolerated. In fact, He will answer the prayers of His people before they have even finished praying! In Isaiah 65 the

Lord talks about life during the Millennium. Take a look at what He had to say about it:

Isaiah 65:24: “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.”

God will immediately hear the prayers of the righteous *before they even have a chance to pray!* But He will be utterly against the wicked. In this age the wicked may lead fabulous lives, but in the age to come they will be cursed:

Isaiah 65:20: “There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.”

Those who serve God will live hundreds of years; those who do *not* serve God will be cursed and live very short lives. It will be obvious to everyone that God puts a difference between the righteous and the wicked. (The resurrected ones will, of course, live forever, but this passage is talking about all the people who survived the Tribulation and had children.)

If a nation sins and refuses to obey God, judgment will be swift:

Zechariah 14:17: “And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.”

18 And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the Lord will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of

tabernacles.

19 This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.”

In this age nations get away with all sorts of terrible sins, but when Jesus sits on the throne in Jerusalem that will all change. During the Millennium sin will be swiftly punished, and God will strike the nations that refuse to worship Him and reject His commands. In this age the righteous are afflicted; in that age the wicked will be the ones who suffer and are cursed.

Not only will Jesus rule with a rod of iron, but His resurrected saints will as well. Take a look:

Revelation 2:26: “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.”

Jesus promised to give “he that overcometh” power over the nations. And who is “he that overcometh”? We find the answer to that in the book of I John (which was written by the same person who wrote Revelation):

1 John 5:5: “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”

If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God – if you repent and put your faith and trust in Him, and spend your days serving Him – then you are one of the overcomers. You have overcome the world, and God had fabulous rewards ahead of you. In this age the wicked may persecute the righteous, but that will change

during the Millennium. In that era the righteous will be in control, and God will give them power over the nations. The saints will no longer be persecuted; instead they will be kings, and will have the power to root out the wicked and break the nations into “shivers”, as the verse says.

In this age it's not safe to be a Christian, because the world hates righteousness and seeks to stamp it out. In the Millennium it will be the reverse: it won't be safe to be wicked. The world will be full of resurrected, incorruptible, immortal saints whom God has given tremendous power and authority, and they will seek out wickedness and put a stop to it. Wickedness simply will not be tolerated. As Malachi 4:3 says, the saints of God will trample the wicked under their feet and reign triumphantly with Christ.

The Return of Elijah

In the final verses of the Old Testament God makes an astonishing promise. He said that before the Tribulation period begins He is going to send back to Earth one of the Old Testament prophets:

Malachi 4:4: “Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:

6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth

with a curse.”

As you may recall, Elijah is one of only two people who have never died. In Genesis 5:24 we are told that Enoch walked with God, and then he was not for God took him. God “raptured” Enoch before the Flood, and took him away so that he might live forever – and so that he would not experience God's terrible judgment upon the whole world. (That is why some people believe that Enoch is a foreshadowing of the Church, whom the Lord will take away from the world before the judgment of the Tribulation. That, however, is a separate topic.)

The other person who never died was Elijah. The Lord took him to Heaven in a chariot of fire:

2 Kings 2:11: “And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.”

That was the last the world ever saw of Elijah – but that was not the end of his ministry. As you can see from Malachi 4:5, God is actually going to send Elijah back to the world! He has more work for Elijah to do.

The book of Revelation speaks of two people called the Two Witnesses. These people preach the gospel during that terrible time and are witnesses for God. During their ministry God gives them great power:

Revelation 11:3: “And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

4 These are the two olive trees, and the two

candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

5 And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies; and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.

6 These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will."

Revelation does not name these two witnesses, but we can see from Malachi that the prophet Elijah will be in the world during that time. It's quite likely that he will be one of the witnesses. As far as the identity of the other witness goes, the book of Malachi briefly mentions Moses right before talking about Elijah. I think that's significant. Remember, Jesus often spoke of the law and the prophets:

Matthew 7:12: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

Matthew 11:13: "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John."

Matthew 22:40: "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Sending Moses and Elijah would make a great deal of sense. Moses would represent the Law, which the world has utterly rejected. Elijah would represent the prophets, whose testimony the world refused to hear. Moses and Elijah may well

be the two witnesses of Revelation.

There is not the time or the space to do an in-depth study of the ministry of Elijah, or of the Two Witnesses of Revelation. However, we can see that God does put a huge difference between the righteous and the wicked. The day of God's judgment is coming, and in that day God will separate the righteous from the wicked. In this age the wicked may seem to be winning, but an age is coming when wickedness will no longer be tolerated – and that age will last forever.

The day of the wicked is short; the Bible tells us that it is coming to a close. After the Day of Judgment the wicked will be gone forever. Only the righteous will live in the New Heaven and Earth that God will create:

Revelation 21:7: “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

So take heart. The triumph of the wicked will be quite short. God will put an end to their reign and will usher in a new era of peace that will last for all the ages of eternity. The age of the oppressor will end, and the reign of Christ will begin – and His kingdom will last forever!