

Micah and Malachi

Disobedience, Judgment,
Forgiveness and
Promise

A Compilation of Notes
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Introduction

This booklet is a compilation of notes on Micah and Malachi. These two prophets' writings are bookends to one another in the Jewish experience. Micah was written prior to the nation of Israel being taken into captivity. Malachi was written after the nation of Israel was released from captivity. These two Old Testament prophets provide an interesting picture of the spiritual health of mankind when they follow the rules of religion versus having a heart that is obedient to the commands and desire of God. These two books have direct application to us today in our life; while at the same time provide prophecy about future events that have occurred....and will someday occur.

Micah – “Judgment and Forgiveness”

1:1 – The opening of Micah identifies who the writer is and when he was writing (refers to lesson 1 for background). Micha’s message is the “word of the Lord” meaning God provided the message to Micah to give to His Chosen People. “Samaria” is a reference to the “Northern Kingdom” of Israel (“Israel”); “Jerusalem” is a reference to the “Southern Kingdom” of Israel (“Judah”).

Micah 1:2 – 2:13 – Micha’s First Oracle. *Micah’s first oracle is a litigation expose that identifies God’s impending judgment on His Chosen People (Israel and Judah) and future restoration. Their judgment is a warning example to the world as it prefigures God’s judgment on all who sin against Him.*

1:2-7: Judgment is coming on Israel (Israel / Samaria and Judah / Jerusalem): Israel was offering sacrifices to idols (“high places”). Their failure to worship only God as the one true God violated the first commandment given to Moses (Mosaic Covenant) and this sin brings God’s judgment.

1:2: “Hear” – this is a summons to all the nations of the world to hear the charges against Israel and Judah; this is God’s lawsuit (bring accusations and provide evidence) against sin. Micha’s use of “Yahweh” (LORD) and “Adonai” (Lord) together (LORD God) indicates that God is sovereign in all things. His use of “His holy temple” (God’s dwelling place and power center) indicates that God has the right to (the authority to)

judge His Chosen People on the basis of the Mosaic Covenant (First Commandment).

1:3-4: “LORD..coming..down” indicates that God is “marching out for battle” to judge His Chosen People for their sin against Him by worshiping other gods. God is described as “treading/walking” on high places; it is picturing God as a giant person stepping from mountain to mountain and as He walks the mountains are melting like wax before a fire and like water rushing down a steep slope; there is nothing capable of stopping God’s judgment, which is mighty and fierce. When this is the reality of God’s judgment, men should be gripped with the terrifying reality that they are going to answer to God for the sin in their life (for their rebellion against God). Christians tend to think about judgment as something related to the judgment of the world and sinful men. While that is true, it is important to know that God’s judgment, as recorded in the Bible, is usually directed to those who are professing to be His people and those who know the truth but are disobedient.

1:5: The reason for God’s judgment is “Jacob’s transgression”, which is worshipping other gods. “Jacob” often refers to the whole nation of Israel, however here it refers to the Northern Kingdom. The identification of Samaria and Jerusalem, the capital cities of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, indicate that these ruling cities were setting the example of worshipping other gods (idols) for their nation’s people; an example of people following leadership. Micah closes with four rhetorical questions that point to the answer that the idol worship was occurring in the capitals of the nations – therefore

God must judge the nations for the sin of worshipping other gods.

Today it is very possible for us to be born into a God-worshipping family and do all the “right” things, and yet be so lost in “idol-worship” (self-centeredness, priority of temporal over eternal) that we have no personal relationship with God. When this is the case – God will judge and judge harshly. Why, because we are demanding that God co-exist as an equal with the existing idols in one’s life.

1:6-7: “I will” indicates God’s judgment would surely occur; and it would first occur to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Micah prophesied that Samaria, the capital city of the Northern Kingdom, would be destroyed (“heap of ruins” / “pour down her stones” / “uncover her foundations”). This judgment occurred as God stated in 722 B.C. when the Assyrians captured and destroyed Samaria (II Kings 17:1-5). Even today Samaria is a landscape of stone rubble, fit to be used as fields for vineyards. The phrase “uncover her foundations” indicates that the judgment and destruction that occurred created public shame for the people of the Northern Kingdom.

God’s judgment not only was the destruction of Samaria, it was also the destruction of all the idols worshiped by the people of the Northern Kingdom. This destruction of these specific idols was complete, none remained. Also destroyed were the goods and money earned by prostitutes used in the Northern Kingdom idol worship. The term “pay as a harlot/fee as a prostitute” identifies the payments of money, food, clothing, material things

that prostitutes received for their service in worshipping the idol. These payments were in turn given by the prostitutes to the temple of the idol as temple gifts. When the Assyrians conquered Samaria and destroyed it they took all of the money, food, clothing, and material things from the temples of the idol destroyed and appropriated it to their own use in their worship to their idols. And in turn God’s Chosen People were forced to worship the Assyrian idols and use (and pay for) the prostitute services of the Assyrian’s idols.

The nations that surrounded Israel during this time believed that the fertility of the world, which provided people with water, food, clothes, shelter and protection, was brought forth into existence through the sexual union of a god and goddess; and such sacred intimacy, they believed, could be encouraged by their practice of “sacred prostitution” as worship to the god in the temple of the god. Through the physical union of a person and a temple prostitute, the gods would be encouraged to practice their intimacy so the land would receive rain, grow crops, sustain herds, and provide children who would be able to carry forward their practice of intimate relations.

1:8-16: *Micah was greatly impacted by the judgment of God on His Chosen People. The judgment is so grave that Micah laments over the coming judgment to Israel in vs. 8-16.*

1:8-9: Micah's personal response. The judgment of God was pronounced against Israel but it greatly impacted Micah. He reacted to God’s coming judgment of

Israel by going into (and exhibiting) extreme mourning; which he exhibited by walking around stripped and naked while wailing and howling. His extreme mourning was further explained and defined by his use of nocturnal jackals and ostriches/owls as illustrations to explain his state of mourning (i.e. jackals and ostriches/owls and their 'wailing sounds' are used in the O.T. to illustrate desolation and destruction). The "incurable".."wound" of God's judgment on Israel was not able to be stopped and it would spread to Judah. It was inevitable that God's judgment would come upon Judah because Judah was also allowing the worship of idols to occur within its borders. This judgment would come to the gate of Jerusalem; which it did in 701 B.C. when Sennacherib's Assyrian army destroyed 46 towns in Judah and surrounded Jerusalem (II Kings 18-19).

1:10-16: Micah's call for others to mourn. Micah describes the desolation the Assyrian invasion would bring to Judah's cities. He uses several "wordplays" to describe the desolation. Ironically Sennacherib also used "wordplays" when he recorded his conquest of Judah.

1:10: "Tell it not in Gath" (cf. II Sam. 1:20) reflects David's statement concerning the death of King Saul, as Micah did not want the inhabitants of Gath to know about God's judgment on Judah. Nor did Micah want Gath to "weep" about Judah's desolation because that would inform others of God's judgment on Judah which would encourage enemies of Judah. Micah tells the Judean town of Beth Aphrah ("House of Dust") to "roll in dust" as an expression of their grief of God's judgment.

1:11-12: Micah tells the town of Shaphir ("beautiful / pleasant") that they would become a town of "nakedness and shame" because of God's judgment and they would be led out to exile. He tells the town of Zaanan (related to word "come out") that they would not come out of their town because of God's judgment; for they were fearful and would not go out to console others who had been destroyed. He tells the town of Beth Ezel ("house of nearness / house of taking away") that no one would come to them for protection or support them because they would be in mourning over God's judgment and in need of help. He tells the town of Maroth (similar to "bitterness") that people within Maroth would writhe in pain from God's judgment while waiting for help from Jerusalem. Micah concludes these statements to these Judean towns with the statement that God's judgment ("disaster") would come to the "gate of Jerusalem" (which occurred in 701 B.C. – v. 9).

1:13: Lachish (similar to "team of horses") was located SW of Jerusalem. It was a key military fortress in Judah that was well known for its horses. Lachish's sin was dependence on and trust in their own military might, which lead to acts of rebellion by the people (Isa. 30:15-17). Lachish's actions influenced the people of Judah toward and into idolatry. Micah sarcastically urges the citizens of Lachish to get a chariot ready to escape God's judgment, but nothing they can do will allow them to escape God's judgment.

1:14: Moresheth Gath (similar to "betrothed") was located SW of Jerusalem. In God's judgment it would be given away as a "parting gift/presents" (a betrothal gift

from a father to a bride) by Jerusalem to the Assyrians. Achzib (“deception”), another town SW of Jerusalem, would promise help to Jerusalem but it would not come through. It was conquered by the Assyrians and would become “deceptive/be a lie” to Jerusalem.

1:15: Mareshah (“possessor”) would be conquered (‘bring an heir’) and become the possession of the Assyrians as a result of God’s judgment. The leaders of Israel (‘glory of Israel’) would flee to caves at Adullam as fugitives from the conquering Assyrians, just as David did (1 Sam. 22:1).

1:16: God’s judgment was severe as it separated children from their parents. The Assyrians exiled the children from their parents in the towns they conquered. This would cause the people to mourn and grieve; and this extreme judgment would be cause for them to shave their heads in deep mourning, making them look like a bald eagle or vulture. The cutting of hair was a sign of sorrow and baldness (due to cutting of the hair) was a sign of helplessness and shame.

2:1-11: *Micah, after speaking generally about rebellion and sin and the forthcoming of God’s judgment in chapter 1, now speaks directly to the sins of Judah.*

2:1-5. The sins of the wealthy; the sin of the rich against the poor. The courtroom scene continues here with “accusations” being read against the rich of Judah as they had violated the God’s Law (Ex. 20:17, Lev. 19:11-13). The rich landlords had destroyed communities in Judah because they believed that God’s land (Lev. 25:23-34) belonged to anyone powerful enough to take it.

2:1: Micah pronounced a “woe oracle” against the wealthy who devised evil schemes to seize houses and land from the poor and weak. He declared that those who lay awake at night, plotting the evil that they put into practice the next day, would experience “woe.” Woe, in Scripture, announces punishment coming because of guilt. Those who were rich and had the authority to carry out their schemes are identified by the phrase “the power of their hand.” The poor were at the mercy of the wealthy.

2:2: As background to this verse, property in the nation of Israel was ultimately to be permanently owned by the family who had received it (i.e. Lev. 25:8-17). God had given to each tribe and family its share of the ‘promised land’ (Josh. 13-21) and no one was to take away any of the land a family had been given (‘their rightful inheritance’ – Lev. 25:23-34). The robbing of the poor of their “fields,” “houses,” and “inheritance” (including land) by the rich came from their covetousness, which was enable by their power and use of deception (‘violence’). In so doing, the rich not only violated the tenth commandment against coveting what belongs to their neighbor, but also the eighth commandment against stealing (Exod. 20:15,17; Lev. 19:13; Deut. 5:19,21). (‘Covet’ means “to determine to get something that is not your own.”) The sin of the rich was not only covetousness and theft; it was the wanton disregard of their fellow man. They were guilty of breaking the second greatest commandment, which said that they should love their neighbors as themselves (Lev. 19:18; cf. Matt. 22:34-40).

2:3: Because the rich had done these things, God was planning disaster (“calamity”) against and on the “family” (‘the people’) of the Israel (the covenant nation) that they

would not be able to escape. They would be locked into God's judgment like a yoke holds the neck of an ox; meaning they would be unable to save themselves from the coming judgment, there was no escaping God's judgment. The coming judgment would be a hard time for all in Israel and it would humble them; especially the rich as their pride and arrogance would be replaced with defeat and loss.

2:4-5: As a result of sin of the rich, God would judge the entire nation of Israel ('the assembly of God') by allowing foreign invaders to divide the land among themselves; meaning none of God's chosen people would have the inheritance apportioned to them in Joshua 13-21. When God's judgment came upon Israel, other people would ridicule them. God's people would also lament—with *bitter* weeping—and mourn their complete destruction, as the victims of the rich Israelites' crimes just cited had mourned. They would bewail God's removal of His blessings, including their lands, from them—and His giving them to others that they considered apostate.

The nation of Israel had set the boundaries between some land plots by casting lots (cf. Josh. 14:1-5; Ps. 16:6). Because of God's judgment on the nation of Israel, no one would remain in Israel who could set boundaries between land plots. The reason was that God would send His people into captivity and give their land to their captors.

This is one of many examples of God's talionic ('an eye for an eye') justice. The Israelites would reap what they had sowed (cf. Gal. 6:7); just as they had taken land from their countrymen greedily and illegally, so God would take their land from them and let others occupy it.

The lesson we need to learn is that God is the same today as He was then; and we will reap what we sow as God does still judge sin in the lives of His own.

2:6-7a: Micah continues with his use of wordplay. The false prophets were 'preaching' ('dripping') to Micah to quit 'preaching' (dripping) the message of God's coming judgment for sin. These false prophets were trying to silence him because they did not like his message (cf. Isa. 30:10; Amos 7:10-13). They were saying that Micah should not prophesy (meaning 'casting a surveyor's line'). The false prophets questioned whether the 'Spirit of the Lord' would ever be angry with His people or if God would ever do such things (bring disgrace on the people for the sins that Micah was charging the people with). The false prophets were telling the people of Israel and Judah that God would be patient with them, and that God judging them was not His way of dealing with them because He had committed Himself to them (cf. Deut. 26:17-18). But they failed to tell the people of Israel and Judah that God had also promised to punish them if they departed from His covenant (Deut. 28:15-68).

2:7b-9: Micah affirmed that God would bless those who do right (Deut. 28:1-14). God provided blessing when His people obeyed Him, but He also disciplined them when they disobeyed. By failing to warn them of coming judgment for sin, the false prophets were really treating their fellow Israelites as their enemies; they were not doing them a service but a disservice. ***This is a clear reminder that preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God involves telling people how they fall***

short of God's commands, so they can repent and enjoy His blessing, as well as affirming them for their good deeds.

Micah then proceeds to list the sins that the false prophets and rich were practicing. They had taken the clothing of their fellow countryman as payment for their debts, something their law forbade (cf. Exod. 22:26-27; Amos 2:8). They also did this to "unsuspecting" travelers who passed through their land, and to soldiers who had recently "returned from war." They also exacted payments from the dependent "women" of Israel (i.e., widows), so high that they could no longer afford to live in their own houses (cf. Matt. 23:14; Mark 12:40). Their conduct affected the "children" as well, since these children would have to live out their lives in a foreign land as exiles (cf. Exod. 22:21; Ps. 146:9).

By not telling the Israelites to repent and return to the Lord, the false prophets were willfully neglecting and ignoring the only thing that could save the people from God's judgment; the warning to the people to repent and turn back to the Lord.

2:10-11: Sarcastically, Micah tells the false prophets and the rich to rise up and go into exile (cf. Amos 4:4-5). The perverted teaching of the false prophets and the sin of the rich had irretrievably defiled the land of Israel; it was not a land of 'rest' ('a land of justice') it was a land completely filled with sin ('oppression / greed / overindulgence'). Micha's sarcasm was truthful, as the false prophets and rich should leave while they could because "painful/utter destruction" was coming as punishment (cf. Lev. 18:24-28). Micah bemoans the fact that the Israelites had drifted so far

from God's truth that they had become so responsive to the false prophets that if one of them preached a lie that promised them all the wine and beer they could drink, they would follow *him*! The false prophets, who preached affluence and prosperity, even though that message is a lie, had many followers. In contrast, Micah's truthful message of God's forthcoming judgment was unpopular, and few responded.

Warren Wiersbe has stated, "Today we need to deal with our sins of covetousness, selfishness, and willingness to believe 'religious lies.' We must abandon 'soft religion' that pampers our pride and makes it easy for us to sin. Why? Because 'our God is a consuming fire' (Heb. 12:29), and 'The Lord shall judge His people' (10:30). Remember, judgment begins in the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17)." Unfortunately today we have many people who want a religion that advocates self-indulgence, not one that demands obedience to God, righteousness and holiness; so we find many following "prosperity" preachers. Such people do not desire truth because they do not want to deal with the reality of being obedient to God – they are focused only on what this world can give them. May this not be true of us!

2:12-13: Micah closes his first oracle with a message of hope, the future regathering and leadership of Israel. Ironically, the message of the false prophets that God would not judge His own people was not completely wrong because it represented a reality of God's promises to Israel. Micah's message to this point had been focused on God's judgement upon the nation for its sin. He was calling the

people to repent or they would experience God's judgment. But now he reminded the nation of Israel that there were wonderful blessings ahead, but they would come later.

2:12-13a – The first prophecy of hope by Micah is that the Lord will regather and renew His people as their Shepherd. Micah declares that the Lord Himself would "assemble" the scattered "remnant" of "all" the Israelites ("Jacob" and "Israel"; cf. 1:5) following His dispersion of them into exile. The Assyrian and Babylonian exiles were only the first of several that the Jews have experienced. Most recently, the Romans scattered them in A.D. 70, and since then most Jews have lived dispersed around the world, rather than in a homeland of their own. The return of many Jews today to the nation of Israel does not fulfill this prophecy, which is made clear from what Micah and the other prophets say about that future regathering of the nation of Israel.

"The remnant" refers to the part of the people that would remain, following the dispersion of the majority of the Israelites into the world (cf. 4:7; 5:7, 8; 7:18). God will be leading the remnant like a shepherd leads a flock of sheep. He will assemble them, just as a shepherd gathers "sheep in" a "fold" ('pen'), "in the midst of" a "pasture" (cf. 5:4; 7:14) for safe-keeping. This pictures the regathering of the Israelites into the Promised Land. This 'pen' "will be noisy" and crowded with Jewish believers and it will be a time and place of great rejoicing—like the city of Jerusalem was during one of Israel's annual feasts.

The "one who breaks open" is the Lord, who as the Shepherd clears the way for His sheep by going out before them. As the Shepherd, the Lord breaks through

obstacles and barriers to lead His sheep and clear the way for His sheep to return to the land (cf. Ps. 78:52-53; 80:1). They will "break out" of their former habitations, "pass through" the way ("the gate") He opens for them, and leave all parts of the world to return to the Promised Land.

"This long-awaited time of blessing will come about for the nation of Israel in the Millennium. Some interpreters claim that this promise of blessing is being fulfilled now in the church, rather than in the future for Israel [i.e., Reformed covenant theologians]. However, if Micah 2:12-13a refers to spiritual blessing for the church, then Israel has been misled all these centuries since Abraham to think that she will inherit the land forever." (John A. Martin)

2:13b – The second prophecy of hope by Micah is that the Lord will lead His people as "their King." Christ will not only function as their Shepherd but also as their (Davidic) King (cf. Isa. 6:5). He will lead them as a mighty conqueror and ruler (cf. Isa. 33:22; Zeph. 3:15; Zech. 14:9). God has not abandoned His people. His covenants stand for eternity as His Word is always true and not subject to whim or change. Christ, as the 'Shepherd-King' will lead His Chosen People (the covenant nation of Israel), passing "before them" as their "Head." He will fulfill His promises to Israel because He loves His people. Passages such as this are strong proof that God's heart yearns for a believing remnant in the nation of Israel; and that His covenant to Abraham still stands and will be fulfilled one day.

Micah 3-5: Micah's Second Oracle - Micah's second oracle identifies the guilt of Israel's leaders and holds out hope for the future. Micah contrasts the current conditions of injustice and corruption in Israel in chapter 3 with Israel's future blessings in chapters 4-5. In Micah's first oracle, only the last two verses dealt with Israel's future blessings (2:12-13), while everything preceding (1:2 – 2:11) exposed Israel's sins and guilt. In this second oracle, the balance of emphasis is different, about one-third deals with Israel's present sins and two-thirds with Israel's future blessings.

Chapter 3 is a condemnation of Israel's leaders and it consists of three sections. The first two sections point out the sinfulness of two groups of Israel's leaders, civil and religious. The last section climaxes to assure their punishment. The leaders of God's people were not the only guilty individuals, of course, but they were particularly responsible and culpable because they affected so many other Israelites.

Micah 3 – Condemnation of Israel's Rulers and Prophets

3:1: Micah's second oracle begins with a summons to the leaders (civil and religious) of Israel ("Jacob" and "Israel" refer to the covenant nation of Israel) to hear his message. The initial "And I said" ties this oracle to the first oracle and provides continuity. Micah asks the civil leaders of Israel if it was not proper for them to "know justice" (meaning to practice justice with fairness, equity). It was not only proper, but it was essential.

3:2-3: But instead of the rulers loving and fearing God as they should, they hated good and loved evil, which

perverted their "justice." Their actions showed that they did not love the Lord, nor did they fear Him (cf. Prov. 8:13; Isa. 1:16-17; Amos 5:15). Micah compared the unjust rulers to hunters who killed and ate God's people. The implication is that the rulers regarded and treated the ordinary citizens of Israel as mere animals rather than as human beings. The 'tearing the flesh off the people, eating their flesh, and cooking their bones' (a representation of one making a stew to eat / in the extreme – an illustration of cannibalism) illustrates and represents the leader's abuse of the people under their rule for their own selfish desires. The leaders were stripping the poor of their money and property through the use of unfair legal actions, bribery, theft, and extortion. The leaders oppressed God's people unmercifully.

3:4: But there will come a time when the leaders of Israel would be on the receiving end of God's judgment because of their sin. When that time came, they would cry out to God for help, but God would not answer. Because these rulers had turned deaf ears to the pleas of orphans and widows, they *themselves* would eventually "cry out to" God in prayer, asking Him for help. "But He" would "not answer" them (cf. Ps. 27:7-9; Prov. 21:13; Jer. 7:12-15). Their cry for help would be rejected by God because it would be a selfish cry for deliverance from the pain of God's judgment, not a cry out of repentance for deliverance from sin. God's hiding His face from the leaders of Israel is a "picture/illustration" of God disregarding them and turning His back on them. God hears all prayers because He is omniscient, but He chooses

not to respond to the 'cry' (prayers) of the leaders of Israel in their time of great need.

The application of the prophecy of Micah to the civil leaders of Israel is a stark warning to us today. When we do not love the Lord (cf. Psalm 97:10) and fear the Lord (cf. Prov. 8:13), we cannot expect God to answer our prayers to get us out of situations we have created because of our own selfish desires. God always listens to the prayers of those who believe in Him but sometimes He refuses to relieve them from the consequences of their actions. Micah's prophecy is a clear reminder that we should always be genuine in our repentance so we have God's ear when we call out to Him.

3:5-8: The Guilt of Israel's 'Prophets'

3:5: The prophets in Judah were guilty of misleading the people. Instead of proclaiming truth they proclaimed "peace" to those who gave them money or things; they told the people what they wanted to hear, which created a false hope. They proclaimed "war" on those who gave them nothing. These false prophets were guilty before God (the Judge) because of their misleading of the people, which was motivated by their greed. Self-interest motivated these prophets, rather than the fear of the Lord (cf. 2 Tim. 4:3).

Even today, some ministers tailor their message to please others to gain favor with people who will treat them well. And sadly there are ministers today who neglect or attack those who do not treat them well.

3:6: Because the false prophets were not leading the people with integrity and were taking advantage of them materially, these leaders would be ashamed and humiliated. Because of this type of treatment, the Lord would withhold prophetic revelations from them. Rather than seeing the light, they would grope in the darkness. The "night" and "dark" pictures impending doom. "The sun," a symbol of God who bestows blessings and favor, would set on their day, and they would have to live in the "darkness" of His disfavor.

3:7: When God's judgment comes upon the people of Judah, the false prophets would not be able to explain to the people what was happening. These "seers" (one who receives visions from God) and "diviners" (one who seeks knowledge of the future through illegitimate means – outlawed by God) would suffer embarrassment and humiliation because they would not receive any word from the Lord. And by receiving no word from the Lord, they would lose their position of honor and standing with the people; thus the titles of "seer" and "diviner" were used in derogatory terms by Micah. True prophets seek the Lord's glory and gain; false prophets seek their own glory and gain. Covering the face ("covering their lips") was a sign of mourning (cf. Lev. 13:45; Ezek. 24:17, 22).

3:8: In contrast to the false prophets who were full of greed, Micah claimed to be full of spiritual "power" as a result of God's "Spirit." Micah stated that his prophecies were inspired by the "Spirit of the Lord"; therefore his message was authoritative and true. Micah followed the will of God, and God's Spirit filled him (cf. Eph. 5:18). "Justice" marked his pronouncements (cf. vv. 1-3, 5), and "courage"

his ministry (cf. vv. 4, 6-7; cf. Acts 4:13). Micah did not tailor his prophecies to the people and what they wanted to hear; nor did he tailor his prophecies in fear what people might withhold from him. His ministry was to declare the sins of the Israelites (as well as their future hope), and he fulfilled it faithfully and boldly.

The church today needs preachers who declare the whole counsel of God as God leads them through the work of the Holy Spirit. This is needed for God to bless the church. This is needed for the church to be the testimony of God to the community. The pastor today needs God's enabled justice and courage to proclaim God's truth

3:9-12: The Guilt of Israel's Rulers

3:9: Micah proceeds to carry out his ministry (cf. v.8) by confronting the rulers of Israel. He called all of Israel's rulers (Northern and Southern Kingdom) to pay attention to what he had to say to them. He identified them as rulers who despised ("utterly abhorred" / "regard as an abomination") 'justice' and distorted ("perverted / twisted") all that is right ("all that is straight/equity").

3:10-11: Micah describes the rulers of Israel as those who built Jerusalem by sacrificing the lives of innocent people. Micah declares that they were guilty of bloodshed and injustice. These evil rulers of Israel gave favorable verdicts to those who bribed them. The rulers so influenced the society and culture that the priests only taught for money and the prophets "divined" ("seeking knowledge of the future though illegitimate means"; i.e. "telling fortunes") for those who would pay them. Bottom-

line, the rulers, priests and prophets of Israel were only out for money.

Yet they all claimed to trust in the Lord. They falsely interpreted God's patience and grace as His approval of their actions. Therefore, they encouraged themselves with the false hope that since the Lord was among them, He would allow no evil to overtake them; therefore the nation of Israel would not be destroyed. The civil and religious leaders of Israel saw Jerusalem and the temple as signs of their irreversible 'right standing' before God. This was a sin of presumption because they were using the promises of God as a prop, using them to serve their own selfish lust for power and money.

It has been correctly stated; "When the leadership of a nation—both civil and religious—is evil, no form of government will work."

3:12: Because of the evil state of the religious and civil leaders, Micah declares God's judgment on Israel. Micah declares that God would plow up Jerusalem like "a field," and tear down its buildings until they were only "ruins", a heap of rubble. Even the Temple mount, the most holy place in all Israel, would become like a hilltop in a forest: overgrown with thickets and neglected. Micah's prophesy identifies 3 places, Zion, Jerusalem and the Temple; which indicate that God's judgment will occur on all the political and religious aspects of the nation of Israel.

Jeremiah, who lived a century later, quoted this portion of Micah's prophecy to assure the citizens of Jerusalem that the doom of their city was certain (Jer. 26:18). Jeremiah prefaced this quotation with, "Thus the LORD of hosts has said." He viewed Micah's prophecy as

inspired of God (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16); which was fulfilled when the Roman's destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

There is a strong application of Micah today. It has been stated: "Micah's words, remembered for their shocking severity a hundred years later, deserve to be taken to heart by each generation of God's people. They challenge every attempt to misuse the service of God for one's own glory and profit. They are a dire warning against the complacency that can take God's love and reject his lordship. They are a passionate plea for consistency between creed and conduct. The Lord is content with nothing less." (Leslie Allen)

"If Micah were ministering among us today, he would probably visit denominational offices, pastors' conferences, Bible colleges, and seminaries to warn Christian leaders that privilege brings responsibility and responsibility brings accountability." (Warren Wiersbe)

Micah 4-5 – Blessings for Israel in the Future

4:1-8: The Exaltation of Israel. In Micah 4:1-8, Micah identifies 11 characteristics of the 'kingdom'. Note: Micah 4:1-3 is very similar to Isaiah 2:2-4. There is debate about who wrote this first; if one borrowed from the other or if each one received this revelation directly from the Lord, God knows and He states that "the testimony of two men is true" (John 8:17).

4:1: Micah reverses from declaring impending judgement from God upon Israel to prophecies about the future millennial kingdom. Micah's reference to "the last days" denote the time when God will bring an end to

human history; usually it is a reference to the Tribulation and the Millennium. Here in Micah it appears to be closely aligned with the Millennium.

"The mountain of the house of the Lord" is Mt. Zion where the Temple, the Lord's house, stood in the past and will stand in the future (cf. Ezek. 40—43). In the future, Mt. Zion will become "the chief of all the mountains" ('exalted above the hills') on earth, rising above all other mountains or hills in its importance (cf. Gen. 12:3; Zech. 8:3). The Temple site will be the center of the millennial government that rules the world; the place where Christ will physically rule the world with a 'rod of iron' (Rev. 19:15). This is quite a contrast from what Micah had prophesied about the immediate future of Jerusalem and the Temple: from its destruction and abandonment to its center of world rule. When the Temple is the center of world government, "peoples will stream to it." There they will worship Christ and learn directly from Him.

4:2: "Many nations will" acknowledge Christ's rule by coming to the millennial Jerusalem to worship Christ and learn His ways and laws directly from the Israelites (Zech. 8:20-23). God's plan to bless the world through Israel (Gen. 12:3) is now physically being fulfilled. Also, Israel will finally fulfill its function as a kingdom of priests, by mediating between God and the people of the world (cf. Exod. 19:6). The entire Gentile world will want to be taught Christ's ways so they can obey His will. This is in sharp contrast to the Jews of Micah's day that did not want to obey God. Jerusalem will become the source of communication concerning the Lord and His will.

4:3: The Lord will serve as the global Judge, deciding disputes between many peoples and nations far removed from Israel geographically. These people and nations will see the wisdom and power of Christ as He makes judgment on what is right and who is right. His judgments are righteous and fair, so much so that the nations will convert their implements of warfare into agricultural tools to promote life. They will never again engage in warfare or train for battle. Standing armies and stockpiles of armaments will be things of the past. The Millennium will become the world that people long for where the earth is used wisely and where justice and righteousness prevails. In Joel 3:10, the reverse imagery is used in describing the Tribulation.

4:4: Peace will prevail worldwide. The figure of people sitting under their vines and fig trees describes them at rest, enjoying the fruits of their labors and God's blessings. The people in the Millennium will be secure, they will not fear; and peace and prosperity will reign for all men. Micah wrote that these promises came directly from God, not from him. These were prophecies that were sure to come to pass, in contrast to those of the false prophets of Micah's day (cf. 3:5).

4:5: In Micah's day the Gentile nations, and many of the Israelites, followed other gods, but in the future they will all follow Christ. The nations who were following their own gods in this verse is a reference to the nations of Micah's day, because in the Millennium all nations will be coming to Jerusalem to learn God's ways (vs. 2-3). Israel in the Millennium will walk (vs. 2) in the name of the Lord where she will follow and obey Christ's rule and law.

Micah is using this prophecy to challenge Israel to "walk" in the Lord's ways rather than in the ways of the gods of other nations (cf. 2 Pet. 3:11-12; 1 John 3:3).

Walking "in the name of the Lord our God" means living in dependence on Him and His strength, which His attributes manifest. Is this not what we are supposed to be doing today?

4:6: Micah, in v.5, summarizes that all men will walk with God during the Millennium when Christ is physically ruling the earth. The nation of Israel has been injured by God's judgment ("the lame/the outcast") Micah prophesies of future hope for Israel. In "that day" (the Millennium) the Lord promises to "assemble" and "gather" His people, who have been 'exiled' around the world. This exile has occurred because God has judged Israel by allowing nations to "afflict" her whom He has "afflicted" by allowing nations to abuse Israel. The assembling of Israel will occur when He returns to the earth at His Second Coming, which marks the beginning of the Millennium.

This "assembling" will be welcomed by the Jews – it is their future hope. The Jews to this day suffer under "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:20-24), and will do so until Messiah returns to the earth (Matt. 24:31). "The times of the Gentiles" are the times during which Gentiles control the affairs of the Jews, which has occurred since Israel lost her sovereignty. Even today this is true as Israel, though a sovereign nation is totally dependent on other nations for its existence. The "times of the Gentiles" includes the Jews suffering in the Tribulation to come (Dan. 7:25; Zech. 14:5).

These times began when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and took the Jews into exile in 586 B.C., and they will end with the return of Jesus Christ to the earth at the Second Coming.

4:7: Micah declares that the LORD (Jesus Christ) promises to make these 'lame outcasts' of the earth, the surviving remnant of Jews from the Tribulation, into a "strong nation," and to personally "reign over them" as their Messiah from "Mt. Zion"..."forever" (cf. Ps. 146:10; Zeph. 3:14-20; Luke 1:33; Rev. 11:15). He will begin His rule as King ruling with a "rod of iron" (Rev. 19:15) in the Millennium and will continue to reign until the destruction of the present heavens and earth (II Pet. 3:10-13); then it will continue on a new earth throughout eternity (Rev. 21:1-8). Once His rule begins, it will continue forever.

4:8: Micah declares the future of Jerusalem/Mt. Zion, which will become the 'watchtower' for 'the flocks' of God's people, Israel, and a stronghold to her descendants. Jerusalem will be the center of Christ's rule over the world. Jerusalem's dominion over the world would be restored; Israel's "former dominion" over her world—under David and Solomon—would return. The use of the phrase "the daughter of Zion, and "the daughter of Jerusalem" refer to the inhabitants of Jerusalem as they will be they will directly participate in the rule and governance of the world during the Millennium.

It should be noted that only if we spiritualize the meaning of "the daughter of Jerusalem" to mean the church, we get away from the clear promise of Israel's restoration here (cf. Rom. 11:26). Reference to restoration of the glory of the former Davidic kingdom predicts the revival of the Davidic

kingdom (cf. Isa. 9:7; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11) in the Millennium.

There are 11 characteristics of the future Messianic Kingdom in 4:1-8. They are: (1) the global prominence of the temple (v. 1a) and (2) its attraction of people worldwide (v. 1b); (3) Jerusalem will function as teacher of the world (v. 2a) and will be (4) the disseminator of revelation (v. 2b); (5) The Lord will judge the world from Jerusalem (v. 3a), and (6) peace will be universal (v. 3b). (7) Israel will experience peace and security (v. 4), (8) spiritual sensitivity (v. 5), (9) regathering to the land (v. 6), (10) strength (v. 7), and (11) dominion (v. 8).

4:9 – 5:1: Exile to the Kingdom. *Micah declares to the nation of Israel that 4 events will take place before the Millennial Kingdom is established.*

4:9-10a: First Event: Israel's exile. Micah, speaking for the Lord, prophesied that the Jews would be taken into captivity and that they would "cry aloud" in panic and pain. They would "writhe in agony... like a woman in labor" who can do nothing to relieve her pain and agony. They would be forced by their captors to camp in open fields and live in the countryside as they were being led to Babylon. Judah would be taken captive to Babylon about 100 years later to fulfill Micah's prophesy. This was an amazing prophecy that was fulfilled because at the time Micah made this prophesy the Assyrians were the empire in control of the world as the Jews knew it and were the greatest threat to Israel and Judah. This is one of the earliest references to the Babylonian Captivity in prophetic Scripture (cf. Isa. 39:1-7).

When the Israelites were carried into captivity, the nation of Israel would have no king or counselor leading them. The loss of the king was a much more painful thing for Israel than for any other nation, because of the promises to Israel that were attached to the throne. The king of Israel was a visible representative of the grace of God, and his removal was a sign of the wrath of God.

4:10b: *Second Event: Israel's rescue.* Micah prophesied that "the LORD" would eventually rescue and "redeem" them from their captivity in Babylon. He would deliver them and return them to their land.

4:11-13: *Third Event: Battle of Armageddon / Messiah King.* In Micah's day, "many nations" desired to see Israel destroyed. However, they do not know the "thoughts of the Lord" nor did they "understand His counsel." They failed to see that God would gather the all the nations together for judgment, as a farmer gathers "sheaves" of grain on a "threshing floor" in preparation for their judgment (their 'beating'). The gathering of the nations to one location is a reference to the Battle of Armageddon, which will be the last great attack of the nations of the world against Israel just before Christ returns as the Messiah King to set up the Millennial Kingdom. This event is mentioned in Joel 3, Zechariah 12 and 14, Ezekiel 38 and 39.

God will enable Israel to destroy the nations and will turn over their wealth to them to give to the Messiah King, possibly to adorn the Temple. This event will bring the nations into subjection to the sovereign Lord. Israel has not yet done this, so the fulfillment lies in the future, when Messiah returns to reign (cf. Zech. 14:12-15).

5:1: *Fourth Event: Current Humiliation of the King of Israel.* This verse is the last one in chapter 4 of the Hebrew Bible. It continues the theme of Zion's might. "But now / Now" in the Hebrew refers to a soon-coming event. Micah calls on the Israelites to prepare for war, and reminded them that they had often engaged in war, by referring to them as a "daughter of troops." This expression means that their external enemies would wage war against them. These enemies would "laid siege against" them and would even "strike/smite" Israel's "judge ... on the cheek"—a figure of speech indicating humiliation of him. The "judge of Israel" in view appears to be King Zedekiah for the following reasons (cf. 2 Kings 25:1-7): First, according to this verse, the time of this 'striking' is when Israel was under siege. Second, Micah 5:2-6 jump to a time in the distant future, whereas 5:1 describes a time in the near future. Third, "judge" (Heb. *shopet*) in 5:1 is different from "ruler" (Heb. *moshel*) in 5:2, which describes a different individual - Christ. Micah, through the leading of the Holy Spirit was led to use *shopet* because of its similarity to *shebet*, "rod", which is a clear reference to Christ. As noted earlier, Micah is famous for his wordplays.

5:2-6: Israel's Ruler – the Messiah.

5:2: The introduction of 5:2 "But you" indicates a change from the message in 5:1. Micah prophesied that "Ruler" of Israel ("Messiah") will come from Bethlehem Ephrathah. Bethlehem (meaning "house of bread") was about 5 miles S of Jerusalem and was a small town not mentioned previously in Scripture as a town where the clans of Judah lived (Josh. 15 / Neh. 11). It was the town

that David was born in (I Sam. 16:1,18-19; 17:12). Matt. 2:6 shows that Jewish scholars of Jesus' day believed that Bethlehem was the birthplace of the coming Messiah. Ephrathah (meaning "fruitful") was the name of the district Bethlehem was located in; and it differentiated Bethlehem from a town of the same name in Galilee. "For me" indicates that the coming Messiah is the ruler of Israel on God's behalf. The Messiah's "coming forth" ('goings out'/origins) is "from of old, from ancient days" ('days of immeasurable time') meaning that the Messiah was eternal and participated in Creation, was seen in theophanies in the O.T., and was incarnated as Jesus Christ in human form in Bethlehem (John 1:1, Phil. 2:6, Col. 1:17). Christ, Israel's Ruler, will accomplish several things for Israel during His Millennial rule. He will: 1) reunite and restore Israel, 2) care for Israel and give them security, and 3) destroy their enemies.

5:3: Micah begins v.3 with the prophesy that He (the Messiah) will "give them up until the time" of their "birth." This is a reference to the interval between Israel's rejection of the Messiah at His first coming (the first Advent) to the time of His Second Coming (the second Advent). This is known as the "time of the Gentiles" when Israel is under the rule of Gentiles. This is a time of distress and pain for Israel, just like a woman in labor. But the nation of Israel will be 'born' when all of the children of Israel are regathered, restored, reunited as a nation when Christ returns the second time as Messiah.

5:4-5a: The Messiah will "shepherd" the nation of Israel. This was not occurring during Micah's day. Christ, as Messiah, will care, guide, and protect the nation of

Israel by God's (Yahweh) authority and strength; and for His sake. As He shepherds Israel, they will have peace and security (Zech. 14:11) because "His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth" (Psa. 72:8, Mal. 1:11). Since He will rule over all the earth all will know of His sovereign power, which will guarantee Israel's safety.

5:5b-6: Micah's prophecy continues with the Messiah bringing peace to Israel by defeating and destroying its enemies. Assyria was the main threat to the Israelites in Micah's day and Micah's prophecy predicts Israel's victory over the Assyrians, which did not and has not happened in the history of Israel. Therefore, this prophecy will be fulfilled in the future for Israel. The "Assyrians", as used here, is a term that represents Israel's enemies in the future. The enemies of Israel will invade Israel and will destroy its mansions; and the Israelites will rise up against them. The expression "seven ... and eight" means the same as "three ... and four", which means 'full and sufficient', completeness, more than enough to complete the task. The Israelites will have more than enough leaders to defeat their enemy. The leaders of Israel will conquer "the land of Assyria with the sword"; they will bring it under Israelite control. The "land of Nimrod" is a synonym for Assyria and "its entrances" imply the strategic areas of its territory. The Messiah will lead the Israelites in victory over their enemies at the beginning of the Millennium.

Micah's prophecy assured the Israelites that a time was coming when they would no longer be threatened by powerful, hostile nations. The Millennium will be a new era for Israel; it will be an era of peace and security for

them where the Messiah prevents the lion-like 'Assyrians' of the world from terrorizing and controlling His people.

5:7-15: The Work of the Messiah and the Jews.

Micah's prophecy has assured the Israelites that a ruler (Messiah) and time was coming when they would rule the world when it would be a time of peace and security for them.

5:7: After Christ, the Messiah, has destroyed Israel's enemies (Micah 5:5b-6) the Jewish nation of Israel will rule the earth. In that day "the remnant of Jacob" will live all over the world, scattered among the other nations. "The remnant of Jacob" is one of Micah's favorite terms for the believing Jews living in the "last days" (cf. 2:12; 4:7; 5:8; 7:18). The presence of the Jews will be a divine gift to the other people of the world, as dew and rain are to the earth. God will send them among the nations as He sends the dew and rain; their presence there will be due to His working, not the result of human choices or national policies ultimately.

5:8-9: The Jews will be dominant and powerful over the other people of the world in the Millennium. To some peoples they will be a source of blessing (v.7); but to other peoples they will be seen as a young lion having the capability of being a source of fear and destruction. In the Millennium they Jews will be in power and their enemies will not be able to rise up against them. This will be a time of complete and absolute peace.

5:10-11: At the beginning of the Millennium, the Messiah will destroy the earthly sources of security from the Jews that have always tempted them, represented by:

"horses," "chariots," "cities," and "fortifications." Israel had been prohibited from using "horses and chariots" because they would trust in them versus God (cf. Deut. 17:16; I Kings 10:26-28). The Jews also trusted in their "cities and fortifications" and the Messiah destroys them so their dependence was totally on God. Is it not true of us today, we, too many times, trust in human-made resources instead of God.

5:12-14: At the beginning of the Millennium, the Messiah will also destroy all sources and accouterments of idol worship. "Sorceries" involved seeking information from demonic sources. "Fortune-tellers" cast spells by calling demonic spirits to influence other people. "Carved images" were pagan idols. "Sacred pillars / Asherah images" were stone and wooden symbols (poles) of the male and female Canaanite deities. . These were items that were the "work of their hands" that would be destroyed and no longer worshiped. Occultism that exists in the world today will continue into the Tribulation (Rev. 9:21), but the Lord will "root it out" in the Millennium.

5:15: At the beginning of the Millennium, the Messiah will take "vengeance...on the nations" that "have not obeyed" His will (cf. Ps. 2:9; Rev. 12:5; 19:15). "Vengeance" is "a legal term for the action of a royal sovereign against rebels who will not acknowledge his sovereignty. The peoples (nations) that fail to acknowledge and worship Christ (Messiah) as the only true God will be judged as He is a ruler that rules with a rod of iron (Psa. 2:9, Rev. 19:15). All peoples in the Millennium will need to submit to the Lord (Messiah) or they will face Christ as their Judge as the Sovereign and Holy Ruler (Matt. 25:31-46).

Micah 6-7: Micah's Third Oracle. *Micah's third oracle lays out God's case against Israel and His judgment for their sins; and God's promise of future restoration and the ultimate triumph of His kingdom. Micah vindicates God's justice in this oracle. He justifies God for His punishing of Israel and for His fulfillment of His promises in the future. All of this is certain because God is faithful. Chapter 6 explains the causes of judgment, and chapter 7 the coming glory.*

6:1-5: The Lord's Indictment Against His People. *Micah opens this third oracle in a courtroom setting where there are 3 speakers – The LORD as plaintiff pleading His case before a jury, Israel responding, and Micah as a lawyer for the plaintiff.*

6:1-2: In the third oracle (litigation speech) Micah calls his audience to hear what the LORD has told him to say. The LORD has a "case" (lawsuit, Heb. *rib*) to bring against His people. The Lord is summoning Israel to defend herself in a courtroom setting. He addresses the "mountains," "hills," and "foundations of the earth" as the jury in this case (cf. Deut. 4:25-26, 32:1; Isa. 1:2). The "mountains / hills / foundations" represent the nations (peoples) of the world. The LORD, therefore, has called this '*jury of nations*', which had observed Israel's history from its beginning, to hear His "case" of indictment against the nation of "Israel." If these jurors could speak, they would witness to the truthfulness of the Lord's claims. The LORD is asking Israel to defend her actions against Him.

6:3: The LORD appeals to His "people." He asked them to answer His appeal; to testify how He had caused them

to be so weary of Him that they ceased to obey Him. His rhetorical questions were unanswerable; He had not given them reason to become dissatisfied with Him (cf. 1 Sam. 17:29; 20:1; 26:18; 29:8; Isa. 5:4). His questions convey a sense of compassion; rather than simply criticizing them, He asked how He had failed them. They had complained against Him very often, but He had given them no occasion to do so.

6:4: Instead of wronging them, the LORD had done nothing but good for them. Instead of letting them down, He had lifted them up. He had brought them from Egyptian bondage into the Promised Land of milk and honey. He had brought them out of "the house of slavery"—"Egypt"—which their Passover celebrated (cf. Exod. 12:3, 7, 12-13). The word "redeemed" means "to ransom"; a reminder to them that a lamb was slain so that the oldest son of each Jewish family would not be killed. Also, He had given them capable leaders for their wilderness travels in "Moses, Aaron, and Miriam"; leaders whom the Jews have respected throughout their history. Moses, the prophet, had given them their law (cf. Deut. 18:15-22). Aaron served them as their first high priest, and Miriam was a prophetess who led them in praising God for His goodness (Exod. 15:20-21).

6:5: The LORD then charges the Israelites to "remember" that "Balak, king of Moab" tried to get Balaam to prophecy against His people, but Balaam revealed that God would never do that, instead Balaam blesses the Israelites (Num. 22—24). The LORD's intentions for His people had consistently been good. The events of their crossing the Jordan River and entering the Promised Land

showed the same thing. "Shittim" was the Israelites' last camping place before they crossed the Jordan, and "Gilgal" was where they camped first after crossing (Josh. 3:1; 4:18-19). God had always done what was consistent with His covenant obligations to His people, never burdening them, but always protecting, defending, and enabling them. He had lovingly led them from slavery, in a hostile foreign land, to settling in their own promised land (cf. Josh. 24; 1 Sam. 12).

6:6-8: Micah's Response for the Nation of Israel. Micah opens in Micah 6:1-5 with the LORD as plaintiff pleading His case before a jury. Here in verses 6-8 Micah responds to the LORD's plea on behalf of the nation of Israel. Micah speaks as a righteous man who understood the nation of Israel's sin. These verses are one of the great passages of the O.T.; these verses are well known today.

6:6: Micah, as a prophet of the nation of Israel, asks what offering he should bring to the exalted LORD in heaven that would be appropriate to regain His favor—in view of the LORD's mercies to the Israelites throughout their history. Should he go with 'year-old calves' to be sacrificed as 'burnt offerings'? Would these year-old calves be suitable burnt offerings; as they were the very best offerings one could offer that expressed the worshipper's total personal dedication to the LORD (cf. Lev. 9:2-3; 22:27)?

6:7: Micah continues his requests. Would the LORD be pleased if he offered Him "thousands of rams" and "ten thousand rivers of oil," like Solomon and other kings had done (cf. Lev. 2:1-16; 1 Kings 3:4; 8:63; 2 Chron. 30:24;

35:7)? Micah even asks if perhaps the making of the ultimate sacrifice in the offering his "firstborn" son to atone for his sins would please the Lord?

Micah knew that these sacrifices would not appease the LORD's wrath on the nation of Israel. Israel, as a nation, was under the covenant of God that involved a sacrificial system. Micah knew that these sacrifices by themselves would not please or appease the LORD but he used them as examples of ritual worship that the Israelites thought would satisfy God.

Micah asked these rhetorical questions to inform the nation of Israel that nothing, not even the most extreme sacrifices, could atone for their sin of idolatry. Neither the quality of a sacrifice nor its quantity was the important issue. The real issue was that the LORD wanted the nation of Israel to change their actions and attitudes; He wanted a change of their heart to have faith, trust and dependency on Him for His grace and mercy.

6:8: Micah concludes by telling the nation of Israel exactly what the LORD desires from them. It was not these sacrifices that the LORD wanted. He had already told the Israelites what would be "good" (beneficial) for them when they sinned (cf. Deut. 10:12, 18; 1 Sam. 12:24; Hos. 12:6).

He wanted each of His people ("O man") to change his or her behavior. The address "O man" means 'any person' in Israel and it emphasizes the difference between God and man, particularly man's subordination under God. The LORD did not want man to be related to Him in an external, ritualistic way (expressed by a 'duty' of being 'burdened' to obey) but rather to be related to Him in an

internal, humble and submissive way (expressed by a desire to be obedient to His commands).

Specifically, the LORD wanted His people to practice "justice"—rather than continuing to plot and practice unfairness and injustice toward one another. He also wanted them to "love kindness," and to practice loyal love (Heb. *hesed*), by carrying through on their commitments to help one another, as He had with them. And He wanted them to "walk humbly with" Him, to live their lives modestly trusting and depending on Him, rather than arrogantly relying on themselves.

These requirements remain the same today. Before the relationship between the LORD and a man can be "good" (beneficial); it is required of man to have their heart right before the LORD. There is a progression in these 3 requirements, from what is external to what is internal, and from human relations to divine relations. Doing (1) justice toward other people demands (2) loving kindness, which necessitates (3) walking humbly in fellowship with God (cf. Matt. 22:37-39; 23:23; 1 Cor. 13:4-7; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Pet. 5:5). These 3 requirements explain the essence of what should be the internal spiritual reality of our heart; which is in stark contrast to external, ritual worship which is outward words only with no internal reality. The LORD's primary desire was for a heart attitude that is marked by the characteristics Micah proclaimed. It has been said; "No vital relationship with God is possible if one is unfaithful to the responsibilities arising out of his God-given relationships with his fellow men."

7:1-7. Micah's Lament over Israel's Sins. *Micah's lament is an individual lament, similar to many of the psalms. Here out of love, Micah cry's to himself over Israel's sin.*

7:1-2: Micah bemoans his own disappointment with Israel's situation. He is sorrowful of being in the midst of a people who were totally godless. He compares himself to Israel's "fruit pickers" and "grape gatherers" who go to the fields to pick fruit but find that all the good fruit (first-ripe fruit) is gone, even the gleanings left after harvest are gone.

Micah indicates through hyperbole that he could not find faithful "godly" or morally and ethically "upright" people in the land. This statement was an obvious overstatement because there were some righteous people in Israel, including Isaiah, but it did correctly identify the state of the society of the nation. By overstating his case he made his point that there were very few godly upright people in Israel. The condition of society made it appear that "all" people in the nation of Israel seemed to "wait" for the opportunity to advance their own interests, even resorting to violence and "bloodshed" to do so. They behaved like hunters waiting to snare unsuspecting birds in their nets.

7:3-4a: Micah laments that the people of Israel were so skillful at doing evil that it seemed they could do it equally well with either hand; they were ambidextrous when it came to sinning. The only thing the people could do well was sin!

The leaders of Israel always had their hands out to receive 'gifts' (bribes); in the courtroom the judges accepted bribes as they ruled on cases before them; and

the powerful did what they felt was necessary (evil) to get what they wanted. These leaders formed networks of conspiracy, like a basket, to get what they wanted. Even the best and most upright of the people were like briars and thorn hedges in that they entangled and hurt all who came in contact with them.

7:4b: Micah declares that what God's prophets warned the people about would someday come true. Just as the people posted a watchman to warn of coming danger, so the prophets, God's "watchmen," had announced coming "punishment" from the LORD. Yet the people had not heeded their warnings of the LORD's judgment, and when that Day of Judgment came the people would be confused, not knowing what to do.

7:5-6: Micah warns the people against trusting in their neighbors, friends, or even wives who reassured them that everything would be all right. Treachery was so rampant in Israel that a person's own family members were their enemies. They could trust no one because everyone was telling lies to gain their own advantage. They could not trust the members of their own families because everyone was after his or her own interests, and would stoop to betrayal to obtain them.

7:7: Micah concludes his lament with a statement of his trust in the LORD. In contrast to the Israelites of his day, Micah is determined to "watch expectantly" and "wait" patiently "for the LORD" to act as He had promised (cf. 1 Sam. 4:13; Tit. 2:13). Micah knew that the LORD would ultimately bring salvation to His people (cf. Isa. 59:20). Micah's commitment and the LORD's promise gave him confidence that the LORD would "hear" his prayers.

The reason Micah did not succumb to utter pessimism—in view of the terrible conditions in his day—is that he was determined in his heart to trust God because of LORD's promises. The same faith is needed by us today (cf. Phil. 2:14-16).

7:8-13: Micah's Confidence in the LORD. Micah continues to speak as an individual, but he also spoke for the faithful remnant of Israelites in his day. His sentiments would have been theirs. Therefore the lament is communal (Micah as a person and the remnant of Israel as a nation); but the lament gives way to expressions of confidence, petition and praise.

7:8: Micah, speaking for himself and the nation of Israel, expresses confidence in the fact that the LORD will eventually reverse Israel's situation. When Micah's and Israel's enemies saw them experience failure and discouragement, they rejoiced. Micah tells them not to rejoice, because though he and Israel had fell, God would raise him up. Though they appeared to be 'groping/sitting' "in darkness", "the LORD" would be "a light" to them to illuminate the right path for them to take.

7:9: Micah identifies with Israel by confessing his guilt. Though he had not personally committed the sins that he criticized his fellow Israelites of practicing, as a part of Israel he was with them in their guilt. He would have to bear the consequences of the LORD's judgment as they did. The LORD's judgment would be the means of bring Israel to the "light" to establish "justice."

The LORD, whom has been indicting the nation of Israel, would come to Micah's and Israel's defense. They

would eventually come out of their dark circumstances into "the light" of God's presence, and they would behold God's "righteousness." They would see God demonstrate His justice and faithfulness to His promises. This occurs when they (Micah and Israel) confess their sin and acknowledge the justice of God's judgment.

7:10: When Micah and Israel see God's righteousness, then Micah's and Israel's enemies will feel ashamed for accusing the LORD of abandoning His people ("Where is the LORD your God?"). Micah and Israel will also see these enemies humiliated and brought low, trodden down like mud in the street (cf. Josh. 10:24; Ps. 110:1).

7:11-13: "In that day" refers to a future day when Israel would see the "walls" around their vineyards being rebuilt, and the boundaries of the nation expanded (cf. Ezek. 47:13-23; Obed. 19-20; Zech. 2:1-5). The word used here to describe walls, *gader*, refers to the walls around vineyards (cf. Num. 22:24; Isa. 5:5), not walls around a city. In the Millennium, Jerusalem will have no walls (Zech. 2:4-5). This refers to the distant future when God will re-gather and reestablish Israel in her land, in the Millennium, not following the Babylonian Captivity.

Israel's former enemies from all over the world, represented by "Assyria" and the "Euphrates" River on the northwest, and "Egypt" and its "cities" on the southeast, would "come to" the Israelites in their land (cf. Isa. 19:23-25; Amos 9:11-15). They would come from everywhere between the seas and the mountains ('seas and mountains' are a figure of speech that uses a part of something to represent the whole), meaning from everywhere on earth (cf. Ps. 72:8; Zech. 9:10).

Yet before that occurs, the earth will become "desolate" when God judges its inhabitants for their sinful "deeds" (cf. Isa. 24:1; 34—35). This will happen in the Tribulation and in the judgment of the nations that immediately follows the Lord's Second Coming (cf. Matt. 25:32-33, 46).

7:14-20: Micah's Prayer and Praise.

7:14 - Micah prays to the LORD to ask Him to again take the active role as the Shepherd of His people Israel. Shepherding with His rod ("scepter," Heb. *shebet*) implies kingly leadership and blessing. This is a request for the promised descendant of David to appear and lead Israel. Israel is "the flock" that the LORD possesses and they were isolated ("dwells by itself") even though they inhabited the land that God had given them. Micah prays that they might enjoy God's blessings, as when their flocks fed on the lush, grassy hills of "Bashan" and "Gilead" earlier in their history.

7:15 - The LORD replies to Micah's prayer. He promises that He will "show" Israel "miracles" again, as when He sent the plagues on Egypt just before the Exodus (cf. Exod. 3:20; 15:11). The Jews' liberation from Gentile domination and return to their own land will occur after the Tribulation at the beginning of the Millennium; it will be another miraculous Exodus event (cf. Hos. 9:3; 11:5,11; 12:9).

7:16-17 - The Gentile "nations" will observe this miracle, and feel "ashamed," because they will realize that "all their might" is inferior to God's power. They will be speechless and they will refuse to hear about what God is doing for His people, because His power is so

overwhelming. They will become as submissive as slaves and humble as snakes. "Licking the dust" is a figure of speech describing total defeat (cf. Gen. 3:14; Ps. 72:9 Isa. 49:23; 65:25). The Gentile nations will surrender to the LORD, coming to Him in fear of what He will do to them.

7:18 – Micah praises the LORD as One who is *unique* in that He pardons the rebellious sins of the surviving "remnant of His people." "Who is a God like You?" is a rhetorical question. Answer, "there is no one like the LORD." The LORD will "not retain His anger" against the Israelites "forever" (cf. Ps. 103:9). He will "pardon" them (cf. 1:5; 3:8; 6:7; Exod. 34:6-7) because He delights to be faithful to His "love" (Heb. *hesed*) for them (cf. v. 20). Here we see God's grace in action.

7:19 – The LORD will "again have compassion" (tender, heartfelt concern, Heb. *rehem*) on the Israelites, as He had done so often in their history (cf. Ps. 102:13; 103:4, 13; 116:5; 119:156; Hos. 14:4; Zech. 10:6). He will subdue their "iniquities"—as though their sins were insects that He stepped on and obliterated. He will do away with "all their sins," as surely as someone gets rid of something permanently by throwing it "into the ... sea" (cf. Ps. 103:12).

The use of three words for sin[s], in verses 18 and 19 ("iniquity," "rebellious act/transgression" and "iniquities/sins"), gives added assurance of God's forgiveness. God will forgive all types of Israel's sins; and this applies to us today.

7:20 - The basis of Micah's confidence was that God would be faithful to His promises "to Jacob," and loyal to His commitment (Heb. *hesed*) to bless "Abraham" (cf. Gen.

12:2-3; 13:15; 15:18-21; 17:7-8, 13, 19, 21; 28:13-14; 35:10-12; 48:4; et al.). These were promises to Israel's "fathers," which God had sealed with His oath, vowing to fulfill them (e.g., Gen. 22:16-18; cf. Rom. 4:13; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 4:1-10; 8:10; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 21:3,7). One day, Jesus Christ will return to earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to restore the Israelites to their promised land and to rule over the world from Jerusalem.

Micah's final oracle begins dark and foreboding in an atmosphere of gloom; and it ends in one of the greatest statements of hope in all the OT. Today modern orthodox Jews read verses 18-20 in their synagogues on the Day of Atonement following the reading of Jonah. Once a year orthodox Jews go to a running stream and scatter into it bits of paper and small articles, repeating while they do it Micah 7:18-20 (the "son-called Tashlik" ceremony). It is but an outward act, yet it testifies to the existence that there is still faith in Israel that God will fulfill His promise. It will be a glorious day when God forgives Israel of their sins, remembers them no more and regathers them to their promised land.

Malachi – Do Not Forget God’s Love

Malachi was written sometime in the years of 450-430 BC. This was about 300 years after Micah was written; and it was about 100 years after Cyrus issued the decree that permitted the Jews to return from exile to Judah.

The name of the writer is the title of this book. "Malachi" means "my messenger" and is the last prophet in the OT period as John the Baptist is the next prophet identified after Malachi (whose ministry is prophesied by Malachi). We know nothing of the prophet's parentage, ancestral or tribal roots, geographical origin, or other vocation. All we know is that Malachi received and communicated the word of the LORD to the Jews of his day.

Malachi was a contemporary of Nehemiah; and was soon after Ezra and Esther. He was one of 3 postexilic prophets, the other two being Haggai and Zechariah. Historically, the first group of Jewish exiles returned from Babylonian captivity in 537 B.C. Ezra 1—6 records their experiences. Haggai and Zechariah ministered to these returnees in 520 B.C. and urged them to rebuild the Temple. The Temple was rebuilt and completed in 515 B.C. The events recorded in the Book of Esther took place in Persia between 482 and 473 B.C. A second group of Jewish exiles returned in 458 B.C. under Ezra's leadership.

Ezra sought to beautify the Temple and institute reforms that would purify Israel's worship (Ezra 7—10). Nehemiah led a third group of Jewish exiles back in 444 B.C., and the events recorded in Nehemiah describe what happened

between 445 and 420 B.C., including the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall. It was in this time period that Malachi ministered in Jerusalem. It is believed that Malachi ministered to the Jews in Jerusalem during the time when Nehemiah returned to Babylon following the completion of Jerusalem's walls. Nehemiah (the last historical book written in the O.T.) and Malachi both address a corrupt priesthood, mixed marriages, and the people's neglect and disregard of their spiritual life.

Life was not easy for the Jews who had returned to Judah, beginning with their return in 537 BC until the time of Malachi. The Jewish people continued to live under Gentile (Persian) sovereignty even though they were back in their own land. Harvests were poor, and locust plagues were a problem (3:11). Even after Ezra's reforms and Nehemiah's amazing success in motivating the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem's wall, most of the Jews were cold-hearted, even resentful toward the LORD. Priests and people were not observing the Mosaic Law as commanded, as is clear from Malachi's references to sacrifices, tithes, and offerings. Foreign cultures had made deep inroads into the values and practices of God's people. The restored Jews still intermarried with Gentiles (2:11), and divorces were quite common (2:16). The spiritual, ethical, and moral tone of the nation was low. Malachi and the Jews who had returned to Judah were living in an uneventful waiting period, when God seemed to have forgotten His people and the covenantal promises He had made to them. Even though the Temple had been completed, nothing had occurred to indicate that God's

presence had returned to fill it with glory; and many were losing their faith.

Malachi's purpose was to confront the Jews in Judah with their sins and to encourage them to pursue holiness. He indicts the religious leadership of the day and chides the Jews for their spiritual apathy; and their skepticism and cynicism concerning God's plan for their future. He calls the people to correct their wrong attitudes of worship by trusting in the living LORD with genuine faith. He also warns them of their immoral behavior toward one another and calls for their repentance lest they be terrorized at the coming of the Lord.

Malachi's chief revelation was the person and work of the LORD. He presents the LORD as sovereign over Israel and the whole world; and One who loves and is very patient with His wayward people.

Malachi's notable messianic prophecy deals with Messiah's forerunner, John the Baptist, (3:1; 4:5). He would be like Elijah and would call the Israelites to repentance (cf. Matt. 11:14; 17:12-13; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:17).

Malachi uses the Mosaic Covenant as the standard by which he measures the Jew's postexilic conduct (covenant blessing requires covenant faithfulness). He points out the Jew's covenant unfaithfulness (problems of neglect and disobedience) and urges them to return to the covenant. He reminds the Jews of the LORD's faithfulness to His covenant promises—including promises of future blessing.

He seeks to motivate the Jews to return to the Lord, by convicting them of their sins and converting them to love for their LORD. The Jewish people's lack of proper perspective of God's covenant faithfulness and love, and the loss of hope that His Kingdom would be established had led to widespread unfaithfulness and sin.

Malachi's style is quite different from that of any other O.T. prophet; instead of delivering messages to his audience, he charges them with various sins, six times in all. He employs a very confrontational style of address in his writing through the use of charges. After each charge, he proceeds to back up the charge with evidence. Malachi's rhetorical disputation speech form contains four components: assertion, questioning, response, and implication.

This disputation form used by Malachi can be viewed in two different ways. One view is as six distinct messages, either as a charge or a command then proof is given and a challenge is presented. The second view is as three addresses with each having three elements: situation, change, and motivation. We will use the second view to study Malachi.

- I. Priests exhorted not to dishonor the LORD.
- II. Judah exhorted to faithfulness.
- III. Judah exhorted to return and remember.

This final book of the Old Testament is about the error of forgetting the love of God. Malachi charges the Jews with seven specific sins. In each case, the Jewish people respond

by challenging his criticism. They said, "How have we done that?" (cf. 1:2, 6; 2:14, 17; 3:7, 8, 13). Their response indicates hardness of heart with a resistance to deal with the internal conditions in their hearts that needed correcting. Malachi proclaims the sensitivity of the LORD to their condition and the corresponding insensitivity of the people to it. The Jews believe that since they were serving the LORD as He had directed, then He must be pleased with them. Malachi responds by telling them that their hearts were not right with the LORD and He was *not* pleased with them. The people had a form of godliness, but they were devoid of the power of godliness.

In summary, the message of Malachi to us is this: We must appreciate God's constant love because it is the key to revitalizing our present spiritual life and assuring us of our future divine blessing.

Priests Exhorted Not To Dishonor The LORD

Malachi 1:2 – 2:9

1:1: Malachi is chosen by God to deliver His message to Israel. The word 'burden' sets the tone for the God's message as it is a 'heavy sentence', a sober message that denounces sin within the nation of Israel. The phrase 'word of the LORD' indicates the authority of Malachi's message to Israel. The priests were to be the messengers of the LORD, but Malachi is the one delivering the LORD's message which was an indictment of the priest's spiritual relationship with the LORD.

1:2a: The LORD's first word to Israel was short and sweet. He had "loved" them. He had told His people of His

love for them repeatedly throughout their history (cf. Deut. 10:12-22; 15:16; 23:5; 33:2-5; Isa. 43:4; Hos. 11:1, 3-4, 8-9). The LORD's love was a covenant love (cf. Duet. 4:32-40, 5:10, 7:6-11) because He had sovereignly and graciously elected Israel to be His own possession; He called her into existence, ruled over her, raised her as she was the object of His love. Love was the heart of this covenant relationship.

1:2b: But Israel was questioning His love and implying that there was no evidence of it in their present situation in life – "In what way have You loved us?" The LORD had promised the Israelites blessing, but they were struggling under Gentile oppression, were experiencing hard times and the kingdom promised to them was not in place. Their question revealed distrust and lack of faith in the LORD and hostility toward Him. BUT if they had carefully read and understood the covenant they had with God (Deuteronomy) that would have known the problems they were having were the result of their disobedience.

NOTE: *Are we guilty of this today? Do we actively question God's love for us? Are we asking that same question and saying 'Look at the things that are happening to us today? How can you say that God loves us? Do we demand proof of God's love for us today? Or, have we not examined ourselves to see if we are obeying God's commands.*

1:2c-3: The LORD replies to the people's defensive question by asking them if "Esau" was not "Jacob's brother." The LORD answered that question by stating that He had "loved Jacob" and "hated Esau", evidence of the free sovereign choice that the LORD has, as He choose the

'younger' over the 'older'. The LORD provided evidence to support this statement by stating that He had made Esau's inheritance (the "mountains" of Seir) a desolate "wilderness." Unstated is the fact that the LORD loved Jacob in that He sovereignly elected him and his descendants for a covenant relationship with Himself (Gen. 29:31-35; Deut. 21:15-17), as His special possession (cf. Deut. 4:37; 5:10; 7:6-9) and gave them the Promised Land for an inheritance. In light of the LORD's statement, Israel needed to consider what her lot would have been if she had not been elected by the LORD to a covenant relationship.

This passage of scripture presents challenges to us today concerning the issue of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Does this passage teach that the LORD loved Jacob more than He loved Esau? Does this passage teach that the LORD predestined Jacob for salvation and Esau for damnation to hell? Does this passage mean that the LORD does not love the whole world and everyone in it (cf. John 3:16); or that He does not desire that all men come to repentance (cf. II Pet. 3:9)?

The LORD's regard for individuals does not depend on their behavior or character. This is an issue involving His justice, since it seems unfair that the LORD would bless some more than others. However, since the LORD is sovereign, He can do whatever He chooses to do (cf. Rom. 9). This passage deals with the LORD's choices regarding Jacob and Esau. He did not choose to have an intimate relationship with Esau; He did choose to have an intimate relationship with Jacob. God made this choice even before Esau and Jacob were born (Gen. 25:21-34; Rom. 9:10-13). The bottom line is that the LORD chose to bless Jacob to an

extent that He did not choose to bless Esau. This decision of the LORD's lay behind all the decisions that these twin brothers made. They were responsible (accountable) for their decisions and actions, but God had sovereignly determined their destinies (cf. Eph. 1:3-6; Rom. 8:28-30, 9:6-13).

In Malachi 1:2b-3a the LORD stated that He had "loved Jacob" and "hated Esau", which is evidence of the free sovereign choice that the LORD exercises. The LORD's sovereign choice, I believe, was based on His foreknowledge of all the decisions that these twin brothers would make; as they were responsible (accountable) for their decisions and actions they made. The LORD provided evidence in Malachi 1:3b-4 to support His "hated Esau" statement by declaring that He would make Esau's inheritance (the "mountains" of Seir) a desolate "wilderness." The LORD provided evidence in Malachi 1:5 to support His "loved Jacob" statement by declaring that He would restore Israel as a nation.

1:4: Even though Esau's descendants, the Edomites, would determine to rebuild their nation after it had suffered destruction by the Babylonians (cf. Jer. 27:2-8), they would not be able to do so. They could not because the 'LORD Almighty' ("LORD of hosts") would not permit it (cf. Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 35). He would "tear down" whatever they rebuilt, so much so that other people would view them as a "wicked" land ("the Territory of Wickedness"). Edom, because of the LORD's sovereign will and Edom's willful actions, became the object of the LORD's perpetual indignation. The LORD condemned Edom to complete destruction, never to be restored; He sealed the fate of the Edomites, as a people (nation), forever.

1:5: In verse 5 Malachi contrasts the LORD's dealing with Edom to His dealing with Jacob (Israel) when he calls them to observe what the LORD will do for them. Malachi, as the messenger of the LORD, declares Israel's future blessing – the LORD would restore them because He had entered into a covenant relationship with them. The Jews were thinking that the LORD had abandoned them and forgotten His promises to them because times were hard and the Kingdom seemed nowhere in sight. Malachi was challenging them to think about the contrast between the future of Israel and the future of Edom. Even though Israel seemed to be experiencing the same fate as the Edomites, the LORD would restore them because He had entered into covenant relationship with them. By observing the LORD's dealings with Edom, the Israelites would experience His love for Israel and His greatness that extended "beyond ... Israel." This reminder of the LORD's love should have provided positive motivation for the priests to return to the Lord.

The LORD is keeping His promises, both to the Israelites and to the Edomites. The LORD had set Israel apart for special blessing as His chosen people, which will be fulfilled at His Second Coming. Edom, in contrast, was set apart for destruction, which has occurred. The LORD by stating that He had "loved Jacob" had called upon Israel to consider what her lot would have been if she had not been elected to a covenant relationship with the LORD. Even though Israel and Edom received judgment from the LORD, the LORD promised to restore Israel (Deut. 4:29-31; 30:1-10), which was in stark contrast to His condemnation of Edom to complete destruction.

What impact do these verses (Mal. 1:2-5) have on us today? Do we actively question God's love for us? Do we question God because of the circumstances that are happening to us today? Do we demand proof of God's love for us today? Have we examined ourselves to see if we are obeying God's commands?

"Commands" - Matt. 22:36-40, 28:20; John 13:34, 14:15, 14:21, 15:10-17; Acts 17:30; Rom. 13:9; Eph. 6:2; I Tim. 4:9-12, 6:12-15; I John 2:3-8, 3:22-24, 4:21, 5:2-3; II John 1:4-6

"Will of God" - Matt. 7:21-23 (cf. Mark 3:35; John 6:38-40; Gal. 1:4); Rom. 12:2; Eph. 6:5-6; I Thess. 4:3, 5:18; Heb. 10:36; I Pet. 2:15, 4:2; I John 2:17

1:6-10: The Priest's Failure to Honor the LORD. The preceding section (Mal. 1:2-5) addresses the nation of Israel's lack of love for the LORD, but it ends with a statement of the LORD's greatness. The second section (Mal. 1:6-9) opens with a question about why Israel's priests did not honor Him when they should have been the example of the proper attitude and response to the LORD's authority.

1:6: Malachi addresses the priest's first because of their responsibility of leading the nation in worship of the LORD; as they were responsible to teach the nation of Israel the Law, to mediate between the LORD and His people, and to judge the people. Yet the priests were leading the nation in despising the LORD. This is the reason that the LORD Almighty (LORD of Hosts) begins by asking the priests why they did not "honor" Him, since sons normally honor their fathers (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16), and He was their Father

(Exod. 4:22; Isa. 1:2; 63:16; 64:8; Hos. 11:1). And since servants "respect" their masters, why did they not fear Him since He was their Master (Isa. 44:1-2)?

The priests respond to the LORD's questions by denying that they are despising His name. By asking how they had despised His name, the priests were claiming ignorance as to how they were doing this. Their question declares that they resented the statement that they were despising His name. This attitude demonstrated they were ignorant (or totally insensitive) of their selfishness and sin.

1:7: The LORD responds that the priests had "despised" Him by presenting "defiled" (not ritually clean or acceptable - cf. Lev. 22:2, 17-30, 32) sacrifices ("food" – Lev. 21:6) to Him. By offering defiled sacrifices, they defiled (made unclean) both the "altar" of burnt offerings and the LORD Himself.

The priests respond by asking "how have we defiled You?"; which indicates that they had hardened their heart to the point of rationalizing their sin. Their question is answered by their actions that declared the "LORD's table" as "contemptible".

1:8: The priests "contemptible" actions were offering "blind," "lame" and "sick" animals as sacrifices. These were unacceptable according to the Law (Lev. 22:18-25; Deut. 15:21), punishable by death (Lev. 22:9). The LORD Almighty asked them if this was not evil. It was because they would not dare to offer blind, lame, sick animals to their "governor" for fear of displeasing him. But they did offer these unacceptable, defiled, strictly forbidden sacrifices to their King – the LORD Almighty.

1:9: The LORD, through Malachi, utilizes irony in His message to the priests. How foolish it was for them to pray for the LORD to bestow His favor on them and the nation of Israel when they were openly, publicly despising Him in their service and worship. How could they expect the LORD to extend His grace to them when they were insulting Him with unacceptable sacrifices? The principle here is that the LORD will not hear the prayers of those who dishonor him.

1:10: The LORD continues His ironic response when He wishes the priests would "shut" the temple "gates," and stop offering sacrifices, since they had so little regard or respect for Him. He was displeased with them because their sacrifices were insincere and useless; therefore He would not accept any offerings from them. The LORD had ordained the offering of sacrifices under the Law, but He preferred that the priests not offer them rather than have them offer meaningless sacrifices simply as an obligation or ritual. To emphasize this point, the LORD stated that the whole temple service might as well be shut down as it was useless to light the fires on the altar because He was not pleased and would not accept any sacrifices or offerings from them.

Do we offer the LORD our best in service and worship or do we just go through the motions? Anything second-rate that we offer to the LORD is inappropriate in view of who He is. This includes our worship, our ministries, our studies, our money, our vocation, our physical gifts, anything and everything. The Lord is worthy of our very best and we should give Him nothing less. To give Him less than our best is to despise Him; whether as a pastor, missionary,

teacher or member of a church; being a servant of the LORD is a serious thing and it deserves the very best that we can give. How many of us are flippant or ritualistic/habituall about our ministry and commitment to the LORD?

1:11-14: The Priest's Profaning the LORD's Name. Malachi 1:11-14 explains how the priests were dishonoring the Lord's name (cf. 1:6-9) as the priests had been commanded to stop the pointless sacrifices (1:10).

1:11: 1:11 begins with the word "for", which indicates that the message that follows is the reason the LORD is refusing to accept the priest's offerings. It was inappropriate for Israel's priests to continue to offer pointless sacrifices that despised the LORD, because the time would come when people from all over the world would honor His "name". The phrases "from the rising of the sun....to its going down....in every place" refers to the whole earth, including Gentiles. In that time, people in the whole earth will offer "pure" offerings. This refers to 'pure' worship in the Millennium (Isa. 11:3-4, 9; Dan. 7:13-14, 27-28; Zeph. 2:11; 3:8-11; Zech. 14:9, 16) in the rebuilt Temple (Ezek. 40-48). "Incense" accompanied prayers (cf. Rev. 5:8), and "grain [meal] offering(s)" were offerings of praise and worship (cf. Lev. 2; Heb. 13:15-16). At that time the LORD will receive pure worship throughout the world and His name will be honored by all.

1:12: "But" the priests of Malachi's day were profaning the worship of the LORD. The rebuke of the priests outlined in vs. 7-8 is repeated here. The priests of Malachi's day were treating the LORD with disdain by refusing to lead

the people to reverence the LORD by offering Him their best – thus their attitude and actions were profaning the altar and insulting the LORD. The proof of this was their statements that the altar was "defiled," and the offerings on it were "despised." Their attitude and their actions were wrong, but they took no action to correct their attitude or worship. ***[This is true today when we disregard or disobey the Lord's instructions and requirements; by our actions we profane His name and desecrate our worship of Him.]***

1:13: The priests not only openly acted profanely in their worship, they openly complained by saying that it was "tiresome" ("wearisome") and distasteful ("sneer / scorn / contempt") to worship the LORD. Their worship should have been passionate and joyful instead of boring and distasteful (cf. Col. 3:16-17). They disdained worship of the LORD and treated it as something they despised. They were bringing as offerings what they had stolen, as well as "lame" and "sick" animals (vs. 7-8; cf. 2 Sam. 24:22-25). Why? Why did they expect the LORD to "receive" such sacrifices from them? How could He? [Do we do the same today?]

1:14: Malachi changes his focus from the offering of sacrifices to the payment of vows. The priests and people were swindling God. They vowed to offer an acceptable animal as a sacrifice, but when it came time to present the offering they substituted one of inferior quality. Making a vow to the LORD was not (and is not) mandatory, but if a person made a vow he was required to pay it (Deut. 23:21-23). Certainly no one would try to cheat a king or governor if they had made a vow. How totally inappropriate this was for a priest or person to make a vow to the LORD then

renege on that vow. Since the LORD was "a great King," the greatest in the universe, His "name should be feared among all "the nations." Yet His own people and their spiritual leaders were treating Him with contempt by not keeping their vow and cheating in fulfilling it.

Is this happening today in our church? Worship of the LORD is the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is ultimate goal because God is ultimate, not man. Lack of a true heart for the LORD and His service marked the priests in the day of Malachi. They evidently thought He did not notice their actions and attitudes, but Malachi confronted them with their hypocrisy. Are we doing this today by how we are worshiping the LORD and treating Him? Malachi's words should challenge us today to examine our hearts and motives.

J. Vernon McGee stated: "At the time that I was ordained into the ministry, the man who gave me the charge of entering the ministry said that there are three great sins of the ministry that I should avoid. ... The number one sin of the ministry is laziness. ... Then the second great sin of the ministry is an overweening ambition. ... The third great sin of the ministry is to be dull and boring, to be tedious and wearisome. ... Any preacher who goes into the pulpit unprepared despises the name of the Lord, and he is causing people to say, 'Boy, the Bible is boring!'"

2:1-4: The Results of Disobedience, Priests Rebuked.
Malachi's message shifts at this point from pointing out the willful sins of the priests (cf. 1:6-14) to the judgment that occurs as a result of their willful sin.

2:1-2: Malachi begins by announcing to the priests that a command has come from the LORD specifically to them. This command from the LORD was to be listened to because if they did not pay attention to His rebuke and "take it to heart", He would "curse" them (cf. Deut. 27:15-26; 28:15-68).

The phrase "take it to heart" is used twice in vs. 2, so this means that what is being told to the priests is important to note. The Hebrew word 'heart' (*leb/lebab*) indicates the command center of a person's life where knowledge is collected and considered; and where decisions and plans are made that determine the direction of one's life (i.e. Prov. 16:21-23, 22:17, 23:12). This is important to understand because the English word "heart" is defined and used as the center of emotion and personality; and the English word "mind" is defined and used as the center of conscious reasoning, intellect and will.

Malachi's message to the priests – to give 'glory' and 'honor' to the LORD - is one that is to be taken into their heart so they would change the direction of their life, decisions and service (repent). The very essence of this command is directed to the duty and privilege of the priests to honor the name of the LORD. The failure of the priests to honor the LORD would result in a curse being sent upon them by the LORD; which is consistent with O.T. standards – blessing for obedience, curse for disobedience – Deut. 27:15-26, 28:15-68. Because of the disobedience of the priests, the LORD would cut off their "blessings" and troubles would plague their lives. 'Blessing' was the responsibility of the priest and by cursing their blessings the LORD was rendering their pronounced blessings vain. This

curtailment of blessing included material blessings such as their income from the people, in addition to spiritual blessings. In fact, the LORD had already begun to curse them because of the condition of their heart.

2:3: The priests were warned that this curse would also fall on their 'seed'. This curse extended to the priest's descendants " (Heb. *zera*'; meaning physical descendants or seed for sowing). The curse included the spreading of "refuse" (Heb. *Zarah*, meaning offal, the internal waste of the sacrificial animal) from their sacrifices on the faces of the priests. This graphic illustration is of the LORD taking the internal waste of the sacrificed animals and smearing it on the priests' faces; demonstrating how the LORD viewed unfaithful priests. The offal of the sacrificed animal was carried away from the place of sacrifice and disposed of by burning; so also the priests will be 'taken away'(thrown out as garbage) from the Temple in humiliation, as one who was defiled, and would be disposed of and discarded by loss of their office and position (they were excommunicated).

This play on the Hebrew words (*zera* [seed]/*zarah* [refuse]) actually communicates a *double* curse. The priests' descendants would not continue because the priests would cease to bear any or many children, and their inferior sacrifices would render them defiled unfit for service. As Levites, they would not be able to continue to function in their office. The LORD's purpose in issuing such a stern warning was to shake them out of complacency so the priesthood of the Levites would /could continue.

2:4: When these things happened, the priests would "know" that this curse/rebuke/warning had indeed come

from the LORD. They would know the price of disobedience by bitter experience. The intent of this rebuke was to purify the priests so God's "covenant with Levi" could "continue" (God had promised a continuing line of priests from Levi's branch of the Chosen People - Deut. 33:8-11; cf. Exod. 32:25-29; Num. 3:12; 25:10-13; Neh. 13:29; Jer. 33:21-22). This covenant was one of mutual responsibility, in which the LORD expected reverence and honor for Himself in exchange for the life of the priests. The priests of Malachi's day had deceived themselves by claiming the privileges of the covenant while neglecting the conditions of the covenant (as if the LORD was bound to bless them even when they rejected the obligation to serve Him in obedience to His commands). ***Do we do the same thing today?***

2:5-9: The Results of Disobedience, Priests Rebuked.

Malachi's message shifts at this point from pointing out the willful sins of the priests (cf. 1:6-14) to the judgment that occurs as a result of their willful sin.

2:5: The Lord's covenant with Levi (Aaron: Lev. 8—9) was a covenant of grace (Deut. 33:8-11). In this type of covenant, one individual and perhaps his descendants, receive a promise of continuing blessing for a special service rendered. The special service that Levi and his descendants rendered to God involved serving as His priests. The covenant that God made with Levi and his descendants resulted in "life and peace" for them. God gave them these blessings because they respected the LORD and feared His name (Num. 18:7-8, 19-21). Example: Phinehas in Num. 25:1-13.

2:6: In contrast to the priests Malachi observed, Levi and his descendants had given the Israelites "true instruction" rather than perverted teaching. Levi, who here represents his faithful descendants, "walked with" the LORD "in peace (Heb. *shalom*) and uprightness, and he turned many" away "from iniquity."

2:7: The priests were messengers of the LORD in Israel. They were to represent the people of Israel to the LORD, and they were responsible to represent the LORD to the people. Priests were to speak true "knowledge," and be a reliable source of instruction (Heb. *torah*) because they are messengers of the LORD. The spiritual life of Israel depended upon its priests to preserve God's written word and effectively proclaim it when the people sought it. Ezra was the great example of a faithful priest in postexilic Judaism (cf. Ezra 7:10, 25; Neh. 8:9).

The description given in Malachi 2:6-7 applies to pastors and elders today. This is why pastors should concentrate on preparing and teaching the Word of God to their people; as they are accountable for the life they live and the Word they preach and teach to others.

2:8: The actions of Levi (vs. 6-7) are in stark contrast with the actions of the priests of Malachi's day. The priests of Malachi's day had deviated from the straight path of truth, and had "caused many" people who followed them "to stumble" through *their* "instruction" (Heb. *torah*). The definite article on 'instruction' (*torah* / law) suggests that it is not just any teaching in general but **the instruction** of the Law of Moses – the Torah. The priests of Malachi's day were actually creating obstacles to the people's understanding of the Word of God itself and its commands.

These obstacles caused the people to 'stumble in the Torah', which meant the people were so misled in the meaning of the commands within the Torah that they failed to understand and keep its requirements. In so doing, the unfaithful priests had "corrupted" the Lord's "covenant" with "Levi." ("LORD of Hosts" means LORD ALMIGHTY)

This applies to the church today when they seek a pastor. The church must have a pastor who does not create stumbling blocks to understanding God's Word and spiritual growth through self-centered actions or false teaching; but rather to have one who accurately interprets God's Word and is able to live it, teach it and preach it.

2:9: Since the priests had despised the LORD, the LORD had made them despised / contemptible in the eyes of "all the people." The priests of Malachi's day had radically departed from the Law to benefit themselves. Their disobedience, false interpretations and poor examples had caused the people to stumble. They did not obey the LORD's will or command, but instead had told the people what they wanted to hear for their own selfish interest. This action and attitude had a severe consequence; as their punishment should have been death (Num. 18:25-32).

This ends the first hortatory discourse (instruction urging a course of action) in Malachi (Malachi 1:2 – 2:9) where the priests are exhorted not to dishonor the LORD. This exhortation specifically addressed Israel's unfaithful priests, but it should challenge all of us to serve the LORD with heartfelt gratitude for His grace and with the awareness that He will punish unfaithful workmen.

Judah Exhorted to Faithfulness
Malachi 2:10-3:6

The LORD addresses the entire nation of Israel in this address (Mal. 2:10-3:6) because of their indifference toward His will. The nation of Israel was blaming their social and economic troubles on the LORD's supposed injustice and indifference to them (2:17). But they were being unfaithful to one another, especially the husbands to their wives as they were abandoning their wives for foreign women. These conditions profaned the temple and the Mosaic Covenant (2:10b-15a). The LORD's command was for the people to stop their treachery toward one another (2:15b-16) with the emphasis being placed on the proper love for and relationship with people. Malachi addresses the issue of faithfulness by using questions that are asked to the people.

2:10a: Malachi begins by asking a rhetorical question – “Don’t we all have the same Father?” By asking this rhetorical question, Malachi is stating that God was the “father” of all the Israelites (cf. 1:2, 6; Exod. 4:22; Hos. 11:1). He was not saying that God is the father of all human beings in the modern “universal fatherhood of God” sense. He is saying that God had created the nation of Israel and had adopted it as His son. Therefore the Israelites needed to honor the Lord. Since God is the creator and redeemer of His people, they have an obligation to honor, love, fear, worship, and obey Him.

2:10b: In view of their common brotherhood as the chosen one’s of God, it was inappropriate for the Israelites to treat each other as enemies and “deal treacherously” with each other. The phrase “deal treacherously” means “to act

unfaithfully to a prior agreement or covenant.” The Israelites were unfaithful in their relationships with one another, which resulted in the covenant being profaned. By dealing treacherously with each other, they had made the covenant that God had made with their ancestors virtually worthless. The opposite should have been true where they would have treated each other as brothers and supported one another as a family (Lev. 19:18). For better understanding, the Mosaic covenant at Malachi's time was understood as a quaint, archaic document that was too restrictive to be taken seriously and inapplicable to the Israelites of the day. *Is not that virtually the same way that most people today view the Bible? And is this also true of Christians today as demonstrated by how we are treating one another within the body of Christ?*

2:11: The evidence of Judah's (Israel's) ‘treachery’ was that the Israelites were marrying foreign women who practiced idolatry. A worshiper of an idol was considered to be its child (Jer. 2:27). Unless a foreign woman became a believer in the LORD, they often led their Jewish husbands into idolatry and thereby the worship of the LORD was contaminated. Therefore the Jewish men who married foreign women profaned the LORD's Temple and the covenant with the LORD. This activity of marrying foreign women who worshipped other god's had caused the nation of Israel to become unfaithful to the LORD by leading them into practicing idolatry. Their actions profaned (made common) the LORD's beloved "sanctuary/institution" (sanctuary / institution refers to the temple and/or His chosen people and demonstrated a lack of faithfulness to God Himself.

2:12: Verse 12 is a curse, as Malachi pronounced judgment on any Israelite who married such a woman. All men of Israel, including priests, were being addressed by Malachi. The judgment would be that each man who married a foreign woman that worshipped idols would die and/or that his line would die out (be "cut off").

NOTE: The difficult Hebrew idiom translated "who awakes and answers (NASB)" / "the master and the scholar (KJV)" / "whoever he may be (NIV)" means 'every man who makes a conscience decision' – all men are in view here. This curse would befall on each man who made a conscience decision to marry a woman who worshipped idols, even if he brought offerings to the LORD at the temple. This last phrase of v. 12 emphasizes the hypocritical attitude of those who committed the sin of intermarrying. Worshipping God did not insulate those men from the LORD's punishment; which is true today. To consciously, willfully sin against God's commands today will bring His judgment and chastisement (Heb. 12:5-11).

2:13-14 - The men reacted to this judgment by "weeping" profusely over the LORD's altar; "weeping" because the LORD was not answering their prayers. These men, men who had dealt "treacherously" with each other and with their wives, did not see their actions as sin. They publicly declared "For what reason" were their prayers not being answered. They believed that since they 'worshipped' the LORD by outwardly following the rituals of worship that the LORD would answer their prayers. But that could not happen because of their sin. They had violated their marriage covenant vows, divorced their Jewish wives and had joined themselves with wives

that worshipped idols. They were hypocrites, hypocritically worshipping the LORD; yet they expected the LORD to answer their prayers – and bless them. *Do we do the same thing today with the LORD? Do we harbor and practice sin yet believe that God should answer our prayers and bless us?*

NOTE: References in verses 13-15 to "covenant" and "one" have double meaning – one, the personal marriage covenant between man and woman and two, the national covenant between the LORD and Israel. The Hebrew used in these verses are difficult to translate, therefore both meanings can apply – marital and national.

2:15 – Malachi begins this verse with an emphatic statement – "Did not the LORD make them one? Or "Did not One make them?" This opening statement emphasizes the LORD's sovereignty and power – in the creation of a nation or of a marriage union of man and woman. "Oneness" is the theme and focus of Malachi's message. "Having a remnant of the Spirit" literally interpreted is "and a remnant of the Spirit/spirit to him." It is not clearly understood if this refers to the Holy Spirit or to the human spirit. What is understood is that no individual Israelite, who benefited from even a small amount of the Holy Spirit's influence, would break such a covenant as the marriage covenant or that no one who had even a little of the proper human spirit (proper sense of right and wrong) toward marriage would break the covenant of marriage. As stated before the focus of these phrases is "oneness". The LORD would not break His covenant with Israel; therefore men should not break their covenant with their wives. "And why one" (either

nationally or martially) is answered by Malachi – to have “godly offspring.” The LORD as creator of life could have made Adam a number of wives but He only created one, for the purpose of raising godly offspring. In both cases, the creation of a godly offspring was a major reason for not breaking the respective covenants.

NOTE: The Word of God provides the foundation for the union of a man and woman in marriage – they are to raise godly offspring as God provided. The first divine command given to Adam and Eve was to 'be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it' (Gen 1:28). God intended that a man's purpose in departing from his father and mother and in joining himself to a wife by covenant, thus becoming one with her in flesh (Gen 2:24), should be fruitfulness. By that means were God's people to spread His rule throughout the whole earth, producing and discipling children who would manifest the His glory in their lives and continue the process until the earth was full of his glory (Gen 22:17). Although sin interfered with the process, this purpose has not been superseded.

Malachi now issues a command – “therefore take heed to your spirit ('guard your spirit'), let none deal treacherously (to act unfaithfully to a prior agreement or covenant) with the wife of his youth.” The Israelite men needed to be careful not to break their marriage covenant with the wife he had married in his youth. The man is the responsible (guilty) party in the text, because in Israel only husbands could conveniently divorce their wives, as the context implies. Wives divorcing their husbands were less common in Jewish patriarchal society.

Does this not apply to us today? God wants believers to be God honoring in their marriage vows – for the purpose of being fruitful raising 'godly offspring'.

2:16 – Malachi uses very strong language to emphasize the LORD's feelings and position concerning divorce – “He hates divorce/ I hate divorce.” The Hebrew literally translated is “If he hates sending away, says Yahweh God of Israel, then violence covers his garment, says Yahweh of hosts.” This phrase could accurately be paraphrased as “For the man who hates and divorces, he covers his garment with violence.”

The Israelites were not to break their marriage covenants. The Jewish man who divorces his wife to marry a foreign woman "covers his garment with wrong", meaning he covers himself with violence. The reference of 'covering" is to the Jewish custom of a man putting a garment over a woman to claim her as wife (Deut. 22:30; Ruth 3:9; Ezek. 16:8). Here in Malachi, instead of men spreading their garments to protect their wives, they were spreading their garments over their wives with violence toward them – meaning sending them out and away to fend for themselves. Therefore, by his action the Jewish man covers himself with wrong when he divorces his wife, whom he has previously covered with his garment (i.e., married).

When a Jewish man divorced his wife to marry a foreign woman that action constituted breaking a covenant entered into that God Himself witnessed (v. 14). To break a covenant (a formal promise) is to do something that God Himself does not do. There is an exception that proves the rule; Ezra (Malachi's

contemporary) commanded divorce (Ezra 10) and that may appear to contradict God's prohibition of divorce here. Ezra was dealing Jewish men who had already married pagan women therefore he was looking to restore marriage between Jewish men and women. Does this mean that it is all right for a believer to divorce an unbelieving spouse? NO, Paul made it clear that a believer is to divorce neither (1 Cor. 7:10-20). It is inappropriate for believers today to appeal to Ezra 10 as a precedent for Christians who are married to unbelievers to divorce. It was the sin of a Jewish man marrying a foreign woman that led Ezra to advocate and enforce divorce case. Malachi was issuing a warning to Jewish men not to divorce their Jewish wives in order to marry pagan women.

For added emphasis, the LORD repeated His warning to "take heed" to one's "spirit," so he or she does "not deal treacherously" with his covenant partner (cf. v. 15). The LORD's warning "to take heed/to guard your spirit" was a strong warning to every Jewish husband that he must be constantly on his guard against developing a case in his mind to divorce his wife – and that warning applies to us (both men and women) today.

2:17 – A new dispute is introduced here with a new question and answer. Malachi makes an announcement to the Israelites that they had "wearyed the LORD with 'their' words". The LORD was tired of hearing them hypocritically worship and cry out to Him; and complain continuously about their circumstances. Their 'words' gave proof to the LORD that they were acting without any faith in the LORD – they did not believe in the LORD and

that needed to change (cf. 2:10b-15a). The Israelites were disillusioned – the Temple was rebuilt, the walls were rebuilt (cf. Ezra and Nehemiah) but they were struggling in difficult circumstances.....and the LORD had not returned to set up His Kingdom.

NOTE: This is another place where Scripture seems to contradict itself. On the one hand, God said He does not grow weary (Isa. 40:28), but here He said He was weary of hearing their words. A correct understanding of Scripture is that in Isaiah the LORD is speaking about His essential character; He does not tire out like human beings do. Here the LORD is saying that He is tired of the Israelites speaking hypocritically without faith while willfully sinning.

The Jewish people responded to Malachi's statement; and their response was a hypocritical disdain. They believed the LORD could hardly be tired of listening to them, since He had committed Himself to them as their covenant LORD (cf. Isa. 40:28). Yet the LORD was tired of the Israelites hypocrisy and lack of faith; as demonstrated by their saying that He delighted in in those who did evil ("everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD"). They seem to believe that because the LORD did not punish the evil doer (while they were observing the prosperity of the wicked) that He must approve of their sin. In fact, their question of "where is the God of justice" was a direct challenge to God's justice.

The apparent prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous is an age-old challenge. For the Jews of Malachi's day they knew that God had promised them material prosperity as a reward for obedience

(Deut. 28) so the prosperity of the wicked was a challenge for them (cf. Job 21:7-26, 24:1-17; Psa. 73:1-14; Eccl. 8:14; Jer. 12:1-4; Hab. 1). Their reality was dire - they were suffering, the LORD was not blessing their activity and He seemed far away. Yet they did not recognize their own disobedience to the LORD by their actions of marrying foreign woman and practicing hypocritical worship without obedience or faith. They had failed to hope in the truth that God's justice would be come to bear in the future when wickedness would be punished (cf. Job 24:22-24, 27:13-23; Psa. 73:16-20; Eccl. 8:12-13; Jer. 12:7-17; Hab. 2:3, 3:2-19).

Don't we do the same thing today? Don't we sometimes get disillusioned with God because we perceive that we are not being blessed by God, that our prayers are not being answered? Do we at times say - "If there is a just God, why doesn't He do something about all the suffering in the world?" "If God is just, why do the wicked prosper?" If God is just, why am I suffering? If I am God's child, why am I not being blessed in all that I do? Scripture tells us that God blesses the wicked as well as the righteous—because He is good (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17); and the righteous suffer as well as the wicked—because of the Fall and sin (Gen. 3:16-19; Eccles. 2:17-23). Also, God allows Satan to afflict the righteous as well as the wicked (Job 1—2); and God chastises His own for their sin (Heb. 12:3-11). God has promised that He will punish the wicked and bless the righteous, but not necessarily in this life (cf. Rev. 20:11 – 22:5). We are to be found being faithful and obedient in our walk with

the LORD despite our circumstances. How are you doing?

3:1-6: The Coming Messenger Of Judgment.

3:1 – Malachi directs the attention of the Israelites to the future. The LORD announces to the Israelites (in direct response to their question - Mal. 2:17) that He was sending them His "messenger" (cf. Isa. 40:3-5; John 1:23) to "clear the way" for the LORD. The LORD's future messenger was John the Baptist; confirmed by Jesus Himself (Matt. 11:7-10; cf. Mark 1:2-3; Luke 7:27). Therefore, Jesus Christ is the LORD (Yahweh) since John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. This points to the first of a twofold eschatological event, the coming of Christ as Jesus the Servant; the second part of the twofold eschatological event, which will be the Second Coming of Christ as LORD and King.

Malachi writes that "the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His Temple" (cf. Ezek. 43:1-5; Zech. 8:3). To 'come suddenly' does not mean immediately, but instantaneously and unannounced. Though Jesus entered the temple in Jerusalem many times during His earthly ministry, this 'sudden coming' was not fulfilled during His earthly ministry (cf. Mal. 3:2-5). The 'sudden coming' will occur at His Second Coming when Jesus Christ the LORD returns to set up His messianic kingdom. We know that Malachi 3:1 refers to the Second Coming of Christ because judgment (Mal. 3:2-5) occurs at His 'sudden' appearance, which did not occur at His first coming.

The title "Messenger of the covenant" only appears here in the Bible. Because the "Messenger" will come to

the Temple it is a reference to the LORD Himself (Yahweh). The “Messenger” is the divine Messiah, the One who has the authority to reward or judge His people on the basis of their faithfulness to His covenant with them. No other passage in the Bible so clearly assigns divine, exclusive privilege and rights than to “Messenger” as Yahweh / LORD / Messiah.

There are two views of the "covenant". One view is that the “covenant” is the New Covenant that God promised to make with the Jews in the future (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-36; 37:26). The other view is that the “covenant” is a reference to the Mosaic Covenant and, behind it, the Abrahamic Covenant. In either case, the “covenant” being referred to is one that the LORD Himself had entered into with the Jewish people; and is a “covenant” He would fulfill.

For the “Messenger of the covenant” to “come suddenly to His temple”, the Jewish people should have been excited because His "coming" is a subject of messianic prophecy and an object of eager anticipation from early in Israel's history. Here the LORD promised His coming again – “Behold He is coming says the LORD of Hosts”. Yet the Jews had been expressing disbelief that God would intervene and establish justice in the world (2:17), but God promised He would – and He will.

3:2-3: When the LORD comes suddenly to His temple, no one will be able to "stand" before Him. Numerous prophets foretold that at the LORD’s coming it would be a day of judgment on the whole world marked by disaster and death (Mal. 4:1; Isa. 2:12; Joel 3:11-16; Amos 5:18-21; Zech. 1:14-17). Here, Malachi states that no one

would be able to ‘endure ... His coming’, because He would "purify the sons of Levi" (the priests). Just as "a refiner's fire" purifies "gold and silver," so He would burn up the impurities of the priests, and as a laundryman's "soap," He would wash them clean (cf. Deut. 4:29; Isa. 1:25; Jer. 6:29-30; Ezek. 22:17-22; Zech. 3:5).

Once the LORD purifies the priests, they would then be able to offer sacrifices to the LORD in a righteous condition (Isa. 56:7, 66:20-23; Jer. 33:14-18; Ezek. 40:38-43, 43:18-37, 45:9-25; Zech. 14:16-21), rather than a defiled one, as they were in Malachi's day (cf. Mal. 1:6—2:9). The multiple figures of cleansing, and the repetition of terms for cleansing, stress the thoroughness of the cleansing that the “Messenger” would produce in the lives of the priests that will serve in the millennial temple (cf. Ezek. 44-45). Once cleansed, they can offer what is righteous as called for in the millennial sacrifices (Ezek. 45:9-46:24). These offerings will be made “in righteousness” meaning they are given from cleansed hearts that are in the right condition before God. The millennial sacrifices are a memorial commemorating Christ’s sacrifice on the cross at Calvary.

3:4: After the cleansing of the priests by the LORD (3:2-3), "Judah and Jerusalem" (i.e., all Israel) will be able to offer sacrifices that would please the Lord, in contrast to the sacrifices that were being offered at the time of Malachi, which did not (cf. 1:13-14, 2:12-13). The sacrifices after this cleansing would be acceptable, like the offerings the priests offered earlier in Israel's history (Solomon-II Chron. 7:8-10; Hezekiah-II Chron. 30:26; Josiah-II Chron. 35:18), before the priesthood had become corrupt.

3:5: The judgment and purification of the Levites (3:2-3) precedes the LORD's judgment of the nation of Israel. After the judgment and refinement of the Levites, the LORD assures His people that He will "draw near" to them, but it will be "for judgment." He will quickly judge ("be a swift witness against") all types of sin that they practiced, whereas in Malachi's day, and now, He waits to judge (cf. II Pet. 3:9-10). All the Israelites living at the LORD's second coming will come under His judgment (cf. Ezek. 20:34-38). He will judge them for all types of activity forbidden for His people: sorcery; adultery; lying; oppression of employees, widows and orphans; mistreatment of aliens; even all forms of irreverence for, and unbelief in, Him. This judgment results in the LORD removing all sinners from the nation of Israel (leaving only a believing remnant); which is His answer to their claim that He was unjust (2:17) – this judgment clearly demonstrates His justice.

3:6: The LORD concludes this passage (3:1-5) by reminding His people of one of His character qualities that should have made them fear Him and have hope. He does "not change," and that is why they will not be totally "consumed." The LORD was and will be faithful to His covenant promises in the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. He will never destroy the nation of Israel completely; but He will (1) chasten and (2) bless them.

By calling the Jews "sons of Jacob," the LORD was connecting the nation of Israel's behavior with that of their notorious patriarch. Promises are only as good as the person who makes them, so the fact that the LORD does not change strengthens the certainty of the covenant's fulfillment (cf. Deut. 4:31; Ezek. 36:22-32). Paul gave the

same reason for expecting the nation of Israel to have a future (Rom. 3:3-4; 9:6; 11:1-5, 25-29).

The statement that the LORD does not change (cf. 1 Sam. 15:29; Heb. 13:8) may seem to contradict other statements that the Lord changed His mind (e.g., Exod. 32:14). The statement in 3:6 that He does not change refers to the essential character of God. He is always holy, loving, just, faithful, gracious, merciful, etc. The other statements, that He changes, refer to His changing from one course of action to another. They involve His choices, not His character. If He did not change His choices, He would be unresponsive; if He changed His character, He would be unreliable. Therefore, because the LORD does not change in His love for His people (1:2-5); the descendants of Jacob (the nation of Israel) will not be destroyed (cf. Jer. 30:11) at Christ's Second Coming.

Judah Exhorted to Return and Remember

Malachi 3:7-4:6

This is the third and last hortatory speech in Malachi. This speech begins and ends with commands; and this speech ends with a climactic command to remember the Law (4:4-6). The focus of the first speech was on the people's relationship to God (spiritual responsibility – Mal. 1:2 – 2:9), the focus of the second one was on their relationship to one another (social responsibility – Mal. 2:10 -3:6), and the third one is on their relationship to their possessions (economic responsibility – Mal. 3:7 – 4:6).

3:7 – Malachi begins this speech with a blanket condemnation of Israel's disobedience to the conditions and demands of the LORD's covenant with Israel. From Israel's

early history, the people had been stubborn and often deviated from the path that LORD had prescribed for them to walk in the Mosaic Covenant. They repeatedly disobeyed the Mosaic Covenant conditions and demands.

Here Malachi voices the LORD's appeal to Israel. The LORD calls His people to "return" to Him, with the promise that if they did, He would "return" to them (cf. Deut. 4:30-31; 30:1-10). This command to "return" to the LORD occurs here (3:7) at the beginning of this speech, and a promise that the LORD would "return" to them occurs at the end of the speech (4:6).

The response of the people was that they did not know "how" to "return." Israel pretended to be ignorant of their failure to follow the conditions and demands of the Mosaic Covenant. They were quite cynical in their response to the LORD's appeal – 'how could they return when it wasn't them that left the LORD, but rather it was the LORD that had left them.' The Mosaic Covenant specified how they were to return—by trusting and obeying the LORD—so their question indicated a reluctance to change their ways. "'How should we return? / In what way shall we return?' is not a legitimate request for information but a self-serving declaration of innocence. The people, in effect, are saying, 'What need do we have to return since we never turned away to begin with?'

Is what we observe with Israel's response to the LORD's request, 'return to me', similar to how we respond today when we are confronted with our sins? Do we often make excuses and rationalize our behavior? G. Vernon McGee makes this statement concerning Mal. 3:7; "I would say that this is pretty much the picture of a great many folk in the

church today. Ritualism has been substituted for reality. Pageantry had been substituted for power. The aesthetic has been substituted for the spiritual, and form for feeling. Even in the orthodox, conservative, and evangelical circles, they know the vocabulary, but the power of God is gone. They are satisfied with a tasteless morality, they follow a few little shibboleths, and they feel that everything is all right." (Note: Shibboleth means a peculiar behavior that distinguishes a set of persons; a belief with little current meaning or truth.)

3:8 – In answer to their question, Malachi (led by the LORD), asked a question – "Will a man rob God?" This question provided a visible and undeniable illustration of how Israel was being disobedient to the Mosaic Covenant by not giving tithes. Bluntly stated, Malachi was accusing Israel of being a thief – and in doing so answers their question – 'in what way shall we return?' In response to the question of 'will a man rob God' the response of Israel was sarcastic – "In what way have we robbed You / How do we rob You?" This was a brazen self-defense statement that indicates arrogance and rebellion against the LORD.

The LORD, through Malachi, answers their question by replying, "In tithes and offerings." By the LORD directly responding to and answering their question, it clearly establishes that the nation of Israel was clearly robbing the LORD by their actions in not following the Mosaic Covenant. To understand the severity of this issue, to rob the LORD is to say that you are stronger and smarter than He. Yet that is what the Israelites were saying and that is what their actions were demonstrating.

They were robbing the LORD by withholding required tithes and offerings that the Mosaic Covenant commanded them to bring to the LORD. The required tithes and offerings established by the Mosaic Covenant were to: 1) support the Levites, 2) support the national religious festivals, and 3) support widows and orphans.

Specifically the tithes and offerings the nation of Israel were required to give are: 1) the tenth of the remainder after the first-fruits, this amount went to Levites for their livelihood (Leviticus 27:30-33); 2) the tenth of the tenth received by the Levites went to the priests (Numbers 18:26-32); 3) the second tenth for the needs of the Levites and their own families at the tabernacle (Deuteronomy 12:15-19) including an additional tithe every third year for the poor (Deut. 14:28-29); and, 4) a tenth for worship and religious festivals at the Tabernacle or Temple (Deut. 14:22-27).

Malachi's reference to 'tithes and offerings' represents all of the economic responsibilities of Israel to the LORD. Since the LORD owned the land and its produce in the first place (cf. 1:12-14; Lev. 25:23), withholding tithes when He commanded the Israelites to give them amounted to robbing Him. Earlier, the LORD criticized the priests for offering an inferior quality of sacrifices (1:7-14), and now He criticizes the people for offering an insufficient quantity of sacrifices. And it was this failure to give the required tithes and offerings that led to and created the breakdown of priestly service (cf. 1:7 – 2:9).

Because the nation of Israel was not giving as commanded by the Mosaic Covenant, they were cursed. The descriptions of the curses for disobedience are found in Deut. 28:15-68; specifically the curse of famine due to insect

infestation, and vines without grapes is found in Deut. 28:38-40, which the nation of Israel was experiencing.

The question that must be asked of us today – do we gladly give to the LORD from what He has given to us and blessed us with (II Cor. 9:7)?

3:9 – Israel was guilty of robbing the LORD. This 'robbing from God' was widespread, but that did not mean that every individual Israelite was guilty of robbing the LORD. But the nation of Israel not giving the priests and Levites what was due them was actually robbing God, since they were His servants and representatives, and they maintained His house, the Temple. Because of their disobedience they were experiencing "a curse" from the LORD for this covenant violation (Deut. 28:15-68).

3:10a – Malachi challenges the nation of Israel to bring "all the tithes into the storehouse" in the Temple, not just part of what they owed. There were special rooms in the Temple, known as storehouses, devoted to storing the tithes and offerings from the nation of Israel that provided "food" in the LORD's "house" —for the priests and Levites (cf. I Kings 7:51; Neh. 10:38, 13:12). Also, the sacrifices offered by the nation of Israel were, in a figurative sense, 'food' for the LORD (cf. 1:7).

The LORD urged the Israelites to put Him to a 'test' ("try me") by doing this. This 'invitation' to put the LORD to a 'test' was based on their repentance of their sin of 'robbing God' and returning to obedience to the tithing requirements of the Mosaic Covenant. This appeal was a reaffirmation of the obedience-blessing specified in the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28:1-14). No other nation had such promises from the LORD, and the LORD was urging the nation of Israel to be obedient

so He could bless them (to show that His Word is sure and true).

There are several references to people testing God in the New Testament that discourage this practice (e.g., Acts 5:1-11; 15:10; 1 Cor. 10:6-11; Heb. 3:7-11). It is always wrong to test God's patience by sinning and presuming on His grace when it is to fulfill selfish desires. It is another thing to hold Him accountable to His promises, and so test His faithfulness in one obediently doing His will, which God asked His people to do here.

3:10b - The LORD had promised to bless the Israelites for obedience, so their obedience in bringing the full amount of tithes that the Mosaic Covenant required would test (i.e., prove, demonstrate) His faithfulness to His promise. He promised to reward their full obedience with rain ("windows of heaven") and harvests abundant enough to satisfy their needs ("blessing" that "overflows"). His "storehouse" of blessings for them was full.

This verse has often been used to urge Christians to tithe. However, the New Covenant under which Christians live never specified the amount or percentage that we should give back to God of what He has given to us. Rather it teaches that we should give regularly, sacrificially, as the LORD has prospered us, and joyfully (cf. 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:1-4, 9-14; 2 Cor. 9:2, 7, 12; Phil. 4:10-19). In harmony with the principle of grace that marks the present dispensation, the LORD leaves the amount we give back to Him unspecified and up to us.

Believers who focus on God's mercy and grace often give more than 10 percent of their income or resources. Since tithing preceded the giving of the Mosaic Covenant (Gen.

14:20; 28:22), a number of believers giving 10 percent of their income or resources as a minimal responsibility. However, the examples of tithing that appear before the Mosaic Law are just that: examples, not commands. Examples are not binding on believers, but precepts (commands) are. Today, each believer is to give in a manner that they believe the LORD has led them to give.

The example of tithing, as presented to us today in Malachi 3:10, is not a command or obligation that is binding on Christians today. However it is an example that provides a principle of giving that is demonstrated throughout scripture; meaning there is continuity throughout scripture on the principle of giving. We have an obligation before the LORD to be stewards of what the LORD has blessed us with.

This verse has also been used to teach "storehouse giving." Those who do so view the church as the "storehouse" into which Christians should bring their gifts to the LORD. Some go so far as to say that it is wrong for Christians to give to the LORD in ways that bypass the local church, for example, giving directly to a missionary. This viewpoint cannot be supported scripturally. There is a major difference between Israel's temple and a local church. Israel's temple was a depository for the gifts that the Israelites brought to sustain the servants and work of the LORD throughout their nation. The church, however, is different in that we have no central sanctuary, as Israel did, nor does the church have a national homeland. Christians live and serve throughout the world, in contrast to the Israelites, who were to fulfill their mission by serving God within their land. God told the Israelites to stay in the land and let their light shine from there (Exod. 19:5-6), but He

has told Christians to go into 'all the world' and let our 'light shine' (Matt. 28:19-20).

Scripture is clear that the "tithe" of the Mosaic Covenant was specifically directed to the nation of Israel to support the theocracy that the LORD established for Israel. Scripture is clear that giving to the LORD today is determined by each individual believer as they consider the LORD's mercy and grace; and how He has blessed them. As each believer considers what they should give back to the LORD, the O.T. serves as an example – not as a command. Today we are to be a 'cheerful giver' (II Cor. 9:6-15) – especially to those in need and to those who labor in the Word (Acts 4:31-35; Gal. 6:6; Phil. 4:14-19; I Tim. 5:17).

3:11-12 – The LORD will bless the nation of Israel for obeying the Law by not only providing adequate harvests (v. 10), but He would also preserve the harvested crops ("fruits of the ground") from animals and diseases ("rebuke the devourer" to "not destroy") that might otherwise destroy them. Also their grapes would develop fully on their vines rather than dropping off prematurely. When these blessings occur, "all" other "nations" will acknowledge the LORD's blessing on the Israelites, because their "land" will be a "delightful" place.

Summary of 3:7-12 – *Israel had walked away from the LORD by not obeying the Law. The LORD had chosen them and given the Law to them to obey; and for their obedience they would be blessed (Deut. 28:1-4). By their disobedience to His Law, specifically to giving the required tithes, Israel had demonstrated their idolatrous hearts in placing themselves before God; and they showed their callous hearts in leaving the Levites and the poor to fend for themselves. But if Israel*

repented and returned to obedience of the Law, the LORD would bless them as He had promised.

Today, the Mosaic Covenant, with its promises of material blessing for obedience, is no longer in force (Rom. 10:4; Heb. 8:7-13). Today, obedience to God's will does not necessarily result in material prosperity (Phil. 4:11-13; cf. 1:29). However, we do have promises that God will reward those who trust and obey Him (Phil. 4:14-19), and we will enjoy many spiritual blessings now (cf. Rom. 5:1-11; Eph. 1:3-14).

3:13 – Israel had questioned the LORD (2:17), violated His Law (2:11), disobeyed His Law (2:9), defiled His altar (1:7,12), and despised His name (1:6); now they openly and arrogantly spoke against Him. Yet when the LORD challenged them about their speech they asked for proof: "What have we spoken against You?"

3:14 - The LORD answered their question by using their own words. Israel was saying that serving and obeying the LORD did not benefit them; therefore it did not pay to serve the LORD. They also said that when they "mourned" over their sins their circumstances did not improve. Israel was saying that they gained no benefit from being faithful to the LORD because they presumed that their outward actions would be blessed by the LORD, even though their hearts were sinful and self-centered. They were hypocritical legalist – performing the acts of religious obedience as vindication of their own righteousness – with no repentance of sin within their heart. Their legalism actually blocked them from repentance (cf. Matt. 5:20-48, 23:1-36).

3:15 – The LORD continues. Israel was saying that those who practiced wickedness were the ones who were being blessed. For them life was all about material prosperity, so it

seemed better to be wicked than righteous. Israel even stated that even though the wicked tested the LORD, they escaped His punishment.

Warren Wierbse: *"I hear this complaint from some believers about their churches. 'We're not getting anything out of it!' But a church is like a bank or a home: you don't get anything out of it unless you put something into it."*

J. Vernon McGee: *"There are a great many people who say that the church they attend is cold. Are you sure that the church is cold, or is it maybe you who are cold? It might be well to check up, because the problem here was with the people—it was not with God at all."*

Do we wholeheartedly serve the Lord today? Or do we make excuses because we have deceived ourselves into thinking and/or believing that our life is being lived in obedience to God's commands and His will?

3:16 - Upon hearing the LORD's rebuke (cf. 3:7-15), the Israelites who genuinely "feared the LORD" (one's who were true and righteous) gathered together. This group was either individuals who were righteous and feared the LORD's judgment or they were convicted of sin and repented because they were fearful of the LORD's judgment. The resultant 'fear of the LORD' was a direct result of the LORD's warning delivered by Malachi. A "book of remembrance" was created. This 'book' was either a physical record of their commitment to be obedient to the LORD's commands within the Mosaic covenant or it is a 'book' that the LORD keeps as a record of man's words and actions done in their life (cf. Ps. 56:8; Dan. 7:10; Rev. 20:12). Of note, the Persians had a custom of recording in a book all the acts of a person that should be rewarded in the future (cf. Esth. 6:1).

This scripture provides guidance to the answer of the question; "How can an individual remain faithful to God in a faithless world?" **1) Commit to be faithful to God, even if those around you are not – write it down. 2) Surround yourself with a group of likeminded individuals for encouragement (cf. Heb. 10:25). 3) Remember that you will answer to God one day (1 Cor. 3:12-15).**

3:17 – The LORD announces that one day those who 'fear the LORD' will become His possession. "Mine" is emphatic in the Hebrew; meaning that those who 'fear Him' will belong to Him and be His special treasure ("jewels" – cf. Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6, 14:2; Psa. 135:4). On that day the LORD will make them His own. The 'day' being referred to is probably the "day of the LORD", which refers to the Second Coming of Christ. On that day, the 'day of the LORD', Jesus Christ returns to earth to establish His "Kingdom" and the Jewish nation will rule and reign over the earth in the "Kingdom", fulfilling His promise to the nation of Israel.

On the "day of the LORD" Christ will resurrect Old Testament saints and judge them (cf. Dan. 12:2). The faithful will receive a reward in His kingdom for their faith and obedience to in Him (Dan. 12:3).

The LORD also promised to "spare them as a man spares his own son." When Jesus Christ judges Old Testament saints He will also judge all men who survive the Tribulation and He will separate the sheep (those who believe in Him) from the goats (those who reject Him) (Matt. 25:31-46). The "sheep" are His 'sons', and He will spare them the judgment and punishment which will come on those who have not repented and submitted in obedience to His commands (vv. 14-15).

3:18 - In that day, the 'day of the LORD', it will be clear who was and is righteous and who is wicked, because Jesus Christ will reward the righteous and judge the wicked. Then the righteous will be clearly distinguished from the wicked – it will be clearly known. In the past Israel has seen God distinguish between the righteous and the wicked (c.g. the Exodus) but at this "day of the LORD" this distinguishing between the righteous and the wicked will be clear and dramatic. The judgment of the wicked is death, and the preservation of the righteous, through physical deliverance and through bodily resurrection, to enter into the Kingdom (Millennium). When this occurs, Israel, as the LORD's "treasured possession/jewel", will fulfill the LORD's original intention (Ex. 19:5-6; Deut. 7:6, 14:2, Psa. 135:4)

In Malachi's day, and in ours, the true motives of God's people (professors and possessors) are not obvious, but in the future they will become clear for many to see. As Christ told the Pharisees, there is coming a day when the unknown will become known (Luke 12:1-5). For the nation of Israel, from Abraham until the "day of the LORD", the "Day of the LORD" is the day when all becomes clear about who is righteous and who is wicked – hearts will be judged. And that day will also occur for us (possessors – II Cor. 5:10; professors – Rev. 20:11-15).

Malachi 4:1-3 directly answers the Israelites question voiced in Malachi 3:14 - "What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance?"

4:1 - The LORD, through Malachi, now elaborates on "the day" identified in 3:17. This 'day', the Day of the LORD, will be a day of judgment. The Day of the LORD will occur at the

Second Coming of Christ (Rev. 19:11-21). (Note: There are some who believe that this "Day of the Lord" occurs at the end of Christ's millennial rule (cf. Rev. 20:11-15), but the context of Mal. 3:1-4:3 supports the "Day of the LORD" occurring at His Second Coming – cf. Matt. 25:31-46).

The judgment that occurs on the "Day of the LORD" is compared it to a fiery "furnace," in which "all the arrogant/proud" and "every evildoer/all who do wickedly" will burn like "chaff/ stubble." The judgment of fire is like a burning "oven/furnace" – meaning a judgment of high intensity that is under control. The LORD will set the fire and manage it as He punishes the wicked, which is so thorough that the wicked will be entirely consumed, like a shrub thrown into a hot fire is totally burned up - from "root" to "branch." The totality of the destruction of the wicked pictures the intensity of the judgment, which is an accurate picture of the final punishment of the wicked that occurs at the Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

NOTE: This verse gives no basis for the error of annihilationism. It describes physical death only. The unrepentant will be conscious in their eternal state (Luke 16:19-31), just as the repentant will be conscious in their eternal state (Rev. 21:1-7).

4:2 - In contrast, the Day of the LORD, which is "fire" to the wicked, will be like 'sunshine' to the righteous. The phrase "sun of righteousness" has various interpretations, as this is the only time in the Bible that this phrase is used. Some believe that the "sun of righteousness is a title for Christ as He rules in the Millennium. Others believe that the "sun of righteousness" is a description of the blessing that comes from Christ being the ruler during the Millennium.

One commentator (Pieter Verhoef) stated; ""We prefer the point of view according to which *righteousness* must be regarded as the key word, and *sun* to be its nearer definition. On the Day of the Lord righteousness will become apparent just like the shining sun in all its brightness and blessedness [cf. Ps. 37:6; Isa. 58:8]." It seems best to view "the sun of righteousness" as a description of the day of blessing that LORD will bring - the Millennium – when the righteous enter into the Kingdom and the wicked are destroyed.

The ones who fear ("revere") the LORD (Mal. 1:14; 3:5, 16-17) will experience a reign ("sun") of "righteousness." Malachi visualized the 'righteous reign' of the LORD to be like the "wings" of a bird stretching over the earth. This righteous reign will have a "healing" effect on those who fear the LORD (cf. Ezek. 47:1-12), as well as "healing" the earth from the destruction that has occurred to the earth during the Tribulation (cf. Rev. 4 – 19).

Malachi uses the figurative language of stall-bound calves being loosed into an open, fertile pasture to picture the joy and freedom that the righteous will enjoy that day (i.e. calves cavorting in open pasture after having been cooped up in a stall) (cf. Isa. 65:17-25; Hos. 14:4-7; Amos 9:13-15; Zeph. 3:19-20).

4:3 – When the Day of the LORD occurs, the righteous will "trample/tread down" the "wicked." The righteous will be the ultimate victor over the "wicked", so much so that the "wicked" will be like "ashes under the soles of their feet." In that day the "wicked" will suffer judgment and offer no resistance (cf. Isa. 66:24; Matt. 3:12; Mark 9:48).

The LORD is "preparing" that "day," so it will inevitably come. Are we prepared for that day?

Malachi 4:4-6 concludes Malachi's message to the nation of Israel. This passage contains two warnings and a promise. Malachi 4:4 is a warning, Malachi 4:5-6a is a promise, and Malachi 4:6b is a warning.

4:4 – Malachi's message to the nation of Israel has focused on the Mosaic Covenant and the lack of faithfulness and obedience of the nation of Israel to the commands of the Mosaic Covenant. Just as Moses exhorted the Israelites to remember the Law in Deuteronomy (Moses gave them 14 exhortations to remember the Law), Malachi (through the LORD's guidance) Malachi closes his writings with the same exhortation.

The verb "remember" was used 14 times in Deuteronomy as a command. In the Hebrew, as it was used by Malachi, 'remember' means "to recall and to obey." The nation of Israel was to "remember" (recall and obey) the Law that was given to them at Horeb (ancient name for Mt. Sinai). The "Law of Moses" (i.e., the Pentateuch) was God's Word to His people. By calling Moses "My servant," the LORD was reminding Malachi's audience of how Moses faithfully carried out God's will. He was to be their model of obedience. The nation of Israel needed to renew their fear of the LORD; they needed to repent and be faithful in obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. In light of Malachi 4:1-3, this repentance would benefit them in the coming Day of the LORD.

4:5 – Through Malachi, the LORD promised to send His people "Elijah the prophet before" the "great and terrible day of the LORD" arrived. There are various interpretations of this verse, of which the following notes present the best interpretation. In Luke 1:17, an angel told John the Baptist's

parents that their son would minister in the spirit and power of Elijah; but John denied that he was Elijah (John 1:21-23). In Matt. 11:14 (i.e. Matt. 11:7-15) Jesus said that John would have been the Elijah who was to come if the people of his day had accepted Him as their Messiah. But since they did not, John did not fulfill this prophecy about Elijah coming, though he did fulfill the prophecy about Messiah's forerunner (3:1). This interpretation has in its favor Jesus' words following the Transfiguration, which occurred after John the Baptist's death. It was then that Jesus told the disciples that Elijah would come and restore all things (Matt. 17:11-13).

Whether the original Elijah or an Elijah-like person will appear during the Tribulation before the Day of the Lord is unknown. What John the Baptist did for Jesus at His first coming, preparing the hearts of people to receive Him, this latter-day "Elijah" will do for Him prior to His Second Coming. The two witnesses in the Tribulation will carry out this ministry (Rev. 11:1-13). Who the witnesses are is a mystery; but one of them will be Elijah or an Elijah-like person as the two witnesses will perform miracles, as Elijah and Elisha did.

4:6 - When this "Elijah" comes, he will be used by the LORD to cause the Jews to unite ("hearts of fathers to children...hearts of children to fathers") in their belief that Christ the LORD is their Messiah. If the LORD did not send this "Elijah," and if he did not turn the hearts of the Jews back to God, the LORD Jesus Christ would have to come and strike the earth "with a curse" (cf. 1 Cor. 16:21-25). But, because the Jews will turn to Jesus Christ in faith (Zech. 12:10; Rom.11:26) during the Tribulation, blessing will come to the earth, not a curse (vv. 2-3; cf. Zech. 14:11).

Joyce Baldwin: "The warning that ends the Old Testament is not absent at the end of the New (Rev. 22:10-15), but the difference is that there grace has the last word (verse 21).

Malachi is the last revelation that God gave His people before the forerunner of Messiah whom He promised in 3:1 – John the Baptist - , appeared some 400 years later. Although the Hebrew canon ends with Chronicles rather than Malachi, Malachi concludes the Prophets section of the Hebrew Bible. The Jews regarded "the Law and the Prophets" as comprising their entire Scriptures (cf. Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 24:14; 28:23; Rom. 3:21).

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