

MALACHI

THE RETURN OF THE MESSENGER

WILDERNESS CAMP

MALACHI

THE RETURN OF THE MESSENGER

STUDY NOTES • 2026



WELCOME

Dear Young People,

Welcome to Wilderness Camp 2026! We are really looking forward to studying the Prophecy of Malachi together.

Wilderness Camp is designed to help us regularly put aside time away from the distractions in our lives to spend time with God and His Word. To meet this aim, the camp involves a personal commitment by each of us as attendees to study Malachi. These notes will help in accomplishing that, as we come to appreciate the challenges faced by the Ecclesia of Malachi's day, and the wonderful visions he shared with them.

The camp will be structured around interactive workshops and discussion groups rather than a series of talks, so the more time and effort we put into preparing, the better the camp will be - both for ourselves and everyone else!

What does this mean for me?

As an attendee at Wilderness Camp, you are expected to:

- Prioritise attendance at the **Preparatory Workshops**.
- **Listen to the series of studies**, available on the website.
- Study Malachi using the **Camp Notes**, as well as any other materials you may find helpful.
- **Mark your study** into your Bible.

With that done, we will all be well prepared for the activities at the Camp.

We would like to thank the many Brothers and Sisters who have contributed to these notes and pray that God will remember their work for good.

Malachi is an enjoyable and achievable study. We recommend you plan out and regularly put aside time for your study in order to complete it. Please get in touch with us early if there is anything we can do to assist you in planning or completing your study.

We trust that each of us will be inspired by this short prophecy to prepare for the return of our Lord, the ultimate *Messenger of the Covenant*, and look forward to sharing Wilderness Camp 2026 with you if he does not return beforehand.

In hope of the return of *the Messenger of the Covenant*,

The Wilderness Camp Committee

November 2025

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RESOURCES

In preparing these notes, many resources have been referenced. Some of the key ones have been listed below and may be helpful for further reading.

BOOKS

- **The Exiles Return**, Bro Michael Ashton (1992). *The Christadelphian*.
- **Prophets After the Exile**, Bro John Carter (1962). *The Christadelphian*.
- **The Prophecy of Malachi**, NZYC 1998. *Christchurch Suburban CYC Conference Committee*.
- **Who May Abide the Day of His Coming**, Bro John Ullman (1975). *CSSS*.

STUDIES

- **Malachi** - Bro Ron Cowie
- **Malachi** - Bro Grant Bowden
- **The History and Prophets After the Exile** - Bro John Owen (Helpful for broader context)

KEY ABBREVIATIONS & REFERENCE WORKS

ESV = English Standard Version	Cp = compare
ISV = International Standard Version	Gk = Greek
LITV = Literal Translation of the Holy Bible	Heb = Hebrew
LXX = The Septuagint Old Testament	mg = margin
NASB = New American Standard Bible	s/w = same word
NIV = New International Version	
Roth = Rotherham's Translation	
RSV = Revised Standard Version	
YLT = Young's Literal Translation	

Barnes = Barnes Commentary
Camb. Comm. = The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges
ESV Study Bible = The ESV Study Bible, Crossway, 2008 Ed.
Ges = Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon
Kohl/Mounce = Kohlenberger/Mounce Concise Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament
Str = Strong's Concordance
BDB = Brown Driver Briggs' Hebrew Definitions

BACKGROUND



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

MALACHI 3 : 1

INTRODUCTION

Malachi was the final prophet before the close of the Old Testament, and his voice, the last that would be heard from God before the coming of His Son. He was sent to a nation in a desperate plight. Spiritually, they were critically ill, yet they didn't know it. They were estranged from God, yet they didn't care.

'I have loved you,' the prophet begins in his austere tones. Throughout his prophecy, Malachi will probe the people's relationship with their God at every level. He will call out their broken relationship with their Father and Master; he will chastise them for their disrespectful worship of God; he will rebuke them for their failure to uphold the covenants they have made – both with God and man. Treachery, or unfaithfulness, will be shown to be a major problem of the times. The priesthood had broken their covenant (2:8), the nation had broken theirs (2:10), and individuals were breaking theirs (2:14). Also characteristic of his prophecy will be the many impudent questions that Malachi poses on the people's behalf. He makes a statement from God, then anticipates the people's abrupt question in response, betraying their blindness to their own faults and their ignorance of what God truly requires.

In his prophecy, Malachi will warn of the imminent coming of Nehemiah, *'the Messenger of the Covenant,'* who would sit in judgement and hold Israel to account on the basis of their very own commitments to God. But his prophecy is couched in the most remarkable of ways, for as we will find, Malachi spoke also of another day, another judgement and another *Messenger of the Covenant* who would come. Like Nehemiah, he had once been with his people; like Nehemiah, he had once established a covenant with them; and like Nehemiah, he will return 'from a far country' (Lk 19:12) to hold his people to account on the basis of that covenant.

As Malachi's closing words rang out across the hills surrounding Jerusalem and then faded into silence, a thick darkness settled over the nation. The sun had gone down upon the prophets (Mic 3:6). This final message would remain with the nation during the next 400 years of darkness. And yet, Malachi had spoken of the coming of another dawn. One day, *'the Sun of Righteousness'* would arise with the coming of the Messiah. For some, his advent would be a long-awaited relief; for others, it would herald their day of judgement when they will be burned into oblivion.

The prophecy before us, therefore, was the final call to Israel to prepare for the coming of their Messiah. There could hardly be a prophecy more suited to our day. As Israel stood awaiting the first advent of Christ, we stand awaiting the second. Malachi's appeal is for us to do everything possible to prepare for that day, because *the Lord, whom we seek, shall suddenly come to his temple.*

Malachi's question to us is, who will abide the day of his coming?

Our prayer is, that by the grace of God and with the guidance of Malachi's prophecy, that may include us all.

TIMES AFTER THE EXILE

3rd RETURN

445 BC Nehemiah's return Neh 2:1,6

THE 20TH YEAR OF ARTAXERXES

- 9/20 Nehemiah hears of Jerusalem's plight Neh 1:1
- 7/120 Asks leave of Artaxerxes Neh 2:1,6
- 29/4/20 Arrives at Jer'm Neh 2:11 after 3-4mths (cp Ezra 7:7-9)
- 3/5/20 Wall starts after 3 days Neh 2:11; 3:1
- 25/6/20 Wall built after 52 days Neh 6:15
- 17/7/20 Ezra reads Law Neh 8:2
- 15/7/20 Feast of Tab' Neh 8:18 Lev 23:34
- 24/7/20 Prayer & seal covenant Neh 9:1,38
- ? Dedication ceremony Neh 12:27

- 457 BC Ezra's purge completed Ezra 10:17
- 479 BC Esther queen Est 2:16
- 483 BC Ahasuerus' feast Est 1:3
- 474 BC Haman's plot Est 3:7
- ~451 BC Letter to Artaxerxes Ezra 4:11-16

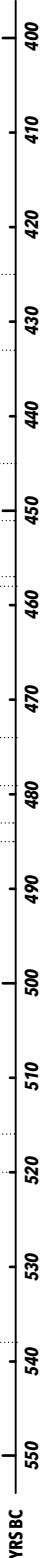
- 2nd RETURN
- 458 BC Ezra's return Ezra 7:7-9

- 520 BC Haggai & Zechariah Ezra 5:1
- 516 BC Temple completed Ezra 5:1

- 1st RETURN
- 538 BC Decree of Cyrus Ezra 1:1

- ~425 BC Nehemiah returns to Jer'm Neh 13:6

Neh. Governor in Jer'm (12 yrs)



PERSIAN KINGS	CYRUS THE GREAT 559-530 BC	CAMBYSES 530-522 BC	DARIUS HYSTAPES 522-486 BC	XERXES 486-465 BC	ARTAXERXES I 465-423 BC	DARIUS II 423-404 BC
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THREE RETURNS FROM CAPTIVITY

	DATE	RETURNS	RECORDED	DECREE
1	538 BC	Zerubbabel + ~50,000 people	Ezra 1:6	Ezra 1:1-4 - Authority to build Temple
2	458 BC	Ezra + ~8000 people	Ezra 7:10	Ezra 7 - Authority to establish Godly rule
3	445 BC	Nehemiah	Neh 1:12	Neh 2 - Authority to build the walls of Jerusalem

THE TIMES OF MALACHI

Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets, and his message was God's final appeal to His people to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah. He spoke at the end of the post-exilic period, the history of which is recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah, which were originally one book in the Hebrew Bible.¹ It was during this time that the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi all delivered their messages in Judah, while back in Persia, the events of the book of Esther also took place.

The years after the return from exile were times of reformation and renewal in the Persian province of Judah. At the same time, the new Ecclesia faced many intense and protracted challenges. They returned to a scene of complete devastation, the ruins of their ancient homeland. The famed City of David, their beloved Temple and the city of their forefathers were all but ashes and debris now.

INTO EXILE

Over 150 years before Malachi's time,² in about 606-586 BC, God had delivered His people over to a series of Babylonian onslaughts. These waves of invasions and deportations came because of their ongoing unfaithfulness and rejection of His messengers (2Chr 36:15-16). The consequences were shattering, and the shock of the nation at the fall of Jerusalem and the violence and devastation that unfolded is captured in the Lamentations of Jeremiah (e.g. Lam 4:11-12). The prophet had forewarned them that the captivity would last 70 years, during which time the Land and Temple would lie desolate (Jer 29:10; 2Chr 36:21). So it happened, and in exile, the nation fell into despondency.

*'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion'
(Psa 137:1).*

ZERUBBABEL'S RETURN

But eventually the 70-year period reached its completion. Babylon fell to the Medo-Persian forces in 539 BC,³ and liberty was proclaimed by the Decree of Cyrus in 538 BC,⁴ which permitted the Jews to return to Judah and rebuild God's Temple at Jerusalem (**Ezra 1:1-4**).

¹ Cambridge Commentary on Ezra & Nehemiah notes that these two books are to be found as one in the Hebrew manuscripts, and were considered as one by Josephus, Melito (bishop of Sardis, 180 AD), the Talmud, the Massorettes and 'the great Jewish commentaries'. It was not until about 200 AD that they were first spoken of as separate books by Origen, a Christian theologian of Alexandria, although he was careful to note that in the Hebrew they were one book.

² This is based on the conventional approach to the chronology of the post-exilic period. For a consideration of the different approaches to the chronology of this period, see Appendix 1.

³ Recorded in Daniel 5.

⁴ Ezra describes this as occurring in 'the first year of Cyrus king of Persia' (Ezra 1:1; 2Chr 36:22). Secular history states that Cyrus had been king since 559 BC, however it appears the Biblical dating relates to the first year of his reign over the Persian Empire following its conquest of Babylon.

Approximately 50,000 people⁵ took up the invitation and returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel⁶ and Joshua (**Ezra 2**). A spirit of elation must have filled the hearts of the exiles as they made their way up along the Mesopotamian plain, following the course of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and then descended from the north into the Land promised to their forefathers. The journey of some 1500km would take the lumbering caravan approximately four months.⁷

Psalms 126, while written after the earlier deliverance from the Assyrian invader in the days of Hezekiah, doubtless captures the spirit of the returning exiles:

'When Yahweh turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, Yahweh hath done great things for them. Yahweh hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.'

The Temple Built

Upon their arrival, things got off to a good start as work began on the altar. The first priority of the returned captives was to revive the worship of God according to the Mosaic law, which they did through the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles in **Ezra 3**.

Early the next year, work commenced on the Temple, and the foundation was completed amid jubilant celebrations. The joy was mixed with sorrow, however, because there were those who recalled the former glory of Israel's Kingdom, and to them, the events and projects of this period paled into insignificance. They considered it 'a day of small things.'⁸

The arrival of these Jews was no welcome sign for the new occupants of the Land. The vacant lands had been occupied by Samaritans who had migrated south during the period of the captivity. The Samaritans began a systematic campaign of deception and antagonism with one goal in mind: to stop the work. This becomes a theme of Ezra and Nehemiah; the constant opposition faced by these men from their neighbours. The effect upon the freshly returned exiles was to dry up their enthusiasm. Apathy set in, and with it a preoccupation with their own houses and lives. The Temple building ceased for about 15 years, until the second year of Darius Hystaspes, in 520 BC (**Ezra 4**).

Everything changed in that year. Two men, Haggai and Zechariah, stirred the nation into action. Haggai, likely the older of the prophets, was sent by God to chastise the nation for their complacency; to 'consider their ways' and to build the house of Yahweh.⁹ Meanwhile, Zechariah inspired the nation into action with dramatic visions of the future. The effect was almost instantaneous, and the building work recommenced with vigour.

Again, seeing the Jews at work irritated the Samaritans, and a letter was sent to Darius enquiring as to the authority of the Jewish workmen (**Ezra 5**). The response was exhilarating – not only did Darius support the work, but he provided further assistance and threatened any who would not (Ezra 6:6-12)! Accordingly, the building prospered and the Temple was completed in the 6th year of Darius, 516 BC (**Ezra 6**).

⁵ Listed in Ezra 2.

⁶ Ezra 2:1-2. Zerubbabel = Sheshbazzar (cp Ezra 5:16 with Zech 4:9). He was 'the prince (leader) of Judah' (Ezra 1:8).

⁷ Cp Ezra's return - Ezra 7:7-9. Approx 900 miles / 1500 km (Cambridge Commentary)

⁸ Zech 4:10.

⁹ E.g. Hag 1:7-9

The Intermission

At this point, Ezra's account skips over 58 years¹⁰ of history, taking up the story in the 7th year of King Artaxerxes,¹¹ 458 BC. The intervening decades had seen the Ecclesia fall into disrepair. Inter-marriage with the world was rife, so that the carefully documented genealogies (e.g. Ezra 2) - designed to keep the Ecclesia safe from infiltration by the world - had been undermined and ignored.

Back in Persia, the events of Esther likely unfolded in this time during the reign of Xerxes, the 'Ahasuerus' of Ezra 4:6 and the book of Esther.¹²

EZRA'S RETURN

In the 7th year of Artaxerxes, a wonderful opportunity arose for the struggling community in Judah. They were joined by the esteemed priest and scribe, Ezra, '*a ready scribe in the Law of Moses*' (Ezra 7:6). Ezra was renowned as such by all - right up to the Persian monarch himself!¹³ He arrived with approximately 8000 returnees, with authority to establish law and order and '*beautify the house of Yahweh*' (**Ezra 7**).

The journey is recorded in **Ezra 8**, but what he found is recorded in **Ezra 9**. '*The people of Israel*', Ezra was told, including many of the leading priests and Levites, '*have not separated themselves from the people of the lands*.' Inter-marriage was rife, and its effect upon the Ecclesia, disastrous. Ezra was distraught. He offered a prayer of remorse and confession and then set about rectifying the situation (**Ezra 10**).

The Next Intermission

After Ezra's reform in Ch 9-10, nothing is said of what happened for another 13 years. Ezra 4, however, sheds some light upon what Ezra did during this time. We can hardly imagine that this man, so full of the Word of God, would have considered his job done after an Ecclesial reform and settled down! He would have noted how vulnerable the city was to attack and set about defending its inhabitants. This is confirmed by Ezra 4, which states that '*in the days of Artaxerxes*' (v7), a letter was sent to the Persian king accusing the Jews of '*building the rebellious and the bad city*' and setting up '*the walls*' (v12,16). Artaxerxes was duly concerned, so he wrote back to the Samaritans, '*Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded until another commandment shall be given from me*' (v21). That was some time after the 7th of Artaxerxes - perhaps just a few years after Ezra's purge.¹⁴

¹⁰ It may at first seem strange that Ezra skips over such a time period without any mention, but it must be remembered that Ezra-Nehemiah was originally one book so that in actual fact, there are multiple time periods skipped over within this book: **58 years** between Ezra 6:22 & 7:1, **13 years** between Ezra 10:44 & Neh 1:1, **12 years** between Neh 12 & 13 (referred to in Neh 5:14).

¹¹ We take the 'Artaxerxes' of Ezra & Nehemiah to be Artaxerxes I Longimanus (c. 465-423 BC). See Appendix 1.

¹² There is debate as to which Persian monarch is to be identified with Ahasuerus. Again, the options are considered in Appendix 1, but the conventional approach which identifies him with Xerxes (r. 486-465) appears most likely. Either way, it is of little significance to the events of Malachi.

¹³ Ezra 7:12,14,21,25

¹⁴ The reason for the inclusion of this interchange between Artaxerxes and the Samaritans back in Ezra 4 (out of chronological order) is simply that Ezra is demonstrating the ongoing policy of Samaritan antagonism towards the work of the Truth. He introduces the problem of Samaritan opposition in Ezra 4:1-4, showing how they managed to stop the work during the reign of Cyrus. In v5, Ezra tells us that this continued all the way to the reign of Darius - that is, through the reigns of Cambyses (8 years) and Pseudo Smerdis (7 months), until the 2nd year of Darius Hystaspes (v5,24). Ezra then flashes forward in time in to show that the same policy of opposition existed in the days of Ahasuerus (v6 - i.e. Xerxes) and Artaxerxes (v7-23 - i.e. Artaxerxes Longimanus).

NEHEMIAH'S RETURN

When a few years later, in the 20th year of Artaxerxes, Nehemiah heard of the state of Jerusalem, he was shocked. He would have known of Ezra's reforms in Jerusalem, and being the king's cupbearer,¹⁵ he also was likely aware of both Ezra's efforts to build the walls and Artaxerxes' command to stop. But he didn't expect what he heard: *'The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire'* (Neh 1:3). The Samaritans had wreaked havoc on Ezra's work. Nehemiah was devastated and turned to God in prayer (**Neh 1**). But interestingly, he hesitated before taking his request to the king; he waited four months,¹⁶ and even then he only raised the topic when invited to do so by the king!

Why did Nehemiah wait so long? It seems it was because he appreciated just how much was at stake. It was a very big deal to take a request before a Persian monarch. It could cost one's life,¹⁷ but it is probable Nehemiah had greater concerns than that. Ezra, who was highly esteemed by the King, had been commanded not to build the walls, and now, just a few years later, Nehemiah wanted to ask for permission to do exactly that!

'So I prayed to the God of heaven,' writes Nehemiah (2:4).

Then, doubtless recalling the provision made by the king some years earlier,¹⁸ he made his request to rebuild the city of his forefathers.

Having obtained favour from the King, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and conducted his night tour to assess the damage. A few days after his arrival, he then addressed the rulers and told them *'of the hand of my God which was good upon me'* (2:18) including the consent of Artaxerxes for the building work. The response of the rulers was spontaneous: *'Let us rise up and build!'* So the work began (**Neh 2**).

An intriguing list of builders follows (**Neh 3**). What seems at first just a list of names turns out to contain little bits of information that will prove integral to the dramatic story that follows. The work is headed up by the High Priest Eliashib and his priestly companions (v1). To them fell the northern section of the city wall, which, being the most vulnerable, was protected by a number of towers.¹⁹ But cracks emerge in their defences, when Eliashib – who should have known how important it was to keep the world out of the Ecclesia – omitted to lock and bar the gate that he built.²⁰ While apparently a small oversight at first, the significance of Eliashib's omission becomes apparent as the rest of Nehemiah's story unfolds.

Neh 4 returns to the theme of Samaritan opposition. Initially, their approaches take the form of mockery and threats against the entire Ecclesia. In response, Nehemiah commissions an army of workmen to keep the builders safe.

¹⁵ Neh 1:11

¹⁶ Chisleu (Neh 1:1) = 9th month (Zech. 7:1), whereas Nisan (Neh 2:1) = 1st month (Est 3:7) of the following year.

¹⁷ Est 4:11,16

¹⁸ In commanding the work on the walls to cease, Artaxerxes had said, *'Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease... until another commandment shall be given from me'* (Ezra 4:21).

¹⁹ Neh 3:1. *'This area was crucially important for the defense of the Temple Mount. The mount was surrounded by steep valleys on every side, except the north. This was the reason why there had to be defensive towers on the north'* (Bro Leen & Sis Kathleen Ritmeyer, *Jerusalem in the Time of Nehemiah*, p28).

²⁰ Contrast the description of Eliashib's building of the Sheep Gate in v1 (he *'set up the doors of it'* – no mention of locks/bars) with every other gate (v3,6,13,14,15 – where they *'set up the doors thereof, and the locks thereof, and the bars thereof'*).

Next, an Ecclesial breach emerges in **Neh 5**, as a rift between rich and poor boils over into open conflict. Nehemiah finds himself redirecting his wrath from the enemies of Judah to the oppressors in their midst.

The Samaritans then change tact. **Neh 6** brings a swathe of personal attacks against Nehemiah. The ringleader is initially the abrasive Sanballat, who had always led the Samaritan opposition against Nehemiah since his return (2:10,19; 4:1,7; 6:1). Sanballat was a ruthless man who threatened to use the Samaritan army to crush the Jewish cause (4:2) and now led a series of attempts to get Nehemiah to come outside the walls of Jerusalem so that they could kill him (6:1-4). This failed, so next they sent an open letter insinuating that Nehemiah was guilty of treason (v5-9). Again, Nehemiah was undeterred, so their next attempt was to intimidate him through deceitful Jewish prophets (v10-14). But despite all these attempts, the work proceeded and in v15-16 the wall of Jerusalem was completed. The intensity of the opposition is highlighted by the fact that Nehemiah returns in v17-19 to describe the last, and most deadly, technique that was used by the enemies of the Truth: infiltration. Tobiah, who had always been second in command to Sanballat, now comes to the fore with his political overtures, and Nehemiah describes the ties that were developing between this slimy individual and leaders within the Ecclesia. These alliances would prove fatal to the Ecclesia and would lay the backdrop for many of the indicting rebukes of Malachi.

With the walls complete, Nehemiah sets about reforming its inhabitants. He recalls the list of those who returned with Joshua and Zerubbabel from Ezra 2, recording them again in **Neh 7**. This was to ensure the purity of the Ecclesia in view of all the threats of infiltration. Next, Nehemiah worked with Ezra to conduct a national re-education effort, at the 'Bible school' of **Neh 8**. This in turn led to a prayer of national confession in **Neh 9**, led by the Levites who recounted Israel's history and failures along with God's grace and forgiveness.

In their state of contrition, the nation then entered into a covenant of commitment to God in **Neh 10**, with the leaders signing the covenant (v1-27). This covenant is of the utmost importance to Malachi's prophecy, as many of his rebukes are directly aimed at different elements of this covenant that they had broken. The great issue of Malachi's day would be how faithful God's people would be to their covenants - both nationally and individually. Malachi would tell of the coming of 'the messenger of the covenant' who would come to hold the nation to account (Mal 3:1). This stunning prophecy would be couched in terms applicable to Malachi's own day, in the return of Nehemiah from Persia, and yet in their ultimate sense, to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ (see notes 3:1). For the people of Malachi's day, the terms of the covenant to which they would be held accountable are detailed in Neh 10:28-39.

With the covenant in place, the reconstructed city of Jerusalem now needed to be filled. Accordingly, **Neh 11** describes how the people cast lots to determine who would relocate to Jerusalem (v1-24) and in the villages (v25-36). **Neh 12** then records further lists of the priests and Levites whose role it was to lead in Godly worship and teach the people (v1-26), followed by the grand dedication ceremony of the completed walls, led by Ezra and Nehemiah (v27-47).

The Final Intermission

It is at this point in Nehemiah's story that he passes over another few years. All the events of Neh 1-12 had transpired within a period of approximately 12 months (see timeline, p8). Nehemiah specifically informs us that he was governor in Jerusalem for another 12 years

(5:14), after which he returned to Persia (13:6). He remained there for an undisclosed period of time, and in his absence, the Ecclesia in Jerusalem were left to fare for themselves. It is likely that the aged priest Ezra also died during this time. The burning question was how God’s people would go in the absence of these two spiritual leaders. Would they remain faithful to the covenant they had made?

THE MESSAGE OF MALACHI

In His love towards His people, God chose to give them one final warning before the return of their governor. He sent His messenger, Malachi, to warn Judah to prepare for the coming of Nehemiah. Chronologically, Malachi falls between chapters 12 and 13 of Nehemiah, and a brief survey of his message shows how many of his key exhortations referred the nation back to the covenant they had made with God in Neh 10:

Neh 10	The Covenant	Malachi’s Warning	Mal
v29	Promised to obey God’s Law	Causing people to stumble at Law	2:8
v30	Promised not to marry with world	Married daughter of a strange god	2:11,14
v34	Promised to bring wood offering	Stop kindling fire on altar in vain	1:10
v35-37	Promised to give firstfruits	Offered the blind, lame, sick, torn	1:8,13,14
v37-38	Promised to give tithes	Robbed God in tithes and offerings	3:8
v39	Promised not to forsake Temple	Desecrated the sanctuary God loves	2:11

The response of the nation to Malachi’s message, therefore, would determine their fate upon Nehemiah’s return.

The Return of the Messenger

Neh 13 is the record of that return. Nehemiah came from the palace of Persia – from the right hand of the supreme monarch of the day. He returned to a nation who looked forward to his coming, but who were, in reality, unprepared. They were ‘found naked’ at the return of their governor.

The period for which Nehemiah was absent from Jerusalem is not disclosed. It must have been a few years, for it was long enough for marriage with the world to become a problem, and to result in children who spoke the language of the Philistines (Neh 13:24), indicating perhaps 5-8 years. But the fact we are not told is significant, because it is similar to the undisclosed period of absence of our Lord, who ‘went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return’ (Lk 19:12). Nehemiah’s second coming to Jerusalem, therefore, is of the greatest significance to us, because it is a type of Christ’s second coming. Both men would return as ‘the messenger of the covenant’; Nehemiah, to find out how they had kept the covenant they had made in Neh 10, and Christ, to find out how we have kept the covenant we have entered into at our baptism.

What Nehemiah found was nothing short of devastating. It is worth sitting down and reading through Neh 13 and imagining this final scene with which the Old Testament closes. It is a devastating picture. Nehemiah is depicted as returning from Persia to find his Ecclesia in tatters. Spiritual corruption had set in at the very top. Eliashib, who had failed to appreciate the need for physical protection when setting up the gates back in Ch 3, had miserably failed in providing spiritual protection as well – for he made a room for Tobiah, the arch enemy of

the Truth, *inside* the House of God (Neh 13:4-5). And from the top, the spiritual corruption had spread like a cancer through the entire Ecclesia.

Everywhere Nehemiah looked, there were problems. God's law had been forsaken (v1-3), the Ecclesia infiltrated (v7-9), the tithes/collection neglected so that the Levites were unable to teach (v10-13). The Sabbath had been over-run with business (v15-22), intermarriage with the world was commonplace (v23-28) and worship had fallen into disrepair (v29-31). And all of this was in direct violation of the covenant they had made:

Neh 10	Covenant Made	Covenant Broken	Neh 13
v29	Obey God's law	Broken God's law	v3
v30	No mixed marriages	Married wives of Ashdod	v23-28
v31	No trading on Sabbath	Sold on the sabbath	v15-21
v32-33	The Temple tax	Treasurers had to be reappointed	v13
v34	Wood offering	Wood offering neglected	v31
v35-38	First-fruits & tithes	Portions of Levites withheld	v10-11
v39	Not forsake House of God	Why is the house of God forsaken?	v11

Thus, Israel had fallen foul of their promises. With the arrival of their governor, their day of opportunity closed. They had neglected their covenant, but they had also ignored Malachi who had specifically warned of many of the things for which the nation were judged:

Mal	Malachi's Warning	Nehemiah's Return	Neh 13
1:12-13	Meal offering profaned	Meal offering restored	v9
2:8	Covenant of Levi corrupted	Priesthood purged	v28-29
2:11	Married 'strange' women	Purged 'strange' (s/w) marriages	v27,30
2:15	Sought Godly seed	Rebuked for worldly seed	v24-25
3:3	Shall purify sons of Levi	Levites purified	v30
3:3	He shall... purge	Thus I cleansed	v30
3:7	Astray from days of fathers	Did not your fathers thus?	v18
3:8	Tithes forsaken	Tithes re-instituted	v10-12
3:16	A book of remembrance	"Remember me"	v22
3:17	I will spare them	"Spare me"	v22

Malachi's Message to us

The message of Malachi, therefore, presents to us a final warning and appeal so that we can prepare for the coming of Christ. Like Nehemiah, at his second coming, Christ will come to purge out the wicked from his Ecclesia. Our prayer is that we will respond to God's messenger, so that we may be counted among those who *'feared Yahweh and thought upon His name'* and like Nehemiah himself, be *'remembered for good'* (Mal 3:16-17; Neh 13:31).

STRUCTURE & BREAKDOWN

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

The suggested breakdown below may help to identify the flow of the book. Malachi takes us from Israel’s privileged position, through the problem of their perversity and the punishments this brought upon them, to the promise God has in store for those who respond to His appeal.

Introduction 1:1

The Privilege of the Nation 1:2-5

1:2-5 Declaration of God’s love for Israel

The Perversity & Punishment of the Nation 1:6-3:12

1:6-14 Rebuke of the Priests – *Corrupt Worship*

2:1-9 Judgement on the Priests – *Corrupted their Covenant*

2:10-16 Rebuke of the Nation – *Unfaithfulness to their Covenants*

2:17-3:6 Judgement of the Nation – *By the Messenger of the Covenant*

3:7-12 Appeal to the Nation – *True Worship*

The Promises to the Remnant 3:13-4:3

3:13-4:3 Judgement & Relief at the Coming of Christ

Conclusion 4:4-6

4:4-6 Remember my Covenants

LITERARY STRUCTURE & ANALYSIS

The book of Malachi is laid out in a high-level chiastic structure (see next page), drawing attention to the central portion of the book: Ch 2:10-16.²¹

Up to this central point in the book, Malachi has emphasised the nation’s privileged position as recipients of God’s love (1:2-5), he has squarely rebuked the priests for leading Israel astray as they spurned God’s love in their worship (1:6-14), and he has promised that judgements will come upon the priests if they do not repent, because of the way they have corrupted the covenant God made with the Levitical priesthood (2:1-9).

Now, in Ch 2:10-16, Malachi turns to the heart of the issue: The entire nation has been unfaithful to their covenants, both to God (2:10) and each other (2:14). There are usually only two covenants we make in life: one with God (through ‘baptism’ into Moses for Israel/into Christ for us), the other with a spouse. Israel was breaking both. The word ‘treacherous’ appears 5x in this section, and nowhere else in the book. The big issue of Ch 2:10-16 is the nation’s treachery, or unfaithfulness, to their covenants. And Malachi says that *needs to change*.

²¹ A chiasm is a literary device in which the concepts, words or phrases at the beginning of a passage are mirrored by similar or contrasting concepts, words or phrases at the end of that passage. The result is a portion of text that pivots around a central section. This central part of the chiasm often highlights the key message of the whole passage, or it may hold a key to unlocking the meaning of the rest of the passage. When depicted graphically, the figure resembles the Greek letter ‘chi’ (X), hence the name ‘chi-asmus’.

Accordingly, in the next section (2:17-3:6), Malachi warns that *the Messenger of the Covenant* is coming. When he comes, he will hold them to account based on the covenants they have made. Malachi then counterbalances his rebuke of the priesthood's *corrupt worship* in Ch 1:6-14 with an appeal to return to *true worship* in Ch 3:7-12. Finally, in the last major section of the book, the prophet returns to the way God deals with those whom He loves (Israel/the faithful remnant) and those He hates (Edom/the wicked), and shares the promise of deliverance and judgement that is coming when 'the Sun of Righteousness' arises upon this earth at the return of Christ (3:13-4:3).

Malachi then closes off the book with a last appeal for the nation to remember their covenants with God, with two beautiful allusions to national covenants God had established with Israel – first the Mosaic, and then the Abrahamic (4:4-6).

The Chiastic Structure of Malachi:

Introduction (1:1)

A Yahweh's undeserved love for Israel and hatred for wicked Edom (1:2-5)

- Yahweh's undeserved love for Jacob (1:2)
- Judgement on wicked Edom (1:4)

B Priests have cheated Yahweh in their offerings (1:6-14)

- Unacceptable and inferior offerings have been brought (1:7,8,13-14)
- Curse upon those who have cheated in the offerings (1:14)
- Yahweh wishes the temple doors to be shut to stop unacceptable offerings (1:10)
- My name shall be great among the nations (1:11,14)

C Yahweh's Messenger (Priesthood) had been faithful, but has turned from Yahweh (2:1-9)

- The priest was meant to be the messenger of Yahweh (2:7)
- God made His covenant with Levi (2:4-5), but they corrupted it (2:8)
- The priests have departed out of the way (2:8)
- Reminiscence of Levi's past faithful service (2:5-6)

D Stop being faithless to your covenants with God and each other! (2:10-16)

C' Yahweh's Messenger is coming to restore the covenant and purify Levi (2:17-3:6)

- I will send My messenger (3:1)
- I will send the Messenger of the Covenant in judgement (3:1)
- My messenger will prepare the way before Me (3:1)
- Reminiscence of Levi's past faithful service (3:4)

B' Israel has robbed Yahweh in tithes/offerings; but if they change, God will bless them (3:7-12)

- Unacceptable tithes and offerings have been brought (3:8-9)
- Curse upon those who have robbed in the offerings (3:9)
- Bring acceptable offerings to My house and I will open the windows of heaven (3:10)
- Ye shall be blessed among the nations (3:12)

A' Yahweh will spare the righteous and destroy the wicked (3:13-4:3)

- Yahweh's compassion on (sparing of) those that fear Him (3:16-17)
- Judgement on the wicked (4:1)

Conclusion: Keep my Covenants (4:4-6)

THEMES

The Prophecy of Malachi has a number of strong themes running throughout it. Tracing these through the book and highlighting them can be useful in both appreciating the structure and understanding the meaning of the book.

The Nation's Questions – A Nation in Denial

Malachi's prophecy has a very distinctive style. It is abrupt, direct and succinct. But perhaps its most characteristic feature is the list of questions littered throughout. Frequently, Malachi begins with a statement from Yahweh, and this is immediately followed by a question posed on the peoples' behalf. Whether or not these were actually voiced by the people, they did reflect the nation's *attitude*.

Israel was guilty of both arrogance and ignorance, as betrayed in the questions they asked:

1. 'Wherein hast Thou loved us?' (1:2)
2. 'Wherein have we despised Thy name?' (1:6)
3. 'Wherein have we polluted Thee?' (1:7)
4. 'Wherefore?' (2:13-14)
5. 'Wherein have we wearied Him?' (2:17)
6. 'Where is the God of judgement?' (2:17)
7. 'Wherein shall we return?' (3:7)
8. 'Wherein have we robbed Thee?' (3:8)
9. 'What have we spoken so much against Thee?' (3:13)
10. 'What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance...?' (3:14)

When we survey these questions, we see just how deceitful sin can be in blinding people to their own state. Israel in Malachi's day were like the Laodicean ecclesia, assuming they were doing nothing wrong, when in reality they were a lukewarm Ecclesia – spiritually poor, blind and naked (Rev 3:17). Ignorance of our true spiritual state is one of the biggest threats to the Ecclesia at the end of every age (e.g. Isa 6:9-10; Acts 28:26-27; Rev 16:15).

The Covenant

In view of the prevailing apathy and indifference of the nation, this next theme comes as little surprise, and it forms the central theme of the book. It is the theme of **faithfulness to one's covenants**. Recall that under Nehemiah, the nation had made a covenant of commitment to God (Neh 10) and that at his return Nehemiah would judge them on the basis of that covenant (Neh 13). Malachi was sent to prepare them for that return.

A brief look at the chiastic structure of the book (p17) will show that the theme of the covenant arises in the middle three sections. The priests had broken their covenant (2:1-9), the nation had broken theirs' (2:10-16), so God was going to send *'the Messenger of the Covenant'* to judge them (2:17-3:1-5). As with all these themes, it is worth highlighting the covenant:

- 2:4,5 God's **covenant** with Levi remembered
- 2:8 God's **covenant** with Levi corrupted by the priests
- 2:10 God's **covenant** with the people profaned
- 2:14 Marriage **covenants** broken
- 3:1 The Messenger of the **Covenant** will come in judgement

But this theme of the covenant is not just an abstract idea. A covenant is a formal agreement designed to preserve the relationship between two parties. For example:

- God made a covenant with Israel that He would be their God, and they would be His people (Ex 6:2-4,7).
- A husband and wife make a covenant of commitment to each other (Mal 2:14).

These covenants are a solemn commitment from both parties to do their part in preserving the relationship. But the problem in Malachi's day is that the nation had been '**unfaithful**' or '**treacherous**' to their covenants. This is another key word, and it appears 5x, all in the central section of the chiasm: 2:10,11,14,15,16.

When we consider the similarities between our own day and Malachi's, the importance of remaining faithful to our covenants stands out as a major lesson for us in the Last Days.

The Name

There are ten references to God's '*name*' in Malachi: 1:6(x2),11(x3),14; 2:2,5; 3:16; 4:2.

God's name, 'Yahweh,' means '*He who will be*'.²² Just as a friend's name brings to mind the sort of person they are, God's name is expressive of both His character and purpose (Ex 33:19; 34:6-7; Ezek 36:22-24). God's purpose encapsulated in His name is '*that He will be manifested in a multitude*'²³ of men and women who take on His name by becoming a part of His family and demonstrating His character in their lives (Acts 15:14; Rev 14:1).

Israel were called to be a people for God's name, but they refused to adopt the character of the One who bore it (Jer 13:11). In Malachi's day, they despised God's name through their unacceptable approach to worship (1:6-8; 2:2). Malachi emphasises the respect with which we must treat Yahweh and His name, and highlights God's regard for those who fear Him and meditate upon His name (3:16; 4:2). Ultimately, Malachi reveals that one day all the world will honour the name of Yahweh (1:11).

Father-Son

Another theme of Malachi's prophecy is the Father-son relationship between God and Israel: 1:6; 2:10; 3:17. Throughout the book, God demonstrates the love of a father to those who fear Him, but He does require the honour that is due from a son to his father. This is linked to the theme of the name, in that Israel were bearers of God's name because they were His children (e.g. Isa 43:6-7).

²² Bro John Thomas, *Eureka*, Vol 1, p100.

²³ *Ibid*, p100.

Yahweh of Hosts

‘The LORD of hosts’ or *Yahweh Tz-vaoth*, occurs 24x in this short prophecy - more frequently than in any other Old Testament book. The title means ‘*He who will be manifested in armies*’, as *tz-vaoth* is the Hebrew word for ‘a mass of persons’ and in particular, ‘an army’ (Str, BDB).

Interestingly, the next two books in which this title is used most frequently are the other two prophets after the exile, Haggai and Zechariah. As can be seen from the records of Ezra and Nehemiah, Israel in these times did not have any army of its own, so it would have been a great comfort to know that *Yahweh of Armies* was overshadowing them and would fight against their enemies (e.g. Mal 1:4).²⁴

However, the title also bears a stern warning, because the same God who is capable of defending Israel is also more than capable of punishing them, and the title is most often used in the context of rebuke in Malachi (e.g 1:6,8,9). God refers to Himself by this title in the context of coming judgement (3:1,5) and salvation (3:12,17).

Honour & Fear

In sending Malachi, Yahweh was seeking a response from the nation of honour and fear (1:6). ‘Honour’ occurs twice in the book (1:6, 2:2), but ‘fear’ becomes another common theme throughout. See notes on 1:6 & 2:5 for the significance of these two concepts.

Heb	Meaning	Occurrences
<i>môrâh</i> H4172	‘Fear, reverence, terror’ (BDB). From root <i>yare</i> .	1:6; 2:5 (fear)
<i>yare</i> H3372	‘To fear, revere, be afraid’ (BDB)	1:14 (dreadful); 2:5 (feared); 3:5,16 (fear); 4:5 (dreadful)
<i>châthath</i> H2865	‘To prostrate’ (Str), ‘broken or dismayed’ (BDB)	2:5 (afraid)

The Law

There is a significant emphasis upon the Law of Moses and its rituals throughout Malachi:

Offer(ed)	1:7,8 (x3),11; 3:3	Feasts	2:3
Offering	1:10,11,13; 2:12,13; 3:3,4	Temple	3:1
Offerings	3:8 (diff Heb)	Law	2:6,7,8,9; 4:4
Sacrifice(th)	1:8,14	Ordinance(s)	3:7,14
Altar	1:7,10; 2:13	Tithes	3:8,10
The table	1:7,12	Statutes & judgements	4:4

God uses each of these elements of the law to demonstrate that while the priests and people were professing to worship God in accordance with the law, their *attitude* was completely wrong. In worship, vows, personal relationships and tithes, the nation had flouted the principles of God’s Law. The Law was the codified covenant God had made with them, and He was reminding them of the many ways in which they had abandoned it. This is seen particularly in the offerings they brought (see note on the *minchah* ‘offering’, 1:10).

²⁴ ESV Study Bible, note on Mal 1-2, p1775

Messengers

Malachi's name means '*my messenger*', and his prophecy is filled with references to individuals whose role it was to convey a message from God to His people.

The priest was supposed to be God's messenger (Lev 10:11; Mal 2:7), but Malachi shows that they had failed (2:8). Consequently, God had now sent another messenger, 'Malachi'. He describes himself as '*my messenger*' (3:1), and he came with a message of warning to the nation. He warned that a third messenger was coming, '*the Messenger of the Covenant*' and as his description implied, he would come to avenge God's covenant (3:1-2; cp Neh 9:38-10:39 with Neh 13).

But as is often the case with Bible prophecy, the events of which Malachi spoke in Ch 3:1 were not only limited to his day; he spoke also of the coming of Christ at his first and second advents, and the 'messengers' who would announce his coming (see notes on 3:1, p67).

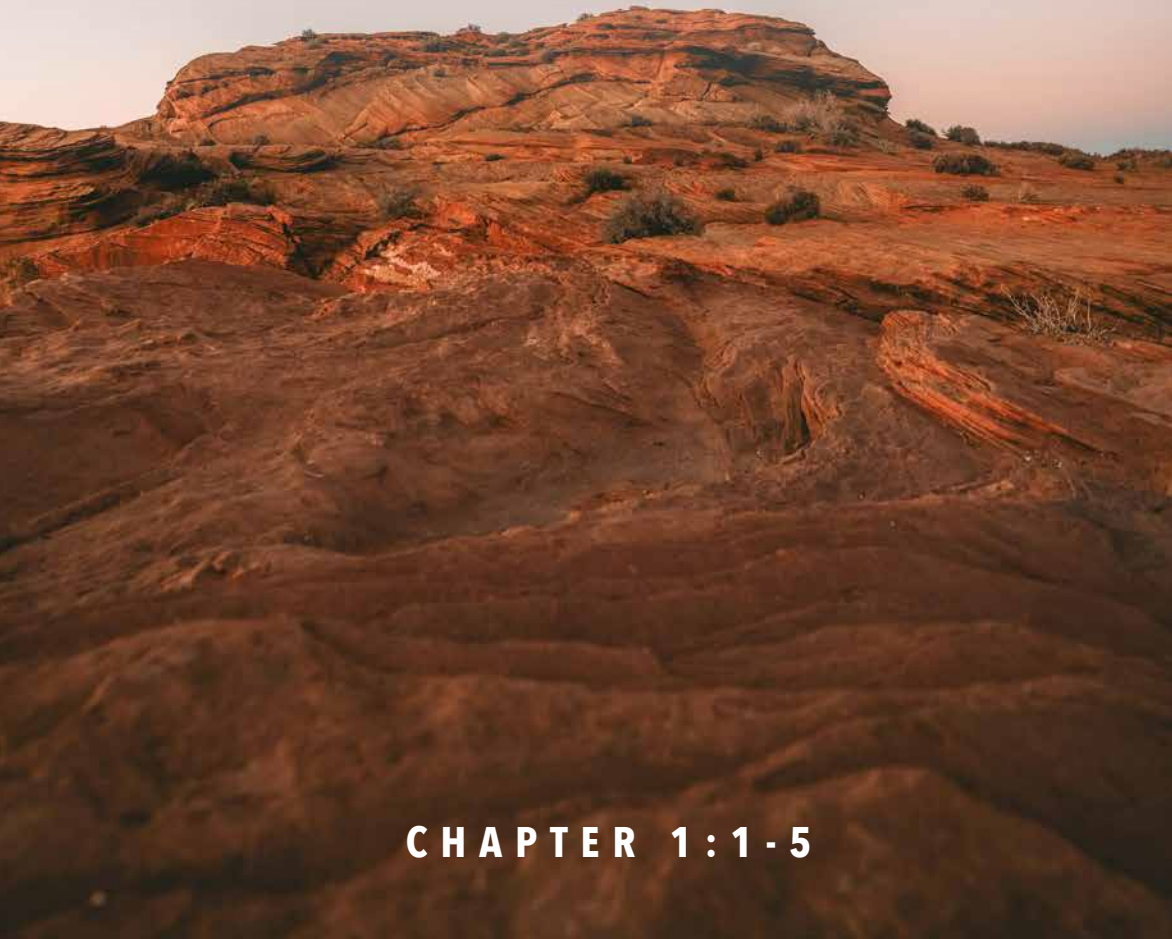
All in all, Malachi's prophecy refers to six messengers:

1. Levitical priests - 'the messenger of Yahweh of Armies' (2:7)
2. Malachi - the first 'My messenger' (3:1 - as his name means)
3. Nehemiah - the 'messenger of the covenant' (3:1) of Neh 9:38-10:39
4. John the Baptist - 'My messenger' at the first advent of Christ (3:1)
5. Elijah - 'My messenger' at the second advent of Christ (3:1; cp 4:5: 'I will send you Elijah')
6. Jesus Christ - the ultimate 'messenger of the covenant' (3:1)

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

MALACHI 1:11

DECLARATION OF GOD'S LOVE FOR ISRAEL



CHAPTER 1:1-5

DECLARATION OF GOD'S LOVE FOR ISRAEL (1:1-5)

The prophecy of Malachi opens with a vivid description of God's love for His people, set in stark contrast to His hatred of Edom. It seems an unusual way to begin at first, however it was perfectly suited to its recipients.

Malachi is going to appeal to Israel on the basis of God's covenant love extended to them. As an introduction to that appeal, he calls to mind two men:

- One, Jacob, was beloved of God and responded in kind.
- The other, Esau, was 'hated' (see v3 regarding the meaning of this), and responded by disrespecting God and His promises.

God could only work with one like Jacob who was pliable to His word, but as He will go on to show throughout the remainder of Ch 1, through their behaviour Israel were not aligning themselves with Jacob, but with Esau!

1 The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

The Burden

Burden Heb *maśśâ'* H4853 = 'an utterance; chiefly of doom' (Str); 'oracle' (Roth).

Malachi Heb *mal'ākîy* H4401 = 'My messenger' (BDB).

Malachi's very name marked him out as a messenger of Yahweh, one of the 'holy men of God' who spoke as he was 'moved by the holy spirit' (2Pet 1:21, cp Amos 3:8). This introduction to the prophecy is brief and abrupt, befitting the stern nature of its message.

The prophecy is described as a 'burden'. The Hebrew word is versatile: it is used for literal burdens (i.e. things to be carried - Ex 23:5; Num 4:15), heavy responsibilities (Num 11:17), inconveniences (2Sam 15:33), songs (1Chr 15:22), tribute (2Chr 17:11), debt repayments (Neh 10:31 'exaction'), and wise sayings (Prov 30:1, 31:1). However, the most common use is in relation to prophecies - by Isaiah (13:1), Jeremiah (23:33), Ezekiel (12:10), Nahum (1:1), Habakkuk (1:1) and Zechariah (9:1). Malachi was yet another prophet sent by Yahweh '*rising up early and sending them*' (Jer 26:5, cp 2Chr 36:15-16), giving His people every possible chance to repent.

2-3 I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.

I have loved you

Malachi's message begins with a short statement which was intended to be appealing and designed to evoke a humble response. Yahweh has always had a tender and affectionate love for His people (Jer 31:3; Deut 7:7-8; 10:15), but He intended that this love should be

reciprocated in obedience to His commandments (Deut 7:11). A lack of obedience was exactly the problem in Malachi's day – but despite their failures, Yahweh remained their father and was intimately concerned with their welfare.

MEDITATION POINT - GOD'S LOVE FOR US

Surveying their miraculous past, Israel had no reason to doubt God's love. As part of the spiritual 'Israel of God', do we appreciate the abundance of opportunities, time, safety, and ease of access to the scriptures / study materials that God has provided? Do we appreciate God's willing provision of His son as a sacrifice on our behalf (1Jn 4:10,19)? Or do we reject God's love by failing to recognise His provisions or failing to make the most of the opportunities He provides?

Wherein hast thou loved us?

This must be one of the most tragic responses in the whole of scripture! Israel had failed to see God's hand of providence in their history: instead, they *'forgot His works, and His wonders that He had shewed them'* (Psa 78:10-11).

This is the first of the anticipatory questions that Malachi incorporates into his message²⁵, each of which reveals the people's ignorance concerning God's ways and the true nature of their relationship with Him. The love of Yahweh for the nation was clearly demonstrated in their past, yet they lacked the spiritual understanding to see that love for what it was.

Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith Yahweh: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau

Hated Heb *sânê* H8130 = 'to hate, to be an enemy; to be unloved... can be active, as an enemy or adversary; or passive, as someone unloved or shunned' (Kohl/Mounce).

Yahweh's response to this first question touches on both the history and the future of Jacob and Esau, illustrating His love for Israel in events both past and future.

The use of the apparently extreme word 'hate' is an idiom, or way of putting things, intended to illustrate the contrast and express the depth of love (cp Gen 29:30-31; Mt 6:24; Jn 12:25, compare Lk 14:26 with Mt 10:37).

Jacob and Esau were both sons of Isaac, yet before they were even born, God foretold there would be a difference between them (Gen 25:23). Their differences became increasingly apparent as they grew older: the incident of Esau selling his birthright illustrated his short-term focus on present gain as compared to Jacob's love for God and the covenants of promise (Gen 25:27-34). This culminated in Jacob inheriting the promises and blessing from Isaac (Gen 27:27-29) while Esau was excluded (v33-35, cp Heb 12:16-17).

Paul draws on this story in Rom 9:6-13, quoting Mal 1:2-3 to illustrate that God's purpose through the Abrahamic covenant does not necessarily apply to all the natural descendants of Abraham (the 'children of the flesh' Rom 9:8); rather the promises are to the 'children of promise' – the 'elect' who respond to God's call. Thus, although Israel were God's chosen people (Isa 44:1; Amos 3:2), the blessings are not limited to literal Israelites – we can be saved by association with them (Acts 28:20; Eph 2:12-20).

²⁵ See Themes (p18) for a complete list.

And laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.

Dragons Heb *tannâh* H8568 = 'Jackals' (ESV, NASB, NIV). A carnivorous dog-like scavenger found across south-east Europe, the Middle East and southern Asia (Wikipedia²⁶).

Esau's descendants became the Edomites, who settled in a rocky stretch of land near the Dead Sea, including part of modern-day Jordan and the city of Petra – a land that was given to them by God himself (Deut 2:4-6). The Edomites were known for their hatred and violence against Israel (Obad 10, Amos 1:11; Ezek 35:5) and had even assisted the Babylonian army in plundering and persecuting the Jews in the days of Nebuchadnezzar (Obad 11,14; Psa 137:7). Because of this, Yahweh brought judgement on their land and continually laid it waste, from the days of David (2Sam 8:13-14; 1Ki 11:15-16), and Amaziah (2Chr 25:11-12), to the judgements of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 27:3-8) and even beyond (Ezek 25:12-14). Yahweh's judgements on Edom were thus a demonstration of His continuing love for the seed of Jacob.

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

We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places

Impoverished Heb *râshash* H7567 = 'to demolish' (Str); 'beaten down' (NASB). Only other use Jer 5:17.

When Nebuchadnezzar swept through the Middle East, he took captive all that came into his grasp, including both Israel and Edom. When Babylon was overthrown, however, their Persian successors permitted them to return and rebuild. In the period after the exile, Israel – despite struggling against innumerable odds and hostile forces – were able to rebuild both their temple and city. Edom, however, did not succeed, despite their determination – an illustration of the principle of Psalm 127:1 that *'except Yahweh build the house, they labour in vain that build it.'* This contrast between the fate of the two nations was a further demonstration of Yahweh's continuing love for His people.

MEDITATION POINT - TRUSTING IN OUR OWN STRENGTH

The Edomites here showed an attitude of trusting in their own strength to achieve safety and prosperity. There are many other examples of this in scripture (e.g. Gen 11:4; Isa 9:9-10). James comments on this attitude in 4:13-15, pointing out that we don't even know 'what shall be on the morrow,' and we ought always to recognise the hand of God in guiding our lives.

How do your attitude and habits compare to the spirit of Prov 3:5-6?

They shall build, but I will throw down

Despite Edom's determination to rebuild, they never regained their kingdom following the days of Malachi. During the days of the Maccabees (BC 175-135) they were overtaken by

²⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jackal>

the Judean army and given the choice of converting to Judaism or being put to the sword. This was how the Idumeans (Edomites), including the Herods, found their way into Israel in New Testament times.

The border of wickedness

Roth 'the Boundary of Lawlessness'.

The people against whom Yahweh hath indignation for ever.

Indignation Heb *zâ'am* H2194 = 'onomatopoeia²⁷ of the roar of a camel, angry speech' (BDB)

God's wrath upon the Edomites would be so severe that their ruin would be a testimony from generation to generation (Isa 34:10; Ezek 35:9). Firstly, this was fulfilled in the time of the Maccabees (refer above), but also appears to have a secondary fulfilment as Scripture speaks of a symbolic latter-day Edomite (see box below). Yahweh will never compromise with the things Edom represents. They will always be pulled down and called lawless until the warfare ends and Yahweh and Israel stand triumphant and Edom is destroyed.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

Examine the context of Isa 34, Eze 35 and Jer 49 and see if you can prove whether or not Edom has a latter-day application. (Note: Check the locations of Mt Seir and Bozrah in a map / atlas to establish that these are referring to the land of Edom - cp Isa 63:1). Then, if you believe there is a latter-day Edomite, draw up a character summary of what it will be like, particularly from Ezekiel 35. (A good place to start may be *Ezekiel*, Bro John Allfree, notes on Ch 25, p246-249).

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

Magnified Heb *gâdal* H1431 = 'to twist, i.e. to be / make large' (Str).

NASB: 'Yahweh be exalted beyond the border of Israel'; NIV: 'Great is Yahweh - even beyond the borders of Israel!' The fulfilment of this comes in two parts:

1. It was firstly fulfilled in the times of the Maccabees (see notes on v4), especially with regard to the Edomites who were forced to convert to Judaism or die, thus 'magnifying' or 'extending' Yahweh's name.
2. The ultimate fulfilment will occur when all nations know of Yahweh in the kingdom age and worship Him as their God (Psa 72:9,19; Isa 2:2; Hab 2:14; Zech 14:16).

²⁷ The formation of a word from a sound associated with what is named (e.g. cuckoo, sizzle) (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

*But ye are a chosen
generation, a royal priesthood,
an holy nation, a peculiar people;
that ye should shew forth
the praises of him who hath
called you out of darkness
into his marvellous light.*

1 PETER 2:9

A young lamb with thick, light brown wool stands in the center of a grassy field, looking directly at the camera. In the background, several other sheep are grazing, and a dense line of trees is visible under a soft, golden light.

REBUKE OF THE PRIESTS

CORRUPT WORSHIP

CHAPTER 1:6-14

REBUKE OF PRIESTS - CORRUPT WORSHIP (1:6-14)

Having affirmed His love for the nation of Israel through the contrast between Jacob and Esau (1:1-5), the prophecy now turns from contrast to comparison. Though Israel was the object of divine election ('I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau') their conduct mirrored that of Esau, who despised his birthright for immediate gain. From v6 onward, the tone changes sharply. God reproves His people for their ungrateful response to His goodness. Even the priests, who were charged with maintaining pure worship, had instead profaned it, offering polluted and defective sacrifices (v7-9). Such irreverence revealed their contempt for His name. Therefore, God announces that He will no longer accept their offerings (v10) and will instead choose other nations who would honour His name (v11,14).

The section has a chiastic structure climaxing in v10 with a cry of disgust, calling for someone to close the temple:

	Comments	Chiastic Structure
A	God's name and authority dishonoured by the priests	- (v6) Israel's Father & lord - No fear (<i>môrā' from root yārē'</i>), name despised by priesthood
B	Israel's corrupt offerings and disobedience	- (v7) Polluted bread; table of Yahweh contemptible - (v8) offer blind... lame and sick - Will governor be pleased (<i>râtsâh</i>)?
C	Will God accept these offerings?	- (v9) This is by your means (<i>yâd</i>): will he regard your persons?
D	Cease offering; Close the temple	- (v10a) Shut the doors! Stop the offerings!
C'	God rejects these offerings	- (v10b) No pleasure... neither will I accept offering at your hand (<i>yâd</i>)
B'	Israel's corrupt offerings and disobedience	- (v12) Table of Yahweh is polluted... fruit contemptible - (v13) brought torn... lame, and sick - Should I accept (<i>râtsâh</i>) this of your hand?
A'	God's name and authority exalted by the nations	- (v14) A Great King and lord - name is feared ('dreadful' = <i>yārē'</i>) by Gentiles

This section is addressed to the priests, who bore responsibility for Israel's worship and instruction in the law (Lev 10:11). Their conduct and teaching set the spiritual tone for the entire nation. From 1:6 to 2:9 they are singled out for special rebuke. As those appointed to teach God's law (2:7-8; Jer 2:8), they should have known better. But they had completely failed in their duties, and the consequences rippled through the entire nation.

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

God uses two relationships to show the way in which His people should have regarded Him:

A son honoureth his father ... if then I be a father, where is mine honour?

Son Heb *ben* H1121 = 'a son as the builder of the family name' (Str), from *banah* H1129 = 'to build or establish' (Str).

Honoureth Heb *kâbad* H3513 = 'to be heavy, weighty' (BDB), that is to treat someone as important, to take them seriously and value their words. When applied to Godly parents, it means respect, gratitude and obedience. When applied to God it means acknowledging His worth through reverence, obedience and sincere worship.

The first relationship Malachi describes is that of a father and son. God is a Father to Israel, and He uses very descriptive language to illustrate the affection He feels towards them (Ex 4:22-23; Hos 11:1-4; Jer 31:9). One of the first principles of the Law of Moses is that one must honour his father and mother (Ex 20:12; Lev 19:3; Deut 5:16).

God became the father of the nation when by Divine intervention He quickened Sarah's womb and promised Abraham that he would become a great nation (Gen 12:2). Israel became the children of Abraham (Jn 8:33) and children of God (Deut 32:6; Isa 63:16; 64:8).

Scripture consistently portrays a true father as one who genuinely seeks his child's good. A true father provides for his children (2Cor 12:14), shows compassion (Psa 103:13), and teaches them so that they can 'live' (Prov 4:4). Even when discipline is administered, it is given out of love (Prov 3:12). In God's case, correction is '*for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness*' (Heb 12:10). It is for this reason a son will honour his father; not just because he is told to do so (Ex 20:12), but because he understands his father has his best interests at heart (Mt 7:9-11). But despite God's love for Israel, they had not shown Him due respect.

And a servant his master... if I be a master, where is my fear?

Servant Heb '*ebed* H5650 = 'slave, servant' (BDB).

Fear Heb *môrâh* H4172 = 'fear, reverence, terror' (BDB), from the root *yare* H3372 = 'fear, revere or be afraid' (BDB). The word can mean a negative emotion of terror (Deut 11:25) or a positive emotion of reverence (Lev 19:3) depending on the context. In this context, God is not asking '*Why don't you tremble in terror*' but '*Why don't you revere me as your Lord?*'. See Themes, p20.

The second relationship Malachi portrays is that of a master and servant. As well as being God's son, Israel was also His servant. God also asked His people for fear, or reverence – as a servant towards his master. The two ideas are related for Moses was to say to Pharaoh, '*Let my son go, that he may serve me*' (Ex 4:23).

Israel was subjected to cruel bondage as Pharaoh's servants in Egypt (Ex 13:3; Deut 15:15). God saved them from this plight and made them His servants (Lev 25:42, Neh 1:10, Isa 43:10). But, unlike Pharaoh, God is a good and gracious Master whose authority is characterised by mercy and lovingkindness (Ex 34:6). His servants are not oppressed because '*His commandments are not grievous*' (1Jn 5:3). It is not a vain thing to serve God because '*it is your life*' (Deut 32:47) and 'no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly' (Psa 84:11). Reverence therefore is not burdensome, but a glad response to His kindness. As a servant to his master '*our eyes wait upon Yahweh, until that He have mercy*

upon us' (Psa 123:2), knowing that 'his mercy endureth for ever' (Psa 136:1). Therefore, we 'serve Yahweh with fear (reverence), and rejoice with trembling' (Psa 2:11).

Unto you, O priests, that despise My name

Despise Heb *bâzâh* H959 = 'to despise, hold in contempt, disdain' (BDB).

The priests had been given the unique privilege, above the rest of the nation, of ministering before Yahweh. They were called to be the servants of God in a very intimate sense. They were the custodians of the Law, charged with offering sacrifices correctly (Lev 22:17-25), teaching the Law (Lev 10:8-11; Mal 2:7-8) and setting the spiritual tone of the nation (Deut 33:10; Mal 2:1-2). Their influence was considerable (Hos 4:9).

Yet, instead of revering God's name, they disgraced it and disregarded the obligations of their office. Instead of honour and fear (as to a father and master), they rewarded God with contempt and neglect, as the subsequent verses will show.

The first occurrence of this word 'despise' in scripture is in reference to the very man God has been speaking about in v1-5: Esau, who 'despised his birthright' (Gen 25:34). The nation's attitude towards God's name and purpose flowed through to their worship of Him. In the same way they showed contempt to His name, they also disrespected His table and sacrifices (despised = s/w contemptible v7,12). In today's terms, their private attitude towards God showed itself in their attitude towards the memorial meeting and the service God asked of them.

There is an infamous list of characters who share this contemptuous attitude in scripture, including: Goliath (1Sam 17:42), Michal (2Sam 6:16; 1Ch 15:29), Sanballat (Neh 2:19), Vashti (Est 1:17), Haman (Est 3:6), and Christ's persecutors (Psa 22:6; Isa 53:3).

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

Polluted Heb *gâ'al* H1351 = 'to defile, pollute, desecrate' (BDB).

Bread Heb *lechem* H3899 = 'bread, food, grain' (BDB); food both of man and beasts (Ges).

'Bread' here refers to all sacrifices which were offered on the altar, not just meal or grain offerings (Ezek 44:7). The word 'bread' is translated 'food' in Lev 3:11, referring to animals v10, so 'bread' is simply the food of God (Lev 21:6,17). The polluted bread of this verse is the blind, lame and sick animals of v8, which were illegal (Lev 3:1; 22:19-25; Deut 15:21; 17:1).

Ye say, 'The table of Yahweh is contemptible'

Contemptible Heb *bâzâh* H959 = 'to despise, hold in contempt, disdain' (BDB). s/w 'despise' v6.

The table of Yahweh was the altar (cp v7a; Ezek 41:22; 44:16). It is unlikely the priests ever said that it was permissible to despise Yahweh's table, but Malachi is bringing to the surface their subconscious attitudes by drawing out the implications of their complete indifference to the ways of God.

MEDITATION POINT - THE TABLE OF YAHWEH

We have a new table of the Lord at which we meet (1Cor 10:21). We too are warned against taking it for granted (1Cor 11:28-29). To share fellowship in remembering our Lord Jesus Christ is no small thing. Do we come imagining we meet with an equal, or a human governor? We come to meet with the Lord of Lords and King of Kings to whom every knee will bow (Php 2:10-11). Does our attitude reflect this? And what is the condition of our offering (Rom 12:1, 1Pet 2:5)?

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

God calls the priests to consider how poorly they were treating His service. Damaged offerings were specifically forbidden (Lev 22:19-25; Deut 15:21). The offerings to God were meant to be a sweet-smelling meal for Him of the best they could bring (Lev 1:9,13,17). The people were bringing, and the priests allowing, blind, lame and sick offerings – to ‘meet’ the requirements of God’s law whilst keeping back the best to minimise the cost to themselves. God shows that by doing this they were reducing Him to a level of respect below that of their human governor, who would certainly not be satisfied with such a gift. For a sacrifice to really be a sacrifice, it must cost us something (1Chr 21:23-25).

Offer it now unto thy governor

Governor Heb *pechah* H6346 = ‘(of foreign origin) prefect of a city or small district’ (Str).

The governor was set over the nation by the Persian king (s/w Ezra 8:36; Neh 5:14).

The prophet’s words are full of irony. Their worship was not even worthy of a Gentile official. They knew full well that no earthly governor would tolerate such disrespectful, defective gifts; but they expected God to do so. The challenge from God is obvious: *If a human ruler would reject defective gifts, how much more would I, Yahweh, reject them?*

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

Means Heb *yad* H3027 = ‘hand, power’ (BDB). Same word as ‘hand’ v10; 2:13.

The phrase ‘this hath been by your means’ is better translated ‘this hath come from your hands’. ESV: *‘And now entreat the favour of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favour to any of you? says the LORD of hosts.’*

This is a strongly ironic statement from Malachi. God has already condemned the priests for offering defective and disrespectful sacrifices (v7-8). But their attitude is audacious – they presume that God should accept offerings that no human ruler would tolerate. In v9, the rebuke continues, highlighting the absurdity of their reasoning: *since you have offered gifts that no man would accept, why do you presume God will show you favour that no man would grant?*

This is the same sort of mockery that God used to Israel (Jud 10:14), Elijah to the prophets of Baal (1Ki 18:27), and Job to his friends (Job 12:2-4). See Prov 26:5.

Will he regard your persons?

Persons Heb *paniym* H6440 = 'face, faces' (BDB).

God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35); He will not regard faces or reputation. The question begs the answer – what will God regard? And that answer can be found in the prophets: Isa 66:1-2; Mic 6:6-8.

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

Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought.

For nought²⁸ Heb *chinnam* H2600 = 'freely, for nothing, without cause' (BDB). The word can mean three things (1) for free, without payment, (2) in vain, without any purpose and (3) without any reason.

Structurally, this phrase is the centre of this section, so it is an important phrase to understand correctly! Put simply, God is asking for someone to shut the Temple doors and stop the offerings because He's had enough! It is akin to His statement in Amos 5:21-22: '*I hate, I despise your feast days*'.

But to arrive at this meaning, we need to unpack the phrase 'for nought.' Simply put, it means 'for free' or 'for no purpose'. There are, therefore, two possible interpretations:

1. The priests were so insincere that they wouldn't open the temple doors or even light a fire on the altar unless they were paid first. This interpretation relies on reading the opening words of the verse as a question, as in the KJV, YLT & Darby translations.
2. The priests were so insincere that God wished there was someone who would shut the temple doors to stop the pointless sacrifices from being offered. This relies on reading the opening words of the verse as a plea, as in almost all other translations. For instance, the NIV has 'Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar!' (See also ESV).

Which interpretation is correct? The answer lies in the context. In the remainder of v10, God has no pleasure in their offerings, in v11 He looks to the time when the Gentiles will offer pure offerings, in v12-14 God condemns the corrupt offerings. On this basis, it makes more sense that God is asking them to *close the temple and stop the offerings* altogether, rather than that He is commenting on the greed of the priests. The second alternative, therefore, fits the context better.

God's displeasure had reached the point where He would rather the priests cease their empty, self-serving rituals than continue pretending to serve Him. Any delight He once took in their offerings was gone (cp Isa 1:11-15, Jer 6:20, Amos 5:21-24), so He wished for the doors of the temple to be closed.

But the very fact that this plea was made implies someone could or should close the doors, but that no one is willing. The doors being spoken of here refer to the doors of the temple

²⁸ The KJV has the first occ of the phrase 'for nought' in italics because the word is not found in all manuscripts (such as LXX, Vulgate & Syriac), however the Masoretic text includes both occurrences of the word, which is what the KJV translation is based on.

courtyard (2Chr 29:3,7), which contained the brazen altar. Shutting the doors was not something an ordinary Israelite could do. It would have required someone within the priestly system - a gatekeeper (1Chr 9:17-27; 2Chr 23:19), Levite, or priest (Num 18:7) - to take that action, like their role model Phinehas (Num 25:6-9; 1Chr 9:20).

Whilst this plea is presented as a rhetorical question, the mention of the governor in v8 is relevant here. Before he left, Nehemiah had been Judah's civil governor, whose Persian commission gave him practical authority (Neh 13:11,17,25) even over the high priest when necessary (v6-9). He most likely also had the power to shut the temple, so that Malachi's words served as a warning of the severe consequences that awaited the nation when '*the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple*' (Mal 3:1). In the more distant future, the doors were shut for good in AD 70, when the temple was destroyed by the Romans - again, God's solution to Israel's hypocritical worship (Dan 9:24,27).

I have no pleasure in you, saith Yahweh of hosts

Pleasure Heb *chephets* H2656 = 'delight, desire, longing' (BDB).

Yahweh has always desired sincere hearts and minds, expressed through reverent and obedient worship (1Sam 15:22, Hos 6:6), rather than sacrifices performed without devotion. The sacrifices were intended to be outward expressions of inward faithfulness (Psa 51:16-17; Jer 9:23-24; Mic 6:6-8). God would rather have no worship than hypocritical or defiled worship (Prov 15:8; 21:27).

MEDITATION POINT

We don't sacrifice animals today, but there is a sense in which we still bring offerings (Rom 12:1, Php 4:18, Heb 13:15-16). Think of some areas in your worship that are at greatest risk of being displeasing to God. How can we avoid spiritual hypocrisy?

Neither will I accept an offering at your hand

Offering Heb *minchah* H4503 = 'gift, tribute, sacrifice' (BDB).

Every time (except one, 3:8), the word 'offering' in Malachi is the word *minchah*, and has reference to the meal offering. The meal offering represented personal labour, the work of a man's hands. It could be a voluntary offering (Lev 2:1) or a compulsory offering with the burnt or peace offerings (Num 15:4-10) as in Mal 1:13. Israel found these offerings a weariness (v13). This is in contrast to the future, when a pure *minchah* will be offered by the (Gentiles v11).

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

From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same

This expression is a Hebrew idiom meaning the entire world, from east (rising of the sun) to west (going down of the same), or everywhere the sun shines. The same phrase is used in Psa 50:1; 113:3; Isa 59:19. A similar idea is expressed in the phrase 'all the ends of the earth' which occurs in Psa 22:27; 98:3; Isa 45:22.

My name shall be great among the Gentiles

Great Heb *gadol* H1419 = 'great in any sense' (Str), from root *gadal* H1431 = 'grow, become important, magnify' (BDB). Since the reference here is to God's *name* being great, rather than to God Himself being great, the meaning relates to God's majesty and dignity (rather than, for example, His power or knowledge).

God's name will be recognised as supremely exalted, majestic, and worthy of reverence among the nations. In contrast to the distinct lack of reverence given by Israel (v6), the Gentiles would revere God as a great king (v14). The significance of Malachi's words is that this recognition will not just be from a small group of Gentile converts, it will be from east to west; the entire Gentile world will look back at Israel's conduct with disbelief and will not copy it! It is worth noting that the phrase '*my name shall be great among the Gentiles*' is repeated. This emphasis highlights the contrast with Israel.

The fulfilment of this verse occurs in two stages:

- The first stage is the conversion of the Gentiles in the Christian era. Jesus told the woman of Samaria that '*the hour cometh, **and now is**, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth*' (Jn 4:21-23). Peter adds, '*In every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, **is** accepted with him*' (Acts 10:35). The apostles then took the Truth to the Gentiles (Acts 1:8; 13:46-48, Rom 10:18-21), calling out of them a people for God's name (Acts 15:14). This is how God's name is made great among the Gentiles now (Rom 15:9-11).
- The second and ultimate stage is when the world is converted in the Kingdom Age. At that time, '*God's name shall endure forever: His name shall be continued as long as the sun: and all men shall be blessed in Him: **all nations shall call Him blessed***' (Psa 72:17). See also Isa 66:23, Zech 14:9, Rev 15:4.

So, whilst God was not prepared to accept Israel's worship, He would not be without worshippers. The Gentiles would honour His name instead, being grafted into the hope of Israel (Rom 11:17) and fulfilling what Israel failed to do (Mt 21:43, Rom 9:24-26, 10:19, 11:11-12), until Israel could finally be converted in the Kingdom Age (Rom 11:25-26).

In every place incense shall be offered unto my name

Incense was solely the realm of the priests (Deut 33:10), so that this prophecy would have incited their angst. Furthermore, under the Law, incense could be offered only in one place - the sanctuary - yet God declares that honour and worship will be given to Him '*in every place*' by the nations. This anticipates the truth spoken by Stephen, that '*the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands*' (Acts 7:48). Incense in Scripture symbolises the prayers of the saints (Psa 141:2, Rev 5:8, 8:3-4); thus, Malachi foretells a time when pure worship and true prayer will come from all nations, not merely from Israel, whose worship God had rejected (v10). The Jerusalem temple ceased to become the place of offering after AD 70.

And a pure offering

Offering = *s/w minchah* v10. A pure offering is opposite to Israel's polluted offering in v7.

In the present age, the Gentiles offer 'spiritual sacrifices' (1Pet 2:5), the 'sacrifice of praise' and Godly conduct (Heb 13:15-16) with their whole lives being a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1).

In the Kingdom Age, these words will find their literal fulfillment when all nations ascend to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh (Zech 14:16) and present offerings acceptable to Him (Isa 56:7; 60:7). At the same time, Israel will also offer a pure and holy offering (Mal 3:3-4).

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

But ye have profaned it

Profaned Heb *chalal* H2490 = 'defile, pollute, desecrate; to treat as common' (BDB); to take something which is holy/sacred and make it ordinary/mundane.

The 'it' of this verse is the name of Yahweh. In contrast to the Gentiles, who will honour God's name with a pure offering (v11), Israel profane it through their attitude towards the altar and sacrifices (v12). This attitude leads them to break vows and offer blemished animals (v13-14), failing their duty as God's servants. Verse 12 therefore reveals the contemptuous heart behind Israel's failed sonship.

But note that v6 said Israel *despised* God's name, whereas v12 says they *profaned* it. The former word means 'to despise or hold in contempt', whereas the latter, 'to defile or treat as common'.

Verse 12 is almost a repeat of v7, but it is now written against the backdrop of the future conduct of the Gentiles in v11. Israel was acting like Esau and not Jacob v2. Esau was a '**profane** person' (s/w in v12 LXX as in Heb 12:16) who sold his birthright for a meal. He put no difference between the things of God and the things of common life. This is what profaning the name of God means (Ezek 22:26). God punished the nation for this attitude (Jer 23:11-12, Ezek 11:21) by bringing the Babylonians against them and will punish them again if their attitude doesn't change (Mal 2:17-3:5).

In that ye say, The table of Yahweh is polluted and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible.

Polluted Heb *gâ'al* H1351 = 'defile, pollute, desecrate' (BDB), to make something repulsive, detestable or loathsome.

Contemptible Heb *bâzâh* H959 = 'to despise, hold in contempt, disdain' (BDB), s/w v6 (despise) & v7.

Meat Heb *okeh* H400 = 'food' (BDB, Str) - i.e. of any kind, not just literal meat.

The table of Yahweh was the altar (cp v7; Ezek 41:22, 44:16). The 'fruit/meat' were the offerings laid upon it, **however** these are not the usual words used to describe the offerings. This is significant.

The priests' statement here relates to the portion of the sacrifices they were to eat.²⁹ Having allowed unworthy sacrifices to be offered (v7-8), they now complained that the 'food' they received as part of their service (cp 1Cor 9:13) was disgusting or contemptible.

The word 'meat' is a common word used for *normal* 'food' (e.g. Gen 41:35) as opposed to that which was offered to God. None of its 44 occurrences refer to that which was offered to God - except here in Mal 1:12. The priests had turned that which *should have* been holy

²⁹ Cambridge & Barnes' Commentaries on Mal 1:12. Note that the priests would eat a portion of the meal offering (Lev 2:3, 6:16-18), peace offering (Lev 7:31-34), sin offering (Lev 6:26,29), trespass offering (Lev 7:6) and firstfruits/heave (Num 18:8-13).

(‘the bread of their God’ Lev 21:6; Mal 1:8) into just normal food, and they didn’t rate it very highly! Thus, they ‘profaned’ it just like Esau, and if they didn’t change their attitude, it would cost them their Levitical birthright (2:3,8-9).

The priests were complicit with the people in offering sub-standard offerings but then complained that their portion of those offerings was ‘contemptible.’ In other words, they despised the altar but still expected good food from it, as if to say, ‘We don’t care what we offer to God, but we do care what He gives back to us.’ This was the audacity of their complaint.

The priests should have remembered the lesson of Nadab and Abihu’s folly (Lev 10:1-3). They viewed the fruit of God’s table as contemptible, so God would make the priests themselves contemptible before the nation (2:9).

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

Behold, what a weariness is it! And ye have snuffed at it

Weariness Heb *mattelaah* H4972 = ‘toil, hardship’ (BDB); ‘what a trouble!’ (Str).

Snuffed Heb *naphach* H5301 = ‘to breathe, blow, sniff at’ (BDB); fig. ‘to disesteem’ (Str).

The priests had snuffed at fellowship with God. A similar attitude is demonstrated by the people in 3:14. They had lost sight of the joy of the Truth, and the meagre effort they were putting in was just too much hard work. They failed to see any value in serving God, possibly because of other interests (Amos 8:5; Neh 13:15). Our worship must be driven by joy and thankfulness to God for all He has done (Deut 28:45-47). The attitude of Israel is a risk for us too (Lk 8:14) particularly in the last days (Lk 21:34).

MEDITATION POINT - WHAT A WEARINESS IS IT!

Consider for ourselves if this is ever something that we have thought about our worship of God. Does it ever seem like an inconvenience, something we might be tired of? Is it a difficulty in our life, rather than a joy? Isa 43:21-24 highlights the danger of this attitude – if we are weary of worshipping God, He is certainly weary of us! Amos 8:4-6 goes further and shows us that weariness of serving God leads to weariness of serving other people, sometimes to the point of misusing other people.

The opposite of weariness in something is to take delight in it. Consider Psa 1:2, 37:4 and 40:8 in light of our own attitude to worship. ‘*For the joy of Yahweh is your strength*’ (Neh 8:10).

Ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick

Torn Heb *gazal* H1497 = ‘to tear away, seize, plunder, tear off, pull off, rob, take away by force’ (BDB).

Sacrifices of this sort were illegal (Lev 22:19-25; Deut 15:21, 17:1). Defective offerings were symptomatic of the heart of the offerer, an unwitting acknowledgement that the offerer was spiritually sick (see Rev 3:17).

Should I accept this of your hand?

Accept Heb *râtsâh* H7521 = 'to be pleased with; accept favourably' (BDB).

The answer, of course, was *No* (Lev 22:20 cp Isa 1:10-15, Amos 5:21-22). To please God, an active, seeking faith is required (Heb 11:6). The nation was breaking the Law (by offering blemished sacrifices) in order to keep the Law (performing the sacrificial ritual), which turned the whole system into a mockery of the Law (Mt 15:4-6; Rom 2:23).

14 *But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.*

Cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth

Cursed Heb *'ârar* H779 = 'to curse' (Str).

Deceiver Heb *nâkal* H5230 = 'to defraud, act treacherously, beguile' (Str).

ESV: '*Cursed be the **cheat** who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished.*'

God condemns those who cheat Him by offering defective animals. This word (*nakal*) is only used in three other places in scripture:

- Where the brothers of Joseph **conspired** against him to kill him Gen 37:18
- Where the women of Moab and Midian **beguiled** the Israelites to serve false gods Num 25:18
- Where the taskmasters of Egypt dealt **subtly** with their Jewish servants Psa 105:25

This puts the people and priests of Malachi's day in the company of Joseph's brothers, Moab's women and Pharaoh's taskmasters. But why does Malachi make this point?

We have already observed that v12-13 almost exactly repeats v7-8a. When we come to v14, we see the contrast between Israel's corrupt worship and the future pure worship of the Gentiles further intensified. Not only do Israel offer defective sacrifices (v7), which no earthly authority would accept (v8), but they do so knowingly and deliberately (v14); they possess the means to offer proper sacrifices, even making vows to do so, and then intentionally withhold what they have promised. Their disobedience is not mere negligence or ignorance, it is a calculated, wilful defiance of God. They flaunt their deception openly, knowing full well that their offerings are unworthy, thereby treating their worship of God with a flagrant and audacious contempt.

God would not overlook this conduct; they would be cursed (Deut 28:15,20). This is the first of 3 curses in Malachi (also 2:2; 3:9), spoken against those who thought they could deceive or defraud God. (The final 'curse' of Mal 4:6 is a different word and means to utterly destroy, not curse).

And voweth and sacrificeth unto Yahweh a corrupt thing

Voweth Heb *nâdar* H5087 = 'to promise, to do or give something to God' (Str).

Corrupt Heb *shâchath* H7843 = 'to decay, that is, ruin' (Str).

A vow is a solemn, voluntary promise made to God. People made vows to express devotion or gratitude (Num 30:2) or to petition for blessing or deliverance (Jud 11:30-31). The Law

required that any vow be fully paid; failing to fulfill it was considered a sin (Num 30:2, Deut 23:21-23, Ecc 5:4-5). Vows could involve offerings or sacrifices, which had to be perfect and without blemish (Lev 22:23-25). This is in contrast to freewill offerings, where some flexibility existed – an animal could have a leg too long or too short and still be acceptable (Lev 22:23 ESV).

It appears possible that some were exploiting what they believed to be a loophole in the law, taking advantage of the concession for freewill offerings and applying them to vows as a justification for offering corrupt sacrifices. Since it was not compulsory to make a vow in the first place, it is likely these vows were made for ostentatious purposes, as an outward show of dedication, with no attempt at sincerity. They cheated God as did Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10), and by making their '*boast in the law*' they dishonoured Him by breaking it (Rom 2:23).

Ruined, decaying beasts were being offered. This summarises the blind, lame, sick and stolen sacrifices God had decried (v8,13).

For I am a great King

Malachi is not arguing this point. He is stating it. God is King over all the earth (Psa 47:2), a great King above all gods (Psa 95:3), the King of glory (Psa 24:10), the governor among the nations (Psa 22:28).

Ironically, Israel would submit to an earthly governor (v8), but treated the 'governor among the nations' with indifference and contempt. The lesson for us is to heed the advice of David in Psa 86:11-12 *Teach me Thy way, O Lord...*

My name is dreadful among the heathen

Dreadful Heb yare H3372 = 'to fear, revere, be afraid' (BDB).

Yare is the root of the word 'fear' (*morah*) in 1:6. As noted there, the word can indicate terror or reverence, depending on the context. In this context, God's name is 'great among the Gentiles' (v11), implying that the Gentiles see value in worshipping God, so that the word 'dreadful' means awe-inspiring, worthy of reverence or respect.

In v6, Israel was presented both as a son and a servant. As a son, they had failed to honour God; as a servant, they had failed to fear Him.

- In v11, God declares on two occasions that His name will be '*great among the nations*' – i.e., the Gentiles will **honour** God's name in the future by bringing acceptable incense and a pure offering.
- Now in v14, God says they will **fear** Him as well. He describes Himself as their 'Lord' (*adonai*, from *adon* = master v6) and 'King' in this verse, both of whom are worshipped by servants.

Thus, the Gentiles will fulfil the roles that the Jews had not, provoking them to jealousy so that they might return to Yahweh (Rom 11:11). As adopted sons and willing servants, the Gentiles would give Yahweh the honour that Israel withheld, until the Kingdom age when all nations shall serve Him (Psa 22:27).

JUDGEMENT ON THE PRIESTS

*CORRUPTED
THEIR COVENANT*

CHAPTER 2:1-9

JUDGEMENT ON THE PRIESTS – CORRUPTED THEIR COVENANT (2:1-9)

Having declared God's love for Israel (1:1-5) and rebuked the priests for their failure to respond in kind (v6-14), Malachi now issues a command to the priests to reform. Chapter 1 concluded with the declaration that Yahweh is king; chapter 2 opens with an order *from* that king. It was the priests who held the leadership and therefore the responsibility for the nation's spiritual health, and so it is to them that Malachi issues the first call to action.

1 *And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you.*

It is a scriptural principle that those with greater authority bear greater responsibility (Lk 12:48, James 3:1). In this case the priests and the people were cooperating in iniquity. Even if the people went astray, the priests ought to have remained faithful to Yahweh, therefore the greater condemnation rested with them.

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

If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart

Hear Heb *shama* H8085 = 'to hear, listen to and obey' (BDB) This is a major theme of the prophets. E.g. s/w 'obey/obeying' 1Sam 15:22.

God's intention has always been to change the hearts of those who serve Him (Deut 6:5, 1 Tim 1:5, Psa 24:4), yet we all have a tendency to be 'forgetful hearers' – to hear the word of God while our heart and way of life remain unchanged (James 1:22-25). This was a problem with the Jewish leaders in the time of Christ (Mt 13:15, Lk 16:31), with the priests of Israel before the captivity (Hos 4:6-10), and here again in the time of Malachi. As in the days of Eli (1Sam 2:27-30), these priests had despised their privileged position, thus Malachi appeals to them to 'lay these things to heart,' to replace their indifference and self-righteousness with humble obedience.

To give glory unto my name

To glorify the name of Yahweh should be the aim of all our worship (1Cor 10:31), yet the priests had 'despised' His name by offering polluted bread upon the altar (cp 1:6-7). This problem never really went away – the spiritual leaders in Christ's day thought only of their own glorification (Mt 6:5, 23:5, Lk 18:11-12). By contrast, Malachi later refers to a faithful remnant that '*feared Yahweh and that thought upon his name*' (3:16).

DISCUSSION POINTS

- The idea of bringing glory (or conversely, dishonour) to the name of Yahweh appears frequently throughout the Bible. See if you can come up with a list of people who did or did not do this, or quotes which speak about it.
- How does keeping the commandments of Yahweh and ‘laying them to heart’ bring glory to His name? What are some practical ways we might glorify God in our daily lives?

I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings

One of the priestly duties was to bless the people in the words of Num 6:23-27. Note particularly v27:

‘And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.’

Thus, the priests were involved in pronouncing the blessings that were promised to Israel as the people of Yahweh (cp Deut 28:10). But these priests had ‘despised the name of Yahweh’ and therefore curses were pronounced upon both them and the people. This follows the pattern set out when Yahweh gave the law to Israel: if they ‘hearkened diligently’ unto His commandments then they would be blessed, but if they failed to hearken they would be cursed. This pattern is outlined in two key chapters (Lev 26 and Deut 28) as shown in the table below:

Blessings and Curses Upon Israel	Lev 26	Deut 28
Blessings promised for obedience	v3	v1
Blessings described	v4-13	v2-14
Curses promised for disobedience	v14-15	v15
Curses described	v16-39	v16-68

Compare also Deut 11:26-28.

Yea, I have cursed them already

One of the key blessings / curses of Deut 28 related to the fruitfulness of the land (v4-6, 16-18), and it seems this curse was already evident in the drought experienced in the time of Malachi (Mal 3:9-11).³⁰ Yahweh had turned the priestly blessings into a curse (cp Psa 69:22), and this would have particularly impacted the priests since they relied on tithes of the land for their own living.

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

I will corrupt your seed

Corrupt Heb *ga’ar* H1605 = ‘to chide’ (Str). Translated ‘rebuke/reprove’ in every other occ (s/w 3:11).

³⁰ As had also occurred in about 90 years earlier, in the days of Haggai (Hag 1:6-11, 2:16-17).

There are two possible meanings here (or potentially a double meaning):

- The 'seed' might refer to the seed they planted in the ground, so the corruption of the seed refers to the drought Yahweh brought upon them (see notes on v2). Note in 3:11 that the drought was removed by a figurative 'rebuken' of the locusts (s/w 'corrupt').
- The 'seed' might refer to the priests' descendants (cp NIV 'I will rebuke your descendants'). We know the descendants of these priests had become very corrupt by the first century AD and were severely rebuked by Christ and the apostles.

And spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts

This is a deliberate use of graphic language to illustrate just how contemptible their sacrifices had become. Rather than accept their sacrifices, God would take the vile refuse of the animals and rub it in their faces! For God to use such strong language is an indication of how unacceptable the nation had become in His eyes. Note that this was the dung of 'your' solemn feasts - Yahweh wanted nothing to do with them (cp Amos 5:21). A similar situation prevailed in the days of Christ - it was 'the Jews' feasts' (Jn 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 11:55) rather than 'the feasts of Yahweh' (Lev 23:2,5).

And one shall take you away with it

Under the law, the dung of the sacrifices was carted outside the camp to be burned (Lev 4:11-12, 8:17, 16:27). In the same way, the Levitical seed would be eradicated and removed from the land by God's fiery judgements. This would ultimately be fulfilled in AD 70, when this terrible sentence was carried out by the Romans. During this time, the 'condemnation of Gehenna' (Mt 23:33) came upon the wicked inhabitants of Jerusalem, when many were crucified and subsequently thrown on the rubbish dump outside the city (Gehenna) to be burnt.³¹

4 *And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.*

And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you

Cp v1 - they would find out by personal, bitter experience; a calamitous time they could have avoided if they had humbled themselves. When Nehemiah returned, the priests were duly punished (Neh 13:22, 28-29), and they knew that Malachi had indeed been the messenger of God (cp Deut 18:22, Ezek 33:33).

That my covenant might be with Levi

The intention of the commandment given in 2:1-3 was to purify the Levites so that they could continue their service. They were to be reminded of the actions for which Levi was originally granted the covenant of priesthood, when they stood aside from the idolatrous worship of the golden calf (Ex 32:25-29). It was for this reason that the tribe of Levi were consecrated as Yahweh's firstborn in the matter of priesthood (Deut 10:8-11, Num 3:12-13, 41-45, 8:13-18).

The covenant principles Levi once stood for are now reiterated by Malachi to remind them of their obligations.

³¹ Note that the judgements of AD 70 were also a key component of the prophetic curses in Deut 28 (v47-57). For more details on Deut 28 and AD 70, refer to *The Christadelphian Expositor - Deuteronomy* (H.P. Mansfield) p.320-329.

MEDITATION POINT - FIRSTBORN OF GOD

We have replaced Levi as the figurative 'firstborn of God' (Heb 12:23, 1Pet 2:9). Will we treat our responsibilities lightly - like the Levites of Malachi's day - or will we strive to glorify the name of Yahweh like Levi of old?

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

My covenant was with him of life and peace

This is a reference to the covenant given to Phinehas when he intervened for Yahweh when Israel sinned in the matter of Baal-Peor, smiting the presumptuous offenders with a javelin and thus halting the plague that was sweeping the nation (see Num 25). In response to his actions, Yahweh made a 'covenant of peace' with Phinehas and promised an 'everlasting priesthood' to him and to his descendants (Num 25:12-13). The covenant to Phinehas was an extension of that promised to Levi, but whereas Levi's priesthood was 'everlasting' in the sense that it passed from priest to priest 'throughout their generations' (Ex 40:15), Phinehas was *personally* promised an 'everlasting' priesthood, along with his descendants. This necessitates his resurrection, making it a covenant 'of life and peace.'

Notice the circumstances under which the tribe of Levi received their promise, and Phinehas received his covenant. In Ex 32:25, the people were found 'naked', and in Num 25:3,6 they committed immorality with the Moabite women. In both cases, Levi was zealous for Yahweh and stood against the tide to stop immoral practices in the Ecclesia. This is where they had failed in Malachi's day. Intermarriage with the world and unfaithfulness to one's spouse had become commonplace (Mal 2:11,14; Neh 13:23-27) and the priests not only stood by - some joined in (Neh 13:28)!

In an age plagued by immorality and waning faithfulness in marriage, Malachi's call for the house of Levi to rekindle the flame of their ancestors' zeal for Yahweh is of the greatest importance to us as well.

The fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name

Fear Heb *morah* H4172 = Noun form of H3372 (Kohl/Mounce).

Feared Heb *yare* H3372 = 'To be afraid, frightened, revere, respect' (Kohl/Mounce).

Afraid Heb *chatat* H2865 = 'Stood in awe' (ESV / NASB / NIV).

What a contrast to the priests of Malachi's day who never feared Yahweh and instead despised His name (cp 1:6). Malachi later commends the faithful remnant who were keeping the spirit of their fathers alive: 'them that *feared* Yahweh and that *thought upon his name*' (3:16 - note 'feared' is a closely related Heb. word to 'fear' / 'feared' in 2:5).

THE FEAR OF YAHWEH

The fear of Yahweh is one of the themes of Malachi, and of Scripture. Proverbs describes it as ‘the beginning of wisdom’ – the foundation for a Godly, profitable life (Prov 1:7). So why is it so important?

The fear of Yahweh is a mindset. We are instructed to live *‘in the fear of Yahweh all the day long’* (Prov 23:17). As noted earlier (1:6), this is not abject terror, but a reverential appreciation of the greatness and majesty of our God. If Malachi’s contemporaries had feared Yahweh as Phinehas had, their entire story would have been different! In our days of ceaseless activity, it is all too easy for us, like Israel, to forget the greatness of the God we serve, and become too familiar in our approach to Him. We need to remember that Yahweh looks *‘to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembles at His word’* (Isa 66:2).

Fearing the Name of Yahweh: The idea of ‘fearing’ (i.e. reverencing / standing in awe of) the name of Yahweh also arises many times in Scripture. For example, you may like to survey the following passages: Deut 6:13, 10:20, 28:58, 1Ki 8:43, 1Chr 17:21, 2Chr 6:33, Neh 1:11, Psa 61:5, 86:11, 102:15, 111:9, Isa 59:19, Mal 1:14, 2:5, 3:16, 4:2. Once you have looked at these quotes, consider the following questions:

- What does it mean to ‘fear the name of Yahweh’?
- Are there different types of ‘fear’ spoken about in these verses?
- What actions / events result in someone coming to ‘fear the name of Yahweh’?

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

The law of truth was in his mouth

Once again, the contrast with the priests of Malachi’s day is clear. One of the primary responsibilities of the priests was to *‘teach the children of Israel all the statutes which Yahweh hath spoken’* (Lev 10:11, Deut 33:8-10, Ezek 44:23). As mentioned in the background section, Malachi most likely uttered his prophecy a few years after the death of Ezra, during the absence of Nehemiah. Ezra stood as a stark contrast to these priests: we know he was a direct descendant of Phinehas (Ezra 7:1-5), and he firmly stood for the principles of his ancestors:

‘For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments’ (Ezra 7:10).

Having the law of Yahweh written in our hearts and mouths is a principle of the New Covenant in Christ based on the righteousness of faith, and thus it is a standard to which we all should aspire (Deut 30:11-14, Jer 31:33-34, Rom 10:6-8, Heb 8:10-11). The example of Ezra demonstrates the principle that the law of Yahweh will not naturally come to our mouths unless we first prepare our hearts by making an effort to seek out His word and practice it in our own lives. We are likewise called to be as a ‘royal priesthood’ to God (1Pet 2:9), and our aspiration is to be kings and priests in the kingdom age, teaching and inspiring others in the ways of righteousness (Rev 1:6) – but those words of instruction and encouragement will never come to our mouths if we have not written the principles on our hearts.

Iniquity was not found in his lips

Ascribing this quality to Phinehas implies that the priests of Malachi's day were lacking in this regard – that guile and untruthfulness were to be found in their lips. Compare Christ 1Pet 2:22.

He walked with me in peace and equity

Equity Heb *mishor* H4334 = '(geographical) plateau, plain, level ground; (of ruling and right living) uprightness, justice, straightness' (Kohl/Mounce) (i.e. this is the same word used to describe an even, level piece of ground – e.g. Zech 4:7)

Roth: 'in well-doing and uprightness'. Walking with God implies total fellowship (compare the example of Enoch in Gen 5:22-24). The principle is given in Amos 3:3 – '*can two walk together, except they be agreed?*' Peace and equity are principles of God's character (1Cor 14:33, Psa 98:9); to walk with Him implies that we value those principles and demonstrate them in our own lives.

And did turn many away from iniquity

Through his courageous act, Phinehas '*turned away [God's] wrath*' from Israel (Num 25:11) by curbing the immoral trend that had gripped the nation. It was as though he had stood as gate-keeper to the nation, and in his zeal, crushed the influences that threatened to undermine it. Because of this, Phinehas became the role model for the porters, or door-keepers, of the nation (1Chr 9:19-20), whose role was to keep evil out of the Ecclesia, and so 'turn many away from iniquity.'

What a contrast to the priests of Malachi's day who '*caused many to stumble*' (v8)! Scripture is very clear about the blessings promised to those who 'turn many to righteousness' (Dan 12:3, see also James 5:19-20, Acts 3:26). On the other hand, judgement is reserved for those who cause others to stumble or turn from the way (Mt 18:6; Rom 14:13,21). Compare also the sad story of Jeroboam who '*made Israel to sin*' (1Ki 14:7-16).

FURTHER EXPLORATION - THE PROFILE OF A PRIEST

Build a character profile of Phinehas, and the attributes that made him an ideal priest. What can we learn for our personal and ecclesial life today?

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

Messenger Heb *mal'akh* H4397 = 'a messenger' (Str). This is the base word for 'Malachi'.

Echoing the idea from v6, the Levites should have imitated the example of their ancestors with the 'law of truth' being found in their mouths: God intended that the nation should look to them for spiritual guidance (Lev 10:11; Deut 17:9-10). Moses' blessing on Levi in Deut 33:8-11 shows that they were given this privilege of 'teaching Israel Thy Law' because of their faithfulness in Ex 32 and Num 25.

If we are to fulfil our roles as a chosen 'royal priesthood' to God (1Pet 2:9), this ought to be our aim likewise (Tit 1:9, 2Tim 2:24-25, Col 1:9, Prov 2:1-6).

Unfortunately, the Levitical priests often neglected this responsibility, leading to the lament that *'my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge'* (Hos 4:6, cp Isa 5:13). The priests should have been the 'messengers' of Yahweh, but their short-comings led to the necessity for Malachi to fill the gap.

8 But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

But ye are departed out of the way;

Departed Heb *sur* H5493 = 'To turn away, depart, leave' (Kohl/Mounce).

Way Heb *derekh* H1870 = 'way, path, route, road, journey; by extension: conduct, way of life' (Kohl/Mounce).

Here is the key point of Malachi's argument in this section. After reminding them of the outstanding example of Levi and Phinehas, and presenting the ideal of priestly service, he now turns to pointedly state their failure. Not only were the priests astray, but they were leading others astray also.

The two words used for 'departed' and 'way' in this verse are the same words used to describe Israel's worship of the golden calf – the incident when Levi first took a stand aside from the moral corruption of the nation:

'They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it' (Ex 32:8).

See also Moses' retelling of the incident in Deut 9:12,16. Whereas the tribe of Levi had originally been instrumental in bringing the people back to God when they departed from the way, here it was they themselves who had departed – and they were taking the people with them!

Ye have caused many to stumble at the law

Law Heb *torah* H8451 = 'law, direction, instruction' (BDB).

'The Law' is a key word of this section (2:1-9), with four of the five occurrences in Malachi contained within it. Instead of teaching the Law (v7) following the example of their forefathers (v6), the priests were instead causing people to stumble.

Ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi

Corrupted Heb *shachat* H7843 = 'To corrupt, destroy, ruin' (Kohl/Mounce).

The covenant of Levi had been made with those who stood aside from corruption; now the covenant itself was being corrupted by those who should have upheld it. When Nehemiah returned, this was exactly the state of affairs he found (Neh 13:29).

FURTHER EXPLORATION

Verses 5-8 draw a deliberate contrast between the righteous ways of Levi / Phinehas and the corrupt action of the priests in Malachi's day. The righteous actions of Levi and Phinehas are recorded in Ex 32 and Num 25 respectively – can you find any word links between these chapters and the prophecy of Malachi?

9 *Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.*

Made you contemptible and base before all the people

This is another reference back to 1:6-7 (s/w 'contemptible'). They had treated the altar of Yahweh as contemptible, now He would cause them to be treated in the same way. This judgement would certainly come upon them in the time of Christ – when he would frequently call out their hypocrisy in front of 'all the people' – and later in the events of AD 70 when the priesthood was removed. However, there is also a more direct application in that Malachi's words in this very chapter had highlighted the failings of the priesthood in front of all the people who heard his message.

But have been partial in the law

The Hebrew for 'been partial' literally means to 'lift the face'. The RV translates this as 'but have had respect of persons in the law'. The idea of 'respecting persons' is what we would call 'corruption' in modern language: giving people special treatment because of their position or wealth. This was expressly forbidden in the law (Deut 1:17, Lev 19:15), but these spineless priests respected the people more than they respected God (a trait they would share with their descendants in the days of Christ – see Mt 21:26, Lk 11:42).

FURTHER EXPLORATION

Yahweh is not a respecter of persons, and we are frequently exhorted to follow His example in that regard. To explore this idea further, start by looking at Acts 10:34-35 and James 2:1-6. It may then be helpful to search for the phrase 'respect of persons' in your Bible software. Try to answer the following questions:

- What did respect of persons look like in Bible times?
- What might it look like today in family or ecclesial life?
- Why is this behaviour so specifically disliked by God?

*If ye will obey my voice indeed,
and keep my covenant,
then ye shall be a peculiar treasure
unto me above all people:
for all the earth is mine:
And ye shall be unto me a kingdom
of priests, and an holy nation.*

EXODUS 19:5-6



REBUKE OF
THE NATION
*UNFAITHFULNESS TO
THEIR COVENANTS*

CHAPTER 2:10-16

REBUKE OF THE NATION – UNFAITHFULNESS TO THEIR COVENANTS (2:10-16)

Having addressed the conduct of the priests in the previous section (2:1-9), Malachi now turns his attention to the rest of the nation. Just as the priests had ‘corrupted the **covenant of Levi**’ v8, the nation had ‘profaned the **covenant of our fathers**’ v10 and dealt treacherously with ‘the **wife of thy covenant**’ v14. For their sins, the priests would be judged. In like manner, the nation would be also.

But the judgement would be very specific and the punishment would fit the crime (Psa 18:26):

- God would make the priests **contemptible** before the people (2:9) because they had **despised** (same word) God’s name (1:6). God would treat them like they had treated Him. They held God’s name in contempt, so He would hold them in contempt.
- In the case of the nation, many of the men had ‘put away’ their first wives (v16) and married foreign women (v11). God’s judgement on them would be to cut them off (v12). That is, God would cut off the man who cut off his wife.

But the link between the people and their priests wasn’t just that the priests had broken their priestly covenant and the people had broken their marriage covenants. Some of the priests had also married foreign wives (Neh 13:28), as they had done previously (Ezra 9:1-2, 10:18-19). It appears the people simply copied this example (see 2:7).

This entire section is a progressive lament about the sins of the nation, followed by an exhortation to ‘guard your spirit’ or change your heart (v15, 16). But the section divides into two halves which match each other point for point. The first four verses (v10-13) describe the nation as the unfaithful children of God’s spiritual family. The final three verses (v14-16) address problems of unfaithfulness in their individual families.

We might paraphrase the section like this:

- There is one God and (for those of you who are married), God gave you one wife.
- You have a covenant with God; you have covenants with your wives.
- You have been treacherous (unfaithful) to God; you have been unfaithful to your wives – change your hearts!
- God has cut you off because you cut off your wives.
- And because God doesn’t accept your offerings, you have covered His altar with your tears, yet you don’t hesitate to cover your garment (marriage, see v16) with violence – again, change your hearts!

The word ‘treacherously’ is the key word of the section (v10,11,14,15,16).

Breaking the Covenant with their God		Breaking the Covenant with their Wives	
v10	Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?	And did not he make one ?... wherefore one ?	v15
	why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother	the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously	v14
	Profaning the covenant of our fathers?	She thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant .	
v11	Judah hath dealt treacherously , married the daughter of a strange god	and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth	v15
v12	Yahweh will cut off the man that doeth this	Yahweh... saith that he hateth putting away : (Not same Heb as 'cut off', but similar ideas. God will cut off the man who cuts off his wife)	v16
v13	And this have ye done again, covering the altar of Yahweh with tears	for one covereth violence with his garment, saith Yahweh of hosts:	
	therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously .		v16

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

Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?

These two questions are parallel. The 'one Father' and 'one God' is Yahweh. The 'we' / 'us' is the nation of Israel. The churches use this verse to teach that we are all the children of God and that there is a universal brotherhood of mankind (as if all men have the hope of salvation and God is everyone's Father in the same way). This is not true because the verse goes on to speak of a brotherhood united by 'the covenant of our fathers', which is a reference to the Law of Moses given to Israel. In this context, God is presented as a Father and as a Creator.

God became the **Father** of the nation through Abraham and Sarah (see notes 1:6, p31). As the children of God, the nation ought to have reflected the character of their Father, but they did not (Deut 32:5-6,20, Mal 1:6). They should also have been united as a family, but they were not - every man was against his brother, in Mal 2:10.

God became their **Creator** when he called the nation out of Egypt, making them His witnesses to the world (Isa 43:1,7,15,21) and adopting them as His covenant people (Ex 19:5-6, 24:8) - but they subsequently profaned the covenant of their fathers, in Mal 2:10.

Why do we deal treacherously

Treacherously Heb *bagad* H898 = 'to cover as with a garment; by imp, to act covertly, deceitfully, unfaithfully, betray' (Str). s/w v10,11,14,15,16.

RSV: 'Why then are we faithless one to another'. It was inconsistent to claim a common descent from Abraham and at the same time to deal unfaithfully with their brethren (Jn 8:39-40). The same exhortation applies to us today. When we sin against our brethren, we sin against Christ (1Cor 8:12, Mt 25:40, James 3:9-10, 1Jn 3:17, 4:20). The law said love your brethren (Lev 19:17-18). Love doesn't act like this towards each other (Rom 13:8-10).

Every man against his brother

This highlights the moral breakdown that had occurred in the post-exilic community. Nehemiah records a classic example of this evil where the rich exploited the poor financially

during his time as Governor, even though *'our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren'* (Neh 5:1-13, esp v5). The Law forbade this conduct (Lev 25:35-43, Deut 15:1-11, Psa 15:5). See also Mal 3:5.

By profaning the covenant of our fathers

Profaning Heb *chala* H2490 = 'to defile, pollute, desecrate, treat as common' (BDB).

NASB: 'So as to profane the covenant of our fathers'. Treacherous conduct between brethren was a desecration of the national covenant. The covenant being spoken of here is the Mosaic covenant God made with the nation when He brought them out of Egypt (Ex 24:2-3,8). It is called the 'covenant with your fathers' in Jer 34:13 (also Deut 4:31, 29:25, 2Ki 17:15, Jer 11:3-5,10, 31:32, Heb 8:9). Speaking about this event at the end of the 40 years wilderness wanderings, Moses wrote a song as a witness against the nation because he knew they would break the covenant when they entered the land (Deut 31:19-20).

The Mosaic covenant bound the nation to God (Ex 19:4-6, Deut 26:16-19) and to one another (Lev 19:18). They broke this covenant by marrying outside (v11-12, Deut 7:3-4), divorcing their wives (v13-16, Deut 24:1-4, Mt 19:8), and displaying treachery and injustice towards each other (v10, Lev 19:18). This violated the family unity of their Father and Creator. When the nation of Israel is restored in the kingdom age, they will re-establish their covenant with God (Ezek 37:26) and with their brethren (Ezek 37:15-17,22).

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

Judah

'Judah' does not mean the tribe of Judah only. The northern kingdom of Israel comprised 10 tribes (1Ki 11:30-32) and went into Assyrian captivity in about 722 BC, about 290 years before the time of Malachi. The southern kingdom began as two tribes but soon included representatives of all 12 tribes (2Chr 31:6). They went into Babylonian captivity in 586 BC but returned from captivity under Zerubbabel 70 years later in 538 BC (Jer 29:10), about 100 years before Malachi's prophecy. This return included representatives from all 12 tribes ('all Israel' Ezra 2:70). Therefore, 'Judah' represents all from among the 12 tribes who returned from Babylonian captivity.

Judah hath dealt treacherously and an abomination is committed

Abomination Heb *to'ebah* H8441 = 'something disgusting or abhorrent' (Str), both ceremonially (e.g. unclean foods Deut 14:3) and morally (wicked conduct such as immorality or idolatry Deut 32:16, Isa 44:19).

Two specific abominations are recorded in this verse: (1) profaning the holiness of Yahweh, and (2) marrying the daughter of a strange god. Two locations are mentioned: (1) Israel and (2) Jerusalem. As we will see, the holiness (or holy place, the temple) of Yahweh was profaned in Jerusalem and intermarriage was happening in all Israel.

Judah hath profaned the holiness of Yahweh which he loved

Holiness Heb *quodesh* H6944 = 'sacredness, separateness' (BDB), 'a sacred thing' (Str)

NIV: 'Judah has desecrated **the sanctuary** the LORD loves.' Also see ESV, RSV, NASB.

As these translations indicate, the 'holiness' God loved was actually the temple in Jerusalem. The word *quodesh* is often translated 'sanctuary' (e.g. Ex 30:13, Lev 10:4, Num 3:28, 1Chr 9:29) or 'holy place' (e.g. Lev 16:27), referring to the building / tabernacle rather than to the characteristic of holiness.

But how was the nation profaning the temple?

Whilst the temple could be profaned with incorrect sacrifices (Lev 19:8), Malachi has already spoken about the nation bringing defiled sacrifices (s/w profane Mal 1:12), so he must have something else in mind here. The answer is to be found in the second half of the verse. Many of the men had married foreign wives which would have led to the introduction of idolatry in the home. To indulge in idolatrous practices and then present yourself before Yahweh is to profane (pollute/treat as common) His temple. The priests were also marrying foreign wives (Neh 13:28), so it would have also been impossible for them to serve in the temple without hypocrisy.

It is interesting to observe that the word 'treacherously' means to cover up or conceal (see notes on v10), so we might presume that the idolatry we have spoken of was done in private and not in public. Indeed, this is likely because there is no record of widespread public idolatry by those who returned from captivity. What this does mean is that many in the nation served God feignedly (by deception, as a sham Jer 3:10, Mt 15:8) just as they had prior to captivity.

And hath married the daughter of a strange god

The law forbade marriage with the nations or the forming of any type of covenant with them (Ex 23:32-33, 34:11-16, Deut 7:2-4) because it would lead to idolatry. Instead, they were to break down the altars and images of the heathen (Ex 34:13) and not enquire how they served their gods (Deut 12:30-31), even destroying the cities of their brethren who worshipped false gods (Deut 13:12-15). The nation failed to do this. Instead, they married foreign wives and worshipped idols (Jud 3:5-7) which resulted in their eventual captivity (Israel 2Ki 17:6-8, Judah 2Chr 36:14-20).

There should have been no surprise here. When the iniquity of the Amorites was full (Gen 15:16) the land spued them out (Lev 18:28). The same would happen to Israel if they copied Amorite worship.

The prohibition against marrying foreign wives was not on racial grounds. A mixed multitude went out of Egypt (Ex 12:38) and Boaz married Ruth (Ruth 4:13), but in both cases these groups had put away their false gods (Num 9:14, Ruth 1:16).

But here, the nation had married the daughter of a strange god. Malachi puts his finger on the issue. 'Daughter of' implies the woman has an allegiance to the false god or was spiritually identified with it, rather than being a literal descendant. In a similar manner, a son of Belial means a man of wickedness (Deut 13:13).

Since a married couple with different religions must come to a common understanding in order to live happily together, one or other partner must compromise on religious matters. In Israel's experience, the less demanding standard quickly prevailed (1Ki 11:1-8, 16:31, Neh 13:23-27) and apostasy developed. Since the nation was driven into exile for apostasy, it was unthinkable that the whole community could be put at risk again, yet this was occurring.

The foreign marriages in Ezra 9:1-2 resulted in the nation 'doing according to their abominations.' Post-exilic Judah was indeed repeating the sins of pre-exilic Judah (Neh 13:23-28).

Strange god

The word 'god' is the Hebrew word 'el' (power). This is the same word used of 'God' in v10. So, the 'strange god' has supplanted the 'one God'. The significance of this is that Yahweh regarded Himself as married to Israel (Isa 54:5, Jer 3:14, 31:32), so the adoption of a strange god was considered to be spiritual adultery (Jer 3:8) and treachery (v10,11). For this reason, Nehemiah called this a transgression against God (Neh 13:27).

In 1Pet 2:9, we are called to be a holy nation. Peter is quoting Deut 7:6 which is the reason given for not marrying someone of a different religion (Deut 7:1-5). For the same reason, the New Testament requires believers to seek marriage partners 'only in the Lord' (1Cor 7:39).

12 *The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts.*

Yahweh will cut off the man that doeth this

Cut off Heb *karath* H3772 = 'cut asunder, by implication to destroy or consume' (Str).

The word is used in Gen 15:18 where God made (cut) a covenant with Abraham. Covenants were established by cutting sacrificial animals in half with the covenant-makers passing between the pieces (Gen 15:9-11,18, Jer 34:18) to symbolise the future fate (death) of the person who broke the covenant (Jer 34:20, Gen 15:11).

The sins referred to here are treachery against their brethren (v10), marrying foreign wives, and profaning the temple (v11). Since these sins broke the covenant with God, those who committed them would suffer the covenant fate, which was death.

The master and the scholar

Master Heb *ur* H5782 = 'to awake, open the eyes, rouse oneself' (BDB, Str) – a teacher.

Scholar Heb *anah* H6030 = 'to answer, pay attention, respond' (BDB, Str) – a pupil.

The teacher and the scholar represent the whole spectrum of the nation from great to small (1Chr 15:8, Isa 24:1-2).

In this context, the teachers were the priests who had led the people astray (Mal 2:7-8). The pupils were the common people, but since both priest and people had transgressed (e.g. in marrying outside Neh 13:23,28), neither would be spared (Isa 9:13-16 s/w cut off v14). Also, Ezek 14:9-10, Mt 15:14.

And him that offereth an offering unto Yahweh of hosts

Those who violate God's covenant will not be exempt from judgement even if they bring offerings. In fact, because of their insincerity, God would judge both their corrupt actions (treachery to their brethren and marrying foreign wives) as well as their hypocritical appearance of piety (offering sacrifices) Isa 1:11-17, 66:2-4, Hos 6:6, Amos 5:21-24. Also see Isa 29:13, Mt 15:8.

13 *And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand.*

And this have ye done again

This was the second time intermarriage had occurred since the return of Judah from Babylon. The first time was in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:7, 458BC). At that time they made a covenant with God and separated from their foreign wives in Ezra 9:1-2, 10:3, 11-12, 18-44. When Nehemiah came to Jerusalem 13 years later (Neh 2:1, 445BC), the people made a covenant not to marry foreign wives (Neh 9:38, 10:28-30). Then 12 years later, in Nehemiah's absence, (Neh 13:6 433BC), they married foreign wives again (Neh 13:23-28).

Covering the altar of Yahweh with tears

NIV: *'This is what you do again: You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning, because he no longer looks with favour on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.'*

After taking foreign wives (Ezra 9:1-2) the people expressed remorse for their sin and wept (Ezra 10:1). When Nehemiah came to Jerusalem and exposed the people's lack of knowledge, they wept again (Neh 8:9). Malachi records their mournful conduct when they brought their offerings before God (Mal 3:14), but it was for show.

He regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand

How would the people have known that God no longer accepted their offerings? In two ways: (1) by the teaching of Malachi, who could quote earlier precedents (Isa 1:11-17, 66:2-4, Jer 6:20, Amos 5:21-27), and (2) the present curse on their crops (Mal 3:10) which were being eaten by locusts (v11). There is a precedent for this in Hag 1:4-11. When the people served themselves, they were cursed. When they served God, they were blessed (Hag 2:16-19). The curses for disobedience in Deut 28 included agricultural hardship (v18), natural disasters (v20,42), and even (ironically) the loss of husbands and wives to other people (v30).

God doesn't want offerings, He wants obedience (1Sam 15:22), true justice (Prov 21:3) and a broken and contrite spirit (Psa 51:16-17). Without this spirit, sacrifices are an abomination to God (Prov 21:27).

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

Yet ye say, Wherefore?

Literally, 'Why?' The people were so ignorant of the character of God and blind to their sin that they couldn't understand why He was rejecting their offerings. This is a question of incredulity. They were affronted and outraged.

But there is perhaps more to this question than meets the eye. The people didn't understand that God's disapproval was tied to His view of the marriage covenant. This was likely because, having contracted alternative marriages, they had been influenced by the worship of false gods in their private lives. These gods did not have the same moral requirements as Yahweh, with the following consequences:

- The people were told not to marry outside because of the threat of idolatry (Deut 7:3-4).
- This idolatry would lead to immoral practices (Ex 34:15-16).
- Participating in religious immorality would encourage marital infidelity (Hos 4:12-13).
- Because false gods have no principles (Psa 96:5), they are morally inert (Jer 10:3-4).
- Therefore, they prioritise external rituals and offerings over Godly conduct (1Ki 18:26-28).
- They would be a thorn in the nation's eye (Josh 23:12-13), blinding them to true godliness (2Cor 4:4).
- So the nation would serve Yahweh like they served idols and be dumbfounded when He didn't accept them.

Because Yahweh hath been witness

Witness Heb *ud* H5749 = 'to duplicate or repeat' (Str)

Covenants can be made for all sorts of reasons, but the marriage covenant is a covenant made before God, and in His presence as a witness. Even in the world, marriage is most often a public covenant, made before many different groups in one's community: the state, family, friends, colleagues, and (often) God. These different groups are invited because the couple wishes them to witness a public declaration that their commitment is comprehensive, enduring, and touches every aspect of their existence.

The wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

Companion Heb *chabereth* H2278 = 'companion, wife, consort' (BDB), from Heb *chabar* H2266 = 'unite, join, bind together' (BDB)

Covenant See v10.

Treacherously See v10.

Three terms of endearment are used of their wives, each highlighting a different aspect of the marriage relationship:

The wife of thy youth - emphasising beauty, affection, shared dreams and experiences. The expression refers to the woman a man married when he was young, before he was prosperous or powerful, with the early, innocent devotion of a new bride (Prov 5:18-19, Song 1:15). Divorce was the betrayal of a long-standing relationship.

Thy companion - emphasising friendship, partnership and mutuality. She was not a burden to the man but an ally, a partner for life, formed by God to assist him (Gen 2:18). Divorce was the violation of trust and emotional, personal and spiritual fellowship.

The wife of thy covenant - emphasising the fact that marriage is a binding, sacred agreement made before God with responsibilities that last a lifetime. Divorce, therefore, is not just the termination of a contract, but a sin before God; the kind of sin committed by the '*strange woman... who forgetteth the covenant of her God*' (Prov 2:16-17). This is particularly significant because God betrothed the nation of Israel to Himself (Ezek 16:8, Hos 2:19-20). Would the nation have been pleased for God to treat His marriage to them as flippantly as they did with their marriages to their wives?

But there is another dimension: The marriage between a husband and a wife is elevated to a spiritual plane in Eph 5:22-33 where marriage is not merely a social institution, but a living parable of Christ's love for the Ecclesia. The statement that the husband and wife become 'one flesh' (Gen 2:24) is quoted in Eph 5:31 and followed by the comment: '*I speak concerning Christ and the Ecclesia*' (v32). So, the Ecclesia is the bride of Christ, his wife (2Cor 11:2, Rev 19:7-9).

In that case, we would expect Christ to have made the same vows to the Ecclesia as husbands make to their wives. And that is exactly what we find. Christ says he is 'one' with the Ecclesia (Jn 17:21), that he never abandons her (Heb 13:5, Jn 10:28), and that his commitment to her is permanent (Rom 8:38-39). Now consider what it would mean if Christ was to divorce the Ecclesia; it would mean he doesn't mean what he says in Jn 13:1, it would mean he would not remain faithful even if we were faithless (2Tim 2:13), it would mean that the promises of God could no longer be trusted, that the cross of Christ wouldn't really save us and that salvation was impossible (Acts 4:12).

FAITHFULNESS TO OUR COVENANTS

In view of Christ's absolute commitment to his bride, the sin of treachery stands out in all its ugliness and selfishness. This is a big lesson for us in choosing a life companion, and in our commitment to our vows – both our literal marriage vows, and our vow of commitment to our Lord. How will we feel when we stand before our Lord who is the pattern of faithfulness within the marriage covenant?

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

And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit.

Residue Heb *she'ar* H765 = 'remainder' (Str) – the rest left over.

Malachi now emphasises the seriousness of the points he made in the previous verse. When God only made one woman for Adam in Gen 2, was it because He ran out of power? No, after making Eve, God had '*the residue of the spirit*' or power left over (and, for that matter, Adam had many more ribs!)

But God took Adam (Gen 2:21), made him into two (v22) and then combined those two back into one (v24), so God's purpose with marriage involved one man and one woman for life. Jesus quoted Gen 2:24 in Mt 19:4-6, adding the comment '*what God hath joined, let not man put asunder,*' thereby making no provision for divorce and remarriage or for polygamy.

And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed

Why did God only make one wife for Adam? So that they might raise a 'seed of God' (KJV mg), so that the Truth could be passed on to the next generation (Gen 18:19, Deut 6:6-7, Psa 78:1-8, Eph 6:4). This obviously meant that both parents needed to be in the Truth; so having one wife, but a wife who was not a believer would not satisfy this requirement (see for example Neh 13:23-24. Also, Gen 24:3-7, 27:46).

Furthermore, marrying an unbeliever would be to yoke yourself unequally (2Cor 6:14-15) and create a marriage with ongoing challenges (v16-17). Marrying outside the Truth would certainly 'fill the earth' (cp Gen 1:28), but it wouldn't fill the earth with God's glory (Num 14:21).

Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

Take heed Heb *shamar* H8104 = 'to keep, guard' (BDB).

Spirit Heb *ruach* H7307 = 'wind, breath, mind' (BDB) (context determines).

Here the word 'spirit' refers to one's inner disposition, the seat of intention and moral will, the mind (translated 'mind' in Gen 26:35 [KJV mg 'bitterness of spirit'], Dan 5:20, Hab 1:11). Malachi is saying: Guard your heart and motives; be faithful (non-treacherous) in disposition as well as in deed.

The family was intended to be the school in which God's way of life was learned and practiced (Ex 20:12, Deut 11:19). Only when both parents remain faithful to their marriage vows can children be given the security which provides the basis for Godly living (Col 3:18-21).

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

For Yahweh, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away

'For I hate divorce' (RSV), or, as Jesus said, 'What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder' (Matt 19:6). God hates divorce because it destroys the family unit, betrays the commitment between husband and wife, compromises the raising of a Godly seed (Mal 2:15), and mocks the covenant love Christ has for His ecclesial bride, of which marriage is a type (Eph 5:25).

In Deut 24:1 God appears to endorse putting away by making provision for a 'bill of divorcement' in the Law of Moses. However, rather than endorsing divorce or remarriage, this law *acknowledges the reality* of human hard-heartedness and *regulates* the situation if it occurs. When the religious leaders cited this to challenge Jesus, he explained that Moses permitted it only because of the hardness of their hearts (Mt 19:7-8). God's ideal is the faithful preservation of marriage, but His law and Jesus' teaching recognise that divorce sometimes still occurs, and this law provides guidance to limit harm and uphold covenant principles even when the bond is broken.

In Jer 3:8 we are told that God **did** put away Israel. How does this harmonise with God's view of hating putting away (same word) in Mal 2:16?

God was figuratively espoused to the northern kingdom of Israel (Jer 2:1-4). After repeated infidelity towards God (Jer 3:6) and repeated pleas to desist (v7), God finally put them away by taking them captive into Assyria. This was an act of judgement because Israel had already broken their covenant with God (Jer 31:31-32). God put away Israel in an effort to save Judah, who was copying her northern sister (Jer 3:10).

Despite putting Israel away, God still calls on her to repent and return to Him (Jer 3:12) and He still regards Himself as married to her (v14), ultimately intending to '*betroth thee unto me forever*' (Hos 2:19, Jer 31:33-34). God never broke the marriage bond with Israel.

In contrast, the 'putting away' in Mal 2 was purely for selfish reasons, for the purpose of marrying foreign women, violating their original covenants and exploiting the vulnerable (v11,14). It was motivated by lust and treachery.

A COMMENT ON MARRIAGE IN MALACHI

The Bible speaks about marriage in many places. From Genesis, where marriage is instituted as a sacred bond of companionship, loyalty and unity (Gen 2:18-24), to the teachings of the Lord and Paul (Mt 19; Eph 5; 1Cor 7), Scripture presents marriage as a relationship grounded in faithfulness, love and peace, with shared responsibilities before God.

Malachi, in Ch 2:10-16, condemns the treacherous behaviour of men who abandoned 'the wife of their youth' (v14) for foreign wives. God says He hates putting away (v16), but it is important to understand what He is – and is not – saying. He is saying that He hates divorce and it should therefore be avoided wherever possible, but He is not saying that every marriage be preserved at all costs at the expense of other Biblical principles. For example, if a spouse makes rejecting God a condition of the continuation of one's marriage, Scripture is clear that our relationship with God is pre-eminent (1Cor 7:15). God is also clear that the safety of each party is paramount (Psa 11:5).

Malachi's message, therefore, is not one of endurance of abuse or captivity, but of God's deep opposition to the betrayal and violence that destroys His covenant design for marriage, which is intended to reflect Christ's self-sacrificing love for the Ecclesia (Eph 5:25).

For one covereth violence with his garment, saith Yahweh of hosts

Violence Heb *chamas* H2555 = 'violence, wrong, cruelty or injustice' (BDB).

With Heb *'al* H5921 = upon (BDB).

Garment Heb *lebush* H3880 = 'clothing, raiment' (BDB).

The phrase is obscure in the Hebrew as illustrated by the following translations:

- '*He covers violence with his garment*' (KJV, YLT).
- '*He covers his garment with violence*' (ESV, NASB, NKJV) – i.e. the opposite way around.

The literal Hebrew is '*He covers violence upon his garment.*' It is his garment that is being covered because there is something upon it. So the correct translation is '*he covers his garment with violence*', as reflected in the modern translations.

But what does this mean? In Bible times, to cover a woman with one's garment was a vivid idiom for entering into a marriage covenant and taking her under one's care and protection.

- In Ruth 3:9, Ruth says to Boaz, '*Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid,*' which was a request for the covering of marriage.

- In Ezek 16:8, God says of Israel, *'I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness... and entered into a covenant with thee.'*

So, in Ruth and Ezekiel, the garment stands as a symbol of the marriage covenant. In Malachi, this garment has been subjected to the moral violence of divorce. So the man's covenant garment, which was once a symbol of love and faithfulness, has become stained with violence³². His marriage was meant to reflect God's protective love. It now reflects cruelty, injustice and betrayal.

Therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

Guard your disposition so you don't betray the covenant, whether with your spouse or with your God.

And why? Because, as 3:1 will foretell, the messenger of the covenant is coming.

³² More dynamic translations attempt to give the meaning of the Hebrew idiom in plain English, for example the NIV has 'does violence to the one he should protect'.

JUDGEMENT OF THE NATION

*BY THE MESSENGER
OF THE COVENANT*



CHAPTER 2:17-3:6

JUDGEMENT OF THE NATION – THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT (2:17-3:6)

Having set Yahweh's complaint before the nation and reminded them of their obligations as His covenant people, Malachi now shows that divine judgement is coming.

In Neh 10, the nation entered a covenant with God and committed to serve and remain faithful to Him. This covenant was facilitated by Nehemiah the Governor, who then returned to Persia. Some years later, in Neh 13, we read of his return to Jerusalem, where he finds a people who have broken their covenant, corrupted their worship and worst of all, didn't care. Malachi's message was delivered during Nehemiah's absence, and he warned the nation to prepare for the return of their Governor.

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

Ye have wearied Yahweh with your words

The people had worn God out with their disrespect towards Him, their careless and insincere questioning of His ways, and their disregard of their covenants with Him and with their wives. To 'wear God out' is a big indictment; He is renowned for His long-suffering (1Pet 3:20; 2Pet 3:9), it being an essential element of His character (Ex 34:6-7) – and the Levites had even specifically appealed to that long-suffering in their prayer which led to the signing of the covenant under Nehemiah (Neh 9:17).

Wherein have we wearied him?

Once again, the people demonstrate their ignorance of their own faults. Are we truly aware of our attitude towards God? Are we genuine about our worship towards Him, our covenant with Him and our dealings with others in His Ecclesia? Or are we wearing Him out with our insincere platitudes and hypocrisy?

When ye say, 'Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of Yahweh'

Just like the priests had shown partiality in their application of the Law (2:9), so the people elevated politics over principle. They placed greater importance on their relationships with other people than with God, justifying and normalising sin.

There is a strong parallel with Isaiah 5 through this section:

Malachi		Isa 5	
2:8	Caused many to stumble at the Law	Cast away the Law of Yahweh	v24
2:9	Ye have... been partial in the Law	Acquit guilty for a bribe; deprive innocent of right	v23
2:17	Every one that doeth evil is good...	Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil	v20
2:17	Where is the God of judgement?	Let Him make speed, and hasten His work, that we may see it! ³³	v19
3:2	Who may abide the day of his coming... he is like a refiner's fire... all the wicked shall be as stubble	As the fire devoureth the stubble ... the anger of Yahweh [is] kindled against His people	v24-25

Those who did evil include:

- Those who teach wrong doctrine and fail to teach the Truth (2:8)
- Those who have profaned God's holy place (2:11-13)
- Those who commit divorce and remarriage (2:14-16).

The nation were justifying all these sins and those who committed them, but there was one particular individual in Malachi's time to whom this statement has a distinct application... and that was Tobiah the Ammonite.

TOBIAH - 'EVERY ONE THAT DOETH EVIL IS GOOD...'

Tobiah was an Ammonite (Neh 2:10), descended from Lot (Gen 19:38) and an avowed enemy to the Truth (Deut 23:3-4). Yet his name means 'the goodness (Heb *tob*) of Yahweh' (cp Str). His history, as detailed by Nehemiah, is a startling illustration of Malachi's indictment on calling evil good:

- Tobiah started out openly hostile to the Ecclesia (Neh 2:19), but was always listed second to the aggressive Sanballat, who was clearly the leader (e.g. Neh 2:10,19; 4:1,3,7).
- Once the enemies hear that the walls are almost complete (Neh 6:1), Tobiah changes tact and goes silent, while Sanballat carries on his attacks (e.g. 6:2,5).
- Sanballat's intimidation techniques had failed to stop the construction of the wall, so Tobiah then comes to the fore. He bribed Jewish prophets to try to deceive Nehemiah (6:10-14, note Tobiah's name is now first in v12,14).
- We then discover that he had been busy forming political alliances with leaders in the Ecclesia (Neh 6:17), including marriage alliances (v18).
- He deceived most of the elders into thinking he was a warm, friendly individual (Neh 6:19a), while beneath the surface he hated Nehemiah and tried to privately intimidate him (v19b).
- He cultivated a friendship with Eliashib the High Priest (Neh 13:4), who furnished him a suite in the Temple (v7), where the tithes and Temple provisions were supposed to be kept (v5).

³³ The ESV Study Bible notes that in saying this, the people were 'daring God to punish them'.

- Many of the items that Tobiah's lodging should have housed (v5) were essential items for national worship:
 - o Meal offerings, oil and frankincense (e.g. Lev 2:1).
 - o The vessels of the sanctuary (Neh 10:39).
 - o Tithes - designed to allow Levites/Priests to focus on worship/teaching (cp Neh 10:35-38), and the porters/doorkeepers on keeping the Ecclesia safe.

These items were supposed to be under the oversight of the High Priest elect.³⁴ Instead, they were placed into the hands of a corrupt infiltrator! In this way, Tobiah placed a stranglehold on Bible teaching (role of Levites Neh 13:5), took control of national worship (singers v5) and undermined the ability of the doorkeepers to keep God's people safe (porters v5). And so, by stating that 'every one that doeth evil is 'tob' in the eyes of Yahweh', Eliashib brought the nation to ruin - this deceitful political alliance ate the nation out from within, leading to many of the problems in Neh 13.

What is the lesson for us, in view of the imminent return of our Governor, the Messenger of the Covenant?

'Where is the God of judgment?'

Once more, the nation presents a brazen question to God. Essentially, they're saying, *"You keep threatening that God will judge us and our day of reckoning is coming; but we've been living like this for as long as we can remember, and nothing's happening! Everything just continues like it's always been. Who says God will judge us, anyway - what we're doing is fine."*

This is a foolish and dangerous question - little did the people realise what they were asking for! This spirit has been found in the Ecclesia in many 'end-of-the-age' epochs:

- Before the flood (Lk 17:26-27),
- Before the destruction of Sodom (Gen 19:14 - Lot's sons-in-law 'thought he was joking' ISV),
- Before the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon (Isa 5:19; Jer 5:9-13; 17:15; Ezek 12:22,27),
- Before the coming of Nehemiah (here),
- Before the fall of Jerusalem again in AD 70 (2Pet 3:3-4), and
- It will again characterise the time before the return of Christ (1Th 5:3).

The principle is outlined by Solomon in Ecc 8:11: *'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.'* But ultimately judgement will come, as Malachi now proceeds to show.

³⁴ See parallels between Neh 13:5 & Num 4:16: oil / incense / meal offering / oversight of house of God / vessels.

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

This verse refers to two messengers: the first ('my messenger') will prepare the way for the second ('the Messenger of the Covenant'), who in turn will bring the judgements the people had mockingly referred to.

Behold, I will send my messenger

Back in 2:7, the priests were called the messengers of God, yet because they had failed in their duty, God would send them His own messenger.

The prophecy of the messengers has three separate applications:

1. The first was to **Malachi**, whose work was to prepare the people for the coming of Nehemiah.
2. The second was to **John the Baptist**, who prepared the way for the Lord's first advent. The three synoptic Gospels apply this reference to John the Baptist (Mt 11:27; Mk 1:2; Lk 7:27).
3. The third and final application is to **Elijah** the Prophet, who will come and prepare the Jews for the Lord's second advent.

Malachi's Prophecy Mal 3:1	First Fulfilment: Malachi and Nehemiah's times	Second Fulfilment: Christ's first advent	Third Fulfilment: Christ's second advent
'Behold, I will send my messenger	Malachi (name = 'my messenger')	John the Baptist	Elijah
'And he shall prepare the way before me	Warned Judah of Nehemiah's coming	Warned priesthood (Mal 3:3) and in fact everyone (v2) that the Messiah had come (Mt 3:7-12; Jn 1:19-34).	Will regather scattered Israel (Ezek 20:33-35) & purge them (v38; Mal 3:3) ready to meet Christ.
'And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the Covenant'	Nehemiah returned from Babylon (Neh 13:6-7) to re-instate the covenant made with Yahweh in Neh 10 (see v29).	Christ came to confirm God's covenant (Dan 9:27; Mk 14:24; Rom 15:8).	Christ will 'make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah' (Jer 31:31-34; cited of Christ Heb 8:8-12)

We are standing just before the third and final fulfilment of this prophecy. How relevant, therefore, is the message of Malachi for our day as we prepare for the coming of the Messenger of the Covenant.

And he shall prepare the way before me

Israel was in no fit state to receive the 'Messenger of the Covenant'. The work of the first messenger was to prepare their hearts and minds, penetrating the dullness of their spiritual perception.

This phrase alludes back to Isa 40:3, *'The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'*" Mark links Malachi and Isaiah together and applies them to John the Baptist:

'As it is written in the prophets, (Mal 3:1) Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. (Isa 40:3) The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight' (Mk 1:2-3).

John the Baptist also applies Isa 40:3 to himself in Jn 1:23. At the time of Christ's first advent, John the Baptist fulfilled the role which the priests had failed to perform by turning many away from iniquity (Mal 2:6-7).

The work of these three messengers was to introduce a new epoch of change:

- Malachi's message was to urge the exiles to repent from their evil ways and return to the elements of the covenant they had made (see Background, p9-15);
- John the Baptist's was to prepare Judah for the advent of their Messiah; and
- Elijah's will be to educate the remnant of Israel to receive their rejected Messiah.

And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple

The Lord Heb *adon* H113 = 'lord, master' (BDB) - i.e. a reference to Nehemiah (initially) and Christ (ultimately).

The phrase 'whom ye seek' is related to the question of the people in 2:17: *'where is the God of judgment?'* The insincerity of their question is matched by the irony of the prophet's response: *'whom ye seek.'* Those who professed to seek a God of judgement omitted to ensure they were ready for the coming of that judgement.

Nehemiah returned suddenly in Neh 13:6-7 and his return found the people totally unprepared. He literally returned to the Temple and began a much-needed clean-out.

In Christ's day, Israel was waiting in expectation for the coming of Messiah, yet when he did come, for most, his coming was not as they had expected and so they rejected him. Like Nehemiah, he came to a nation unprepared and conducted a forceful purge of God's house (Jn 2:13-17; Mt 21:12-13).

So also at his second advent, the Jews and many believers will be taken by surprise when the Lord returns (Rev 3:3). Appropriately, Christ's judgements will *'begin at the house of God'* (1Pet 4:17, cp Ezek 9:6).

The messenger of the covenant

This is a reference in the first instance to Nehemiah, who would come to hold the nation to account on the basis of the covenant they had made with God in Neh 10,³⁵ but ultimately it refers to Christ who came to confirm the promises to the fathers (Rom 15:8) and establish a new covenant (Heb 9:15). Just like Nehemiah, when he returns, he will judge us according to the covenant we have entered into with him and his Father (Jn 12:48-49).

Whom ye delight in

Everyone said they looked forward to the return of Nehemiah from Persia. But they woefully misjudged themselves. What about us? Do we say we look forward to the return of Christ? Are we *actually* preparing?

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

But who may abide the day of his coming?

Roth: *'But who may endure the day of his coming?'* They had asked where the God of judgement was, and Malachi responds, *he's coming, but consider whether you are ready for him! Will you survive his judgement?*

Christ instituted the memorials that we might be reminded to examine ourselves regularly and test whether we are in the faith (1Cor 11:28-32; 2Cor 13:5). We do this to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord, that by God's grace we might be able to endure the day of his coming, and that by judging ourselves now we might not be condemned eternally (1Cor 11:31).

And who shall stand when he appeareth?

None would 'stand' if God were to mark iniquities (Psa 130:3). None of us can claim to be righteous in the presence of God, but if we 'watch and pray,' remaining vigilant of our spiritual state, we may be 'accounted worthy... to stand' (Lk 21:36).

For he is like a refiner's fire

A refiner's fire was used to separate the dross from the gold. He would use fire to separate and bring the impurities to the surface, so that they could be removed, leaving the purified metal. The refiner's fire is therefore taken as an illustration of the way God purifies character (Prov 17:3) and perfects faith (1Pet 1:7) through the heat of trial.

In a limited sense, Christ did this work during his first advent. John said he would, *'baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire'* (Lk 3:16). Christ's words were refining and cleansing (Jn 15:3); they removed the dross from those who listened to him with a sincere desire to learn from him and obey him.

At his second advent, however, he will perform the ultimate refining work. He will come to purify his Ecclesia (1Cor 3:13-15), then Israel (Zech 13:9; Isa 1:25-27) and finally the world.

Note that fire is also used in a very different capacity - i.e. to consume, rather than to purify. Malachi refers to this in Ch 4:1, where the wicked will be 'burned up' as stubble - completely consumed. Cp 2Th 1:7-9.

³⁵ See Background, p14-15.

And like fullers' soap

The work of a fuller was to wash and clean clothes, which they did by trampling them underfoot in a trough and beating them with a stick. The idea is one of cleansing from spiritual and moral defilement.

God appeals to Israel through Isaiah to, *'Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes... though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool'* (Isa 1:16-18). The work of cleansing Israel is one that Christ will complete at his second coming.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

Why does Malachi reference two different purifying processes (smelting and washing)? Is there a difference between them? (Jer 2:22 and Rev 3:18 may help).

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

Roth *'Therefore will he sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and will purify the sons of Levi, and will smelt them, as gold and as silver; so shall they belong to Yahweh, offering a gift in righteousness.'*

And he shall sit

i.e. He will sit 'as a King and Judge on His throne, with authority, yet also to try accurately the cause of each' (Barnes).

As a refiner and purifier of silver:

The work of the refiner is to separate the pure metal from the dross. The analogy of trial and refinement of metals is a theme throughout scripture (Psa 66:10; Prov 17:3; 25:4; 1Pet 1:7). For those who are to be accepted, Christ will complete the process at the Judgement Seat, removing the final impurities that we might, by his grace, stand perfect before him.

And he shall purify the sons of Levi

When Nehemiah returned from Persia, he did exactly that (Neh 13:22,29-30). God has made a covenant with the tribe of Levi that they will never *'want a man before me to offer burnt offerings... and to do sacrifice continually'* (Jer 33:18,20-21). Accordingly, Christ's initial work at his return involves their purification in preparation for their future work (cp Isa 66:20-22).

Purge them as gold and silver

Symbolically, gold speaks of tried faith (1Pet 1:7; Job 23:10), while silver speaks of redemption (Ex 30:11-16; 38:25), so that there may be an allusion to the process of redemption by faith. The smelting process involved intense and protracted trials for Israel in 'the furnace of affliction' (Isa 48:10); if the Levitical priests are to lead in worship in the future age as Malachi goes on to show, then they will have to undergo a process of purification first.

That they may offer unto Yahweh an offering in righteousness

In the Kingdom Age, the sons of Levi will offer sacrifices in righteousness: *'And the Levites that are gone away far from me [e.g. in Malachi's day], when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having charge at the gates of the house, and ministering to the house: they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister unto them'* (Ezek 44:10-11).

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

Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto Yahweh

In the same way that the corruption of the Levitical priesthood (1:6-2:9) led to the corruption of the nation (2:10-16), so their refining (3:3) will lead to the spiritual restoration of the nation (3:4). The priesthood who once presented Judah's 'polluted' sacrifices (1:7), will now present a 'pleasant' offering on their behalf, having been 'provoked to jealousy' by the Gentiles' pure offering (1:11; Rom 11:11).

In its initial fulfilment, when Nehemiah returned to judge the nation, he reinstituted both the duties of the priests and Levites and the wood offering to support the Temple sacrifices (Neh 13:30-31).

Ultimately, this will occur once the wicked have been removed from Israel in the Kingdom age, a time of which Ezekiel speaks: *'I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me... For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, declares the LORD God, there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land. There I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings'* (Ezek 20:38-40 ESV).

As in the days of old, and as in former years

That is, the golden age of the Kingdom of Yahweh under David and Solomon (1Chr 29:20-25; 2Chr 7:1-12; note that Amos uses similar language to describe the days of David, Amos 9:11).

The Kingdom of God will be the 'restoration' (Acts 1:6) of that which was established under David. Accordingly, it is described as 'the restitution of all things' (Acts 3:21) and 'the regeneration' (Mt 19:28), because it is the glory of the former Kingdom of Yahweh restored (1Chr 29:23; Jer 33:14-18).

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

I will come near to you to judgment

NIV: 'So I will come to put you on trial.'

This is God's answer to the question of 2:17. The people had asked, *'where is the God of judgment?'*, so Malachi warns that though Divine judgement might seem slow in coming, it will come.

How would God come near? He would do so through His representative – the messenger of the covenant (v1) who will perform the work of judgement (v2-3). As with the other parts of this prophecy, there is a tiered fulfilment of this ultimatum:

1. Nehemiah would arrive as their 'Lord'/governor with authority to purge Jerusalem (Neh 13). He came particularly 'near' in judgement, striking and plucking out the hair of the offenders (v25)!
2. Christ would come near to his people in judgement following his first advent – in the armies of AD 70 (Dan 9:26; Mt 21:40-43).
3. Christ will again come near to his people (natural Israel) in judgement at his return (Zech 13:8-9; 12:10-14 – notice that this prophecy also speaks of Christ as 'me/Yahweh' 12:10; 14:3-4).

Of course, as the wild branches that have been grafted in to Israel's hope (Rom 11:17-22), we cannot expect that Christ will treat us any differently – he will come as a 'swift witness' against all who commit the following sins, whether in natural or spiritual Israel.

I will be a swift witness

Despite the long delay, Malachi warns that when God's judgements finally strike, they will be sudden (v1) and swift (v5). Habakkuk had given a similar warning of Babylon's invasion: '*If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay*' (Hab 2:3 ESV, cp 1:6,8).

This is exactly what happened – it is worth highlighting the action words in Neh 13,³⁶ as the governor moves from one thing to the next, wreaking God's judgements upon the wayward city. When Nehemiah arrived, it would be too late to change. It will be the same when Christ returns (Rev 22:7,12).

Against the sorcerers

Sorcerers Heb *kashaph* H3784 = 'to whisper a spell, to enchant or practise magic' (Str)

And against the adulterers

i.e. the covenant breakers of 2:14 who ignored the responsibilities of their marriage vow.

And against false swearers

False Heb *sheqer* H8267 = 'lie, deception, disappointment, falsehood' (BDB)

Swearers Heb *shaba* H7650 = 'to swear, adjure, take an oath' (BDB)

In Neh 10:29, the people had '*entered into a curse, and into an **oath*** (Heb *shebuah* – i.e. the noun derived from verb *shaba*)' to walk in God's Law and keep His commandments. Now, Nehemiah will come and witness on God's behalf against the liars who signed it falsely. This is extremely indicting language, and a powerful lesson for us!

What's more, this is not the first oath Nehemiah had taken of them – and which they had broken. Back in the period of constructing the walls, an immense ecclesial breach had broken out between rich and poor in the Ecclesia, with the rich oppressing their poor brethren (Neh 5), and Nehemiah had taken an oath of the priesthood that they would fulfil

³⁶ Nehemiah's actions in Neh 13: cast forth v8, commanded v9, contended v11, testified v15, contended v17, commanded v19, testified v21, commanded v22, contended v25, cursed v25, smote v25, plucked v25, chased v28, cleansed v30.

their promises to restore what was due to their brethren (v11-13). But now that's the next thing on Malachi's list...

Against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless

Oppress Heb *ashaq* H6231 – 'To press upon, oppress, violate, defraud, do violence, get deceitfully, wrong, extort' (BDB)

As in the days of Nehemiah's governorship, oppression was rife in the Ecclesia (Neh 5:2-5). Employees were taken advantage of, being overworked and underpaid. Those who had no helper or defender – the widows and the fatherless – were violated. But the rich nobility should have known what was coming, because these classes of people were highly protected under God's Laws (Ex 22:22-24; Lev 19:13; Deut 24:14-15, 24:17, 27:19; Prov 22:22-23). To attempt to steal from any of these vulnerable individuals, was to challenge God who had promised to 'plead their cause with thee' (Prov 23:10-11).

That turn aside the stranger from his right

Roth: '*and that drive away the sojourner*' – i.e. refuse to give help to a stranger in their time of need. Also prohibited (Ex 22:21).

Fear not me, saith Yahweh of hosts

This was the underlying problem, as Nehemiah had pointed out (Neh 5:9). The fear of Yahweh is a mindset. If the people had lived '*in the fear of Yahweh all the day long*' (Prov 23:17), they never would have treated their brethren in such a way (cp Lev 25:17,36,43). But they didn't (1:6).

SECRET SINS

Notice that the sins in this verse are mostly committed in secret or away from the public eye. What does this mean for us (1Cor 4:5)?

6 For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

I am the LORD

'The LORD' = Yahweh, God's covenant name (Ex 3:13-15; 6:2-8), which carries the assurance that He will keep His side of the covenant, as well as execute judgement on those who fail to keep theirs.

All the sins of v5 are found in Lev 19: sorcerers v31, adulterers v20, false swearers v12, oppressors of the hireling v13, oppressors of the needy v15, those who turn aside the stranger v33,34. Notice that a key theme of that chapter is '*I am Yahweh your God*' - it appears 16x! The reason for their obedience to these laws should have been because of a respect and a love for Yahweh's Name.

I change not

This is of the greatest importance in the times of Malachi. The nation had completely sabotaged their side of the covenant of their fathers (Mal 2:10). If God broke His side, then Israel were doomed. But God does not change: there is '*no variableness, neither shadow of turning*' with Him (James 1:17). He remained faithful despite the unfaithfulness of the nation.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

Make a list of all the places where God says He is unchangeable (maybe start with Num 23:19-21), and note any connections to the theme of God not destroying His people. Why does this matter to us?

Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed

God's covenant name was first revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3); a bush that was not consumed. The bush represented Israel. God's purpose with Israel would not fail, just as the bush was never consumed; His people would remain despite the persecution endured down through history (Isa 43:1-2; Jer 46:28). This was in stark contrast to Edom (1:2-4).



APPEAL TO THE NATION

TRUE WORSHIP

CHAPTER 3:7-12

APPEAL TO THE NATION – TRUE WORSHIP (3:7-12)

In v1-6 Malachi showed that judgement was coming. In v7-12 he now explains why it was coming and what could be done to avert it. God requires obedience, a changed way of life, not just theoretical knowledge.

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

Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances

'The days of your fathers' may refer back to the times of the Patriarchs (cp 'sons of Jacob' v6), however the term 'fathers' (Heb *ab*) is a broad term which can simply denote their 'ancestors' (ISV). It may refer to the generation who came up from Egypt (1Sam 12:6), or more broadly to their forefathers down through history who had been consistently wayward (Acts 7:51-52). From their beginning as a nation, Israel had perpetually turned aside from the commandments of God (Deut 9:7).

And have not kept them

Kept Heb *shamar* H8104 = 'keep, guard, observe' (BDB)

The reason God could work with Abraham was that He knew that '*he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall **keep** (s/w *shamar*) the way of Yahweh*' (Gen 18:19). At their inauguration at Sinai, God had made it clear to Israel that their position as God's 'peculiar treasure above all people' was conditional on their keeping of His covenant (Ex 19:5-6). Hence His appeal:

Return unto me and I will return unto you, saith Yahweh of Hosts

Israel had broken the relationship; they, therefore, needed to first turn back to God in order to receive His mercy. If a person acknowledges their need of God's mercy and reaches out to Him in humility, then He will hear and respond (1Jn 1:9). The parable of the prodigal son illustrates this principle. The father was always ready for his son to return, but the son needed to initiate that return. When he did, his father responded immediately and ran to meet him (Lk 15:11-32).

Malachi's appeal echoes that of Zechariah, some 90 years earlier: '*Turn ye unto me, saith Yahweh of hosts, and I will turn unto you*' (Zech 1:3). Zechariah, in turn, appears to allude to the reforming work of Hezekiah (2Chr 30:6-9): '*Turn again unto Yahweh God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you.*' He urged them to '*be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against Yahweh God of their fathers*'. As Malachi echoed this appeal almost 300 years later, one would think Judah would be able to reflect on their history and realise it was imperative to return, '*that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you*' (2Chr 30:8). But it was not to be.

But ye said, Wherein shall we return?

Israel's response was to question, "*What do you mean, return?! What's there to repent of anyway? Are you saying we've done something wrong?*"

They were blind; completely unaware of their true spiritual state, just like the goats of the parable in Mt 25:41-46.

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

Will a man rob God?

Rob Heb *qaba* H06906 = 'to cover, i.e. (figuratively) defraud' (Str).

Only other occ: Prov 22:23 'Yahweh will plead their cause, and **spoil** the soul of those that **spoiled** them.' God defends the poor who are taken advantage of, He will also punish those who defraud Him.

Wherein have we robbed thee?

The nation had drifted so far that they did not even *know* what they owed God. The same can be true of us: if we do not appreciate that we owe our lives to God (Rom 6:11; 12:1), then we will rob Him of his dues (Mt 22:21).

In tithes and offerings

The tithes and offerings belonged to God (Lev 27:30-32), and to hold them back, therefore, was theft. In reality, everything we own belongs to God – as David acknowledged, '*all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee*' (1Chr 29:14; cp Psa 50:10-12). But the tithes and offerings were an acknowledgement of all that God had given, and a way of showing gratitude and devotion to Him. The tithe also served a very important practical function: It provided sustenance for the Levites and then in turn the Priests (Num 18:21-24,26-31; 1Cor 9:13). This allowed them to focus on their role of educating the nation in God's way and leading them in worship (Mal 2:7; 3:3). Refusing to give the tithe, therefore, was to steal from God and to cut off the spiritual lifeline of the nation. This is exactly what Nehemiah found on his return (Neh 13:10-12), thanks to Tobiah (see notes on 2:17, p65).

MEDITATION POINT - A GIVING ATTITUDE

It is good to ponder our own attitude towards giving to the Truth. A miserly attitude to giving in God's service reflects a lack of understanding and appreciation of the true source of all that we possess. Consider the example of David who was *grateful* for the opportunity to give (1Chr 29:14), and the Macedonians who begged Paul to accept a gift towards the work of the Gospel (2Cor 8:1-5 ESV).

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

Ye are cursed with a curse

Despite withholding the tithes from God, the people had not benefited. God had brought a curse upon the land, evidently withholding rain (v10) and bringing infestations to harm their crops (v11). This is one of the curses Moses had specifically warned about as a

consequence for breaking the Mosaic covenant – for failing to listen to and obey God (Deut 28:15-17). It wasn't the first time they had suffered this since the return from exile either (Hag 1:2-6,10-11)!

For ye have robbed me, even this whole nation

This sin implicated the entire nation; both priests and people were guilty of withholding from God what was due to Him.

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

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse

Food would have been hard to come by in these times. During the wall-building phase about 15 years earlier, it was hardly safe to leave the precincts of the city (Neh 4:12; 6:2) and the nation had been suffering a famine (Neh 5:3). These hardships were likely used as an excuse for withholding the tithes.

Malachi calls on the people to fulfil the terms of the covenant they had agreed to with Nehemiah (Neh 10:29,32, 33). The key term here is 'all', they had to bring in **all** the tithes, not just whatever part was convenient to them at the time. (ASV: 'Bring ye the whole tithe').

Storehouse – Lit. 'treasure house'. The treasury at Jerusalem from where the work of the priests and Levites was supported (Neh 10:38 - s/w). By this time it was probably the residence of Tobiah the Ammonite (Neh 13:4-5, see notes 2:17 p65).

That there may be meat in mine house

This would mean that the Levites would be able to return to the work of spiritually educating the nation. By giving of their natural meat, the people would then be able to receive the spiritual meat from the Levites. Paul shows in 1Cor 9:9-14 that it is appropriate for those who minister in the Truth to be supported by those who benefit from their ministrations.

Prove me now herewith

ESV: *'put me to the test'* – a challenge to act in faith and fulfil their responsibilities. God had told them to *'honour Yahweh with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.'* (Prov 3:9-10).

Open you the windows of heaven

NIV: *'floodgates of heaven'*. If the people would give of their treasures (tithes) into God's treasure house, then He would in turn give them of His treasures and send rain: *'Yahweh shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season'* (Deut 28:12).

This had happened previously during the days of Hezekiah. Hezekiah had reinstituted the tithes, and the response was so overwhelming that the chief priest said, *'Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of Yahweh, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for Yahweh hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store.'* (2Chr 31:10)

11 *And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.*

NIV: *'I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe, says the LORD Almighty.'*

And I will rebuke the devourer

It seems the 'devourer' is a reference to locusts, which would consume the harvest when it appeared. Locusts were one of the curses of Deut 28 promised for disobedience (v38). Here God offers His Divine blessing of harvest and protection from infestation. Contrast Mal 2:3.

For your sakes

Removing the locusts would relieve the people of the famine they were experiencing and demonstrate the God was in control, motivating them to serve and worship Him.

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

And all nations shall call you blessed

Referring back to the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3). When the people returned to God in faith, they would be blessed like faithful Abraham.

For ye shall be a delightsome land

This was originally the case when the nation was brought to the Land (Deut 8:7-10), and will again be the case in the future: *'Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for Yahweh delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married'* (Isa 62:4).

*But unto you that fear
my name shall the Sun of
righteousness arise with
healing in his wings;
and ye shall go forth, and grow
up as calves of the stall.*

MALACHI 4:2



JUDGEMENT &
RELIEF AT THE
COMING OF
CHRIST

CHAPTER 3:13-4:3

JUDGEMENT & RELIEF

AT THE COMING OF CHRIST (3:13-4:3)

The final major section of the book, Ch 3:13-4:3, presents us with a series of arrogant accusations by the people against God, followed by His answer. The people assert that there's essentially no point to the Truth – serving God is a waste of time, we haven't got anything to show for all our service and worldly people prosper anyway.

God answers this series of accusations with an incredible response in 3:18-4:3. He takes the peoples' minds right into the future to put the present in its true context. To do this, he paints the picture of a sunrise. The sunrise is Christ's return, and Malachi uses this very same event to demonstrate the impact of the return of Christ upon both the righteous and the wicked. The same sun that brings warmth and healing to the righteous (4:2) will scorch the wicked (4:1). Through this word picture, Malachi lays to rest each of the peoples' accusations against God, while simultaneously providing a wonderful vision for the faithful.

The People's Accusation		God's Answer	
3:13	Spoke 'one to another' against God	Spoke 'one to another' in the fear of God	3:16
3:14	Vain to serve God	God will spare those who serve Him	3:17-18
3:14	What profit is it to serve God?	The righteous will be God's special treasure	3:17
3:15	The proud are blessed	The proud will burn like stubble	4:1
3:15	The wicked prosper	The righteous will tread down the wicked	4:3

THE PEOPLE'S ACCUSATIONS (3:13-15)

13 *Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?*

Your words have been stout against me

Their words (recorded in v14-15) had been 'arrogant' (ISV, NIV) against God.

What have we spoken so much against thee?

Roth: *'What have we spoken, one to another, against Thee?'* This is in contrast to 3:16, where the faithful remnant spoke 'one to another' of God's name and purpose.

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

Ye have said, it is vain to serve God:

Vain Heb *shav* H7723 = 'emptiness, vanity, falsehood' (BDB)

The Ecclesia was completely pre-occupied with business and mercenary pursuits (Neh 13:15-21). They saw no financial gain from following God's Laws, and so they regarded it as useless, a waste of time.

God answers this accusation in 3:18, when in the day of judgement, *'ye shall return, and discern... between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.'* i.e. there is good reason to serve God, even if you cannot see it yet!

What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance

Living the Truth was regarded as a transactional exercise: if we serve God, then we will be blessed with increase.³⁷ A mercenary attitude towards serving God is a far cry from the obedience motivated by love that our Heavenly Father desires. These people were simply in the Truth for what they could get out of it. The problem was that at the helm of the nation sat Tobiah, installed by Eliashib, and he was passionate about money (lived in the treasury, Neh 13:5) and knew how to use it to achieve his ends (Neh 6:12).

There is a lesson here for us too. Sometimes we can be in danger of viewing blessings from God as 'rights,' thinking that we are entitled to certain things because we serve God faithfully. Yet all these things are blessings, which it is God's prerogative to give.

And that we have walked mournfully

Mournfully Heb *qedōrānnîyth* H6941 = 'mournfully' (BDB), 'blackish ones (that is, in sackcloth)' (Str).

The problem was that it was all for show (Mt 6:16-18). They found pleasure in their mourning (cp Isa 58:3), rather than a humble, genuine mourning (Mt 5:3-4).

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

ESV: *'And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evil-doers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.'*

Asaph wrestled with this issue in Psalm 73. He first considered the wicked who seem to enjoy all the privileges of life without any regard for God (v3-16). They live in comfort and without care. But as Asaph grappled with this concept, he came to realise that the wicked will eventually come to their end (v17) - that they will be *'brought into desolation as in a moment'* (v19). But while Asaph's pondering led him back to God, the people of Malachi's day used this as an excuse to stop serving God.

Now we call the proud happy

Happy = s/w 'blessed' v12. While God said all nations will call them 'happy' if they obey Him (v12), the people retort that, on the contrary, it is the proud rebels who are happy.

³⁷ They had misconstrued the *national* promise of blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience (e.g. Deut 28) as an *individual* guarantee. This is often termed the 'prosperity gospel' - i.e., the belief that God blesses all who serve Him faithfully with material and physical blessings like wealth and health in this life, so those who are not blessed (or have trials come) must be evil (e.g. Jn 9:2).

In reality, the proud are destined to destruction (4:1; Prov 16:18). They are cursed by God (Psa 119:21), because He hates pride (Prov 6:16-17). He has *'respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off'* (Psa 138:6).

Yea, they that work wickedness are set up

Those practicing evil seem to prosper. They are 'built up' (LITV), or 'successful' (NET). Both Job and Jeremiah lamented the same situation (Job 21:7-15; Jer 12:1-2). The wicked appear to be well established in life – everything seems to go well for them, despite their shady dealings. But when God's judgements come, it will all go up in flames (4:1) and the righteous will be left standing upon a pile of ashes – all that remains of the once-imposing establishment of the wicked (4:3).

They that tempt God are even delivered

The people were tempting God's patience by their apathetic attitude to His service. Perhaps the worst offender was the High Priest himself. Imagine watching him stroll through the courts of God's house, hand in glove with Tobiah. Here he was undermining the nation from within; yet no consequences seemed to follow! But one day they would (Ecc 8:11-13) – Neh 13:7-9,28.

GOD'S PROMISE TO THE FAITHFUL (3:16-18)

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

Then they that feared Yahweh

In the midst of the corrupt nation, there was still a faithful remnant. They remained separate from what was going on around them and maintained a Godly reverence for Yahweh.

Spake often one to another

Spoke about what? 'His name' (see end of verse). They regularly met together to discuss God's name and therefore His purpose, strengthening and encouraging each other to remain faithful (cp Deut 6:4-7).

As in the First Century, when many were falling away from the Ecclesia, the faithful needed to ensure they were *'not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching'* (Heb 10:25).

If our minds are constantly thinking about God's Word and meditating upon His principles, then we will naturally seek to speak about those things to others. However, if our minds are filled with the things of this life, then we will find it difficult to engage in spiritual conversation with our fellow believers. Compare Lk 6:45, and Jeremiah's example (Jer 20:9).

And Yahweh hearkened and heard it

Hearkened Heb *qashab* H7181 = 'to prick up the ears, i.e. hearken' (Str).

God 'paid attention' (ESV) to their conversation. This is an astounding statement – Yahweh, the Almighty God seated on His throne in Heaven – heard what they were saying! This is singularly comforting, particularly in view of the general attitudes that were pervading the

nation in v13-15. God hears everything, including our conversations and our prayers (1Pet 3:12).

And a book of remembrance was written before Him

Picture the scene: While most people in the nation were thinking that the rich and powerful are to be esteemed, in the throne room of heaven it was very different. We can imagine a great book being opened before 'the Great King' (1:14), and upon its pages are written, one by one, the names of individuals that God wants to remember for all time. Most people didn't even know about these people, much less care about them! **'They** shall be mine, says Yahweh of Hosts.' Not the rich; not the proud; not the wicked. *These people* who humbly fear God and meditate on His purpose (Isa 66:1-2).

The picture presented is analogous to that of the Persian court in these times. It was customary for the kings to record notable deeds done by their subjects in a book (Est 2:21-23; 6:1-3; Ezra 4:15; 6:1). Scripture refers to two figurative books, one called the 'Book of life' which records the names of the faithful (Dan 12:1; Ex 32:32-33; Rev 3:5; Php 4:3) and the other which is a 'Day book' (or set of books), recording daily events in the lives of the faithful (Psa 56:8; Rev 20:12,15).

The people had charged God with injustice because the wicked were prospering (v13-15). But in this statement, God shows that He *does* remember those who faithfully serve Him; while they might seem to be ignored in the short term, neither they nor their service will go unnoticed.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

An excellent little study to do is to trace these 'Books' as they are mentioned throughout the Bible. Rev 20:12 indicates that there are indeed two separate types of book - determine how they differ and what the function of each is (Suggested resource: Eureka, vol 1, p360-364).

For them that feared Yahweh, and that thought upon His name

Thought Heb *chashab* H2803 = 'to plait or interpenetrate, i.e. to weave or fabricate... hence (from the mental effort) to think, regard, value, compute' (Str).

The same word is used throughout Exodus of the 'cunning' work on the Tabernacle. The picture here is of these faithful brothers and sisters weaving together all the different concepts bound up in the Name of Yahweh - the character of the one who bears that name, the purpose enshrined within it and the covenant symbolised by it. All these strands were brought together in their thoughts and conversations to form a beautiful tapestry.

THE NAME OF YAHWEH

'The Name Yahweh signifies 'He who will be' or 'He who will become'. It announces the purpose of the Creator to extend His family to embrace children who shall have a family likeness (both in character and ultimately in nature) to Himself. These children are selected from mankind, educated in His Word, called to manifest His character, and ultimately to attain to His physical glory (Rom 5:2; 2Pet 1:3-4). Thus the Name of Yahweh reveals what He who has announced Himself as 'He who shall become...' intends to do for His children. We honour Him by seeking out the things of the Name, and thinking upon them' (Bro HP Mansfield, Malachi Expositor, p226-227).

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

And they shall be mine, saith Yahweh of hosts

i.e. They become sons and daughters of the living God (1:6), spared from destruction (end of 3:17). The phrase 'they shall be mine' is reminiscent of the language God uses of His covenant with Israel, when He promised to be Israel's God and that they would be His people (Gen 17:7-10; Ex 6:2-4,7). This covenant is then referred to frequently throughout the prophets in the same terms (e.g. Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:27; Zech 13:9). We can also become God's by entering the same covenant (2Cor 6:16-18; Gal 3:26-29).

In that day when I make up my jewels

Jewels Heb *segullah* H5459 = 'possession, valued property, treasure' (BDB) ESV: 'treasured possession'.

This is a reference to God's promise at Sinai to make Israel His 'peculiar treasure' (Ex 19:5-6 - s/w as 'jewels' here).³⁸ This was originally a national promise, but it was conditional upon their keeping of His covenant (Ex 19:5), living as a holy nation that was dedicated to God (Deut 7:2-15). But Israel had fallen desperately short of their calling, instead living like the surrounding nations (e.g. Ezek 11:12). Consequently, Malachi says, it is now only a remnant who will make up God's 'special treasure'.

This remnant has been extended through Christ to include us, by God's grace (1Pet 2:9; Tit 2:14 - both clear references to the OT picture of God's 'special treasure'). But as we have seen, Malachi's day is much like our own. How we respond to Malachi's call is a choice we must make now.

I will spare them

Spare Heb *chamal* H2550 = 'to spare, pity, have compassion on' (BDB)

God's 'sparing' in the day of judgement will be an act of compassion. They have not earned their salvation; it will be God's gracious gift (Eph 2:8). That Malachi is referring to the day of judgement is evident from Neh 13:22. Four times in Ch 13, Nehemiah appealed to God to 'remember' the good he had done towards God, and the evil of his contemporaries. Ultimately, Nehemiah knew that they will all be brought to account when the *true* Messenger

³⁸ The word *segullah* trans. 'jewels' in v17 occurs 8x in Scripture: On two occasions it speaks of **literal treasures of kings** (David 1Chr 29:3; Solomon Ecc 2:8) and 6x of the nation of Israel as **God's special treasure** (Ex 19:5; Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Psa 135:4; Mal 3:17).

of the Covenant returns and sits in judgement. In that day, God says, He will spare the remnant.

As a man spareth his own son that serveth him

God's 'sparing' of the faithful remnant demonstrates His forbearance and mercy. It is not something they receive because they are faultless, but rather because they have tried to serve God and show by their conduct that they are His children (cp 1:6; Rom 8:13-15; Psa 103:13).

18 *Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.*

ESV: *'Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.'*

Then shall ye return

The 'ye' is the nation who had questioned the point of serving God in v14 and commended the wicked in v15.

And discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not

The people claimed that there was no benefit to being righteous; they claimed that the wicked were benefitting from being wicked (v15). Yet God shows here that in the day of judgement, He will clearly discern between the righteous and the wicked. He will show definitively that it is not vain to serve Yahweh.

THE DAY OF DISCERNMENT (4:1-3)

The people had asked, 'where is the God of judgement?' (2:17) and 'what profit' is there in living the Truth? (3:14). God, on the other hand, had asked, 'who may abide the day of his coming?' (3:2). In the final chapter of Malachi's prophecy, all these questions will be answered.

In v1-3, Malachi describes a day in which the difference between the righteous and the wicked will finally become apparent, when the sun (Christ) arises to cast his healing rays over the righteous and at the same time to burn up the wicked.

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

Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven

Burn Heb *baʿar* H1197 = 'to kindle or consume' (Str).

Oven Heb *tannûr* H8574 = 'a fire pot or furnace' (Str).

In this verse Malachi continues his answer to the question, 'Where is the God of judgement?' (2:17). He further expands on 'the day of his coming' (3:2), speaking figuratively of the intensity of the 'sun' on that day. This day will see the 'sunrise' of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness (4:2; Lk 1:78-79) and Messenger of the Covenant (3:1), who will begin his

work of judgement as a consuming fire (2Th 1:7-8; Acts 17:31). The simile of an oven or furnace (4:1) refers to the terrible intensity of the sun on that day, as fire can attain a greater heat when in a furnace than in the open. It is this heat which consumes the wicked, discerning between 'him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not' (3:18).

And all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble

Stubble Heb *qash* H7179 = 'straw (as dry)' (Str).

This is the fate of those who do not 'abide the day of his coming' (3:2). Israel had asserted that they '*call the **proud** happy... they that work **wickedness** are set up*' (3:15 - s/w respectively). In sharp contrast, the prophet shows that in the day of Yahweh, they will be like dry straw in the face of His fiery judgements. Imagine the swiftness and intensity of dry straw ignited in a burning furnace: that is how the wicked will perish, vanishing '*as smoke is driven away*' (Psa 68:2) by '*a consuming fire*' (Heb 12:29).

John the Baptist had a very similar message for the proud Jewish leaders of his day (Mt 3:12), as he warned them of the coming of Christ. John was thus fulfilling the same role as Malachi before him and Elijah in the future, as the 'messenger' preparing the way before the coming of the 'Messenger of the Covenant' (see notes on v5 and 3:1 for more detail).

Cp Isaiah's comments on the proud being humbled in '*the day of Yahweh*' (Isa 2:12,17; 40:23-24), and other passages associating stubble/burning with judgement (Nah 1:10; Obad v18; Mt 7:19; Jn 15:6).

FURTHER EXPLORATION - A CONSUMING FIRE

The idea of God's judgements as a consuming fire is a theme throughout scripture. Consider the following passages: Ex 3:2-4, Psa 145:20, Isa 33:14-15, 1Cor 3:13-15. Try to answer the following questions: What does the burning bush represent? Why was it not consumed? Why are some things consumed by God's fire but not others? Is there a link between the idea of God's fiery judgements and the idea of 'refining' in Mal 3:2-3?

It shall leave them neither root nor branch

Removal of both root and branch/fruit indicates the complete annihilation of the tree (Job 18:16-17; Ezek 17:8-9; Amos 2:9). John the Baptist had again used this precise word picture to warn the religious leaders of his day of what was coming for the Israelite tree in AD 70 (Mt 3:10; Mt 22:7).

Interestingly, there are a few instances in Bible prophecy where a symbolic 'tree' is said to sprout new branches from the roots that had been left after the tree was cut down ('*a Branch shall grow out of his roots*' Isa 11:1; '*out of a branch of her roots shall one stand up*' Dan 11:7; cp Dan 4:26). Thus, removal of both root and branch symbolises complete destruction with no possibility of revival.

2-3 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.

Having described the impact of the heat on the wicked (v1), Malachi now turns to consider the effect of the rising sun upon those who 'feared Yahweh, and that thought upon His name' (3:16).

The sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings

Arise Heb *zârach* H2224 = 'to shoot forth beams; to rise as the sun' (Str).

Wings Heb *kânâph* H3671 = 'An edge or extremity' (Str).

'The Sun of Righteousness' is Christ (Lk 1:78 'dayspring' = sunrise; 2Sam 23:4) who brought light to a world in darkness at his first advent (Isa 9:2; Jn 12:46) which will spread across the world at his second advent (Isa 60:1-3).

'Arise' is the usual word for the rising of the sun (Gen 32:31, Ex 22:3, Jud 9:33 etc.), so this verse paints a beautiful picture of a sunrise, the first rays of dawn shooting forth with invigorating warmth after the bitter cold of night, as those who fear the name of Yahweh are healed from the effects of mortality and sin.

'Wings' simply means 'the extremities.' The word usually describes the wings of animals (e.g. Gen 1:21) in that they are the animal's extremity, just like the 'borders' of one's garment (s/w Num 15:38). The sun, however, does not have wings, so that it is evidently a reference to the rays of the sun, as suggested by the NIV: *'the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays'*. These rays of light extend the sun's influence by penetrating the dark of night, and may well refer to the influence of the word of Yahweh (light, Psa 119:105) as it goes forth from the King in Zion (Isa 2:3-5).

Throughout Scripture the work of Christ is closely associated with the ideas of both healing and light.

- Forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice is described as **healing** (Isa 53:5), and the two are closely linked (Psa 103:3; Jer 33:6-8; Jas 5:14-16).
- Likewise, the influence of Christ is often depicted as bringing **light** to expel the darkness of sin from our lives (Mt 4:16, Jn 8:12, Acts 26:18, Eph 5:8-14).

These effects will be fully realised in the Kingdom Age, when the 'Sun of Righteousness' illuminates the whole earth (Isa 24:23, 60:1-3, 19-20), and the healing effects of forgiveness are extended first to natural Israel (Isa 30:26, 57:18-19, Hos 6:1) and finally to the whole world (Rev 22:2).

Go forth and grow up as calves of the stall

Grow Up Heb *pûsh* H6335 = 'To leap, frolic, gallop; this may refer to the playful pawing action of a young animal' (Kohl/Mounce).

Stall Heb *marbêq* H4770 = 'from an unused root meaning to tie up; fatted' (Str).

NASB: 'You shall go forth and skip about'; ESV: 'You shall go out leaping'. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p61) gives the following explanation for 'calves of the stall':

'Some oxen were raised for sacrifice or prime quality meat. Rather than running with the herd, they were fed in a small enclosure. Fatted calf, fed beasts, stalled ox, fattened cattle and yearling described such well cared-for animals.'

Calves of the stall were young, healthy, strong, well-nourished animals (Prov 15:17, 1Sam 28:24, Amos 6:4). This verse depicts the boundless energy of such a calf on being released from confinement – a fitting simile for the joy of the perfected saints when released from the bondage of sin and death,³⁹ healed by the 'Sun of Righteousness' with their youth renewed as the eagle (Psa 103:5). The righteous are now prepared for their work of personally participating in the judgements upon the wicked.

Tread down the wicked... under the soles of your feet

God's judgement on the wicked is figuratively described as a process of threshing wheat – a practice that would have been familiar to almost anyone in Malachi's day. During this process, the harvested stalks of wheat would be spread on the floor, and oxen shod with metal plates would trample on the stalks until the grain was separated from the husks.⁴⁰ There are several prophecies which speak of the involvement of the saints in this process of judging the world (e.g. Psa 149:7-9, 1Cor 6:2, Rev 17:14).

In the idea of treading down the wicked there are echoes of the campaigns of Joshua (Josh 10:24-25), the conflicts of the Psalms (Psa 44:4-7), the repulsion of Assyria (Isa 14:24-26), and the final victory of Israel over their enemies (Zech 10:5), all of which are brought about by Yahweh of Armies, and all of which echo the ultimate victory, the crushing underfoot of the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). No doubt this victory is one reason for the joyfulness of the 'calves of the stall':

'The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth"' (Psa 58:10-11)

³⁹ Imagine, for instance, the reaction of the Apostle Paul when his prayer of Rom 7:24 is finally answered.

⁴⁰ Ronald. F. Youngblood (1995) *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, p1268. Compare also Mic 4:13 which describes the ox threshing with hooves of brass.



REMEMBER MY COVENANTS

CHAPTER 4:4-6

REMEMBER MY COVENANTS (4:4-6)

In v4-6, Malachi now pleads with the nation to remember and return to the Law of Moses, concluding with a vision of the future when Elijah will come to finally turn the hearts of Israel back to their God. This is the prophet's final appeal to remember their covenants with God before the advent of the Messenger of the Covenant. As with Ch 3:1-6, although elements of this concluding section have a partial application to the times of Malachi and John the Baptist, the full application can only be to the time of Christ's second advent.

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

In concluding his prophecy, Malachi draws the nation's attention to Moses and Elijah. Of course, the selection of these two individuals is no accident. As well as being two of the great spiritual leaders from their history, both Moses and Elijah were passionate about Israel's keeping of their covenant with Yahweh (Deut 5:1-3, 1Ki 19:14), both have been or will be involved in an *exodus*, and therefore both were involved in the Transfiguration with Christ. Through these two men, Malachi encourages them to seek out the laws of Yahweh and return to the ways of their fathers.

Remember ye the law of Moses my servant... with the statutes and judgements

Statutes Heb *chôq* H2706 = 'an enactment; commandment' (Str).

Judgements Heb *mishpāt* H4941 = 'a verdict pronounced judicially; justice' (Str).

With these words, the last writer of the Old Testament roundly endorses the first. In view of the coming judgement, the best remedy for the woeful state of the nation was to get back to the Law – back to Bible study! Although the Law could not give life and was only a schoolmaster (Gal 3:24), it could teach vital principles that the nation was lacking at this time and could bring them closer to the God they did not really know.

Israel was about to enter a period of prophetic darkness as the sun went down upon the prophets, and Moses' example and laws would be an invaluable source of spiritual guidance during this time. Even though they lived in 'the last days', the answers to their problems were still to be found in the Law of Moses. Christ summarised the law in two phrases, namely '*love the Lord thy God...*' and '*love thy neighbour as thyself*' (Mt 22:37,39), both of which Israel had broken (Mal 2:10,14). A return to the law with its statutes and judgements was thus indispensable, for without the law, Israel would be lost.

We find ourselves in a similar position today, in a period of spiritual darkness awaiting the return of Christ. From our vantage point, Malachi's exhortation would include '*all Scripture*' (2Tim 3:16). God's word is not outdated. Though we live so many years later, we face many of the same issues as Israel in Malachi's day, and often the solutions to these problems are based squarely on principles that were first outlined in the writings of Moses, and elaborated throughout Scripture.

MEDITATION POINT - RETURNING TO THE WORD OF GOD

Consider the words of Paul that 'all scripture... is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness' (2Tim 3:16). God's word can have incredible power as a guiding light in the darkness of the world, but how important a role does it play in our daily lives? Do we turn to the Bible for help in overcoming challenges or making difficult decisions? The advice of Prov 3:5-6 to 'trust in Yahweh with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding' is often very difficult to follow. How can we increase our trust in the wisdom of God's word?

Which I commanded unto him in Horeb

Malachi takes his readers' minds back to the foot of Mt Horeb. It was here that God gave them His Law and covenant in the first place, and their status as his 'peculiar treasure' hinged upon them keeping that Law. To put it another way, they could not be God's jewels (Mal 3:17) if they refused to keep His covenant (Ex 19:5). There is something very graphic about the events of Ex 19. Israel needed to learn 'the fear of Yahweh' (Mal 1:6), and the events of Sinai were designed to help them develop that reverent approach to God.

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

Malachi now echoes the words of 3:1 concerning the 'messenger' who would precede the 'Messenger of the Covenant', applying them to the future work of restoration to be accomplished by Elijah. It may not be immediately obvious that both 3:1 and 4:5-6 are speaking about the same messenger, but there are two points that help to establish that connection:

1. Both speak of a messenger who would prepare the way for coming judgements.
2. Both find a fulfilment in the work of John the Baptist (see box on p94):
 - a. Mk 1:2 quotes Mal 3:1 and applies it to John (*as a secondary application, the first being to Malachi*)
 - b. Lk 1:17 quotes Mal 4:5-6 also in relation to John.

Hence, we conclude that both verses may be applied to the same messenger.

I will send you Elijah the Prophet

Like Moses, Elijah was a powerful example of faith from the nation's past. As a prophet to Israel, his most earnest desire was to turn the hearts of the nation away from their idolatry and back to Yahweh their God - a desire which was seen in his fervent prayer on Mt Carmel:

"Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again." (1Ki 18:37)

But although Yahweh answered with fire from heaven⁴¹, we know that the nation did not turn from their idolatry, and Elijah instead learned to work with a small group of faithful believers as a '*still, small voice*' (1Ki 19:12,18). His work was therefore incomplete - and it remains incomplete to this day. Yet from this verse we know that the day is coming when he

⁴¹ Elijah's offering was on an altar of 12 stones, which we are specifically told corresponded to the 12 tribes of Israel (1Ki 18:31), yet only the northern kingdom was present at that time. Perhaps the dramatic acceptance of this offering by Yahweh hinted at Elijah's future work in re-uniting the nation and turning their hearts back again.

will once again be sent to the nation, and his goal of *'turning their hearts back again'* will finally come to fruition. This is why Israel were to *'remember the Law of Moses'* – because the Law represented their covenant with God, and Elijah will be sent to call them to return to God and enter into a new covenant relationship with Him (Jer 31:32, Ezek 20:33-37).

In the days following the battle of Armageddon, Elijah will be sent as a messenger to the Jews scattered throughout the nations of the world to call them back to the land of Israel, an event often called *'the Second Exodus'* (see Appendix 2 for more detail). Elijah's role in leading this second Exodus is also hinted at in Luke's account of the transfiguration:

'Behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.' (Lk 9:30-31)

'Decease' is the Greek word *'exodus'*. Moses' led an *exodus* in delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt, Christ led an *exodus* in delivering God's people from the power of sin and death, and Elijah will lead a future *exodus* as he delivers Israel from Gentile oppression and regathers them from their dispersion.

JOHN THE BAPTIST - THE INITIAL FULFILLMENT

Malachi's prophecy concerning Elijah is quoted in the New Testament and applied to the work of John the Baptist. So, who is it really talking about? Elijah or John? The answer is: both!

At first glance this seems like a difficult question since Christ told his disciples that John was the *'Elijah'* (Mt 11:14), but John himself said that he was not the *'Elijah'* (Jn 1:21). Later, when Jesus' disciples questioned him about this issue, he confirmed that the prophecy has a dual application:

'Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things [future tense – future application]. But I say unto you, That Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed [referring to John who was beheaded]' (Mt 17:11-12).

So while there would still be a future coming of Elijah, *in a sense* he had also come in the person of John. The key to unlocking this conundrum lies in the words of Gabriel to John's father:

*'He [John] shall go before him [Christ] **in the spirit and power of Elijah**, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord'* (Lk 1:17).

While John was not *actually* Elijah, he came with Elijah's *'spirit and power'* – that is, he came with the same authority and a similar mission to Elijah in his future work. Like Elijah in the future, John's mission was to turn the hearts of the people back to God, to prepare them to meet their Messiah.

There are, however, important differences between the two. Since both John and Elijah precede Christ, their mission in each case mirrors the work of Christ at each advent:

- At Christ's first advent he did not come to convert the entire nation, but to work with a relatively small group of individuals. The work of John was therefore comprised of individual conversions and baptisms.

- By contrast, at Christ's second advent he will come to rule the entire nation, and the work of Elijah, therefore, will bring about a national reform.

John turned the hearts of 'many of the children of Israel' (Lk 1:16), but Elijah will 'restore all things' (Mt 17:11). For more detail, refer to *Mystery of the Covenant of the Holy Land Explained* p.22.

Before... the great and dreadful day of Yahweh

Dreadful Heb *yare* H3372 = 'To be awesome, be dreadful, be feared' (Kohl/Mounce).

Day Heb *yom* H3117 = 'Day (24 hours), daytime (in contrast to night); by extension: an indefinite period of time, an era with a certain characteristic, such as 'the day of the LORD' and the prophetic 'on that day' (Kohl/Mounce).

Note that the word 'day' does not necessarily refer to a 24-hour period; often it refers to a period of time that is marked by a certain characteristic. For example, Isaiah frequently uses the phrase '*in that day*' to speak of the era of judgement and restoration following Christ's return, and in most cases it is obviously not referring to a 24-hour period⁴².

The phrase '*the great and dreadful day of Yahweh*' is only used two other times in Scripture:

- Joel 2:11 - '*The day of Yahweh is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?*'
- Joel 2:31 - '*The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of Yahweh come.*'

The first of these (Joel 2:11) is in the context of Armageddon specifically, but the second (v31) refers more generally to the era of judgement on the world following Christ's return. We know that Elijah's work will be to lead a second Exodus - to call the tribes of Israel to come out of all the nations where they are scattered, so it appears that '*the great and dreadful day of Yahweh*' in this verse is referring to God's judgement on these nations, rather than to Armageddon specifically. It refers to the *era* of God's judgements on the world (which includes Armageddon), but for these nations the judgements will not begin until some time after Armageddon has taken place. Hence Elijah is sent *after* Armageddon but *before* these nations (and the scattered Jews) experience the judgements of the 'great and dreadful day'. Like Moses before the first Exodus, he will warn God's people of the coming plagues and call them to separate from the nations oppressing them.⁴³

⁴² There are 43 instances in Isaiah, a good example is Isa 11:11 which speaks of the process of Israel being called back out of the nations - obviously a process that will take much longer than a single day.

⁴³ There are differing views on the interpretation of this verse. Some understand 'the great and dreadful day of Yahweh' to refer to Armageddon specifically and thus conclude that Elijah will be sent out to preach *before* Armageddon takes place. While this interpretation could make sense in the context of Mal 4, it seems to contradict what we know about the timing and nature of Elijah's work based on various other prophecies. For more detail, refer to Appendix 2.

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

Turn the heart of the fathers to the children

Turn	Heb <i>shub</i> H7725 = 'To restore, recover, bring back' (Kohl/Mounce).
Fathers	Heb <i>ab</i> H0001 = 'Father, in a literal and immediate, or figurative and remote application' (Str).
Children	Heb <i>ben</i> H1121 = 'Son, child (of either gender), descendant (in any generation), offspring (human or animal)' (Kohl/Mounce).

Like many Old Testament prophets, Malachi comes to a somewhat abrupt end, summarising the outcome of Elijah's future work. This can be a confusing verse to interpret; the key lies in understanding who the terms 'fathers' and 'children' refer to.

One view is that this refers to the restoration of family unity in the nation, so that parents and children will no longer be at enmity – however this does not work with the context. This verse forms the conclusion of Malachi's prophecy, describing the end goal of Elijah's Second Exodus, and they are the closing words of the Old Testament. It seems incongruous to suggest that this verse is simply speaking about pleasant family relationships⁴⁴ – clearly there are more significant issues at play.

As per the definitions above, the words for 'fathers' and 'children' don't necessarily refer to immediate family relationships: often the meaning is closer to 'ancestors' and 'descendants'. Notably, when Malachi uses these terms elsewhere in his prophecy, they are always used in this sense.⁴⁵ 2:10 and 3:7 use the term 'fathers' to refer to Israel's ancestors, while 3:3 and 3:6 speak of the 'sons' (descendants) of Jacob and Levi. It seems reasonable to conclude that the pattern continues in 4:6.

Note that the word 'turn' means to return or restore. One of the key issues throughout Malachi's prophecy is that the nation had forsaken the ways of their faithful ancestors – they had profaned the covenant of their fathers (2:10). The work of Elijah will be to turn their hearts back again to the ways of their ancestors. He will restore the hearts (the way of thinking) of the forefathers to the children of Israel, and he will turn back the hearts of the children of Israel (their way of thinking) towards their ancestors. They will remember the principles of the Mosaic covenant which they had forsaken, their hearts will be turned back to the ways of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and they will thus be prepared to enter into the 'New Covenant' spoken of by Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-33) as they return to their God and learn to accept their Messiah. Bro John Carter describes this as '*bring[ing] Abraham's children back to Abraham's faith*'.⁴⁶

This passage is quoted by Gabriel in the New Testament in a manner which supports this interpretation:

'And many of the children of Israel shall [John] turn to the Lord their God. And [John] shall go before [Jesus] in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers

⁴⁴ Also notice that Malachi doesn't touch on the idea of inter-generational enmity anywhere else in his prophecy, so this would imply the introduction of an entirely new topic in the final verse.

⁴⁵ i.e. The plural forms of these words. The singular forms are used in 1:6, 2:10 and 3:17, in each case referring to a father-son relationship with God.

⁴⁶ *Prophets After the Exile*, Bro John Carter, p.307

to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' (Lk 1:16-17)

Notice that Gabriel quotes the first half of the phrase ('turn the hearts of the fathers to the children'), but then paraphrases the second half as 'and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just'. We can thus align 'the children' with 'the disobedient' and 'the fathers' with 'the just'. Bro Thomas re-translates this verse as *'to restore to posterity the father's dispositions, and disobedient ones to just persons' mode of thinking*⁴⁷. In other words, the disobedient children will turn back to the wisdom of their ancestors who were 'justified by faith'.

Thus, the prophet's reference is to the bringing back of God's people, the seed of Abraham, to the faith of their forefathers. This is a much more logical conclusion to the prophecy of Malachi, and in fact to the Old Testament itself!

FURTHER EXPLORATION - CHANGING THE HEARTS

In his first ministry, Elijah had to learn the power of the 'still, small voice' to change the hearts of those who heard it. Interestingly, this idea of the change of heart comes up several times in the prophecies of Israel's future restoration – see Jer 24:7, 31:33, Eze 11:19, 36:26. The same idea is also present in Hos 2:14 – see if you can find it!

Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse

Curse Heb *cherem* H2764 = 'devoted, set apart for destruction' (Kohl/Mounce)

'Lest I come' is a reference back to 3:5. God *will* come in judgement upon those who refuse to repent.

The 'earth' spoken of here is not the physical globe (which will not be destroyed, Psa 119:90; Ecc 1:4); rather, the 'earth' is a common prophetic symbol referring to the people of a nation (e.g. Isa 1 describes 'rulers' and the 'people' in v11 as the 'heavens' and 'earth' in v2). Applying this interpretation to Mal 4:6, then '*the earth*' which might be smitten with a curse refers to the Jewish people. As shown above, the word here translated 'curse' (which is different to the other words translated curse throughout Malachi) usually refers to something set apart for destruction (s/w used of Jericho in Josh 6:17-18). Ezek 20:38 indicates that there will be some at the time of the second Exodus who will not repent and will therefore be destroyed.

This follows the same pattern as Christ's first advent: John preached repentance '*for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*' (Mt 3:2). Then Christ came and warned of coming judgements when the Jewish earth would smitten with the curse of destruction (Lk 19:41-44), which occurred in AD 70 (Mt 22:7). Peter describes these events as, '*the earth and the works that are therein*' being '*burned up*' (2Pet 3:7,10).

Thus, the prophecy of Malachi draws to a sudden close. It seems like a rather negative conclusion to the Old Testament. God could have concluded Malachi's prophecy with the promise he made through Zechariah only a short while earlier: Zechariah spoke of 'one King'

⁴⁷ *The Mystery of the Covenant of the Holy Land Explained*, Bro John Thomas, p.22

in Mt Zion, of 'living waters' in Jerusalem, and of the city 'safely inhabited' with '*no more utter destruction* (s/w 'curse') (Zech 14:8-11). But he didn't.

God chose to conclude Malachi's prophecy with a warning – with a final dire warning for all who persist in their ignorance of or opposition to God's ways. This can only be because the listeners – be they of Malachi's day, or of our own – will be hard of hearing, and so all God can do in a hope to save them is to leave them with a warning. God *will* come in judgement – the question is how he will find us.

The promises of Yahweh are certain, and we need not fear His judgements if we learn to fear His name. For all those counted among His 'jewels', the day is soon coming when the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his rays.

A P P E N D I C E S

APPENDIX 1: UNLOCKING THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE POST-EXILIC PERIOD

Chronology is the backbone to any historical story. Understanding the order of events and their relation to each other provides a framework upon which we can create a mental picture of the times.

The period of Biblical history that follows the captivity of Judah into Babylon is a fascinating one. It embraces the historical accounts of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, the prophetic works of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, and it involves the fascinating life-stories of some of the Truth's greatest protagonists and antagonists.

But fascinating though it is, the period is also one which also presents significant chronological challenges.⁴⁸ Scripture dates the period according to the reigns of the Persian Kings at the time; however, we are not given a succinct, inspired list of the order and duration of each Persian Monarch. Multiple perspectives have therefore been put forward by Bible students over time, including Christadelphian expositors, on how to piece together the events after the exile. A summary of these perspectives has been given below, along with arguments for and against each view.

Ultimately, the exact sequence of events has little bearing on the moral lessons of the post-exilic story. Its primary value is in enabling us to create a mental picture of the times in which Malachi lived, but if one settles on a different solution to that presented in these notes, the ultimate lessons do not change.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE CHRONOLOGY

There are two main perspectives that have been put forward in Christadelphian writings concerning the chronology of the period after the exile:

- The **Traditional View**, which states that the Persian Kings are known in the Scriptural account by their historical name or primary title. This is called 'traditional' because it is the view generally accepted in Christian circles.
- The **One-King View**, i.e. the view that 'Darius', 'Ahasuerus' and 'Artaxerxes' are all titles for the same king, Darius Hystaspes.

⁴⁸ It has been described as 'the most difficult period in the whole realm of Bible Chronology' (Anstey, *Romance of Bible Chron*, p232).

A number of expositors have embraced each view, providing various arguments for each perspective, as outlined in the table below:

	Perspective Summary	Christadelphian Sources	Other Sources
#1	The Traditional View: <i>The Persian Kings are known in the Scriptural account by their historical name/title.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• John Thomas, <i>Chronikon Hebraikon</i>, p35-37.• F R Shuttleworth, <i>Who Was Ahasuerus?</i>, The Christadelphian, Vol 21, p408-412.• John Carter, <i>Prophets after the Exile</i>, p9-14.• Michael Ashton, <i>The Exiles Return</i>, p x-xi, 32-33, 56-60, 77,• Leen & Kathleen Ritmeyer, <i>Jerusalem in the Time of Nehemiah</i>. (Place Esther in reign of Darius Hystaspes).• Jeremy Thomas, <i>At the Citadel in Susa</i>, p14	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cambridge Bible Commentary, <i>Ezra & Nehemiah</i>, Intro, Chronology, p72.• NIV Study Bible, <i>Introduction to Ezra</i>, p720.• ESV Study Bible, see <i>Introduction to Ezra</i>, p799-802, and <i>Nehemiah</i>, p821-822.
#2	The One-King View: <i>'Darius', 'Ahasuerus' and 'Artaxerxes' are all titles for the same king, Darius Hystaspes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HP Mansfield, <i>The Story of the Bible</i>, Vol 4, p334-339.• Graeham Mansfield, <i>Daniel Expositor</i>, p250-256.• Jack Lawson, <i>The Ecclesia in Exile</i>, p72• CSSS chart, <i>The Kings and Prophets of Israel and Judah</i>.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anstey, <i>The Romance of Biblical Chronology</i> (1913), p232-257.

While other views have also been put forward by expositors outside of Christadelphia, it is these two views that will be primarily discussed below. The remaining views will be briefly considered at the end.

THE PERSIAN KINGS

Given Scripture dates events in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther according to the Persian Kings, a list of these kings is helpful in piecing together these events.⁴⁹

Reign (BC)	King	Length (yrs)
559-530	Cyrus the Great	29
530-522	Cambyses	8
522	(Pseudo-Smerdis)	7mths
522-486	Darius Hystaspes	36
486-465	Xerxes	21
465-423	Artaxerxes I	42
423-404	Darius II	19

⁴⁹ This list is taken from *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* (3rd Ed., p127-130, 203) and *The Times Complete History of the World* (8th Ed., p82-83) and agrees with that put forward in *The Exiles Return* (Bro Michael Ashton 1992, *The Christadelphian*, pX-XI), and is almost identical to that of Cambridge Commentary, *Ezra & Nehemiah*, pXLVI.

THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

This Traditional View, which is the one taken in these notes, takes the names and titles given in Scripture to be the same as those by which these kings were known historically. This appears to be both the natural reading of the Biblical account, and the best fit when all the data points are considered. An overview of this perspective is given in the Background (p8-15), and further technical details are elaborated below.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

1. Consistency of Biblical names

The names/titles attributed to each Persian Monarch can be read consistently throughout Scripture, with no need to chop and change. Consequently, this is the most natural reading of the text.

2. The 70-Weeks Prophecy

This view harmonises with the chronological requirements the 70-Weeks Prophecy of Daniel 9 (elaborated further, p107).

3. Flow of the Narrative

There is no need to shift entire sections of Ezra or Nehemiah (as Newton suggests, p109), except in cases where the author specifically indicates he is using a flash-forward technique (as in Ezra 4:6 *'and in the reign of...'* and 4:7 *'and in the days of...'*) or specifically referring back to past events (as in Neh 7:5).

4. Generations of Samaritan Opponents

Each epoch had its own group of leaders of Samaritan opposition. The Traditional View allows time for this:

In the days of...	Approx Date	The ringleaders were...	Reference
Cyrus / Zerubbabel	536 BC	Unnamed	Ezra 4:1-5
Darius / Zerubbabel	520 BC	Tatnai, Shethar-boznai	Ezra 5:6; 6:6
Artaxerxes / Ezra	485 BC	Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, Rehum, Shimshai	Ezra 4:7-8,17
Artaxerxes / Nehemiah	445 BC	Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem	Neh 2:19; 4:1; 6:1

5. Subject of Samaritan Opposition

The Samaritan opposition during the days of Cyrus and Darius focussed on the Temple (Ezra 4:1-5; 5:8-17), as did Darius' reply (Ezra 6:6-12). In contrast, the opposition during the days of Artaxerxes related to the 'city' and its 'walls' (Ezra 4:12,16,21).

6. Generations of High Priesthood

The Traditional View allows time for the six generations of High Priests listed in Neh 12:10-11. The first of these, Jeshua, was High Priest at the first return under Zerubbabel (Neh 12:1,7; Ezra 3:2), and the third, Eliashib, was High Priest when Nehemiah first returned (Neh 3:1). At Nehemiah's second coming to Jerusalem, which was evidently still during the reign of the same king 'Artaxerxes' (Neh 13:6), Eliashib's grandson was of marriageable

age (Neh 13:28). In contrast, it is difficult to fit all these generations into the 36-year reign of Darius Hystaspes with the One-King view. (See table p104).

CHALLENGES TO THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

There are, however, several difficulties to be considered with the traditional view. These are listed below, and then dealt with sequentially:

- The lists in Neh 10 & 12 contain many of the same names, yet they are supposed to be about 90 years apart.
- Age of Ezra & Nehemiah
- Age of Mordecai & Esther
- The wall of Ezra 5:3

1. The Lists of Neh 10 & 12

The Problem

In Neh 10:1-13 we read a list of the names of the leaders who sealed the covenant with Nehemiah in 445BC. But the problem is, this list contains many of the same names as the list of those who returned with Zerubbabel about 90 years earlier (538 BC), as recorded in Neh 12:1-7 (and Ezra 2 & Neh 7). If the two lists include the same individuals, and those in Neh 12 were, say, 40 years old at the time of the return from captivity (because they were all elders v7), they would be about 130 years old in Neh 10, which is very unlikely. How do we explain this chronological puzzle?

The Solution

The first step to finding the answer lies in mapping out the priestly generations of the returned exiles.

Seraiah is the first priest mentioned in the list of those who returned with Zerubbabel (Neh 12:1). He is also mentioned at the signing of the covenant 90 years later (Neh 10:2).

At the time of the return from captivity under Zerubbabel, the high priest was Jeshua the son of Jozadak (Neh 12:1; Ezra 3:2). In Nehemiah's time, the high priest was Eliashib, the son of Joiakim the son of Jeshua (i.e., the grandson of Jeshua, Neh 12:10, 3:1).

This is an important observation. Seraiah the priest was one of those who returned from captivity during Jeshua's tenure as high priest (Neh 12:1). When Jeshua died, he was replaced by his son Joiakim. When Seraiah died, he was replaced by his son Meraiah. The record explicitly tells us that Meraiah was contemporary with Joiakim (Neh 12:12).

Then, after the death of Joiakim, Eliashib became high priest. His contemporary in the line of Seraiah is not named, but it is presumably the son of Meraiah. Yet in the days of Nehemiah, when Eliashib was the high priest, we are told that *Seraiah* sealed the covenant with Nehemiah (Neh 10:1-2). Since the original Seraiah is now dead, this second 'Seraiah' is either:

1. A grandson of the original Seraiah, with the same name. (Seraiah would be notable as one of the captives who returned, so it is possible his subsequent family in Israel wished to enshrine his name when naming their children); or
2. A reference to the family or house of Seraiah, rather than the individual. The list in Neh 12:12-21 presents Seraiah as the 'chief' of his house, with his son Meraiah as

the priest in the days of Joiakim (v12), so whilst successive priests filled the various offices, the ancient names seem to have been retained as family designations.

Of the 22 names listed in Neh 12:1-7, eleven appear in Neh 10:2-8 (which contains 21 names). Although it's not impossible that so many families named sons after their grandfathers, this strong overlap suggests the names refer to families, rather than different people with the same names.⁵⁰

The chronology can thus be represented as follows:

Gener- ation	Approx Year	High Priest	References	Comment	Priests
1	538-490 BC	Jeshua	Ezra 3:2; Hag 1:1; Zech 3:1; Neh 12:1,10	Returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel, rebuilt altar and temple foundation, served during ministries of Hag & Zech	Seraiah
2	490-460 BC*	Joiakim	Neh 12:10,12, 26	Mentioned as serving after Jeshua. The priests listed in Neh 12:12-21 ministered 'in the days of Joiakim'	Meraiah
3	460-430 BC*	Eliashib	Neh 3:1,20- 21; 12:10,22; 13:4-7	High priest during governorship of Neh (445-433 BC), helped rebuild Sheep Gate, later compromised with Tobiah	(gson of) Seraiah
4	430-400 BC*	Joiada	Neh 12:10, 22-23; 13:28	His son married a daughter of Sanballat. Nehemiah opposed this type of intermarriage	(ggson of) Seraiah
5	400-370 BC*	Jonathan/ Johannan	Neh 12:11, 22-23; Josephus Ant 11.7.1	Mentioned as high priest in the Elephantine papyri (~407 BC), confirming his existence in Nehemiah's later years	(Descend- ant)
6	370-320 BC*	Jaddua	Neh 12:11,22; Josephus Ant 11.8.4-5	Last priest named in Nehemiah; Josephus records him as meeting with Alexander the Great	(Descend- ant)

* Generations are estimated at approximately thirty-year intervals.

As previously noted, it is worth observing that the succession of priestly generations listed above from Neh 12 is very difficult to accommodate with the One-King view of the chronology.

The Use of Family Names

During his reign, David divided the priesthood into 24 courses (1Chr 24:6-19), with each course being named after the original priest of that course. We read in Lk 1:5 that Zacharias was of the course of Abia, who is mentioned in 1Chr 24:10.

However, when the exiles returned in 538 BC, only priests from four of the original 24 courses returned (i.e. Jedadiah,⁵¹ Immer,⁵² Pashur,⁵³ Harim⁵⁴ - Ezra 2:36-39, Neh 7:39-42). Since the rest were missing, these four courses were divided to recreate the original 24

⁵⁰ Cambridge Commentary suggests, 'The 21 names given [in Neh 10] are those of **priestly houses**... we have no reason to look for the names of individual priests among the names of the priestly houses.' (Note on Neh 10:3).

⁵¹ 1Chr 24:7

⁵² 1Chr 24:14

⁵³ Pashur was a notable descendent of Malchijah in 1Chr 24:9, see 1Chr 9:12 & Camb Comm on Ezra 2:38.

⁵⁴ 1Chr 2:8

courses,⁵⁵ so that by the completion of the temple 15 years later the priests were 'set in their divisions' (Ezra 6:18).

In David's day, all priests from the course of (say) Abia were descendants of Abia. In Zerubbabel's day this was no longer true. As a consequence, family names carried a status and recognition independent of the course a priest was attached to. The fact that priestly families and courses were no longer related might explain the continued use of family names in Neh 10 even after the administrative courses were restored.

2. The Age of Ezra & Nehemiah

The list of those who returned with Zerubbabel in 538 BC includes two men by the name of 'Nehemiah' (Ezra 2:2) and 'Ezra' (Neh 12:1). Some have insisted⁵⁶ that these must be the same Ezra and Nehemiah we know from Ezra 7-Neh 13 because they share the same name. This would make Ezra at least 120 in the 20th year of Artaxerxes, and Nehemiah about 140 years in the closing scene of his book.⁵⁷

However, it has been well observed that '*identity of name is not a sufficient proof of identity of person*'.⁵⁸ The importance of this statement is demonstrated in the genealogy of Ezra, in Ezra 7:1-5. Notice there are two Azariah's, and when we compare the Chronicles account of Ezra's genealogy, we find there were in fact *three* Azariah's in Ezra's lineage (1Chr 6:4-15). So, care must be taken in identifying two names as the same individual - particularly when they are separated by more than a century of time. Many of the lists in Ezra and Nehemiah contain duplicates of the same name, indicating there were some names which were evidently more common at the time - e.g. Bani (Neh 10:13,14), Hanan (Neh 10:10,22,26).

The likely conclusion, therefore, is that there were in fact an Ezra and a Nehemiah who returned with Zerubbabel, and a different Ezra and Nehemiah who become the protagonists of Ezra 7-Neh 13.

Ezra's age has one more complication, however, and that is in relation to his father. Ezra 7:1 says that Ezra's father was Seraiah, and 2Ki 25:18-21 records the murder of the high priest Seraiah when Jerusalem fell in 586 BC. If this Seraiah is indeed Ezra's immediate father, then Ezra would have to have been born in (or before) 586 BC, making him at least 140y/o at the dedication of the wall in Neh 12.

⁵⁵ **The Jewish Talmud** explains: *'The Sages taught: Only four priestly watches ascended from the Babylonian exile, while the other twenty stayed in Babylonia. And these are the watches who returned: The descendants of Jedaiah, Harim, Pashhur, and Immer. The prophets among those who returned arose and divided them and established them as twenty-four watches. They achieved this by writing the names of these new twenty-four watches on pieces of paper, mixing them up, and putting them in a receptacle [kalfei] from which lots were drawn. A representative from the family of Jedaiah came and drew his portion and the lot of five other watches, for a total of six. Harim came and also drew his portion and the lot of five other watches, a total of six. And likewise Pashhur, and likewise Immer.'* (Talmud, Book of Taanit, sections 27a-b, accessed at www.sefaria.org/Taanit.27a)

Alfred Edersheim similarly comments: *'The institution of David and of Solomon continued till the Babylonish captivity. Thence, however, only four out of the twenty-four 'courses' returned: those of Jedaiah, Immer, Pashur, and Harim (Ezra 2:36-39), the course of 'Jedaiah' being placed first because it was of the high-priest's family, 'of the house of Jeshua,' 'the son of Jozadak' (Ezra 3:2; Hagg 1:1; 1Chron 6:15). To restore the original number, each of these four families was directed to draw five lots for those which had not returned, so as to form once more twenty-four courses, which were to bear the ancient names.'* (The Temple: Its Ministry and Services (2006 Ed.), Ch 4, *The Officiating Priesthood - The Courses after the Captivity*, p59).

⁵⁶ E.g. Floyd Nolan Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament*, p240.

⁵⁷ If they were already leaders in the nation when they returned with Zerubbabel, they would have had to be at least about 30 years of age. So, 538 BC (return of Zerub) - 445 BC (20th of Artaxerxes) = 93. Hence Ezra = at least 30 + 93 = 123 y/o in Neh 8-12, and Nehemiah = at least 30 + 93 + 12 (governor) + about 8 in Persia = 143 y/o in Neh 13.

⁵⁸ Keil & Delitzsch (Est 2:6), commenting on whether the 'Mordecai' who returned with Zerubbabel was the same individual mentioned in the book of Esther.

There are two potential solutions to this:

1. It may be that the Seraiah referred to in Ezra 7:1 is the one who, about 50 years later, returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2) and who was a priest (Neh 12:1), rather than the High Priest Seraiah who was killed by Nebuchadnezzar.
2. We know that at least 7 names are skipped over in Ezra's genealogy in Ezra 7:1-5 (see 1 Chr 6:14-15 & 9:11), and it is likely there were more,⁵⁹ so that it is also entirely plausible that Ezra's father, and possibly grandfather, are excluded as well.⁶⁰

3. The Age of Mordecai & Esther

Another argument against the conventional dating, somewhat similar to the last, is that if the Ahasuerus of Scripture was Xerxes (as the Traditional view suggests), then Mordecai and Esther would be absurdly old in the events of the book of Esther. It is said that Est 2:5-6 states that Mordecai was carried *into* Babylon with Jehoiachin (598 BC), and given Xerxes ruled 486-465 BC, Mordecai would have to be at least 120 years old, and his cousin Esther (v7) a similarly unrealistic age – yet still 'fair and beautiful' (Est 2:7). The most likely solution appears to be that the individual referred to in Est 2:6 is Kish, the great-grandfather of Mordecai, who was carried into Babylon.⁶¹

It must also be noted that if we read Est 2:5-6 to mean that it was *Mordecai* himself who was carried captive into Babylon, then the age of Mordecai and Esther become problematic with the One-King view as well. If we assume that Mordecai was taken captive as a baby in 598 BC, then he must be at least 77 years of age by the time Darius Hystaspes commenced his reign in 521 BC, and 84 years of age when Esther was taken into the king's house in his 7th year, 514 BC (Est 2:16). Esther being his cousin (2:7) would therefore be quite old to be described as 'fair and beautiful' (2:7), although it is not impossible (Gen 12:11).

4. The Wall of Ezra 5:3

In Ezra 5:3, which is set during the 2nd year of Darius (Ezra 4:24), the Samaritans challenge Joshua and Zerubbabel by asking: '*Who hath commanded you to build this house, **and to make up this wall?***' Anstey takes this to mean that '*they were building both the house and the wall at the same time*'.⁶²

The answer to this suggestion is relatively simple, however: The word translated 'wall' here refers to the Temple walls and is different from the words used to describe the city walls of Jerusalem:

⁵⁹ Cambridge Commentary on Ezra 7:1: 'In this genealogy 15 names occur between Ezra and Aaron. This is manifestly too small a number for a period of about 1000 years (reckoning 30 years to a generation), especially when we find 26 names recorded between Zerubbabel (who was of the previous generation to that of Ezra) and Nashon, prince of Judah, the contemporary of Aaron, in 1Ch 2:10-15; 1Ch 3:1-19. Ezra's genealogy therefore appears here in an abbreviated form.'

⁶⁰ See ISBE on 'Ezra' and McClintock and Strong Biblical Cyclopedia on 'Seraiah'.

⁶¹ Keil & Delitzsch (on Est 2:6) suggest that, while this may be possible, it is more likely that the phrase, '*involves only the notion that he belonged to those Jews who were carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar with Jeconiah, so that he, though born in captivity, was carried to Babylon in the persons of his forefathers.*'

⁶² Martin Anstey, *The Romance of Bible Chronology*, p241.

Str#	Word	Meaning	Occ	Comment	Used of
0846	<i>ush-sharna</i>	'wall, paneling, beams, structure' (BDB)	Ezra 5:3,9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Ezra-Nehemiah, these two words are only used in Ezra 5 and are used interchangeably. Clearly refer to the Temple walls (see v3-4,8-9). The focus of Ch 5-6 is clearly on 'the house' 5:2,3,4(this building),8,11,12,13,14(x2),15(x2),16,17; 6:3(x2),5(x4),7(x2),8,12,15,16,17,22. 	Temple
03797	<i>kethal</i>	'a wall' (BDB)	Ezra 5:8		
07792	<i>shur</i>	'wall' (BDB)	Ezra 4:12, 13,16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used 3x in connection with 'the city'. Set in the reign of Artaxerxes Refers to Ezra's work building the walls of Jerusalem, some time between 7th – 20th year of Artaxerxes. 	City walls
01447	<i>gader</i>	'fence, wall' (BDB)	Ezra 9:9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the idea of protection (as trans. in ESV), and refers not to a literal wall but the safety granted by God through the decrees of Cyrus & Darius (Keil & Delitzsch, Camb Comm) 	Divine protection
02346	<i>chomah</i>	'wall' (BDB)	All thru Nehemiah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly refers to 'the wall of Jerusalem' (1:3), i.e. 'the wall of thee city' (2:8) throughout Nehemiah. Is the only word translated 'wall' in Nehemiah, where it occurs 32x. 	City walls

THE ONE-KING VIEW

This approach was promoted by Martin Anstey in his book *The Romance of Bible Chronology* (1913). A summary is given by Bro Perce Mansfield in *The Story of the Bible*, Vol 4, p334-339, and we recommend reading that section for a good overview of this approach, including arguments in its favour.⁶³

In essence, this view assumes that the Bible uses three different titles for the same king, Darius Hystaspes, making the events of Ezra, Esther and Nehemiah all fit within his 36-year reign.

CHALLENGES TO THE ONE-KING VIEW

A number of problems arise by making all three titles of Darius, Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes apply to Darius Hystaspes.

1. The 70-Weeks Prophecy

The most significant challenge relates to the duration of the 70-Weeks Prophecy. In its simplest form, this prophecy given to Daniel in Dan 9:24-27 provided the returning Jews with a timeline until the coming of Messiah. Each week stood for 1 year, so that a period totalling 490 years was spoken of by Gabriel. This period of 490 years would commence with '*the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem*' (Dan 9:24-25). There are four potential decrees which this could relate to:

⁶³ Or, for a more detailed survey of the evidence to support the One-King view, see p232-257 of *The Romance of Bible Chronology* (Martin Anstey, 1913). As at Nov 2025, this can be accessed at <https://archive.org/>.

#	King	Yr of King	Decree Recorded	Subject of Decree	Trad date	One-King date ⁶⁴
1	Cyrus	1 st (Ezra 1:1)	Ezra 1:1-4	Rebuilding of temple	538 BC	538 BC
2	Darius	2 nd (Ezra 4:24; 5:3)	Ezra 6:1-12	Rebuilding of temple	520 BC	520 BC
3	Artaxerxes	7 th (Ezra 7:7)	Ezra 7:11-26	Restoration of temple worship & authority of Ezra	458 BC	515 BC
4	Artaxerxes	20 th (Neh 2:1)	Neh 2:1-9	Nehemiah's travel and rebuilding of the city	445 BC	502 BC

The basic problem is that if ‘Artaxerxes’ in Ezra 7-10 and Nehemiah is Darius Hystaspes, then the 490 years ends before Christ was even born. Yet the 70-Weeks Prophecy points to the ‘cutting off’ of Messiah at his crucifixion, partway through the last prophetic week. This view, therefore, is not possible with the current dating system. Anstey’s solution to this was to suggest an error of about 82⁶⁵ years in the secular chronology of the Persian kings.

2. The Kings of Ezra 4

Ezra 4 mentions all three kings: Darius (v5,24), Ahasuerus (v6) and Artaxerxes (v7-23). The One-King View requires us to either read these as all the same king, or assume that the latter titles refer to a different ‘Ahasuerus’ and ‘Artaxerxes’.

The suggested solution⁶⁶ to this conundrum is that the ‘Ahasuerus’ of Ezra 4:6 is Cambyses, and the ‘Artaxerxes’ of 4:7-23 is Pseudo-Smerdis, so that the chapter reads chronologically from Cyrus (v1-5), through Cambyses (v6), Pseudo-Smerdis (v7-23) to Darius (v24).

This solution is not viable, however, because Pseudo-Smerdis reigned for only 7 months, which does not allow a reasonable timeframe for the interactions of v7-23, bearing in mind the length of the journey between Jerusalem and Shushan (Ezra 7:9).⁶⁷

3. The Kings of Ezra 6:14

Ezra 6:14 names three kings who issued commands supporting the building of God’s house:

3. Cyrus (see Ezra 1:2)
4. Darius (see Ezra 6:6-9)
5. Artaxerxes (see Ezra 7:21-23,27)

The One-King View states that the text of Ezra 6:14, which reads, *‘They builded (the Temple), and finished it, according to... the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia’*, should be changed to *‘Cyrus, and Darius, **even** Artaxerxes,’* on the premise that only two kings, Cyrus and Darius, issued decrees to build the Temple.⁶⁸ The rationale for this change is that the Hebrew *vav* rendered ‘and’ can also be translated ‘even’. This appears to be selective, however, given the same conjunction *vav* is translated ‘Cyrus, **and** Darius, **and** Artaxerxes’. Given Artaxerxes did issue a decree that *‘whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven’* (Ezra 7:23), there is no need to reinterpret Ezra 6:14.

⁶⁴ Calculated on the basis that ‘Darius’ & ‘Artaxerxes’ both = Darius Hystaspes, so that the years are allocated according to his reign.
⁶⁵ Anstey, *The Romance of Bible Chronology*, p256. The *Daniel Expositor* suggests 44 years difference (Ch 9, p251).
⁶⁶ In both *The Romance of Bible Chronology*, p239-240, and *The Story of the Bible*, vol 4, p338.
⁶⁷ Anstey later uses Ezra’s 4-month travel period as an estimate for the duration of Nehemiah’s journeys (p253).
⁶⁸ Martin Anstey, *The Romance of Bible Chronology* (1913), p244; *The Story of the Bible*, vol 4, p336.

OTHER VIEWS

Suggestion	Comment	Source
Isaac Newton		
Newton contends that Neh 7:5-12:9 should be inserted into the book of Ezra between Ezra 3:7 and 3:8, so that Nehemiah leads a national reform with Ezra in the first year of Cyrus, before Zerubbabel constructs the temple (which occurs in Ezra 3:8-6:21).	<p>The basic premise for this is that, following the parallel lists of those who returned under Josh & Zerub in Ezra 2 & Neh 7, both records go on to describe a keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles using parallel language (Ezra 2:70-3:1 / Neh 7:73-8:1).</p> <p>In response, note the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We cannot assume that because descriptions are parallel, the events must be identical. Events in Scripture are frequently described in the same way – and often with the same words – as a previous event, to show that the latter group are following the example of the former. 2. In Ezra 3, Zerub was governor (v2; Hag 1:1), whereas in Neh 8 it was Nehemiah (v9). These governorships were two separate time periods (Neh 12:47). 3. Neh 8:16 records that the people constructed booths ‘in the courts of the house of God’, yet in Ezra 3:6 we are specifically told that ‘the foundation of the Temple of Yahweh was not yet laid.’ They must, therefore, be separate events. 	<i>Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended</i> , p358. (Summarised in Floyd Nolan Jones’ <i>The Chronology of the OT</i> , p243-244).
Floyd Nolan Jones		
<p>Follows Newton’s basic proposal with a few tweaks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests a 9yr co-regency between Artaxerxes I and his father Xerxes. • Suggests the Ahasuerus & Artaxerxes of Ezra 4 = Cambyses & Pseudo-Smerdis respectively. 	<p>The above comments on Newton’s suggestion also apply to FNJ, who embraces the same view.</p> <p>Regarding FNJ’s proposal of a co-regency between Xerxes and Artaxerxes; this evidently boils down to which historical sources/inscriptions one relies on most.</p> <p>The suggestion regarding Ezra 4 appears unlikely for the reasons already noted.</p>	<i>The Chronology of the Old Testament</i> , p226-240; 240-249; 249 n.2 and 251-252,257; 267-272.
Bullinger		
Places the two books in parallel, starting with Neh’s return in 445 BC.	Creates more problems than it solves.	<i>Companion Bible</i> , Appendix 58

FURTHER READING

Many of the arguments for and against the Traditional View are discussed further in *The Exiles Return*, by Bro Michael Ashton, and we recommend this for further reading.⁶⁹ For a detailed consideration of the identity of Ahasuerus, the following may prove helpful: *At the Citadel in Susa* (Bro Jeremy Thomas), and the article ‘Who is Ahasuerus’ (Bro FR Shuttleworth, *The Christadelphian*, Vol 21, p408-412).

In the end, a correct understanding of the chronology of events is helpful for building a mental picture of all that had occurred in the times leading up to Malachi’s prophecy, but small differences in perspective on the chronology will not change the truly important aspects of this period – the timeless lessons for our own lives today.

⁶⁹ Particularly **Ch 7**, p32-33 ‘An outline of Ezra and Nehemiah’; **Ch 11**, p56-57 - a good overview of Ezra 4; **Ch 20**, p107-112; and **Appendices 1, 3 and 6** (p205-226).

SUMMARY TABLE

This table summarises the key events of the Post-exilic period, according to the traditional view, and complements the timeline on p8.

BC	Event	Passage
539	Cyrus conquers Babylon	
538	Decree of Cyrus to return & build the Temple - 1st yr Cyrus ⁷⁰	2Chr 36:22; Ezra 1:1; 5:13; 6:3
538	Return under Zerubbabel	Ezra 2:1-67
538	Altar built & Feast of Tabernacles kept (7 th mth)	Ezra 3:1-4
535	Foundation of Temple laid (2 nd mth/2 nd yr of return)	Ezra 3:8-10
	Adversaries of Judah cause Temple building to cease	Ezra 4:5
536	Daniel receives last prophecy (Ch 10-12) - 3rd yr Cyrus	Dan 10:1
530	Cambyses commences 8yr reign	
	Pseudo-Smerdis commences 7mth reign	
522	Darius I Hystaspes commences 36yr reign	
520	Haggai & Zechariah commence prophesying (2nd yr Darius)	Ezra 5:1; Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1,7
	Work on God's house recommenced	Hag 1:15; Ezra 4:24; 5:1
518	Zechariah's Latter Prophecies commence	Zech 7:1
516	Temple completed (6 th yr Darius)	Ezra 6:15 (Adar = 12th mth, Est 3:7)
516	Passover kept	Ezra 6:19
486	Xerxes begins 21yr reign	
~485	Accusation written in beginning of Ahasuerus' reign ⁷¹	Ezra 4:6
483	Ahasuerus' 180-day Feast	Est 1:3,4
479	Esther becomes queen	Est 2:16,17
474	Haman schemes to destroy Jews	Est 3:7
473	Decree published to kill all Jews in 11mths time	Est 3:12,13
	Jews saved & feast of Purim instituted	Est 8:9; 9:21,26
465	Artaxerxes I begins 42yr reign	
458	Ezra resumes his account after 58 yr gap ⁷² , describing how he left Babylon (v7) with ~8000 others ⁷³ and a letter of authority from Artaxerxes (v11-26) (1d/1m/7yr Artaxerxes)	Ezra 7:9
	Ezra arrives in Jerusalem (1d/5m/7yr)	Ezra 7:7-9
	Ezra gathers the people to Jerusalem to sort out intermarriage; great rain (20d/9m)	Ezra 10:9
	Ezra's work of purging intermarriage begins (1d/10m)	Ezra 10:16
~457	Ezra's work of purging intermarriage ends (1d/1m)	Ezra 10:17
	After purging the Ecclesia, Ezra evidently stirred up the people to commence building the walls. The enemies around saw this and, noting that Ezra's letter from Artaxerxes (7:11-26) did not give express permission to build the walls, they mounted a conspiracy and wrote to Artaxerxes ⁷⁴ with an objection (Ezra 4:7-11-16).	
~451	Letter in the days of Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:7) brings reply (v17-22) demanding work on city walls cease.	Ezra 4:11-16
445	Hanani tells Nehemiah of Jerusalem's desolate condition (9m ⁷⁵ /20yr Artaxerxes)	Neh 1:1,2
	Nehemiah obtains leave of Artaxerxes (1m ⁷⁶ /20yr)	Neh 2:1,6
	'The Queen sitting by him' may be a reference to Esther as queen-mother (34yrs after she was made queen by Xerxes)	Neh 2:6
	Wall of Jerusalem begun	Neh 2:18
	Wall of Jerusalem completed after 52 days	Neh 6:15
	Ezra reads the Law, followed by Feast of Tabernacles	Neh 8:2
	The prayer of the Levites & the Covenant made (Neh 9-10)	Neh 9:1
433	Nehemiah returns to Persia after being governor for 12yrs	Neh 5:14; 13:6
	Malachi prophecies whilst Nehemiah is back in Persia	See table, p15
~425	After 'certain days' Nehemiah obtains leave a second time	Neh 13:6

⁷⁰ According to secular history, Cyrus had been reigning since 559 BC.

⁷¹ This chronology takes Ahasuerus of Ezra 4:6 to be the same as Ahasuerus in the book of Esther, and identifies both with king Xerxes I of secular history (r. 486-465 BC).

⁷² 6th yr of Darius (516 BC) Ezra 6:19 to 7th yr of Artaxerxes (458 BC) Ezra 7:9.

⁷³ There are ~1770 males listed in Ezra 8, plus women & children = ~8000.

⁷⁴ It appears reasonable to assume that the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:7-23 is the same as Artaxerxes of Ezra 7-Neh 13; i.e. Artaxerxes I Longimanus of secular history (r. 465-423 BC).

⁷⁵ Chisleu = 9th month Zech 7:1.

⁷⁶ Note, years are dated according to the Persian kings whereas the months are Jewish months, so that Nisan (Neh 2:1, the first month Est 3:7) is four months after Chisleu (Neh 1:1, the ninth month Zech 7:1), but is still within the 20th year of Artaxerxes.

APPENDIX 2: THE FUTURE WORK OF ELIJAH

The restoration of the nation of Israel back to their land is one of the most prevalent themes throughout Bible prophecy, and a thorough exposition of the topic might easily be longer than this entire set of notes! What follows is therefore just a brief overview of some of the key points.

JUDAH AND ISRAEL

From the days of Rehoboam onwards, the twelve tribes of Israel were split across two separate political entities: The Kingdom of Israel (in the north – sometimes referred to as ‘Ephraim’) and the Kingdom of Judah (in the south). While we often think of Israel as the ‘ten tribes’ and Judah as the ‘two tribes’, the reality was more complicated:

- The Kingdom of Judah in Rehoboam’s time incorporated not just the literal tribe of Judah, but the tribe of Benjamin and the Levites (2Chr 11:12-14) as well as ‘all those that dwelt in the cities of Judah’ (1Ki 12:17, 2Chr 10:17), which likely included at least some of Simeon since Simeon’s territory was fully enclosed by Judah (Josh 19:9).
- Throughout the ensuing reigns there was a gradual migration of the faithful to Judah (2Chr 11:16, 15:9, 30:11, 31:1, 34:6) so that by the time of the captivity, ‘Judah’ was comprised of a smattering of all of the tribes.

Israel (the Northern Kingdom) were eventually taken captive into Assyria, and Judah were later taken captive into Babylon. However, the return of the exiles was (so far as we know) exclusively from Babylon, and the restored nation (i.e. the Jews in the land at the time of Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi) was called ‘Judah’ (e.g. Neh 2:5, 5:14). Thus, the distinction between ‘Judah’ and ‘Israel’ remained: ‘Judah’ referred to the Jews in the Land of Israel, and ‘Israel’ therefore referred to those outside.

This distinction becomes particularly important when considering the Prophecies of the Restoration and the Second Exodus. From various prophecies (e.g. Ezek 38:8 and Zech 14:14), we understand that there will be Jews living in the Land of Israel at the time of Armageddon⁷⁷. These are referred to prophetically as ‘Judah’, while those outside the land (who will be gathered by Elijah) are referred to as ‘the house of Israel’⁷⁸. Following Armageddon, the Jews in the land who survive will be delivered by Christ and will come to accept him as their ruler and Messiah (Zech 12). Notice that, as David’s son, Christ will follow the same pattern as David in being accepted as ruler over Judah before he is accepted by the rest of the nation (2Sam 5:1-5).

⁷⁷ This is the ‘partial and primary restoration’ spoken of by Bro Thomas (*Elpis Israel* p441). The modern nation of Israel existing in the land today thus fulfils one of the requirements for Armageddon to take place.

⁷⁸ It is important to exercise caution when interpreting this rule because sometimes ‘Israel’ refers to the whole nation (including Judah) (e.g. Ezek 37:11). This might sound confusing but in practice the meaning is usually quite clear from the context.

THE MESSENGERS

Following Armageddon, Elijah will be sent out to preach to the Jews who are scattered among the nations of the earth – the beginning of the Second Exodus. He will, however, have assistants who will aid him in this work, and the prophecies tell us exactly who these assistant messengers will be.

The prophecy of Zech 13 tells us that there will be a massive slaughter of the Jews in the land of Israel at the time of Armageddon: Two thirds of the nation will die (v8), and it is only the third who remain that will come to accept Christ (v9).

Isaiah also speaks of these events but adds some additional detail. Isa 66:16 foretells a destructive battle involving all nations (Armageddon), and in the aftermath of this battle we are told the following:

‘And I will send those that escape of them unto the nations... and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto Yahweh out of all nations.’ (Isa 66:19-20)

Comparing this with Zech 13:8-9, it seems that ‘those that escape of them’ are the one-third remnant of the Jews in the land who survive Armageddon. Christ will choose some of these to send as messengers alongside Elijah to preach to the nations and to call the Jews who are scattered throughout these nations to return to the land of Israel.

This sending of the messengers to scattered Israel is also hinted at by Jeremiah:

‘Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel⁷⁹, saith Yahweh; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith Yahweh, and I will not keep anger for ever.’ (Jer 3:12)

But compare this with what we are told later in the same chapter:

‘In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers.’ (Jer 3:18)

At first glance this appears to contradict: v12 says that the message will go to Israel specifically, but v18 says that Judah will return alongside them. The explanation of course is that the message will be carried by Judah – ‘those that escape of them’ from Isa 66:19.⁸⁰

Note that this is one reason for believing that Elijah will be sent out *after* Armageddon, since the messengers sent alongside him consist of those who escape that destruction. Thus it seems that ‘the great and dreadful day of Yahweh’ in Mal 4:5 refers not to Armageddon specifically but to the coming judgements on the nations among whom Israel are scattered (particularly Catholic Europe).

⁷⁹ We know from the context (v11) that this is referring specifically to the ‘house of Israel’ and does not include Judah.

⁸⁰ An additional reason is found in Joel 3:6 & Zech 14:2 – some of the Jews in the land will have been sold as slaves or taken captive around the time of Armageddon.

THE SECOND EXODUS

The process of calling scattered Israel from out of the nations and bringing them back into covenant relationship with God is referred to as the Second Exodus. Just as Moses was the leader of the First Exodus when Israel was called out of Egypt and the Mosaic Covenant was established (Ex 3:10), so Elijah will be the leader of the Second Exodus when Israel is called out of spiritual Egypt and they are brought into the New Covenant (Mal 4:5-6, cp Lk 9:31 – note ‘decease’ = Gk ‘exodus’). There is strong scriptural support for linking these two events (Jer 16:14-15, Ezek 20:33-37, Mic 7:15) and this is a particularly useful concept since the story of the First Exodus can then serve as a guide for understanding the Second. Consider the following list of parallels:

First Exodus	Second Exodus
Moses was sent with his warning just before the plagues came upon Egypt	Elijah will be sent before the ‘great and dreadful day of Yahweh’ (Mal 4:5)
Israel were brought out by the power of Yahweh ‘by a mighty hand ’ (Deut 4:34)	Israel will be brought out of the nations by the power of Yahweh ‘with a mighty hand ’ (Ezek 20:34)
Israel sojourned in the wilderness for 40 years before entering the land (Num 14:33)	Israel will be called out into the ‘ wilderness of the peoples ’ (Ezek 20:36, Hos 2:14), and it seems the period of the second Exodus will likewise be 40 years (Mic 7:15)
Israel were brought into a covenant relationship with Yahweh (Ex 24:1-8)	Israel will be brought into a new covenant relationship with Yahweh (Ezek 20:37, Jer 31:32)
Those who rebelled did not enter the land but perished in the wilderness (Num 14:33, Josh 5:6)	Those who rebel will perish in the wilderness and will not enter the land (Ezek 20:38)
Israel finally entered the land by crossing the Jordan near Jericho (Josh 3)	Israel will finally enter the land at the same location (the valley of Achor – Hos 2:15)
The First Exodus served as an incredible demonstration of Yahweh’s power to the surrounding nations (Josh 2:9-11)	The Second Exodus will likewise serve as a demonstration of Yahweh’s power to the nations of the world (Jer 16:14-15)

FURTHER READING

For more information on the restoration of Israel, the following books may be helpful:

- *The Mystery of the Covenant of the Holy Land Explained*, Bro John Thomas, p20-26
- *Elpis Israel*, Bro John Thomas, p480-491

And the following studies (available on scripturescribe.com):

- *The Future Restoration of Israel*, Bro Roger Lewis
- *Elijah: They Shall Be My People, I Will Be Their God*, Bro Mark O’Grady

*Behold, the days come,
saith Yahweh, that I will make
a new covenant with the
house of Israel, and with
the house of Judah...*

*After those days, saith Yahweh,
I will put my law in their inward parts,
and write it in their hearts;
and will be their God,
and they shall be my people.*

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