

THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK

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Verse By Verse Bible Studies

MALACHI

A Loving Father Calls the Wanderer Home

By

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DEDICATION

To

Rachel Smith Turner

&

To the Memory of

B. F. Turner

My Mother and Father-in-law

BACKGROUND

Judah must have felt like a pawn on a gigantic chessboard. At times it may have seemed more like she was a rudderless ship tossed about on a stormy sea of international intrigue, politics, and war. On a map she appears as a tiny spot trapped between the greatest powers of the ancient world. Judah was often caught up in the conflict between those powers, powers often given to cruelty beyond our imagination.

Israel was the chosen nation, a people set apart for the glory of God, chosen to make His name great among the nations. God had delivered the Children of Israel from Egyptian bondage and led them to Sinai where He entered a covenant relationship with them. From the very beginning, the Israelites had rebelled against Him, first by refusing to go into the Land of Promise and possess their possessions. Because of their rebellion they were forced to wander in the wilderness for forty years, some thirty-eight years longer than it should have taken them to enter the land (including the time at Sinai). They continually griped and complained against God and His servant Moses.

At the end of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, God commissioned Joshua, His chosen successor to Moses, to lead the Children of Israel across the Jordan River to possess the land. Joshua led in the conquest of Canaan and the division of the land according to God's plan. From the very beginning, the Israelites had rebelled against the Lord. During the Period of the Judges, they went through a relentless cycle of rebellion, judgment, repentance, deliverance, and peace for as long as God's judge or deliverer lived. Then the cycle of rebellion began all over again.

The Period of the Kingdoms continues the rebellion of God's Chosen People, proving that the nation had not learned from God's dealings with their ancestors. God established the nation of Israel, with the Twelve Tribes united under David, and continuing under Solomon, before a rebellion under Rehoboam led ten of the twelve tribes to follow Jeroboam I in forming the Northern Kingdom of Israel, leaving the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to form the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Israel never knew a godly king, but God continued to reach out to them, sending Elijah and Elisha, and other prophets to declare His redemption to them. They refused to obey Him, rejected His laws and statutes, and resisted any and every effort to return the nation to a covenant relationship with the Lord. Finally, He sent Amos and Hosea with a final warning - a warning they rejected until God declared, "Prepare to meet thy God. O Israel!" True to His word, God sent the ruthless Assyrians against Israel and in 722 B.C., Sargon II defeated Israel and deported many of its people, replacing them with foreigners who worshiped pagan gods.

God had warned Judah, through Isaiah and Micah, that they must repent and follow Him or face Him in judgment, just as He had judged Israel. There would be one major difference, however. He had used Assyria to destroy the Northern Kingdom, but he would raise up Babylon to overthrow Assyria

and take the people of Judah into captivity in Babylon for seventy years. The didn't, and He did! Even when God sent Jeremiah with a final warning, they declared, "We will not obey you. We will not listen." True to His word, He sent the Babylonians to take them into captivity. He returned a remnant under Zerubbabel in 536 B.C. to rebuild the temple and to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. They returned, but the people persisted in rebelling against God. They refused to honor the covenant into which their ancestors entered with Yahweh at Sinai. God sent Nehemiah, Ezra, and others to try to reach them. The promises and provisions of the covenant were fulfilled, but the people of Israel and Judah could take no credit for it.

The promise of a land flowing with milk and honey must have seemed very remote in Malachi's day. From the time of the Covenant, Israel had known very little peace. There had been but one brief period of splendor and greatness in their entire history, one brief period of prosperity when they had commanded the respect of the nations of the world. That was during the reign of Solomon, following the great victories by David.

If the people of Malachi's day recalled their history, they could only see a downward spiral, with periodic avalanches of war, famine, vassalage, and captivity. As they reviewed their history and considered their current status, they became more and more pessimistic and despondent. Many were cynical. God had promised great things, but so far as they could see, He had never delivered on His promise. They refused to accept responsibility for their situation, preferring to blame God. They had been promised a land flowing with milk and honey, but they were living in unprecedented poverty. Pagan nations, following their gods, had it better than they. They refused to obey the Lord, and they refused to accept the fact that they were to blame for their plight. God had made them a promise and He had failed to keep it.

Rabbi Kushner wrote a book sometime around 1980 in which he deals with the question, Why do bad things happen to good people. This book is still popular with some people. I do recall that the rabbi concluded that bad things happen to good people because, though God cares, He cannot do everything. The amazing thing is that many Christians read what he wrote and believed it. A serious Bible student discovers the truth. Bad things do not happen to good people! There are no good people. When compared to one's neighbor he may seem good, but when Jesus Christ is the standard, there is none who is good. Sin is the cause behind suffering. God is the answer to both sin and suffering. Before we condemn those ancient Israelites we should take an inventory of our culture today - for that matter, we should take an inventory of the church today.

We cannot fully appreciate the Book of Malachi without some knowledge of the background of Israel and her covenant relationship with Yahweh. This book is written against that background. It should be remembered in any study of a book of the Bible that God is the Author. Malachi is the human instrument, but this is the product of the mind of Almighty God. We must remember also that every word we read in the Book of Malachi is the inspired Word of God, just as much as what we read in the Gospel According to John, or the Revelation.

INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

Both Israel and Judah frequently found themselves caught up in a power struggle, if not war, between surrounding nations. A series of powerful kings led Assyria to a long period of world dominance,

beginning with Tiglath Pileser III (called Pul) in 745 B.C. Interestingly, this falls right in between the prophecy of judgment upon Israel by Amos and the prophetic ministry of Hosea.

Assyrian control continued throughout that part of the world under his sons Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.) And Sargon II (722-705), his grandson Sennacherib (704-681), his great grandson Esarhaddon (681- 669), and his great-great grandson Ashurbanipal (669-631 B.C.). These were powerful, ruthless expansionists, bent on world domination.

For 16-17 years, Ashurbanipal's control of the empire was undisturbed, but in 652 B.C., Shamashsumukink, his brother whom Ashurbanipal made king over the city state of Babylon, rallied all the enemies of Assyria against Ashurbanipal. It took six years to put down the revolt and by the end of that war Assyria's decline had set in and she would never recover. This was exactly as God had promised. He would use Assyria to destroy the Northern Kingdom and to judge Judah. He would not, however permit Assyria to do to Judah what she did to Israel. When the time came to judge Judah for her persistent rebellion against Him, God would raise up Babylon to break the power of Assyria as one breaks a twig between his fingers. Babylon would defeat Judah and take her citizens into captivity for seventy years.

Nabopolassar and Cyaxares led, respectively, the combined forces of Babylon and Media against Assyria. Asshur fell in 614 B.C. and Ninevah in 612. Harran fell in 610. The next year, Pharaoh Neco (609-593 B.C.) Came on a mission to relieve the faltering Assyrians and to halt Babylon expansion. Josiah, the godly king of Judah who sought spiritual revival with all his heart, was killed by Pharaoh Neco's forces when he moved to intercept him when his army marched, without permission, across his country. Josiah was killed in 608 B. C., ending the last hope and attempt at revival. Jeremiah was delivering God's message of judgment during this time. His ministry began about the time the City of Babylon began to flex her muscles, sometime around 626-626 B.C.

{Pharaoh Neco arrived too late to aid Assyria. At the battle of Carchemish in 606 or 605 B.C., the issue between Babylon was settled. There, Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, won a decisive victory. Babylonian dominance continued through the three invasions of Judah and well into the years of Judah's exile into Babylon.

The world empires of that era were, Assyria, Babylon, and Medo-Persia, followed by the mighty Greek Empire and then the even more powerful Roman Empire. Nothing happened among these nations and empires that was beyond the scope of God's vision and His determination. He promised the rise and fall of empires, and moved them like one moves a pawn on a chessboard. He raised up Assyria to judge the Northern Ten Tribes (Israel), Babylon to judge Judah and take her into captivity, Persia to return the remnant to the Holy Land, the Greek Empire to establish a common

language throughout the world they knew at that time (and provide the perfect language for the writing of the New Testament). Then God raised up the Roman Empire to give the world the greatest highway system the world have ever known (with major population centers along those roads), the safest travel by land or sea in the history of the world, and the greatest postal system the world had ever known. The stage was set then for the coming of the long awaited Messiah.

INTERNAL SITUATION

The entire reign of the wicked king Manasseh (698-642 B.C. - some begin his reign in 696) was under the control of Assyria. Amon, his son (642-640), was assassinated in an anti-Assyrian coup. The rebellion of Babylon against Assyria brought a 16-17 year period of independence. Josiah became king in 640 at the age of eight and reigned until his death at the hand of Pharaoh Neco in 608 B.C. This pious young king instituted both political and religious reforms (2 Chronicles 34:3). The reform was really accelerated after the discovery of the Book of Law in 621. The first revival in Judah since the days of Hezekiah and Isaiah ended with the death of Good King Josiah.

Jehoahaz, Josiah's second son, was made king by Pharaoh Neco. Three months later, Neco summoned Jehoahaz to Riblah and set his older brother, Jehoiakim, on the throne of Judah, where he reigned from 609 - 598 B.C.

Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of the Egyptian and Assyrian coalition at Carchemish in 606 (of 605) meant that Judah's vassalage shifted to the Chaldeans. Joikim withheld tribute and Judah suffered an invasion by Babylon. Jehoiakim refused to pay tribute again in 598 and Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem. Jehoiakim died during the siege and was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, who surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar after only three months (597 B. C.). He was carried into captivity, where he was imprisoned until Evil-Merodach, Nebuchadnezzar's successor, released him and gave him preferential treatment.

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, as king in Judah to succeed Jehoiachin. For ten years, he followed the Babylonian policy before finally yielding to a pro-Egyptian faction in Judah and withheld tribute to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar moved quickly and laid siege to Jerusalem in 588 B.C. A year and a half later, a breach was made in the wall and the city fell to the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar carried Zedekiah into exile and made Gedaliah, of the family of Stephen, governor of Judah. Judah would not see a king again until Jesus came and established His kingdom in the hearts of believers. Jesus is coming again at the end of the age as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, ultimately fulfilling all prophecies concerning His Incarnation, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, intercession, return and reign.

A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

Jeremiah was called to begin his ministry in 626 B.C., about the time of the revolt of Babylon against Assyria. Josiah's great reform movement following the discovery of the Book of Law began

in 621 B.C. Judah was given 16-17 years (625-609 B.C.) To put her house in order - to return to a covenant relationship with Yahweh. We do not know what role Jeremiah played in Josiah's reform. Some believe he must have played a major role, but others question it. Heflin believes Jeremiah played a major role and that the first major period of his prophetic ministry coincided with the 16-17 years of reformation. Someone declares that Jeremiah's reform thunders across the years.

JOSIAH'S REFORM

2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 34:35

Tragically, the efforts of both prophet and king were futile. Judah rejected God. The wholesale repentance God demanded never materialized. This was an incorrigible people, a rebellious people who refused to repent. They openly defied God and dared Him to do anything about it, arrogantly declaring that they would not listen, they would not obey God, and that they would do what they wanted to do.

Events happened in rapid sequence from 609 to 586 B.C. Judah's 16-17 years of independence ended abruptly in 608 B.C. when Josiah was killed on the Plains of Megiddo. Once again, Judah found herself under the strong arm of Egypt. This time it was short lived, however. It ended with the Battle of Carchemish. Now, once again, Judah found her self under the domination of a nation from Mesopotamia. Jehoiakim, the expedient politician, accepted his lot, but was not happy about it.

Historians point out that when Nebuchadnezzar arrived at Jerusalem in 598 B.C. to deal with Jehoiakim's rebellion, he acted with a great deal of patience for a powerful monarch. After Jehoiakim's surrender he made Zedekiah king. Zedekiah's reign (598-597) was an unparalleled disaster. There was continual rebellion by a people who seemed bent on national suicide. The dates of the last five kings of Jeremiah's day are:

1. Josiah - 639-608 (or 609) B.C.
2. Jehoahjuz - 608 B.C. (Or 609)
3. Jehoiakim - 608-598 B.C.
4. Jehoichin - 598 B.C.
5. Zedekiah - 598-597 B.C.

THE POST-EXILIC PERIOD

The people of Judah had spend seventy years in Babylonian captivity. Liberation came when Cyrus,

the Persian king and founder of the Persian Empire (Medo-Persia), conquered Babylon and then issued a decree that permitted the Hebrew captives to return to Canaan (see Is. 44:28; Jer. 25:12-14; 2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4).

Cyrus ordered the people in all the provinces where the Jews “sojourned” to share their material possessions with the returning Jews. They were also ordered to give a freewill offering to finance the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:7). Cyrus also gave them a generous amount of money to be used for the construction of the temple. He restored the vessels which Nebuchadnezzar’s army had taken when they destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

My Old Testament professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. T. J. DeLaughter, preached a revival in a church I served, and while he was there he gave me a copy of a commentary he had written on Malachi. In it he said, “The decree of the return of the people to their native land (ca. 538-535 B.C.) Marked the beginning of the significant era which is commonly known as the post-exilic period. It extended to the close of the Old Testament time, including the inter-biblical period” [1: 12].

We may want to remind ourselves that God had revealed that only a remnant of the Chosen People would return to the Land of Promise. Many elected to stay in the province or country in which they lived under the domination of the Persian Empire. They had businesses, homes, and families there and they did not want to leave them - and many, no doubt, did not look forward to the trials that faced the returning exiles.

The first group to return was led by Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:11), a son of Jehoiachin, exiled king of Judah, and therefore a prince of the Davidic line (Ezra 5:16). Almost no information is available concerning this group and their accomplishments. They returned, taking with them the vessels from the Temple that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar, and either laid the foundation for the new temple, or began the work on the foundation. We may assume that they began some kind of worship when they arrived back at Jerusalem.

A second group was led by Zerubbabel, who was appointed governor, and Joshua, the high priest (Ezra 2:1-2). Accurate records were kept, as we see from Ezra’s account:

“The whole assembly numbered 42,360, 65 besides their male and female servants who numbered 7,337; and they had 200 singing men and women. Their horses were 736; their mules, 245; 67 their camels, 435; their donkeys, 6,720” (Ezra 2:64-67, NASB).

Zerubbabel was the son of Shealtiel, Jehoiachin’s eldest son. He was Sheshbazzar’s nephew.

It is possible, based on Ezra’s account, that the second group arrived shortly after the first group and joined them in laying the foundation of the temple (Ezra 3:1-11). The foundation may have been started by the first group and completed by the second group. The construction work of the first returnees may have been hindered by enemies, just as they tried to stop Zerubbabel’s work (Ezra 4:1-6). Construction work was discontinued for fifteen years (Ezra 4:23-24; Haggai 1:2-3), but the

enemy cannot be blamed for that. The people started the work on the temple and then became more concerned with their own houses.

“When Darius the Great assumed the throne in 521, the Jews themselves were more to blame for their inactivity than their angry opponents. Darius showed interest in religion throughout the empire, and the Jews should have sensed that the opportunity to resume their labors was at hand. Instead, they were strangely satisfied to exist without a center for worship” [21: 8].

I grew up with the Word of God. I knew about Abraham and the covenant God made with him. I knew the stories about the great heroes of the faith: Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samson, Deborah, Gideon, Samuel, David, and the great prophets. Then, I read about the horrible atrocities committed against the Jews by Hitler, Stalin, and others. Later, I discovered that Anti-Semitism did not begin with Hitler. For some reason, in my youth I had assumed that they suffered for their faith. That being the case, I supposed I had assumed that, given an opportunity, all Jews would worship Yahweh - even if they rejected Jesus as the Messiah. There are many secular Jews who are not interested in religion at all. As my friend says, “I am a scientist, I am not religious.” He had served as chairman of the building committee when they built the local temple, but he never goes to it. If you listen to him you get the feeling that the closest he has come to religion in decades was when he recruited the rabbi for his weekly poker game. He recently called me off to the side and asked, “Johnny, do you play poker?” When I answered, “No,” he waved me off and said, “I was about to invite you to join a fifty years old poker club.” The rabbi has retired and moved to New York, and there was an opening.

I remember when American Christians went on tours of the Holy Land and came back with slides to show at church. Some of us were blessed with re-runs at home. Our friends would show us slides of the wailing wall and tell us that these poor, misguided Jews were going to the wailing wall to pray for the coming of the Messiah. One Jew corrected them, “We are not praying for the Messiah, we are praying for Israel.” Rejection of God and neglect of worship is not an ancient phenomenon.

THE AUTHOR

Even though Bible scholars disagree on the author of this book, it will be assumed in this study that Malachi was the name of one of the three great post-exilic prophets, and that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the book that bears his name. Many students of the Word accept Malachi as the human author. The name is possibly a shortened form of the name Malachiah, which is translated “messenger of Yahweh.” Many abbreviated forms of names are found in the Old Testament (Abi for Abijah; Uri for Uriah). DeLaughter points out that another reason for accepting the word Malachi as a personal name is that none of the other prophetic books is anonymous and it would be a strange exception for this book to be regarded as such [1: 17].

C. F. Keil saw no valid argument against accepting Malachi as a personal name. Why bring up any question about the author is that is the case? Because many liberals love to try to bring the

authorship of a book into question - raise doubt about the author, then attack the message. However, since the second century A. D., however, the title given this book has been understood to be a personal name. There is enough support among scholars today for this writer to accept Malachi as a personal name.

THE DATE

The date has been almost as much of a problem as the identity of the author. Malachi and Nehemiah dealt with the same three abuses: (1) the neglect of God's services, (2) defilement of the priesthood, and (3) cruelty to their own Jewish wives [4: Vol. 3, No. 6, p. 3]. C. F. Keil identifies Malachi's ministry with Nehemiah's second governorship (430-425). Irving Jensen sets the date at the time of Nehemiah's return to Babylon in 433 B.C. [6: 78]. Herbert M. Wolf holds that Malachi worked in conjunction with Nehemiah because they dealt with the same sins [12: 57]. He dates the book during, or just prior to Nehemiah's second period as governor. This hinges on the meaning of the term governor in 1:9. One problem is that Malachi never mentions Nehemiah. Haggai mentions Zerubbabel several times.

John Patterson, in *THE GOODLY FELLOWSHIP OF THE PROPHETS*, wrote that "The situation in the book of Malachi seems to indicate developments which are different from Haggai and Zechariah (ca. 530-520 B.C.) As well as from those facing Ezra and Nehemiah (450-420 B.C.)." He favors a date around 470, according to Brian Harbour [4: 3].

Since there is no mention of the work of Ezra and Nehemiah being in progress at the time of Malachi's ministry, it is possible that Malachi prophesied just prior to their ministry. Harbour suggests 47-460 B.C. DeLaughter finds the dates 450-430 as accurate and acceptable as any [1: 19]. Others prefer the time between the Nehemiah's two tenures as governor.

THE STYLE

Malachi exhibits more of a poetic flair than Haggai. However, while there is some use of parallelism, which characterizes true Hebrew poetry, the book may be better described as "lofty prose" [21: 50]. In the book of Malachi, we see the spirit of the scribe, a new spirit in Old Testament prophecy" [4: 2]. There is a strong sense of instruction and argument in the book. "The most striking feature in the book is the running dialogue between a righteous God and a sarcastic, unfaithful people" [21: 59].

Prophecy seems to have changed by this time from the authoritative, "Thus saith the Lord," to the more deliberative, argumentative style of the teacher or lecturer. Compare the language here with that of Amos (8th century B.C.) To see how clear the difference is.

The book is “forceful and direct, carefully planned and systematically arranged” [1: 24]. It is obviously a single unit with a single theme. Leon Hyatt says the theme is “Answering the Cynic” [5: Title]. T. J. DeLaughter claims that divine love is the theme of the book. All three have a lot of merit, for His chosen people lead Him to try to rekindle the fires of faith and He seeks to do so by answering their cynical protests. “A Loving Father Calls the Wanderer Home” seems like an appropriate theme.

Malachi is easily the most argumentatively of all Old Testament prophecies. The academic model or pattern is easily followed:

1. A truth is declared a charge is made).
2. Then the objection of the hearers is stated, beginning with the words, “but you say,” or “Wherein have we...”
3. Then the Lord answers the objection.

Leon Hyatt suggests: proposition, protests, pronouncement, and promise [5: 1ff]. There are eight of these formal arguments in fifty five verses (1:2, 6, 7; 2:14; 3:7. 8. 13). “But you say” occurs ten times.

DeLaughter quotes George L. Robinson: “He shows clearly the influence of the schools and is on the way to the Talmud” [1:24]. This is a new style for the prophets. While a trace of this method is seen in other prophecies (Amos, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah), it reaches full bloom in Malachi. It is obvious that the office of prophet is in a state of transition during the time of Malachi, from that of a proclaimer to that of teacher. Malachi has often been called “the Hebrew Socrates.” Both Malachi and the Greek philosopher employed the same teaching technique - they were contemporaries.

It may help to understand the difference between the prophecy of Malachi and the earlier prophecy found in Amos and Jeremiah. First, look at Amos:

“The Lord says: I will not relent from punishing Moab for three crimes, even four, because he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom. Therefore, I will send fire against Moab, and it will consume the citadels of Kerioth. Moab will die with a tumult, with shouting and the sound of the ram’s horn. I will cut off the judge from the land and kill all its officials with him. The Lord has spoken” (Amos 2:1-3, HCSB).

“I sent plagues like those of Egypt; I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I caused the stench of your camp to fill your nostrils, yet you did not return to Me— the Lord’s declaration. I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a burning stick snatched from a fire, yet you did not return to Me— the Lord’s declaration. Therefore, Israel, that is what I will do to you, and since I will do that to you, Israel, prepare to meet your God!” (Amos 4:10-12, HCSB).

Consider the prophecy of Jeremiah:

“Has a nation [ever] exchanged its gods? (but they were not gods!) Yet My people have exchanged their Glory for useless idols. Be horrified at this, heavens; be shocked and utterly appalled. This is the Lord’s declaration. For My people have committed a double evil: They have abandoned Me, the fountain of living water, and dug cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jer 2:11-13, HCSB).

Now, look at Malachi:

“An oracle: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. “I have loved you,” says the Lord. But you ask: “How have You loved us?” (Mal 1:1-2, HCSB).

George Adam Smith stated, “Just as with Zephaniah we saw prophecy into apocalypse, and with Habakkuk into the speculation of the schools of wisdom, so now n ‘Malachi’ we perceive it tending toward the scholasticism of the Rabbis” [1: 25]. Malachi is the forerunner of later Judaism. The synagogues and other schools after Malachi’s time continued to use this method of teaching.

THE SILENT PERIOD

The Old Testament record breads off with the dedication of the second temple (Zerubbabel’s Temple) in 516 B. C., and the years from 516 - 480 are passed over in silence. This is one of the most obscure periods in the history of Israel, though definitely not a silent period on world history. It was during this period that the Greeks began to challenge the Persian for world supremacy [8: 7]. In 490 B.C.. The Greeks, led by Miltiades, defeated the Persians on the plains of Marathon. In about 480, they turned back the Persians at Thermopylae and destroyed the Persian fleet at Salamis.

It was also during this time that Greece emerged as a world leader in art, literature, and philosophy. Pericles was born about 495 and Socrates around 470 B. C. Malachi and Socrates were contemporaries. The world knows a lot more about Socrates, but one wonders what a difference it would have made if people in general had paid more attention to Malachi.

For a number of reasons, this was one of the most difficult periods in Hebrew history. The Jewish remnant had returned to Jerusalem “with the promises of the prophets ringing in their ears - promises of freedom, prosperity, and world dominion” [8: 8]. See Isaiah 49:22-23; 54:13; 61:5-7.

When the blessings did not come as they expected, Haggai and Zechariah declared that the reasons the promises had not been fulfilled was that the people had stopped the work on the temple. They went to work and completed the temple in four years. Again, they waited for the blessings. Again, nothing happened! Instead of becoming “a crown of beauty” and “a royal diadem” (is. 62:3), they

were oppressed by the Persians, who levied heavy tribute on them and forced them to provide for soldiers stationed in the land.

Economic conditions were extremely poor. Unemployment was very high (“there was no wage for man or any wage for beast:.. Zech. 8:10). Crops were destroyed by droughts, plagues, and hailstorms (Hag. 1:10-11; 2:16-17). There were also many enemies who created almost insurmountable problems for them.

Faith turned to skepticism and skepticism to cynicism. Disillusioned, they began to question whether or not the Lord really loved them (Mal. 1:2). A new spirit prevailed and it was a dangerous, self-destructive spirit. There were three significant results:

1. The people and the priests began to neglect the temple and its services. They did not stop going, but some were just going through the motions of worship, while others were corrupting worship.
2. They became less concerned about their identity as God’s Covenant People. They were in danger of being absorbed into the culture of the day, the culture of the world. They neglected the Sabbath, withheld the tithes and offerings, and married foreign women (often, we are told, divorcing their Jewish wives in order to marry younger pagan women).
3. Moral and ethical standards declined to the point that they had no scruples against enslaving their own countrymen, sorcery, adultery, perjury, or divorce.

Malachi faced a difficult situation. “His responsibility was to strengthen the faith of the faithful who had become discouraged and call the nation back to God” [4: Vol. 3; No. 6; p. 4]. The Lord, as in the days of Elijah, had preserved a faithful remnant in Judah. They had not all gone astray.

Even though Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament, it may not have been the last book written [1: 26]. While it was the last of the prophetic books to be written, Ezra and Nehemiah were as late or possibly later than Malachi. Christians may be surprised to learn that Malachi is not the last book in the Hebrew Bible. Possibly even more surprising is the fact that Daniel is not included in the prophets, but with the books of History. Daniel is viewed by the Hebrew people as a statesman rather than a prophet. Malachi has historical significance in that it is an important source of information about the life and times of the post exilic community in Judah following Haggai and Zechariah.

Malachi has much in common with Ezra and Nehemiah. The people are looking back to the good old days when God’s work was seen in a spectacular way among His people. “The book is marked by a strong apocalyptic tone and by a messianic emphasis on the coming of a divine deliverer (cf. 3:13-4:2) [1: 26]. It is also interesting that there is no mention of a king during this period, only a governor. There is no mention of a vision, either of or from God in the prophet’s account of his call or in his message. DeLaughter cites Farrar, who notes that “in Malachi we see the germs of

Pharisaism which relied on eternal ordinances; of Sadduceeism, which minimized the elements of religious faith, and of open worldliness which cared for nothing but the greed and lust of the present life” [1: 26].

Note some of the prominent terms: “Yahweh of Hosts” is used 24 times; Yahweh, 21 times; God, 9 times; Lord, one time; Father, two times; Master, one time; and King, one time. When we remember that every word of Scripture is divinely inspired, we will want to pay attention to the key words and to titles for God.

We will also want to watch for the themes for the many books of the Bible. That is no less so in the study of the Book of Malachi. “The message and theology of Malachi magnify the great themes of the Bible. The loftiest emphasis which is made is the love of God for His people. ‘I have loved you’ is one of the most profound and amazing declarations in all the Bible (cf. 1:2) This is the theme of Malachi” [1: 27].

MALACHI’S MESSAGE

I. GOD’S LOVE IS DECLARED, 1:1-5

NOTE: The Holman Standard Christian Bible is used in this study.

Dr. Leon Hyatt has given the following simplified outline for these verses:

- 1:1 - Introduction
- 1:2a - Proposition (Declaration)
- 1:2b - Protest (Denial)
- 1:2c-3a - Pronouncement (Demonstration)
- 1:3b-5 - Promise

A. The Superscription, 1:1

ORACLE. “*An oracle: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi .*” The word Oracle, translated “burden” in the KJV, is a “prophetic message of threatening or menacing character, often against the nations” [HCSB notes]. The Believer’s Study Bible (Notes) provides the following information :

“Burden” (*massa*, Heb.) is a common term used for a prophetic message, found at the beginning of Isa. 13; 15; 17; 19; 21-23; Zech. 9; 12; and the Books of Nahum and Habakkuk. It is also found, however, introducing Prov. 30 and 31. In the prophets it

may describe the heaviness of the judgments pronounced or the greatness of the responsibility of the prophet” [BSB].

The word *masa* means to bear, carry, or to lift up. “As it is used in the messages of the prophets, the translation ‘lift up’, signifying the lifting up of the voice in proclaiming or preaching, seems to convey its basic meaning” [1: 34]. In common usage, it may be translated, as already noted, “oracle”, meaning a burden or weighty message.

MALACHI. The word Malachi means “my messenger.” Many believe the word was added as a title by a scribe or editor. In this study it will be assumed that Malachi was the name of a prophet and that the prophet wrote the book that bears his name. It must be remembered that the message is the important thing. It must also be remembered that God is the divine Author.

G. Campbell Morgan points out that the Lord has seven complaints against these people: profanity, sacrilege, greed, Weariness in service, honoring of vice, robbery of God, and Blasphemy against Him [13: 43].

LORD. This is the covenant name for the Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer. It is the holy name by which God identified Himself to Moses from the burning bush. The phrase, “of the word of the Lord” declares this message to be God’s holy Word. It is not the word of Malachi. It came by the hand of Malachi, but he was only the human instrument. See also Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zeph. 1:1.

B. God’s Love Is Proclaimed, 1:2a

1:2a - I HAVE LOVED YOU. “I have loved you,” says the Lord.”

The theme of the book - certainly one of the themes - of Malachi is the love of God. Any study of the love of God should begin with the God of love. We study the force, direction, implications, and the object of His love, but there is evidence everywhere that we hold a sadly inadequate view of the Subject of that love. A. W. Tozer’s book, *THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY*, should become a standard for sincere Christians.

Brian Harbour observes that in verses 2-6, Malachi points to two basic ideas about God which, if understood and accepted, would bring a dramatic change in our understanding of God [4: Vol. 3, No. 7, p. 1]. Those two ideas are the affection of God and the authority of God.

“I have loved you” is both the introduction and the foundation of the book. The burden of the prophet and the basic purpose of the prophecy is to proclaim once again the love of God for His covenant people.

God loves His people with an everlasting love. “Have loved” is a previous perfect verb form. “It is descriptive of that which reaches back into the past, but it is operative in the present, and future. It says, ‘I have loved you from the beginning, I love you now, and I shall love you’ [1: 37-38]. This

reminds us of the covenant name for God, "I AM", which in its fullest sense means, I AM THAT WHICH I AM, I WAS THAT WHICH I WAS, AND I WILL BE THAT WHICH I WILL BE. Yahweh loves us with an everlasting, unchanging, unconditional, sovereign love.

C. They Questioned God's Love, 1:2b

HOW HAVE YOU LOVED US? *"But you ask: 'How have You loved us?' 'Wasn't Esau Jacob's brother?' This is the Lord's declaration."* This is the first of the objections raised by a pessimistic people who are given to a degree of cynicism. It seemed that their wicked neighbors were prospering while they, to whom God had promised great blessings, were living in almost unprecedented poverty. This reminds us of the demand the people made of Isaiah to give them "a bill of particulars" of the love of God to be paraded before them. Isaiah describes this in his song to the vineyard (Is. 5:1-4).

D. The Lord Answers Their Questions With Historical Proof, 1:2c-5.

1:2c - I LOVED JACOB. *"Even so, I loved Jacob."* By Jacob, He means Israel. The Lord changed the name of the patriarch Jacob (one who follows after another to trip him up) to Israel (a prince with God). God chose Abraham and entered a covenant relationship with him. That covenant involved the Holy Land, many descendants, a Chosen People (nation), and One who would bless all nations (Jesus). God loves all people according to John 3:16, but He had a special love for His Chosen People, with whom He had a covenant relationship.

1:3 - I HATED EDOM. *"But I hated Esau. I turned his mountains into a wasteland, and [gave]his inheritance to the desert jackals."* The NASB renders it, "Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau" - following the KJV. Many people have questioned how the Bible can say "God is love" when He hated Esau. The HCSB clarifies this and answers those questions. God hated, not Esau, but the nation that he fathered.

God is simply reminding them of the great contrast between His dealings with Israel and Edom, the two nations that sprang from the twin sons of Isaac. Jacob had committed himself to the Lord, even though he had dealt deceitfully with Esau when they were both young men. Esau and his descendants rejected Yahweh as their sovereign Lord. In time the descendants of Esau would do all they could to thwart God's purpose for Israel. They did their best to prevent God from leading Israel back to the Promised Land after He had delivered them from Egypt. There is no question that Edom knew who the Israelites were and why they were marching toward the land God had given to Abraham. Even Rahab of Jericho said that all those in the area were aware of what God was doing with Israel.

God's dealings with Israel is a testimony to His covenant love for His Chosen People. The history of Israel is a constant reminder of God's love for the people He chose to be His covenant people. The covenant rested in God's love for Israel, not their love for Him or their faithfulness to Him. They were not faithful, they were not deserving, and they did not always love Him. Yet, He loved them and He honored the covenant He had made with them - just as the New Covenant relies upon

His love and His faithfulness and not ours. The history of Israel is a testimony to both the character and magnitude of God's boundless love for Israel. We see the same kind of love today for His children.

The statement, "I hated Esau", has needlessly troubled a lot of sincere Bible students. In the first place, the Hebrew word "to hate" often means to rank something lower than something else (see Deut. 21:15). "To love may mean to choose something and rank it higher than something else" [1:38]. In the second place, as already noted, the Scripture here is not dealing with those twin sons of Isaac, but with the two very different nations that descended from them, Israel and Edom. See Genesis 25-33 for more on Jacob and Esau.

Perhaps the prophetic message of judgment God delivered against Edom through the prophet Amos will help us to understand something of the character of Edom:

"The Lord says: **I will not relent from punishing Edom** for three crimes, even four, **because he pursued his brother with the sword**. He stifled his compassion, his **anger tore at them continually**, and **he harbored his rage incessantly**. Therefore, I will send fire against Teman, and it will consume the citadels of Bozrah" (Amos 1:11-12, HCSB - emphasis added).

The descendants of Esau harbored a hatred for Israel they would not let die. They nurtured it, cultivated it, watered it, and fed it from generation to generation. They kept themselves worked up into a rage, much as the Palestinians and other Muslims hate Israel today.

Attention to Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is appropriate here:

"Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut 6:4-9).

We need to teach our children that the Bible is the revelation of God's love, a revelation of how that love has manifested itself throughout history. God's love for Israel is well documented and these people to whom Malachi ministered should have known it - and would have known it if they had known the Scripture. They should have known passages like Isaiah 63:7-9. They should have known what God revealed through Jeremiah. They were well aware of what a bitter, ruthless enemy Edom had been to Israel and to Yahweh.

For an interesting study of the relationship between the descendants of Jacob and Esau, see Major Ian Thomas' outstanding book, *THE SAVING LIVE OF CHRIST*, chapter 7, for a discussion of Amalek. Amalek was the grandson of Esau and the Amalakites did all they could to prevent God

from fulfilling His promise to deliver Israel from the wilderness wandering to the Land of Promise.

God's election is seen in His choice between Jacob and Esau. It must be remembered that, even though God chose Jacob for His special purpose, He did not condemn Esau to a life of rebellion and paganism. Esau might have followed the Lord and been blessed. H. H. Rowley, in *THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF ELECTION*, states that, "It is ever the election for a purpose, and God ever chooses those who are best suited for His purpose" [1: 44].

DeLaughter quotes George Adam Smith: "In the Old Testament predestination is not to character or fate, to salvation or its opposite, to eternal life or eternal punishment, but to service or some particular form of service, for God and man" [1: 45]. This explains the election of Jeremiah to be the prophet who would confront Judah with her rebellion and hold before her a way of blessings and a way of judgment. Of course God's foreknowledge is to be considered. Yahweh foreknew Jeremiah redemptively - He knew that Jeremiah would be born, that he would become His child, by grace, through faith. In His foreknowledge, He knew Jeremiah would be obedient in the awesome task given him. John the Baptist was elected for service as well. We know that God would not have been able to use either if they had not committed themselves to Him.

Neither Jacob nor Esau was worthy of God's choice. Jacob coveted the birthright and the covenant responsibilities and responsibilities that went with it. Esau despised it, or treated it with contempt. The descendants of Esau were vile, godless, cruel, and filled with hate for their kinsmen. When the Israelites, under Moses, asked permission to pass through their land on the way to the Promised Land, permission was not granted. They knew who the Israelites were, where they had been, and where they were going. They, like the Amalakites, sought to block God's purpose for Israel.

Jacob's descendants responded favorably, if not consistently, to God's grace and entered a covenant relationship with Him. The nature, character, attitude, and commitment of the two nations helped to determine their treatment. Various Psalms provide a poetic commentary on any nation that sets itself against God. The folly of fighting god is clearly seen. Revelation affirms God's judgment against those who choose to follow Satan and rebel against God.

On the basis of His sovereign power, God declares that it is His purpose to destroy anything Edom may try to build. The fall of Edom was possibly the work of the Nabotean Arabs who drove out the Edomites prior to the ministry of Malachi (dates suggested place this between 550 and 400 B.,C.). Rome conquered the area in A.D. 100.

The thing to remember here is that God entered a covenant relationship with Israel and promised to bless them, to establish them, and to preserve them. Today, there are some six million Jews in Israel and there are perhaps a billion Muslims who want to see Israel destroyed. Israel has been attacked repeatedly by those who seek her destruction, but if there is one thing we can be sure of it is that there will be an Israel when Jesus returns. The Jews were without a home for almost two thousand years, and they returned against incredible odds. There is an Israel today, but where are the Edomites? When God promises to preserve He will preserve, but when he promises to destroy, He will destroy.

1:4 - THE LORD OF HOSTS SAYS. *“Though Edom says: “We have been devastated, but we will rebuild the ruins,” the Lord of Hosts says this: “They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called a wicked country and the people the Lord has cursed forever.”* Ever defiant, Edom boasts, “We have been devastated, but we will rebuild.” To which, Yahweh declares, “They may build but I will demolish” it all again. They were a wicked nation and they would always be recognized as such.

1:5 - THE LORD IS GREAT. *“Your own eyes will see this, and you yourselves will say: The Lord is great, even Beyond the borders of Israel.”* They would behold the greatness of the Lord and declare it in Israel and wherever they might go. God is great. Sadly, this proclamation is only made by children at meal time in many homes in America - and in many other homes it is never uttered at all. God is Great, and recognition of this fact would have been a blessing to ancient Israel. Recognizing that He is great would revive the church in America today.

II. THE GOD OF LOVE IS DISHONORED, 1:6-14.

Note the pattern: Proclamation, Protest, Pronouncement, Promise.

A. God Deserves Honor, 1:6

A SON HONORS HIS FATHER. *“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. But if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is your fear of Me? says the Lord of Hosts to you priests, who despise My name.’ Yet you ask: ‘How have we despised Your name?’”* God reveals himself as our heavenly Father. The term father is God’s choice, not man’s. It is not that man in trying to explain God to his children came up with idea of using the word as a metaphor for God. God is the role for the earthly father. A loving, responsible father offers certain things to his children: protection, provisions, and relationship. God gives the earthly father specific directions in the Pentateuch to teach his children, to train them in the laws, statutes, and ordinances of God.

In the Ten Commandments children are commanded to honor their parents.

A SERVANT. The Lord gave Moses specific instructions for masters and servants. Paul touches on this relationship in Ephesians. In the Old Testament the servant had better honor his master. The master had power and authority over the servant, but he was provided security, food, and shelter for his servant. Israel has been called the servant of Yahweh since her earliest days (Ex. 3:12; 9:1; 1 Sam. 3:9). This relationship was seen, not only on an individual basis, but on a national basis. Israel understood that servant/master relationship, they just did not honor it. At this very time, Israel was the servant of a foreign power, and they had more fear of that foreign power than they did of their heavenly Father.

FEAR. In the first place, we are commanded to fear God. This is not an unhealthy fear of the unknown, but a reverential fear of the One who is known, the One to whom reverential fear is due.

In the second place, when man has an encounter with God in the Bible, he is told to fear not. That certainly implies that in each case, the recipient of that blessing did in fact fear God. He did not have to be told to fear God, he feared God (as John in the Revelation).

WHERE IS MY HONOR? God declares Himself to be the heavenly Father throughout the Old Testament (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 32:6; Is. 43:6; 63:16). Honor and glory come from the same root word. If the earthly father deserved honor, what about our heavenly Father? If the earthly master received honor from his servant, where is the honor due our heavenly Father?

THE LORD OF HOSTS. The “Lord of Hosts” is used of Yahweh 267 times in the Old Testament, 247 of them by the prophets. It is known as the prophetic title for God. Malachi uses it 24 times [4: Vol. 3, NO. 7, p. 4].

YOU PRIESTS. God, our Father, asks, “if I am a master, where is your fear of Me? says the Lord of Hosts to you priests, who despise My name.” The theme of 1:6-2-9 is the priests;’ failure to live up to their responsibilities. They had shown contempt for God, and failed in their responsibility to teach the laws and statutes of God [8: 20].

God accuses the priests of despising His name. From the time of the return from Babylonian Exile in 536 B.C., Judah was governed by a council of elders, presided over by Zerubbabel (the governor) and Joshua (the high priest). See Ezra for more on this.

Joshua served a long term as high priest and upon his death he was succeeded by his son Joiakim, who continued in office until Nehemiah’s time. The high priest’s functions were greatly expanded during post-exilic times. Most governors were foreigners. “Malachi mounted a relentless attack on the priests, not because he was opposed to the priesthood, but because he believed in it so deeply” [8: 20].

The priests denied that they had despised God: “How have we despised Your name?” One wonders if their denial was more protest or cynicism. The priests, rather than repenting, demand that God give them “a bill of particulars” to prove His claim that they had despised Him. Rather than seeking the particulars, they show a haughty spirit. They are not ready to repent. They are determined to continue in their sin. They cannot plead ignorance, they are guilty of iniquity. They were guilty of personal sins, and they had polluted worship for the people of Israel. Corruption of worship is a serious matter.

The late German theologian, Karl Barth, said, “Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life.” Whether we agree with Barth on many other issues or not, it would be hard to improve in this statement, unless we expand the issue.

Henry Ward Beecher, pastor of the Plymouth Church in Brooklyn for many years, was for many years one of the most famous preachers in America. People from all over the nation came to his church. One Sunday while he was gone his brother Thomas K. Beecher filled the pulpit for him. When he came to the pulpit the people immediately realized that Henry Ward Beecher was not in the pulpit and some of the sightseers started for the door. Thomas Beecher said, “All of those who came

here this morning to worship Henry Ward Beecher may not withdraw from the church. All who came to worship may stay.”

In a mission in Africa, one of the young converts was attending her first worship service after her conversion. The pastor prayed before the offering during the service. In his prayer he spoke of our need to give back to God in a spirit of sacrifice for what He has done for us. Then the plate was passed. This young girl had no money. She had nothing tangible to give. Yet, she had an inescapable urge to respond to the grace of God in her life. So, as the plate came to her she silently set in on the floor, got up and stood in it. These priests had lost their sense of reference for God and their sense of the value of worship.

If the priests did not fear God, how were they going to teach the people to fear Him. Their lack of fear prevented their teaching the masses to fear Him. Centuries later, Paul would charge that the people of the first century had no fear of God. In America today, there is every evidence that our people do not fear Him. When the ACLU declared war on creation, sanctity of life, and the Ten Commandments, they showed no fear of God. A state representative in Texas has introduced a law that would deny funds to any school district that permitted sexually explicit dress and moves by cheer leaders (make that vulgar dances and immodest dress). Lawyers fight to keep pornography on Television, the right to attack Jesus in movies, and the right to advocate violence against police officers in music. There is no fear in such stands. When the marriage vow becomes meaningless, there is no fear of God in the hearts of those who break those vows.

B. They Had Indeed Dishonored Him, 1:7-8

1:7 - PRESENTING DEFILED FOOD. *“By presenting defiled food on My altar.’ You ask: ‘How have we defiled You?’”* God had charged the priests with despising His name. They did what the guilty so often do: they ask, “When have we despised your name?” They are not only denying that they despise Him, they are demanding that He prove what He has said. They are either trying to put God on the defensive or outright denying the charge. Modern politicians do this all the time. When someone is criticized, instead of confessing or offering an explanation, they say, “But what about Senator Jones? He is the one who is guilty of a really serious offense.” These priests ask for proof and they are about to receive it. Don’t ever ask God to prove that you have been unfaithful to Him. He has the answer.

They had presented defiled food on God’s altar, a clear violation of the Mosaic Law and a vile sin against God. They dishonor Him and they fail the people they profess to serve. These priests had seriously dishonored the Lord. The words altar and table are used interchangeably here. The altar stood in the outer court. Stephen Olford’s treatment of the Tabernacle, its furnishings, and its offerings in the book, *CAMPING WITH THE LORD*, is both inspirational and educational. The offerings which the people brought were the means of renewing and strengthening the covenant relationship. Burnt offerings symbolized the complete dedication of the worshiper.

The offerings were placed on the altar and as the smoke rose from the sacrifice, the offerings were

considered as having been consumed by Yahweh as evidence that the worshiper was both surrendered to Him and accepted by Him [1: 56]. What the priests were doing was the complete opposite of what God required. This is what He calls to their attention and this is what He condemns. We may not bring offerings to an earthly altar today, but God demands for pure worship have not diminished. One may come to church, bring his tithes, and sing hymns and dishonor God at the same time. Hypocrisy dishonors God. Insincerity does not deceive God. Deception may work on fellow worshipers but it invites God's wrath.

The worship Malachi condemns is the opposite of what God desires - and the worship He specifically prescribes in the Mosaic Law. These priests could not plead ignorance of the Law. These people had not stopped worshiped, they just corrupted worship of Yahweh. The participles used in this verse, pointing to the continuous practice of offering polluted bread on the altar. It was not a matter of simple backsliding or a simple "slip up" at a weak moment. They clearly and consistently violated God's altar. This was their regular practice.

Many who come to the Lord's house of worship today come Sunday after Sunday, singing God's hymns, giving offerings, and claiming God's blessings. Then, they misuse God's holy day when they leave. The rest of the week they dishonor His name and His commandments. Many lie, cheat, steal, deceive, lust and covet all week long, just as though they have not worshiped at all. They haven't!

WHEN YOU SAY. "*When you say: 'The Lord's table is contemptible.'*" When had they said, "The Lord's table is contemptible (despicable), they show contempt for the Lord Himself. They found the sacrifices despicable. The word used is a strong term, used also in Daniel 11:21 to describe Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian king who sacrificed a pig on the same temple altar in Jerusalem and tried to terminate Judaism about 165 B.C. [21:69]. Not only were the priest offering unacceptable offerings on the altar, their attitude regarding the altar was contemptible. Actions spring from attitudes.

Christians in America have watched the news in disbelief as report after report has proved that many who profess to be Christians are showing this same kind of contempt for God and His Word today. Homosexuality is defended by some woman bishop; a homosexual priest is elected bishop by the Episcopalian Church (much to the shock of many Episcopalians); Abortion is defended by some who profess not to believe when life begins; and now it is same-sex marriage or same-sex unions. Where is the church? Better yet, where are those called of God to proclaim His Holy Word? Where are the pastors and evangelists? A lot of preachers in America openly reject the inerrancy of the Word of God. Those deny the clear teachings of the Word of God hold the God of the Word in contempt. How can one trust any part of the Word of God if they believe enlightened man is justified in picking and choosing what parts of the Bible they will accept and what they will reject?

I have often stressed that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, the perfect Word of the perfect God. If God could not have given us a perfect book why call Him God. If He could have done it, but would not, what kind of God is He? The Bible is very clear when it comes to divorce, yet the divorce rate among Christians has now reached that of non-Christians. More and

more Christians drink, gamble, go to “R”rated movies, and download pornography from the Internet. James Dobson reports that many of those who call The Focus on the Family to seek help with their addiction to pornography are members of some church staff, including a shocking number of pastors. Do they hold God in contempt? It seems that way.

Numerous books have been written in recent years high-lighting the fact that the same kind of irreverence and indifference is a part of much of what passes for worship today. In an older commentary, my Old Testament professor, Dr. T. J. DeLaughter, quoted Raymond Calkins on Hosea: “ Irreligion is at the root of all our problems today as truly as it was in the days of Hosea. And in order to reinstate religion it is necessary to have an intelligent, a competent, a courageous and devoted ministry. This is perhaps the greatest need of the church today” [1:57]. The worship of the person in the pew needs as much attention as the person at the pulpit.

Dr. Leo Eddleman, speaking in the chapel at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in the early sixties, said, “Most of the problems in the world today are caused by bad theology.” Now, the modern psychologist or sociologist may not agree with that, but I wish they had an opportunity to debate the issue with the late president of that great seminary. Dr. Eddleman was not only one of the most brilliant individuals I have ever known, he was also one of the most courageous, and he ranked with the most outstanding preachers of the Word I have ever heard. He illustrated his point by pointing out the fact that many people in India were suffering from malnutrition and some were starving in an area where cattle roam the country side freely. They worship the cattle and will not kill them for food. They might be eating some dead relative!

1:8 - WHEN YOU PRESENT. “*When you present a blind animal for sacrifice, is it not wrong? And when you present a lame or sick animal, is it not wrong? Bring it to your governor! Would he be pleased with you or show you favor?*”, asks the Lord of Hosts.” They asked, and God answers. They demanded to know how they had shown contempt for Him, and His answer is very specific. They had contempt for God and now they are met with contempt from God’s prophet. It is interesting that, while the prophet and the priest should have been equally committed to God, we find many that many priests dishonored Him and we read of many committed prophets. Does this mean that the prophets were more righteous than the priests. Not necessarily. Often, when Jeremiah or one of the other writing prophets deliver God’s message, there is a strong condemnation of false prophets. Elijah thought he was the only one who was faithful to the Lord, but God told him he had many faithful followers in Israel. However, in Jeremiah’s day, he was the only one who was faithfully proclaiming the word of the Lord. So, both priests and prophets held God in contempt, but the priests were the ones who offered sacrifices in the temple. Their sins were more visible, and more blatant.

To offer blind lame, and diseased animals on God’s holy altar reveals the depth of their contempt for God. There is no doubt that they rationalized that they were performing a needed service. Their contempt is met by the sarcasm of the prophet. In essence, he asks them, if it is not evil to offer blind, lame, and diseased animals to the Lord, try offering them to the foreign governor.

All of this has an application today. The following quote is what students expected of Dr. T. J.

DeLaughter:

“Time and service are given to curry favor with the public. Are such offerings characterized in the so-called death bed repentance of one who has lived his whole life apart from God, yet with the knowledge of God and in the atmosphere and influence of the Christian religion? When he comes to die, he blows smoke of the flickering candle of a burned out and dissipated life into the face and nostrils of God. He desires that this shall be an acceptable offering. Such conduct is as offensive to God as that for which Israel was sharply condemned. It is a repudiation of God, and insult to His high and holy character, and is rejected as unworthy and unacceptable.

“One can hardly refute the argument that much of the scorn which is heaped upon the church today by one who professes no religious faith is because he sees much profession and too little practice among the churchmen with whom he associates. A down-to-earth garden variety of the flowers of honesty, purity, kindness, forgiveness, brotherly love, and godliness must grace our tables of regeneration, justification, and sanctification if beauty and fragrance are to be provided for a sordid world” [1: 58,59].

D. The Consequences of Despising God Are Severe, 1:9-14

1. God’s favor is withdrawn from Israel, 1:9.

1:9 - NOW ASK GOD A FAVOR. *“And now ask for God’s favor. Will He be gracious to us? Since this has come from your hands, will He show any of you favor?” asks the Lord of Hosts.*” God is gracious and merciful and ready to forgive. He is compassionate but His gracious acts are held back because of their sins. There is a note of ridicule and cynicism as the prophets asks, *“Since this has come from your hands, will He show any of you favor?”* A negative response is anticipated. They were taking God gifts they would be both ashamed and afraid to take to the governor. See Isaiah 59:1`-3.

2. Their worship is offensive to God, 1:10.

1:10 - SHUT THE GATES. *“I wish one of you would shut the temple doors, so you would no longer kindle a useless fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the Lord of Hosts, “and I will accept no offering from your hands.”* This kind of worship has always been offensive to God. Amos had declared the same message to Israel, the Northern Kingdom around 758 B.C. that Malachi is proclaiming now to Judah. In each case, they proclaim the message God has sent them to deliver. Isaiah had delivered a similar message to Judah toward the end of the eighth century B.C. Look at the message God sent Amos to deliver to Israel - remember, these priests knew these words (emphasis and notes added):

“I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept

them (*the fact that we bring an offering does not mean that it is accepted by the Lord*); And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. **Take away from Me the noise of your songs** (*God hated their song services*); I will not even listen to the sound of your harps (*Do you think He wants His service to sound like a beer joint today?*). **“But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”** (Amos 5:21-24)

“Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel? (*God has a long memory - but they knew of which he spoke*) You also carried along Sikkuth your king and Kiyyun, your images, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves. Therefore, I will make you go into exile beyond Damascus,” says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts” (Amos 5:21-27).

What did God expect of them? He does not keep that a secret: “Let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” In Micah 6:8, He expands this: “He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?”

In order to appreciate how God felt about the way the priests and the people abused temple worship we must understand the significance of the Temple to Israel. It was a place of worship and a symbol of the presence of Yahweh with His people. The Lord had led Israel out of Egypt around 1400 B.C. and they dwelt in tents, or tabernacles, in the wilderness. At Sinai, God entered a covenant relationship with Israel and at that time, He told them to pitch Him a tent because He would take up residence with His covenant people. As long as the Tabernacle was there they understood that God was with them. I talked with a friend once who had been in Tokyo at the end of the Second World War. He told me that he had seen General Douglas MacArthur every afternoon for many months. General MacArthur left his office and went out and got into an open jeep and was driven through the streets of downtown Tokyo every afternoon from 4:00 until 4:30. When they lost the war their emperor was forced to admit that he was not god. The people were devastated, frightened, and insecure, but as long as they could see General MacArthur they had a reason to hope things would get better. His presence was both a comfort and assurance to a defeated people. This may have been compounded by memory of the terrible atrocities committed by the Japanese during the war.

Until the Babylonian Captivity the Temple represented God’s presence with His people. In Jeremiah’s famous Temple Sermon, Jeremiah 7, God told His prophet to deliver His message to those who had gone so far as to believe that as long as they had the Temple God’s hand was forced. In other words, as long as they had the temple God had to defend them. They were focused on the physical Temple, not the Lord of the Temple. Listen what God said to the ancestors of those who heard Malachi’s message:

“The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Stand in the gate of the LORD’S house and proclaim there this word and say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah, who enter by these gates to worship the LORD!’ Thus says the

LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place’ (Jer 7:1-3, NASB).

“Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD. For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, 6if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever’ (Jer. 7:4-7).

“Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—that you may do all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,’ declares the LORD” (Jer. 7:8-11).

“But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I made My name dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because you have done all these things,” declares the LORD, and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you but you did not answer, therefore, I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim. As for you, do not pray for this people, and do not lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with Me; for I do not hear you” (Jer. 7:9-16, NASB).

The destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was the most shocking thing imaginable to Judah. The Temple had become their security. They thought it would force God’s hand. He would have to defend them because of the Temple. To lost the Temple would symbolize the withdrawal of Yahweh’s presence, His protection, and His blessings (1 Sam. 4:21-22; 1 Kings 8:27-30).

They were to learn that the Temple is not God and that God is greater than His Temple. In fact, He can destroy the Temple and have it rebuilt - which is exactly what He did. Judah had rebelled to the point that God told Jeremiah not to pray for them: “Do not lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with Me; for I do not hear you.” These people knew this - certainly, the priests knew it and if the people did not know it, it was because the priests had not taught them.

Let us remember that the sacrificial system is not condemned here. It was the manner in which the people used it that is condemned. Not only is there an indictment of the way these people were worshiping, there was a condemnation of the worshiper. We must remember that Judaism is not condemned here, but the abuse of worship. Jesus did not come to destroy the Law and the

prophecies of the Old Testament, but to fulfill them.

3. God's name is destined to be great among the nations, 1:11.

1:11 - MY NAME. *“For My name will be great among the nations, from the rising of the sun to its setting. Incense and pure offerings will be presented in My name in every place because My name will be great among the nations,” says the Lord of Hosts.*” In the Old Testament, one's name did more than identify him. A person's name might denote both his nature and character. When we pray in Jesus' name we are doing more than identifying the Second Person of the Trinity; we are seeking to pray a prayer that is in keeping with the nature, character, and purpose of our Savior. Malachi writes of a time when the name of God will be great among the nations of the world. His name may be despised in Judah but there will be a time when His name will be honored from the rising of the sun to the setting of the sun. This covers the whole realm of human habitation.

This is a difficult verse and there have been various interpretations. The question is, should the verb be translated “is” or “will be”? If it is “will be” (as in the HCSB), then the reference is either to the Christian era, or to the millennial reign. If the verb is “is” the interpretation is more difficult. Are the heathen redeemed? The answer is no. Does this refer to the Jews of the Dispersion? Does it refer to a remnant of true believers scattered among the nations? Some may point out that a remnant of faithful believers would fulfill this proclamation (Abraham, Melchizedek, and Daniel are examples). Others believe this anticipates worship in Christian as the Gospel is spread around the world (The Great Commission fulfilled). DeLaughter taught that this is a warning to the people of Israel that they must be of the remnant of the true spiritual Israel if they are to continue in the favor of Yahweh to fulfill His purpose as a fruitful vine (Is. 51:10).

The Gospel is proclaimed around the world today and Scripture has been translated into most of the world's languages and dialects. There are faithful Christians in various countries around the world. This may be the fulfillment of the prophecy, but whether this refers to the Christian era or to the millennial reign of Christ, there is one thing we do know for sure. God would have us to honor His name and worship Him in truth and spirit right now, wherever we are.

4. They were profaning God's name in their temple services, 1:12-13.

1:12 - PROFANING IT. *“But you are profaning It when you say: “The Lord's table is defiled, and its product, its food, is contemptible.”* God charges His Chosen People with profaning His holy Temple. Verse 12 is a transition verse and a contrast to verse 11. While there is, or will be worship among the heathen that will glorify Yahweh, the very people chosen to “magnify His name among the nations are delinquent in their spiritual life, detestable in attitudes, and degenerate in religious performance” [1:70]. They kept on profaning God's name by saying, “The Lord's table is defiled.”

1:13 - YOU SCORN IT. *“You also say: “Look, what a nuisance!” “And you scorn it,” says the Lord of Hosts. “You bring stolen, lame, or sick animals. You bring this as an offering! Am I to accept that from your hands?” asks the Lord.*” The priests and the people found God's worship a nuisance! That is incredible. They scorned worship. Worship of the living God was a burden to

these people. Based on the Sunday School attendance, attendance at the evening worship service and mid-week prayer service, one may well ask if millions of Americans have the same attitude toward true worship. Sunday School lessons have been dumbed down, sermons have, in many cases become shallow and entertaining. The people disdain expository preaching, and preachers are often more determined to please the people than to honor the Lord.

A friend told me about the Texas choir that went on a west coast tour. They were surprised when they received a staff member took a call from a staff member of the mega-church where they were scheduled to sing. He wanted a list of their songs. His explanation was that they didn't want anything about the blood or anything else that might offend those people out there. The Director of the Church Music Department of the Louisiana Baptist Convention visited in our church back in the eighties and while he was there he tool pastors to task for failing the Lord and His church by inviting musicians into their church who brought music he called the devil's music into our services. The music this dedicated man warned us about is has found a place in evangelical churches today.

I am convinced that in many churches today, worshipers are offering God that which is stolen, lame, or sick. Millions go to church with little preparation, but plan carefully for the golf course, the lake, of the mall. If you are shocked to see the depravity of those ancient worshipers, let me assure you that when we are guilty of many of the same things today we are sinning against a greater light.

YOU SCORNED IT. Another rendering is, "You snorted at it." They snorting at the Lord's worship services. This means that the attitude of the priests has spread to the people. This attitude shows contempt, first for worship, and ultimately toward God.

AM I TO ACCEPT THIS? The question demands a negative answer. No, God would never accept this. This question shows God's repudiation of their worship. We may call what we do worship, but if it does not honor God and glorify His name, it is not worship.

Is there an application in these verses for us today? Consider the revival in which the evangelist and the music director do not respect each other. Think of the choir that is working on a Christmas cantata when members of the choir dislike each other. One minister of music asked me if I knew what was wrong with our choir. I did, but I asked any way. He said, "We have choir members who don't like each other. In fact, they can hardly stand each other." Another minister of music once asked me if I knew what was wrong with our choir. When I answered, "Yes," ye asked, "What?" I said, "Too many chiefs and not enough Indians." He seemed surprised, but agreed with me.

I was in a meeting once when I worked with a department of the USDA. The office manager, a deacon in the First Baptist Church of that city was leading the meeting. After some time, he looked at his watch and exclaimed, "I have to get out of here. I have a _____ deacons meeting." He used God's name in vain. There are people in services every Sunday whose hearts are filled with larceny, lust, covetousness, and jealousy. Others are arrogant and condescending. Still others gossip about fellow members. Do you think God accepts the worship of those who are guilty of these things?

A pastor who has been a friend for many years, a man who served with me on the executive board of

the Louisiana Baptist Convention for six years, told me that he was sitting in a restaurant when the pastor of one of the mega-churches entered near him. He said, "I called his name and asked how he was doing as I reached out my hand to shake hands with him. He looked directly at me without shaking my hand, rolled his head up so he was looking at the ceiling, and turned and walked off. They call that freezing. He had done that to several other pastors in the area." Do you think God accepts that?

5. Corrupt worship brings a curse, 1:14.

THE DECEIVER IS CURSED. *"The deceiver is cursed who has an acceptable male in his flock and makes a vow but sacrifices a defective animal to the Lord. For I am a great King," says the Lord of Hosts, "and My name will be feared among the nations."* We may think of Cain, who could not bring himself to sacrifice a prized lamb to God's altar, so he brought some produce he would not miss. His offering was not accepted by the Lord. God does not accept the offering or respond to the worship of anyone who is deceptive, hypocritical, or ego-centric.

What we learn here is that an inadequate view of God led to an attitude of indifference, then contempt for worship. This verse is marked by the use of the participle, which reveals the continuous character of their corrupt worship as well as the sad performance in the Temple of God.

MAKES A VOW. The sin described in this verse has to do with deception and violation of a vow. Vows were frequently made to God in a time of crisis. Israel's history offers many examples (Gen. 28:20; 1 Sam. 1:11; 2 Sam. 15:7; Ps. 16:13). The vow may have been made in seeking God's favor. Apparently, an animal was pledged in connection with the vow, but when the time came for them to bring the animal they brought a defective animal rather than one without spot of blemish. Their sin was deliberate. They sinned with their eyes wide open. The NASB has, "Cursed is the swindler..." These were not people who had made an honest mistake. They were swindlers who had lied to God.

I AM A GREAT KING, His Sovereignty is proclaimed throughout the Old Testament. He also declares that He is a great King. There has never been another like Him. For those who would like to pursue this subject, I would recommend a wonderful book by A. W. Tozer, **KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY**. As a matter of fact, I would urge any believer to spend a lot of time with the writings of A. W. Tozer, Andrew Murray, E. N. Bounds, and F. B. Meyer.

It is possible for God to be dishonored today just as blatantly by people who profess to be His people as it was in the days of the prophet Malachi. Do we give Him quality time and energy, adequate resources and service, or do we just give Him the left-overs.

III. GOD WILL PUNISH THE UNFAITHFUL PRIESTS, 2:1-9.

A. God Will Curse Those Who Corrupt Worship, 2:1-3

2:1 - FOR YOU PRIEST. *“Therefore, this decree is for you priests.”* A leadership crisis of major consequence has developed in Judah and Malachi has been commissioned by Yahweh to deal with it. The spiritual leaders of his day had failed miserably - failed God and failed the people. The just, holy, righteous God commands them to repent. The priests are singled out because of their responsibility to God, but the people are not excused.

2:2 - IF YOU DO NOT LISTEN. *“If you don’t listen, and if you don’t take it to heart to honor My name,’ says the Lord of Hosts, ‘I will send a curse among you, and I will curse your blessings. In fact, I have already begun to curse them because you are not taking it to heart.”* God commands the priests to listen to His word. The word means to hear with a mind to obey. The only way they can avoid punishment is to repent.

HONOR MY NAME. When we see any reference to God’s name, we must not dismiss it without seriously considering the significance. God’s name is holy. God’s name is not to be taken in vain. God’s name is not to be used in a casual manner. Remember Moses before the burning bush. God commands Him to take off his shoes, for the ground whereon he stood was holy ground. Any time we come before God we are on holy ground.

Rush Limbaugh pioneered conservative talk radio. He has the biggest audience in the history of radio, with over twenty million listeners in a given week. Rush has been the standard bearer for talk radio, especially for conservatives in America. He is probably the most consistent talk show host on almost all issues. At the same time, he has turned off a lot of people by his brash, seemingly egotistical statements. When you listen for some time you become aware of the fact that most of these statements in the lead-in to a segment are made tongue-in-cheek. There is one thing that he has been saying for several years that disturbs me. From time to time he introduces himself with the statement, “With talent on loan from Gaawwd.” When asked about it, he says that what he is doing is acknowledging that all his talent is a gift from God. I have listened carefully, hoping I would hear gratitude or reverence in his voice, without hearing it. I could be wrong - I would like to be wrong. I want to believe he fears God, as his brother David does, as His grandfather did, as his parents did.

God created man for His pleasure, expecting the one being created in His image to bring honor to his name. He chose Israel as a people who were to bring glory to His name. They failed miserably, from Sinai, through the wilderness, to Canaan, through the Period of the Judges, and throughout the entire period of the Kings. There were brief times when they honored His name, but that was always short lived. Now, God is confronting their priests - but we can be sure He includes the prophets, political leaders, and all the people in this warning.

God says, “if you don’t take it to heart to honor My name,’ says the Lord of Hosts, ‘I will send a curse among you, and I will curse your blessings. In fact, I have already begun to curse them because you are not taking it to heart.” After commanding them to hear with a mind to obey, He reinforces this command by telling them they had better that what He says to heart. He identifies Himself to them as the Lord of Hosts. The Chosen People would understand the significance of any of the well known titles for Yahweh.

I WILL CURSE YOUR BLESSING. Repetition reinforces the warning: “I will send a curse...I will curse your blessings.” How are blessings cursed? Ryrie says this means that God will dry up the supply from which the priests receive their portions of meat, grain, etc. [16: Notes on Mal. 2:2].

Another interpretation is worth considering. The priests were to pronounce a blessing upon the people as a part of their ministry (Num. 6:24-26, for example). What a shocking thing it would have been if every time the priest opened his mouth to bless the people, all his blessings turned into a curse.

“I have already begun to curse them because you are not taking it to heart” seems to mean that this judgment is already in progress because there had been no sign of repentance. There would be no indication of repentance on the part of these priests upon hearing this word. These priests had to know what God had said to Judah in the days of Jeremiah:

“Thus says the LORD,
Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths,
Where the good way is, and walk in it;
And you will find rest for your souls.
But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’
And I set watchmen over you, saying,
Listen to the sound of the trumpet!
But they said, ‘We will not listen.’
Therefore hear, O nations,
And know, O congregation, what is among them.
Hear, O earth: behold, I am bringing disaster on this people,
The fruit of their plans,
Because they have not listened to My words,
And as for My law, they have rejected it also.”

----- Jeremiah 6:16-19

Brian Harbour has pointed out that the priests were suffering a crisis of integrity [4: 2]. He illustrates his point with a story about a General Dean. During the Korean War, General Dean faced execution at the hands of the enemy. Before being shot, he was given a few moments to write a letter to his family. He penned only a few lines. The essence of what he said was summarized in his admonition to his son Bill. He wrote, “Tell Bill the word is integrity.” The word is still integrity. Job understood the importance of integrity and he refused to compromise his integrity, in spite of his all but unbearable suffering.

2:3 - I AM GOING TO REBUKE. “*Look, I am going to rebuke your descendants, and I will spread animal waste over your faces, the waste from your festival sacrifices, and you will be taken away with it.*” The word “look” implies a very strong warning. “I am” leaves no doubt as to the source of this warning. It comes from the One Who has both the power and the authority to carry it out. It also comes from the One whose holiness demands the kind of judgment about to be handed

down.

At the time of the re-write on this study, I am preaching through the Book of Revelation. I am writing sermon manuscripts for each sermon. Sermon Number 27, from Revelation 16, deals with the seven bowl judgments, the final judgments poured out upon the earth. Following the pouring out of the third bowl,

“The third poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. I heard the angel of the waters say: You are righteous, who is and who was, the Holy One, for You have decided these things. **Because they poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets**, You also gave them blood to drink; **they deserve it!** Then I heard someone from the altar say: Yes, Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments” (Rev 16:4-7, HCSB, emphasis added).

The priests are rebuked and disqualified for service. There are various translation here. The NASB has “I am going to rebuke your offerings.” The LXX has, “I will cut off your arm.” Some translate it, “shoulder”, and consider it a reference to the shoulder of the animal that was given to the priest as a part of his blessing (Lev. 7:32; Deut. 18:3). If it means descendants, it means that punishment will extend to succeeding generations. If it denote offspring or descendants, it might mean that the priesthood would be cut off through barrenness [2: 10].

Some believe it should be translated, “I will cut off your arm.” To cut off the arm of the priests could mean to take away the priests’ spiritual power to bless, which is symbolized by his raising his arm and stretching forth his hands [1: 79].

Today, as we read this passage and look for an application, we should not focus on its application to priests of various denominations - or religions. We should include all those called to preach the Word of God. My son John was on a break from law school and he joined me on a trip to Memphis, where we attended the Nationwide Bible Conference at Bellevue Baptist Church. Speakers for these conferences included well known preachers like the pastor, Adrian Rogers, Charles Stanley, Jerry Vines, Stephen Olford, and Manley Beasley. As we were driving home, John commented on how much he enjoyed hearing Jerry Vines and a number of others. I said, “John, all of those preachers said what we wanted them to say, and they said it the way we wanted them to say it. But Stephen Olford did not say what we wanted to hear. What he said made us uncomfortable, but we needed it.”

What had Stephen Olford said that made us uncomfortable? In the first place, he did not preach before us, he preached to us. We loved saying “Amen” when the others made a point. When Stephen Olford made a point, we may have said amen, but we were thinking, “He’s right, but that is not what I came here to hear. He is getting too close for comfort.” What was he saying that we needed so much to hear, but really thought we could have put it off a little longer? He declared that “there is a famine in America, and it is a famine of expository preaching.” He proceeded to tell us why and what to do about it. The why had to do with preachers who are too lazy to study to prepare expository sermons, preachers who spend more time on the golf course than in the study. I might

add, that one can spend all day in the study without doing a lot of studying, especially if the phone rings all day.

I was attending a church growth conference in Atlanta once when Richard Harris, with the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board (NAMB) was asked about preachers he like to hear. He mentioned a number of preachers before adding, “The one I get more out of than anyone else is Stephen Olford.” I was at t board of trustees meeting at LifeWay Christian Resources and overheard someone there making a similar statement. A friend and fellow trustee, Roger Wilmore, worked with Stephen Olford for several years and when he was dying in a hospital in Memphis, Roger went to Memphis to sit with the family. Roger told a group of us that when he was will Stephen Olford Ministries, people called all the time for a speaker, but they wanted Stephen Olford, not one of the staff members.

What made Step Olford so special? I believe he was totally sold our for Jesus Christ. I met him at Luther Rice Seminary in 1978. He and Spiros Zodhiates received the Doctor of Theology and a large number of us received our Doctor of Ministry degree the same night. We were in Jacksonville for an entire week for a colloquy, during which Olford spoke. What I remember is that when I met this man I realized that I was looking into the eyes of a man in whom there was the nearly perfect mix of power and humility.

Stephen Olford was very much in demand as a conference preacher, but he was never as popular with the public as a few others. In fact, I can remember the publicity on some which declared that this man was one of the most popular preachers in America. Since when should the God-called preacher focus on popular preaching? I have known since college what popular preaching was - what it boils down to is saying what people want to hear and saying it the way they want to hear it. I also knew that God did not call me to entertain His sheep; He did not call me to psychoanalyze His sheep; and He did not call me to traumatize His sheep. He called me to feed His sheep. If I may address any preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ today, I would urge him to feed His sheep - don't contribute to the famine! It is hard work and it may or may not be popular, but without it, the children of God will suffer from malnutrition.

Occasionally, one hears of a preacher who “falls.” Far more preachers Fail than Fall! They fail to preach the pure, unadulterated Gospel. They fail to spend the time in study and prayer necessary to preach the Word of God faithfully. The following article was forwarded to me by Andy Mercer, a long time friend from Hearst, Texas. He is a deacon in a large mega-church that has seen some trials in recent months. The article is entitled, “A Pioneer of Christian Happy-talk,” written by Brannon S. Howse (posted, April 23, 2005).

To attract the largest followings possible and because they have bought the lie of the new tolerance, many of America's churches, Christian publishers and Christian radio stations – whether they know it or not – have rejected biblical Christianity and adopted the more popular but bogus gospel of Christian happy-talk. As a result, churches brim with converts committed only to their personal self-actualization, publishers lavish feel-good pabulum on their readers, and the airwaves ring with an

emotive rendering of Christianity that would fit nicely alongside the corruptions of faith Jesus chides in the second and third chapters of Revelation.

More than 30 years ago, Vance Havner, in his book "Playing Marbles with Diamonds," offered the following insightful:

The devil is not fighting religion; he is too smart for that. He is producing a counterfeit Christianity so much like the real one that good Christians are afraid to speak out against it. ... We are plainly told in the Scriptures that in the last days men will not endure sound doctrine and will depart from the truth and heap to themselves teachers to tickle their ears. We live in an epidemic of this itch, and popular preachers have developed ear-tickling to a fine art. Today, the angle is to avoid "negative" preaching and accentuate only the positive.

Havner wrote at a time when the work of one of America's most influential pioneers of Christian happy-talk was fomenting what is still a powerful factor in the happy-talk world. A follower of Norman Vincent Peale, Robert Schuller has become the face and voice of today's "Christian" self-esteem movement. Of course, there is nothing Christian or biblical about Schuller's self-idolatry message. It is clearly more akin to New Age thinking.

NOTE: Rick Warren is the most successful student of Robert Schuller! Rick Warren is very popular across America, and this is not an attack on Warren. It is a challenge to preachers to pray, study, and preach expository sermons - do not copy Rick Warren.

I WILL SPREAD. This is strong and it is consistent with the context: "I will spread animal waste over your faces, the waste from your festival sacrifices, and you will be taken away with it." The NASB has "refuse", and the KJV has dung. I love the King James and every verse I have ever memorized has been from the KJV. I also love the New American Standard Bible, which as been my primary study Bible since I replaced the American Standard Bible with the NASB when it was released. Now, however, I love and use the Holman Christian Standard Bible and trust it. I have for several years been on the board of trustees for LifeWay Christians Resources. I am currently vice-chairman of the Broadman and Holman Committee, the only committee on which I have served throughout my tenure on the board. I had the privilege of hearing Dr. Ed Bloom, the General Editor, report to our committee. I had an opportunity to sit with him at lunch one day and listen to him field questions. I have listened to a lot of reports on the HCSB, and I have said that one of the most important votes I have ever cast was to stay the course on this translation. Another was to establish our own Bible Society in order to make Scripture available at an affordable price for distribution in America. I trust both the HCSB and the NASB to be accurate; the HCSB to be more readable, which means that it can be understood at a lower grade level.

Whichever translation is used, this is the ultimate insult. The sacrificial lamb had to be without spot

of blemish, and the priests had to be both hygienically and ceremonially clean. To have the body waste from the animal being sacrificed spread on the face of the priest would not only be the supreme insult, it would disqualify them from priestly service.

This may be a dramatic prophecy that the priesthood and the sacrificial system are going to come to and end (Matt. 27:51). Sadly, a lot of people missed the message they should have learned when the veil in the temple between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place was torn from top to bottom. They have also missed a major section of the book of Hebrews, which emphasizes the fact that Jesus, the superior High Priest, offered Himself as the once for all sacrifice for our sins.

B. God Had Made a Covenant with Levi, 2:4-7

2:4 - THEN YOU WILL KNOW. *“Then you will know that I sent you this decree so My covenant with Levi may continue,” says the Lord of Hosts.* God wants His people to be informed - in fact, He insists on it! We can still hear the words of Paul as they echo across the centuries, “I would not have you ignorant, brethren.” The story was told of the preacher was preaching his last sermon at a church that seemed to feel a call to make every pastor both poor and humble. This day, the pastor - whether a slip of the tongue or by design - read the passage, “I would not have you, ignorant brethren!” God wants His people informed, and commanded those with whom He entered a covenant relationship, to observe all his laws, ordinances, and statutes, and to teach them to their children. They were to keep them before their eyes and before their children. They had clearly failed.

I SENT YOU MY DECREE. This decree is not of Malachi or any other human being. It is the decree of the Lord of Hosts, affirming and reaffirming the covenant. I am always encouraged and inspired when I am driving along an interstate highway and see an eighteen wheeler with the name of the company, “Covenant Trucking.” Often as I pass an glance more closely at the truck I will see a sign affirming the sanctity of life, or a verse of Scripture. I find it intriguing to think of the faith behind this trucking company.

Emphasis on God’s covenant with Israel runs like a scarlet thread through the Old Testament. Today, many people place great emphasis on the significance of a covenant relationship with the Lord in and through Jesus Christ our Lord. Others seldom mention that covenant relationship. When we see the emphasis God places on His covenant with Israel in the Old Testament, should we not place as great an emphasis on the covenant relationship with His Son today?

The purpose of God’s decree here is that the covenant might continue. Nehemiah refers to the covenant of the priests and the Levites (13:29). See also, Numbers 25:12ff; Deut. 18:1-8; 33:8-11 for background, including the covenant with Phinehas, grandson of Aaron.

2:5 - COVENANT OF LIFE. *“My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave these to him; it called for reverence, and he revered Me and stood in awe of My name.”* Levi understood

from the beginning that God's covenant was a covenant of life and peace and he responded with reverence and obedience. The Hebrew word for "life" here is plural, which suggests fullness. The same word is used in Genesis 2:7, which states that God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, life in full measure.

The word "peace" is the Hebrew word *shalom*, the customary term of greeting, but it has meaning far beyond a greeting. Peace in the New Testament is always a positive term, never negative. It seeks all that is the best, highest, and most noble. It is possible to regard life and peace the divine side of the covenant, and fear to be its human side [1: 81]. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Pro. 1:7; Job 28). If fear is the human side of the covenant, it is something he receives from God and must exercise with reference to Him (His holiness, sovereignty, etc.). The fear of the Lord emphasized in the Bible is not the fear of the unknown but a holy reverence for a holy and righteous God.

2:6 - HE WALKED WITH ME. *"True instruction was in his mouth, and nothing wrong was found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and fairness and turned many from sin."* God gave Levi and the priesthood a covenant of life and peace, and they responded in fear, or reverence. As commanded by Moses, the tribe of Levi taught the statutes, commands, and ordinances of the Lord faithfully. Levi was never perfect, nor were the Levitical priests, but there was a time when they served the Lord faithfully.

2:7 - THE LIPS OF THE PRIEST. *"For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, because he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts."* The priests of Malachi's day had failed God miserably. God called Jeremiah to confront the priests of his day with various sins, including the pollution of worship. That does not nullify the office of priest. There had been many faithful priests throughout the history of Israel. Think of Aaron, Eliazer, and Phinehas, the first three high priests. Then there were other faithful priests like Ili, Samuel, and a host of others. The priest was the messenger of "the Lord of Hosts." The people were expected to listen to Him. Sadly, in the days of Jeremiah and Malachi, the priests shirked their responsibility and the people strayed.

The Believer's Study Bible Notes (QuickVerse Bible Library Software, Parsons Technology) offers the following summary on 2:4-7:

"God had promised Levi and the priesthood "life and peace" in return for "fear," i.e., obedient trust. Representing the ideal minister of God, Levi was characterized by four qualities: (1) the fear of the Lord (v. 5); (2) teaching accurately the Word of God (v. 6); (3) walking with God, i.e., practicing the truth that he taught (v. 6); and (4) retrieving many from sin and bringing them back to the Lord by his exhortation and example (v. 6). One who properly teaches the Scriptures to the people God has entrusted to him has the high calling of being "the messenger of the Lord of hosts" to them (v. 7). It is a noble and awe-inspiring experience to be called as a minister; it demands the most and the best in a man (cf. Acts 20:28-35; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Pet 5:1-4). The responsibility also entails serious accountability (James 3:1) [BSB:

Notes].

Jesus Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, is our superior High Priest, and the perfect sacrifice. When he declared, "It is finished", there would never again be a need for an earthly priesthood. However, God still calls preachers, evangelists, missionaries, and pastors to preach and teach the Word of God. We are commanded to preach the Word. Paul wrote in Romans 10 that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. The emphasis in that passage was on the preaching of the Word. God holds the preacher accountable for teaching His people, and He holds the people responsible for hearing the Word and making an application of it in their daily life.

2:8 - YOU, ON THE OTHER HAND. *"You, on the other hand, have turned from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have violated the covenant of Levi," says the Lord of Hosts.*" There had been many faithful priests, but those to whom Malachi spoke had "turned from the way." They had sinned and caused the people to sin. Because they had violated the covenant and caused others to stumble, God would make them despised and humiliated before the people (2:8-9).

"You, on the other hand" denotes the priests of Malachi's day, who are here contrasted with the ideal priests (vs. 7). They had turned away from the truth, and in turning they had caused many to stumble. Interestingly, it was their teaching, which should have turned the people to the truth, that had caused them to stumble. Their teaching was the stumbling block. How can that be? Anyone who has followed the teachings of liberal teachers and preachers over the past century know the answer to that question. Any preacher or teacher who causes people to question God or His word have deceived them, and in doing so, set them up for further deceit. False doctrine that deceives one generation will continue to bear fruit for generations to come.

The conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention has been a long drawn out battle for the Bible. I thank God for the victories He has granted His people, just as I thank him for those whom He has called out to lead in that battle. I thank the Lord for permitting me to be a small part of the struggle. I have stressed a few basic things of which I have been convinced. First, when a denomination drifts it will always drift to the left. A move to the right is a correction of course. Second, the Bible is the divinely inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, the perfect Word of the perfect God. If God could not have given us a perfect book, why call Him God. If he could have done it and would not do it, what kind of God is He? Third, when you compromise with error, false doctrine, apostasy, and liberalism, serious consequences should be expected. The battle against error is a constant and ongoing battle, a part of the spiritual warfare that has been going on since the Garden of Eden.

2:9 - MADE YOU DESPISED. *"So I in turn have made you despised and humiliated before all the people because you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in your instruction."* God is aware of all deception, all false doctrine, all the sins of those who are set aside to serve Him. These priests may have been satisfied with their apostate condition, but God was fully aware of their apostasy, false teachings, and their pollution of worship. What would He do about it? Interestingly, those who should have had the respect of the people of God would find themselves despised and

humiliated before all the people. Bobby Ready, Baton Rouge, Louisiana evangelist, told me that he was driving through Atlanta when he had to stop for gas. The service station manager noticed the Louisiana license plate and commented on it. He then asked where Bobby was from in Louisiana. Bobby told him he was from Baton Rouge and then the man asked, “What do you do?” Bobby told me, “When all the networks are covering the fall of Jimmy Swaggart, one of the most popular televangelists in America, you are not overly anxious to tell people you are an evangelist from Baton Rouge.” When one minister cheats one person, that person becomes suspicious of all preachers. When people hear the one pastor has fallen morally, people joke about it, tease other pastors, and often try to humiliate other ministers.

When I was a teenager, the most respected person in almost any community was the local pastor. Young single preachers had to be on guard against those mothers who would have loved nothing more than seeing their daughters married to a preacher of the Gospel. By the time I got out of seminary, families wanted their daughters to marry someone who could provide the kind of security few pastors can offer. Pastors are not held in the same esteem they were in my youth. In many cases, it is the fault of some few preachers who have compromised morally and ethically. The consequences can be serious.

I was asked to visit with the pastor search committee of a church that had expressed an interest in my becoming their pastor. As we visited, someone said, “We expect our pastor to spend eight hours a day in the study.” I assured the man that I would never agree to such restrictions on my ministry. I pointed out that there are people in nursing homes who can only be visited after their breakfast and bath in the morning or after their nap in the afternoon. There would be people in hospitals whose schedule allowed visits only during strictly enforced visiting hours.

The man explained that a former pastor, a very young man, had become involved with a woman on another church field. I said, “He sinned and you are going to penalize me for it!?” I assured him that we would not be moving to his church field.

IV. JUDAH IS CHARGED WITH UNFAITHFULNESS TO GOD, 2:10-17

A. Their Unfaithfulness Is Detailed, 2:10-11.

2:10 - ONE FATHER. *“Don’t all of us have one Father? Didn’t one God create us? Why then do we act treacherously against one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?”* This verse begins with two questions. Following the Hebrew pattern of parallelism, the second answers the first. The unity of the Hebrew family is emphasized - they are one people, His people, the Chosen People. The emphasis is upon the fact that Israel is a distinct and separate people. God’s covenant with Israel was specific with respect to foreigners, including marriage (Ex. 34:10-16; Deut. 7:3-4). A third question follows, If we are of one Father, “why do we act treacherously against one another?”

In doing this “they profaned the covenant of our fathers.”

2:11 - JUDAH HAS ACTED TREACHEROUSLY. *“Judah has acted treacherously, and a detestable thing has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the Lord’s sanctuary, which He loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.”* The prophet is using strong words to portray their infidelity: they had acted treacherously, and they had done “a detestable thing.” To have “married the daughter of a foreign god” would have been a detestable thing. As a matter of fact, God often used this abomination as a metaphor for idolatry. God’s covenant with Israel is often considered a marriage contract, with the Chosen People the bride of Yahweh, as the church today is the bride of Christ. Any student of the Old Testament is aware of the fact that when such a strong condemnation of Israel or Judah is found, there is a possibility that the sin is idolatry, or that it might lead to idolatry. That may be hard for some today to understand. It was, no doubt, even difficult for the Jews living in the time of Christ to comprehend it. They were a monotheistic people. They would die rather than bow to an idol at that time. However, the besetting sin of the Hebrew people from the time they were delivered from Egypt, through the wilderness, throughout the entire period of the Judges and the Kingdoms, was idolatry. They were continually turning from God to follow dumb, lifeless idols. This was the primary sin of the Northern Kingdom (Israel), and it was the primary sin Jeremiah condemned in Judah (the Southern Kingdom), the sin that led to the Captivity.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary (QuickVerse Bible Library) may broaden the scope of our understanding of the sin condemned in this passage:

“The abominable unfaithfulness that profaned Israel’s holiness was intermarriage with pagans. Daughter of a foreign god refers to pagan women who worshiped false gods. (If *qoôdÔesú* refers to the “sanctuary,” then possibly the profanation referred to the involvement of these women in temple worship.) Such marriages had been expressly forbidden because they would lead the people into idolatry (Ex. 34:11-16; Deut. 7:3-4; Josh. 23:12-13). Intermarrying was a big problem after the return from the Exile (cf. Ezra 9:1-2, 10-12; Neh. 13:23-27). The Jews were supposed to marry within their own nation. Failures to do so were acts of unfaithfulness among themselves as well as to God. They involved both a disregard for the nation’s corporate nature and disobedience to God” [BKC].

B. They Rejected God and He Would Reject Their Offerings, 2:12-13

NOTE: Proposition, Protest, Pronouncement

2:12 - CUT OF ANY DESCENDANTS. *“To the man who does this, may the Lord cut off any descendants from the tents of Jacob, even if they present an offering to the Lord of Hosts.”* Because they had broken faith with God and with each other, He would not regard their offering, though they offer them with tears (v. 13). Verse 12 is a difficult verse, in part because the Hebrew is somewhat ambiguous. Compare translations:

The KJV has, “The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar.”

The NIV has, “As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off...”

The NASB has, “As for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob....”

I love the KJV and the NKJV, but usually study from the HCSB and the NASB, both of which are word for word translations. The difficulty in translating this verse is seen in . DeLaughter translates it, “Let Yahweh cut off, to the man who does this, any to witness or answer from the tents of Jacob, and one bringing an offering to Yahweh.”

The cutting off may refer to excommunication which would deprive the guilty person of his right in court without a defender and his privileges in worship. This is in keeping with the heinous nature of their sin. If there is one thing that is obvious from the various translations it is that their sins were grievous and the consequences are going to be extremely severe.

2:13 - COVER THE LORD’S ALTAR WITH TEARS. *“And this is another thing you do: you cover the Lord’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning, because He no longer respects your offerings or receives them gladly from your hands.”* Once again we have a difficult verse. Whatever the sin, some see this as an outbreak of marital infidelity. Others see it as divorce, with the first sin being marriage to heathen women. Some believe this means that they had covered the altar with tears before this time.

This cannot mean, as some think, that the divorced women were weeping at the altar, because women could not come to the altar. DeLaughter said, “It is more natural, and in keeping with the context to see this as a frequent outbreak of emotions by guilty husbands” [1: 97]. That may be the case if the guilty persons were husbands, rather than priests who were weeping on the altar. The Bible Knowledge Commentary (QuickVerse Bible Library) provides an interesting approach to this verse:

“The two lines of evidence in this oracle are arranged chiastically so that the sin-consequence structure in the foregoing (v. 12) is reversed here. The consequence or symptom of the sin is presented first (v. 13); then the sin is stated (vv. 14-16a). Malachi said some people flood the LORD’s altar with tears. Whose tears do these refer to? Some have suggested that these were the tears of divorced wives who were seeking justice from the Lord. But the second half of verse 13 indicates that these were the tears of the men who (after divorcing their Israelite wives to marry pagans, v. 14) found that the Lord no longer received their offerings. This fits naturally with verse 12” [BKC].

Whatever the meaning, they had added insult to injury. Not only had they done a detestable thing and acted treacherously (v. 11), they came to the altar of God “with tears, weeping and groaning.” The New Commentary on the Whole Bible (NCWB) offers the following contribution to our study:

“Apparently the priests came before God with great demonstrations of emotion, making requests to him. They had offered so many blemished sacrifices, however,

that the Lord had stopped paying attention to them. They thought he had deserted them, but they had left him” [NCWB].

There is a time for tears. God blessed us with an emotional release. Tears may express joy or sorrow, triumph or defeat. Some people shed tears very easily, while others seldom show their emotions. There are people who come to the house of God and never show emotions. Others shout, wave their arms over their heads, shout, and weep. We would be on dangerous ground if we try to prevent others from expressing emotions. We may be on more dangerous ground if we fake emotions.

A friend, who was our family optometrist for a number of years told me about the lady who came in for a check-up a number of years ago. My friend is a committed Christian, but he was not prepared for the emotional expressions from this lady. She was dropping “praise the Lord” and other expressions practically every sentence. She was obviously from a church where ecstatic expressions are the norm. Suddenly, everything changed. The doctor closed the gadget he uses in an eye exam in front of the lady’s eyes and could not believe the response. The woman began cursing “like a sailor” and raging at him. He had pulled out an eyelash implant. He assured her there was nothing to be concerned, he could replace it. He added, “I never had before but I did it that time!”

Emotionalism does not translate into worship - it does not preclude it, but it does not guarantee it. America has had its share of Elmer Gantrys, emotional preachers who may live in sin, but come to the Lord’s service on Sunday with ready flow of tears. The fall of a few tel-evangelists caused a lot of people to question all ministers of the Gospel in the 1980s and 1990s. When some immoral false prophet came before America with tears running down their cheeks while they were living an immoral life, they were compounding their guilt.

I might add, that I have known a lot of preachers in the past half-century, and I can recall very few whose morals would have ever been questioned. I also remember that true preachers of the word condemned their behavior in no uncertain terms.

One tel-evangelist begged people to send money with their prayer requests. Investigators discovered that they opened the envelopes, took out the money, and threw out the prayer requests. Journalists discovered the prayer requests in the dumpster behind the office. When a man who professes to be a man of God does something like that it is a horrible sin. When he comes before the camera and breaks down and cries as he begs for money to meet the need of an orphanage in the Caribbean, or weeps as he claims to heal people in his services, he compounds the guilt.

I have a confession. When I am in a service I am almost always doing the preaching. However, I have heard many others preach over the years. I have friends who love conference preaching, and some of them gauge the value of the sermon by the amens, especially of those amens are loud ones. Some people love to shout during a sermon. I often say amen myself. However, when the Holy Spirit leads someone to prepare a sermon, and empowers them to preach it, and illuminates my heart that I might hear the word of God (Romans 10), I do not always even think to say amen, and while I appreciate the amens from others, I certainly do not want to message to be interpreted. I want to

hear the sermon. I want to listen to the still voice of God, making whatever impression He chooses to make in my heart and on my mind when I hear a sermon.

My younger brother Mike is a serious and well disciplined attorney who does not like having his time wasted, either in court or in church. For example, he says, “The music is something I have to listen to in order to hear the sermon.” The preaching should be central in the worship service - that is when God specifically and uniquely speaks to His people (Romans 10). Here is a test: you are standing on a hillside, listening to a preacher who is sitting on an outcropping of rock. As he begins his sermon:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
Blessed are those who mourn, because they will be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, because they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, because they will be shown mercy” (Matt 5:3-7, HCSB).

Now, can you imagine yourself raising your hand and saying something like, “Preach on, preacher!” Or, “AMEN!!! Lets hear some more!” When God gives His servant a message to deliver, I want to hear it. I will confess that I have watched a few tel-evangelist whose audience applauds, shouts, laughs, and possibly even cries - and I do not sense that I have missed anything at all. I sense that this response is more important to those preachers than what they have to say - but then, I don’t want to be judgmental!

C. They Objected to God’s Charges, 2:14a

2:14 -FOR WHAT REASON. “*Yet you ask, “For what reason?”* They ask, Why does God no longer accept our offerings, and why did the Lord not answer their prayers, even when they offered them with tears and with weeping and groanings.. It is amazing that some who live in open sin seem amazed that God would hold back His blessings for any reason.

What we see here is such serious spiritual insensitivity that they either could not, or would not acknowledge their sin. They ask, “Why would God be upset with us?” The prophet has to spell it out.

D. God Said They Had Violated Their Marriage Covenant, 2:14b-16

14b: - THE LORD HAS BEEN A WITNESS AGAINST YOU. “*Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have acted treacherously against her, though she was your marriage partner and your wife by covenant.*” Yahweh was acting as the witness between such a man and his wife with whom he had broken faith (cf. vv. 10-11, 15-16), that is, the woman he had .

This “witness” may have been in a legal sense or in a general sense, depending on the covenant referred to. If it is to be taken in a legal sense, then the Lord was called on to be a witness and a judge in a legal agreement, as was sometimes done among the ancients (cf. Gen. 31:50, 53). If *berîdôt Ôekaô* means your marriage covenant (NIV) then the Lord’s witness would have this legal sense. He was the witness of the marriage covenant between the man and woman. However, the word *berîdôt Ôekaô* (lit., “your covenant”) could conceivably refer to the covenant between God and Israel (cf. Mal. 2:10). In that case the Lord was a witness in the general sense that He knows all that happens. Then “the wife of your marriage covenant” would refer to the fact that she was chosen from among the covenant people. While the preceding context seems to support this second interpretation, the statement she is your partner (v. 14) seems to emphasize the marriage relationship itself (cf. Prov. 2:17). Most likely the word “covenant” (Mal. 2:14) refers to both the national covenant between God and Israel and the marriage covenant of individuals” BKC].

In any passage of Scripture we must look for the one true interpretation, and then we must seek an appropriate application for our lives or for our times. What is the application we should seek from this passage for us today? For one thing, why do you suppose God’s injunction against interfaith marriages has been disregarded by so many people who profess to know the Lord today? God commands us not to be unequally yoked with nonbelievers, yet professing Christians do it all the time. They may violate this injunction either by marrying one from his or her own culture who is not a born-again believer, or by marrying someone who is actively practicing another religion.

Some have suggested that many Jews in Malachi’s day married heathen women because their clan or family had become established in the area during the Babylonian Captivity and there were still there. Some of them were prosperous and they had no conviction against their daughters marrying Jews. These marriages offered financial stability. Today, people marry those of other faiths for a number of reasons, including financial security. Brian Harbour asks what is wrong with interfaith marriages. He offers three things that are wrong with them:

- 1) To begin with, an interfaith marriage disobeys the specific command of God. The Bible is clear in Deuteronomy 7:2-3 in the Old Testament and in 2 Corinthians 6:14 in the New Testament.
- 2) An interfaith marriage denies our purpose as Christians.
- 3) In addition, an interfaith marriage deprives us of the privilege of fellowship in the most important dimension of our lives - the spiritual dimension. “Mixing faiths in marriage deprives you of what marriage at its best provides” [4: Vol 3, No. 10; p. 3].

Unfortunately, today many people seem to romanticize interfaith marriages. Any person who speaks against it is a narrow minded bigot - and everyone knows that bigotry is the greatest sin in our society. Today, the charge is that we are being judgmental if we condemn anything. They cheer when some beautiful young woman marries a handsome, and possibly wealthy Muslim. Ten years later when he has their children in Saudi Arabia and she cannot visit the, it is not longer so

glamorous.

This narrow minded bigotry must seem much worse than rearing children in an atmosphere in which he or she is denied an opportunity to become a Christian in their youth. Bigotry must be worse than divorce to some people. So, any preacher who opposes interfaith marriage is too narrow, to negative.

“Marriage is not just a dynamic duo. It is a holy triangle in which a common faith in God is confessed” [4: 3]. George Adam Smith said, “No higher word on marriage was spoken except by Christ.”

In this passage God charged, “You have acted treacherously against her, though she was your marriage partner and your wife by covenant.” In this passage Malachi is giving the people of Judah the reason God did not answer their prayers, even when they were accompanied by tears and groanings. The Lord revealed through Joel what they needed to do:

“Even now— this is the Lord’s declaration— turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Tear your hearts, not just your clothes, and return to the Lord your God. For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in faithful love, and He relents from sending disaster” (Joel 2:12-13, HCSB).

God is still the unseen witness at every wedding. Marital infidelity was a sin known to God, Who is a witness to every marriage covenant. Many people today try to justify living together outside a legal marriage on the grounds that a marriage license is “just a piece of paper.” However, this is one piece of paper no one can sweep under the rug by modern liberated minds. God Himself is the unseen Witness to the marriage contract. Those who take the marriage vows lightly are going to discover that God does not.

In Malachi 2:14c. God charged the people of Judah with dealing treacherously with “the wife of your youth.” Remember that the issue here is why God refuses to receive their sacrifices and offerings, and why He refuses to hear their prayers. The priests had offered polluted meat on the altar, and the people had not honored the marriage vows, both very serious sins against God. “The question in this verse regards why the Lord no longer favors the sacrifices being brought to Him. The sanctity of marriage is stressed here. The marriage contract involved not only the man and the woman but also God as an ever-present witness (cf. Gen 31:50; Prov 2:17). Therefore, the partners are one with each other by solemn covenant” [BSB].

Remember again, these people were guilty of two sins. First, they divorced their Hebrew wives, and second, they married heathen women. Their sin was made more heinous because of the plight of the divorced woman of that day. Today, the liberated woman is often equipped to provide for herself and divorce may not condemn her to a life of poverty, or even prostitution, as it did some in those ancient times. That is not to say that a divorced wife does not suffer today, because many suffer far more than most of us believe.

Since 1973, more than one million couples every year have been getting a divorce, some with

serious grounds, but others over minor issues. This is a problem for our society, as well as the church. What should the church's position be? In the first place, the Word of God must be proclaimed faithfully.

Contrary to the statement of the new pope, elected in April, 2005, it is not "dangerous" to trust the Bible without filtering it through church traditions. The Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. It is authoritative in every area to which it speaks.

In the second place, we must remember that while God hates divorce, He loves people and He will forgive sin, any sin, save one (which is not the issue here). There are many victims in divorce and those victims do not need to be judged unfairly. The victim of divorce does not need to be treated as though he/she has leprosy. Remember that God hates all sin, not just divorce. In the third place, the church must do all it can to help preserve the existing marriage. Many churches provide marriage counselors to help couples who are struggling with issues that might lead to divorce if they are not dealt with before it is too late. We must also provide help for those who are anticipating marriage. We must also provide help, support, and fellowship for those who are already divorced.

2:15 - DIDN'T ONE GOD MAKE US. *"Didn't the one God make us with a remnant of His life-breath? And what does the One seek? A godly offspring. So watch yourselves carefully, and do not act treacherously against the wife of your youth."* The question demands a positive answer - God make them a godly offspring, but His desire for a godly offspring was threatened by divorce. This is one of the most difficult verses in the Old Testament. Possibly, the most natural interpretation "sees God as one who in the beginning created one man and one woman and ordained the rite of marriage" [1: 101]. The Lord could have given Adam many wives, but He gave him one. Furthermore, God gave him a woman for his wife, not another man - no commentary is needed on this when we recall His command to multiply and fill the earth. Procreation requires a man and a woman. As someone has joked, God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. The issue of homosexuality is a subject for the study of the Levitical Law or the first chapter of Romans. Here, if as it seems, the issue is monogamy, the Lord is making his point by pointing to both creation and His choice of the Israelites as His covenant people.

Monogamy was God's purpose for His people so that He might raise up a godly seed for a covenant people. To intermarry with heathen wives thwarts God's purpose. History, social science, and common sense teach us that divorce and remarriage, especially to heathen wives, is not ideal for the spiritual progress of a family or a nation.

We can make an application of this Scripture today, but we must remember that we are not the Chosen People with whom God entered a covenant relationship at Sinai. These people were clearly chosen for a messianic purpose. I believe very strongly that the church fulfills many of God's promises, there are promises that specifically refer to Israel.

The New Testament clearly holds up the high standard for marriage set down in the Old Testament. God's plan for marriage is clearly one and one woman for life. God hates divorce, but Jesus died for sinners - He died in order to redeem sinners unto himself. I Have witnessed to murderers who received Jesus Christ as Savior. I have seen rapists receive Jesus as Lord. I also recall the kidnapper who refused to ask the Lord to save him "because I am a three time loser and when I go into court I

am going to plead innocent and I have a lot of lying to do. I cannot become a Christian and do all that lying.” That statement probably shocks more than the person who professes to be a Christian, but goes on and lies anyway! I recall the one opportunity I had to witness to Kenny Wagner (I provide the details of that visit in the introduction to my commentary on the Book of Ephesians in THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK series. Kenny Wagner was the hero of the toughest prisoners at Parchman, the Mississippi State Penitentiary. He had killed a number of law enforcement officers in gun battles, but no one who knew him believed he would do anything really low or underhanded. I sensed that I had one opportunity to witness to the friendly giant I visited in the hospital at Parchman eight days before he died. He was totally blind to the truth - “I don’t have anything against God. A preacher told me one time that if I wasn’t for Him I was against Him, and I don’t have anything against Him.” Then, he was off on another subject. When I walked outside and got into the car with Chaplain Rosoe Hicks, he asked me if I thought Kenny Wagner would ever be saved. I said, “No. He has too much pride.” You would think he would have had every reason to be humble under the circumstances, but he was a proud man. He had great pride in his ethics, his honesty, his morals - “I would respect your sister just like I would respect mine.” I wish all who profess to be Christians could say that!

The point is, some of the most faithful Christians I have ever known were divorced persons - and some of the sorriest, too. The former were committed to Jesus Christ, the latter to the pursuit of their own lusts. If God would receive Tommy, who had beaten and strangled a young woman to death in a drunken rage, he will - and does - receive one who had been divorced.

I don’t know how many times I have heard someone say, “There are always two sides to every story.” That may well be true, but there are innocent victims in divorce cases. My son and one of my brothers are attorneys and neither wants anything to do with family law - divorce, support, child custody, child support. As a matter of fact, there are a lot more lawyers involved in family law cases than are certified in the field, or so I am told.

My question is, why should we leave the victim of a divorce in the hands of the lawyers and judges when they also need the support of the church? No person is perfect, all are guilty of mistakes and failures, but when one spouse is led by lust to become involved in an adulterous relationship with someone other than his/her wife, there is an innocent victim (often innocent children and other family members need out support, too). Before condemning that divorced person who is not attending your services, stop to ask how many of them are not in church because they have been rejected.

WATCH YOURSELVES. He says, you are a “godly offspring. So watch yourselves carefully, and do not act treacherously against the wife of your youth.” These people profess to follow the Lord, but defy him and open the door to idolatry for the following generations.

2:16 - IF HE HATES AND DIVORCES HIS WIFE. “If he hates and divorces his wife,’ says the Lord God of Israel, ‘he covers his garment with injustice,’ says the Lord of Hosts. Therefore, watch yourselves carefully, and do not act treacherously.” New American Standard Bible renders this verse:

“For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

Verse 16 continues the thought of verse 15. God hates divorce. There is not stronger word in the Old Testament against divorce and marital infidelity than we find in this passage. In a patriarchal society divorce was allowed for a man but not for a woman. Under the Law of Moses provisions were made for divorce because of the hardness of the hearts of the people, but this was not God’s plan from the beginning, and it is not His will. Malachi paints a beautiful picture of marriage and a sordid picture of infidelity - of divorcing one’s wife in order to marry another woman.

This entire passage is difficult, as a comparison between the HCSB and the NASB illustrates. The Believer’s Study Bible Notes may help:

“Divorce, although permitted and regulated by the Law (cf. Deut 24:1ff.), is expressly rejected by God. The beginning of the verse could be more literally translated “For He hates divorce [sending away], says YAHWEH the God of Israel, and him who covers his garment with violence, says YAHWEH of hosts.” As in 1:9, The Lord refers to Himself in the third person. It is also grammatically possible to understand the verb “hate” as an adjective, whose person must be supplied by the context. This indictment against divorce is made all the more emphatic by the balanced arrangement of the lines of vv. 15b, 16 in Hebrew and by the double “says the Lord” clauses. This is reflected by a more literal translation:

“Therefore take heed to your spirit,
And let none deal treacherously ...
For He hates divorce,
Says the Lord God of Israel,
And him who covers his garment with violence,”
Says the Lord of hosts.
“Therefore take heed to your spirit,
That you do not deal treacherously”
[BSB].

Observe that the charge in verse 15b is repeated in verse 16b: So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith (cf. vv. 10-11, 14).

“The Israelites were not to break faith with one another by divorcing their Jewish wives and intermarrying with pagans (v. 11). Such activity profaned the covenant promise God gave to.” Israel. By guarding their spirits they would be acting in accord with God’s purpose and would help preserve the unity of the nation as well as their individual marriages” [BKC].

E. God Condemns Their Cynicism, 2:17

2:17 - **WHERE IS THE GOD OF JUSTICE.** *“You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you ask, ‘How have we wearied Him?’ When you say, ‘Everyone who does evil is good in the Lord’s sight, and He is pleased with them,’ or ‘Where is the God of justice?’”*

1) God charges, “You have wearied the Lord with your words.” In 1:3, the people are weary with the requirements of worship. Now, Malachi says, “You have caused the Lord to be weary.”

2) They protest, “How have we wearied Him?” They are still cynical and they are still talking back. They would remind us of their forefathers who would not listen to God’s message delivered by Jeremiah. They arrogantly declared that they would not listen, they wouldn’t obey.

3) God responds with two examples.

a. They wearied Him when they said, “Everyone who does evil is good in the Lord’s sight, and He is pleased with them.”

b. They wearied Him when they said, “Where is the God of justice?”

Commenting on verse 17, Morgan writes, “That...is a peculiar sin of our own day. Find me anywhere a people who are weary of a strong and robust Christianity and I will find you a people who cannot bear to be told of the judgment of God” [13: 55-56].

What is the source of this cynicism? Harbour claims that skepticism is rooted in a faulty memory recollection of the past. He notes, “The human mind can store six hundred memories a minute for seventy-five years without a strain. However, two distortions often interfere with our attempt to recall those experiences of the past from our memory bank” [4: Vol. 3, NO. 11, p. 1]. One tendency is to glamorize the past and the other devalues the past.

Harbour goes on to mention two other sources of skepticism. One is a faulty evaluation of the present and the other is a faulty anticipation of the future” [4: p. 2]. There is a practical remedy for such skepticism - in three steps:

1) Remember the past.

2) Repent in the present.

3) Ready yourself for the future.

V. GOD’S LOVE IS REVEALED IN A GREAT PROMISE, 3:1-6

A. His Love Is Manifested in a Promised Messenger, 3:1

1. His coming will be heralded by His messenger, 3:1a.

3:1a - MY MESSENGER. “*See, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me.*” The KJV begins with “Behold”, whereas the HCSB has “See.” The word is used to emphasize the fact that something monumental is about to be announced, something startling and unusual.

“My messenger” is a translation of the word “Malachi.” This messenger is identified as John the Baptist by Jesus Himself (Matt. 11:10-14). Matthew 17:12ff identifies him as Elijah. In Matt. 3:1-3, John identifies himself as the one God promised as the Lord’s messenger:

“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Wilderness of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!’ For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said: A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way for the Lord; make His paths straight!’”

John identified himself as the one of whom Isaiah prophesied:

“A voice of one crying out: Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness; make a straight highway for our God in the desert. Every valley will be lifted up, and every mountain and hill will be leveled; the uneven ground will become smooth, and the rough places a plain” (Isaiah 40:3-4, HCSB).

This prophecy is inserted parenthetically to answer the skeptics who demanded proof of God’s love. John the Baptist reveals himself to be the forerunner, or messenger of who Malachi writes here. The picture here is that of a slave who is sent throughout a province to herald the visit of the king to that province, and to alert the people so that they might prepare the road for his journey. Residence would be expected to take their tools and begin work on the road in their immediate area so that the king’s journey would be both comfortable and safe. Unexpected detours would (1) cause uninvited delays, (2) cause discomfort to the king if the detour was rough, and (3) possible compromise security. A detour in a wooded area might leave the king open to an ambush. Dirt roads were often left impassable as late as World War II in many rural areas when a mud hole developed in a road. People would drive around the mud hole rather than repair it. After some time, there might be a number of mini-detours, sometimes rough and narrow enough to slow a vehicle almost to a standstill. The messenger sent to alert the people to the coming of the king was warning them to get the road in shape for the coming of the king. They did not dare disregard the warning.

John's purpose was to go ahead of him to alert the people to the fact that the King was coming so that they might prepare for His coming. How would they prepare for the coming of this King? By repenting of their sins and trusting in Him. Those who disregard the messenger's warning are going to answer for it, and the consequences are going to be far more severe than those faced by a rebellious people who refused to prepare for the coming of an earthly king. It is also going to be eternal.

2. The messenger of the covenant is Jesus Himself, 3:1b.

3:1b - THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT. *"Then the Lord you seek will suddenly come to His temple, the Messenger of the covenant you desire—see, He is coming," says the Lord of Hosts.*" All we are told here is that a messenger would come to prepare the way for the coming of the Promised One. The time of His coming is not given, we are simply told that He will come suddenly, which calls to mind the promise of the Lord's return - His return is coming, but the emphasis is not upon "soon" so much as "suddenly," or quickly.

The coming Messenger of the covenant will visit the temple. Jesus' was taken to the temple when he was a tiny infant, and then the next recorded visit came when He baffled the temple officials at age 12. During His active ministry, Jesus both taught, performed miracles, and cleansed the temple.

It is noteworthy that this verse begins with the statement that the Lord of Hosts will "send" the Son. The second part of the verse tells us that the Son will come. This is a testimony to the fact that while the Father and the Son are one in essence, they are two distinct Persons. We worship a God who is three in person (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), one in essence.

B. The Promised One Will Initiate a Time of Purging, 3:2-6

1. It will cause great fear, 3:2.

3:2 - WHO CAN ENDURE? *"But who can endure the day of His coming? And who will be able to stand when He appears? For He will be like a refiner's fire and like cleansing lye."* The two questions asked in this verse points to a visitation of severe judgment when the Lord visits His temple. According to Malachi, it would be an awesome day, a day of terror. He draws on two familiar trades (refining metals and cleansing clothes) to show that the purpose of His visit and His work is not total destruction, but refinement and cleansing of His people.

"I will put this third through the fire; I will refine them as silver is refined and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say: They are My people, and they will say: The Lord is our God" (Zech 13:9).

2. He will purify the sons of Levi, 3:3-4.

3:3 - HE WILL PURIFY. *"He will be like a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of*

Levi and refine them like gold and silver. Then they will present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.” The Lord would specifically target the sons of Levi for his purging when He purges His people. The purpose of refining or purging Levi is that “they will present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.” If we seek an application today it may well be that God expects God-called preachers of the Gospel to go to Him for cleansing before they preach His holy Word to the people.

3:4 - THE OFFERINGS OF JUDAH. “*And the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will please the Lord as in days of old and years gone by.*” God’s purpose is clear. He wants them to present offerings that are pleasing to Him. “As in the days of old and years gone by” will remind us of the many times God commanded the people to bring offerings, and the priests to offer offerings that would rise as a pleasant aroma to His nostrils. The picture is that of smoke rising from the altar, symbolizing the prayers and commitment of the worshiper, would be pure and holy, which would be pleasant to Him, just as any pleasant aroma would be pleasant to one’s olfactory nerves.

The exact time of the “days of old” is not spelled out. We are not told the period in Israel’s history He has in mind. Sadly, those times when their worship was pleasant to Him were few and far between. It is not easy to pinpoint any particular time when they brought pleasing gifts to the Lord for any sustained period of time.

History reveals that the Period of the Judges was one long cycle of rebellion against God. The Period of the Kingdoms was spawned by the rebellion of the Children of Israel, who rejected God as their King and demanded an earthly king like the Philistines had. They promised God and Samuel they would obey God, but that never lasted very long. Sin led to the rebellion of ten tribes and to the divided kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south (comprised of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin). Even though Yahweh sent prophets like Elijah and Elisha, Amos and Hosea, and a host of others, the northern ten tribes persisted in rejecting God and turning to false worship. The Lord sent Isaiah and Micah to Judah during the Golden Era of Prophecy, the Eighty Century B. B., but the people of Judah refused to repent - they showed signs of repentance but it never lasted very long.

Jeremiah, called around the time Babylon rebelled against Assyria (626-625 B. C.), delivered God’s word to the people of the southern kingdom. Yahweh pronounced His indictment against Judah:

“Hear the word of the Lord, house of Jacob and all families of the house of Israel. Here is what the Lord says: **What fault did your fathers find in Me that *they went so far from Me*, followed worthless idols, and became worthless themselves?** They stopped asking: ***Where is the Lord who brought us from the land of Egypt***, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and ravines, through a land of drought and darkness, a land no one traveled through and where no one lived? I brought you to a fertile land to eat its fruit and bounty, but **after you entered, you defiled My land**; you made My inheritance detestable.

“The priests quit asking: Where is the Lord? *The experts in the law no longer knew Me*, and the rulers rebelled against Me. The prophets prophesied by Baal and followed useless idols. Therefore, I will bring a case against you again. This is the Lord’s declaration.... consider carefully; see if there has ever been anything like

this: **Has a nation ever exchanged its gods?** (but they were not gods!) Yet My people have exchanged their Glory for useless idols. ***Be horrified at this***, heavens; be shocked and utterly appalled. This is the Lord's declaration.

“For My people have committed ***a double evil: They have abandoned Me, the fountain of living water***, and dug cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jer 2:4-13, HCSB, emphasis added).

Such was the history of Israel and Judah. At one point the Lord proclaimed through Jeremiah that Judah had been more treacherous than her evil sister, Israel. When has Israel brought pleasure to Yahweh for any extended time? They had polluted worship and desecrated and turned God's house into a den of thieves when Jesus visited the temple. They rejected Christ, the promised Messiah, demanded His crucifixion, and paid the found themselves scattered all over the world (the Dispersion). Not until after the Second World War did they even have a homeland again.

It is sad today when an Arab Christian believes in the Messiah which Israel vehemently denies. It is also amazing when a Palestinian Christian carries a deep burden for the spiritual welfare of the descendants of these Israelites of Malachi's day than they have for themselves. Anis Shorosh and I were at Mississippi College at the same time. We became friends and I have visited with him on two occasions since that time, the most recent in the April of 2005. Anis was but a young child when the Israelis invaded Nazareth and killed his father, among others. He hated Jews and lived with one purpose in mind - to get old enough to start killing Jews.

Anis got a job in a Baptist mission hospital when he was a teenager and before long he became a Christian. He was called to preach the Gospel and missionaries made arrangement for him to attend Clarke Memorial College in Newton, Mississippi. Clarke was a junior college, and like so many other graduates, Anis enrolled at Mississippi College upon graduation from Clarke. During that time, I visited often with Anis and fellow Palestinian believers, Sam and Phillip Matalka and their sister Nadya, all of whom were an inspiration and an education to other students.

Upon graduation from Mississippi College, Anis began his studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Until 2005, I had not personally heard Anis say anything about something that happened in his life while in seminary. He graded for one of the professors - a testimony to his intelligence and academic accomplishments. He shared some of his experiences with a group of us at Victory Baptist Church in Monroe, Louisiana, where my long time friend, Everett Geis, is pastor. I picked up my son John and we drove over for a noon meal and service. There for the first time I learned that Anis, who excelled in his studies, actually failed Hebrew. He did well in Greek and he had learned other languages, including English and Greek. He could not pass Hebrew. Finally, he said, “I went to the Judge.” Looking at me, he said, “You know who that was.” Of course, I knew he meant the esteemed Hebrew and Old Testament scholar, Dr. J. Hardee Kennedy. Dr. Kennedy helped him to understand that he was capable of learning Hebrew.

Anis said, “I discovered that my mind rebelled against learning the language of my enemy. I was a Christian and thought I had a right relationship with the Lord, but when it came to learning the

language of my life long enemy my mind rebelled.” When I was able to confess this and receive forgiveness I went back and took Hebrew and made a good grade.”

Some time later, Anis Shorosh went with a group on a tour of the Holy Land. As they approached Nazareth, the guide told the American tourists, “I was a captain in the Israeli army who was in command when we took Nazareth.” Anis said that it all came back to him and he didn’t know how he would handle it. Prayerfully, he trusted the Lord to deal with the old hatred. As he approached the former officer, he whispered, “Twenty-two people died here that day.” The guide looked at him, seeing that even though he was with an American group, he did not look like the rest of them and he spoke with an accent. He was suddenly very cautious. People in general did not know how many people were killed at Nazareth.

Anis added, “My father was one of them. But I forgive you because of Jesus and I would like to talk with you about Him. Anis Shorosh has been debating Muslim clerics for twenty years, during which time he says, “they have made eleven attempts on my life.” He asked prayer as he went on to Scotland to debate a Muslim cleric there, promising to be very careful. His life is in danger because he always wins the debates for the simple reason that the Koran is no match for the Word of God.

More Arabs are receiving Jesus Christ as their Savior than Jews today, but every Jew who trusts Him for His great salvation brings pleasure to God. All who are born again and live in worshipful obedience are pleasant to God today.

3. He will judge them, 3:5.

“I will come to you in judgment, and I will be ready to witness against sorcerers and adulterers; against those who swear falsely; against those who oppress the widow and the fatherless, and cheat the wage earner; and against those who deny justice to the foreigner. They do not fear Me,” says the Lord of Hosts.”

God is the Judge: “I will come to you in judgment” is a statement that should bring fear to the hearts of all who hear it. Malachi’s statement here reminds us of the great Eighth Century prophets, Amos and Hosea in Israel and Isaiah and Micah in Judah. He is the Judge no sinner can deceive or bribe. He is the unimpeachable witness. He will judge all those who are cynical about His judgment. They should have been very much aware of this fact.

But look, you keep trusting in deceitful words that cannot help. ‘Do you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and follow other gods that you have not known? Then do you come and stand before Me in this house called by My name and insist: We are safe? As a result, you are free to continue doing all these detestable acts! Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your view? Yes, I too have seen it.’ This is the Lord’s declaration” (Jer 7:8-11, HCSB).

SORCERERS. Sorcery involves any effort to gain power, wealth, or wisdom through evil spirits. Sorcery, necromancy, witchcraft and other related evils are condemned in the Law. The reader must see that God was not simply offering a suggestion here. His law is laid down most emphatically because occult practices are a direct affront to the person, nature, and character of Yahweh. He commanded:

“When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not imitate the detestable customs of those nations. No one among you is to make his son or daughter **pass through the fire, practice divination, tell fortunes, interpret omens, practice sorcery, cast spells, consult a medium or a familiar spirit, or inquire of the dead.** Everyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, and the Lord your God is driving out the nations before you because of these detestable things. You must be blameless before the Lord your God. Though these nations you are about to drive out listen to fortune-tellers and diviners, **the Lord your God has not permitted you to do this**” (Deut 18:9-14, emphasis added).

If God prohibited all occult practices, the penalty for violating His law would logically match the offence. According to the Scripture, the penalty for sorcery is death: “You must not allow a sorceress to live” (Ex 22:18). Again, the Law demands that, “A man or a woman who is a medium or a spiritist must be put to death. They are to be stoned; their blood is on their own hands” (Lev 20:27).

ADULTERERS. This denotes sexual immorality, including marital infidelity. God’s purpose for the creation created in His image is very clear in the Bible. The biblical model for marriage is one man and one woman for life. The Bible allows only for monogamy. The marriage vows are sacred and must not be violated. God’s commandment against adultery is included in the Ten Commandments, which set down the foundation for the Christian ethic. All other laws find their roots in the Ten Commandments. This standard for morality covers all sorts of moral situations, including homosexuality, incest, and polygamy. Adultery is often used as a metaphor for spiritual infidelity to God, or in other words, idolatry.

THOSE WHO SWEAR FALSELY. This again, is a violation of one of the Ten Commandments. To see how strongly God feels about swearing falsely, or lying, look at Revelation 21:8: “But the cowards, unbelievers, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars—their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

THOSE WHO OPPRESS THE WIDOW AND THE FATHERLESS. Those who oppress widows and orphans face the certain judgment of God.

“You must not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, they will no doubt cry to Me, and I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will burn, and I will kill you with the sword; then your wives will be widows and your children fatherless” (Ex. 22:22-24).

CHEAT THE WAGE EARNER. If one loves God he cannot abuse his fellow man. The Golden Rule applies in business - both to the employer and to the employee. In ancient times, the employer was in a much better position to defraud his employees than the other way around. Sam Scott was a godly Christian man, a man of dignity and character. His son and I graduated from high school together, which means that we were friends for many years. I was talking with the father one day when he told me of plantation owners in the area would take a stack of silver dollars and settle with tenants in such a way that left the tenant wondering what had happened to his year's labor. He would tell him how much he had earned from the sale of cotton, but then he would begin showing how much he charged for the use of a tractor and implements, and for various services the tenant was not aware he had received. Then, I thought of my father, who sometimes has less actual cash left at the end of the year than some tenants. Of course, he was paying for land and equipment at the time. I never knew of my father charging any tenant for the use of a tractor or any other implement.

One man moved onto our place from one of the largest plantations in the area. I repeated some of the stories told about his former employer to him. Everyone in the area knew about John B. This is the man who had an attack of appendicitis and was rushed to a hospital in Memphis for surgery. He looked so poor and deprived that the hospital staff felt sorry for him. After the surgery, the surgeon came by to check on his patient and announced that his normal fee for the surgery was five hundred dollars, but, he added, since John B. Didn't look like he could afford it, he was only going to charge him seventy five dollars. John B. thanked him over and over, "I'll tell you right now, I 'preciate it." His speech impediment often made the story, or part of it. John B. Said, "I'll give you a check on the Jonestown bank."

The doctor asked if he was sure he could write a check for that much money and John B. Said, "Call Jonestown bank and ask them if I can.? The doctor called and asked the banker if a check on John B. for seventy-five dollars would be good. "Yes sir!" came the answer, "Or seventy-five thousand." Even though he was in a Christian hospital, the word was that the doctor gave him a sound cursing.

John B. went to an equipment sale in another part of Mississippi and as he passed through the town he stopped and asked someone at the bank to cash a check for ten thousand dollars (remember that you could buy a new truck for two thousand dollars at the time). The banker told him he didn't have enough cash on hand to cash his check. The next year, when he went to the sale he stopped by the bank and deposited one hundred thousand dollars and announce, "I'll tell you right now, from now on you will have enough money to cash my checks!"

Everyone had his favorite John B. stories. He began with a small grocery store, and he saved quarters by throwing them into a box. When he bought his first farm he would go out to work and if there was any ripe fruit at the time he would not take lunch. He might eat plums from the tree. He was a miser, but one who often bought large blocks for his daughter, while keeping his son in a tenant house on his farm ("He would just waste it if I gave it to him.").

I mentioned some of the stories to the man who had moved onto our place and was surprised to learn that this man, Slim, had some stories of his own. Slim worked on the farm and in the fall, he worked at John B.'s gin. One day, he received his pay check and when he looked at it he saw that it was fifty cents short. He pointed it out to John B. and was surprised when John B. said, "Son, I expect you better move." He lost his job and his home over fifty cents - his own fifty cents. The stories of John B.'s vast wealth lost some of their amusement.

"Do not oppress a hired hand who is poor and needy, whether one of your brothers or one of the foreigners residing within a town in your land. You are to pay him his wages each day before the sun sets, because he is poor and depends on them. Otherwise he will cry out to the Lord against you, and you will be held guilty" (Deut 24:14).

THOSE WHO DENY JUSTICE TO THE FOREIGNER. According to the Law, foreigners were to be treated with respect. They were not to be forced to work on the Sabbath: "Do your work for six days but rest on the seventh day so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave as well as the foreign resident may be refreshed" (Ex 23:12).

THEY DO NOT FEAR ME," SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS. Paul wrote that the sin that lies behind the whole catalog of sins listed in Romans was that they did not fear God. This is the root of all the sins mentioned in this verse, so we have both the root and the fruit given here. Fear of God, a reverential fear of God, leads to faith and obedience. Irreverence leads to a host of sins.

4. Because God is immutable, a remnant will be spared, 3:6.

"Because I, Yahweh, have not changed, you descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed."

"There is no support for the view that God is virtually retracting the condemnation of the sins which are clearly set forth in verse 5" [1: 116]. It does mean that mercy will be mingled with judgment (Is. 48:9-11). On one hand, Yahweh is a God of mercy, and on the other hand, He is a God of justice. When you read through the Bible you must be impressed that two attributes of God, love and holiness balance out each other. Too often, those who profess to be students of the Word avoid in depth study of the Word. We teach our children in the preschool departments that God is love. As they grow older, they need to learn that He is a holy God. One of my close friends and one of my all time favorite deacons asked me one Sunday morning about something I had fortunately been giving some thought to that morning. He asked why God struck down David's servant when he reached out to steady the ark of the covenant when it rocked and he thought it was in danger of falling from the cart (2 Samuel 6). On the surface it does appear that God was being unfair. The man meant only good.

When my friend asked the question I pointed to the verse that tells us that after the crisis was over David asked God how he should move the ark of the covenant. That is the question he

should have asked first. If he had done what he often did - he “inquired of the Lord” - he would have known what to do. That which distinguished David from all the other kings in the history of the world up until that time is summed up in these words - David inquired of the Lord (which explains why he was a man after God’s own heart). That also explains why all succeeding kings of Israel were compared with David. He was the standard by which they were judged. He was a great military genius. He was a talented musician. He put together a staff of powerful and courageous men. He inspired greatness and heroism among his top military leaders. He trusted the Lord and when there was a major decision to be made he “inquired of the Lord.” Why then, is it that when he came to that which was most holy, he simply acted on his own. As a matter of fact, in 2 Samuel 7, we learn that David decided that God had lived in a tent long enough. David lived in a palace, so it made sense to him that God should live in a palace - or a beautiful temple. Before you condemn David, let me ask you to think about something. A wealthy member offers to pay for the new educational wing or the new Family Life Center you feel your church needs. What is your first thought? I will tell you what mine might well be: if he meets two tests, it must be of God. One, he has the money. Two, he is willing to give it. Now can you conceive of a modern pastor who would not entertain the possibility that this generous offer was inspired by the Lord?

Modern pastors often look for programs, find one that is producing the results they want, go off and receive the training, and return to implement the program. Then they ask God to bless it. Do we lack the faith to seek God’s purpose first, then implement His program with full knowledge that if it comes from God He will bless it? That may seem like a subtle difference at first, but upon careful examination, there is a drastic difference.

BECAUSE I, YAHWEH, HAVE NOT CHANGED. One class every theology student must take while in seminary is Systematic Theology. I will never forget the time the professor was out and his fellow presented the lecture. The subject was God. Our graduate fellow made the statement that you cannot define God, and they proceeded to offer three definitions. He was right in the first place - you cannot define God. Finite man can no more define God than he can comprehend God. If you can fully understand and define your god, you have the wrong god!

In Genesis 1:1, there is no effort to explain God, define God, or prove His existence. God simply inspired the writer to write, “In the beginning, God created...” From that verse through the last chapter of Revelation, God reveals Himself. How does He do that? He is the Designer behind a designed universe. He is the power behind creation. He is the Father behind His tender mercies and His saving grace. God is love. God is holy. God is immutable. This attribute is underscored throughout the Bible: I am God, I change not! He is the changeless God of eternity, the uncaused Cause of all that exists. He is the immutable God behind our salvation. Our salvation depends upon His immutability. Our fellowship depends upon His immutability.

God has promised that Israel will be purified. His purpose is not her destruction but her purification. The Bible Knowledge Commentary offers the following explanation:

“But will this judgment bring about the end of Israel? Will the people be consumed by the refiner’s fire? No, for as other prophets had predicted, Malachi stated that

Israel will be delivered in the day of the LORD. The descendants of Jacob will not be destroyed. This is because of God's covenant promise. A promise is only as good as the person who makes it. God will keep His promise to the nation of Israel—it will not change—because His Word, like Himself, is immutable. This is the basis for Israel's hope (cf. Deut. 4:31; Ezek. 36:22-32). Significantly the Apostle Paul gives the same reason for expecting a future for national Israel (Rom. 3:3-4; 9:6; 11:1-5, 25-29)" [BKC].

The immutability of God has a direct bearing on every believer of every age, including the modern student of the Word.

YOU DESCENDANTS OF JACOB HAVE NOT BEEN DESTROYED. They were guilty of all the sins with which they have been charged - and the One doing the charging is Yahweh Himself. There is no mistaking their guilt, nor is there any denying the fact that they had never kept the covenant, and because they had not kept they covenant they were undeserving of the benefits derived from it. The covenant was/is maintained by the grace of God, never by the merit of man. The same may/must be said of our salvation. It is all of God, "not of man, lest any should boast."

VI. YAHWEH ACCUSES HIS PEOPLE HAVE ROBBED HIM, 3:7-12.

A. They Have Never Obeyed His Ordinances, 3:7.

"Since the days of your fathers, you have turned from My statutes; you have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of Hosts. But you ask: 'How can we return?'"

SINCE THE DAYS OF YOUR FATHERS. This denotes personal backsliding as well as national backsliding. These people of Malachi's day were guilty, but so were their forefathers. Their entire history is a chronicle of their backsliding, from the Exodus until that very day. You would think they would have known better. You would also think modern, well educated Americans would know better than to reject the God who breathed life into a young nation more than two hundred years ago.

TURNUED FROM MY STATUTES. They cannot claimed that they has simply strayed from His statutes, they had deliberately chosen to turn from them. Those who rebel against God today may rationalize that they "made some bad decisions", or that they had done "something stupid", but while they may excuse themselves, God does not let them off the hook that easily. They were guilty of turning from His statutes.

The entertainment industry relishes the memory of the infamous Clark Gable line in famous Civil War movie, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a....." Many were shocked, others disappointed, and still others were overjoyed that a barrier had been broken in the movie industry. Ever since that

time, Hollywood has been “pushing the envelope”, not only with language, but with romantic scenes, and dress - or maybe we should say, lack of dress. The entertainment industry has not just made some bad decisions, it has deliberately turned from morality and decency, and as it has turned, America has turned from the statutes of God. This does not mean that all the blame should be placed at the feet of the movie and television industry. As we move deeper and deeper into the post-Christians era of our history it is becoming more and more obvious that America has turned from God and His Word.

RETURN TO ME, AND I WILL RETURN TO YOU. This is a strong command, not a gentle suggestion. Social, political, economic, and spiritual responsibilities are involved. The people must return with their whole heart. The God who never changes has always urged His covenant people to return to Him. He anticipates a time when they will return to Him unconditionally:

“I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, **for they will return to Me with their whole heart**”
(Jer. 24:7, NASB).

HOW CAN WE RETURN? “But you ask: ‘How can we return?’” As incredible as it seems, they are still arrogant, cynical, and insolent. They had been in rebellion against God so long that they did not understand that they had turned from Him. “Their hearts were so hardened that they could no longer see their sin. They were not even aware that they were far from God” [NCWB]. God was determined to return to them if they would return to him. He will remove anything standing in the way of reconciliation, short of violating His character and their free will, as stressed in (Is. 1:18:

“Come now, and let us reason together,”
Says the LORD,
“Though your sins are as scarlet,
They will be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They will be like wool” (NASB).

I had the privilege of hearing the late Dr. J. Hardee Kennedy explain that this promise is conditional. It is conditioned one’s response. What God promises is that though our sins are as scarlet, they will be made white as snow - if we meet his requirements. What does He require? He commands us to repent and return to Him. In Jeremiah 3:22, this appeal is repeated (a century later than the appeal in Isaiah):

“Return, O faithless sons,
I will heal your faithlessness.”
“Behold, we come to You;
For You are the LORD our God.

B. They Had Robbed Him of the Tithe and Offering, 3:8.

WILL A MAN ROB GOD? *“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me!” You ask: “How do we rob You?” [By not making the payments] of 10 percent and the contributions.”* The NASB renders this verse: “Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. “To what is God responding with this question? He had just given their response to His demand that they return to Him : “How can we return?”

His answer may seem disconnected, but it cuts off debate and forces them to face the real issue. He asks them a question that demands a negative answer. “Who would dare do such a thing?” they may have been thinking. Yet, He declares, you are going on robbing me. This denotes continuous action.

There are people who are robbing God every day, but if you confronted them with it they would rationalize it away. There are Christians who do not bring God’s tithe to the storehouse. There are others who take a part of the tithe to do good works, either for personal credit or out of sympathy for another, who know they are receiving credit for what they do with God’s money. You do not have the right to take God’s money and help pay your neighbor’s hospital bill. If you take credit for doing a good deed, which was done with your tithes and offerings, you are robbing God. How should we help our neighbor? If the church helps the person, God gets the glory, but if you do it you rob God of both the money and the glory.

One of my many roommates, James King, was a very quiet senior adult - at least I assumed he must have been. After all, he was at least thirty-five years old! He was one of those men I appreciated so very much - World War II vets, men who had fought for my freedom. King was called to the Gospel ministry and enrolled in William Carey College at Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He was a pastor and went to seminary as he could until he graduated.

James King told me that he had been trying to convince his brother to tithe for a long time, but he had not been successful. One day, his brother and sister-in-law came for a visit. They invited them in and offered them a seat. Just as they began to visit, King exclaimed, “Wait just a minute!” Then he jumped up and grabbed his shotgun and headed for his gun safe, put the gun in it and locked it. Then he returned to his seat. His brother asked, “Why did you do that?” James said, “If a man will steal from God he may steal from me!”

God demands, “Will a man rob God?” Any believer would be incredulous - “Of course I would not rob God!” Yet people do it all the time. They rob God of his holy day, His lordship, and His money.

There is no telling what this country might have become if all those who profess to be Christians had tithed throughout the history of this country. Jesus said that we are to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s. It would be very nice if Caesar would settle for what God asks of us.

It would be interesting to speculate on what America would be like today if, instead of politicians taxing us in order to finance programs that keep them in office, they could simply leave much of the care for our neighbors to the local church. In the first place, there are millions of “neighbors” out there who feel that they have a right to tax money, who would not want to receive anything from the church. They can demand things of politicians, but they would have to ask of the church. They can approach the government with anger, pride, and arrogance, demanding their rights. They would have to humble themselves in asking for help from the church.

This, in part, explains why many people are opposed to President George W. Bush’s emphasis on the need for faith based initiatives. He has pointed out the advantage of having the church become involved in helping people. Those who know him best are convinced that President Bush is a man of deep faith and Christian character. He is a man of prayer, a man who loves God’s Word. His faith based initiative reveals that he is a practical believer.

HOW DO WE ROB YOU? Taken out of context, one may assume that these people were serious in asking this question. The context, however, reveals their cynicism. This is the cynicism we may read when we pick up the local paper and read the letter to the editor written by a professor from a local university who obviously enjoys setting poor ignorant Christians straight on religion, philosophy, and morality. Readers of the Monroe, Louisiana daily paper will immediately identify such a professor. A liberal ACLU attorney used to call THE MOON GRIFFON program before it became a syndicated program, and under a pseudonym, attack the church, the Bible, preachers, and Christians in general. “Steve” was cynical, clever, and combative. People loved to respond to his arguments, but many became angry in trying to debate him. My son, another local attorney, was one of the first to identify “Steve”. He says he enjoys talking with “Steve” until God is mentioned. His church is the ACLU and he spouts their gospel wherever he goes.

Cynicism seems never so arrogant as when discussing evolution and creation. As a friend says, “I am a scientist, I was trained in evolution. I took all the classes and I just cannot get beyond that to believe in a god.” The big obstacle for many like my friend is that if you accept special creation, especially the Genesis account of creation, you must acknowledge a Creator. If the Bible is right about the Creator, it must be right about our accountability to Him. If He is Creator, He is Judge.

TITHES AND OFFERINGS. They were continually robbing God of the tithes and offerings which He demands. The tithe acknowledges God’s ownership of all we have. He not only owns the cattle upon a thousand hills, He owns all that He created. As a member of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources, I was attending a board meeting in Nashville when I met Dr. Ed Bloom, the General Editor of the Holman Christian Standard Bible. As a matter of fact he met with the Broadman and Holman Committee, on which I serve, to answer questions about the translation. This was before it was released. At lunch, Dr. Jimmy Draper, President of LifeWay Christian Resources, brought Dr. Bloom to my table to answer questions for a man who was seated across from me. Dr. Bloom sat down at the end of the table between us and waited for this Hispanic trustee from Florida to ask his question. Why, he asked, did they use the word slave instead of the more familiar word “servant”? Dr. Bloom explained that the HCSB is a word for word translation and that the Greek word is translated literally. Dr. Bloom explained that we are His slaves. We are bought with a price, we belong to Him. The tithe acknowledges His ownership of all He has

entrusted to us.

The charge that they were robbing God by withholding their tithes and offerings was a serious one. They were commanded to pay the tithes and offerings into the temple treasure for the support of the ministry, to help the needy, and to every other work of God. The tithe is one-tenth of one's income. They knew the Law.

“Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S; it is holy to the LORD” (Lev. 27:30).

“To the sons of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting” (Num. 18:21).

“You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year. You shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always” (Deut. 14:22-23).

It is interesting that no defense is offered against the charge that they were robbing God. No doubt, they made excuses, just as people do today. It is easier for some to figure their tithes than for others. A farmer, for example, may borrow money in the February or March to “make the crop” that year. He repays it back in the fall when he sells his harvest. Does he wait and give all the tithe after he sells his cotton, soybeans, or rice? Or, does he plan to give monthly, and they adjust it at the end of the year? Suppose he has a complete crop failure?

I once heard a church member make a cynical remark about tithing that helped me make up my mind about how I would figure my tithe. He observed that his pastor lived in the parsonage and the church paid his utilities. He claimed that the pastor did not pay tithes on the house and utilities. Well, since I was that pastor, I didn't want to make an issue of it. My wife and I have always paid our tithe on our gross package, not the net salary. We have never regretted it. Neither do we have any of those stories we like to see associated with tithing. We have not been blessed with great wealth because we pay our tithes. Then, again, we have been blessed with great wealth, wealth no money can buy.

Years ago, Paul Powell, in PROCLAIM Magazine, (SBC, Oct. - Dec., 1987) illustrated a point about robbing God with a story about a jewel thief.

Author Barry is considered the greatest jewel thief of all time. He committed more than 150 robberies involving jewelry valued at between five and ten million dollars. He never robbed anyone unless their name was in the social register, and he wore a tuxedo while committing the crime. He was so charming that on several occasions when he was caught in the act of committing a crime, he talked his victim out of reporting the crime immediately.

Eventually, he spent seventeen years in prison for his crimes. After his release, he worked as a waiter at a roadside restaurant on the east coast, making fifty dollars a week.

A news reporter learned of his whereabouts, and during an interview, he talked freely about his life of crime. He concluded by saying, “I am not very good at drawing morals, but when I was young I had intelligence, charm, the ability to get along with people, and guts. I could have made something out of my life but I didn’t. So, when you write the story of my life and tell people about all these robberies, don’t leave out the big one. You can tell them that Arthur Barry robbed Jessie Livermore, the Wall Street baron. You can tell them that he robbed the cousin of the king of England. But don’t forget to tell them that, most of all, Arthur Barry robbed Arthur Barry” [15: 15].

C. They Were Placed Under a Curse for Robbing God, 3:9.

A CURSE. *“You are suffering under a curse, yet you—the whole nation—are [still] robbing Me.”* The judgment of God upon the guilty is unleashed in the form of droughts, plagues of locusts, a blight of mildew, and other things that will cause crop failure (Malachi 3:11; Hab. 3:17; Hag. 1:5, 9-11). Spiritual blessings were also denied those who were robbing God.

The first curse mentioned in the Bible is found in Genesis 3:14ff. See Deut. 28:15ff for the announcement of the curse and Hag. 1:5ff; Zech. 5:1-4; and Malachi to see how the curse is carried out in reality.

The people to whom Malachi wrote should have known their history, and knowing it, understood that they were under the judgment of Yahweh. They knew their history - even pagan people knew something of God’s dealings with Israel. Yet, these people cynically denied their guilt. Obedience is demanded of those who would receive God’s blessings. If these people and their ancestors had been obedient to God, there would be a Davidic king sitting on the throne of David, ruling a nation that reached from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River. It would have been a land flowing with milk and honey, an expression used metaphorically for God’s blessings, for prosperity.

Judah had been forced into subjection by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and now the Medo-Persian Empire. The curse under which they lived was economic in that they had to pay tribute. It was compounded by the fact that they were subject to Gentiles. Another curse of sin is that those who living in rebellion against God were having to live with others who were guilty of the same sins. Many people today are living in deplorable conditions because of their own sins, or the sins of their parents. Addiction to drugs, alcohol, gambling, and immorality will imprison people in a lifestyle from which they cannot free themselves.

ROBBING ME. Children in Vacation Bible School used to sing about committing to God all of their money, talent, time, and love. Withholding either is in a sense robbing God. Here, however, the emphasis is upon one’s tithes and offerings.

The “Me” is emphatic here. Malachi is very clear - the curse will not be removed until the cause is

corrected. It is the Lord of Hosts Who is being robbed. David had been inspired to write, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). He is the Lord of all and they have robbed Him. An inadequate view of God had no doubt led them to neglect the tithe. If they did not recognize His ownership of all things, they would not be sufficiently motivated to give the tithes and offerings. These people needed to return to the Lord, but they needed to do more than just bring their tithes. They needed to return in faith, and paying the tithe is a practical way of expressing faith in God.

D. God Promised to Bless Them If They Would Give the Tithe, 3:10-12.

TEN PERCENT. *“Bring the full 10 percent into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this way,” says the Lord of Hosts. ‘See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure.’* Students of the Word may be more familiar with the Kings James:

“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.”

God promises to pour out blessings on those who are faithful to Him. First, they must “bring the full 10 percent into the storehouse.” God demands a tithe of all the income with which He blesses us. Why 10% rather than 7% or 12%? I seriously doubt that the primary reason is that it is easier to calculate 10% than 12%! However, in those ancient times when people brought their choice produce and their lambs, that probably did simple things. It is possible that, considering the fact that the number 10 is the number for human completion, 10% would represent the individual’s complete commitment to God, total submission to His Word, His Law, and His Person.

There are several things of which we can be sure:

- (1) anything less than 10% is not a tithe. Any time there is a question about how to calculate the tithe, it would seem that it would be better to err on the side of caution.
- (2) No one has given God anything until after he pays God’s tithe. That is the claim made by the Creator of the universe, the Uncaused Cause of all that exists, the Cause of your existence.
- (3) They must bring the tithe to the storehouse. Today, we bring the tithe to Cod’s church. Many Christians prepare an attendance and offering envelop and give their tithe during Sunday School. Some may give during the worship service.
- (4) No one has the right to use the tithe in any other way, no matter how noble he considers the cause. For example, one may decide that since the church is meeting its budget, but not helping a neighbor, he would give his tithe to the neighbor. Who gets the credit? Who has given him

permission? If he says God told him to do it, this verse proves him wrong. Here is God's word on the subject.

(5) This is an imperative command. The emphasis is strong and it must include all of the tithe,

FOOD FOR MY HOUSE. Some may have claimed that they could not give 10% to God and buy food for their family. The Lord says that they must bring the full tithe so there would be "food for My house." They must not forget their obligation to provide for the priests and Levites.

The Lord did not abolish the tithe. In fact, he complimented the Pharisees for their faithfulness in giving the tithe. He didn't compliment them on much else! He condemned them for their method and purpose in giving, not their adherence to the Law.

TEST ME IN THIS WAY. When Satan tempted Jesus, the Lord quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16, said, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (Matt. 4:7) This is preferable to "thou shalt not tempt the Lord your God" - since God cannot be tempted. In Deuteronomy, we are indeed told that we must not put God to the test - that is to try to force Him to prove Himself.

In the Deuteronomy passage, there is an addition that Jesus did not include: "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah." What happened at Massah. They put Him to the test and He provided them with water - and He did not rebuke them for putting Him to the test (see Ex. 17). Then in Deuteronomy, He commands them never to do it again. What was the difference in Exodus and Deuteronomy? Massah came before God entered a covenant with His Chosen People, the command of Deuteronomy came after they entered a covenant relationship with Him. They were in their infancy at Massah, but after Sinai they should have matured in their relationship with Him.

Here God invites them to put Him to the test, which obviously means that it was acceptable. That does not provide scriptural authority for every "name it and claim it" tel-evangelist who promises all sorts of financial blessings to those who support his ministry. During the nineteen seventies and eighties certain tel-evangelists paraded one celebrity after another before the cameras with tells of how they gave sacrificially and God blessed them with wealth. The implications were that if people sent their money to that ministry God would make them healthy, wealthy, and wise. Some of the most godly saints I have ever known had very little in terms of material wealth, and they spent little time worrying about it. Wealth is not proof of righteousness, not is it a testimony against it. Poverty is not proof of unfaithfulness, not is it a testimony to righteousness.

As I work at my desk, I am enjoying two painting and a sculpture by Sam Gore, the man who established the art department at Mississippi College, Dr. Gore's father baptized my father many years before Sam and I became good friends. Sam has been in two churches where I was pastor to sculpture The Head of Christ, Mother and Child, and the Creation of Man. I look over my desk and see enjoy the painting of a cotton gin, which Sam painted at Rolling Fork, Mississippi in 1975. I saw it on a wall in him home and we talked about it for some time. I grew up on a cotton farm in the Mississippi Delta and Sam's father was our director of missions when he was a youth. When I

called John, my older son, to get with him on our schedule when he was packing to come home at the end of this freshman year at MC, he said, “Dr. Gore gave my your picture.” I was surprised when I got there and found that Sam had given the painting to John and asked him to give it to me.

A faculty member told Mark, my younger son, “The day will come when the average person will not be able to afford a Sam Gore work. If you go to the Stennis Office Building in Washington, D.C., you will see Sam Gore’s statue of the late senator. If you enter the Baptist Medical Center in Jackson, MS, look to the left and there in the small museum honoring nurses is Sam’s sculpture of the student nurse, a composite of a number of different student nurses. If you go to the Mississippi Agricultural Museum on Lakeland Drive in Jackson, plan to spend some time with the American Farmer. The farmer, patterned after his father, Brother John Gore, is seated on a stump, an open Bible in his left hand, his beagle curled around his feet.

Sam spend the better part of an hour explaining what he was trying to convey as he finished the amazing bronze master piece. Sam said, “I took off the left hand and made it larger because the hand that holds the Bible should not be a wimpish hand.” He told me how he and a friend brought a beagle into the basement of the fine arts building and fed and watered it and watched it until it went to sleep. Then he made a clay model of it. He looked at the finished product and said, “The dog is sound asleep. He’s trusting his master, just as his master is trusting his Master.”

God blessed Sam Gore with talent beyond anything most of us can comprehend. Mark, while working for Sam while at MC, discovered a closet packed with certificates, awards, and honors he has received, including National Art Educator of the Year in America. None are displayed, so his purpose is not personal glory.

I WILL OPEN. This shows continuous action. God guarantees it. He would open the floodgates of heaven and pour out the rains that were essential to a good crop. He does not stop there. He opens the floodgates of heaven for all faithful stewards.

God challenges the people to bring the tithes to the storehouse and “See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure.” Sam Gore might have accumulated a lot of money through his amazing talent in various areas of the fine arts. Instead, you would see him driving an ancient vehicle which he patched up from time to time. What did he do with his money? He and Margie opened their door to foreign students, missionary kids, and other students, sometimes even letting them stay in their home the entire summer. They spent their resources on others. The honorariums were used to set up an endowment for the art department at Mississippi College so that Christian young men and women could go to a Christian school and study art in a Christian atmosphere. Students can earn a degree without ever seeing a nude painting or a model in immodest dress. He gave all his honorariums to build up the endowment fund, but he gave a lot more. He first gave himself. In many ways, Sam illustrates what can happen when God opens the windows of heaven and pours out His blessings on those who are faithful to Him.

The Bible states that a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches. On more than one occasion, I have watched the rich and powerful come to a function for Sam Gore. One evening,

Mark had set up a faculty exhibit in Jackson and he wanted Becky and me to be there. At one point as I visited with Sam he turned and addressed a man who was taking in all the art work on exhibit and said, "Bill, I would like for you to meet a friend of mine. This is Johnny Sanders. Johnny, this is Bill Waller." Governor Bill Waller!

When Mark worked for Sam in the art department, a friend from the business office told him that the word around the campus was, what Dr. Gore wants at MC, Dr. Gore gets. God has indeed blessed him with that which money cannot purchase.

The late Stephen Olford was a student in England when he had a serious accident on a motor cycle. While he was lying in the bed in the hospital he received a letter from his father, a missionary to Africa, who had not heard about his son's accident. In the letter, his father wrote, "Remember, only one life; it will soon be past; only what is done for Christ will last." Stephen Olford determined that he would commit his all to Christ and before his death in 2004, he was called the greatest expositor of the Word in the world. He was blessed, and he was a blessing.

There is a downside to this, and that is the danger that people will adopt a vending machine attitude toward tithing. Many pastors have heard the testimony, "I am afraid not to tithe - if you don't give it to God He will take it anyway." These people needed this promise and God provided a promise that fit perfectly the Hebrew mind of that day. Remember that they knew much less than we about life (and rewards) after death.

The late, Dr. J. Hardee Kennedy observed that Joel places emphasis on the Lord's concern for the whole life of the people. He says that "no equation is drawn between the degree of faithfulness to God and the measure of material prosperity, for none is possible. But neither is separation assumed between physical disaster and moral disintegration, for frequently the two are interrelated. On the basis of his own goodness and grace, He (the Lord) announced forgiveness and abundant favors to the penitent" [20: 12-14, 18-19].

Many people inject a mercenary motive in worship and service. This is especially applicable when it comes to tithing. Too much emphasis is placed on material blessings. Tithing is not a guarantee that one will prosper materially, "But when a life is surrendered to Yahweh, tithing is a by-product of that surrender, and such a life is a life of blessing" [1: 128]. Alexander McClaren wrote:

This is the universal law, not always fulfilled in increase of outward goods, but in the better riches of communion and of larger possession in God Himself. He suffers no man to be His creditor, but more than returns our gifts, as legend tells of peasant who brought his king a poor tribute of fruits from his field, and went away from the presence-chamber with a jewel in his hand" [11: 349].

The Bible Knowledge Commentary carries the following note:

"One must be careful in applying these promises to believers today. The Mosaic Covenant, with its promises of material blessings to Israel for her obedience, is no longer in force (Eph. 2:14-15; Rom. 10:4; Heb. 8:13). However, the New Testament

speaks about generosity and giving. While not requiring a tithe of believers today, the New Testament does speak of God's blessing on those who give generously to the needs of the church and especially to those who labor in the Word (Acts 4:31-35; 2 Cor. 9:6-12; Gal. 6:6; Phil. 4:14-19)" [BKC - BIBLE NAVIGATOR].

3:11 - I WILL REBUKE. "I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not ruin the produce of your ground, and your vine in your field will not be barren," says the Lord of Hosts." Verse 11 continues the emphasis on blessings we have seen in verse 10. When they return to Him, He will take away the obstacles to their blessings. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible offers adds: "Instead of destroying their crops, God would make them come in greater abundance than they had ever imagined possible (Amos 4:9; Hag. 2:19; Zech. 8:12)." The "devour" here is "probably referring to locusts, though the word here is general in meaning . In the Near East, locust swarms are known for their ability to damage huge tracts of agricultural land" [NCWB].

3:12 - A DELIGHTFUL LAND. "Then all the nations will consider you fortunate, for you will be a delightful land," says the Lord of Hosts." Though they were under a curse for turning away from God, and for refusing to return to Him, a glorious promise may still be realized. They were promised a land flowing with milk and honey, but it has never flowed with milk and homey. The problem was not that God could not deliver on His promise. The problem was that the people continually rebelled against Yahweh. The fault was theirs. Still, He promises that if they will follow Him theirs would still be a "delightful land."

VII. GOD LOOKS AT THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED, 3:13-4:6

A. He Charges Them with Arrogance Toward Him, 3:13-15

1. Their words were harsh against Yahweh, 3:13a.

13:13a - YOUR WORDS. "*Your words against Me are harsh,*" says the Lord." G. Campbell Morgan offers the following commentary on this charge:

"The very worst form of blasphemy is the misrepresentation of God by people who profess to love His name, and look with exuberant delight for the coming of His kingdom. The man who openly blasphemes, and who, standing under the sun, looks up at the heavens and says, "I hate God," is far less dangerous in the influence of his life than the man who says, "I love God" and disobeys Him. The blasphemy of which

to be afraid is that which joins with the great congregation in saying, “Thy will be done, Thy kingdom come,” and all the while thwarts the will of God and denies his kingdom within” [14: 60].

Satan is a liar from the beginning. He is the great deceiver, as well as the accuser. He is vile in the use of his power and worldly wisdom, but he is the most vile when he parades his venomous attack against God in the language of religion - complete with claims of love, peace, joy, harmony, justice, and fairness.

The words of these people, rather than deceptively kind and gracious, were harsh and critical. Apparently, there was nothing subtle about what they were saying. Even though judgment is drawing near because of their arrogance, God still reaches out to them in redemptive love. Just what were their harsh words? (1) “What have we spoken against You?”, and (2) “It is useless to serve God” (13b, 14).

2. They protest, 13b-14.

3:13b - YET YOU ASK. “*Yet you ask: “What have we spoken against You?”*” The context clearly shows that they are not looking for answers or seeking correction. They arrogantly demand an answer from God.

3:14 - IT IS USELESS. “You have said: “*It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping His requirements and walking mournfully before the Lord of Hosts?*”” One wonders what has happened to the hearts and minds of those who reach the point that they state that “It is useless to serve God.” How do people get that way? Perhaps you have heard someone say, “I tried religion one time, but it didn’t meet my needs.” Some of the most cynical and arrogant people I have ever known have been people who have “tried God,” or “tried religion,” but gave it up because of all the hypocrites in the church, or because God did not answer their prayers. These are the ones who quote Scripture to serve their purpose, or look for failures in Christians.

A deacon and friend went with me to visit a man who had not been to church in several years. My friend told me that this man and his family were in church every Sunday until his three year old son ran out into the street and was hit by a truck. He stopped going to church because, he said, if God had wanted to, he could have prevented his son’s death. What kind of God will let a little boy like that be killed?

Even worse, there are those who use the church for financial gain. In fact, there have been some televangelists who promise those who send money to their ministry will be blessed financially. They ask people to send what they call “seed money” - they send it and watch their fortune grow.

Those to whom Malachi wrote were aware of the promises from Deuteronomy that the righteous will prosper and the unrighteous are cursed. They did not see it playing out that way in their time. They were not a powerful nation as they had been under the reign of David. Instead, they were living under the control of another foreign power.

3. They complain that God is unfair, 3:15.

3:15 - CONSIDER5 THE ARROGANT TO BE FORTUNATE. *“So now we consider the arrogant to be fortunate. Not only do those who commit wickedness prosper, they even test God and escape.”* A Hebrew professor translated this verse, “And now we are blessing the proud; also the workers of iniquity are built up; yea they tempt God and continue to escape” (DeLaughter). The root meaning of the word translated proud (arrogant) is “to boil over.” It symbolizes insolence, impudence, fierceness, or arrogance. This denotes sin that is presumptuous and high handed. These arrogant people who professed to follow Yahweh had decided that hardened sinners had chosen the better way. It was more profitable, they reasoned. For a contrast, read Hab. 3:17-19:

“Though the fig tree should not blossom
And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail
And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
And there be no cattle in the stalls,
Yet I will exult in the LORD,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
The Lord GOD is my strength,
And He has made my feet like hinds’ feet,
And makes me walk on my high places.”

(NASB, Emphasis added)

Maybe you have heard the expression, “He’s full of himself.” I went to high school with a student whose parents owned a fairly large sized farm, though much smaller than some of the largest plantations in the Mississippi Delta. I returned home one summer after several years at Mississippi College and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and saw this acquaintance from high school. He was now managing the family farm, and with more success than many had expected. He would meet with other farmers for coffee or see them at a place of business and boast of his cotton or soybean harvest. In all his boasting it was obvious to all that he was saying that his success was due to his brilliance. One day as he drove away from a group of farmers, one man said, “What that boy needs is a good crop failure!” It is human nature to want to see someone that arrogant “taken down a notch or two.” The person who puts his arrogance on display before God is inviting Him to take him down a notch or two. We must remember that God resists the proud, but He hears the humble.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary offers the following summary:

“The problem, of course, was not on God’s side. Malachi had already demonstrated that God was responding to them in accord with the covenant. However, His response was not in the form of blessing, which they desired. Two reasons explain this: (1) The people’s hearts were not right with God; they were disobedient. (2) Some of the people who made the complaint (3:14) were guilty of the myopic

legalism that eventually led to Jewish Pharisaism in the first century A.D. This legalism concentrated on performing certain rigorous activities and not doing other things as the means of vindicating themselves before God. But this actually stifled the full expression of inner righteousness required by God (Matt. 5:20-48; 23:1-36). Thus their works would not be accepted as proper covenant obedience. God requires external obedience, but it must stem from the heart, and this obedience is not to vindicate one's own righteousness but to manifest God's righteousness. Believers today are in a much better position than Old Testament saints because those in the body of Christ have received the permanently indwelling Spirit who can overcome the flesh in manifesting the righteousness of God (Rom. 8:1-17; Gal. 5:16-26; Phil. 2:12-13)" [BKC].

B. Those Who Fear God Should Encourage One Another, 3:16-17

1. The will be recorded in the Book of Remembrance, 3:16.

3:16 - THOSE WHO FEARED THE LORD. *"At that time those who feared the Lord spoke to one another. The Lord took notice and listened. So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared Yahweh and had high regard for His name."* "At that time" ("then" in NASB) is emphatic, meaning that the action taken in this verse is the result of the preceding confrontation (vv. 13-15).

The question is, to whom does "those who feared the Lord" refer. Either this refers to a remnant of the people who did not arrogantly challenge the Lord, reasoning that it would be more profitable not to obey Him, or it means that all of them arrogantly challenged but a remnant of the people repented and now feared the Lord. Certainly, we know that the Lord has preserved a remnant in every generation that have remained faithful to Him. Elijah thought he was the only one who was faithful to the Lord, but the Lord informed him that there were many faithful people in the land who had never bowed their knees to Baal.

Those who feared the Lord were the ones who heard the Lord with a mind to obey Him. God what these people said and He would act on it in His own time and in His own way, vindicating the righteous and visiting punishment on the ungodly.

BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE. The Persian king kept a book of remembrance in which memorable deeds were recorded (Esther 6:1). God told Moses to write down what He said and read His words to the people. Joshua declared that Moses wrote in the book what God told him to write, and that he did all that Moses had written in the book for him to do. Here we learn that God has a book of remembrance.

"Nevertheless He looked upon their distress
When He heard their cry;
And He remembered His covenant for their sake,
And relented according to the greatness of His lovingkindness.

He also made them objects of compassion
In the presence of all their captors” (Ps. 106:44-46, NASB).

“For he will never be shaken;
The righteous will be remembered forever” (Ps. 112:6).

“God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took
notice *of them*” (Ex. 2:24-25).

“This book of remembrance in Malachi has a rich heritage and a great depth of meaning. It must be associated with the biblical concept of salvation and its ultimate fulfillment in an eternal fellowship with God” [1: 135f]. Jesus promised, “He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and **I will not erase his name from the book of life**, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels” (Rev. 3:5, NASB). Books, including the book of life are associated with the great White Throne Judgment:

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and **books were opened**; and another book was opened, which is **the book of life**; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in **the book of life**, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:11-15, NASB, emphasis added).

2. They will be a special possession to the Lord, 3:17.

2:17 - THEY WILL BE MINE. *“They will be Mine,” says the Lord of Hosts, “a special possession on the day I am preparing. I will have compassion on them as a man has compassion on his son who serves him.”* “A loving Father calls the wanderer home...” Israel was a holy nation to the Lord, a nation that was to bring honor to His name, just as true believers today are to be holy, separate, set aside to bring glory and honor to the name of our Lord. During the most intense trials (and minor ones I unfortunately elevated to the “intense” category,) I have often quoted Paul’s words to Timothy: “Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness’” (2 Tim. 2:19).

Two things stand out in this verse: (1) God will claim them as His possession, and (2) He “will have compassion on them as a man has compassion on a son who serves him.”

At the time I am writing this study I have been on the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian

Resources for some five years. Every trustee serves on at least one committee, and I have always served on the Broadman and Holman Committee (serving now as vice-chairman). As I have mentioned in other writing, I had the privilege of listening to Dr. Ed Bloom, the General Editor for the Holman Christian Standard Bible while the translators were still at work. We has received a hard copy of various books at one point and at lunch one day, Dr. Jimmy Draper, president of LifeWay, led Dr. Bloom to my table to answer questions for a Hispanic man from Miami. Dr. Bloom sat at the end of the table between another trustee and me and patiently answered questions. The one question I recall had to do with the fact that the HCSB translators used the word “slave” where his translation used the word “servant.” Dr. Bloom explained that the HCSB is a literal, word for word translation. He explained that slave is the correct translation, and that we are slaves to God, bought with a price. When God saved you He declared, “You are mine.”

C. They Will Distinguish Between the Righteous and the Wicked, 3:18.

3:18 - YOU WILL AGAIN SEE. *“So you will again see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.”* This verse is the answer to the complaints registered in 2:17 and 3:13-15. “When God has separated those who truly love him from those who do not (Psa. 58:11), those who thought that only the ungodly prospered would see how wrong they were” [NCWB].

The Bible Knowledge Commentary offers the following thoughts on this verse:

“In previous times Israel had seen God intervene decisively in judgment and deliverance (e.g., the Exodus, the Exile, and the return). Those events pointed up a distinction between the righteous and the wicked. The future day of the Lord, however, will bring about a much more extensive judgment on the wicked, and through physical deliverance and bodily resurrection, the righteous will be His “treasured possession” in the kingdom, fulfilling God’s original intention for Israel (Ex. 19:5-6; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4). This hope renews the righteous and strengthens their fear of God” [BKC].

D. The Nature of God’s Judgment Is Revealed, 4:1-6.

NOTE: There is no break between 3:18 and 4:1

1. The day is coming when the wicked shall burn like stubble, 4:1.

4:1 - THE DAY IS COMING. *“For indeed, the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and everyone who commits wickedness will become stubble. The coming day will consume them,” says the Lord of Hosts, ‘not leaving them root or branches.’* “For indeed” serves notice that something very serious is about to be proclaimed. The Lord has the answer for all the questions of the arrogant skeptics of all ages.

Emphasis is placed on “day” here. This is in keeping with “the Day of the Lord” in other prophetic messages.

“Woe to you who long for the **Day of the Lord!** What will **the Day of the Lord** be for you? It will be darkness and not light. It will be like a man who flees from a lion only to have a bear confront him. He goes home and rests his hand against the wall only to have a snake bite him. Won’t **the Day of the Lord** be darkness rather than light, even gloom without any brightness in it?” (Amos 5:18-20, HCSB, emphasis added).

“Woe because of that day! For the Day of the Lord is near and will come as devastation from the Almighty” (Joel 1:15, HCSB).

The Day of the Lord has eschatological implications, with emphasis on the consummation of the ages. “Although it looks to the future, it is kept alive by the interventions of Yahweh in redemption and judgment at various intervals throughout history” [1: 138].

The Day of the Lord is coming, and while there is an emphasis on it in the Old Testament, the New Testament both affirms it and amplifies it. In the Day of the Lord there will be a distinction between the treatment and destiny of the righteous and the unrighteous. I am preaching a series of messages from the Revelation at this time. I have prepared about thirty manuscripts and anticipate that there will be at least forty sermons in the series. I have written some thirty volumes on various books of the Bible, which are included in THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK series. The sermons from Revelation will be included in THE SERMON NOTEBOOK. Both Notebooks may be viewed on the PastorLife website, the official website of the Georgia Baptist Convention, which is the creation of Dr. Mike Minnix. The goal is to make PastorLife free to all pastors everywhere. One cannot spend as much time in Revelation as I have without sensing the importance of the Day of the Lord.

In Joel 2:11, the Day of the Lord is “terrible and dreadful - who can endure it?” In Joel 3:14, the prophet writes, “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the Day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.” In Obadiah 1:15, “the Day of the Lord is near.” In Zephaniah 1:2, it is “The Great Day of the Lord.”

In the New Testament:

In 1Corinthians 1:8, Paul wrote, “He will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8). In 1Cor 5:5, he wrote, “turn that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord.” In 1 Thes, 5:2, Paul warns, that “... the Day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.” In 2 Thes. 2:2, he

encouraged these first century saints “not to be easily upset in mind or troubled, either by a spirit or by a message or by a letter as if from us, alleging that the Day of the Lord has come.”

BURNING LIKE A FURNACE. Malachi warned, “burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and everyone who commits wickedness will become stubble. The coming day will consume them,” says the Lord of Hosts, ‘not leaving them root or branches.” Does this point to the consummation of the ages. Peter wrote, “But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed” (2 Peter 3:10). For the people described by Malachi (wicked, arrogant people), the Day of the Lord will be a terrible day. For those who are faithful to the Lord, it will be a glorious day: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity” (2 Peter 3:18).

STUBBLE. The arrogant skeptics are portrayed as worthless chaff or stubble. Right now, God loves every sinner enough to send His only begotten Son to die for him. God would have all sinners to come to him. Jesus said, “He that comes to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37b). However, in the Great Day of the Lord, the unsaved person will be treated as worthless stubble. The joy of eternity will not be diminished for all eternity because of worthless stubble. This is shocking, but true.

We must remind ourselves that the world will be destroyed by fire, as Peter wrote. At the same time, there is an eternal fire, called hell, which burns day and night forever. Those who reject Jesus Christ will spend eternity in hell, where there will be conscious, eternal torment. Those who ignorant of the holiness of God man jump to the conclusion that a loving God could never send anyone to such a horrible place. Those who know the Word of God are well aware of the fact that there is no place in God’s holy heaven for those who look Him in the face and say, “I don’t want you! I reject Your Son, and I reject your salvation.” There is no place in heaven for those who do not acknowledge the One Who sits on the throne of heaven. Instead of being shocked at how severe God is, we should be shocked at how evil arrogant skeptics are.

NOT LEAVING THEM ROOT OR BRANCHES. Root and branches denote the totality of their destruction. However, this does not imply annihilation. See Isaiah 5:24; Amos 2:9; and Rev. 20. One popular New Age preacher reportedly proclaimed that hell is nothing more than low self-esteem. Another popular tel-evangelist is reported to have said that the worst thing you could say to another person is to tell him that he is a sinner. Liberals have rejected the idea of hell for generations, preferring annihilation to the fires of hell. Someone once told Dr. R. G. Lee that he did not believe in hell and Dr. Lee replied, “You won’t be there five minutes before you change your mind!”

2. The God of love will preserve the righteous, 4:2-3.

4:2 - BUT FOR YOU. *“But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and you will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall.”* “But” emphasizes the great contrast between verse 1 and verse 2. There is an indescribable contrast

between the destiny of the righteous and the destiny of the redeemed of the Lord. As a matter of fact, there is a tremendous contrast between the saved and the lost!

SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. The sun is not mentioned in verse 1, but it may be a symbol of the blazing fire that will destroy the wicked and of the “gentle rays that overshadow the righteous.

Some do not see the “sun” here as representing Jesus Christ. Many others, following the Authorized Version (capitalization), do see it as a reference to Christ. What is important here is to see that God is the source and that the sun as the instrument of God’s judgment. There is no question that Jesus is the Son of Righteousness, but that fact neither stands nor falls on this reference.

JUMP LIKE CALVES. When the “sun of righteousness rises, and you receive the fullness of God’s healing, “you will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall.” This is a picture of glory, liberty, and victory. Anyone who has spent much time on a farm can appreciate this picture. When a calf is released from a dark, confining stall, it will run and jump as it revels in its new freedom. What joy this expresses! And what a contrast this is with the ultimate end for the wicked and arrogant person who refuses to obey the Lord.

It is amazing to consider all that God offers those who accept Him in faith and follow Him in righteousness, a righteousness for which they can take no credit. We must thank our Lord every day that He did not say, “When you have produced enough righteousness to satisfy My holiness, then I will grant you salvation.” Of course, we know that there is none who is righteous. Our highest attempt at righteousness comes up so short that He compares it to filthy rags. If you have seen rags so filthy that you would never touch them with your hands, you will appreciate how God reacts to human righteousness. Paul stressed in Romans that Abraham believed God and it was attributed unto him for righteousness.

When I was a student at Mississippi College, I led the Baptist Student Union (BSU) mission trip to the Hinds County Jail for two and one half years. During part of that time I was also going to the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman every Sunday morning to preach to prisoners at one of the camps. I left home at 6:00 A.M. so that I could be there to preach at 8:00. After that, I drove to Ruleville where I picked up Mom and Pop Gordon and took them with me to Sunday School at the Dockery Baptist Church, between Ruleville and Cleveland where I was student pastor. Both of these missions impacted my life, and I still benefit from the experience.

One day, as we drove to the county jail in Jackson, I asked different people to go to different cells to preach or witness. I really preferred to go to the maximum security cell, where I had the opportunity to lead several high-profiled prisoners to the Lord. Two of those who had committed murder, made it a point to speak with me later in Parchman. On this particular day, I was looking forward to speaking with twelve year old Rocky, from New Orleans, and his friend, who were in a cell in the juvenile section down stairs. I asked two students to visit with a man who was in a cell in the juvenile area. Little did I understand why a grown man was in a juvenile cell, and separated from the juveniles by an empty cell. I had heard a little about homosexuals, and in time I concluded that this man may have been separated from other men for that reason.

As I began speaking with Rocky and his friend, I remembered the frustration I experienced the week before when I asked, "Do you know Jesus as your Savior?" His pat answer, no matter how I phrased the question, was, "Yeah, I was baptized when I was a baby." I was praying for wisdom in witnessing to the two boys, but I had only been talking with them a few minutes when the two boys I had asked to witness to the lone man in the cell a short distance away approached me, showing some obvious anxiety. They asked me to trade places with them because the man seemed threatening to them. I was the leader so, as much as I wanted to talk with Rocky and his friend, I had to trade places with them.

I walked the few steps down to the other cell and saw a man sitting on a cot, his head down. There was only a cot and a seatless commode in the cell. I introduced myself and asked the prisoner his name. He told me it was Michael. I asked where he was from and when he told me, I told him that during the summers I worked for the Department of Agriculture (Quitman County ASCS), and that I had measured cotton near his home. Actually, we plotted cotton fields on an aerial photograph so that ladies in the offices could run a planimeter around the lines to determine the acreage.

Michael was responsive, possibly because I was from his part of the state and knew his home town. After a few minutes, I felt compelled to simply ask, "Michael, do you believe in God." He said, "Yeah, I believe in God." My next question was so completely unplanned that I give the Lord credit for putting it in my mouth. I found myself saying, "Michael, you have told me you believe in God. Now let me ask you another question. Do you believe God? There is a difference in believing in God and believing God."

Michael looked directly into my eyes, got up from his cot, and started walking toward the bars where I stood. As he took those few steps, I was recalling the fear my friends had expressed to me only a couple of minutes earlier. As Michael approached, I was wondering about their fear. I knew Michael could not escape from the cell, so what did I have to fear. I could step back one step and he couldn't reach through the bars and touch me. However, my mind was working overtime as I saw Michael's hands coming up, reaching for the bars. I did not want to step back. I was not afraid of him physically. I was a bigger man than he and I loved boxing, so I would not have feared him physically if he had been on the outside. I would have feared an altercation that would not have served the Lord in any way. I realized that to show any anxiety at this point could send the wrong signal to Michael.

I had but a fraction of a second to calculate what Michael was going to do. His hands came up, and he reached for bars directly in front of his shoulders. Catching those bars with his hands, he leaned forward so that his eyes were between two bars, and said, "Johnny, can you get me a Bible?" He got a Bible!

Tommy had committed a brutal murder. He had met a girl while working the Mississippi State fair in Jackson. She was seven months pregnant when her boyfriend told her to get out. She had no place to go, so Tommy told her she could move into his motel room. He said, "I can handle it" - meaning that he could handle knowing she was pregnant with someone else's baby. Then one night the twenty-two year old young man got drunk and decided he couldn't handle it. He beat and strangled

her to death. We read about it in the Jackson Clarion Ledger. I had an opportunity to talk with Tommy and another man, one with whom I had talked before.

As I arrived that day, there was a reporter standing in the small area just inside the heavy metal door, separated from Tommy by two sets of bars, far enough apart to keep visitors from having physical contact with each other. The jailer told me to go on to the cell because the reporter's time was up. As I walked through the doorway, the reporter was badgering Tommy: "You must think you are tough, beating up a woman, don't you?" Tommy was saying, "You come behind these bars and I'll show you how tough I am."

The reporter turned and looked at me and demanded, "Who are you?" I gave him my name and he demanded, "Where are you from?" I looked him in the eye and said, "Home." I stood, looking him in the eye until he left. I could see his next article about some bleeding heart liberal from Mississippi College over there trying to convert this murderer.

I talked with Tommy and the man in the next cell. Tommy had asked for a priest as soon as he was arrested and one showed up with a pamphlet and told him to read it and when he returned in a week he would ask him some questions about it. Tommy asked the jailer not to let the priest back in to see him. The other prisoner talked with Tommy after I left. He told him not to talk with a reporter - "He is going to get you the gas chamber!" He added, "Next Thursday, you listen to Johnny Sanders. He is telling you the truth." A couple of days later I received a letter from Tommy, simply addressed to me at Mississippi College, Clinton, Mississippi. The folks at the post office in Clinton found my box and put it in it. In that letter, Tommy said, "Johnny, I am trying to find God." I wrote back and assured him that God was trying to find him before he ever considered his need for God. I saw Tommy pray to receive Jesus Christ as his Savior. He was sentenced to life at Parchman, and one day when I preached at camp 4, Tommy was there, and he was excited. He said, "Johnny, when I get out I just want to serve God." I assured him that he did not have to wait to serve the Lord: "You will never find a better place to serve the Lord."

Mr. Taylor had married a woman two weeks before he murdered her for the life insurance he had taken out on her. One Sunday morning after I preached to around 140 men in the mess hall, a man waked up to me and asked, "Were you in Jackson last May?" I quickly thought back and then assured him that I had been. He then asked, "Did you come to the Hinds County Jail?" I told him I was there every Thursday afternoon. His smile lit up his face as he held up a new testament and showed me what I had written in the front when I gave it to him after he was born again in maximum security. At that time, the heavy metal door was locked and I had to talk with him through a heavy wire mesh. I could see the prisoners, but they could not see me. Mr. Taylor said, "I couldn't see you, but I remember your voice."

Later, I met his brother when I preached at a church just outside Columbia, Mississippi. His brother was a deacon in that church and assured me that his brother was sincere. He told me that he got out ten days every Christmas and spent that time with him.

Mr. Taylor and Tommy were not dancing like calves in a physical sense, but inwardly they were

rejoicing in their freedom in Christ. Iron bars can keep prisoners inside a cell, but they cannot keep Jesus Christ out. Mr. Taylor has been with the Lord for a number of years. I do not know about Tommy, but I wish I had stayed in touch with him. I do have a note from him, and a sketch he made of me. I loved those men, though I detest what they did. They deserved to pay the price they paid for their crimes, but I thank God that He set them free. Even in prison, they knew the joy of His salvation. When I read this passage, my mind went back all those years, back to 1959, when I saw two men who had each committed a brutal murder set free by God's eternal Truth, the Son of Righteousness. They were prisoners of the state of Mississippi, but by the grace of God they were free.

4:3 - YOU WILL TRAMPLE THE WICKED. *"You will trample the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day I am preparing," says the Lord of Hosts.*" True believers will not only rejoice in the victory, they will share in the administration and the prosecution of the victory! I can neither comprehend the scope of this statement, nor hope to communicate it fully to another person. I do know this promise is pregnant with promises that will be delivered in God's own time. When Jesus returns to earth He will be wearing the crown of victory (Rev. 17-18), showing that the victory is His, even before He begins the final battle in that age-old war between our Lord and the prince of this world. He will put all enemies under His foot. The picture is of a king, seated on the throne in ancient times. His commander in chief is returning from war against an enemy. There is a great parade, people lining the streets, cheering the victorious troops, mocking the bound prisoners. At the front of the parade, the defeated king is forced to march in his chains before - and his deep humiliation - before the cheering crowds. Finally, they reach the place where the king sits, awaiting his commander and his officers, knowing that they have given the defeated foe his instructions. Finally, they reach the place where the king has set up his throne. They stop and the defeated king is made to prostrate himself before the victorious king, placing his head, face down, right in front of the feet of the victorious king, who reaches out a foot and places it on the back of the head of the defeated king.

When Jesus returns, He is going to defeat the enemy, and force him to bow before Him so that He can place His foot on his head - described in Scripture as putting his enemy under His foot. I cannot imagine our full participation, but we will share in the victory, as portrayed here in trampling the wicked. The contrast is inescapable. All lost people are called the wicked. All who reject Jesus Christ are wicked people in God's sight. All believers are portrayed as trampling the wicked. Sadly, a lot of the wicked who will be trampled are members of some church. Religion can free one from wickedness, only Jesus Christ can do that.

THEY WILL BE ASHES. The prophecy continues, "They will be ashes under the soles of your feet." This does not teach annihilation of the lost. On the contrary, it is a simple figure of speech that underscored the magnitude and completeness of the victory of the righteous over the unrighteous. We must remember the emphasis Paul places on the fact that we cannot produce righteousness of our selves. It is imputed unto us by Jesus Christ when we trust Him.

ON THE DAY I AM PREPARING. As the old Gospel song declares, "There's a Great Day Coming." However, the Bible portrays the Great Day of the Lord as both a day for rejoicing, and a

day of extreme misery. The redeemed of the Lord will be rejoicing in the victory, as a calf released from its stall. The unsaved will be weeping and wailing and crying for the rocks and the hills to fall on them to hide them from the wrath of God.

CONCLUSION, 4:4-6

A. Believers Are Urged to Keep the Law of Moses, 4:4.

“Remember the instruction of Moses My servant, the statutes and ordinances I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.”

Throughout the book of Malachi there is an emphasis on the Law and the covenants. “They constitute a bridle against sin and a challenge to the righteous: [1: 142]. That emphasis is not restricted to this prophecy, however. It runs throughout the Old Testament:

“When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is: fear God and keep His commands, because this is for all humanity. For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl 12:13-14, HCSB).

When an aging David sought to prepare his son Solomon to take over the reigns of the kingdom of Israel he gave instructions concerning the kingdom, worship, character, and the building of the temple:

“Above all, may the Lord give you insight and understanding when He puts you in charge of Israel so that you may keep the law of the Lord your God. Then you will succeed if you carefully follow the statutes and ordinances the Lord commanded Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Don’t be afraid or discouraged” (1 Chron 22:12-13).

God expects His people to be well grounded in His law and statutes, as well as His great salvation. His holds up Abraham to them as an example:

“Listen to Me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were cut, and to the quarry from which you were dug. **Look to Abraham your father**, and to Sarah who gave birth to you in pain. When I called him, he was only one; I blessed him and made him many. For the Lord will comfort Zion; He will comfort all her waste places, and He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and melodious song. **Pay attention to Me, My people**, and listen to Me, My nation; **for instruction will come from Me**, and My justice for a light to the nations. I will bring it about quickly. My righteousness is near, My salvation

appears, and My arms will bring justice to the nations. The coast lands will put their hope in Me, and they will look to My strength. Look up to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and its inhabitants will die in like manner. **But My salvation will last forever, and My righteousness will never be shattered**” (Isaiah 51:1-6, emphasis added).

Great emphasis is placed upon both the role of the Law and the role of the prophets in preparing for the coming Messiah. Moses and Elijah are representative of the Law and the prophets respectively.

B. God Promises to Send Elijah before the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord, 4:5-6.

“Look, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome Day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

“Elijah” means “Yahweh is my God” and if anyone ever demonstrated that reality more clearly than the great prophet one would be hard pressed to prove it. The meaning of the prophet’s name seems particularly appropriate in light of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 17:1ff).

The question here is, how is the coming of Elijah before the day of the Lord to be understood? Jesus clearly stated that Elijah had come and that John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of the coming of Elijah before He began His ministry. This, however, appears to be a prophecy of the Second Coming of Christ. Will another Elijah come before end-time events begin? Did John the Baptist fulfill both prophecies? Did the appearance of Elijah with Moses and Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration fulfill the prophecy?

Jesus’ statement in Matthew 17:9-13 is clear. He stated that Elijah had already come and He was speaking of John the Baptist. The New Testament reveals that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies - furthermore, the Law “is unto John.” See Isaiah 40:3; Mal. 3:1; 4:5. See also, Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:2-8; Luke 3:2-18; 7:27. John 1:21 states that John the Baptist was not literally Elijah, but it does not deny that he was one who had come in the spirit and power of Elijah.

Elijah represents the prophets and John the Baptist was the great prophet who declared, “Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world...” (Which is the fulfillment of all Messianic prophecies). Jesus is Prophet, Priest, and King. Everything in the Old Testament points to Jesus. Everything in the New Testament centers around Jesus, His virgin birth, His perfect life, His announcement that He is the Messiah, His teachings, His mighty manifestations of power, His death, burial, resurrection, appearances, promised return, and ascension. In Revelation, we see Jesus as the Lamb of God standing at the right hand of the Father.

If one wonders why the references to Elijah here in Malachi, we may remind ourselves that this is the final book in the Old Testament. God knew that there would be no more Scripture written until

after the Messiah came, even though that would be centuries in the future. Closing out the final book in the Old Testament in this manner demands special scrutiny.

The work of Elijah, or the Elijah like prophet, is seen in verse 6. He will restore love in the home between parents and children. He will point to a time when ideal relationships will be established. He will hold before us the ideal relationship between man and God. This prophecy possibly led many post-millennialists to believe an ideal society would be established on earth before the return of the Lord. Pre-millennialists see this as the character of the millennial kingdom. The problem is that this prophecy clearly states that this is to be done before the day of the Lord.

A possible explanation is that this refers to the time before the return of the Lord He will try to establish the ideal relationship between people, especially in the home. However, if they refuse to obey Him, He will come and smite them with a curse. The word “curse” is from “cherem”, meaning ban, or exterminate. It is something used to set people apart for a purpose. At times it is used to mark people for destruction.

The book ends with the word “curse”, but that is not the theme or purpose of the book of Malachi. The theme is the love of God. Malachi emphasizes the lengths to which Yahweh will go to try to persuade His people to return to Him and live in fellowship with Him so that He might bless them and not curse them.

Any individual must climb over a lot of obstacles in order to reject God. There is the revelation of God within the individual and without the person, as described in the first chapter of Romans. Today, there is the church, Bibles everywhere in America, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the testimony of the saints, thousands of preachers proclaiming the Gospel around the clock and around the world. There are the lives of countless thousands of believers. There are the showers God sends upon the ungodly just as it rains on the just. Even the unrighteous are recipients of both God’s protection and His provisions.

I know a man who laughs at Christians, jokes about Jesus, and speaks with absolute confidence and conviction about the death of the dinosaur millions ago. He declares that the world is fifteen million years old. Interestingly, he says, “I am not an atheist,” but continues to spew forth the gospel of evolution. He has even said, “I wish I did believe there was a heaven.” This man has blinded himself to the truth so long that he is spiritually blind. I have often spoken with this man and two of his friends who are as blind as he. God has given them life, He has given them His Son, He has given them His Word, He has sent His Spirit to convict them. He loves them and wants to save them, but if they persist in rejecting Him they come under the curse, and eternal curse from which there will never be an escape.

Those who want to know the Lord must come to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ, Who died on a cruel cross for our sins. Paul wrote, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved” (KJV). The Lord spells out how those who receive the Lord’s salvation must live:

With what shall I come to the LORD

And bow myself before the God on high?
Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings,
With yearling calves?
Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams,
In ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts,
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justice, to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:6-8, NASB

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