

Minor Prophets: Malachi

Introduction

Malachi is situated in a special place in history, the last of the prophets, and the last of the prophetic voice of the Lord for over 400 years. God's final words to Israel happen in this book until John the Baptist and Jesus arrive on the scene in Matthew. The people had a finished temple for around 100 years and the walls of the city were built and they were safe, but they were also apathetic in their waiting for the Messiah. It is to this situation that Malachi bursts forth on the scene as an excellent teacher to teach the people to be ready for the Messiah by shoring up their lifestyle and serving God with excellence as they wait.

He teaches on everything between the tithe and divorce, between offering pure sacrifices and keeping the faith with excellence until the Messiah comes. We must be people who are eagerly and energetically and correctly serving the Lord until He returns! Essentially, Malachi served in the same world that we have right now, an apathetic and lethargic world that doesn't care about serving God with excellence despite the dreary surroundings. So his final words before the silence of God for the Intertestamental Period speak directly to us today!

About Malachi the Prophet

Malachi's name means, "My Messenger." It was probably a shortened form of Malachiah, meaning "Messenger of the Lord." Because the name is a bit strange, some scholars have suggested that it is not a proper name, but a pseudo name. They have suggested everything from Malachi being a third section of Zechariah because of its similarity to Zech 9:1 and 12:1 to the book belonging to Ezra, Mordecai, or even Zerubbabel.

The desire to discount authors is not rare among liberal scholars. It is most likely that Malachi is simply a shortening of Malachiah and that this man did indeed exist. He lists no father or place of origin, but this is not extremely unusual. Other prophets have lacked a listing of their personal information. Other than his name, we know very little about the man, except that he was a great teacher and encouraged people in a time of spiritual apathy.

Malachi in History

The book of Malachi does not lend itself to helping us discover much about its historical setting. However, there are a couple of clues here and there. For one, the content and subject matter warrant the probable dating to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. They also have dealt with intermarrying and the problem of divorce. So it is most likely that Malachi ministered at some point in or around these governors' administrations. But the question becomes a matter of timing. Scholars would put the date of this book anywhere from about 470-425 BC.

Another bit of evidence can be found within the text itself. In Malachi 1:8, we are shown that the governor would not accept the lame and blind sacrifices that the people are bringing. We know from Nehemiah 5:15 and 18 that Nehemiah did not require any gifts from the people, and

The Prophetic Message of Malachi

Chapter 1

1:1 The oracle of the word of the Lord unto Israel by the hand of Malachi.

The final book of prophecy and of the Old Testament (in the Christian Canon) opens with the details of its author and its genre. It is an oracle, an utterance or proclamation, and it is for Israel or concerning Israel. It is a word from the Lord and speaks directly to the people's needs and situation and society, as all of the prophets have done. It is also written by the hand of Malachi.

Malachi's name is probably short for Malachiah, meaning "messenger of the Lord." We are not given anything else to put him in a historical context in this opening verse, but the idea of "my messenger" should be enough to grab our attention. The prophets proclaimed the messages of God to the people of Israel throughout the Old Testament, always bringing a word from the Lord concerning the people's situation and culture.

The prophets spoke to correct the sins and false leading away from God. Although there is little trouble in this time period with idolatry, there is a huge problem with being lax in religious fervor and having an apathetic approach to God Almighty, so yet another prophet, the last prophet for 400 years, will speak for the Lord once again.

God's Love for His People

As Malachi begins his message to God's people in the fifth century BC, the people are not seeing the glory that was promised in former prophets. They wonder if God even loves them or cares about them, and the prophet starts with that very issue first. Sometimes in our lives, especially when we live in less than ideal circumstances, we could get the impression that God doesn't love us. But His love is everlasting! And He walks with us and provides for us even in the darkest of times. Things could be a lot worse, as Israel will see here.

1:2 "I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "In what way have You loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord, "Yet I have loved Jacob,

The oracle opens with a truth right from the Lord's mouth, that He has loved Israel. He asserts that no matter what has happened, He has maintained His covenantal love for Israel. But the people might find that hard to hear because of their current situation. They are not seeing this glorious empire that the prophets have been talking about. They have not met this Messiah that each of the Old Testament books have referred to in some way or another. They are beginning to doubt that God loves them because of the long wait for these prophecies to be fulfilled.

So the people charge through the assertion of the Lord's love and demand to know in what way or how the Lord has loved them. For some reason they are forgetting their entire history at this moment. Every act was an act of love by the Lord. Sometimes in our own lives, the current situation looms so big in our minds that we forget the former acts of love that God has done. This question is preposterous. God has loved Israel through thick and thin. But the people in their despair still ask the question.

The Lord responds to their inquiry with a question of his own. He goes way back into the history of two current nations by speaking of their forefathers. He asks if Esau is Jacob's brother. The story of Esau and Jacob in Genesis outlines a story of choosing Jacob, the younger, over Esau the older. It is not that God would not bless Esau, but that Jacob received the blessing from their father. The Lord sovereignly chose Jacob over Esau as He points out here.

But why is this so important to the conversation at hand? Because Esau's descendants are the Edomites and Jacob's descendants are the Israelites. God is about to compare two nations to the same situation so long ago with their forefathers. The words for loving and hating here are more about choice than emotion. God's choosing shows His divine and covenantal love to Israel.

In the times that we don't feel God's love, He probably would do the same thing He did for Israel here. He would first remind us that His love is unchanging. And then He would begin to point out all the ways He has loved us in the past. He would point out how He didn't have to go to the cross and save us, but He did. And He didn't have to make us like Jesus, but He is. And He doesn't have to come back and save us out of wrath into heaven, but He will. God's love is never taken away. Even in our sin, God loves us there. Even when we can't feel His love, it's still there!

1:3 “and Esau I have hated. So I put to devastation his hill country, and his heritage is given to wilderness jackals.”

The other side of God's love for Jacob is that He did not love Esau as much. Once again, it is important to realize that we are not saying that God hated Esau in the sense that He emotionally hated Esau, or that He decided the eternal fate of Esau beforehand. We are saying that He did not choose Esau, and likewise, Edom. Instead, He chose Israel. And the prophet goes on to explain that the Lord has been good to Israel and has allowed devastation in Edom.

The examples that He gives follow to show how much more He has chosen Israel and guided that nation of God's people. He has even been the agent in this devastation of the hill country in Edom. The specific event of Edom's devastation could be undefined in history, or it could be the destruction that Babylon caused in its wake during the Exile years, or even the vicious attack by the Nabateans. The book of Obadiah talks about some of these possibilities also. The land has been made desolate and has been taken over by wilderness animals like jackals. The people have deserted the ruins. But the people of Israel are still there in their land!

As we look at how God has lovingly chosen Israel over Edom, we must think about our own lives. God has been so good to us, and although we may not be where we want to be in life,

we can hardly say that God does not love us with a complete love! When we look around at those who aren't believers, we will probably find that they are not enjoying life as much as we are. That is partially because we are loved by God. Even in our tribulation, we have a God who loves us and walks with us, a God who works out our greatest possible blessing and a God whom we can lean on. The people who are not in relationship to God cannot say this!

1:4 If Edom says, “We are shattered, but we will return and rebuild the ruins.” Thus says the Lord of Hosts, “They may build, but I will tear down!” And they will be called the wicked country and the people whom the Lord has cursed forever.

But Edom will not be outdone by all of its catastrophes. The nation as a whole rises up with a spirit of nationalism and declares that it doesn't matter what they suffer. They are survivors. They will rebuild everything. Even when they are exiled from their own land, they'll return and rebuild, just as the Israelites did when they returned from exile.

The word for shattered is intensive here. They have been obliterated. But they will still come back and build their cities once again. That enduring spirit will not be enough against the Lord, though. Here we see once again that name Lord of Hosts that speaks of God's ability to command armies and to bring whatever judgment He desires. The Lord says to let the people build because He will continue to tear down whatever they build. When the Lord is against something, it is not going to be done!

The nation of Edom will get quite a reputation because the Lord's hand is consistently against them. They will be called the wicked country, almost with the idea of being some kind of horrible place because God will not allow them rest and will be relentless. The wicked country speaks more about a place you don't want to live than it does about morality. They will also be called the “accursed by the Lord people.” It will seem to the nations that no matter how positive the Edomites are, the Lord will have them on his cursed list, and they won't be able to truly enjoy any prosperity as long as He is against them.

1:5 Even your eyes will see this and you will say, “The Lord is great beyond the boundary of Israel!”

Why would God so treat the Edomites? Because of the way they have historically treated the Israelites. We don't like to think this way, but because the Lord has a jealous love for Israel, He will defend Israel against its enemies, who just happen to be in many cases, the Edomites. There are so many skirmishes between these two nations that we can't even count them.

The Israelites are blinded now by their current circumstances to see that God loves them and gives them a much more blessed life than their enemies like Edom, but they will eventually see God's love in this way also. When they do, they will proclaim God's greatness that goes way beyond their own borders. God is indeed not only the God of Israel, but the God of the whole world. He has shown this by dealing with nations other than Israel.

How many of us can say that God is great because we see how He has loved us! God's greatness is easy to see when you understand His love for each of us. We can see how He favors us and takes care of us. We can see how He is increasingly great in our circumstances and in ways that we couldn't see before. When we see God's love and greatness, we need to let Him know and worship Him for it!

This first section serves as a dialogue between God and the people of Israel, who in their current state have not noticed just how much God loves them. God loves each of us, and yet we don't always notice it. When we have to ask how God has loved us, we are neglecting to notice His mercies that are new every morning, and our privileged place in His heart. We forget that our very lives are gifts of love from God. How is God loving you right now? How has He loved you in the past? What keeps us from seeing God's love for us?

Second Rate Sacrifices

Malachi will now take to task the priests who had marginalized the Living God of Israel with their attitudes and actions. He will use a system of proposing the reality of Israel's relationship with God and then being challenged by the priests, and finally answering their challenge. We have already seen this in verses 2-5 as the prophet postulated that God loves Israel, was challenged in what way God loves Israel, and then responded to that challenge. Here, the only change is the audience of the priests. Let the slugfest begin.

1:6 “A son honors a father, and a servant his master. Thus if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear?” says the Lord of Hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, “In what way have we despised Your name?”

Malachi begins the conversation with the priests by stating the truth based on one of the Ten Commandments that a father is to be honored by his son. The same example is reiterated in the second image of the servant and master. The word for honor in the text is the word *chabod*, which we are familiar with as the word glory, which shows the weighty presence of God, the importance of God in our lives.

In both examples, the image is of God and Israel. God is Israel's Father, and He is also Israel's Master. As such, He deserves both their honor and their fear. The word fear here is the same used for the fear of the Lord, which is a reverence, an awe of God. It can also secondarily mean to fear as in the emotional response. As we will see throughout the text, God is referred to as the Lord of Hosts, speaking of His ability to command all the armies known and unknown in the universe and creation.

The prophet through God's words then calls out the audience, the priests, as the ones that God is angry with. The priests are surprisingly despising God's name. Despised here speaks of making light God's name, of not assigning to God the gravity and weightiness due His name

and reputation. The priests respond as if they are at a loss to understand why this charge is being leveled against them. They are so apathetic that they don't even see it. The question's form follows the same form as the question in the last section about God's love.

These people were waiting for the Messiah and it seemed so long since the promise of a Messiah that they are getting lethargic and apathetic about His return. So they have loosened their devotion to God in worship. Take an evaluation of your own worship life right now. Is there anywhere that the Lord could be displeased with your approach into His presence? Are you despising His name or making light of His person? Have you become calloused to the Lord's presence or what pleases Him?

1:7 By offering upon My altar defiled bread. But you say, "In what way have we defiled You?" By saying that the Lord's table may be despised.

The Lord answers through the prophet that the priests, those who have been chosen to fulfill the most special position of one who offers all the sacrifices before God, have been offering less than adequate offerings. Here we speak of the offerings of food, such as grain or wine or bread. Literally, the word is bread, but it refers to all of the non-animal offerings. An offering was of the firstfruits of food items while a sacrifice required the blood slaughter of an animal.

The altar of the Lord is also referred to as the Lord's table because upon the altar the fire consumes the offerings. It is seen as the Lord's acceptance of the offerings. The priests most likely did not literally say that the Lord's table, the altar, may be despised, but rather through their actions, they had despised the Lord's altar. Throughout the book of Leviticus especially, but in the whole of the Law, there are prescribed methods and standards for offering offerings to the Lord. When they were not followed, but still allowed to be offered on the altar by the priests, the priests were the ones who were violating God's table through detesting and despising Him. It was their duty to make sure that the offerings were up to code.

What about in your own life? Do you even offer offerings to the Lord? And are they what He wants, or are they second-hand? Many times we offer the Lord less than He desires or our offerings are not as exceptional as we know they should be. That is an issue between you and the Lord, but if you are being convicted about your offerings to the Lord, whether they be monetary or otherwise, should be what He wants, not what you feel like giving.

1:8 When you offer blind *animals* in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer lame or sick *animals*, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept or raise you up, says the Lord of Hosts.

Now we come to the sacrifices themselves, which included the blood spilling of animals. Just as with the offerings of non-animal items, the sacrifices had specific guidelines for how an animal should be presented. The animal was to be without blemish of any sort, the very best and

choicest of the animals. In this way, it showed the honoring of God with the very best one had to sacrifice before Him.

It's kind of like if you have guests over and go out on the street, find roadkill, and bring it to them to eat. That shows complete disregard and disrespect of the guests. You would bring your very best meal to them and enjoy it with them. And so this is how the Lord feels, as though He is not receiving the best, and He is being dishonored in this way by Israel, but once again, the priests are not making the people bring the choicest sacrifices to Him.

This is the issue with the blind and lame animals, as well as the sick. No blemish was to be found in any of the sacrificial animals, and the priests who examined them and approved of them for sacrifice are not doing their job. These are the ways in which they defiled and despised God's altar and name. The Lord through the prophet asks twice if these practices are not evil and wicked. It is evil to go against the Lord's prescribed guidelines for any part of life, especially worship and sacrifice. The perfect sacrifice was a foreshadowing of Christ, and the Father offers His Son Jesus, the perfect sacrifice without fault or blemish. So the Israelites are defaming Christ in their cavalier actions and attitudes toward sacrifice.

Now the Lord asks them if they would bring such horrible animals to their human governor. The principle here is that the people would honor a human governor more than they would honor their divine King and Lord! Some scholars use this to say that Nehemiah was not the governor at the time because he does not take gifts or sacrifices from the people, but it can also be a hypothetical situation the prophet is bringing up. It was most likely common in the nations around Israel for the governors to receive their payment from the people through gifts of animals and the like. The point is this principle of being willing to honor a human being more than God!

If the human governor would not except trashy gifts and offerings, why would the Lord Almighty, the Lord of Hosts. For at least a second time, the Lord of Hosts is given here as a title to remind these apathetic "worshippers" of whom they are worshipping and the standards they are demolishing. This could be an equivalent to our President today. No matter how you feel about the man, you would nevertheless honor the office. If the President visited your house, you would clean and prepare your very best. So when we come into the Lord's house, our offerings and sacrifice, our focus on God in worship, must be our very best and most excellent gift we can possibly give.

1:9 And now, surely appease the face of God from your hand that He might be gracious to us. Will He do this to raise any of your faces? says the Lord of Hosts.

The prophet, or the Lord, then calls the priests to continually offer the sacrifices to the Lord, to continue doing what they do to appease God, to please Him. The language here is very hard to translate, but the imagery is of them entreating the Lord or trying to please Him through their worship, but it is defiled worship and half-hearted. The implication is that the Lord will not accept such worship from the hands of priests who offer defiled sacrifices.

The problem is that it is through the sacrifices that God's blessing and graciousness are seen by the people. In an earlier minor prophet, we saw that when God's house is the priority, He blesses the other parts of life. But that is part of God being gracious when we properly bring right worship to Him. The Lord asks if He should raise them up and be pleased with their efforts. The implied answer is negative.

From this verse we can apply the idea that worship is not done by us for us. It is done by us to glorify God and for God. Sometimes we don't feel like worshipping God, or think that because of our situation we might be angry with Him more than worshipful. I think of Paul and Silas praising God in stocks in a dank dark prison, shackled to the walls. God's blessing comes through our worship. His grace is mediated to us through worship.

And when we think worship is about the songs that we sing or the things we feel like doing, then we have got it all wrong. Worship is about giving glory to God with excellence no matter how we feel. Worship is a lifestyle of glorifying God no matter what we feel or what is going on in our lives. It's easier to worship God in good times for us, but it is more detrimental to our souls when we don't also worship God in the bad times.

1:10 Who indeed among you would shut the doors, that you would not kindle upon my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.

Now an ironic and surprising question rings from God's mouth through the prophet. He asks if there is anyone among the priests who would please shut the temple doors and close down the temple rather than give such horrible and disastrous offerings and sacrifices to Him. God would rather the priests not worship Him at all rather than worship Him with half-baked sacrifices and offerings.

There is a true message here for worshippers of God. There are ways to worship God that please Him and are a delight to His heart, but there are other ways that grate against His ears and give Him indigestion, ways that stink of the trash we offer Him in worship. All of these are disingenuous worship. God would rather the fires that are kindled on the altars to accept the sacrifices be quelled and stopped than to continue with such lame sacrifices, no pun intended.

It was vanity to believe that God didn't notice or care that the sacrifices had blemishes and were not what He commanded them to offer. This would be like getting something broken and giving it to your spouse to show your love. That's not the message the spouse would get from your gift. So also, the Lord was getting the message of spite rather than worship when the priests did not care what they offered.

The harsh statement from the Lord is that He takes no pleasure in these priests. They are making Him sick rather than offering a pleasing aroma to Him. How do you think God would react to your gifts of worship? Do we care what the Lord receives from us? Are we offering excellent gifts of worship or thinking that He won't care that we're not bringing our best to Him?

1:11 For from the rising of the sun until its setting My name will be great among the nations and in every place incense will be offered to My name, and a pure gift. For My name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of Hosts.

Despite however the priests in Israel would treat the Lord's name and reputation, how they would worship Him, the Lord had praise coming from other places. They were not the only ones who would worship Him in the future. Most scholars point to this passage being a prophecy of the Gentiles worshipping God through the Messiah, Jesus.

From the rising of the sun to its setting speaks both of the fact of a whole day of worship and also to the whole area of ground geographically covered by the sun. In other words, for the whole of the days and for the whole of the earth, because the sun's circuit covers the whole earth and it also is the beginning and end of the day. This is the literary device that points to the two extremes and includes everything in between them.

The Lord promises that despite their worship in Israel, His name would be greater than just in Israel and would be among the nations and worshipped by the nations. That happens today through the Church and through believers in Jesus, the Messiah. In every place incense being offered can refer to prayer or to literal incense being offered in worship, as well as the idea of a sweet-smelling offering unto the Lord.

The name of the Lord speaks of His character and also His reputation. While the priests through their lethargic worship practices are spitting on God's name, the nations would worship Him rightly for His attributes and His reputation. They would offer proper praise to Him. The offerings and sacrifices are gifts from the priests, but they are defiled and so result in actually profaning God's name. But the nations will once again do better than God's chosen people in ardently worshipping Him in pure ways. This prophecy is about us. Do we measure up to this?

1:12 But you defile it when you say that the Lord's table is defiled and its fruit may be despised, its food.

The Lord now directly contrasts the nations in the future with the priests in the present. They are nothing like the nations. They should be put to shame for this behavior and false worship, this lack of caring for the sacrifices and gifts unto the Lord. They should be zealous for God's name, but they are apathetic instead. The irony is that they are God's chosen people, not the Gentile nations.

While this indictment should shame them into proper worship, it does not. They continue in their disastrous ways and the Lord's table, the altar, continues to be defiled. The word here for defiled is a strong word, the exact opposite of the word for praise from which we get hallelujah. There is one small part of a letter that separates the two words. The fruit and food represent the bread, the grain, the wine, and all other offerings not sacrificial on the altar.

The priests were a disappointment to the Lord. You can almost hear His sadness and the letdown of these priests. We are priests of God in the New Covenant. May the Lord only take

pleasure in us and never be sad that we are His priests and representatives in this world. Let us make every effort to be zealous for His name so that He must not look to rocks to cry out!

1:13 But you say, “Look, weariness! And you groan at it, says the Lord of Hosts. Then you bring what has been torn by force and what is lame or sick and you bring it as your offering! Should I accept that from your hand?” says the Lord.

In the matter of the sacrifices, the priests instead of fessing up to their lack of interest in the things of God claim that in waiting for the Messiah they are weary of continuing to go through the motions of the sacrifices. They are constantly trying to put their own sense of worship and their lack of worship back on God as His fault. They groan at the duties of the priesthood, of sacrifice and taking care of the implements of the temple. They do not serve the Lord with cheerful and worshipful intent or hearts.

They have become so lazy in their routine that they will offer anything to the Lord, even animals that are not even remotely recognizable. Not only do they have blemishes, but they're torn limb from limb! There is no standard for worship as far as the priests practice the sacrificial system. Everything has been left to whatever they can muster to offer to the Lord. The idea of an animal that is torn by force could be something snatched out of the teeth of a predator or something that has somehow been ripped to shreds.

The standards have been destroyed and obliterated by the priests. Such offerings are not remotely acceptable in any way. They are slapping God in the face with such sacrifices. The Lord asks if He should accept their offerings, with the strongly implied response of “Absolutely not.” The Lord does not delight in half hearted attempts to appease Him, or even the refusal to consider if our worship is glorifying Him. We must deeply care about how and why we are worshipping the Lord. A samek ends the thought here, but another verse remains in the chapter.

1:14 And cursed is the crafty one who has in his flock a male and vows, yet sacrifices the blemished to the Lord, for I am a great King, says the Lord of Hosts, and My name will be feared among the nations.

This might seem to be thrown in at the end, since the samek closed out the thought of the previous section but it is along the same lines of the section. The Lord speaks once again the general idea that is found throughout this section just covered, that anyone who offers wrong worship to God will be cursed and the nations will worship God properly. The crafty one is one who cheats at fulfilling the commandments on how to bring a sacrifice to the Lord, those who cut corners, so to speak.

This cheater is specifically one who has the proper sacrifice in the flock, but chooses to give God the lesser sacrifice! They actual snub their noses at God with such a decision and sacrifice! May we never be in a place where we actually choose to give God the worse of what

we have to bring! Let us always vow our best and bring our best to the Lord. Let there be no blemish in our offerings and praise to God!

The Lord reiterates who He is and why they have so deeply offended Him with their attempts at appeasing God. He is the great King of all Kings and Lord of all Lords. He is the Lord of Hosts who can raise and command armies they can't even imagine. His name and reputation is great and feared and revered among all the nations. The nations have seen God at work and they would not dare to snub Him like the priests. Let us remember who it is that we bring our worship to every day and every moment. Let us approach Him with respect and honor and offer our best!

Chapter 2

Priests Shatter the Covenant

The final verse of chapter one mentions a curse put upon the person who has the ability to fulfill the sacrificial law's regulations for a sacrifice, and yet still brings a blemished sacrifice. The prophet will now continue to berate the priests by pronouncing the effects of a curse upon them for their insolence toward the Lord and their hard-hearted worship and neglect of His glory. There is a consequence for not bringing our very best to the Lord in every worshipful moment of our lives.

2:1 And now, this command is for you, O priests.

The next section of Malachi once again has the priests as its intended audience. The last verse had mentioned a curse upon those that no better and still offer subpar sacrifices and offerings. So the priests happen to be in this category because they are the ones to hold the standards for animal sacrifices. The priest examined each sacrifice before it was offered. It was up to them to turn away subpar sacrifices.

So it is to them that this command comes. The command itself is found in verse four, a command for the Levitical covenant to exist or stand. We will talk about that in verse four, but the idea could have two options on its fulfillment. But before we even get to the command itself, the Lord has choice words for the situation the priests have put themselves in. This "and now" statement starts a new section but with the same audience.

2:2 If you will not listen and if you will not take it to heart to give honor to My name, says the Lord of Hosts, then I will send upon you the curse and I will curse your blessings and I have even cursed them because you do not take it to heart.

The priests seem to be unwavering in their violence toward the sacrifices and the covenant, and so the Lord has no choice but to bring curses upon them. In their arrogance and apathy, they have brought this upon themselves. First, the prophet tells us that the prophets will not listen or hear God's voice on the matter. They are ignoring the prophet and his message. They don't want to hear the life-giving prophetic solution to their apathy.

The second action of the priests to bring the curse upon themselves is that they not only refuse to listen to the prophetic word, but they refuse to take it to heart, to internalize the message and act according to the good word of Malachi. Because they have turned a deaf ear to him and refuse to consider his words, they will be cursed by God Himself. The curse here that God brings is most likely part of the curses discussed after the covenant in Deuteronomy 28:15-68. There are many curses in there and perhaps one or more apply to this group. Some of those

curse have already taken place, like the exile that has already historically happened to Israel, but perhaps others would take place upon them.

Another possibility concerning the curse is that it is a direct reference to the first curse of God in Genesis 3 at the fall of humanity that cursed several prosperous notions of humanity such as work and procreation. The Lord will curse their blessings and no longer will the priests be blessed by the Lord for their service to His temple. The cause for the curse is their hard hearts and unwilling to hear and take to heart His words. God is actually already cursing those blessings so that they do not see the blessings poured out in their lives even now.

We must be careful to not ignore the cause and effect relationships in this verse. Believers may be deluded into thinking that they cannot suffer God's anger because they are believers, but when anyone sins, it does not please the Lord and that person can come under judgment. I don't believe that they will be cursed, but I also don't believe that they will live in God's blessing while in sin. It's quite possible that even not giving God our best in worship would cause the blessings to cease. We have been so privileged in our walk with God, but if we take advantage of that blessing and sin against Him, God has every right and precedent to cause our blessings to be dried up. Let this serve as a warning while we also are waiting for the return of Jesus, our Messiah. Let us not become apathetic in our waiting and so incur the destruction of blessing from God.

2:3 Behold, I will rebuke your offspring and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your festivals and you will be taken up with it.

Some specifics about the curse that God is even now laying upon the priesthood are given in this verse. God will rebuke the offspring of the priests, the Levitical clan. Their children will suffer the scorn of Israel and the nations. This rebuke might also entail the idea of stopping them from having children or taking their children away in some way, perhaps exile, or ineffectiveness in the Levitical acts.

Not only this, but they will also have dung spread on their faces. This would be an extreme act of shame for the priests to endure. They are the chosen priests of God and they are being shamed with dung! Scholars tend to point to the dung that must have been part of the animal sacrificial system that these priests were all too familiar with. But it most likely refers to the festivals becoming as moot and void to them as the dung they had to mop up in the temple.

The next phrase leads me in this direction as it equates the dung with the festivals. The festivals are as dung to the Lord because they are not truly worshipping Him with excellence. So the priests will be taken up with the festivals like the dung that is taken up and cleaned up from the temple altars where animals are sacrificed. This may be a prophetic word, for in the time of the fall of the temple in 70 AD, the Sadducees, the group of priests, are completely stopped and destroyed. They die with the temple.

When we don't worship God with a full heart of attention upon Him, serve Him with distractions in our minds and hearts, we serve God with a double-minded heart, a split heart. We

can't be thinking about our problems or about our task list or be distracted by others in God's presence. God wants us to serve Him with all that is in us, fully devoted to Him. When we worship Him with half-hearted attempts, He is not pleased. These attempts are like the festivals that were not really dedicated to Him, and He views them as dung. Let us be fully present when we worship our holy God! Anything less is to profane His holiness.

2:4 Then you will know that I have sent to you this command, My covenant with Levi will exist, says the Lord of Hosts.

Verse four goes back to the command of verse one and there are two possible ways to take the command that is given here. The command is that God's covenant with Levi, the tribe that concerns itself solely with temple practices, will exist no matter what their actions. The first way this command can be fulfilled is by getting rid of all of the priests and Levites who are not fulfilling their side of the Levitical covenant with God. The second way is that in spite of these current priests, somewhere through someone a true worshipping priesthood would be found, or those who truly worshipped Him would be preserved.

This verse also opens us to the Levitical covenant, explaining its benefits and its demands upon the Levites and priests. Once again as we have often seen through the Minor Prophets, the title of Lord of Hosts reminds the priests that God can bring the battle to them with every army they know and don't know of, including celestial armies. It is by these curses that the priests will know that God has sent the command concerning the continuing of the covenant. The next verses will explain the covenant with Levi.

2:5 My covenant was with him; it was life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was fear, and he feared Me, and before My name he was broken to pieces.

Verses five through seven explain the glories of the covenant, its benefits and expectations. The first point of the covenant is that it brought life or was life to the Levites. The life was full of service and worship to God in the temple. It brought life because through the temple sacrifices, the people could live with God in their camp. The covenant brought a way of life through worshipping God in His house.

It also brought peace. The word peace here is in its typical Hebrew understanding not only of no war but of everything in life being in harmony with everything else. Peace is the perfect environment for prosperity to be poured out and for the blessings of God to be realized. Not only were these two promises of that covenant, but God delivered on these two promises. He gave to the Levitical priesthood life and peace.

The Levitical covenant also demanded fear in the sense of being reverent of God, in awe of His awesome Person and power. The Levites above all in Israel would have a sense of awe as they ministered before the Lord daily. They were the closest to His house and should have

known that glorious King the best, but alas, their closeness to Him actually worked in them a disdain for His glory.

It was in that fear of the Lord, that reverence, that Levi and all who followed Him in his clan would be broken before the Lord into pieces. They would be shattered. This is the image of being laid bare on the altar of the Lord, our souls exposed to the one who knows us inside and out. That breaking to pieces was not for destruction but for the building up of our souls before Him. We stand before God bare. There is nothing we can hide or keep from Him. He sees all in us and knows us fully. While that sounds scary to many, it is a benefit of knowing God, so that He can work His glory into our lives. Being exposed to God fully allows for us to be holy vessels for Him.

2:6 Faithful instruction was in his mouth and iniquity was not found on his lips. In peace and straight uprightness he walked with Me and he turned from much iniquity.

The priests were also required to give faithful and truthful instruction to the people from the temple. The priests were those who taught the Torah, the Law of God contained in the first five books of the Bible, to young Israelites. They were charged with keeping God's Torah at the forefront of the community of Israel's mind.

Similarly, while they spoke the true Torah of God, they also did not speak falsehood and sinful things with those same lips. Their mouths as well as their lives were wholly devoted to the service of the Lord. The priests also lived upright and righteous lives. They treated everyone with fairness and rightness. They were the main examples in the camp of how to worship God with their lives. They were the standard for living a peaceful and harmonious life as well as turning away from sin through repentance.

We don't think about this often, and of course I am guilty of it myself, but the words we speak are also part of our whole worship unto the Lord. The things we center our minds on and the things we listen to and are a part of also speak of worship to God or something else. It is a challenge to be so devoted to God that even with our lips we do not profane the holy purpose of only speaking His goodness into the situations we encounter in life. The way we speak and the instruction we give are also integral parts of worshipping God. Do we honor God with our lips?

2:7 Thus the lips of a priest should guard knowledge and they should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts.

For the reasons of the purity of the priesthood listed above, the priests were once worthy of being sought out for counsel and instruction by the people of Israel. The lips of the priest were holy unto the Lord and because they spoke only the good Torah of God, they kept and guarded knowledge of God for the people. They were the ones to read the Torah to the people when needed and to offer God's counsel.

Originally, the priest was to be the vocal messenger of the Lord. Prophets came along for the express purpose we see here, that the priests did not do what the covenant required of them. Even from the earliest days, priests were not always holy unto the Lord. Through their own choices and actions, certain priests, even Aaron's sons, violated the covenant. But when they did fulfill that Levitical covenant, they were considered honored messengers for the Lord.

Worship goes far beyond singing songs to God or reading our Bibles or even bringing our offering to the Lord. Worship is a lifestyle, and we need to be a pure and holy people in this world, to show them a different and better way through Jesus. When we don't live a pure lifestyle, we can't worship the Lord through bringing His message to the world. We must be pure for His name's sake. We must live holy lives before Him and others, so that other people can see God working in our lives and we can counsel them in the ways of God. The challenge is set before us all as priests of God, as Peter declared our priesthood.

2:8 But you have turned aside from the path. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have annihilated Levi's covenant, says the Lord of Hosts.

Although this was the covenant set forth for all priests and Levites, it is not being followed even by these priests after learning the hard lessons of the exile. This postexilic group of priests is once again falling into apostasy through apathy and ignorance, as well as arrogance. Sadly, as is often the case, the glory of the covenant was not violated by the faithful Lord, but by the unfaithful priesthood.

Instead of following the path or way that was set up by the covenant to be led into life and peace and reverence, the priests turned to their own way, making their own path, and turning to the right and the left. They turned every way except the way of God. Now rest assured, they are not worshipping other gods or in any idolatry as far as we know. Idolatry had been quite well stamped out by the powerful dealing of the exile, but the people and priests are not living up to the standards of the Torah for sacrifices and offerings, which means that they are just as doomed as if they had turned to other gods.

We cannot make our own ways to worship God. God has given us an understanding of what He expects in our worship, and we must be faithful to Him in worship. We do stumble, but we must not continue down that path of false worship or half-worship. We must rededicate ourselves to worship and faithfully continue to serve God with everything in us.

Part of the problem with these priests is not only that they have broken the Levitical covenant between themselves and the Lord and are living in the curse instead of the blessings is that they are also willingly leading others astray down their false paths. Through their actions and the way they are teaching the people through example, they are causing the stumbling of others in Israel through false worship. Their cancerous hearts are spreading to the people, causing the same apathy and disdain for the things of God. They have become toxic and contagious. They have destroyed the covenant between Levi and the Lord.

We must be very careful not to allow our half-hearted worship and distractions and subpar worship to spread to others. We must be examples as the priests were of how to worship God. We should not allow others to discourage us from obeying God fully in worship. When worshipping the Lord, do not look to others to compare yourself or wonder what they would think of you doing something the Lord is commanding that might seem strange. Concentrate on following God in His commands. People are indeed watching us. That is human nature. But let us lead them into God's presence and let them see our obedience. It will spur them on to love God more and more.

2:9 So also I give you to be despised and humiliated before all the people inasmuch as you do not keep my paths but show partiality in your instruction.

The language changes from merely observing that the priests are apathetic and not fulfilling the full covenant to dangerous words like “annihilating the covenant” and “despised and humiliated.” Apathy left unchecked turns into despising God and arrogance in His house and ways. The final part of the curse is given because they have not lived up to the covenantal agreement and done their part.

They will be ashamed before the people in that they will be despised and humiliated before everyone. Shame is not as powerful a motivator in American culture as it is in the Middle East. Guilt serves the purpose of motivation in America, but shame does the same thing to this culture as guilt does to ours. Humiliation is unbearable for these priests. It is one of the worst curses that can be put on the priesthood. They have been used to the privileged position in Israel of being the messengers of God, and are now reduced and relegated to the lowest by the people, to be shamed and despised and humiliated.

The reason they find themselves in this position socially is because they have not kept God's ways or paths and have shown partiality in the way that they taught the Torah or Law to people. They would favor one set of laws that benefited them over another in the Law of God. They would only teach the parts that they wished to endorse rather than the whole counsel of God. These are very dangerous practices. Show partiality is literally to carry or lift a face. They would choose the facets of God's Law they wanted to teach instead of everything. The people then would not be as well informed of the Law of God. Through action and speech, they taught the people how to not worship God with excellence. A peh closes out this scathing rebuke of the priests and description of what could have been if only they would listen and take to heart through obedience the prophet's words. The disappointment in this section is palpable to God and the reader.

Marriage Defiled

After dealing with the priest, the prophet continues to expose reasons for the blessings of God being cursed by Him in the whole of the community. One of the greatest struggles of the remnant community after the exile was to take foreign wives for themselves. After reading the

Law in Ezra, Ezra had commanded them to stop intermarrying with foreign wives. The reason was so that idolatry might not permeate and infect Israel. Ezra, Nehemiah, and it seems Malachi, continuously brought this before the community as a reason God did not accept their worship. We must live within the boundaries God has set to be excellent worshippers for Him as well.

2:10 Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? So why do we deal treacherously with one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?

As the new section begins, and a new subject to consider, Malachi starts with rhetorical questions for his fellow Israelites. The first question asks if all Israelites have one father. The one father could refer to God the Father or to Abraham and the patriarchs. There was room in Judaism to refer to God as Father. Jesus does so on numerous occasions throughout the Gospels and in John is accused of blasphemy for being on such friendly terms with Almighty Father.

The second question asks with a negative, expecting an emphatic positive, if God has not created us. The pronoun here does not refer to general humanity but to the creation of the nation of Israel for God's purposes. God has indeed created all of us as human beings, but the point here is a special nation for God's purposes. That is the background and basis for why intermarrying will be condemned in this section.

The common bond of father and Creator for the whole nation of Israel then prompts the third rhetorical question. Why then would the Israelites abuse one another as comrades and brothers, and deal treacherously with one another? The verb for dealing treacherously refers specifically to being unfaithful with one another. This unfaithfulness will soon shift to the marriage relationship between husband and wife but here only connotes being unfaithful to one's word or vow with other brothers in Israel.

The clarification of this is in the next phrase that speaks of profaning the covenant of the nation's fathers. The patriarchs were men of their word and sought to live righteously. But the Israelites that are part of this postexilic community are apparently on treating one another with kindness and faithfulness to their promises. We should always be people who back up our promises with actions. Let us all be people of our word, especially as representatives of Christ!

2:11 Judah has dealt treacherously, and abomination has been done by Israel and by Jerusalem. Thus Judah has defiled the holiness of the Lord, which He loves, and has married a foreign god's daughter.

Judah is now singled out first as people who deal treacherously, or faithlessly. They have not been faithful to their covenants and promises, as we have already seen from the priesthood. They have allowed an abomination to happen in Israel and Jerusalem. But these abominations are not from an outside nation or source. They are being committed by Judah and Israel themselves. They are happening inside the nation.

An abomination was the most serious way to describe a sin against the Lord. Although the sin has not yet been fully declared by the prophet, we get the distinct impression as readers that it has to do with some type of unfaithfulness or breach of the covenant or a covenant. The prophet follows by saying that this abomination has defiled God's holiness and that Judah has committed the unfaithfulness.

The Lord's holiness was paramount in Judah, and should be to all of us believers today. Some translations and scholars believe that because of the phrase, "which He loves" it is referring to the Holy of Holies or the sanctuary in the temple. This is possible, but I believe the holiness of God in general is in view here. The word defiled is exactly the opposite of holy. It is the worst thing that could happen, that the holy be profaned. Then the charge is leveled against those in Judah. The abomination is pronounced as intermarriage with foreign women who serve foreign gods.

The sin was not intermarriage itself. The sin was marrying women who served foreign gods. That distinction must be made for us today. Marrying foreign women for the special nation and community of Israel was extremely dangerous because the two would become one flesh, and worship of idols would be an import of that marriage. This would make the whole community unholy to God and He would not be able to dwell with them because of the commitment to foreign gods through marriage to their worshippers.

2:12 Let the Lord cut off from the person who does this any who awakes and answers from the tents of Jacob and offers an offering to the Lord of Hosts!

This topic was so pervasive throughout the postexilic times. Israelites seemed to have a very short memory of their long history of people who had married foreign women and been led into idolatry. That is the issue at hand. It is not that the Israelites are openly idolatrous, but that the danger of idolatry is inherent in marrying foreign wives. So the prophet issues a command to cut off those who marry foreign wives and still attempt to make offerings in the temple.

The image of cutting off here does not mean that the people would literally be killed for their marriages but that they would be severed from their citizenship in Israel. They would no longer be part of God's special nation because they have defiled it by introducing idolatry. We may think that this issue is not as big a deal today as it was then, but it is still a big deal today. We must not flirt with anything that would drive us away from God! We must keep ourselves in check and evaluate the things and people in our lives that keep us from wholly and completely serving and worshipping God.

The phrase "anyone who awakes or answers from the tents of Judah" simply means anyone who is doing this act of marrying foreign wives who serve foreign idols. It was possibly a military term for raising an army, asking for all who were able to defend a city, but later became a standard idiom for the people living in a city. Jacob here is the whole of the community, and yet refers to any Jacobite, any descendant of Jacob, who is marrying foreign wives.

The point was that these men could not go and marry these foreign wives and be exposed to their idolatry and then still come and offer offerings before the Lord in His holy place, because they were no longer holy. To come in and offer these while unholy would be to defile the temple and the altar and the name of the Lord. We need to grasp how pervasive foreign gods were for the Israelites and for us today.

The impact of influence from these foreign wives was much more pervasive than we can imagine. Every part of society is so integrated that we can't comprehend it today. We live in a society that compartmentalizes everything, but everything was mixed together in this society. There was no ability to marry a woman who served other gods and not be committed yourselves to those same gods. At best, a marriage would turn into syncretism where both YHWH and the idol would be worshipped equally. A peh breaks this section in half as the charge has been leveled against the people.

This has immediate applications for how much Christians influence unbelievers and are influenced by unbelievers. Being in any relationship with an unbeliever challenges us to stay fully committed to the Lord and to monitor whether any unholy influences are becoming part of our own lives and persons. We must be deeply careful to not allow for the profaning of our intimate relationship with the Lord by unholy thoughts, behaviors and intentions. We must maintain a purity to God for our worship to Him to remain pure. It is not easy for us now or for the Israelites in that community.

2:13 And this second thing you do: cover with tears the Lord's altar with weeping and groaning because He no longer turns toward the offering to accept it with pleasure from your hand.

Commentators tend to point to this verse as speaking of the women in these marriages who have been put away or divorced in favor of the foreign wives. The picture is of these wives who have been neglected going into the temple and pleading with the Lord with tears and weeping over the altars. They would not have any security or prosperity without a husband in this culture, so they had every reason to go to the temple to do so.

However, there is no textual pointer to guarantee this interpretation. It might also be that the men who have married these foreign wives go into the temple to offer their gifts and are wrought with grief because the Lord will not accept these offerings because of the sin in their lifestyles. Either one of these brings a point that is clear in the text: we cannot live outside of God's boundaries and expect Him to gladly accept our worship when it is tainted with a sinful or displeasing lifestyle.

The imagery here is as heart wrenching as it could be. These people are crying out to God, confused as to why these sacrifices are not acceptable, as if it is God who is the problem, but it is them. Because of the sinful practices in their lives, they are not being accepted by God. They could give a perfect sacrifice according to the Levitical rules for sacrifices and it still would not be acceptable. God is not as much concerned with the offering we bring as much as He is

concerned with the intentions and heart that we bring it to Him with, and with the way that we worship Him outside of the house of God.

2:14 But you say, “Why doesn’t He?” Because the Lord was called to witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously even though she is your companion and wife by your covenant.

If a person saw this audience as the Jewish women who were neglected in favor of foreign wives coming into the temple and weeping over their situation, let me take a moment to point out some truths about why God has boundaries for marriage. The prophet brings these truths out in this verse despite the men or women crying at the altar. The first is that marriage is a covenant made between two persons. Covenants are breakable only by death. Otherwise, faithfulness is required of both parties. There is no way out of a covenant.

Marriage so intimately places two people into a relationship of love and interdependence that it is a grave violation of God’s boundaries and the covenant of marriage to rip one person away from another in any way. This is why adultery is so pervasive and painful to spouses when it is committed in unfaithfulness. To commit adultery or to divorce someone is to rip half of their person from them in removing yourself. This wrenching away of a person’s part is not just a physical destruction but also emotional, relational mental and spiritual. We are so candid with divorce in our day, so familiar with this monster, that we look with disdain on the teaching of this principle of the sacredness and covenantal understanding of marriage. We scoff and laugh at this part, but it is true for anyone who has gone through divorce.

The people at the altar cannot understand why God will not accept their offerings and sacrifices. The answer is so obvious for the prophet. These people have been separated in regard to a marriage that is covenantal. They have been faithless to their spouses, and so the Lord considers them faithless to Him because He presided over the vows they took and the covenant they entered.

When people lust over some fresh new person that they think they are in love with, they forget the spouse of their youth, the person that they have been building their lives with. That life building is intimate and cannot be shared by another. God did not design marriage for that purpose at all! Marriage is sacred and intimate, between two people only. Anyone else involved is an intrusion of the most provocative and profane sense! We need to learn how to guard the sacredness of marriage again in our culture.

With three different descriptions, Malachi heartily attempts to remind these divorcees and those who have divorced them of their sacred relationship to one another. The first phrase is “the wife of your youth.” This is meant to remind the men of their love for their Jewish spouses they have kicked to the curb. Their love is not just stopped by lust. They need to remember the reasons they were so drawn to those wives.

Second, the phrase “she is your companion” harkens back to one of the foundational reasons for a man to get married. It is not good for man to be alone. Wives are meant by God as

companions, the completion of a complete and perfect person. The faithless act of divorce cuts the woman out of that rightful place of being the companion to the man. Men were designed to need a companion and women were designed to be a companion to a man. That is how God made us. This does not mean that you cannot remain single and serve the Lord, but that it is most natural to desire to play your designed role when marriage is entered into with another.

Finally, the phrase “the wife of your covenant” reminds these men that they have made a covenant that cannot be broken by divorce and remarriage. These men had simply tossed their wives aside for a new person. It was an act of lust alone. They needed to repent and turn from wickedness before God would ever consider their sacrifices and offerings once again. We cannot simply drop our faith commitments because of some whim. We must be faithful especially in those times where faithfulness is not appealing! We need discipline and self-control!

2:15 Then did He not make you one? And with a portion of His Spirit to you? And what was the One seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit and let no one deal treacherously with the wife of your youth,

Malachi provides another reason for the covenant of marriage. The second reason, aside from the love a man has for a woman and the desire to intimately build their lives together, was to produce godly children, or children for God. The word for children is the word seed, a deeply theological word possibly referring back to the Seed of Eve, the first woman that is promised and then fulfilled in Christ (cf. Gen 3:15).

More rhetorical questions make this verse extremely difficult to interpret. Some scholars suggest that this verse refers to the original couple, Adam and Even in Genesis 2-3. I think that it can serve as God’s reason for every marriage. The prophet reminds the couples that are divorcing that God made them one person. They are no longer two individuals that can simply separate. They have become one person.

Not only this truth, but also that God has placed His Spirit in them. This part is hard to interpret. The word spirit in Hebrew can also mean breath or wind as well as spirit. It could be a reference to Adam receiving God’s breath that animated his lifeless body, and that Eve also was given that same breath of life. It could also speak of the sacredness of a godly marriage in which God’s Holy Spirit is made part of the union between a man and woman.

The One who is seeking most likely refers to God Himself. He was seeking godly offspring or children in marriage. God instituted marriage so that children could be produced in a godly way and could grow up in a godly environment. The second goal of marriage besides sacred intimacy the prophet mentions in this section is to have godly children. It is incumbent upon the parents of children to lead them into godliness. We forget that, sending kids into Sunday School classes and Children’s Church and Nurseries hoping that a good church environment will do the work for them. But it is ordained by God that the church only help, and that the parents teach their children godliness first at home.

The prophet then issues a command to guard themselves in their spirits and to not allow any faithlessness to the wife of their youth. This statement is somewhat hard to interpret also. To guard themselves in their spirits might refer to guarding their spiritual person or their spiritual place with God through being faithful to their wives. Marriage has an innate spiritual bond for couples as well as physical and relational and emotional. I have said that marriage is a spiritual discipline because it is two imperfect people getting close to one another, seeing one another's faults, and still loving each other, just as Christ loved us when we least deserved it. We tend not to notice our weaknesses so easily on our own, and so having a spouse helps us to see them and strengthen them without feeling publicly exposed in weaknesses.

Spiritual protection for these couples came through remaining faithful to their spouses instead of committing divorce and marrying someone else just because of the desire to do so. Some rabbis played fast and loose with the divorce issue. One even stated that for a burnt dinner a husband could divorce his wife! The opposite of that is being suggested by the prophet. They are to stay together instead of divorcing purely for dislike of their spouse. Faithfulness to one's spouse also shows faithfulness to God.

2:16 because the one who hates sends away, says the Lord, the God of Israel, and covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of Hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit and do not deal treacherously.

The Lord gives an explanation of why they must not separate from their wives for their spiritual benefit. The man sends his wife away because he hates her, because he loves another. But the love is not really love. It is lust. He divorces, or sends her away, for someone else, breaking the intimate bonds of covenantal marriage. God says that this kind of behavior soils their garments. It covers their garments with spots of violence.

The word violence most likely refers to the violence done to a wife who would have no protection or provision without a husband in that society, as long as the children that may be involved in the marriage, not to mention the emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual separation of divorce, the ripping of one soul into two destroyed souls. Let us not suggest that divorce is easy or convenient in any way. It destroys both spouses irreparably. Even though there is healing in Christ and reconciliation, that kind of suffering was never intended by God and does not please His heart at all.

We have been too flippant with divorce and we must notice that the violence and destruction that we cause other human beings through intimate involvement and then impossibly trying to sever that connection hurts the heart of God. We cannot expect to come into His house and act like we have done nothing wrong. We take just as much of a spiritual hit of abuse when we are involved in divorce as we take in every other area of our lives. To guard one's spirit, it is better to be faithful to a spouse and to the Lord. A samek closes out this section in favor of the next as the prophet has cut to the heart of the issue and decisively dealt with its affect on excellence in worship.

Messianic Justice

As we have seen this pattern of the prophet making accusations against the priests and the priests asking for details about how they have offended God, the prophet then explains how they have offended Him. Now here we find that the Lord is offended by their speech and will send His messenger to them to purify them in the future. This is most likely a Messianic prophecy about the coming of Jesus in both His first and second comings. When Jesus comes, He cleanses and purifies us completely, like no one else could ever cleanse us!

2:17 You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, “In what way have we wearied Him?” By your saying, “Everyone who does evil is good in the Lord’s eyes, and He delights in them,” or “Where is the God of justice?”

Verse 17 actually starts a new thought and a new section of the book after the section on marriage to foreign women. We get back to the formula of the prophet making a statement, the priests challenging that statement, and the prophet responding to the challengers. This time, the prophet tells the priests that their words weary the Lord. The Lord is sick and tired of hearing from their small understanding and limited speech.

The priests respond as has been their common way to ask in exactly what ways they have wearied the Lord. The prophet answers, as is his custom, that the words of the priests have wearied Him, specifically their lies about everyone who is evil being good and also a secondary charge of them questioning God’s justice. Let us evaluate each of these individually.

First, the Lord charges that the priests have been calling evil people good and telling them that God is pleased with them. The imagery here has background in the Proverbs where the righteous ask why the evil are wealthy and lead good lives while the righteous struggle through life. It is a philosophical question that they have been raising for a long time. The presupposition here is that God rewards the evil with good. That is not the case at all. The evil and the good experience some of the same common graces of God because they both live in the same world. The priests are suggesting that because the evil do experience good in this world that God is in favor of them. There was a misunderstanding that wealth automatically meant that God’s favor was upon a person. However, that is a false understanding of God’s blessing.

The second question betrays the people’s belief that God was not only delighting in and blessing the evil people but that He allowed the cause of justice to go by the wayside. They suggested that He was not responding with justice to any of their situations. This is the question in philosophy concerning the wronged person, the suffering person. Where is God in my suffering? would be another way to pose this question.

The problem that the speakers face is that both of these questions explain that they are unbelieving but do not take into account God’s love and goodness. They are forgetting the promises of God that a Messiah is on the way. They are waiting, but not waiting with faith. We face these same questions from unbelievers and atheists today. Every once in a while, we may

feel like asking them ourselves, but we must remember that God has set His plan in motion a long time ago, and it is still in effect today. We must wait upon the Lord and not question His faithfulness.

Chapter 3

3:1 Behold I am sending My messenger and he will prepare the way before Me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple, and the messenger of the covenant which you delight in, behold, He will arrive, says the Lord of Hosts.

Although there is a chapter break, the literary and subject unit continues. The Lord of Hosts responds through the prophet concerning these questions of unbelief that He is sending a messenger ahead of the Lord. Now this verse prophesies two of the most important events of all human history. First is the coming of the forerunner of the Messiah, and then second is the coming of the Messiah Himself.

The pronouncement starts with that attention getting “Behold!” This is the word that is meant to stop everything for what follows. The next phrase is a promise from God that He is sending His messenger. Now, this could refer to Jesus as the Messenger who is the Messiah or it could refer to John the Baptist. Most would say that it is John the Baptist because he prepares the way or clears the path but pushing things aside. This is what John the Baptist came to do, to prepare the people for Jesus the Messiah.

Then the next phrase tells the people that the Lord whom they seek will suddenly arrive at His temple. It is quite clear to us from the grammar of this prophecy that Jesus is God. There are two reasons for this view. First, the preparer comes “before Me,” before the Lord Himself. Second, He is called the Lord they seek. This is the Messiah and also the Lord. Now it is true that the word Lord here is not the standard YHWH but is the word adonai which can simply be a formal title, like saying “Sir.”

But this messenger is also the Messenger of the covenant. Jesus clearly brought a second or new covenant with Him in His first coming. He made that new covenant with His blood and we have all delighted in that covenant. Jesus came for this express purpose, to bring us the new covenant. Twice behold is used, showing the emphasis and weighty importance of this moment. The Lord declares that this will happen.

3:2 But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand in His appearing? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like a launderer’s soap!

Verse two continues in the line of thinking about Jesus’ coming, but one might understand this as His second coming rather than his first. I would probably lean more toward His first coming. The word for endure, although it is properly translated that because of its stem means to consider or comprehend in its other forms. That reminds me of John telling us the darkness cannot comprehend the Light of Jesus in John 1. But it could also be understood in the second coming when Jesus comes for the battle that no one can endure that day of His second coming. The fact is that Jesus has come and is coming for His people.

The second question also would lend itself to the majestic appearing of Christ in the second coming as well. He comes arrayed for battle and in His splendor, where as the first coming was not as majestic and awe-inspiring, unless you think of the shepherds in the fields and the star that brought the Magi. However, in both the first and the second comings, Jesus did and will be a refiner and a cleanser.

In His first coming, I am reminded of the purifying through taking on with fiery words the established religious leaders of His day, preaching the hard words the people needed to hear. And also the cleansing of the temple and the cleansing of diseases were examples of His purifying power in that first coming. Fire and cleansing are both signs also of the Holy Spirit as well. In the second coming, the refining fire of battle and Kingship will be Jesus' aim. He will cleanse the world of sin and purify it for His purpose.

When we think about Jesus, we can see these are true in our own lives. When Jesus came into your life and soul, He began the work of cleansing you and purifying you from the inside out. He works on our hearts and lives until they are clean before Him. He washes with the water of the word and purifies with the quenching fire of the Holy Spirit so that we can walk in His holy ways. Although these sometimes are very painful experiences, the joy after the cleansing and purifying is unmatched! Let us embrace the cleansing of Jesus in our lives!

3:3 Then He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver. Then they will offer to the Lord offerings in righteousness!

This next part of the prophecy has Jesus sitting as a refiner and purifier, perhaps with the imagery of a Judge or a King, and so this might refer specifically to His reigning as King in the second coming. While Jesus challenged and purified and cleansed the priesthood, the sons of Levi, in His first coming, He did not sit in judgment over them and make a lasting change in their purification and cleansing. He will be able to do that in His second coming.

Gold and silver, and most metals, are refined in fire, in the testing of the furnace. These images probably produce that idea in this text of Jesus refining through a forging fire and making them sparkling clean examples of the priesthood. Once this is done, the priests will once again offer proper offerings in righteousness to the Lord. They will be priests and do the work of priests again, contrary to the current situation with the priests. The Lord will restore a time of justice and purity when He comes!

We can trust that Jesus is coming back to instill justice and purity and righteousness not just in the priesthood but throughout the whole earth when He comes again. We long for His coming not because we don't believe He does not make some things in our lives just now, but that we want to see His just kingdom reigning! We want to live in justice and righteousness, not be surprised by them when they occasionally happen in our world. That is one of the reasons we look forward with great expectation at Jesus' second coming. The injustices that we see today will be dealt with by Jesus when He returns! Injustice has an end date!

3:4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the ancient days and as in former years.

When Jesus comes, He will change the offering by cleansing and purifying the priesthood, making the offerings and sacrifices once again delightful to God. Long ago the Lord was pleased with these offerings, but as of right now for the prophet, they are not up to par. Jesus will administer purity and righteousness so that the Lord will be pleased with the offerings of the people. Other prophets have mentioned the temple having an active role in Jesus' Kingdom, like Zechariah 14.

3:5 Then I will draw near to you to judge and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely and against those who oppress the worker in his wages, the widow and the orphan, those who push away the sojourner, and those who do not fear Me, says the Lord of Hosts.

There may have been a shift in talking first about the first coming and then this shift into the second coming because the parts about judgment and purification are best suited for the time of the second coming when Jesus will reign as King and Judge over the whole earth. This part talks about God drawing near to judge. He can do that through Jesus as King, who is also God.

The Lord Jesus will deal with sorcerers and adulterers and those who swear false oaths. Look at all of these as the things that may have been going on in Malachi's time, that still go on today, that are close to God's heart. God cares about the victims of sorcery and adultery and the people whose reputations are trampled upon by false oath taking. He cares about the sojourner who has little rights in a foreign land and He will punish those who do not revere the Lord.

He cares about those who are oppressed, like the poor, the worker who is abused through low wages, the orphan, the widow. All of those who need someone to fight for them, Jesus will be that hero in their lives as King. He will reign with true justice. King Jesus will be able to summon whatever forces and military He needs, as the Lord of Hosts. The answer to the question posed by the people concerning why the wicked prosper and where the God of justice is are answered partially in the first coming of Christ, and fully in the second coming of Christ.

Return to Me!

This next section focuses on one of the practical ways that the people could affirm their love for God and begin to worship Him truly again. Many people are familiar with this passage about the tithe and robbing God. The main point of this section, however, is that the people return to God. Tithing becomes the vehicle through which they can return to Him. When God gives us an open door to test Him and to see if His promises are true, we should not hesitate to obey!

3:6 For I the Lord do not change thus you, O sons of Jacob, have not perished.

The Lord opens this section with a truth about His nature and how that has actually kept the Israelites from annihilation. God does not change. James tells us in the New Testament that He does not shift like shadows and clouds. God is permanent, immutable. The Lord's policy on Israel, on His chosen people and nation, has never changed. If it had, the Israelites would be gone. God has been faithful to them throughout all of the years of their faithlessness.

This idea sets up the section on returning to Him. In almost every prophetic book, there is a section on God calling the people to return to Him. The unique part of this book is that it is not to return to Him out of idolatry but to return to Him in excellence and obedience, to no longer be lax on their worship practices. The word for perish here has the idea that the Israelites would simply stop existing. Our existence is contingent upon God's grace!

3:7 From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and you have not kept *them*. Return to Me and I will return to you, says the Lord of Hosts. But you say, "In what way shall we return?"

God now speaks of a shortened form of the long history that He has had with Jacob and with this people. From the very beginning, even the forefathers of Israel were not perfect. They also were unfaithful in their own ways. This is the history of the nation. They have no footing to stand on in the area of faithfulness because they have been faithless more often than faithful.

The people were given the statutes and commands of the Law and yet they still could not keep them. No matter how much responsibility God gives any of us, we seem to fall short. This is a good time to thank God for His continuing grace in our lives and in our world. The call to return to God is more concerned with the attitude of the people's hearts rather than their allegiances. It is concerned with the excellence of their sacrifices and their apathy toward the things of God.

When we don't treat God or His things properly, according to this passage, it is considered leaving the faith! This statement of reciprocal return reminds me of James saying that if we would draw near to God, God will draw near to us. You can really see the apathy of the people as they once again challenge God through a question, this time not even about what they have done to upset Him, but rather, how they should return to Him. Their hearts don't seem to be in it quite yet, but at least they are asking how to return to Him.

3:8 Will a human rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, "In what way are we robbing You?" In the tithes and the contributions.

This question opens up the door for God to talk about yet another failed practice in His Temple, that of the tithe and the contributions. It used to be that the people out of their great joy and zeal for the Lord would give plentifully out of their blessings back unto the Lord. Abraham

was the first to set up the idea of a tenth, a tithe, being given back out of the goods received. In the temple, there was a tithe commanded for all of the people and there were also contributions probably based on need.

People argue all the time about the tithe today and whether or not it is in the New Testament. God here seems pretty adamant about it, as we will see. The emphatic nature of this dialogue between God and the people is quite stunning. He starts with a rhetorical question about humans being able to rob God of His possessions. It should not be possible, and yet that is what the people are doing! The pronouns are as emphatic as they can be in Hebrew.

The people of course maintain their same attempt of aloofness to His calls for repentance. They ask Him in what ways they have robbed Him. It is interesting in the prophets to see how many times Israel is on trial and how much God is the victim of their assault, playing the part of the one who is wronged because of the people's attitude and behavior. The Lord responds to their question about their involvement in robbing Him when He mentions both the tithe and the contributions.

3:9 With a curse you are cursed because it is Me you are robbing, the whole nation of you!

The lack of tithing the ten percent yielded curses upon the population. First a curse was given to the priests on their blessings because of their insolence against God, and now the people of the whole nation are suffering a curse because of their refusal to devote a tenth of their wealth to the Lord. The Lord is being robbed, and He is able to defend Himself. So He sends a curse upon them for their stealing from Him. God owns everything in this world.

To be entrusted with some of His possession, commanded to give back a tenth of it, and hoard that amount from Him is to slap the Great Provider in the face. Giving of the tithe helps us to rely upon God for all of our needs. It is a way to prioritize Him in our daily lives. It is not just one or two families that are guilty of violating the tithe principle, but the whole nation!

3:10 Bring all of the tithe into the storehouse that there will be food in My house. Then surely test me in this, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and empty out to you a blessing until there is no more need.

The Lord gives the people a way to return to Him through bringing the whole tithe into the storehouse. This probably infers that people were giving some kind of contribution, but not the full ten percent. The phrase "all of the tithe" suggests that they were only bringing part of it in. It was with the tithe that the priests and the temple could provide for those who were in need, whether they needed food or something else.

Churches today work on the same principle. The tithe usually goes toward the operation of the church and then the ministries that it conducts in the community. Without a tithe, churches would not survive. If nothing else, the tithe is used to operate the church. In the New Testament, God actually demands all of us, not just ten percent. He is more demanding in the New Covenant

rather than the Old. In the New, it is more a matter of hearing from God and being generous, as Paul points out both principles in 2 Corinthians 9. It is no longer a cut and dried number like ten percent.

Now here is the part where God gets very emphatic in His promise. He commands them to bring in the tithe, and then after that they can test Him in the tithe. Nowhere else does God allow anyone to test Him! This is the only place. Beyond this unusual allowance are the emphatic conjunction here translated “surely” as well as the emphatic pronoun, “Me.” The promise is that when we give the full of the ten percent tithe, God will indeed open up the window of heaven and pour out His blessing in our lives. God will pour it out until there is no more need.

Let us point out just two things about this blessing. First of all, it is given for our needs, not our wants. It’s not like God is saying that we can test Him in the tithe and get extra money or blessing for something that is not a need. That could happen, but it is not promised here. What is promised is that our needs will be taken care of. The second point about this verse because it is frequently used by so many is that blessing does not have to be monetary. Blessing can come in whatever way God wishes to bring it. It can be a monetary blessing, but does not have to be. God simply promises to take care of our need with His blessings upon us.

3:11 And I will rebuke for you the eater and it will not ruin the fruits of the ground for you and it will not prove barren for you, the vine in the field, says the Lord of Hosts.

We see here more than mere monetary provision for obeying the full tithe in this verse. Included is the needed prosperity to be able to harvest from the fields. The Lord takes care to make sure that they have everything they need to eat from the fields. He keeps the destructive critters away and makes sure the produce of the ground in all of its forms will be what is needed. This is beyond monetary blessing. God will take care of us when we are faithful to bring the tithe as part of our worship to Him.

3:12 Then all nations will call you blessed for you will be a land of joy, says the Lord of Hosts.

Another way that the blessings will be poured out upon them is being called blessed by other nations, having a great reputation among the nations. Their land will be filled with joy and gladness. These are not monetary blessings, but are part of providing for the need of the whole nation. We must never expect that if we give God money He will return blessing in the form of money. Let us enjoy the blessing of God and know that He will always take care of us when we test Him in the tithe. Let us return to the Lord by being fully committed, not just in the tithe, but in every act of worship. A samek closes out this section on the tithe, although in most Bibles it does not stop here.

Unbelievers and Saints

This next literary unit starts with a problem of unbelief among the Israelites given through two questions and then the Lord's responses. These are then followed by a group of people who revere the Lord and are remembered in a memorial book. Even in these days as we eagerly await Jesus' second coming, there are unbelievers and believers on the earth. May we endure until the time of His return!

3:13 Your words have been strong against Me, says the Lord. But you say, "In what way have we spoken against You?"

The prophet now keys in on two different groups nationally who are making some news. The first group is the sinners and unbelievers who make the case that God has not helped Israel in this time at all. The Lord responds that their words of criticism are harsh and strong against Him, even though He is their God. The unbelievers have raised their collective voice against the Lord who has been with them since the beginning.

They are willing to erase such a faithful history from the Lord's covenantal love because it is currently inconvenient for them. Their complaints are of course unwarranted and wrongheaded. That is why the word is strong against the Lord. As is usual in this prophetic book, the common rhetorical question is asked this time by unbelievers, "In what way have we spoken against You?" May we always be aware of any unbelief that we harbor against God!

3:14 You said, "It is worthless to serve God," and "What is the gain in keeping His charge and in mournfully walking before the Lord of Hosts?"

The Lord responds to the volleying question of how the unbelievers have spoken harshly against Him with two sayings they have spoken. The first is a general statement of disgust on their part because they do not see the benefits of serving God and the covenantal love that God has poured out upon them. They speak of the emptiness of serving God and doing what He has commanded. Their apathy is unbelief, not a simple challenge to the Lord. They directly ignore His good graces that have already been pointed out so far.

The second saying points to their desire to quit doing what the Lord has asked of them in their festivals and sacrifices. They ask what the point of walking before the Lord is anymore. They are more than disillusioned. They see these festivals and celebrations as mournful chores rather than as festivals. They don't want to walk before the Lord. The word walk here speaks of the lifestyle of living before the Lord and honoring Him. They don't see the gain for themselves or for their nation in serving God.

We should never put ourselves in a place of unbelief like this. The Christian faith has answers to our deepest questions about faith and doubt, but the way that we approach the conversation shows just how much we trust in God. There is a way to ask questions of the Lord from a believing perspective rather than from an unbelieving perspective. The attitude can be

seen through the way we question. God is big enough to hear our complaints and our questions about faith, but we sin if we come to Him in an accusatory fashion.

3:15 But now we call the insolent blessed! Workers of wickedness prosper even though they put God to the test and they escape.

The unbelievers continue by turning upside-down the expected paradigm for God to be a good and powerful God. If God is all powerful and all knowing, then why would the insolent or the proud be blessed? Part of the problem to this question is that it has the same presupposition that the other question about the wicked walking in blessing. These people believed that God only rewarded with wealth the righteous, but that is a false presumption.

The wicked continue to prosper not just in wealth but in building families with unbelieving children. The word prosper here speaks of building people, of building families through childbearing. These wicked people are putting God to the test. As we have already seen in this prophetic book, only in one area can a believer test God, in the area of the tithe. So these wicked people have no regard for proper worship of God, and yet they are the ones blessed and prospering? This is the argument of the unbelievers.

But there is a doctrine called common grace, that the sun and rain fall on both the righteous and the wicked, that both will experience at least some grace from God no matter what. This whole argument sounds like the prodigal son's brother complaining that his brother got away with everything. This is ironic that these unbelievers speak of the wicked putting God to the test, and yet through their unbelief, they are doing the exact same thing! We must approach God with humility and reverence, not with bold claims against wickedness.

3:16 Then those who feared the Lord spoke each one to his friend, and the Lord listened attentively and heard and a memorial book was written before Him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed His name.

Contrary to the unbelievers, there is a group of people who fear God in these times in Israel, just as today there are unbelievers who make fun of the rapture and the second coming, and yet Jesus is coming back. These believers or saints are described as being people who fear the Lord. The fear of the Lord is to revere God and to worship Him in His rightful place above all other things. These faithful ones who revere God begin speaking to one another.

In the midst of the holy conversation is the Lord intently listening and paying attention to their thoughts on the matter while everyone waits for this messenger and Messiah to come that have just been prophesied. When the Lord saw their faithfulness and reverence, He made a memorial of them in a book or scroll. Their names were remembered in that book as those who have feared Him.

The Lord keeps tabs on those who trust in Him. We are not walking this life alone in the dark. God is with us. He walks with us. He knows where we are at and what we are dealing with.

We are never alone! We don't need to live like Lone Rangers. We can know that we are never out of God's sight and mind. We can trust that He knows everything going on with us. We are completely connected to God at all times.

3:17 And they will be Mine, says the Lord of Hosts, for the day when I make a personal possession, and I will spare them just as a man spares his son who serves him.

This group of God-fearers who honor His name and esteem Him will be protected and will be God's possession. The word for personal possession here implies a special place, a secret possession that God keeps for Himself. He remembers the remnant in every circumstance. The Lord has always wanted a people to be His people and to be their God. This seems to be the prophecy of that fulfillment later on in time.

There is mention of a day when God will take the people as His possession. This is most likely the day of the Lord, the second coming of Christ. This will be a time of judgment which God's remnant is spared from enduring as He promises here. He will spare the remnant as a father spares the son who serves him. This day of the Lord is coming soon when Jesus comes to fight evil and judge the wicked. But we need not worry about it because He will spare us from these days!

3:18 Then you will return and you will distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between God's servants and those who don't serve Him.

This verse indicates that the question mentioned earlier about the wicked prospering will be answered with God's justice as the Messiah distinguishes between those who are righteous and wicked. This could be during the Kingship of Jesus in the Millennial Reign or a reference to the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of time. Either way, the qualms about injustice are answered in the coming of the Messiah. The distinguishing mark is those who truly serve and worship God and those who don't. We see this also in the book of Revelation with the mark of the beast and the mark of God. There is coming a day when justice will be served. We see injustices all around now, but injustice has a termination date. We look forward to that day! A samek completes the next-to-last section of the book as we begin to talk about that Day of the Lord.

Chapter 4

Final Words

What is the fourth chapter in the English Bible is actually the ending of the third chapter in the Hebrew Bible. These last six verses speak of two different days of the Lord. The first in verses 1-3 speaks of the Day of the Lord at the end of human history, but the last three verses appropriately close out the Old Testament by looking forward to the day of the Lord in Jesus' first coming, the incarnation found just a few pages over in the New Testament and about 450 years later, the Intertestamental Period. We have so much to look forward to when Jesus returns once again! Let us wait with expectation and excellence in our worship!

4:1 (H 3:19) For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the insolent ones and all workers of wickedness will be stubble. The day that is coming will scorch them with fire, says the Lord of Hosts who will not leave them root or branch.

Verse one starts by pointing toward the Day of the Lord, that final era of Jesus' second coming in which He brings justice to the earth and rules as King. With a new image of the day of the Lord burning like an oven, the prophet introduces the same concepts that other prophets have given us for the Day of the Lord. The image, however is new.

Not only will the Day of the Lord be one of heat and fire, but it will be a time in which justice happens. The insolent ones are those who are arrogant or prideful, who think they can presume the future. This group and the group of the workers of wickedness have already been mentioned in this prophetic book, and they finally get their just punishment for their wickedness, answering the questions of the unbelieving in chapter three.

They will be stubble in the oven, and the image is of them burning up quickly under the fierce anger and judgment of God on that Day. That day for those who are wicked will be a day of disaster and scorching, of burning with fire. And they will get no quarter or kindness in that judgment. The Lord will not even leave a root or branch in His scathing and burning judgment.

Because of the seriousness of the Day of the Lord, reading passages and items like this one should cause us as believers to redouble our efforts to witness about what God is going to do. These images leave no room for second chances. We must let people know what is coming and speak to them before it is too late!

4:2 (H 3:20) But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. Then you will go out and leap like calves from the stall.

We have seen from most of the prophets both Old Testament and New Testament that the Day of the Lord, that final era of human history, will have two sides to it. For those who are wicked, they will only know the wrath and judgment of God. But for those who are God-fearers

and saints, there will be the culmination and fulfillment of the promises of God! It will be a time of rejoicing for those who are believers.

For those who believe, the day of the Lord will bring healing and power, the completion of a long and arduous journey into God's presence. The fulfillment of all things will be at hand and cause for great celebration. The people will frolic like calves in the meadows. Every image of peace and prosperity you can think of will light that Day! It is a day that we all look forward to and meditate upon. It is a day that fuels our efforts for evangelism and enjoyment!

4:3 (H 3:21) Then you will tread upon the wicked, for they will be dust under the soles of your feet in the day when I do it, says the Lord of Hosts.

The pronoun in this verse speaks of the righteous treading upon the wicked. The pronoun is masculine plural, referring to all of the righteous ones. The wicked will be tread underfoot, like the soil of the ground, the dust of one's feet. This will be the day of culmination. As we have seen from other passages and prophecies, there will be a great battle between the Messiah and His righteous armies and the nations of the world.

This is the day that the Lord will make things happen and do what He has been promising ever since the beginning! A peh here separates this literary section talking about that final Day of the Lord in human history from the next part, which is the very last words spoken for 450 years to Israel until John the Baptist comes on the scene as the forerunner of Christ. We will see that this day of the Lord referred to after the peh is one that will be the incarnation of Christ.

4:4 (H 3:22) Remember the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded him at Horeb concerning all of Israel, the statutes and judgments.

The prophet begins his closing lines with a command to remember the Torah, the law of God, given by Moses on Mount Horeb. The days ahead would be long and the people would have to learn how to wait upon a very silent God. But He had not left them completely bereft of any instruction. He had long ago given them His Law, and all they had to do was be obedient not just in action but from the heart.

The Law was for all of Israel, not just part of the nation. Everyone needed to be following it. We have seen from the rest of this prophecy that it is not surprising the prophet comments on remembering and doing the Law of Moses since the people had so apathetically pushed it aside in religious arrogance. Now the prophet leaves them with the challenge to obey the Law with every statute and judgment. They must worship the Lord as He has prescribed!

We should be people of the Word of God. We should know His Word as well as we know anything else in all this world. As we wait upon the Lord, His Word gives us so much: hope, comfort, faith, and a host of other necessary items that we need to live out the Christian life. Let us remember and hold fast to the Word of God until Christ comes to take us home!

4:5 (H 3:23) Behold I will send to you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and fearful day of the Lord.

Once again we have that attention-getting conjunction that causes us to lean in for the last few words. The prophet promises as God speaks through him that God will send Elijah the prophet to the people of God. Elijah has always had one of the most honored positions among the Jewish prophets because he did not experience death. It was believed that he could come back to Israel at any time because he never died.

For this reason, the religious leaders and crowds consider that it might be possible that John the Baptist is Elijah when they hear his preaching and see what he wears and how he lives a gruff lifestyle in the wilderness. He was so much the image of Elijah, which is the fulfillment of this specific prophecy here. There are also some that believe Elijah might be one of the two witnesses in the book of Revelation for the final Day of the Lord.

But it is clear that John the Baptist is that forerunner already described who prepares the way of the Lord and acts and looks very much like Elijah of old. So in the sense of these last three verses, the day of the Lord is not that final era that we look for now, but it was the day of the Lord Jesus' first coming in the incarnation and in His public ministry.

4:6 (H 3:24) Then He will turn the fathers' hearts toward *their* children, and the children's hearts toward their fathers, lest I come and strike the land devoted to the ban.

I believe this is a prophecy specifically about John the Baptist who begins to work revivals through his ministry as a precursor to Jesus' coming. It is actually quoted about John the Baptist in the Gospel of Luke (1:17). If it weren't for the ministry of John the Baptist, then the Lord would come and destroy the land and strike it with devastations. His coming was part of the grace of God.

This last word in Hebrew and phrase in the English Bible is usually not fully explained by translators. It speaks of things that are devoted to the Lord for the purpose of destruction, or things under the ban. The ban can be seen in Joshua in the account of Achin taking things under the ban and then being punished for it.

Here, that same idea of the land itself being under the ban and worthy of destruction before the Lord takes shape. The imagery tells us that if God does not send John the Baptist, and then Jesus, the land would be destroyed. Thank God that He sends His grace in the perfect form at the perfect time! Let us now look to continue the ministry of Jesus until we see that final Day of the Lord when Jesus comes back once again!