

# **God's Q&A on Unrighteous Worship**

A study in the prophecy of Malachi

Andrew Swango

## Prophecy of Malachi - Introduction

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### AUTHOR

There is a debate as to who the author is. Verse 1:1 says, "through Malaki." Is this a proper name or not? "Malak" means messenger or angel, and this is how it is translated in the Greek Septuagint. The addition of the "i" at the end makes me believe that this is his actual, proper name which carries the meaning: messenger or angel.

If the prophet does not have a proper name in 1:1, one theory that has been proposed is that the author is Ezra. Perhaps God made Ezra, a righteous priest, become a prophet and sent him to the wicked priests. Ezra became governor of the Persian province of Judah about 30 years before, so this was not after Ezra's time. However, when Ezra dealt with the issue of Jews marrying foreign wives who committed detestable practices (Ezra 9-10), he does not handle the situation like a prophet would. Instead of consulting the people about what to do, a prophet would have heard directly from God.

For these reasons, I do not believe the author is Ezra but a prophet named Malachi.

### DATE

Of all the Old Testament prophets, Malachi is the most difficult to place. Mal 1:8 uses the Persian term for governor, so we know it is after the exile, and because of the references to the altar, this is after the building of the Second Temple. Many of the issues mentioned in Malachi (mostly chapter 2) are the same problems when Nehemiah returns to Judah in Neh 13. In fact, God mentions a vow in Mal 1:14 which is probably the vow the Jews made with Nehemiah before he left in Neh 10. After looking at Malachi and Nehemiah in this way, it seems most likely that Malachi prophesied while Nehemiah was away and before he returned and fixed things. If this is the case, Malachi prophesied between Neh 12 and 13, between 430-424 BC. (It couldn't have happened before Nehemiah because there is no mention of Nehemiah finding these problems throughout chapters 1-12. And it couldn't have happened after Nehemiah because he fixed many of these problems in chapter 13.)

### AUDIENCE

The priests are directly referred to in Mal 1:6, and 2:1-9. And since the whole book has to do with the worship of God at the temple, the main audience are the priests. But the rest of Judah is also mentioned. So they are a secondary audience. After all, it would be the common person who would bring their lame and sick animals and who would bring their tithes (Mal 3:8-10). In a brief section, God speaks to the righteous Jews (Mal 3:16-18).

### STYLE

The most obvious style is that of a Question and Answer session. Both God and Malachi speaks for themselves and for the wicked people like a dialogue where the people are responding with questions. The prophecy of Malachi is a divine Q&A.

### THIS CLASS

#### Style

The style of this class will focus on two things: the worship God is wanting and to understand this by asking questions--as Malachi does.

#### Theme: Understanding through questions

The theme of this class will be Q&A, a dialogue between God and what He has heard from the people. Malachi 2:17, "You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you ask, 'How have we wearied Him?' When you say, 'Everyone who does what is evil is good in the Lord's sight, and He is pleased with them,' or, 'Where is the God of justice?'"

Other Scriptures that show the Q&A: Mal 1:13, "You also say, 'Look, what a nuisance!' The Lord of Hosts says, 'And you scorn it. You bring stolen, lame, or sick animals. You bring this as an offering! Am I to accept that from your hands?' asks the Lord."

## Prophecy of Malachi - Outline

*Andrew Swango*

- 1:1** Introduction.
- 1:2-5** Love for Jacob, hatred for Esau.
- 1:6-14** Defiled and contemptible offerings.
- 2:1-9** God's commands to the priests.
  - 2:1-3 God's warning to the priests about a curse.
  - 2:4-7 God's covenant with Levi.
  - 2:8-9 God's condemnation of the priests.
- 2:10-12** Judah has profaned the covenant.
- 2:13-16** The priests' treacherous marriages.
- 2:17** God is wearied by all of this.
- 3:1-4** God's prophecy of His coming Messiah.
- 3:5-6** God's judgments on the wicked.
- 3:7-12** God's blessings if the people repent.
- 3:13-15** God's reminder of their rebellion.
- 3:16-18** God's compassion on the righteous.
- 4:1-3** God's vision of Judgment Day.
- 4:4-6** God's prophecy of His messenger, John.

## **Prophecy of Malachi - Suggested 8-Week Schedule**

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<b><u>Week</u></b>	<b><u>Scriptures</u></b>
1	Introduction, 1:1-5
2-3	1:6-14
4	2:1-12
5	2:13-17
6	3:1-6
7	3:7-12
8	3:13-4:6

The theme of this class will be Q&A, a dialogue between God and what He has heard from the people. Malachi 2:17, "You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you ask, 'How have we wearied Him?' When you say, 'Everyone who does what is evil is good in the Lord's sight, and He is pleased with them,' or, 'Where is the God of justice?' "

The style of this class will focus on two things: the worship God is wanting and to understand this by asking questions--as Malachi does.

The translation I mostly use is the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

### **1:1 Introduction.**

Oracle. (1) The last time the Jews had a prophet was Haggai and Zechariah who prophesied around the building of the Second Temple between 520 and 515 BC. What a surprise when Malachi shows up 90 years later. Did the Jews believe that prophets had ceased... that Zechariah was the last prophet of God? This is an honest question because Jesus said, "From Abel to Zechariah." Did Jesus think Zechariah was the last prophet? Or, did they not kill Malachi? (2) The arrival of Malachi the prophet should have perked up everyone's ears and obeyed his message from God. However, if my chronology is correct (that this book occurs between Nehemiah 12 and 13), then it didn't quite work. When Nehemiah returns in chapter 13 of his book, that is when things are really set right.

Malachi. (1) There is a big debate over whether a prophet named Malachi wrote this or whether this should be translated "His messenger." For more information, see the introduction. I believe Malachi was a real person and prophet from God.

I pray you, lay it to heart. In the Greek version, there is an additional phrase at the end of the verse. It literally reads, "And place [it or this] upon your heart."

### **1:2-5 Love for Jacob, hatred for Esau.**

I have loved you, says the Lord. This is God's point in this section. God's very first message to the Jews is that He loves them. Of course, God speaks very lovingly to the Jews through all of the Old Testament. He is reminding them that He is a God that loves them and wants the very, very best for them.

You ask, how have You loved us. (1) As God and Malachi do throughout this prophecy, they anticipate the people's questions and wants to give them straight answers. Whether the Jews would actually ask these questions or whether God is hypothetically posing these questions in order to give a great answer (like a Q&A), I do not know for sure. I believe it is the former--that the Jews would honestly be asking these questions. (2) Here, the meaning behind this question is that the Jews doubt that God loves them. This is seen throughout Malachi's prophecy. The Jews do not feel loved. If God does love them, then how has God loved them?

I loved Jacob but I hated Esau. God's message to the Jews: remember Esau? Aren't you descendants from Jacob and not Esau (even though both are descendants of Isaac)? As God goes on to explain, He wants the Jews to compare the current state of Jacob with the current state of Esau. When one looks at how blessed the descendants of Jacob are and how cursed the descendants of Esau are, this is a sign that God has loved Jacob and has cursed Esau--just as God had promised and made happen back in Genesis (Gen 25:22-34, chapter 27). God reminded them of this often in the days of Moses (Deut 4:37-38, 7:6-8, 10:14-15). And since then, God has used the prophets to continually prophecy His curses on Edom, Esau's descendants (Is 34:5-17, Jer 49:7-22, Ezk 35, and all of Obadiah).

[Rom 9:13]. Paul quotes Mal 1:2b-3a in Rom 9:13. There, Paul's point is that God loves the children of Abraham who are true Israel, not merely who are of physical descent of Abraham (such as Ishmael). This is not the exact same as Malachi's point in using this phrase.

His mountains/borders. (1) Verse 3 in the Hebrew reads, "I devastated his mountains and [gave] his heritage to jackals in the wilderness." The Greek reads, "I disposed his borders into disappearance and his heritage to a wasteful gift." The wasteful gift is a play on Esau's birthright. Esau had his birthright, his heritage, but he sold it to Jacob for a bowl of bean soup; it became a wasteful gift. (2) God's message to the Jews: haven't I held true to what I said about the younger serving the older? Do you remember the birthright? That was Esau's own fault. Don't you remember that I left him a country in the wilderness and gave you the Promised Land which flowed with milk and honey?

Edom says. The Hebrew reads, "Though Edom says, 'We are demolished, but we will turn and build.'" The Greek reads, "Inasmuch as he says, 'Edom [is] turned upside down, even we will return it and rebuild.'" Without splitting hairs, both versions have the same meaning.

They may build, but I will demolish. God's message to the Jews: How hard will Edom try to make their nation great? I will keep it cursed. I will uphold the promise I made back in Genesis.

Your own eyes will see this. God's message to the Jews: Haven't you seen that I have fulfilled my promises to Jacob and Esau? Don't you see that I love you more than them--even though they are also descendants of Abraham? It is you I love! God wants the people to repent and return to Him. If they do not repent, then God will make them as cursed as the nations around them (Mal 2:2). In fact, they should recognize that because of their unrighteousness, the curse is already among them (Mal 3:9). And if they do repent, God promises them the blessings of Jacob. He tells them how good their nation can be compared the other nations around them because they have God who wants to bless them (Mal 3:12).

### **1:6-14 Defiled and contemptible offerings.**

Where is my honor. Sparsely through the Old Testament, the Jews recognized God's role as their Father. It wasn't until Jesus day that God's role as Father was one of the primary ways He was recognized. Here, God speaks of Himself as the Jews' spiritual Father. And if He is their Father, then where is His honor? God's message to the Jews: He is not feeling the honor a father ought to feel. The Jews are not honoring God as their Father.

Where is your fear of Me. Even if the Jews do not recognize God as Father, certainly, they must recognize Him as Master, right? Yet even God does not feel like they fear Him as their Master. Whether as Father or as Master, the Jews are not recognizing God as sovereign. As Master, God expects the Jews to be afraid of Him, as a God who rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Again, they are not treating God as sovereign, which they must if God is really their Master.

You priests. This whole section does not necessarily apply to the priests only. There are many things here that can just as easily apply to the common Jew. After all, each person who came to sacrifice at the temple brought their own animals and we see that they are bringing stolen, lame, or sick animals (Mal 1:13). I believe this whole section is to all the Jews. Why does God single out the priests in verse 6? This is because the priests were supposed to inspect the animals before sacrificing them. This is implied in Lev 1 where the priest takes the animal from the people and places it on the altar. The point here is probably that the people are guilty for bringing blemished animals to be sacrificed and the priests are guilty for allowing and sacrificing blemished animals. In short, if a blemished animal is sacrificed, everyone is guilty. There is no blaming others as Adam blamed Eve in the Garden (Gen 3:12) and Aaron blamed the fire at Mount Sinai (Ex 32:24).

You ask, how have we despised Your name. I believe this is an honest question from the Jews. Based on passages like Mal 2:13, I get the impression that the priests are thinking that they are doing things right which explains why they are sad when God is not listening to their worship. They have despised God's name, but they are completely ignorant as to how. Because of Mal 2:13, they believe that it is not their neglect of God but God's neglect of them. They believe they have upheld righteousness and God has withheld blessings. And this may be the real reason why God sends Malachi: to give them the message that their unrighteous worship is the weak link between them and God.

Presenting defiled food on My altar. To despise God's name is too general to know what is going on. The previous question is a good one: how is God's name despised? God's answer is direct: they have been presenting defiled food on the altar.

You ask, how have we defile You. Now, this question from the people is strange. Did God anticipate them asking this, as if the people really had no idea how they are defiling the altar? Or did God ask this hypothetically because He wishes to go into even more specifics about the defiled altar? I do not know. The rest of this section explains how the altar and the Lord's table is defiled. With the way God presents this section with the people's attitude toward worship, I believe it is more of the later situation... that the people, deep down, probably know that their worship is somehow unrighteous. God wants to speak plainly and with many examples about the wicked worship they are offering.

You say, the Lord's table is contemptible. (1) Contemptible means worthless. (2) The Lord's table is a fascinating description of the altar. Throughout all the Old Testament, the table of the Lord refers to the table of Showbread in the holy place (Lev 24:5-9). Only here and in Ezk 41:22 is the altar called the table of the Lord. The picture of a burnt offering is as if it is food to God. In fact, often, such a sacrifice is called a pleasing aroma to God. Now, God isn't interested in "eating," but it is the worship of the worshiper which pleases God. As God goes on to say, He is not pleased with blind animals being sacrificed. Who eats the eyes of an animal anyway? Does God really care about the quality of the animals' eyes? No, but the quality of the animal reflect the quality of the worshiper. This is why it is called the table of the Lord. When

a person offers God his very best, God doesn't care about or smell the burned animal, He is pleased by and smells the worship of the worshiper. Paul makes this abundantly clear to the Corinthians (1Cor 10:16-21). (3) I wonder if what God said about the people viewing His table with contempt came as a shock to them. Does God really think that we view his altar as worthless or not worthwhile? God doesn't give the people much time to think about this because God finally will give a lengthy speech about this that goes through the end of the chapter.

That which is set upon is contemptible. After "the Lord's table is contemptible," the Greek version adds, "and the food placed there is contemptible." The Greek shows that the Jews viewed both the altar and the sacrifices laid on it as worthless. This reminds me of the Pharisees who said that the altar is nothing but the sacrifice on the altar is everything (Matt 23:16-19). Jesus taught that both ingredients of worship are necessary! In the Greek version here, Malachi tells them that both are seen as worthless. How depraved the Jews had become!

When you present. Before we study what God has a problem with, first, take note that the people are worshiping God. Twice in verse 8, in verse 13, and in verse 14, God recognizes that they are presenting, bringing, and sacrificing to Him. The Jews ARE worshiping God. They are giving something to Him. Where is the problem? The problem is that they are violating HOW God had commanded them to do it. Sure, they may have been offering the right animals at the right times, but they needed to go deeper. What they lacked was a commitment to the QUALITY that God had instructed. Sure, they are violating the Law, but that is also just on the surface of the real problem. In this section, God doesn't remind them of book, chapter, and verse on how they must worship. God is attacking their hearts throughout this whole speech. The Jews may be doing some things right, but they have completely rejected the quality that God desires. God wants that quality to permeate their hearts, not only to fulfill His commandments. The Jews were worshipping indeed. They were presenting things to God. However, their hearts, as seen in their sacrifices, were not concerned with the quality God desires. God wants QUALITY worship!

Blind, lame, sick. These should have been buzz words in the ears of the priests and the people. I mean, how often did God tell the Jews not to offer anything that had blemish (Lev 22:17-25, Deut 15:21, 17:1)? Of course offering God blemished animals is wrong! It violates His commands.

Bring it to your governor. In other words: do you treat your governor this way? If you did, would he accept such a worthless gift? Hey, if your governor would be offended if you offered a blemished animal, how do you think God would feel who not only is the Supreme over the universe but specifically commanded you not to do that? Certainly, no Jew would think to present such worthless gifts to their governor. They could easily guess how the governor would respond. Why have they not realized how God would respond to them? If such worthless gifts would be in insult to their governor, how deeply have they insulted God! So of course the Jews are despising God's name with their worthless offerings!

[Verse 9]. (1) The Hebrew reads, "And now, I pray you, entreat the face of God, that He may be gracious to us. Because of your own hand has this come to be. Will He lift your faces? says the Lord of Hosts." This reads very oddly. Everything except "says the Lord of Hosts" seems to be coming from someone other than God. I believe verse 9 is spoken by Malachi. "Says the Lord of Hosts" really belongs to verse 10 which is spoken by God. (2) The Greek reads, "And now, you should pray to the face of your God. And you bind this happening by your hand. Will I take from you your countenance(face), says the Lord Almighty." The phrase before "says the Lord Almighty," is in first person. This actually better explains why "says the Lord of Hosts" is found in this verse. I believe the Greek version is correct and that this verse is spoken by Malachi except that "Will I take from you your countenance" is God speaking again.

Now ask for God's favor. (1) With whom are the Jews trying to find favor? Is it with their governor with whom they would not give worthless gifts? Or is it with God who is the only one with whom they should find favor! If the people found favor with God, what could go wrong? If God is for them, who would they need to fear? (2) Jesus made this clear when he rebuked the Pharisees. What Jesus told them could have been said to the Jews during Malachi's day (John 5:43-45). When Jesus said, "While accepting glory from one another, you don't seek the glory that comes from the only God" (John 5:44), it is possible that Jesus is referring to Malachi's words here. If they fear giving worthless gifts to people like the governor in order to find favor in their eyes, shouldn't they fear giving worthless gifts to God in order to find favor in His eyes?

Shut the temple doors. God is asking if there is anyone among the people who would close the doors of the temple so that a fire could not be set on the altar. In God's Law, He commanded that the fire on the altar never go out (Lev 6:8-13). God's message to the Jews: He would rather the altar's fire go out, which is against His own commands, than for the people to continue in their unrighteous worship! If the people's hearts see worship as worthless, and if their hearts are not in it, then God would rather the people offer nothing.

Useless fire. (1) In other words, vain worship. God recognizes their worship to him as vain. It is so vain, it might as well not happen. (2) Do you remember another time when God accused Jews of vain worship?

Jesus told the Pharisees, quoting Isaiah, "These people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. They worship Me in vain, teaching as doctrines the commands of men" (Matt 15:8-9). I have always been taught that the Pharisees' worship was in vain because the worship they commanded was from men and not God. While this is very true, notice that Isaiah and Jesus both made sure to point out where their hearts were. Both in Isaiah's day and Jesus' day, they were very concerned that the worshipers heart not be far away from God. The quality of one's heart is certainly a deciding factor on whether worship is accepted by God or is worthless. The people in Jesus' day were showing how far their HEARTS were from God by commanding things taught by men. And the people in Malachi's day were showing how far their HEARTS were from God by giving Him worthless offerings.

From the rising of the sun to its setting. God repeats what had been written earlier by a psalmist (Ps 113:3). God likes this image so much that He spoke it through Isaiah (Is 45:6) and again here through Malachi. This message that all the nations will worship God is repeated in the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev 15:3-4).

My name will be great. Interestingly, through all of verse 11, the Greek reads that God's name has been great among the Gentiles, incense is offered in His name, and then finally saying that God's name IS (not will be) great among the Gentiles.

Its product, its food. The Hebrew reads, "The produce, the meat, is worthless." The Greek reads, "The food placed there is worthless."

What a nuisance. Over the course of God's speech, the words He hears from the people get more and more intense. It started as, "The Lord's table is worthless" (verse 7). Then, "The Lord's table is defiled and the product is worthless" (verse 12). Then, "What a nuisance!" (verse 13). First it was the altar, then it was the sacrifice, then they stopped referring to either of them as they call the entire process of worship a nuisance!

And you scorn it. Literally, the Hebrew word is: to blow. The image is one of contempt or scorn. Imagine someone hear an utterly dumb comment from a person they think is dumb. With a mostly closed mouth, they blow out as a sign that they would rather dismiss such a dumb comment. The sound is: PSH.

Am I to accept that. Stolen, lame, or sick animals? Will God accept such blemished gifts? Think about a husband and a wife. The husband brings his wife some flowers, but the flowers are already withered. Would his wife accept that? The husband wants to take his wife out to eat, so they get in the car and he drive through the drive-thru. Would his wife accept that? The husband brings his wife assorted chocolates, but each piece has a bite taken out of it. Would his wife accept that? In all these instances, how would the wife feel? This is how God feels! And God, being a divine being who deserves so much more than what we can possibly give, I'm sure that God would get much more angry than those wives. Sorry, wives. As God said earlier, they might as well bring nothing, let the fire on the altar go out, and close the doors of the temple!

Deceiver. Deceiver does not appear in the Greek but says, "Whoever."

Who has an acceptable male. If a person has an animal that is acceptable for sacrifice, that leaves the person absolutely without excuse when they offer defective animals to God. (1) God calls them liars. How so? They have tried to deceive God by saying something to the effect, "God, here is an animal just for You. I whole-heartedly offer it as a sacrifice to You." The lie is in the person's heart. They have no heart for God if they do this. Therefore, they are either trying to deceive God, thinking that they can hide the blemishes of their animals from God, or they are deceiving themselves, thinking that God will accept a blemished animal the same as He would an unblemished one. Also, if the people made a vow, then they are guilty of lying to God because they are breaking their vow. God did give instructions on how to handle vows connected with sacrifices (Lev 22:18-25, 27:9-10). (2) God calls them cursed. How so? Well, God has already stated that He will not accept blemished offerings. So we know that God will not bless them. Perhaps if they had stayed home and not brought something to the temple, perhaps God will overlook their lack of commitment in their lives. But if they are going to bring blemished animals to God, God is going to blemish them with a curse. If a blemished animal shows their value of God, a curse shows God's value of them.

My name will be feared among the nations. (1) Remember how this whole conversation started (in verse 6)? God's first accusation against the people was that they despise His name. If God's own people, His own possession, despise His name, how will the nations around them recognize God as the one, true God? God wants His name feared among the nations and that starts by His people fearing His name. God's people are the hope for a lost and dying world. God expects His people to be that light; God will judge His people first (1Pet 4:15-17)! This is because He expects them to be the light of the world. (2) If the Scriptures, especially the prophets, are clear about something, one thing is for sure: God will not allow His name to be blasphemed. He expects His true children to bring glory to His name so that His name will be feared among the nations. Whether or not the Jews fear God's name at this time, God **WILL** MAKE HIS NAME FEARED AMONG THE NATIONS!

Feared. In the Hebrew, the word is "fear." In the Greek the word is "visible," "conspicuous," or "memorable."



[King David's example]. In all this context, they should have remembered David's example when he said, "I insist on paying full price. I will not offer to the Lord my God what belongs to you or burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2Sam 24:24, 1Chr 21:24). After all the "do not's" that God is explaining to the people, David stands as a good example of a "do this."

### **2:1-3 God's warning to the priests about a curse.**

For you priests. Here, God is directly speaking to the priests, requiring them to fulfill their God-given role as mediators between God and His people. God reserves this special curse for them, because God holds the priests to a higher standard. When it comes to people bringing blemished animals, the priests are to be the worship police and require the worshipers to follow God's commands.

Already begun to curse. God is giving a dual message here. (1) Firstly, the priests should already feel cursed because they are not serving God in their duties. How has that curse manifested itself in their lives? It's hard for us to know. But they should recognize it. I wonder if a portion of the curse was the stolen, lame, and sick animals. The priests would be eating blemished animals instead of the very best animals that God instructed them to eat. Or, a portion of the curse could be the fact that many of them have returned home to be farmers instead of being priests. That is, the curse is that their labor is of the ground, which connects to Adam's curse, as opposed to their labor in the temple, which connects them to God. (2) Secondly, God is warning them that more serious curses may be coming. All this talk of curses should remind the people of God's more stern warning (Deut 28:20). Whenever God speaks of curses, the people should immediately be afraid of God removing them as a nation and scattering them among the nations all over again.

Animal waste. (1) In the Greek, it is debatable as to what the animal waste is. Some say it is dung or poop. Perhaps more likely, it is "paunch," one of the stomachs of an animal that chews the cud. So in the Greek, a good translation might be "entrails." At the end of the verse, the Greek reads with God speaking, "I will carry you away at the same time." The idea is that whenever the entrails or poop of an animal is carried away and disposed of, because God has put it on their faces, they will be carried away and disposed of also. (2) In Hebrew, the word is excrement, that is, poop. Have you seen parades where there are animals? Either following the animals or at the end of the parade, there is someone scooping the poop off the street. This is the poop God is talking about. God is going to take the poop from the animals at their festivals and, literally, throw it in their faces. Not only that, but God said that the people will smell it and be taken away with it. Now, the text does not imply that the people will smell the poop and enjoy it or be utterly disgusted by it. When it says, "be taken away," it is talking about relocating. That is, God will throw poop in their faces, and they will be hauled away with the poop to the dump. This is not a very pleasant picture that God Himself paints of the curse with which He will curse the priests if they do not give their heart to His name. (3) Whether the Greek or the Hebrew is correct, the image is loud and clear. If the priests do not repent, God is going to make them as valuable as the most despicable of refuse and throw them far away. Because of their unrighteousness, they will be indistinguishable from the poop! This whole image should be a clear image because the Jews did this very thing with the waste of a bull and a goat on the Day of Atonement (Ex 29:10-14, Lev 16:23-28). And this is what God will do to them if they do not repent.

### **2:4-7 God's covenant with Levi.**

Covenant with Levi. (1) Remember that the priests are the sons of Aaron, a subset of the tribe of Levi. Here, God calls it a covenant with Levi, so God is including all Levites as being part of this covenant, not just the priests. (2) When did God make this covenant? It wasn't with Levi himself but his descendant Aaron. It was during the time of Aaron that God made His covenant with the tribe of Levi (Deut 33:8-11).

Him [Levi]. In verses 5 and 6, God speaks to the whole tribe of Levi as if He is speaking about Levi himself. God is personifying the whole tribe of Levi. In verse 7, God switches and says, "a priest," explicitly telling them what a Levite should be doing.

Of peace. This covenant of peace started with Aaron. But it can explicitly be seen in the righteousness of Phinehas (Num 25:6-13).

He is the messenger. This is a bit of play on words. Remember that Malachi means messenger. This prophecy from Malachi is a message from God from a prophet whose name means messenger about how the Levites are designed to be God's messengers to the people. If there were any passage in Malachi's prophecy that should jump out for the priests, this is it. When it comes to God's message to His priests, Mal 2:7 is the climax of that message.

[Church leaders]. Today, though every Christian is a royal priest, the equivalent of the tribe of Levi would be our church leaders such as the elders (presbyters, shepherds) and the evangelists. If we were to read this covenant in view of church leaders, it would read like this. "My covenant with church leaders is one of life and peace, and I gave these to them. It called for reverence, and they revere Me and stand in awe of My name. True instruction is in their mouths, and nothing wrong is found on their lips. For the lips of a church

leader should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from their mouths, because they are the messengers of the Lord of Hosts."

### **2:8-9 God's condemnation of the priests.**

You, on the other hand. God has laid out the design for the Levites and the priests. The whole design sounds good. But the current reality of Malachi's day is that the priests are NOT righteous but have fallen. How have they fallen? By causing many to stumble by their instructions. The Levites and priests were to be the keepers of the Law and know what is right and wrong in order to help all the other tribes understand what righteousness is. Are the people to blame for not being righteous? Sure. But the priests even more so because they had a greater responsibility. Due to their wickedness, they have caused others to lose their relationship with God. God is going to hold their blood accountable for the people's worship. How else have they fallen? They corrupted God's covenant with Levi. Not only have they let God's people down, but they have let God Himself down.

Showing partiality. God identifies another specific sin that they are committing. We should intrinsically know that partiality, or favoritism, is wrong. And God was explicit that this is a sin in the Old Testament (Lev 19:15, Deut 10:17, Ps 82:2-4, Matt 22:16) and in the New Testament (1Tim 5:21, Jam 2:1-9).

[Scribes and Pharisees]. By Jesus' day, the priests and Levites (scribes?) were still lacking in the covenant of Levi. In Malachi's day the priests were not even teaching the right things. In Jesus' day, they were teaching the right things, but practicing the opposite things (Matt 23:2-3).

### **2:10-12 Judah has profaned the covenant.**

[Malachi talking]. From verse 10 to the end of chapter 2, Malachi takes a turn at speaking to the people (also in the style of a Q&A) about their unrighteousness toward God.

One Father, one God. (1) The appeal to God as Father and as Creator seems to tie back to Mal 1:6 where God doesn't feel honored as a Father and doesn't feel feared as a Master. The first mention was from God Himself, this is from Malachi. First, God was the one who didn't pull any punches when rebuking the Jews for their unrighteous worship. From this verse through the rest of chapter 2, it is Malachi's turn as God's prophet to say some words against all the people. (2) This combination of both Father and Creator should call their attention to ancient Scriptures that have something to teach them: that God would rather bless His people, not curse them (Deut 32:5-9, Is 64:8-9).

Married the daughter of a foreign god. (1) This is how the Hebrew reads. This should still be ringing in the ears of the Jews since the days of Ezra, less than 33 years before. After Ezra had arrived as governor, his most significant contribution to the people's purity was the problem with Jews who had married wives who were committing detestable practices. This important event and the putting away of "daughters of a foreign god" is found in Ezra 9-10. (2) The Greek reads, "Have gone after other gods." The meaning here is simple but very serious idolatry, the first of the Ten Commandments.

Cut off any descendants. (1) Interestingly, the middle of verse 12 is translated differently across many translations. The Hebrew is obscure here. Because of that, perhaps we should favor the Greek which reads, "until he is humiliated out from Jacob's encampment...." (2) The image should be well known to the Jews. Being cut off from the people of Israel was serious. Coupled with the fact that Malachi says "Jacob" and not "Israel" is significant too. Not only are these people rejected as true Jews and kicked out of the nation, things have become so bad that Malachi does not name the nation of Israel (their God-given name) but the nation of Jacob (their man-given name).

### **2:13-17 The priests' treacherous marriages.**

This second thing you do. (1) This is how the Hebrew reads. The Greek reads, "These things which I hated, you did."

Weeping and groaning. Why are the priests weeping and groaning? I believe that this verse shows that the priests believe that they have tried to do worship correctly. But they certainly have not been. They don't realize it, but because their worship has been unrighteous, God has been cursing them. So in their minds, they believe they have done everything correctly and it is God who has not kept His side of the covenant while they have. They cry over the altar because they feel that the altar has let them down. No wonder their practices have become worse by sacrificing the worst animals. No wonder they scorn the altar viewing both it and the sacrifices on it as worthless. No wonder they are asking God so many questions about what they are doing wrong. This whole time, they have been blaming God, when it is really their worship that is to blame!

For what reason. Malachi puts a question into the people's mouths. The people will want to know why God doesn't accept their gifts and, as Malachi just told them, how they have profaned their covenant with God.

Malachi's answer is more than only about the sacrifices of worship. Their relationships with their wives is also a broken covenant.

The Lord has been a witness. (1) God has been involved in marriage since the very beginning, even before the Fall of Man for the only two humans who lived. God Himself created marriage. For Americans today, this fact can possibly be overshadowed by the fact that the United States requires a marriage license. But this was not always the law. Even though the colony of Massachusetts has required marriage licenses since 1638, the rest of the states did not follow suit until the mid-1800s. Before that time, if a couple merely claimed they were married, then both the church and the government honored their marriage. If there were any certificates, they would have been between the families of the couple. Ever since government has had a say in who is and who is not married, Americans (even American Christians) may look to the government as to who is married more so than they look to God. But the fact that God is the true witness of marriage is mentioned here. In fact, most vows today include a phrase that refers to God such as the phrase "in the presence of God." In the end, both Moses and Jesus said that God is the one who joins man and woman together in marriage. Whenever two are married, regardless of government or anything else, God's power is behind two people becoming one flesh in marriage. (2) For those who break their marriage, which is a covenant sealed with a vow, then they have God to answer to. And God will hold all vows accountable! These priest should be feeling the burning of guilt. Malachi's point is that they have broken their covenants with God just as they have broken their covenants with the wives of their youth, their first wives. (3) Now, if you are listening to this and also feel the burn of guilt because of a past divorce, I encourage you to seek help in order to make things right in repentance. Most importantly, seek God and make yourself right with Him.

The wife of your youth. Does this mean the wife you had when you were young? Not exactly. This means their first wife. God accuses them of dealing treacherously with her. Now, Moses allowed them to divorce their wives if there was some uncleanness in her.

Your wife by covenant. What were the reasons for these priests to divorce their first wives? We don't know, but because God is rebuking them, we can assume that they had divorced their wives for very selfish reasons. They had replaced their first wife, the wife to whom they made a vow. They broke their vow, probably in order to marry someone else. Not only would God hate how they have wickedly and selfishly divorced their wives, but in the greater context, God hates even more how they broke the covenant (and the vow) they had with their wives. All of this is an example of the bigger picture. They had broken their covenant with God! And they should know this well because they have also broken their covenant with their wives. God takes covenants and vows seriously. It is for this reason why God views someone breaking their covenant with Him today like a dog returning to its own vomit (2Pet 2:22).

Did He not make one. (1) Verse 15 (and 16) has some slight differences between the Hebrew and the Greek. Thought he differences are slight, the difference in meaning is huge. As we will see, the Hebrew focuses on the marriage and how it should be godly, and the Greek focuses on the wife and how she should be valued. (2) The Hebrew reads, "Did He not make one?" It calls our attention to how God made man and woman one flesh (Gen 2:24). The Hebrew shows the value of the marriage, and the wives of their youth. (3) The Greek reads, "And did He not at all make the other [literally, "different" or "else"]." Who is the other? This is probably the wife. It could read in other words, "Did He not make your wife for nothing?" The Greek shows the value of the woman, the wives of their youth.

A remnant of His life-breath. The Hebrew literally reads, "He had the remainder of the Spirit." The meaning of this is not very clear. I believe it is more clear in the Greek which literally reads, "The remainder of His Spirit." What is meant by this? We know that it was by God's Spirit that He breathed life into Adam (Gen 2:7, 7:22). Malachi is saying that there was a remainder of God's Spirit that breathed life into Eve. That is, the same Spirit of God that created man also created woman for man. If both are creations from God, who are you men to reject whom God had created for you and whom had entered into God-ordained marriage with you?

Why one? He sought a godly seed. Here is the second time the Hebrew and Greek differs. (1) The Hebrew reads, "Why one? He sought a godly seed." Again, the Hebrew is talking about marriage. It could read in other words, "Why did God make marriage where two becomes one flesh? Because God desires marriage to have godly seed, that is, children." The Hebrew shows the important of a godly marriage because it brings godly children, as if this is the primary purpose of marriage. (2) The Greek reads practically opposite, "You said, 'The other? Instead, God seeks a seed.'" It could read in other words, "You people say, 'Why the wife? Does she matter? Actually, God seeks children.'" The people believe that God cares nothing about their wives. Instead, God only cares about the children. (3) It is amazing that, in the Hebrew, Malachi teaches that the children are the primary purpose of marriage; therefore, the people are to honor marriage so that their children become godly, and in the Greek, the people believe that the children are the only purpose to marriage which caused them to dishonor their wives. Which one is correct? Is marriage only for

to raise godly children, have the people honored children and at the complete expense of their wives? Paul wrote that even if one half of a marriage is ungodly, the godly half still makes the children godly. In fact, Paul also said that the believing spouse makes their unbelieving spouse holy (1Cor 7:14). In short, Paul wrote that if one half of a marriage is godly, then the home is godly. This is the opposite of what the Hebrew is saying. Therefore, that leaves the Greek which must be correct. Also, the Greek's reason as to why marriage was not being honored makes more sense.

Take heed to your spirit. Malachi already wants the reader to recognize the connection between God's Spirit who gave life to mankind and this teaching on marriage. God used His Spirit to give life to both man and woman. And if that is the case, we should watch out for our spirits, the breath of life God has given us, because God can just as easily take our spirits/our life away from us. What God gave, He could take away, so watch out for your spirit! Malachi's message: If you forsake or betray (deal treacherously) the wife of your youth, God will take your life away.

I hate divorce. (1) The connections to Genesis are clear. In just less than a handful of verses, God appeals to both the creation of man and woman as well as the establishment of marriage. When it comes to this section about treacherous marriages, the prequel would be Genesis chapter 2. It should not be amazing that Jesus did the exact same thing when He was questioned about divorce in Matt 19. (2) The Hebrew literally reads, " 'I hate divorce,' says the Lord God of Israel, 'He who fills up [that is, covers] violence over with his garment,' says the Lord of Hosts, 'Attend to your spirit and don't cover it up.' " If you are like me, you have only heard this phrase applied to how God feels about divorce. It is not my goal to split hairs, but Jesus never condemned divorce alone but divorce and remarriage for reasons that He gave. In fact, Paul taught that if an unbelieving spouse wants a divorce and will not stay with his believing spouse, then the believing spouse is to let him/her leave (1Cor 7:15). Yet in the Hebrew, "I hate divorce," is exactly what God says here. Coupled with the following phrase, "And him that covers his garment with violence," one gets the impression that God is mentions two separate sins and that the second sin does not easily fits in with the context. (3) The Greek shows that the second phrase about covering up violence is connected to divorce. It literally reads, "Instead, if you hate her, sending her away,' says the Lord God of Israel, 'He also covers up wickedness over with your garments,' says the Lord Almighty, 'And watch in your spirit and do not at all forsake Me.' " Here, God says that when men hate their wives and divorce them, they are also committing wickedness and trying to cover it up like with a garment. In other words, when they hate and divorce the wives of their youth, that is committing wicked violence against them! (4) Which is correct? Does God intrinsically hate divorce? Well, if He did, then He wouldn't have allowed Moses to give a provision in the Law about divorce, nor would God have allowed Paul to say what he did in 1Cor 7:15, nor would Jesus allow for divorce in cases that involved sexual immorality. Or, is God saying that hate and divorce is a way of committing violence? This make far more sense than a seemingly random phrase about violence in the Hebrew. I fully believe the Greek is correct. (5) This discussion may be a bit confusing. Perhaps a paraphrased translation of this verse from myself (which more focuses on the Greek) will help. "Says the Lord God of Israel: Instead, if you hate her so that you send her away, then you are covering up wickedness with your garments. Says the Lord Almighty: So watch your spirit closely and do not cover it up and never forsake Me." (6) What law would these treacherous Jews be violating by doing this to the wives of their youth? Prov 5:15-23 explicitly teaches us on this subject! It should also be noted that God is a God who loves and provides for wives who have been rejected in their youth by their husbands. Israel was like a wife who was rejected, deserted, and wounded (Is 54:4-6). God is always concerned about redeeming such women.

## **2:17 God is wearied by all of this.**

[Summary]. Beginning with chapter 3, Malachi's prophecy to the people switches subjects. Chapters 1-2 are about worship. Although Malachi will touch on aspects of worship after this chapter, 2:17 marks the end of God's and the people's hypothetical dialogue about their unrighteous worship. This verse seems to be a summary of everything God and Malachi have addressed so far. All of the people's problems, the problems with their hearts, is summed up in this verse.

Evil is good in the Lord's sight. (1) Are the people actually saying this with their mouths? I doubt it. Instead, as God and Malachi have done over the last two chapters, this is the people's attitude toward worship. In other words, they might as well say, "Whoever does evil is no different from the person who does good; worthless (even evil) worship to God is just as pleasing to God." (2) This verse sounds a lot like Is 5:20 where God says, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil." But I do not believe that the Jews in Malachi's day have reached this point yet, where they completely switch good and evil. Instead, from this verse, the Jews are at the point where they believe doing evil is just as rewarding as doing good.

Where is the God of justice. When we hear about justice, we commonly think of God's justice punishing the unrighteous. However, God's justice is just as strong, and even stronger, the other way: God rewards the

righteous. As we have seen, the people are under a curse; they do not feel like God has been blessing them. They have done evil but believe they have done good. With their false belief that they are doing good, they are expecting that the God of justice will reward them. They have given up on God's sense of justice. In short, they believe that because they are not blessed, God must not be just.

[Mal 3:13-15]. Mal 2:17 has a companion passage in Mal 3:13-15. See also the notes there.

### **3:1-4 God's prophecy of His coming Messiah.**

Messenger. (1) Remember that Malachi's name means messenger? Remember that the Levites were supposed to be God's messengers to the people (Mal 2:7)? Now God is talking about a third and fourth kind of messenger. (2) First, God will send His messenger to prepare the way for God. God will have a herald, a forerunner. Who will he be? We know him as John. John the Baptist quotes this from Malachi about himself (Mark 1:2)! John cleared the way for Jesus. The Jews would have immediately realized this because a similar prophecy is given in Is 40:3 about the coming Christ. John quotes that verse as well (Mark 1:3). As for John, one of God's prophets has prophecy about himself. Did any other prophet have a prophecy about himself? (3a) In your translation the second instance of "Messenger" might be capitalized. This time, it is prophesying the coming Messiah, Jesus! No wonder it says that the temple is "His temple." When Jesus came, He indeed called the temple "My house" (Matt 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-17, Luke 19:45-46). This might have come to a shock to the Jews. How can God come into His temple as a Messenger? These prophetic clues all point to Jesus who was both the Son of God and the Son of Man. At the time of Malachi's writing, I believe the Jews were 420-425 years away from Christ's birth. (3b) The Jews were looking forward to the time when God's Messenger would enter His temple. For us, we can look back and see how this was fulfilled in Jesus. Is there any connection between God coming into His temple and something we look forward to? Well, what is God's temple today? It is our bodies (1Cor 6:19)! We should both see now and look forward to the Holy Spirit dwelling inside our bodies, God's temple. We should see that Spirit now, the down payment of the resurrection to come (Eph 1:13-14, 2Cor 1:22), and we should continually ask God for more of His Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13).

The day of His coming. Not all of the prophecies about the coming Christ were roses and candy. This is one of the prophecies that portray Jesus in a very serious, powerful, and glorious way. Who can endure? Who can stand? This question is true only for Almighty God. And this coming Christ will be just that: God in the flesh. As we see in Jesus, He didn't teach the way the scribes did, but spoke as one who had authority (Matt 7:29, Mark 1:22). When the Christ comes, He will come with the power and glory of God. No one can compare to Him.

As it were gold. In the Greek, the beginning of verse three includes this phrase reading, "He shall sit to melt and purify as it were silver, and as it were gold."

Refiner, purifier. (1) Five times this Messenger is called a refiner, purifier, or one who purifies. The repetition is noticed. More than all the prophets and all the priests before, this Messenger will certainly purify the people like no other person will. He will remove the dirt; He will cleanse the filthy. He Himself will be as pure as perfection and will bring a way for people to be as pure as God. (2) This imagery is also found in Zechariah 13:7-9, which was written about 80 years before.

Present offerings in righteousness. Now that Jesus has come, what righteous offerings does God seek? Jesus gave a direct answer to the woman at the well (John 4:19-26). Other NT writers explained the attitude of a life-long service to God's glory (Rom 12:1, Heb 13:15).

### **3:5-6 God's judgments on the wicked.**

I will come to you in judgment. (1) If God wanted to leave one, most important message to the people, it is verse 5. If there is anything the Jews could do to stay righteous until the Christ comes, they are to do these things. Of course, they are not the only things. And all of these things can be found in the Law. These are the things that the people in Malachi's day needed to hear. If they don't want to be judged by God, they need to obey Him, specifically in these things. (2) This kind of message should remind us of what John the Baptist said to the people in his day—the things they needed to hear. By the time John comes, Rome is in power and John gives them specific things for them to do in order to not be judged by God (Luke 3:7-14).

Swear falsely by My name. The Greek adds "by My name" here.

I have not changed. If there is any disconnect between the people's worship and God's blessings, it is with the people. God has not changed; He still remains faithful to His covenant. This should remind the Jews of Num 23:19.

You have not been destroyed. (1) This is how it reads in the Hebrew. Even though the people are the ones who have broken their covenant with God, God has not wiped them out. There were times when God was ready to do just that but never did. God's people are still around. God will not destroy them, but He still

expects them to stay true to His covenant. (2) This phrase does not appear in the Greek. See the next verse.

### **3:7-12 God's blessings if the people repent.**

[Sons of Jacob]. In the Greek, this phrase appears in this verse and reads, "But you, sons of Jacob, have not refrained from the iniquities of your fathers." The Hebrew reads, "From the days of your fathers..."

You have turned from My statutes. This message should be clear to the Jews. This is most closely tied to how God destroyed the kingdom of Israel because of their utter unfaithfulness (2Kings 17:7-18). And even though Judah could look at Israel's bad example, they did the same things, so God destroyed them also (2Kings 17:19-20).

Return to Me, I will return to you. God gave the same promise through Zechariah (Zech 1:3) about 80 years before. God gives the same promise to everyone today (James 4:8).

You are robbing Me. (1) God tells them of another way they have broken their covenant with Him. If the people are robbing God, I'm sure the Jews expected God to rebuke and criticize them once again as God had done in chapters 1-2. But not this time! God tells them of another way they are cheating Him, but instead of focusing on the bad, God is now promising the good! God tells them what they need to do and gives them one of the most beautiful pictures of the blessings He very much wants to bestow on His people. (2) This is a great passage for people who believe God is mean and harsh. There are times when that is true, but God's promises of blessings like this one are everywhere.

Are with you still. In the Greek, the end of verse 8 reads, "In that the tithes and contributions are with you still." This implies that the people have the means of tithing and giving the right contributions, but they have purposefully neglected them. It is in this way they are robbing and insulting God.

Contributions. What contributions would these be? It could be a lot of things (Lev 7:14, 7:32, etc.). Since the issues in Malachi closely match the issues in Neh 13, I believe these contributions are most closely tied to all the contributions that the Jews vowed to do in Nehemiah's day. The same Hebrew word is used in Neh 10:37, 10:39, 12:44, and 13:5. All of those passages about the vow the Jews made while Nehemiah was governor. Looking to those passages may be the answer to what contributions God expects here. If the Jews made a vow to offer those things, God would hold them to it!

[Verse 9]. This verse is very different in the two versions. The Hebrew reads, "You are cursed with a curse because you rob Me—even this whole nation." The Greek reads, "You certainly turn your back on Me, and you rob Me."

[Verse 10]. (1) This verse is very different in the two versions. For this verse, I want to comment on each version. These can be found below. (2) The Hebrew reads, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and test Me in this (says the Lord of hosts), if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour out a blessing so that there will not be enough room for it." (3) The Greek reads, "The year is completed, and you have brought all the produce into the storehouses. But there will be plunder of it in its house. Prove Me in this (says the Lord Almighty), see if I will not open to you the torrents of heaven, and pour out My blessing upon you, until you are satisfied."

The year is completed [Greek]. God is saying that the year is done. Usually at the end of a fiscal year, a company will pay their taxes and other things. In this case, the people are expected to pay their tithes. And if they do not pay their tithes throughout the year, then certainly they would bring their year's worth of tithes at the end of the year, right? They have harvested, and their storehouses are full. It is time to give their tithes so that the Levites' and priests' storehouses will have enough for the winter also. But because they refuse to do this, all the wealth they have stored up for themselves (and have robbed God) will be plundered. This is the same kind of thing as Jesus said in the Parable of the Talents about the one who buried his talent, "From the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him" (Matt 25:29, Luke 19:26). And it is the same as the parable of the rich man who built bigger barns in Luke 12:16-21.

Food in My house [Hebrew]. Why does God want there to be food in His house? He's not going to eat it. I believe this refers to the problem Nehemiah discovers in Neh 13:10-11a. Why would those Levites return to their farms? This is probably because later there was no food for them (through the people's tithes and contributions) at the temple. God wants food in His house so that the priests and Levites have enough to live on as they are supported by the other tribes. If the people brought their food (tithes and contributions) to the temple, then the priests and Levites can focus on what they were design to do: minister to the people for God.

Test/Prove Me in this way [Hebrew/Greek]. (1) Test God? I thought it was wrong to test God. Passages like Deut 6:16 and Ps 78:56 show that wicked people test God. In fact, just a few verses later in Malachi, it says about the wicked, "They even test God and escape" (Mal 3:15)! Even Jesus Himself said plainly, "It is written: Do not test the Lord your God" (Matt 4:7, Luke 4:12)! But here, God wants His people to test Him.

What is the difference here? All those instances where testing God is condemned are all in the context of wicked people wanting God to fail. In this instance, God wants righteous people to test Him, wanting Him to succeed! It is a good thing to test God when we trust Him to do what He has promised. And this meaning is better shown forth in the Greek, saying, "prove God" (instead of test God). God wants His people to PROVE His goodness! (2) Why would God want people to test or prove Him? God wants to give His people an absolute full assurance that He will bless them if they do righteousness. For who-knows-how-long, the people have been neglecting righteousness and have forgotten what God's blessings look like. God wants to give them blessings in full! God wants them to know that He WILL uphold His covenant with them and shower blessings beyond their imaginations! God is so sure about this, He asks them to test Him in it. (3a) Many in recent times have used this passage to preach the health and wealth gospel. And this is not right! God is not promising people that if they give X amount of wealth, they will receive X times Y amount of wealth and health in return. But even for those who do not subscribe to the health and wealth gospel, there are many who preach a form of it. Many preach that the more you give contributions to God, the more He will bless you... as if it is a mechanical thing that God must reward us. Does God reward and bless people who sacrifice and give in His name? Yes, He does! But this passage is not about a return on investment. Remember that Jesus said that attitude matters (Matt 6:1-4). There are conditions to our giving. Just because we give, we don't do it so God will give us a return on our investment. In short, God will reward those who give, but if we give with the expectation of receiving a reward, then our hearts are in the wrong place. (3b) If this passage is not for health and wealth preachers and this passage is not for those who believe God is obligated to bless them when they give, then who is this message for? Remember the context. In what state were these Jews in? They have given up on God. They no longer feel that they can depend on God to provide for them. They have lost their TRUST in God. They no longer believed that God is in the blessing business. And this is the kind of person who needs to test or prove God. When we see people at the end of their "faith rope," when we see people blaming God for bad things that happen, or when we see people who do not believe God can change their circumstances, this message is for them. God wants to bless. He wants to give us the abundant life (John 10:10). For those who have lost their faith in God's goodness, God wants THEM to test Him. What about you? Do you believe God is vengeful, angry, mean, or harsh? God wants you to believe that He is in the blessing business. If you have trouble believing this, prove God in this way!!!

Open the floodgates of heaven [Hebrew/Greek]. This image that God beautifully paints of His goodness and His desire to bless is a favorite to many. And it should be! This is a gorgeous image of what God wants to do for us if we put our trust in Him to provide our every need. Heaven is certainly a place beyond our reach. Being the "home" of God, I'm sure it is filled with good things beyond imagination, probably to infinity. What stands between us and heaven? Floodgates. And God wants to open those floodgates! As water naturally desires to flow from high places to low places and wet places to dry places, those blessings would be like a tidal wave here on earth! Remember the last time God opened the floodgates in Genesis 7? It was a flood that engulfed the entire earth. Though that was a universal curse for mankind, God now wants to do the same kind of thing, but with blessings! If heaven contains an infinity amount of blessings, certainly, God would cut us off, right? No way! God is willing to let that tidal wave flow so much that He isn't going to measure it. God wants to open those floodgates and not care about closing them! So whenever you are feeling a lack of trust in God or think that God has turned His back on you, remember the image He paints of what He wants to do for you: "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure." These are spectacular words that should permeate our hearts.

Not be room enough [Hebrew]. If the people are keeping back from the house of God, God is telling them that if they test/prove Him in this, then their own houses will not be able to hold everything He wants to bless them with! If they would give their tithes and contributions, then God will give them more than they would have had doing things on their own.

Until you are satisfied [Greek]. Are the people concerned with not having enough through the winter? God is telling them that if they test/prove Him in this, they will not only have enough to meet their needs, but they will have enough to satisfy their wants! If they would give their tithes and offerings, then God will meet both their needs and their wants.

Devourer. (1) The Greek reads, "I will appoint food for you, and I will not destroy the fruit." The idea here is carried over from Mal 2:2 where God said, "I have already begun to curse them." The Greek shows that it is God who has caused the land to be poor, but it is also God who can bless the land into producing abundantly. (2) The Hebrew reads, "I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits." Literally, the word is "eater." God is probably referring to those pesky insects and bugs that eat crops and cause famine. (The same thing could be found in Joel 1:4 and 2:25.) Every farmer knows that they are in a fight with nature's bugs to keep their crop safe for harvest. It is for this reason that many farmers use pesticides today. But much more powerful than that, God is ready and willing to tell nature to

stay away from YOUR food. Those insects and bugs are like a curse (much like thorns are a curse because of Adam). Not only is God ready to bless people from heaven, but He is ready to stop nature from cursing us. God will both bless us and prevent others from cursing us!

Nations consider you fortunate, delightful land. Remember the whole point to God blessing the Jews? It's all about glorifying His name among the nations. This is another promise from God about how He wants to bless His people so much that their reputation for being God's people is restored. Not only that, but God wants to make the actual land they live on pleasant. God blesses individuals, and God blesses entire peoples.

### **3:13-15 God's reminder of their rebellion.**

Words against Me are harsh. As we have been looking at chapters 1-3, we can see how the people's words against God are indeed harsh. Their attitudes have shown that they have given up on God, insulted Him, insulted their sacrifices to Him, and especially insulted His altar. But the feeling may be mutual for God has said harsh words against them also. For example, remember when He said that he was already cursing them (Mal 2:2)? Remember how God said He will rebuke their descendants (Mal 2:3)? Remember when God explained how if they do not repent, He will throw poop in their faces and haul them away with the poop to the dump (Mal 2:3)? Both the Jews and God have said harsh words to each other. But between God and the Jews which one is in the wrong? As Malachi explains, it is the Jews and not God. Which one is the potter who deserves all worship and which one is the clay who must worship God in spirit and truth? From Malachi's prophecy, the answer is obvious. You see, the Jews believe they are in the right and have done everything God has said. And when they didn't, they blamed God. This is why God sees their words and attitudes as particularly hurtful.

What have we spoken against You. Again I wonder if God knows if the people would actually ask this of Him or if this is God's hypothetical lead-in question to what he will explain in verses 14-15. It is anyone's guess.

You have said. Couple this verse with [Mal 2:17](#). Between these two verses, they best summarize the whole point of why God sent Malachi to prophesy to the people. These are the attitudes that Malachi is prophesying against. Do you know anyone who has this kind of attitude about God or giving their life to Him? Then the prophecy of Malachi might shock them into the truth. Of course, focus on Mal 3:7-12.

Arrogant/Foreigner. (1) The Hebrew reads "arrogant." For some reason, God through Malachi has chosen to lump all the "blessed" people as arrogant. That is, the people are saying, "God doesn't bless people. You might as well be arrogant because they are the ones being blessed." (2) The Greek reads, "foreigner." The people are saying, "Since God doesn't bless us and the foreigners are more blessed than us, we might as well do the same things the foreigners do. They are the truly blessed ones."

Test God and escape. The people are looking at the arrogant and the foreigner and are seeing how they defy God and are somehow becoming blessed. Of course, they are blessing themselves with their wickedness, which—in the end—does not pay! They see the wicked prosper and give up on God's blessings. This kind of struggle in one's mind when they see good people suffer and bad people prosper is divinely written by Asaph in Ps 73 and Jeremiah in Jer 12. This is the kind of despair the people have toward God. They are struggling with this idea that the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper, and they are losing that struggle. Instead, God wants them to put their hope in Him and do the right thing. And the hope that says God will make things right is divinely written in places like Ps 37 by David.

### **3:16-18 God's compassion on the righteous.**

Spoke to one another. There is a lot we can learn from this. First, we can see how righteous folks will speak to other righteous folks. The Psalms speak to this in places such as Ps 1, saying, "Happy is the man who does not join a group of mockers.... Sinners will not be in the community of the righteous." Paul also gives a warning against righteous folks hanging out with unrighteous folks. He quotes the poet Menander, saying, "Bad company corrupts good morals" (1Cor 15:33). Second, we can see that when righteous folks talk to each other, God listens! Of course, when does God not listen to us? Never. But there is something special when righteous folks get together and discuss righteousness. God takes notice of it! So the next time you find yourselves with other Christians talking about life and godliness, know that God is pleased with such conversation.

Book of remembrance. What kind of book is this? Is it like the Book of Life? Perhaps. This might be similar to the log books of a king. Remember when king Artaxerxes couldn't sleep so he had them read the books to him to help him sleep and how they made him remember how Mordecai had saved him (Est 6:1-3)?

Remember in Revelation on Judgment Day when everyone appears before the great white throne? On that day, the books will be opened, and the Book of Life will be opened also. Now the books mentioned there are more of a log of wicked works because the context is about how the wicked will be judged and thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:11-15). But the Book of Life contains either the names and/or the righteous



deeds of the saints who will inherit the New Creation (Rev 21). However you want to interpret all these books (the book of remembrance, the books of judgment, and the Book of Life), is up to you. I believe that the book of remembrance here is the same as the Book of Life. God will reward righteous folks and their righteous conversations with other righteous folks. God's point is clear: God will take note and never forget any conversation between righteous folks.

They will be Mine. Whenever God speaks about His people being his special possession, it is such a term of endearment and love. Contrasted to all the bad things God and Malachi have talked about throughout Malachi's prophecy, verse 17 should feel like a mountain of soft pillows. God is not a vengeful God who only wants to punish evil. He is also a beautiful God who wants to reward goodness. And as both the Old Testament and New Testament explain, these two aspects of God are not equal, for God's mercy is able to trump His judgment (Jam 2:13). God not only wants everyone to have saving faith in Him, but He also wants an intimate relationship with His people that cannot be matched by any relationship known to man. I will have compassion on them. Earlier in this chapter, God gave His promise that He will bless those who follow His commands. Not only will God bless our physical needs, but He will also bless our spiritual needs. When we stand in front of God on Judgment Day, what is it that we want from Him? We want compassion; we want mercy! And for those who are right with God, God promises that He will give them just that because He WANTS to give them that. God desires to give everyone compassion and mercy!

One who serves God and one who does not. How will God separate the one who really serves Him and the one who merely claims to serve Him? The answer lies in when God will show compassion. God can most certainly show compassion on those who are still living, but the final display of compassion or judgment will be on Judgment Day. On that day, who will be a sheep (those who truly serve God) and who will be a goat (those who only claim to serve God)? (And then there are wolves, who are those who are intentional enemies of God.) The answer to this is found in Jesus' Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt 25:31-46). The Jews in Malachi's day knew exactly what they needed to do. We Christians today also know exactly what to do. What kind of test will God use to separate those who serve Him and those who only claim to serve Him? Jesus told us Christians exactly what God is looking for. About God's incredible compassion: Ps 103:11-14.

#### **4:1-3 God's vision of Judgment Day.**

[Chapter 4]. In the Hebrew and the Greek, there is no chapter 4 of Malachi. Instead, these six verses are a continuation of chapter 3, making that chapter 24 verses long. As to why Malachi does or not does have 4 chapters, I do not know. My best guess is because the next set of Scriptures, the Latin Vulgate, has 4 chapters. Perhaps this tradition goes back to then.

Will become stubble. The first half of Mal 4:1 reads differently in the Hebrew and the Greek. (1) The Hebrew reads, "Behold, for the day comes that will burn as an oven, and all the arrogant and all who do wickedness will be stubble." As was done in Mal 3:15, the Hebrew says "arrogant." (2) The Greek reads, "Behold, inasmuch as the day the Lord comes burning as an oven, it will bend them, and all the foreigners and all the makers of wickedness will be stubble." As was done in Mal 3:15, the Greek says "foreigners." It also says that the wicked people will be bent by the day of the Lord. (3) When the Lord comes, he will separate the stubble (also translated chaff) and burn them. Mal 4:1 is directly connected to John the Baptist's prophecy (Matt 3:10-12, Luke 3:15-17). It's a prophecy about hellfire for the wicked.

Sun of righteousness will rise with healing. What is this talking about? It could be talking about Jesus Himself, the Light of the world. In Zechariah's (the father of John the Baptist) prophecy, he calls Jesus the Dawn from on high (Luke 1:78). But I really believe this prophecy is directly connected to what the apostle John saw in the New Creation, the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:2-3, 22:5). I believe the latter is true because the context seems to tie most closely with Judgment Day. God Himself will be our Sun (s-u-n) of righteousness!

You will trample the wicked. How will the righteous trample the wicked? I'm not fully sure, but this may be about how the righteous will find vengeance on Judgment Day. All the martyrs who were martyred because of their faith in God have been calling out to God for vengeance (Rev 6:9-11). What will that vengeance look like? Perhaps it looks like how these passages describe: Ps 58:10-11, Job 22:19-20.

#### **4:4-6 God's prophecy of His messenger, John.**

Instruction. This is the Law (Torah) of Moses. God has delivered to the Jews many specific things they need to repent of. But those are not the only things. God is specifically referring to Moses' words at Deut 4:9-10. Elijah the prophet. (1) The Hebrew reads, "Elijah the prophet." The Greek reads, "Elijah the Tishbite," which is was Elijah's name (1King 17:1). In Hebrew, "prophet" and "Tishbite" are not too different (Hebrew: nabi; Greek: tishbiy). Which version is correct? When looking at how this prophecy was fulfilled in the New Testament, sadly the New Testament doesn't quote this verse. It refers to this verse, simply saying, "Elijah." Because of the next point, I believe the Hebrew is correct. (2) God says that He will send Elijah and he will

come before the Day of the Lord. Looking back to Mal 3:1, this Elijah is the same person as the messenger who will clear the way before the Lord. When Jesus came, He explained who this Elijah is (Matt 11:11-14, 17:10-13, Mark 9:11-13, Luke 1:13-17). Interestingly, John the Baptist said something strange when questioned about his ministry: John 1:19-21. John said that he is not Elijah... while Gabriel and Jesus said that he was! But John knew exactly what his purpose was and the prophecies he fulfilled because he quotes Malachi 3:1 in Mark 1:2. Why does John deny that he is Elijah? This is probably best explained in that he is not the Elijah the Jews expected. Since the most widely used version of Scriptures in Jesus' day was the Greek Septuagint, the Jews probably expected that Elijah the TISHBITE (that is, Elijah himself) would come back from the dead or from heaven. Instead, John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah the PROPHET—as Gabriel told his father Zechariah (Luke 1:17). So I believe the Jews came to John and asked, “Are you Elijah the Tishbite?” John essentially responded, “I am not. I have the spirit and power of Elijah the prophet.” And then John refers to the prophecies about himself in Malachi by quoting Mal 3:1.

Day of the Lord. While the imagery in Mal 4:1-3 seems to mostly point to Judgment Day, Mal 4:5-6 seems to mostly point to Christ's first coming. This is seen in a few instances. Peter uses the same phrase (but taken from Joel 2:31-32) in talking about the New Covenant that Jesus brought (Acts 2). Secondly, about the hearts of the fathers toward their children, this is spoken by Gabriel about John the Baptist (Luke 1:17). Those are two reasons that Mal 4:5-6 is talking about Christ's first coming.

Strike the land. The Hebrew reads, “And strike the land with a curse.” The Greek reads, “And utterly strike the land.” Though these are different, God's point is the same. He leaves the Jews with one final warning against disobedient, hoping that they will repent. This last sentence (the second half of verse 6) should tie back up to verse 4 about how the Jews need to remember the Law of Moses. I do not believe this last sentence applies to the prophecies about Christ's coming in verses 5-6a.

