

# Malachi Explained & Applied 39

Ger de Koning



Spiritual Lukewarmness



# **The Book of Malachi**



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## **Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible**

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### **Old Testament**

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah  
Nah – Nahum  
Hab – Habakkuk  
Zep – Zephaniah  
Hag – Haggai  
Zec – Zechariah  
Mal – Malachi

### **New Testament**

Mt – Gospel of Matthew  
Mk – Gospel of Mark  
Lk – Gospel of Luke  
Jn – Gospel of John  
Acts – Acts of the Apostles  
Rom – Letter to the Romans  
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians  
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians  
Gal – Letter to the Galatians  
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians  
Phil – Letter to the Philippians  
Col – Letter to the Colossians  
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians  
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians  
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy  
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy  
Tit – Letter to Titus  
Phlm – Letter to Philemon  
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews  
Jam – Letter of James  
1Pet – First Letter of Peter  
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter  
1Jn – First Letter of John  
2Jn – Second Letter of John  
3Jn – Third Letter of John  
Jude – Letter of Jude  
Rev – Revelation

## Explanation of General Format

**PERSONAL PRONOUNS** are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

**BRACKETS** [ ] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

**SHARP BRACKETS** < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** \* are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

**ALL CAPS** in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

## **The Book of Malachi**

### **Introduction**

What we find in the book of Malachi is the last description of the history of Israel in the Old Testament. It does contain some striking references to the New Testament. The book bridges the period of four hundred years between the two Testaments by anticipating the Gospels.

The book describes scenes that run parallel to the book of Nehemiah. It is about those who have returned from exile in Babylon and are in the land of Israel. The book of Nehemiah deals with the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. The first return, that under Cyrus, is in the book of Ezra. In that book it is about the rebuilding of the altar and the temple. Ezra and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah belong together (Ezra 5:1).

Nehemiah rebuilds the wall and points out abuses among the people. These abuses return in this book of Malachi. We see them in the temple service and in not giving the tithes. Possibly they are situations that immediately after the days of Nehemiah are denounced by Malachi. He prophesied about a century later than Haggai and Zechariah, towards the end of the fifth century BC.

In Malachi 1 the last book of the Old Testament refers back to Genesis, the first book of the Bible by mentioning Jacob and Esau (Mal 1:2; Gen 25:23). In Malachi 3 the book goes forward to the first books of the New Testament (Mal 3:1; Mt 11:10; Mk 1:2) and over that in Malachi 4 to the last book of the Bible, Revelation, in connection with the mention of the return of the Lord Jesus (Mal 4:2).

The book applies to us who live in the last days of the church on earth. We are also children of a revival given by the Lord at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But we are later generations. What our ancestors acquired with much struggle has been thrown into our laps. We do live according to the same forms, but the question is whether behind those forms real life with God is present. In the days of Malachi, worship has become a hollow

form. There is no idolatry, there is temple service, but it is only the outer form, out of which the inner strength has disappeared (2Tim 3:5a).

Important spiritual lessons from this book are coming to us. We see the insensitivity of the people to what the LORD, Yahweh, has been to them. We also see their own iniquity toward Yahweh – their total lack of reverence for God, their contempt for Yahweh. Their insensitivity has reached a climax: they can discover absolutely no evil in their actions which clearly shows that contempt when they are put before them to awaken their conscience.

The abuses to which Malachi refers are not found among the Jews who stayed in Babylon, but among the descendants of those who came out of the confusion – Babel means ‘confusion’ (Gen 11:9). They have returned to the place where Yahweh dwelled. Malachi addresses his important admonitions to them.

The wrongs of that time also occur today in Christianity. We can apply what Malachi says to Israel to all those who say they have separated themselves from the spiritual Babylon. Babylon represents the nominal Christian system that has become Christianity, through which there is no unity but confusion.

The call of Malachi does not concern idolatry, as in the days of the kings. He does not call to return to the land as in the days of Ezra. His message is also not about rebuilding the temple as in the days of Haggai, or rebuilding the walls as in the days of Nehemiah. There is no idolatry. There is a remnant back in the land and the temple has been rebuilt. The religious ceremonies are performed.

But everything happens with the appearance of outer order. Outwardly they are in the right position with a correct ritual, but their moral state is completely false. Therefore, this burden of the LORD in this last message is mainly an incisive appeal to the conscience of the remnant about their low spiritual state.

Malachi means ‘my messenger’ (Mal 3:1). It is not known where he comes from or who his parents are. His message consists mainly of exhortation and condemnation. He resembles John the baptist who also only wanted to be a ‘voice’. His person is completely hidden behind the message he brings

and which serves to prepare us for the soon coming of the Lord. That is the second reason why this book is so topical, after the admonition of the form service: it wants to remind the hearts of the faithful of the coming of the Lord.

Division of the book

1. Heading (Malachi 1:1)
2. God's love for Israel (Malachi 1:2-5)
3. Disrespectful service (Malachi 1:6-7)
4. Unclean offerings (Malachi 1:8-9)
5. Contemptuous attitude (Malachi 1:10-14)
6. Preaching of punishment against the priests (Malachi 2:1-9)
7. The unfaithfulness of the people (Malachi 2:10-16)
8. The coming messenger of the LORD (Malachi 2:17-3:5)
9. God is withheld the tithes (Malachi 3:6-9)
10. Promise of blessing (Malachi 3:10-12)
11. Unfaithful servants (Malachi 3:13-15)
12. Faithful servants (Malachi 3:16-18)
13. The day of the LORD (Malachi 4:1-6)

## Malachi 1

### **Mal 1:1 | A Burden, a Word**

| 1 *The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.*

Malachi begins his book with both “the oracle” – literally “a burden” – and “the word of the LORD” (cf. Zec 9:1; 12:1). Other prophets use one of the two expressions. The description of prophecy as a “burden” indicates that the message is one of exhortation rather than comfort or encouragement. He carries this message as a burden on his heart. At the same time, it is not his word, but the word that God has commanded him to speak.

It is a word “to Israel”, all of the twelve tribes who have returned from exile. Malachi is a servant of God. He performs a service to the people by communicating to them the words of God.

### **Mal 1:2 | A Declaration of Love**

| 2 *“I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How have You loved us?” “[Was] not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob;*

Malachi speaks to the people in a dialogue. The prophecy begins with the heartwarming declaration of God’s love for His people (Deu 10:15; 33:3). Before the consciences are addressed, God wants to touch the heart of His people. We see this also in the last message of John in Revelation 2-3, specifically to the lukewarm Laodicea. It is precisely to Laodicea that the Lord speaks about “those whom I love” (Rev 3:19).

But the reaction of the people, precisely on this expression of God’s love, shows the depraved state of the people. Because they do not experience that love, they raise the question how that love has been shown. The thought does not occur to them to look for the cause of this in themselves. They feel abandoned by God. They are also satisfied with themselves and that goes together with being dissatisfied with God.

The question how that love would have been shown is the root of sin. It is not a sincere question, but a rebellious one, an audacity. They challenge



God to prove that He loves them, as if all the evidence they have experienced is of no meaning.

Would we dare to say something like that? We too are in danger of saying: 'If God loves me, why does He allow misery in my life?' If we think negatively and only see decline, we don't know that love. We do not belong to the Lord because we have loved Him, but because He has loved us and made us His own.

In His answer to their question about His love, the LORD asks them a question. It concerns the relationship between their ancestor Jacob and his brother Esau. God speaks of Esau as "Jacob's brother". In doing so He places special emphasis on the relationship between their ancestor Jacob and Esau. He asks it as a question, and of course they know it to be so. But in the light of their cheeky question about His love, it must become clear to them what an enormous difference there is between Jacob and Esau in their relationship to God.

Although Esau was the oldest and as the firstborn was entitled to the inheritance, the love of God went out to Jacob. That was not because Jacob was more attractive to God than Esau, but because God chose to love Jacob. Jacob was the object of God's elective love. He showed this in the whole history of Jacob personally and in that of his offspring. The people have reacted to this love time and time again with unfaithfulness. In spite of that, a remnant of the people still lives in Jerusalem, with a temple and an altar.

### **Mal 1:3-5 | I Have Hated Esau**

*3 but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and [appointed] his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness." 4 Though Edom says, "We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins"; thus says the LORD of hosts, "They may build, but I will tear down; and [men] will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the LORD is indignant forever." 5 Your eyes will see this and you will say, "The LORD be magnified beyond the border of Israel!"*

It is not about the history of two persons, but about the history of their descendants, the nations that grew out of them. In that whole history God

shows His love for His people and His hatred for Esau (verse 2b; verse 3a). Esau has cause to be hated because of his whole history of rebellion against God. Therefore, this word is only spoken here, in Malachi, at the very end of the Old Testament, and not already in Genesis.

In Genesis, God does not speak about hating Esau. He only says that the older Esau will serve the younger Jacob. God is sovereign and gives each of the brothers a certain place on earth. He does that even before the brothers are born (Rom 9:11-13; Gen 25:23).

Jacob's election has nothing to do with any merit on his part. His descendants claim this election because they are descendants of Abraham. If that were the basis of the election, Esau would also have been entitled to it. God's election is sovereign and independent of man's behavior, while His rejection is the result of man's sin. God chooses people to be blessed, but He does not choose people to be lost.

We cannot reconcile that with our intellect. Our human logic is: if God chooses certain people to bless them, it is automatically so therefore, that He chooses other people to be lost. But then, with our human and therefore limited intellect, we try to check out God and deal with Him because He does not meet our method of reckoning.

The doctrine that God chooses people to be lost is a devilish doctrine, which not only doesn't do justice to the love of God, but even denies it. It is also a denial of man's responsibility. After all, if his damnation is fixed in God's purpose, there is nothing he can do about it and therefore he will not be saved.

God has chosen Jacob from Himself, despite his many failures. He hated Esau because he revealed himself as a "godless person" (Heb 12:16), as someone who has no interest at all in God. That godlessness has been shown by his offspring in an undiminished way. The prophet Obadiah gives a detailed testimony of this (Oba 1:1-15).

Already in the days of Malachi, God can point to His judgment on Esau (verse 3b). It is not yet the final judgment. That will come. What God has taken away are the mountains in which they had made their homes and where they felt untraceable and therefore safe. But for God no one can

make himself untraceable (cf. Psa 139:7). Esau's desolated land has become a home for jackals.

The godlessness of Esau, his not acknowledging of God, is also evident in his arrogant language (verse 4). "Edom", the descendants of Esau (Gen 36:1,8), can boast that they will rebuild the ruins if they are destroyed. There is no thought present in them to humble themselves before God. A proud, arrogant attitude characterizes them. But "the LORD of hosts" answers. Here God presents Himself in His exaltation above all heavenly and earthly powers.

God's answer is that He will break what they have built up again. The area of ruins that will then arise will be given the name in which the character of Edom is expressed: "wicked territory". And the people who live there will forever be under the indignation of God.

What the LORD has done with Edom is presented to Israel (verse 5). They will see with their own eyes the end of Edom. That is once more a proof of God's goodness and love for Israel. At the same time, what God does with Edom is also a warning to Israel. It should not make Israel proud, but give them the awareness that they have earned the same judgment. It also proves that God is not only the God of the Jews, but also the God of the Gentiles (Rom 3:29) His greatness is not only visible to Israel, but everywhere on earth.

### Mal 1:6 | Honor and Respect Are Missing

6 " 'A son honors [his] father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?' says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, 'How have we despised Your name?'

The people will have nodded approvingly to Malachi's words about Esau. But then he turns to them. God has treated Israel as a son, but have they honored him as a Father? They are also in contact with God as a servant to a master, but have they served Him with the due respect?

True knowledge of God is always a combination of childlike trust and deep awe. Trust never leads to inappropriate familiarity and awe never leads to slavish creepiness. These two relationships are the pillars of soci-

ety. If these relationships are respected, it is a blessing for society. If they are not taken into account, society is disrupted.

God addresses these questions, which are an indictment, to “you, O priests”. The whole section of Malachi 1:6-2:9 is addressed to them. God says unequivocally to them that they despise His Name. They are called to teach the people the distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean (Eze 44:23). But the priests in the days of Malachi do not care about that. They do not think about the fact that they owe their existence to God.

The name “Father” means that as a nation they owe their origin to Him. The fact that He is their Master, to whom they owe obedience, does not interest them. They think only of their own interests.

For the New Testament believer, the name ‘Father’ implies a personal connection with Him. Every believer in our time is called to priestly service. Gaining new insight into the practice of priestly service has been one of the blessings of the revival at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But if we forget that it is a gift from God and be proud of it, we become fat and our sacrificial service is an abomination to Him.

The priests react almost in an aggrieved way to the accusation of the LORD. Their insensitivity to this accusation is shown by their hypocritical question which they ask with a straight face: “How have we despised Your name?” On the contrary, they think of themselves as very faithful servants of God. No, here the LORD is very much mistaken, they think. Their question makes it clear that they completely disagree with the reproach of the LORD that they despise His Name.

God confronts His people many times with this way of reacting:

1. “But you say, ‘How have You loved us?’” (Mal 1:2)
2. “But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’” (Mal 1:6)
3. “But you say, ‘How have we defiled You?’” (Mal 1:7)
4. “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’” (Mal 2:14)
5. “Yet you say, ‘How have we wearied [Him]?’” (Mal 2:17a)
6. “Or, ‘Where is the God of justice?’” (Mal 2:17b)

7. ““But you say, ‘How shall we return?’” (Mal 3:7)
8. “But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’” (Mal 3:8)
9. “Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’” (Mal 3:13)

Each time, the people in a questioning sense indicate that they do not agree at all with what God is telling them. It always comes down to them asking God why He blames them. And each time God, in His great patience, gives an answer that cannot be misunderstood. However, the answer does not penetrate them because they see themselves as faithful servants of God.

### **Mal 1:7-8 | Defiled Food and a Despised Table**

*7 [You] are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, ‘How have we defiled You?’ In that you say, ‘The table of the LORD is to be despised.’ 8 But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?” says the LORD of hosts.*

The LORD answers their question from which it may be clear that they despise His Name. It is not a question asked in honest ignorance, but out of outright hypocrisy. Yet the LORD answers. He points out to them their actions with which and how they approach Him. In the way in which they serve God, their contempt for Him is clearly expressed.

Look what they come up with. They bring “defiled food” upon His “altar”. “Food” means a sacrifice that is accepted by God as His food. It gives Him joy when His people present sacrifices to Him. He calls these sacrifices “My food” (Num 28:2; Lev 21:6,8,17). But the sacrifices they bring on God’s altar, the burnt offering altar, are defiled.

It is not about animals that God has declared unclean and which they are not allowed to eat. These are mentioned in a list in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. No, it is about clean animals, but that have a defect. And that is also forbidden by God (Lev 22:20). They bring clean animals, but He cannot accept them because they do not meet the standard of His holiness. He has laid down that norm in His Word and the priests should take it into account like no other member of God’s people. But they don’t do that, they

flout God's Word. This is what God accuses them of and what He holds them accountable for.

For the third time, the people react wronged through the mouths of the priests. They ask: "How have we defiled You?" How can God think that they defile Him? They really have no idea, because they are convinced that they are doing very well. Isn't God getting something from them? And does He say of what they bring, that it defiles Him? Then something must be wrong with His eyes, because they are not to blame. They put the problem entirely with God. This is how countless Christians today manipulate the Word of God. God makes it all far too complicated. He should listen to them, instead of imposing His will on them.

They are blind to the fact that they bring inferior sacrifices, something expressly forbidden by God (Deu 15:21). They bring these sacrifices on His altar, which is also called "the table of the LORD" (cf. Eze 41:22). He has to be content with what they can afford to miss. What an insult to Him!

Don't we also quickly forget how great the work of the Lord Jesus is for God and also for us? How and with what do we go to the Table of the Lord (1Cor 10:16-21)? Some easily stay away from the Table of the Lord. Others take part in the Supper of the Lord nonchalantly, without thinking of what it speaks of. Perhaps we may not be blamed for sin, but how often do we do what we have done so many times dutifully, without it touching our heart. The appreciation of the Table of the Lord depends on our appreciation of the Lord Jesus and His work.

The table of the LORD is His table from which He eats and from which He wants to eat together with His people. Their actions express their contempt for His table. They will never say it, but their actions make it clearly seen. They do bring sacrifices, but their content is nothing. They don't really bring a sacrifice, but something they can miss.

How far is that from the mind of David who did not want to offer a burnt offering to the LORD which costs him nothing (1Chr 21:24). Also the sacrifice Mary brings to the Lord Jesus is a great contrast with these sacrifices (Mk 14:3-5). Even the disciples do not appreciate what Mary does. They say of her sacrifice that it is a waste. With the money she paid for it, in their opinion better things could have been done.

The Table of the Lord for us Christians is the place where we celebrate the Supper of the Lord. It brings about in us sacrifices of praise and thanks, spiritual sacrifices, offerings of praise. Anyone who thinks of the Lord Jesus in all that He has accomplished can only express himself in gratitude and admiration.

What did those sacrifices cost us? There are sacrifices that are very cheap. We can think, for example, of thanksgiving that is only a repetition of what others have said, or a selection from the old box of ourselves, an inanimate repetition of what we have said so many times already. If we live with the Lord, we will have collected much and our sacrifice will have more and more content spiritually, it will be more and more worthy.

And what do we give from our material wealth for the poor, for the work of the Lord, to those who have gone out for His Name without accepting anything from the nations? Do we give the best, the first fruits, or do we give a little of our abundance, of which we do not feel that we miss it, or do we even give our worthless things?

The animal the priests bring is an illustration of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. We must realize how perfect He was in everything. We must not affect Him in any way, nor affect the Word of God. To come to God with deformed, unhealthy sacrifices is a great denial of Christ's sacrifice and a contempt for God's appreciation of Him.

1. We bring a "blind" animal if we believe that the Lord Jesus did not know what He was doing, had no insight in it and did not constantly have His eye on the Father. Such a sacrifice is unworthy of God. The Lord Jesus perfectly knew everything that would come over Him and did in everything perfectly the will of the Father (Jn 18:4; 17:4).
2. We bring a "lame" animal if we believe that the Lord Jesus was not perfect in all His actions, that He did not go the way perfectly. For example, we may think that He could have sinned, although He did not do it. That too is a sacrifice that God cannot accept. In the Lord Jesus there is no sin, He did not know sin and did not do it (1Jn 3:5; 2Cor 5:21; 1Pet 2:22).
3. A "sick" animal is an animal that is not internally healthy. That is what we bring when we doubt the motives by which the Lord was driven, as if He were not completely selfless in everything and sometimes did

something for His own sake. When we come to God with such thoughts about the Lord Jesus, He rejects that sacrifice. Christ was perfect both inwardly and outwardly. He was “altogether that which I also say to you” (Jn 8:25, Darby Translation). He was the truth, and His speech was a true and exact presentation of Himself. His speech presented Himself, being the truth.

God tells the priests that they would not dare to offer the sacrifices they offer to Him, to their governors. If they gave such inferior sacrifices to them, they would not be very happy. No, they don't want to irritate them, but to keep them as friends. But God, who is so much greater, they can buy Him off with something they can do without.

It is truly staggering what is being done to God by people, which those same people would never do to other people. God just has to accept everything, otherwise He can leave. This is how Christianity treats God.

### **Mal 1:9 | Such an Offering on Your Part**

9 *“But now will you not entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?” says the LORD of hosts.*

What is said in this verse is meant ironically. Let them try to “entreat God’s favor” with their inferior sacrifices. They are under the delusion that He does appreciate their sacrifices and that He will be gracious to them in response. How blind can a man, and then a privileged member of God’s people, be to Who God is and to what is His due.

Whoever adopts an attitude as described in the previous verses should not think that he can ask for something from God and then count on receiving it. If we pray for a solution to our problems without removing sin from our lives, God cannot listen to it. He cannot be favorable to us.

They should take a good look at themselves. “With such an offering” on their part and through their actions in general, they show that they have a self-willed religion and lifestyle. Do they really believe that God will be there for them? Who do they think they are dealing with? He who speaks is “the LORD of hosts”!



**Mal 1:10 | I Am Not Pleased With You**

10 *“Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle [fire on] My altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the LORD of hosts, “nor will I accept an offering from you.*

We hear God, as it were, sighing that among the priests there was only one person who would shut the gates. In doing so, He expresses His desire that evil be kept out of His house or that the service be stopped altogether. But there is no such person. Evil has entered His house and is not removed from it. If evil were to be stopped or removed, the offerings on His altar would not be uselessly kindled. They would then be brought in the awareness of Who He is and what is His due.

The application can be made to churches and services that are not (any-more) places where people worship in spirit and in truth, but have degenerated to nothing more than places where people meet to have a good time together. It would be better for them to close the gates than to continue deceiving people who think they are doing God a favor by coming together like this.

God loathes a service if it is held insincerely and only for show (Isa 1:11-15). It is better not to receive an offering than an offering that is worthless. He is not pleased with the priest or the offering that is offered to Him. He does not accept the offering that they hold in their hands and offer Him. He cannot say more clearly how He thinks about them and their service.

**Mal 1:11 | God’s Name Will Be Great Among the Nations**

11 *For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name [will be] great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering [that is] pure; for My name [will be] great among the nations,” says the LORD of hosts.*

God tells the unfaithful priests that He does not depend on them for the offerings He wants to receive. He will ensure that His Name will be great among all nations and not only in Israel. To His Name will be brought incense in every place, and not only in Jerusalem, and a grain offering that is pure. This will be fulfilled in the realm of peace. There will be a general worship of God by the nations (cf. Zep 2:11). At the appearance of the Lord

Jesus, God will be universally honored and the universe will be full of His glory, which will fill the earth as the waters cover the bottom of the sea.

This is already the case for the church, although the church does not bring literal, but spiritual sacrifices (Heb 13:15; 1Pet 2:5). Since the church is on earth, this happens everywhere on earth (1Cor 1:2). Worship is no longer linked to and reserved for a geographical place. It is now about spiritual characteristics (Jn 4:21,23).

### **Mal 1:12-13 | Once More the Attitude of the Priests**

*12 "But you are profaning it, in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised.' 13 You also say, 'My, how tiresome it is!' And you disdainfully sniff at it," says the LORD of hosts, "and you bring what was taken by robbery and [what is] lame or sick; so you bring the offering! Should I receive that from your hand?" says the LORD.*

In verse 12 we return to the raw reality of those days. How awful it is when people who confess to belong to God's people dishonor His Name through their speaking and their behavior. They dishonor His Name especially by doing their sacrificial service in a way that shows their contempt for God. They do not say it, but their dealings with the table of the Lord and the sacrifices show their contempt for it.

And that's not all. They find the service of the LORD but a tiresome, difficult occupation (verse 13). They disdainfully sniff at that service, so little does it mean to them. In another translation it says that they frown at it. That is an indication of their contempt for the service to God. The LORD presents Himself to them again as "the LORD of hosts". They feel sorry for Him!

Don't we see this same tiredness regarding the Lord's things in our days? Are there not Christians who were once active in the service of the Lord, but are now tired? They have grown weary, tired of praying, tired of reading the Bible, tired of thinking of the Lord, tired of preaching the gospel, tired of the things of the Lord and tired of the people of the Lord. A confession without practice and a service without devotion lead to tiredness in the things of the Lord. And when people get tired of something, they will finally despise it.

The LORD also holds up to them with what nice sacrifices they bring to Him. They “bring what was taken by robbery”. A robbed sacrifice is the sacrifice stolen from another person and brought as if it were their own sacrifice. Thus we can use the words of God’s Word in our thanksgiving without having made them our own. Then we steal or rob God’s words (Jer 23:30). We should not adopt expressions because we like them and want to make an impression with them. God wants us to be honest and not pretend that we are more than we are. He wants us to tell Him in our own words Who the Lord Jesus is.

The LORD also repeats the bringing of what is “lame or sick” (verse 13; verse 8). This shows how deeply He has been touched by their contempt. They should not think that He will accept their offering from their hand. Their hand is not pure, their actions are not clean. That is why He does not take anything out of them. The grain offering speaks of the perfect life of the Lord Jesus. We may be able to tell God a lot about it, but if our actions are unclean, He does not accept our thanksgiving. He does not listen to us.

What do we give to the Lord? Do we give Him the best of everything we have, or only what we don’t need? For example, how do we spend our time? Is He at the front and at the top when we start the day? In this way we can look at our possessions and our capacities. Do we serve Him with that or ourselves and should He be content with the leftovers?

### **Mal 1:14 | The LORD Is a Great King**

*14 “But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King,” says the LORD of hosts, “and My name is feared among the nations.”*

The people act just like the priests. There are people who make a vow that they will sacrifice a healthy male animal to the LORD, but they sacrifice to Him “a blemished animal”. Malachi calls someone who acts in this way a “swindler”. It is a conscious, deliberate ‘switcheroo’. Promising something but not doing it is an abomination to the Lord. With a powerful “but cursed be” Malachi expresses his deep indignation about such an act.

It can be compared to the sin of Ananias and Saphira. They want to give the impression that they are giving all their money, while they secretly

withhold a part for themselves (Acts 5:1-11). It is the hypocrisy of pretending to be pious, but acting for one's own benefit, both financially and in prestige.

God stands up in all His greatness. He presents Himself to them as "a great King". How dare man oppose or despise Him! He is "the LORD of hosts". He is above all heavenly and earthly powers. His Name cannot but inspire awe, not only among His people, but among all nations. There is no greater authority in creation than His. There is also nothing in the universe that is not under His government and authority. If Israel were aware of this, they would realize how foolish it is to swindle Him. The same goes for us.

## Malachi 2

### Introduction

In Malachi 1, the indifference and hypocrisy of the priests and the people are presented to them. It is more about religious life. In Malachi 2 it is about the lack of understanding of God's thoughts, which is evident in social life.

We find three covenants here:

1. the covenant with Levi (verses 1-9),
2. the covenant with the people (verses 10-12) and
3. the marriage covenant (verses 13-16).

### Mal 2:1-3 | The Commandment to the Priests

*1 "And now this commandment is for you, O priests. 2 If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the LORD of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them [already], because you are not taking [it] to heart. 3 Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it.*

The priests, people who should know God's will par excellence and who should teach the people, are addressed directly (verse 1). A commandment comes to them. What the commandment means is written in verses 2-3.

The priests are not left in the uncertainty of the consequences if they persist in their unfaithfulness (verse 2). They must not only listen, but also take it to heart. Then they will have a contrite heart, confess their sins and really give honor to God's Name. If they do not do so, He, "the LORD of hosts", sends the curse among them (cf. Deu 28:20).

He will take all their blessings away from them and turn them into a curse. The land will no longer yield food, but weeds. The peaceful society will become a torment by mutual irritation and intolerance. Family life will be disrupted. Instead of love there will be hatred and suspicion. It is not only

a prediction, but God has already brought it among them because they are not focused on Him with their hearts. And it will all get much worse if they don't listen to His call.

The word "offspring" (verse 3) is literally "seed" and refers both to children and to the sown, which must grow on the land as a blessing and of which again tenths can be given. God will rebuke that. They will not experience any joy in what comes after them, not in children and not in harvest.

He will make them feel His displeasure in the clearest way possible. God expresses His contempt for them here in powerful language. He will treat them as they treat Him. He will spread refuse on their faces, the refuse of their feasts. The sacrifices they bring at those feasts are an abomination to Him. He sees these sacrifices in their entirety as refuse. Those sacrifices are not a soothing aroma for Him, but they stink, they cause disgust in Him.

They may think they are celebrating the feasts of the LORD, but He speaks here of "your feasts". Under the cover of a feast for the LORD they have made their own feasts. Thus later the Passover of the LORD degenerates into a Passover called "the feast of the Jews" (Jn 6:4).

God will smear them with the refuse of their feasts. Except that it makes them stink, they will also look repulsive. This extremely deep defamation they have inflicted on themselves will stick to them when they will be taken away to a dung heap, so that there will be nothing left of them in the temple (cf. 1Kgs 14:10). This is how God cleans His house of the refuse.

### **Mal 2:4 | The Covenant With Levi**

*4 Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi," says the LORD of hosts.*

When the judgment comes upon them, the priests will know that the LORD has done it and also why He has done it (verse 4). It will then be too late to repent. Thus all who are judged forever will know that God judges them and also why He does it.

God acts in faithfulness to His covenant with Levi. God's covenant with Levi shows the contrast between the faithless priests and their ancestor Levi, with whom the LORD made a priestly covenant (Num 25:12-13; Deu

33:8-11). The covenant with Levi is a reminder of the faithfulness Levi showed when the whole people were unfaithful. The unfaithfulness of the priests stands out against the background of Levi's faithfulness. A deviation, the unfaithfulness of the priests, is most seen by presenting the original, the faithfulness of Levi (Exo 32:25-29).

### Mal 2:5 | Life, Peace and Reverence

*5 "My covenant with him was [one of] life and peace, and I gave them to him [as an object of] reverence; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name.*

In His covenant with Levi, the LORD guaranteed him life and peace (Num 25:12-13). Life and peace are a summary of the blessing of the covenant. The order cannot be reversed. There must first be life, then peace can come. Without or before there is life, there can be no peace. Life is not only a long life, but also a life under the grace of God. The result is peace. Peace is not only the absence of struggle and war, it is also the beneficial atmosphere of harmony with God.

God gave both to Levi for the purpose of revering Him. And so did Levi. He has been aware of the holiness of God's Name. The presence of that Name has made a great impression on him. This awareness is completely lacking among the priests to whom Malachi addresses here.

### Mal 2:6-7 | Instruction and Life

*6 True instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity. 7 For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.*

The tribe of Levi was trustworthy in the instruction he gave in the law (verse 6; 2Chr 17:7-9; Neh 8:8-9). He did instruct the law impartial and without personal gain, to the strict standard of truth. There was no unrighteousness in what he taught the people from the law. This is an important condition for anyone who today teaches from God's Word. That teaching must be true and without unrighteousness because it must respond to God Himself.

The Word of God is absolutely true. A teacher who teaches from God's Word must be that as well (cf. Tit 1:9). In God's Word every unrighteousness is absent. In what a teacher explains about God's Word it must also be so. He should not proclaim half-truths.

In addition to the words, the walk is also important. If the teacher's lifestyle does not match his teaching, his teaching is not reliable. Levi walked "in peace and uprightness" with God. Not only did he walk after God, but he walked with Him. This goes a little further than following Him. In walking with Him is the aspect of intimacy and fellowship (Gen 5:22; 6:9).

The result of this healthy instruction, supported by a dignified walk, is that many turn back from iniquity (cf. 1Tim 4:16). What a great blessing comes from believers who know, love and live according to God's Word. We see this in a wonderful way in the Lord Jesus to Whom these features only apply completely. He is the perfect example in everything. By His knowledge He has justified the many, which means instructed the many in righteousness. The basis for this is His work on the cross, where He bore the iniquities of those many (Isa 53:11).

Malachi emphasizes what should characterize the priest. His lips must preserve knowledge (verse 7). He must be someone "who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2Tim 2:15). To such a person, the people can go if they want to know something from the law, God's Word. He does not want to be the favorite teacher, someone who has a predilection for certain parts of the truth and who appeases people. The real 'Levite' gives the Holy Scripture in its entirety the place that God gives it as the complete guide for His people and food for the heart. The preservation of knowledge is done to teach that knowledge to God's people. And the transfer of knowledge is meant to make the members of God's people effectual doers of the Word.

The position of Levite – and of the teacher of God's Word – is a great responsibility: "He is the messenger of the LORD of hosts." A messenger or ambassador represents someone and carries out an assignment on behalf of that other person. He is expected to pass on the message of the one he represents unchanged and unabridged. This should make everyone who teaches from God's Word realize that he is not allowed to interpret God's



Word as he likes. It will give a holy reverence and a constant prayer not to pass on or explain anything other than what is according to the purpose of the Holy Spirit.

### Mal 2:8-9 | Turned Aside and Despised

*8 But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts. 9 "So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.*

The word "but" indicates that there is now a contrast with the previous one (verse 8). How far did the priests in the days of Malachi deviate from the example of their ancestors? While they have to tell the people the good, so that they go the right way, the way of life, they lead the people on the wrong path, the path of death. They are the opposite of the faithful Levites who have turned many back from their iniquities (verse 6), for they have caused many of the people to stumble in the law through their instruction. They know the law, but do not live up to it themselves.

Their wrong example is followed by many of the people who also have no desire for the LORD who is the center of God's law. Being occupied with God's Word always has to happen from a living relationship with Him. If that relationship is not there, turning aside is the result. By this they have nullified the covenant with Levi (cf. Neh 13:29).

The application to today is not difficult to make. There are pastors in all parts of Christianity who have deviated from the clear teaching of the Bible. Such people do not teach what God says in His Word, but speak what people like to hear. Preaching in church services becomes social and political talk. Conscience is not addressed. When talking about righteousness, it is not about God's righteousness and sin, but about a just distribution of wealth.

God's rights are no longer taken into account at all. There is no fear of Him anymore. Thus, the people of the church are taken away from God and many stumble to end up in hell, if God does not forbid it. How great is

the responsibility of everyone who, with God's Word in hand, tells others what life is really about.

Because of their nullification of the covenant with Levi, God has made them despicable (verse 9). He has taken away their prestige among the people and abased them. People who want to be popular and adapt God's Word to people's tastes will lose the respect they think they will get. God points out that they do not respect His ways. They do not walk the path He indicates in His Word.

This is evidenced by their behavior. They behave completely different from God and thus give a completely wrong picture of Him. God mentions the example that they regard the person in their teaching of the law. When making decisions in lawsuits they look at the benefit they can get from a case. Such a thing is completely lacking in God. With Him there is no regard for the person (Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; 1Pet 1:17). He has also forbidden it in the law (Lev 19:15; Deu 1:17). Partiality is not allowed to play any role with us as well (1Tim 5:21).

### **Mal 2:10-12 | Illicit Connections**

*10 "Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? 11 Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god. 12 [As] for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob [everyone] who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the LORD of hosts.*

Malachi starts a new subject here, but it connects directly to the previous one. In the previous section the unfaithfulness of the priests and the Levites to God is denounced. In the verses that follow we see the consequences of this in the mutual relationships between the members of God's people up to the most intimate relationship there is, that of marriage. He who does not give God what is due to Him, does not give his neighbor what is due to him.

The prophet begins to represent God as their Father, i.e. as their origin (Deu 32:6b). This is not about the personal relationship as we, believers of the New Testament church, are allowed to know this. It is about God as Father of His people as a whole. He created them. This refers to His power. Through Him they have become a people.

If this were to pervade them, they would also see that they have been brought into a family relationship with each other. It should result in national unity and loyalty to the covenant of the fathers. Malachi makes himself one with the people by talking about “we” and “our fathers”. But they all act unfaithfully, each against his brother. And they trample on the covenant of their fathers. They do not know covenant faithfulness. Nothing is sacred to them. This is how it is with people who have become unfaithful to God.

Judah, Israel and Jerusalem are all mentioned by name (verse 11). There is no exception. The evil of making illicit connections has pervaded the whole people (cf. Ezra 9:1; 10:1-4; Neh 13:25-27). “Judah” is the remnant returned from exile. He started well, but now it is said that he is acting unfaithfully. “Israel” is the name of the people as a whole and “Jerusalem” is the capital of all Israel. They commit an abomination. What unfaithfulness and abomination are involved, Malachi explains in the second part of the verse. We see that in the word “for”.

What did they do? They have profaned “the sanctuary of the LORD”. What is the meaning of this? It is what is dedicated to Him, what He has made His special property. It may refer to the temple, but it is more likely to refer to God’s people. He loves those people and wishes them to serve Him faithfully.

But what did the people do? Against His commandments they married “the daughter of a foreign god” (Exo 34:16; Deu 7:3). They have brought idolaters into God’s people and thereby united the holy with the profane and thus desecrated the holy (1Kgs 11:1-2). This is very offensive to God.

The same goes for us. The believer is forbidden to marry an unbeliever (2Cor 6:14). He who goes against that commandment profanes the Name of God. God cannot acknowledge such a person as His child (2Cor 6:17-18). Only confession of this sin can give restoration in fellowship with the Father.

Malachi feels through the Spirit of God the dishonor done to God by these mixed marriages (verse 12). He wishes that everyone who does so is cut off “from the tents of Jacob”. Such people do not belong in God’s people because they do not keep God’s Word. Malachi mentions some classes of people who are guilty of this evil of mixed marriages and who should be cut off. With these three classes he indicates that the judgment will affect every person involved.

It seems that “who awakes and who answers” is a certain saying. Given the context of this saying, it is about being awake and an answer by people who live in sin and others who condone it. In both cases it concerns people who do something that God abhors and whom Malachi wishes to see eradicated. First there is “who awakes”. He commits this evil with his full mind and consciously resists God’s commandments. Then there is “who answers”. He knows about the evil, he reacts to it, but not in a disapproving, but in an approving way.

We see today in Christianity the being ‘awake’ about the ‘acquired’ freedoms. People are completely lost in a matter as fundamental as marriage. Marriage is outdated, old-fashioned, except when it comes to same-sex marriage. The gays who get married are the ones who awake over them. Then there are the ones who answer. They stand up for the so-called marriage law of gays. Those who awake are actively doing this evil; those who answer are not committing this evil themselves, but are trying to perpetuate this evil and support it that way.

Of the people who do this, there are those “who presents an offering to the LORD of hosts”. They live in sin, but think they can redeem their sins with an offering to the LORD. But “the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD” (Pro 15:8a). He does not accept it, but rejects it (Mic 6:6-8; Isa 66:3).

### **Mal 2:13 | Crocodile Tears**

13 *“This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts [it with] favor from your hand.*

Then there is another thing Malachi notices among the people and these are their tears. Look at them crying and moaning. The tears flow. The altar of the LORD is covered with them. That seems very pious. It seems as if there is a work of God's Spirit going on in them. After all, tears are a proof of sorrow. That is right, but the question is about the nature of their sorrow. Tears that God loves are tears of repentance for the sins committed. But there are no such tears here. They are crocodile tears, fake tears, tears of hypocritical sorrow and played repentance. It is not sorrow that is according to the will of God for that "produces a repentance without regret, [leading] to salvation" (2Cor 7:10).

They cry because they do not feel accepted and blessed by God instead of crying for their sins (cf. Hos 7:14). Instead of repentance, it is a protest against the difficulties they are experiencing. Earlier the sacrifices were refused because the sacrifice was not good, here the offering is refused for their own practice from which they do not want to convert. God does not look at a sacrifice made by people who continue their life in sin. He does not accept it, because it is not pleasing to Him.

### **Mal 2:14 | God Is Witness to Every Marriage**

*14 Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.*

The people ask about the "reason" of the rejection of their offering. The answer that follows is an unparalleled powerful protest against the evil of divorce. Divorce is a sin that powerfully calls to God. Even then, they dare ask why God does not accept their offering. As they embrace strange women, they send their own wives away. So deep can a people sink that turns away from God and His Word!

God is Witness to every marriage, not only at the wedding, but also afterwards (Gen 31:49-50). Wherever a marriage bond between a man and a woman is formed, it is God Who does so, for He has instituted marriage. That is independent of whether the man and the woman involve God in their marriage. It is about the institution as such. God wants it to be maintained. Then He wants to see that both husband and wife act in faithful-

ness to that bond. Unfaithfulness in marriage is the greatest unfaithfulness a person can show. He who is unfaithful in marriage cannot be trusted in any other area.

God addresses the husband here in a serious way on his unfaithfulness. God was there when the husband married the wife of his youth. Now He has to conclude that the husband acts unfaithfully against her. He tells the husband that the wife he married is his “companion” after all! From the day he married her, he shares everything with her until the day of his death: joy and sorrow, hopes and fears, desires and dangers, money and goods, body and soul (1Cor 7:3-4; Mt 19:4-6).

She is also “your wife by covenant”. Marriage is a covenant (Pro 2:17; Eze 16:8). Spouses promise each other faithfulness, in good times and in bad. How awful it is when a husband becomes unfaithful, when he breaks his promise of faithfulness. Of course it also applies to the wife, but here the husband is addressed. He is primarily responsible for the faithfulness in his marriage.

### **Mal 2:15 | He Only Made One**

*15 But not one has done [so] who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did [that] one [do] while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.*

The NASB gives as an alternative reading of the first part of this verse: “Did He not make one, although He had the remnant?” This will be the basis for the explanation.

God has laid down His blueprint for marriage in Genesis 1-2. He did make one, which means that husband and wife are one. He “created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Gen 1:27; Mt 19:4-6). He made one human couple that He bound together in the bond of marriage. Husband and wife are one man together. Adam gets Eve as the one woman who fits him. With her he forms a unity, with her he is “one flesh” (Gen 2:24).

God still had “the remnant of the Spirit” left, which in this context perhaps means that He could have made more wives for Adam. He did not do that. He gave Adam only one wife, Eve, and with that gave the pattern

for every marriage. Why did He do that? Because only within the sacred bond of marriage can He find a “godly offspring” according to His desire. This means that it is God’s intention that children are born and raised in the atmosphere of love and faithfulness that exists between a husband and a wife in marriage.

God breathed into the nostrils of man the breath of life (Gen 2:7). This enables him to judge things as God does. But through sin he is darkened in his mind and cannot take heed of his spirit. He is led by the ruler of the world, the devil, and therefore acts against everything God has instituted, especially against marriage.

Also those who have new life, life through rebirth, have to watch out for the thinking of the world. He must be wary with his spirit not to get carried away in the world’s ungodly thinking about marriage and divorce. Let no one who is married act unfaithfully against the woman he is married to: “Marriage [is to be held] in honor among all, and the [marriage] bed [is to be] undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb 13:4).

Anyone who understands God’s thoughts will remain faithful to his wife. He will not marry a strange woman to conceive children who would be for God. We see in Nehemiah 13 the result of mixed marriages: “In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon [and] Moab. As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people” (Neh 13:23-24). This is what should be expected from mixed marriages. No “godly offspring” was conceived here, there are no children here who seek God.

Here we also see how marriage, marital faithfulness, and children belong together. God instituted marriage in order for children to be born. Using Genesis 1-2 we can say that sexuality has two characteristics. God wants to use it for procreation, having children. God also gives sexuality to enjoy each other, to experience the joy of recognizing the other as someone who suits you. In case of unfaithfulness to the wife of the youth, both goals are destroyed.

## Mal 2:16 | God Hates Divorce

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

This verse begins with the word "for". This indicates that what follows is directly related to the foregoing. There Malachi has shown God's plan with marriage and how important it is not to act unfaithfully in it. This unfaithful act finds its culmination, or better low point, in divorce. To God divorce is not just a wrong choice, it is a destruction of His work, a violent act He abhors.

Covering his garment refers to the old custom where a man throws his garment over a woman to take and protect her as wife (Rth 3:9; Eze 16:8). However, those who divorce their wives do not use their garment that way. They do not protect their wives, but they cover up the violence they use against their wives. Those who seek divorce are often hardened in their natural feelings. The violence can sometimes be physical, but most of all it can be spiritual through the use of harsh words that are "like the thrusts of a sword" (Pro 12:18).

Anyone who does not stay close to the Lord runs the risk of becoming unfaithful to his own wife. He who alienates from the Lord also alienates from his surroundings, most of his housemates and most of all of his wife. In this alienation the urge to view pornographic sites on the internet can no longer be resisted. Someone is becoming more and more alienated. Contacts are made through social media. Meetings are arranged. Finally, there is no turning back and the divorce is initiated.

God hates divorce because it destroys His purpose with marriage. His purpose with marriage, in addition to the aspects mentioned above, is above all that in every marriage the unity between Christ and the church is made visible (Eph 5:31-32). This is what God has in mind when He creates man and woman and establishes marriage as the legitimate sphere in which sexuality may be fully enjoyed. That is why Ephesians 5 refers to the institution of marriage in Genesis 2 (Eph 5:31; Gen 2:24).

The Lord Jesus is clear in His teaching about divorce (Mt 19:3-9; 1Cor 7:10). Divorce is a particularly bad thing. Whoever thinks he can get rid of that



inseparable bond and therefore also thinks he is free to enter into that inseparable bond with someone else, is very mistaken. He commits adultery by entering into a new marriage. The same goes for someone who marries the divorced woman, because this woman is still inextricably connected to her husband. That is so, as long as he lives (Rom 7:2-3).

The exception “except for immorality” or “not for fornication” (Mt 19:9) concerns the case of someone who is betrothed. We have an example of this with Joseph and Mary. While they are betrothed, Joseph plans to send Mary away secretly when he notices that she is pregnant (Mt 1:18-19). When someone is betrothed, there is a fixed connection, but the official marriage has not yet taken place. In the case of Joseph and Mary in their betrothed status, the sending away would have been allowed. God does not blame Joseph for that consideration either, but let him know what is really going on. Then he does not send her away.

### **Mal 2:17 | The LORD Is Weary of Their Words**

*17 You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, “How have we wearied [Him]?” In that you say, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,” or, “Where is the God of justice?”*

Malachi tells the people that they weary the LORD with their words (cf. Isa 43:24b). Through their constant faithlessness and hypocrisy, they have brought God’s patience to an end. They feel that God does not take care that they are doing badly, while their enemies are doing very well. God does not care about them, that is how they experience it. He doesn’t punish the suffering that has been done to them enough, that’s how they judge God’s attitude towards them.

The words they utter about it weary God. The self-complaint is a complaint against God that they make without self-knowledge and without repentance about the way they go. God grows weary of having to listen to their unjustified complaining over and over again. God gets weary of words that are about their own right, and in which He is put in the dock.

The reaction of the people is again a justification of themselves. They would not know what they have wearied God with. But God confronts them with their indifference by quoting their words, reminding them of

it. Their whole attitude testifies to a complete lack of knowledge of God. Not only do they ignore Him, but they also attribute to Him preposterous conduct of which they feel they are the victims.

We hear these kinds of expressions when people say: 'If God is righteous, why then does He let ...?' and so on and so forth. These kinds of questions are commonplace and are found in the mouths of people who think that God acts arbitrarily, both in the world and in their personal lives. They are blind to their own sins, but they blame God for the misery in which they are or which they see around them.

In fact, they are so audacious that they challenge God to show Himself as the God of judgment. If He really is the God of judgment, where is He? What an arrogant attitude. If God were to express Himself in judgment, they would all be stricken by that judgment.

The answer comes in the first verse of the next chapter. There they hear about the coming Judge, Who by God's grace is preceded by a herald who calls for repentance in order to be ready for the Judge's coming.

## Malachi 3

### **Mal 3:1 | The Messenger Comes and the Lord Also**

*1 “Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.*

Here comes the answer to the challenging question at the end of the previous chapter: “Where is the God of justice?” Malachi lets it be known that the LORD sends His messenger, His herald, to clear the way before the God of judgment. This messenger is neither Malachi nor Elijah, but John the baptist. We know this from the quotations of this verse in the Gospels in connection with John the baptist (Mt 11:10; Mk 1:2; cf. Isa 40:3-5).

In the quote in Mark 1 it becomes clear that the Lord Jesus before Whom the way is to be cleared is seen in His Godhead, that is as Yahweh (Mk 1:2). There it says “AHEAD OF YOU” – “You” is the Lord Jesus – and here in Malachi it says that the LORD says “before Me”, that is Yahweh. The clearing of the way through John happens in the hearts of people so that Yahweh can come into their hearts. It is about taking away rebellion against God through the preaching of repentance. John is the forerunner of the humble Man Jesus who is none other than Yahweh, God Himself.

Malachi does not speak here about the coming of the Lord Jesus in humiliation. He goes directly from the announcement of the forerunner to the coming of the Lord to His temple. That coming takes place in the end time and will happen suddenly. Then comes “the Lord”, Adonai, the sovereign Ruler. In this verse the first and the second coming lie side by side (cf. Isa 61:1-3). John the baptist has announced His first coming. But when He came, He was rejected. Now He is in heaven, awaiting the command of God to ask the earth (Psa 2:8). Then He comes in power and majesty.

Malachi’s contemporaries seek the Lord in His majesty. They look forward to a Messiah Who will make them the head of the nations. Only for that reason do they find their joy in Him. But with that they will end up

ashamed. They reveal a spirit other than that which we hear in Psalm 143: “And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no man living is righteous” (Psa 143:2). He will surely come, suddenly, but to judge all who live wickedly. He will come as “the messenger of the covenant” (cf. Isa 63:9; Exo 23:20,23). He fulfills all the conditions of the covenant, including the judgment on those who have broken the covenant.

The verse ends by declaring once more that He is coming. It is a confirmation of a truth that must make a deep impression and lead to sanctification and expectation. We too look forward to the coming of the Son of God. We wait for Him from heaven. He comes first to caught up to Himself believers of the church and the Old Testament believers (1Thes 4:16-17). Then He comes to earth with His own (1Thes 4:14). If we live in that prospect and expectation, it has a cleansing effect on our lives (1Jn 3:3).

### **Mal 3:2-4 | Purifying and Refining**

*2 “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. 3 He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.*

The people long for the coming of the LORD, but who can endure His day (verse 2; cf. Amos 5:18)? When He comes, it will be to judge evil and put it away from Israel –fire speaks of judgment – so that His people will be cleansed (Zec 13:8-9). Here we find the baptism with fire of which John the baptist speaks (Mt 3:11-12). Wood, hay, and straw, representing among other things unbelievers, will be burned up through it (1Cor 3:12-15).

Malachi uses two pictures for cleaning: fire and soap. Fire is used for cleaning metals and soap for cleaning clothes. The fire cleans us internally. Clothing has to do with our behavior, our appearance. The Lord Jesus did not need something like that. Everything is made in accordance with Him, shining white as He is white.

The smelter, that is the Lord Jesus, takes away the foam after the silver has been heated so that the silver becomes pure (verse 3). He is only satisfied

with the purity of the silver when He sees His own face reflected in the silver. The cleansing is for the purpose of being transformed into His image (2Cor 3:18; 1Jn 3:2).

“He will sit” as He proceeds with this process in His own. That indicates rest, care and attention. It is not a fleeting work. It does not happen in a hurry. He keeps a close eye on the temperature of the fire and makes sure that we are not tempted beyond what we are able, “but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it” (1Cor 10:13).

Levi’s sons must be purified. They are called because they have to bring the offerings. They will be purified from the sins mentioned in the previous chapters. Then they can “present to the LORD offerings in righteousness”, that is, in accordance with the law of God (verse 4). They will be able to bring the right offerings in the right way, in the right mind. There is no more injustice in their hearts and in their deeds.

It is an offering of remembrance brought in the realm of peace (Ezekiel 40-46). It reminds us of the days of ancient times, the days of the past, the days of Moses, David and Solomon. Led by these men, the Israelites brought offerings which the LORD accepted with pleasure. The renewed, purified and refined Israel will have the spirit of faith and devotion that also characterized those days.

To cleanse the church, the Lord Jesus uses the water of the Word (Eph 5:26). God uses discipline to sanctify His children and thereby make them partakers of His holiness (Heb 12:10). Tests are also used to purify our faith, our trust in God, so that we respond to the glory of Christ at His coming (1Pet 1:6-7; Job 23:10; Psa 66:10; Pro 17:10; Isa 4:4).

### **Mal 3:5 | The LORD, a Swift Witness**

5 *“Then I will draw near to you for judgment; 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 wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts.*

From the future days of purifying and blessing Malachi returns to the situation in his days. The judgment will not only affect the wicked in the future, but also now. Evil must be judged by the holy God. He will act as a Quick Judge, sealing His judgment with His testimony.

1. The first to hear His judgment are “the sorcerers” (Exo 22:18). They reject the truth of God and turn to the father of lies, the devil, for advice.

2. He then passes judgment on other forms of evil, evil directed against one’s neighbor. The “adulterers” commit a great sin. They ignore God’s plan of marriage as He instituted it at the time of creation. Their behavior is an attack on the relationship between God and His earthly people and between Christ and the church.

3. “Those who swear falsely” are those who take perjury. They call upon God when committing injustice and thus bind His Name to sin. Where God is thus set aside or put in a bad light, the consequences are also catastrophic for relations between people.

4. They are people “who oppress the wage earner in his wages”. They have used someone’s services, but refuse to pay him the wages. They are also in a position to commit this evil.

5. They don’t care about “the widow and the orphan” and “turn aside the alien”. They exploit these socially weak groups of people. They do not share in the special care God has for them.

All these forms of evil, all these wicked actions occur because there is no fear of God. The mentioned wicked have in common an irreverence for God, they do not fear Him. And God is still “the LORD of hosts”. They have to deal with Him and He will judge them.

### **Mal 3:6 | The LORD Does Not Change**

6 *“For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”*

People may change, God does not change (Jam 1:17b). He always remains the same (Heb 13:8). This applies to all His divine attributes, including His love for His people (Mal 1:2). He will not consume the God-fearing among

His people. Because He is immutable and will fulfill His promises, it is not a done deal with Israel.

He speaks here about His people as “sons of Jacob”. That refers to what the people are in their often unfaithful ways. How often have they changed, yet they have not perished. Across all their unfaithfulness, God has led them and brought them to the land that He had promised their fathers to give them.

In the land, they committed the greatest crime of all time by crucifying the Son of God, Who came to them in love. They are badly disciplined for that, but God did not consume them. He has always kept a remnant alive. In the near future His people will go through a great tribulation. Many will perish in that great tribulation, but a remnant will come to repentance and conversion. To them He will show that He has not changed anything in His promises and that He will fulfill everything to the letter (Psa 89:35; Deu 4:31; Psa 106:45).

### **Mal 3:7 | Call to Return and the Response**

7 *“From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept [them]. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of hosts. “But you say, ‘How shall we return?’*

The fact that God will fulfill His plans in spite of the unfaithfulness of His people does not release the people from the obligation to repent. God’s plans and man’s responsibility do not exclude each other, but complement each other. Malachi tells the people for how long they have deviated from God’s ordinances and have not lived up to them.

All generations before them have been unfaithful, and those who are a new generation follow the same path. The LORD calls them to return to Him. Then He will return to them. He has had to turn away from them because of their sins, but He will turn to them again when they confess their sins and stop doing them.

But the people see no reason to return for the simple reason that they feel they have not deviated. They have an answer again. It sounds cheeky again: ‘Returning? How shall we return? Surely we are neat, careful mem-

bers of your people, aren't we? What a fuss Your prophets make of repentance and conversion. Why have we fallen into disgrace?

The people answer the confrontation with their error by evasive questions. They also insult the prophet or challenge him to be a bit clearer, to mention some more details. This is how people react when they do not intend to face the truth. The call to return stirs their pride and brings them to the question how they should return. It proves how dull they are in their sense of what sin is. The answer comes in the following verses.

### **Mal 3:8-9 | Robbing God**

8 *“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation [of you]!”*

God answers their question in which they must return with a question in which the answer is included (verse 8). The answer is that it is of course impossible to rob God. Yet God asks that question, because He wants to draw their attention and make them think about it. In a certain sense they do rob God, and that is by withholding something from Him. With great emphasis He says: “Yet you are robbing Me!”

Again, the brutal reaction is to substantiate this accusation. God needs to prove how they have robbed Him. Immediately the answer comes. They rob Him “in tithes and offerings”. They disobey what He said about it in His Word. He often speaks about giving the tithes, of which there are also different kinds (Lev 27:30-33; Num 18:26-28; Deu 12:18; 14:28-29).

If the people do not give the tithes, the Levites and priests, who live on the tithes, cannot do their work either and have to look for other work for their income (Neh 13:10-13). The offerings are also part of the priest's food (Exo 29:27-28; Lev 7:34; 10:14-15; Num 5:9). If the offerings are not brought, they lack food.

When the Levites, due to lack of income, have to do other work, it is also at the expense of their service to God. God is thus deprived of their service. Failure to bring the tithes also affects the widows and orphans. God has decreed that they must receive of the tithes for their livelihood (Deu 26:12).



Whoever robs God, that is, whoever withholds Him what He is entitled to, causes a lot of evil.

He who robs God does not receive a blessing either, but a curse (verse 9). The people are miserable. They sigh under the curse (Mal 2:2). Here God indicates the cause of it. They rob Him and they continue to do so. And it is not just a single person who does that. No, “the whole nation of them” is guilty of it. But they refuse to understand that the curse that afflicts them is their own fault.

### **Mal 3:10 | Test Me**

*10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.*

The case is not hopeless. God gives a clue that is a challenge to faith. He asks them to bring “the whole tithe,” not just part of their income, “into the storehouse” of the temple. Then there will be “food in My house”, that is, the priests and Levites serving in the sanctuary will then have food to eat.

If they respond to this, He will give an abundant blessing. It must be on His terms. If they want God to open His storeroom, they must first open their storeroom to take the tithes. Those tithes must be brought into “My house”, which is the temple (Neh 10:38; 13:12; 2Chr 31:10).

We often reason that God must first give us abundance and then we can give. But God says: ‘First bring all tithes into the storehouse. If you do that, you will see what I do.’ He then opens “the windows of heaven” to pour out blessing on them in such quantities that there are no barns enough to contain them.

By this He means that He will give an abundance of rain by which the land will give an abundant harvest. The abundance will be so great that they will not have enough barns to store it (cf. Deu 28:12). He can also fulfill this word by providing His people with food in a special way, as with the miraculous salvation of Samaria (2Kgs 7:2,19).

If we first give God His share, He gives us what He has, which is many times more than we have given Him. We see an example of this in what Elijah says to the widow of Zarephath. The woman has only a handful of

flour and a little oil, just enough for a last meal for her and her son. Still, Elijah asks the woman to make him a little bread cake from it first. He adds that she can afterward prepare something for her and her son. The woman does that. Her faith is richly rewarded, because “the bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty” (1Kgs 17:13,16).

God answers our trust in Him with abundant blessing. We “are not under law but under grace” (Rom 6:14). But from this we should not draw the conclusion that ‘therefore’ it does not matter how much we give. Would God be satisfied with two or three percent instead of ten percent? Those who think in this way have little understanding of the true Christian position, of the love that is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:10).

Without any command, the first Christians in Jerusalem do not give ten percent, but hundred percent (Acts 2:45). Would not love lead us not to give as little as possible, but as much as possible? Coercion comes from a law, love gratefully and joyfully gives what it can, and especially enjoys fellowship therein with God, the great Giver (2Cor 9:7,15).

To the extent that the believer has prosperity (1Cor 16:2), the Lord expects a generous gift from him for His work and for the needy saints. Why does it say: “And do not neglect doing good and sharing” (Heb 13:16)? Because we tend to forget them, and then hastily and arbitrarily fish a bit out of our wallets. Let’s see if we have anything left. God often has to be content with our leftovers. That goes for our possessions and also for our time.

Also to us applies: “Honor the LORD from your wealth And from the first of all your produce” (Pro 3:9). Everything we have belongs to Him. Christ bought us for God with His blood (1Cor 6:20; Rev 5:9). This concerns our body and everything we possess. We rob Him when we live for ourselves and use our possessions for ourselves. Should He also say to us: ‘Look at your bank account. To whom does that money belong? What do you want to do with it?’ The Christian does not look at what he can miss, but asks the Lord what he may spend for himself, because everything is His.

### **Mal 3:11-12 | Blessed and Be a Blessing**

*11 Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast [its grapes],” says the LORD*

*of hosts. 12 "All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the LORD of hosts.*

When they test the LORD, not only does He give them an abundance of blessing, but He will make sure that there is no more destruction in the land (verse 11). He will remove judgment and stop the advance of the voracious grasshopper, the devourer, so that he no longer destroys the fruit of the land and the fruit of the trees. God has authority over all creatures; He calls them and sends them wherever He wants, even to His people if necessary. He can also put an end to them when they are no longer needed.

The result is that "all the nations will call" them "blessed" (verse 12). By their return to the LORD they will not only receive blessing themselves, but will also be a blessing for others. They will "be a delightful land". The revelation of the favor of God will be so rich that the surrounding countries will call them blessed.

These promises are based on the Old Testament principle that blessing is given by God when the people obey, just as the curse comes upon them when they disobey (Deu 28:15). Their stay in the land, their freedom from disease, earthly blessings in every form and shape, it all depends on their behavior toward the statutes and precepts they have received from God. They have also committed themselves to this (Exo 19:8; 24:3,7).

### **Mal 3:13-15 | Serving God Is Useless**

*13 "Your words have been arrogant against Me," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?' 14 You have said, 'It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts? 15 So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape.'"*

In verse 13 we are back in the topicality of the days of Malachi. The LORD has a new indictment against them. He brings to the attention of His people the words they have spoken against Him. These words have shown that they are audacious, hard and rebellious, even aggressive. There is an increase in the resistance against God.

And again they react with an insolent objection as to whether the LORD wants to show what they have spoken among themselves against Him. They feel absolutely nothing of what God accuses them of. They lack all Godliness. Nothing in them is attuned to God. And let's not forget: we are dealing here with members of God's people.

The LORD says to them what their talk among themselves consists of (verse 14). Their arrogance is clear from what they say: "It is vain to serve God." And that is precisely the life of man. Serving God is the privilege and duty of the creature and gives him the true meaning and purpose of his life. But they do not agree with that. Serving God, according to them, yields nothing, because they do not get what they want, namely material prosperity.

Well, if so, you'd better stop serving Him. Why will they do their duty for Him if He will not reward them for it? That is how they talk among themselves. Instead of encouraging each other to faithfully fulfill their task for the LORD, they encourage each other to give up their faithfulness to Him. They complain that they have gained nothing with their religion. On the contrary, they suffer from poverty and sorrow.

Walking "in mourning" doesn't help either, they conclude. Keeping fasts, refraining from food, does not bring any profit either. And for that you do your religious obligations, don't you? Quid pro quo. They do what God asks, so God must be very happy with that and give them prosperity. But look at the state they are in... only misery.

What they are blind to is that the problem lies with them and not with God. They don't realize that they only serve God outwardly and that they are depraved inwardly. God sees the heart and that does not beat for Him. What He seeks are torn, repentant hearts and not torn or black clothes (Joel 2:13).

They have completely finished with God. "So", it is better to be arrogant and proud (verse 15). Such people make it in the world. They are prosperous, and even if they test God – here in the sense of proudly challenging – they are not punished, but escape. Life in the world is much better than doing your best to please God as a Christian. If you want to live for God,

all you get is trouble. Many so-called Christians have already talked like that.

### **Mal 3:16-17 | Those Who Fear the LORD**

*16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard [it], and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name. 17 "They will be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "on the day that I prepare [My] own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him."*

In the previous three verses, God reveals that He knows what ungodly people say to each other about Him. He takes note of that (cf. Jer 8:6). In verse 16 we read that He also knows what the God-fearing people say to each other about Him. Among the rebellious people of the previous verses are some who are not rebellious, they know each other and talk to each other. The LORD finds His joy in them and joins them, however few they are.

In the midst of all the bragging, there is a remnant that does not have a big mouth about their own abilities, but talk a lot about the LORD. They fear Him, they are full of reverence for Him. Instead of inciting one another to become unfaithful to a God Who makes things so difficult, they encourage one another. They point out to each other that He does heed them and listens to them. This remnant trusts Him, right through all the trials. We see them, for example, in Luke 1-2, just before and just after the birth of the Lord Jesus, in Zechariah and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary, the shepherds, Simeon and Anna.

The Lord knows also in our time all those who remain faithful to Him in the midst of apostate Christianity. We do not usually see this in mass meetings, but in personal contacts. We should not think like Elijah that we are left alone. The Lord takes note of everything someone says about Him in order to encourage others to remain faithful to Him.

It is human speaking to say that everything is written in a "book of remembrance" (cf. Est 6:1-2; Psa 56:8). God does not need that book. The book serves to give us insight into the value He attaches to us speaking about Him. It is about those "who fear the LORD and who esteem His name".

Reverence for Him is evidenced by the esteem of His Name. His Name is the expression of His Being, Who He is. Esteem for His Name is evident not so much from what is said about that Name, but from meditating on it day and night (Psa 1:2). Esteem means to have such a high regard for that Name that it completely occupies the heart and mind.

Not denying His Name is also one of the characteristics of those who remain faithful to Him in the midst of total decay in the end times in which we live (Rev 3:8). Esteem or reverence for His Name means that we honor Him for Who He is. We may experience this in a special way when we come together as a church. The Lord Jesus speaks about the fact that even if there are only two or three who come together in His Name, He is there in the midst (Mt 18:20). The end time in God's Word is not connected to mass gatherings and impressive signs and miracles, but to small numbers.

The LORD speaks of the believers who form this remnant out of the joy of what they will be to Him (verse 17). They are to Him His "own possession" (Exo 19:5; Deu 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). In it we hear that they are precious to Him, that they are a special treasure (Isa 62:3). His eye and His heart go out to them.

He will openly express this "on the day I prepare", which is the day of His coming. Then they will shine as something precious to Him in the face of the wicked. Now they are still hidden, but then they will be revealed with Him in glory (Mt 13:43).

They will be spared and will not perish in judgment because they are in relationship to Him as a son who serves his father faithfully. It is His appreciation of their devotion to Him, right through all opposition. He can spare them because He has not spared the Son, His own Son, Who served Him perfectly (Rom 8:32).

### **Mal 3:18 | The Distinction Is Seen**

*18 So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.*

The differences between the righteous and the wicked members of God's people are now only appreciated by God. The wicked are still in control. But the time will come when this distinction will be seen and acknowl-

edged by everyone. This will happen on the day that the LORD will prepare (verse 17).

The faithless have thrown at God that it is useless to serve Him (verses 14-15). But on the day the LORD will prepare, they will clearly see the difference to their great shame and disgrace. They will then have to admit that God is righteous. They will then see who really lived for Him and have to acknowledge that and admit that they themselves were the wicked ones. The further explanation will come in the next chapter.

## Malachi 4

### **Mal 4:1 | The Day of the LORD Comes Burning**

*1 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."*

The day to come is the day of the LORD, that is the period in which Christ claims and exercises world government. Then it is over and out with 'the human court', literally 'human day' (1Cor 4:3), that is the period in which man has everything in control, the time in which we live. The day of the LORD comes "burning like a furnace", which means that that day is heralded by judgment. "Burning like a furnace" indicates the intensity of the fire, its heat, and shows the greatness of God's vengeance (2Thes 1:7-8).

The arrogant, praised and blessed by the unfaithful members of God's people (Mal 3:15), and the wicked of the people themselves, will be nothing more than chaff in the flaming fire of God's judgment. That is all that remains of the highly praised arrogance. The contrast between what they imagine in their lives without God and what they are when the fire of God's judgment ignites against them cannot be painted more dramatically.

Once again Malachi says that the day that comes will set them ablaze. "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29). He radically judges all who have rebelled against Him. There is nothing left of them on earth. "Neither root nor branch" is left. They are both ends of the tree: the root deep in the ground and the branch high in the air. Once the root has been eradicated, nothing can grow out of it. Once the branch is exterminated, it cannot take root. The judgment is total. God will remove all stumbling blocks from His kingdom and throw them into the fire (Mt 13:41-42).

By the way, this is about the appearance of the Lord Jesus on earth and not about His coming for the church in the air. No unbeliever will be a witness to the latter. If He appears on earth, it will be together with the church.



### Mal 4:2-3 | The Sun of Righteousness Rises

2 *“But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.*

3 *You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,” says the LORD of hosts.*

In these two verses we see the enormous contrast between what awaits the wicked and what awaits the believers. Again we see the fear of the Name of the LORD (verse 2; Mal 3:16). On earth they have suffered for that Name, but when the Lord Jesus comes, the situation will change completely for them.

After the dark night of the great tribulation He comes as the Sun of righteousness bringing light, warmth, freedom, joy and health (cf. Isa 60:2; Psa 84:11a; Lk 1:78-79). He “is as the light of the morning [when] the sun rises, A morning without clouds,” (2Sam 23:4a). The sun is the symbol of dominion over the day (Gen 1:16). Thus, the day of the LORD is marked by His dominion.

The rays of the sun are compared to wings under which is healing. When the Lord Jesus comes, He will judge the enemies of His people. But for His people He brings healing. He will heal all the wounds inflicted upon His people. They will become a healthy people in body and mind. He makes everything well. He brings forgiveness and healing (Psa 103:3).

His appearance will put an end to forced hiding for fear of the antichrist’s reign of terror. The believers will emerge from their hiding places. They will “skip about like calves” coming out of the stall after the winter in freedom and in the warmth of the sun. It is the picture of spring.

In addition, the believers of the remnant will be skipping with joy, they will also be used by the Lord Jesus to execute the judgment on the wicked (verse 3). Those who were trampled first, will now trample them by whom they were trampled. It will be a reversal of the earlier situation (cf. 2Thes 1:6-7).

Here it is clear that Christ, when He comes, will not enter a world that welcomes Him. He will not enter a world that has been won over to Him

by the gospel. If that were the case, there would be no wicked people to trample on.

#### **Mal 4:4 | Moses**

4 *“Remember the law of Moses My servant, [even the] statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.*

Malachi begins with his closing words. He makes a final appeal to the people. In doing so he connects himself as the last Bible writer of the Old Testament with the first Bible writer, Moses. Between them lies a period of more than twelve hundred years. Because they are both led by the same Spirit, there is no difference of opinion between them. Because there will be no prophet for four hundred years until John the Baptist starts preaching, the people of God will be all the more dependent on the Word of God through Moses.

Malachi calls on the people to remember this. They have to read and observe again the law of Moses which God has – not given, but – “commanded him”. A return to the Word of God is the only possibility for restoration. This applies to all times, including today (cf. Isa 8:20).

God commanded “in Horeb” the law “for all Israel”. The remembrance of the law of Moses is the remembrance of the unchanging basis of His covenant with them. Their safety, and ours as well, lies in obedience to God’s Word. We need the unchanging Word. If we forget it, we must be brought back to it.

#### **Mal 4:5-6 | Elijah**

5 *“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 6 He will restore the hearts of the fathers to [their] children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”*

In the previous verse Moses is presented as the legislator. In these last two verses we see Elijah. His service was to bring the people who had deviated from God’s law back to obedience to the law. In these last verses, Moses and Elijah are connected. The law and the prophets remain as long as the earth exists. We also see in Moses a look back to the origins and in Elijah a

glimpse into the future, what it will be like. The assessment of the present must always take place in the light of the past or that of the future.

Both men together have been of great significance to the people of God and the significance of their service remains for future generations. We meet them together on the mountain of transfiguration in the presence of the Lord Jesus (Mt 17:3). This is a foretaste of the time when Christ reigns in glory and everything will be in conformity with everything they, by order of God, have presented to the people.

When the Lord has come down from the mountain with His three disciples, they ask about Elijah (Mt 17:9-13). On the mountain they have tasted something of the coming kingdom. But they also know about this verse here, in Malachi. They have understood from what the scribes say that Elijah must first come before the Messiah can be revealed. Now they have seen the Messiah in the Lord Jesus, but without seeing Elijah coming beforehand.

The Lord answers that Elijah certainly comes first. In this the scribes are right, for it is in accordance with the prophecy. At the same time, He adds that Elijah will restore all things. The effect of the coming of Elijah is the restoration of all things. Also the Son of man has yet to come, that is to say in glory on earth. The Lord Jesus speaks about that coming in glory and in connection with what Malachi here (verse 5) speaks about, namely, the coming of Elijah. Also in Revelation 11 we have a reference to the service of Moses and Elijah in connection with the coming of the Lord Jesus to earth (Rev 11:3-6).

Before He will come in that way, it is necessary that He be presented to the people as the promised Messiah to see if the people will accept Him. He has come to His people in humiliation, to test His people. The result is that He is rejected, as God has prophesied in the prophets. Because John the baptist has come in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk 1:17), the Lord Jesus can say that Elijah has already come. But they have rejected John as His forerunner (Isa 40:3-5; Mal 3:1).

After this explanation, the disciples understand that in John the baptist Elijah has already come, but that the people as a whole have not listened to his message and are therefore not ready to receive the Messiah. Malachi

has also spoken about the coming of John the baptist (Mal 3:1). If John the baptist had been accepted with his message, he would have been Elijah. He performed his service in the spirit and power of Elijah and testified of the coming Messiah.

But John is beheaded and Christ is crucified. That is why Elijah will come once again. He will come again to test the hearts in view of the coming Messiah Who then will not come in humiliation but in glory. Malachi speaks about the coming of Elijah here in verses 5-6.

The purpose of the coming of Elijah is to work restoration between the generations to make them spiritually fit to receive the Messiah (verse 6). Families are ruined by the loss of parental authority. Authority is the framework within which the right relationships between parents and children are developed. The devil is busy spiritually robbing us of our children. It is because of our changed view of them that he succeeds. That is why first the hearts of the fathers have to be restored to their children. Then the hearts of the children will be restored to their fathers.

This reunion is the basis of blessing. If there is no breakthrough here, this means that the LORD will have to smite the land with a curse when He comes. The Lord Jesus will indeed have to smite the land with a curse at His coming. We see how children increasingly disobey their parents (2Tim 3:2). More and more children do not even know who their parents are. A normal, biblical family life is disappearing more and more from society.

But there will also be those who will come to repentance through the work of God's Spirit. They will listen to the call to repentance and be restored in their family relationships. The curse does not affect them. When the Lord Jesus comes, they go with Him into the realm of peace. There, under His blessed reign, they will enjoy all the blessings a family on earth can enjoy.

With these words about the service of Moses and Elijah, the prophetic testimony of the Old Testament ends. God no longer sends messengers to His people until He again speaks to them through John the baptist in the New Testament.



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