



Lesson 5 March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## Leading Justly

Study Scripture – Malachi 2:1-9; 3:5-6

Background Scripture – Deuteronomy 17:8-13 & Malachi 2-3

### Key Verse:

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

**Malachi 2:2**

### INTRODUCTION

We seem to often forget that the unpleasant fact that leaders and their behavior reflect the kind of people that they lead and the behavior of the followers. When we have bad leaders, leaders who do not follow the Commandments of God we often wonder whether the chicken or the egg comes first. We know from experience that when leaders are entrusted with great responsibility and yet they are casual about their tasks they are in fact reflecting that they too are like the people from which they came.

God now faced this situation at the time of the book of Malachi. God certainly was concerned about His people for it appears that all of the people and the leaders had lost that sense of God's love for them. For some strange reason despite their history they found it difficult to believe that God really cared for them and was interested in them. They did not see that God loved them and so they could not therefore respond in a loving way to God. Their love for God, their worship had gone cold, and so as expected the conditions of worship, family life, and care for the vulnerable and the dispossessed in the nation was at rock bottom.

They would even compare themselves to the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, saying that the judgment of the Edomites was not a demonstration of God's love for Israel, for the situation both in Edom and in Israel was not that great. The Edomites, the children of Esau, were looking at their depressed condition and were saying that though things were not good with them they would rebuild their nation.

But the prophet had to remind Israel that Edom could say what they wanted but they would not rise again. They had no future and they had no hope. God had warned that He would tear them down, but in the case of Israel they had a future and a hope because of the promises to the fathers.

We are therefore looking at the people that did not respond to the love and affection of God and so they could not worship God in any acceptable fashion.

Notice then the spiritual malaise was to be found both in the leadership, in the priests who we know had a central and pivotal role in the life of the nation, as well as in the personal life of the people.

Malachi the prophet had to address the priests because they were the representatives of the nation. They were condoning what the people were doing. The people were bringing blemished sacrifices, blind, and sick animals to be sacrificed in the Temple instead of bringing their best. The priests did not own animals and agricultural land for produce but depended on what the people brought to the Temple for sacrifice, for they kept a part of the sacrifices for their support.

The priests therefore were very foolish because they were hurting themselves when they were guilty of accepting and going along with a perverted form of worship in which the people as well as they habitually despised the Lord.

The priest was arguably the central person the Old Testament economy of Israel. The holy, covenant-keeping God Yahweh dwelt among His people and in order for that situation to continue certain rituals, observations and covenant responsibilities had to be taught and observed. The priest was

1. The mediator between God and His people (Exod. 28).
2. His role was to offer sacrifices which dealt with sins and maintained a harmonious relationship with God;
3. He made intercession on behalf of the people because the system established by God was that by way of sacrifices offered it gave the priests divine access. Similarly when the Lord Jesus offered the once and for all sacrifice on the Cross He could then intercede for those for whom the sacrifice was made;
4. He was to teach God's law to the people (Lev. 10:11; Deut. 33:10) and
5. Act as a court of appeal (Deut.17:8-9).

Even a cursory look at these responsibilities shows that any failure or lack on the part of the priest would have serious, negative impacts on the nation as well as on themselves. Much of the charges brought by God through Malachi in this book could be traced to a failure of the priest.

The parallel in our day are the false or weak and accommodating church leaders who do not teach the truth of God's word. Many live immoral lives with the result church-goers have a warped view of God and His standards for their lives and they in turn question God's character when their expectations are disappointed.

We should therefore be aware that when they perpetuate a perverted type of worship they are not only harming the people, but in fact they are harming themselves. They might think that what they squeeze from the people amount to a great deal of blessing for them, but they don't



realize that if they had followed the ways of God their blessings from the people and from God would amount to a lot more.

Note therefore the very important fact that when leaders and in this particular case the priests had grown cold in their love for God and went along with the people, being disobedient to God's commandments there is a critically important lesson for us today. When leaders are bad it really means the people are bad.

So let us be warned. Let us all examine ourselves from top to bottom. When judgment comes the leaders and priests will suffer and the people themselves will also suffer. We should not want that to happen. So hence Malachi had to call for repentance and a renewal of the covenant.

The Book of Malachi records the ministry of the last of the three prophets that spoke for God after the people of Judah returned from forced exile in Babylon. There followed what is called the four hundred silent years in the history of Israel after this exchange; where God revealed His disappointment with His people and the people made clear their disappointment with God. There was no prophetic word after the ministry of Malachi until the appearance of John the Baptist, (Mark 1; Matthew 3).

The Temple was completed under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Haggai, and Zechariah in 516 B.C. Almost one hundred years passed to the time of Malachi, and whatever reforms were instituted at the time of that watershed event were long compromised, ignored and spiritual apathy had become the order of the day.

The people were disregarding the priests and the Temple, they were not always bringing the acceptable high-quality sacrifices and tithes and offerings. Their worship had become mechanical, tiresome, their sacrifices were no sacrifice at all, only the poorest quality grain and sick and lame animals were offered. There was intermarriage with foreigners, divorce was rampant and social justice had become a victim of the times.

Note however that it was not that the people hated God, they were simply indifferent to Him. The promises of Haggai and Ezra had not yet materialized, the people were totally engrossed in the problems of the day, had forgotten about God and began to doubt the benefits of their relationship with Him.

Malachi faced a people who were in deep spiritual stupor. They were no longer worshiping idols, but everything else about their conduct reflected a serious spiritual malaise. Malachi's mission, called a burden (1:1) was to rebuke the people for their sins. God's would use a number of questions and answers to probe and expose their false sense of security, wicked practices and corrupt priesthood.

Sadly, the spiritual rot in the nation started at the top, with the priests. The spiritual guardians and teachers treated God with indifference. They were accused of not honouring the word of



God, nor did they teach the people the ways of God. Inevitably this led to a moral and spiritual decline, as various sins started manifesting themselves in the lives of the people.

God regarded the conduct of the priests as a sham and He promised to personally defile them, cut off their blessings and reject them as individuals. Neglect of their teaching ministry was partly to be blamed for the people's attitude toward God. It appears the people saw no issue with lackadaisical worship, divorce, marrying pagans and insulting sacrifices to God.

So of course pay special attention to the fact that blaming the priests for the problems of the people in no way let the guilty off the hook; they were responsible for their sin even if they were unaware of Scriptures but the guilt was greater for those who by their false teaching condoned sin in the nation.

Malachi directly addressed the priests in the Study Text. The short message breaks down into three parts: the condemnation (vv. 1-4), the covenant standard (vv. 5-7) and the charge (vv. 8, 9). He first condemned them for their failure in ministry; this would have grabbed their attention and sparked their interest to see what he was so exercised over. He then laid out the standard for their spiritual service so they would know what they had failed to do, and finally he states explicitly what they had done wrong in the light of that standard. This message was likely delivered at the Temple and must have caused quite a stir.

The passage focused on the priests particularly but also spoke to the guilty nation to remind them that no matter what the priests taught; the people were to obey Scripture. Jesus in His day had to remind the people that when the Pharisees 'sat in Moses' seat' (Matt. 23) they had to listen to them, but Jesus also warned to beware of their false teachings, their leaven. So the laity must be discerning, they must know the word of God well enough to discern when the teacher or preacher gets it wrong. All these applications remain today, even though Malachi preached over twenty-four hundred years ago.

Those who teach the Bible, pastors, teachers, missionaries, or any others, must be very careful how they interpret and apply Scripture. The hearers of Scripture must study to know if the message or lesson is true or not. Today we are falling down on both counts.

Among other things Malachi taught that:

- Yahweh would help His people;
- He would hold them accountable for their evil when He comes as judge;
- Yahweh will honor their faithfulness when He comes as judge
- Urged the people to repent of their evil for covenant blessings to flow.

Malachi mentions no kings at the beginning of his book. This makes establishing an approximate date for the prophet's ministry challenging. Even so, the book's contents offer some clues. The issues addressed by Malachi were similar to those facing God's people in the time of Nehemiah in the fifth century BC. With permission from King Artaxerxes of Persia, Nehemiah had traveled from Persia to Judah around 445 BC to rebuild Jerusalem's walls.



Some issues addressed by both Nehemiah and Malachi include:

- mixed marriages (Nehemiah 13:23–27; Malachi 2:11),
- the failure to tithe (Nehemiah 13:10–14; Malachi 3:8–10), and
- corrupt priests (Nehemiah 13:4–9; Malachi 1:6–2:9).

These similarities point to a date for Malachi that is post-exilic which means the setting is an era after the exile in Babylon (Chaldea) ended in 538 BC (Ezra 1:1–4).

Bolstering the conclusion that Malachi is post-exilic is the use of the title “governor” (Malachi 1:8). This was Nehemiah’s official title (Nehemiah 5:14; Haggai 1:1; 2:21); before the exile, Judah had kings, not governors. Based on these and other facts, scholars conclude that Malachi is chronologically the last of the prophets, of about 430 BC.

As we study the text, we should examine ourselves to see whether or not our lives display a serious commitment to God, whether God takes first place in our lives. Do we offer God the best we have, the things that delight us, things which cost us the most and that matter most to us e.g., our time!

## THE TEXT

Up to the point where our Study Text begins, Malachi has written in dialogue format. This involves first stating a proposition from the Lord or presenting a scenario, then anticipating a response. That response is followed by the Lord’s rejoinder. Variations of this technique are found throughout the book. This is Malachi’s method of challenging his audience to rethink their practices and alter their way of living.

Verse 1. And now... at the point of our text, Malachi has already said much about the poor quality of leadership demonstrated by the priests. When the prophet first mentions the priests, he describes them as despising the Lord’s name (Mal.1:6). The priests were abusing their sacred office by offering defective, unacceptable sacrifices (1:7, 8).

God made it clear in the Law of Moses that only the best was to be brought to Him in worship. In the case of animals, only those unblemished are to be brought (Leviticus 1:3, 10; 3:1). But instead of finding delight in the privilege of preparing such offerings, these priests look on their work as a “weariness” (Malachi 1:13). The commandment about to be voiced was an invitation or really a charge to hear God anew and repent.

The verse before us therefore begins the transition from problem to solution—or consequences for allowing the problem to continue. God in reality is no longer analyzing the problem but in fact is really saying what He’s going to do to remedy the problem. The problem has already been described or stated in Malachi 1 and so now it was a time for a clear warning of judgment. We can see the kind of warning that would come for in the previous chapter there was a clear



statement of the love of God for the nation in spite of them profaning His name. Therefore in verse 13 God had declared His position in the universe which required action:

“For I am a great King”  
Says the LORD of hosts,  
And My name is to be feared among the nations”.

Verse 2. If ye will not hear ...the Lord issues a solemn warning to the delinquent priests. Their ministry was intended to bring glory to the Lord’s name (Matthew 15:7–9; 1 Timothy 6:16; Revelation 5:12, 13). He was the One they served. The work they did was to be viewed as a privilege.

But if the priests were unwilling to lay it to heart—take seriously—what the Lord says, then the Lord will send a curse upon them and even curse their blessings (Deuteronomy 11:26; 28:20; Jeremiah 13:17). This may refer to the blessing that the priests are to pronounce on the Israelites

(Num. 6:22–27). If so, then God will make that declaration null and void. The unfortunate truth is that unholy priests cause suffering for all the people.

Another possible interpretation is that God will curse the harvest so that the crops will not produce as they should. This happened in the time of Haggai nearly a century earlier (Haggai 1:5–11). Since the Law of Moses commands that a tithe of the harvest be given to the Levites (Numbers 18:21), a poor crop means a reduced provision for them. (We remind ourselves that all priests were Levites but not all Levites were priests.)

Referring to God as the LORD of hosts emphasizes His power, especially as a warrior in prophetic books (Isaiah 10:24–26; Jeremiah 11:20; Nahum 2:13). So serious is the heart condition of these priests and the shameful conduct that is the outcome, God says He has already cursed their blessings. The problem with the priests was their attitude toward the ministry and the lack of honor to God in their lives

Verse 3. Behold, I will corrupt your seed, ...sinful behavior of a person or group often has consequences for their seed (descendants; 1 Kings 14:9, 10). God declared this to be so in His instructions that accompanied the second commandment (Exodus 20:4, 5). The Hebrew word behind the rendering corrupt is usually translated “rebuke” (Genesis 37:10; Zechariah 3:2), and that is the sense here.

... spread dung upon your faces... the Lord’s rebuke is depicted in a most shocking manner. Normally the dung of animals that are sacrificed, along with the contents of their intestines, was to be taken outside the camp of the Israelites and burned (Exodus 29:14; Leviticus 4:11, 12). If human waste is in view rather than that of animals, the picture is more shocking still (Deut. 23:12–14; Ezekiel 4:12–15). To have dung on one’s face is to be massively dishonored. The language is probably not to be viewed in literal, physical terms. Rather, it is a way of vividly describing how repulsed the Lord is by the priests’ conduct.



... one shall take you away... The priests and their offerings were considered to be in the same category and were themselves to be smeared with refuse and removed from the camp and destroyed (Nah. 3:5-6).

Verse 4. And ye shall know ... the delinquent priests have forgotten, either through passive carelessness or by active intent, the roots of their sacred office and heritage. The priestly covenant goes back to Jacob's son Levi, some of whose descendants were assigned the priesthood (Numbers 3:5-13). Anytime a role is inherited instead of earned by merit, the danger is greater that a person will simply go through the motions. Those of the Levitical priesthood were not immune to this pitfall.

... my covenant might be with Levi, ... God intended His covenant with Levi, Aaron and their seed to continue (Num. 25:11-13).

Verses 5-7 describe how a true priest should act. He should follow the example of Levi, (Deut. 33:8-11):

1. Revere God
2. Speak the truth
3. Walk with God
4. Teach knowledge
5. Be a true messenger of the Lord

Verse 5. ... life and peace ... the special blessings promised to Levi were life and peace, spiritual blessings associated with the Levites' special place in God's service. Levi's descendants in turn were to respond to these favors with fear, expressed as grave respect for the godly tasks they were given (Hebrews 12:28, 29).

When one looks at the life of Levi himself, he does not appear to exemplify a great deal of fear toward the Lord. He and his brother Simeon misused the covenant sign of circumcision to avenge the cruel treatment of their sister, Dinah, by Shechem (Genesis 34; 49:5). The Lord's words here perhaps describe what was true of Levi's descendants when Moses pronounced his final blessing on that tribe (Deuteronomy 33:8-11). Later, the Levites did prove themselves to be a God-fearing tribe (Exodus 32:25-29; Numbers 25:6-13).

But we should never forget that the priests had an example of someone a descendent of Levi who had been the perfect example of honoring the name of God. We read in Numbers 25 the story of a man called Phineas who knew that the false Prophet Balaam had advised the Moabites that the way to destroy Israel was to have the men of Israel engage in sexual activities with the Moabite women. The woman then would encourage the Israelite men into participating in their pagan rituals and worship. This advice was followed when the Israelites were at Shittim, and in response God sent a plague in Israel. God was so angry that He told Moses to take the leaders of Israel and execute them in broad daylight so that His fierce anger would turn away from Israel. While Moses was giving his instruction to the judges in Israel lo



and behold one of the men of Israel was so barefaced in his iniquity and disrespect to God that he brought a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the congregation who had been weeping at the door of the Tent of Meeting and took her into a tent to have sexual relations. When Phinehas saw the man from the people go into the tent with the Moabite woman he spontaneously without any instruction from Moses or the judges took up his spear and went into the tent and rammed the spear through the man and the woman and killed them. One writer points out  
“Phineas, jealous for the glory of God , made an atonement by a single mediatorial act of executing judgment”.

The plague was stayed after 24,000 people were killed and Israel was brought into a relationship of peace with God .God was so pleased that Phinehas saw the necessity for judgment and the upholding of God's law that God praised him and made a covenant of peace and life with him so that the priestly line was carried through his descendants. Psalm 106 recorded this incident of the people provoking God and Phinehas stood out as mediator and stopped the plague. God therefore wants people to stand up for Him. The priests and the people very well knew this incident in the history of Israel, and they knew what God had said:

“Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consider will the children of Israel in My zeal.

Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace.

And it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel”.

They, the priests at the time were not prepared to stand up for the honor of God's name. You can be sure that there were many at the time in Israel that did not like what God did. You can be sure that the priests present would tell you that they were not despising the Lord but we're going to vote their business in a way that they felt was proper. They were really only clock punchers, coming into the Temple at a specific time, doing their job, and punching out at the accepted time. There was no love and no zeal.

... was afraid before my name... a proper attitude toward God is crucial. Our religious actions are judged by our motives! God looks at the heart first, then the covenant obedience becomes significant. It is always heart, then life, then perseverance!

Verse 6. The law of truth ... three important responsibilities for priests are highlighted in this verse. First, they were to teach the law of truth faithfully (Deuteronomy 33:10). This involves communicating the Lord's requirements to His people (17:9–13). No iniquity is to be found in a priest's speech; a characteristic highly commended by James for the new covenant era (James 3:2).

He walked with me in peace and equity... second, the priest's daily walk was to be consistent with his faith profession (Genesis 5:22). To be a person of peace goes hand in hand with loving God's law (Psalm 119:165). The Hebrew word underneath the translation equity can also be



translated “straight” as opposed to “crooked” (Isaiah 40:4; 42:16), and that is the sense here. It indicates that the person is virtuous and lacks any deceit (John 1:47). The faithful priest exhibits high moral character (Psalm 25:21).

And did turn many away from iniquity.... third, the faithful priest is dedicated to helping others (James 5:19, 20). The priest is to set the kind of example that draws others to follow and imitate his righteous lifestyle. His teaching of God’s law should have this result.

Verse 7. ... The priests in Malachi’s day neglected and even abused the divinely given role they were called to fulfill: every priest is the Lord’s messenger. Priests are, in a very real sense, the Lord’s representatives to the people, as those priests bring God’s message (Ezra 7:11; Nehemiah 8). Priests were to look to Him for the knowledge and instruction found only in His law (Leviticus 10:11).

... he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts ... Priests were to transmit God’s law from generation to generation. Theirs was precious cargo that the people needed. But there’s an even bigger picture to consider: the nation as a whole was to communicate the future arrival of the Messiah to the waiting world.

Verse 8. ... departed... the verb implies a settled condition. All of the Hebrew terms for sin a little reflect a deviation from the standard, which is God Himself.

...out of the way... this is a pivotal concept in our understanding of God's will for our lives. God desires for us to follow Him in lifestyle ways. That is why in the Old Testament ‘the way’ was a metaphor for godly living (Exod. 32:8; Deut. 9:12, 16).

This same term, ‘the way’, is used in the book of Acts as the earliest title for the Church (Acts 9:1; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 22:4).

There’s an important lesson for any Christian too, who seeks teaching (Matt. 15:14; 18:5-6; Luke 6:39) and showing partiality (vs. 9). Godly priests turned people to God (vs. 6); godless priests turned them away! They also brought down the spiritual influence of all other priests.

The task of keeping the covenant of Levi means nothing to the delinquent priests (Jeremiah 2:8). Whether the problem was one of mere negligence or of active rebellion, the result is the same: many people stumble (18:15; Hosea 4:6).

LORD of hosts... (Lord of armies) used frequently in Malachi reminds the hearers of the authority and might of the Speaker.

Verse 9. ...therefore... because of their actions God will act against these priests: They will be despised, and they will be abased and note that it is Yahweh Himself who will embarrass the priests before all of the covenant community.



... but have been partial... literally "lifting faces in the law." This idiom refers to a judge lifting the face of someone coming before him to see if he knows the person before rendering a fair verdict (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17; 10:17; 16:19).

The verse makes the case that the problem was not just one of negligence; if it were, the verse could stop with the phrase ye have not kept my ways. The phrase but have been partial in the law points to conscious, intentional disregard of God's ways (era of the Judges, 1 Samuel 2:27–33). To be partial in applying the law is abhorrent to the Lord; frequent warnings against doing so are found in the Law of Moses, (Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 16:19).

Apostasy in life and doctrine is a terrible thing. It leads finally to judgment. Evil leaders and people cannot escape retribution. One writer states:

“Measure for measure. You despise me, I will make you despised. These are words incidentally that come from 1 Samuel....

But there is an important lesson for preachers. The one you seek to please is not the man in the pew. The one you seek to please is above. There's an important lesson for any Christian too, who seeks to witness for Jesus Christ. The important person to please is not the person to whom you talk. The important person to please is the Lord.

Are you in awe of him? Are you really honoring his name? Has God given you the courage to stand and to forthrightly proclaim his word to an individual, to a class, to people or just in your life? That I think, is the challenge of this section”.

#### MALACHI 3:5,6

The Lord does not merely state a problem and stop there. He goes on to give the solution, which begins in Malachi 3:1. His 'messenger' will “prepare the way” before Him. John the Baptist is the one who will fulfill Malachi's prophecy (Matthew 11:10).

Malachi goes on to speak about a second messenger's coming, actions, and results. The refining, purifying, and purging mentioned fit Jesus' work in raising up in His church those who will faithfully serve Him (Malachi 3:3, 4). Though judgment will be brought against all individuals who have violated the covenant, the sons of Levi are still called out specifically (3:3); as teachers, theirs is the greater accountability.

Verse 1. This verse speaks of the coming of the Messiah and his forerunner. It also gives us an insight into the joy that He will bring when he comes and the doom that it spells for the wicked.

... Behold, I will send my messenger ... is a direct answer to the question asked in Mal. 2:17. First it mentions that there will be a forerunner of Messiah or the Christ, whom we now know was John the Baptist. This person was also spoken of by the prophet Isaiah (40:3). The forerunner is God's messenger, herald and ambassador. He was also to give notice that the Messiah's arrival



was 'now at hand'. The news should have helped men to adjust their hearts and minds to be receptive to Messiah.

... suddenly come to his temple ... He was going to come to His Temple, to highlight that despite what the leaders (priests) were doing, that it was still His house. The Temple of God is the place where the people of God gathered to worship. It is to this place that the Messiah would go when He comes. The people were expecting the Messiah to come and anxiously awaited His arrival, for they claimed to delight in Messiah.

... messenger of the covenant... highlights what agreements were made with God in the past and the fulfillment of all the promises to Abraham, that would be fulfilled with His coming.

... whom ye seek ... whom ye delight in..." are in a parallel relationship. This bolsters the interpretation that the terms "the Lord" and "the messenger of the covenant" refer to the same person.

Verse 2. ... who may abide the day of his coming?... God intends to purify his people of their persistent rebellion. They asked where was the God of justice, but now Malachi asks who can endure the day of Messiah when it comes!

Clearly God Messiah will bring justice and deal with the people who were asking the question, where was the God of justice! The people certainly wanted Messiah to come to get rid of wickedness and their assumption was that they would be watching Messiah dispense justice on others. They did not think that they would be the object of Messiah's judgment. God's answer, his response to their questions, would involve much more than they had anticipated.

...Who shall stand when he appeareth?... This is a military term for "holding one's ground" (II Kgs. 10:4; Amos 2:15; Eph. 6:11, 13, 14). The standard by which God will judge humanity is the standard of His own character (Matt. 5:48). That is why the Bible confidently asserts that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God". Our only hope for righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to us (Gal. 3; Rom. 4; II Cor. 5:21).

Note that divine wrath is necessary for God is a just God and He will do what is right. He had instituted a moral universe because of His character and because of that there must be judgment. God is holy and must

Be true to His nature.

But though He is a God of judgment He delights in loving-kindness and mercy.

The prophet introduces two figures of speech to describe this purification process. The fuller's soap was a solvent, a substance capable of removing filth. It was caustic lye, which was used in an extremely rigorous process to clean garments. This would be the mode of Messiah, He will come like a "fullers soap", a tough purifier. He will purify and redeem sinners, so that we might be able to stand before God as 'sons and daughters'.



Verse 3. Here we are told how the Lord deals with us and what plans he has for us in terms of duty and redemption.

... he shall sit as a refiner and purifier ... a person who smelts metal heats the metal until it turns to liquid, so that the imbedded impurities will come to the surface. So when Malachi used this figure of speech he was telling Israel and us that when God brings His refining action, it will dig deep to bring hidden iniquities to the surface, those things that oppose Him.

Note that Messiah refines His people. They are cleansed, but not rejected! This is a judgment of redemption, the outcome is holiness.

God wants a holy people to reflect Himself to a lost world. However, He is patiently working with an unholy people whom He has redeemed!

... offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness... the key to worship is a personal relationship. Only clean people can approach God (Isa. 1:16-20). In the Old Testament the sacrificial system was God's way of providing a way for imperfect people to approach a perfect deity. The key was always an appropriate attitude and mindset (Deut. 6:4-6). Interpersonal relationship affects worship (Matt. 5:23-24; James 4:8). Ritual and liturgy can become a barrier, (Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8-9; Ezek. 33:31).

Verse 4. ... Then shall the offering... after the process of refining is complete it yields a purified substance. Now that God has performed this task on the religious leaders, we can see that this effect will come down to the people and so the entire nation will be purified. This tells us how important our leaders and especially the religious leaders are to God. When they sin, they teach the nation to do the same, when they do righteously, the nation move with them in the same direction.

Now the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the Lord again, because the hearts and minds of the people are directed towards serving Him righteously.

Worship will return to what it was in the past. This means that people knew and did the will of the Lord in the early days. They knew what it was to serve a righteous and holy God.

Verse 5. ... I will be a swift witness ... the literal word here is 'expert' and has the idea of very rapid judgment. God's longsuffering patience, once complete, results in rapid accountability. The judgment will be carried out by the second messenger (Malachi 3:2).

God identifies these people for their benefit and the benefit of His children. First, He calls out the sorcerers. They are those who lived and died in spiritual wickedness and that forsook the oracles of the God of truth to consult the father of lies. Sorcery and related practices were strictly forbidden in the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 18:9–14). This prohibition in part prevents Israel from seeking to manipulate the Lord with "enchantments" (Exodus 7:11; Isaiah 47:9).



Adultery violates the seventh commandment (Exodus 20:14; compare James 2:11; 2 Peter 2:12–14). False swearers are those who profane God’s name and affront his justice by calling him to witness to a lie. To swear falsely breaks the ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16; Leviticus 19:11, 12; Jeremiah 7:9).

... against those that oppress the hireling in his wages ... The oppressors are they who barbarously injure and trample upon those who are at their mercy and deal harshly with those who are not able to defend themselves. They defraud people, lie, cheat, steal and perhaps even murder, if it suits their purpose. They will enact such actions and machinations against widows and the fatherless. Those that do not have anyone to fight for them, those who do not know how to protect themselves because they are strangers in the land, or who are poor; are favorite targets of the oppressors.

The Lord calls to account all those who take advantage of the most vulnerable in Israelite society. The Law of Moses included specific directives to care for each of these groups (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14–22).

... turn aside the stranger ... although the hireling, the widow, and the fatherless are likely fellow Israelites, the stranger refers specifically to someone who does not belong to the covenant people by lineage. God shows a special concern for the strangers who live in Israel. He calls His people to remember their own time of oppression while they lived as strangers in Egypt and to treat strangers in their own land quite differently (Exodus 22:21). Ultimately such disregard for these people in need and for the principles found in the Law of Moses can be traced to a lack of reverence for the lawgiver, the Lord himself (Deut. 31:12, 13; Isaiah 1:2).

... fear not me ... the fear of the Lord has always been “the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 1:7); lack of such fear leads to certain ruin (James 5:1–6).

Where there is no fear of God, no good is to be expected. These people had completely given themselves over to the devil and were blind. God has himself given them the chance to repent and they have with bold faces rejected Him.

God will move against them swiftly as a hostile witness, so that they will not be able to refute His accusations or defend themselves against His charges in any manner.

There were consequences to the messenger coming to His Palace. He will put His people through the fire so that they would be purified, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem would become pleasing to the Lord. The sons of Levi would be purified. They would offer sacrifices in righteousness.

Those that behave abominably are doing so because they do not fear God and are really manifesting their wickedness in unbelief. God therefore we have to act as He has acted in the past.



Verse 6. ... I change not ... God can change His mind (Jonah 3:10), but He does not change His character or principles (James 1:17). His standards of right and wrong always hold true. He will be consistent in carrying out judgment on those who violate these standards, as He has made abundantly clear throughout Scripture.

The context highlights:

1. God's covenant faithfulness (Lam. 3:22-23)
2. God's purpose (Ps. 33:11)
3. God's character (Ps. 127; James 1:17)

His word is established by His character and His actions!

The sons of Jacob, referring to the Israelites, have not been consumed by God's wrath—yet (Hosea 11:8, 9). The Lord is merciful because of His promises and His unchanging character means He will keep those promises.

Some see a play on the term "Jacob," which means 'cheater' or 'supplanter' and is a comparison between the changelessness of God and the fickle rebellion of the nation of Israel. Israel's only steadfast hope is the unchanging character of God.

## CONCLUSION

Malachi's words should serve as sobering warnings to leaders in the church. Dangers abound when we become casual about doing God's work. It's a small step from an attitude of indifference to one of anti-biblical rationalizing by those who serve the Lord in leadership positions.

But note that there is a warning to the people. God will not accept the offerings from you that are damaged or blemished offerings. These kind of offerings show that you are indifferent to your duty to God. You can be observing the feasts of God, going to church regularly and doing all the religious things constantly. But if this is only a formality it means that we are really irreligious and are skeptical of the reality of God.

Don't forget that these people were more religious than we are today because they tried to follow the Law faithfully, offered the sacrifices, observed the Feasts days, went to the priests regularly. But they were really indifferent. We pray therefore that we will avoid the pitfalls that have always faced the people of God. We must not just go through the motions and think thoughts that are slanderous to God. We must remember that God is what scholars call immutable. He does not change. So we pray that He will remember us in His wrath and change us in His mercy.

Speaking honestly to our leaders can be of immeasurable value in avoiding the spiritual death that brought God's harsh criticism of the priests in Malachi's day. Inviting candid feedback from a fellow servant of Christ is always preferable to being on the receiving end of God's correction!



In chapter 3 we read about the people whose hearts were turned to repentance. Verse 16 describes them as people who feared the Lord, who spoke one to another. God gave attention, listened to them, heard what they said to each other and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared the Lord and meditated on His name.

The Lord of hosts, who command all the armies of heaven, the One who cannot be resisted, the One who could not be overcome, the One whose word was law said: "They shall be Mine, On the day that I make them my jewels, And I will spare them As a man spares his own son on God will son who serves Him."

