

Malachi

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Introduction

The name Malachi means 'my messenger' or 'my angel'. The name is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible and who he was is not known. For this reason some argue whether or not the book was written anonymously or by one of the other prophets, principally Ezra. Most commentators however accept Malachi as being the name of the prophet.

(There is no precise description of him such as 'the son of...' or 'the prophet'.)

Since there is not a direct reference to any specific event the date of the book is also in question. Mention of things such as a ruling governor, nothing about the rebuilding of the temple and his message concerning a degenerated worship and intermarriage with gentiles would indicate some passage of time since the exodus from Babylon.

The message of Malachi is to the priests and people of Israel who had become apathetic toward temple ritual and the laws of Moses. By failing to obey God's rules they risk breaking their covenant relationship with God thus leading toward broken relationships within the nation and broken relationships within the family. Intermarriage and divorce are two of the problems Malachi deals with as well as the attitude that God had forsaken the nation.

(The covenant relationship is of prime concern, the covenant with the Levites, the marriage covenant and the new covenant)

v.1:1 The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.

The book begins by getting right to the point. The message about to be given will be a burden. This will be a hard thing to hear and not an easy thing to accept.

The main facts are immediately given concerning the message; 1) it is the word of the Lord, 2) it is directed to Israel and 3) it is being delivered by Malachi.

v.1:2 I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob,

Even though God has loved Israel the people are unconvinced. They refuse to give him the gratitude he deserves through their offerings and sacrifices. Looking back it had been over 50 years since the rebuilding of then temple, promises were made through the prophets but Israel was still subservient to Persia. Because of their situation their response to God was, "how have you shown your love toward us?" (Zech. 1:17; 2:5, 10)

As proof of his love he points to their forefather Jacob. Even before his birth God had chosen him to be heir of the promise and father of a nation. (Gen. 25:23; 32:28) The love of God should have been evident if they had only looked back on their history.

v.1:3 And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.

In contrast to Israel there was Edom, fathered by Jacob's brother Esau. Edom had flourished for a time but by this point in history the Edomite nation had been taken over by the Nabataeans. The fact that God chose Jacob over Esau shows divine sovereignty and his love for Israel. (Rom. 9:13-15)

v.1:4 Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the Lord of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever.

In contrast to Israel's return from captivity, rebuilding the temple and Jerusalem's walls the nation if Edom would not be so blessed. The promise to them is if they would attempt to rebuild he would again destroy that which is built so that they would never rise again. This prophecy was given by the earlier prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah Ezekiel, Joel, Amos and Obediah.

v.1:5 And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The Lord will be magnified from the border of Israel.

Israel would see the love God had for them as they see Edom's unsuccessful attempts to regain their glory. Those who see and understand will praise and thank the Lord for his love.

v.1:6 A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where in mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O

priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?

It has been established that God loved Israel and backed it up by proof. Now the question is does Israel love God in return. Even in their sinful state they knew two common truths; children should honor their parents and servants should obey their masters.

Failing to give God his due honor was no doubt the duty of the entire nation but here the priests are singled out as the chief offenders. One reason was that they, as priests, were fathers to the people and expected to be treated with respect for their position, and second they were the teachers and were not directing the people properly.

Not knowing that God loved them or the extent of that love could not have brought out the proper response to his love. When accused of despising his name they were totally ignorant to this dishonor. This brings into question their whole commitment to God and the relationship they should have with him.

v.1:7 Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar, and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible.

In what way had they despised God's name? They failed to follow God's ordinances. In failing to follow the prescribed rituals they displayed their low opinion of his institution. By not sacrificing in the proper way they polluted the sacrifice. As will be seen the offering itself was polluted and unacceptable.

The table of the Lord is the altar upon which the sacrifices were laid. "That" refers to the offering and the way it was sacrificed. The polluted offering made the Lord's table contemptible.

v.1:8 And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts.

Here the meat offering is singled out as an example of improper sacrifices. Animals brought for sacrifices were blind, lame or sick and were of little use to the individual. Offerings were to be the first fruits, the best of what God had given them but the people were giving something less. (Lev. 22:22,24)

The priests were being admonished because they allowed the sacrifices maybe even encouraged them. They could assume God didn't care or the sacrifice was to be burned anyway so why waste the best when the worst would burn just as good.

As an illustration of how they despised the Lord he asks them what the governor would think of them and their gift if it was given to him. The governor, probably a Persian, would not have accepted such a gift. A further implication is that such action meant they had given little thought to the sacrifices and how God would receive them.

v.1:9 And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the Lord of hosts.

Malachi knows God would not accept just any old sacrifice and so it is with irony that he states that maybe, just maybe, God will accept the sacrifices devised by man as better than his own. Surely he would be gracious for the effort even though it lacked obedience. (1 Sam. 15:22).

v.1:10 Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.

Since the sacrifices were not in accordance with God's law and therefore not acceptable by God, should they be allowed to continue giving them? God questions the priests as to whether they should shut the temple down considering nothing pleasing was being done in it.

Likewise, keeping the fire on the altar burning served no purpose because God would not receive any pleasure from the sacrifices given there.

v.1:11 For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.

A major change is coming in the nature of sacrifices. The prophet does not give a time for when this change would take place but all people would be included.

The phrase "from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same" indicates the extent to which he will be praised. The sun rises everywhere on earth and likewise goes down everywhere on earth.

To indicate the Jews were not going to populate or dominate the entire earth Malachi states that the Gentiles, all the non-Jewish nations, will accept the Lord as being the true God. (Is. 11:10; Ez. 38:23)

Where Malachi's prophecy went further than the prophets before him was that he implied that worship would not be dependent on the Levitical sacrifices offered in Jerusalem. Where sacrifices were now accepted only if done in the temple they would in the future be offered everywhere. The Jewish nation, particularly Jerusalem, would no longer be the center of religious activity.

The incense to be offered to God represents the life of the believer, offered with a pure heart. (2 Cor. 2:15; Eph. 5:2; 1 Tim. 1:5)

v.1:12 But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the Lord is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible.

As a follow up for emphasis the prophet states the same thought as in verse 7. The priests didn't actually say the table of the Lord was polluted but their actions spoke louder than words.

v.1:13 Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord.

One of the reasons why blind, lame and sick animals were accepted by the priests was that they had become complacent in their duties. The sacrifices and rituals had become dull and boring therefore they just tried to get it over by accepting even the most worthless offerings.

The job became a burden to them instead of regarding it an honor and privilege to be in God's service. Again God asks whether or not sacrifices offered half-heartedly should be accepted.

v.1:14 But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.

The answer to the question posed above is "no" and a curse is attached to anyone who would offer less than their best. The deceiver noted here is a person who has the proper offering, vows it, but brings an unacceptable offering instead.

A vow was a voluntary offering and once given was considered to be compulsory. The proper sacrifice was to be a male animal without blemish. (Lev. 22:17-19) Substitutions or redemptions could be given for certain offerings but not for animal sacrifices. (Lev. 27:1-10; 32-33)

The reason for the curse was to remind them of the greatness of God. He is the creator and sustains all life. He especially sustained the nation proving this by being feared by all other nations.

v.2:1-2 And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, 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.

In the previous chapter the charges were directed toward the priests but the people were guilty of the same offenses as well. To avoid any shifting of blame by the priests responsibility of following the commandment is given explicitly to the priests. It is their duty to see to it that glory is given to the Lord by the sacrifices.

If glory was not being given to God the fault lay directly with the priests. They were the teachers of the people and experts of the law. They should have taught the people how to worship in an acceptable manner and so became accountable for not carrying out their office.

"If the priests had given the people better instructions the people would have brought better offerings; and therefore the blame returns upon the priests." Matthew Henry

Along with the rebuke a warning is given to the priests to listen to what was being told them by God through his prophets as to their duties and the proper attitude toward worship. These things were to be taken seriously because this was the covenant the Lord made with Israel. (Ex. 34:28; Deut 4:13-14)

A quick reminder is given concerning the ramifications of breaking this covenant, that is the curses God would bring about for disobedience. (Deut. 28:15-68)

To "curse your blessings" can be taken in two ways; first, blessings were the material wealth given to the priests, these blessing would no longer be abundant. Second, the priests pronounced blessings on the people, these blessing would not come about.

Because of their attitude the prophet states that they had already been found guilty and that the sentence was given, the curses were already in effect.

v.2:3 Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.

The curse spoken of in the preceding verse would reduce the influence and stature of the priests. The word 'seed' may have different meanings in Hebrew depending on how it is pronounced. The most common usage would be referring either to the harvest or to descendants. In this case a reduction in the harvest would affect the amount given for offerings. A reduction in offspring would reduce the number of priests and Levite population thus a loss of prestige.

Another meaning of 'seed' is the arm or shoulder. Blessings were usually given with uplifted and outstretched arms so figuratively rebuking the arm would signify a lessening of official duties performed during the sacrificial ceremonies.

To show the contempt the Lord had toward the priests he compares them to "dung". Dung was the waste part of an animal and unfit for use in a sacrifice. (Lev. 4:3-12) To

have ones face spread with dung would be highly insulting and would also indicate the individual was held in contempt. To show the contempt the Lord had for the sacrifices the dung, which was rejected for sacrifice, especially when sacrificed on a feast day, would be the dung put on their faces.

To top it all off, just as the dung is taken out of the camp to be disposed of the priests should be taken away with it. This basically said they were just as worthless to him as the dung itself.

v.2:4 And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the Lord of hosts.

The commandment, that the priests bring glory to the Lord's name, was given to preserve the covenant with the tribe of Levi. A formal covenant was not established between God and the Levites but the attitude of God toward them did constitute a covenant relationship. He placed them in a special relationship with himself by choosing them to serve the sanctuary. They had rights and promises but also duties to fulfill. Breaking the duties would result in the breaking of the covenant.

God's intentions are not to dissolve the covenant, which he could do since the priests had now broken their part, but to take action to bring the priests back into obedience.

v.2:5 My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.

The true nature of the covenant with the Levites will now be explained to the priests. The covenant was one of life, peace and fear (reverence). For God's part he promised to give life and peace to Levi and all his descendants. The Levites, especially Aaron and his descendants, were to faithfully carry out their duties according to the commandments and statutes set by the Lord in reverence and respect. (Ex. 32:26-28; Num. 25:1-13)

v.2:6 The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

Although through the centuries the priests did not always meet the high standards of his calling ideally the office of priest and Levite was to teach the law. (Lev. 10:11) A picture of the faithful priest of the past is presented to contrast the priest of the present. On the positive side he taught the true meaning and intent of the law. To reinforce this the negative is also given; no untruth was to be spoken. The lifestyle of the priest was one of peace and justice and he continually made the Lord part of his life. Additionally he was not just content with teaching but took part in the lives of many people leading them away from sin.

v.2:7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

The ideal priest should have truth and knowledge always on his mind and be ready to communicate it to the people. The people, in turn, are to go to the priest for instruction and guidance concerning the will of God. The reason for this is that the priest is the messenger

of God. In this respect the priest is acting as the voice of God. He is the intermediary between God and the people and must be a person having the highest integrity, a person of sound moral principles; uprightness, honesty, and sincerity.

v.2:8 But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts.

The priests of Malachi's day are charged with violating all the rules and examples that were before them. They turned the truth into lies, they did not teach with the knowledge of the commandments and statutes passed down to them by their forefathers and imparted injustices on the people.

Not only did the people not fully understand the law but they were violating the law because of the false teachings and bad examples set by the priests. They were being led into sin rather than away from it.

Since they were in direct contradiction with the ideals of the priesthood they were in violation of the covenant made with Levi. To them the covenant was made null and void and any benefits afforded them were forfeited.

v.2:9 Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.

Being "partial in the law" they did not administer justice evenly. They showed favoritism to some while being strict with others. They misinterpreted and misapplied the law as they saw fit. For these offenses judgment would be sent by the Lord. They and their offices would be held in contempt and ridicule. They had betrayed their trust and would now lose that trust of the people.

v.2:10 Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?

Malachi intends to move on to a discussion of another covenant, that of marriage, and begins by giving some general comments concerning this covenant. The first point concerns the covenant with Israel as a people. The general covenant made with God called for them to be a separate people. They were to live differently from the rest of the world. They were not to associate with them or intermarry with those outside their nation. (Lev. 20:24-26; Deut. 7:2-3)

That God "created us" goes beyond the physical. It is the sense that he brought them together as a special people dedicated to him. The idea that they all had one father, the Lord, made them all brothers and sisters. Brother, as used here, is a broad term indicating the brethren or all the people, not just males. This brings up the next point concerning the breaking of the covenant. This concern was twofold; first, they were marrying heathen women and second they were divorcing their wives. This is the treachery the prophet is referring to and it profaned the covenant accepted by their forefathers.

"This creation of them by God, as His people, gave them a new existence, a new relation to each other; so that every offense against each other was a violation of their relation to God." Barnes

v.2:11 Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god.

Malachi moves from his general accusation to the specific as he condemns the practice of marriage into different cultures and different religions than their own. It has been proven throughout Jewish history that more often than not when marrying a heathen the pagan practices replace the God ordained rituals the Jews were required to follow. The strongest of terms, that of abomination, is used to describe how offensive this was in God's sight. That is why such strong warnings are given against it. (Deut. 7:4)

The high priests were called to an even higher standard to assure holiness and to be an example to the people. (Lev. 21:10, 13-15) It is known that the priests were guilty of this offense and were chastised by Ezra and Nehemiah. (Ezra 9:1-2; Neh. 13: 23-25, 28-29)

v.2:12 The Lord will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the Lord of hosts.

The result of a man marrying a woman not willing to convert to a belief in the Lord will be expulsion from the nation, expressed here as the "tabernacles of Jacob". Not being part of the nation would in effect prevent him from having access to the temple, the priests and the sacrifice.

This warning is given to all Israelites. The "master" refers to the teachers and priests while the "scholars" are those being taught, the people. Further, Malachi makes it clear the penalty cannot be avoided by making an offering for this sin, the individual will still be punished.

"May God not only cut off every descendant of such a sinner out of the houses of Israel, but any one who might offer a sacrifice for him in expiation of his sin." Keil

v.2:13 And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand.

(There are two different ways in which this verse has been interpreted. The first is the preferred interpretation because it is more within the context of the subject of which Malachi is speaking. The NIV is worded differently than the KJV and therefore reflects the second interpretation.)

The second sin concerning marriage to be addressed is that of the putting away or divorcing of wives. The "again" has two possible references; that again he has to rebuke them or that this is the second rebuke for the same sin. Ezra's rebuke was years earlier and now Malachi is tying the two together to show them how little they had changed. (Ezra 9:1-10)

The difference in how this verse is interpreted has to do with the weeping and crying before the altar. The context has Malachi rebuking the men for divorcing their wives leaving them alone and destitute. It would follow that the tears, weeping and crying out would be from the wives whose husbands had left them and presumably gone after pagan women. Having no place to go and without support they would come to the temple in a state of anguish pleading for help.

The state the women were in was contrary to the way God wanted them to approach his altar. He wanted the sacrifices to be carried out joyfully with gladness in their hearts. The offerings were not received by God not because they were good or bad but because they were not offered in the proper frame of mind.

The NIV wording is: *Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.*

The interpretation of the NIV leaves out the idea that the women would be grief stricken by being left by their husbands. It makes the tears to be those of all the people because their sacrifices are not being accepted by the Lord. There is no indication in any of the previous verses the people were giving any of this much thought let alone bringing better offerings to the altar. They seemed to be more surprised than anything else.

v.2:14 Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

The response by the husbands to this accusation is to wonder why this has anything to do with whether or not God is accepting their sacrifices. The prophet goes on to explain that a covenant was made with the wife before God himself. He was a witness to this covenant and blessed it.

By using the term "wife of thy youth" he is telling them they should have the same feelings toward their wife now that they had when their covenant was first made. Calling her a "companion" he uses a strong masculine word to describe a close friendship where common interests are shared, whether good or bad.

v.2:15 And did he not make one? Yet he had the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

Following this rebuke Malachi now logically explains the reason why divorce should not and is not a viable option for an Israelite. As far as a man was concerned it had been practiced for centuries and presumably the legal way of doing it was instituted by Moses. (Deut. 24:1) Abraham did it prior to Moses. (Gen 21:14) The question to them was, why is it wrong?

Malachi's first argument is that in the beginning God did not make more than one woman for Adam to choose from or choose both. There was one man and one woman and by design they would become one with each other. (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:24; Matt. 19:3-6)

Having the "residue of the spirit" meant that Adam was chosen of God. He and Eve had intimacy with God. They knew him like no one else could. So, why did he make them one? It was to bring forth a godly seed. Offspring who would praise and worship the Lord.

The rebuke becomes a plea for the people to examine themselves. To determine what was the good and perfect thing for them to do as this godly offspring. To understand their role had not changed from that of Adam's.

v.2:16 For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

It should first be noted that "violence" written here is not interpreted as physical violence perpetrated on the wife. Violence is the sin of divorce of which the men are accused.

Although God permitted divorce because of the hardness of the heart he none the less hated it. (Deut. 24:1) Despite what was happening then, and is now, God's desire is that marriage should be kept sacred. (Prov. 18:22; Heb. 13:4)

Figuratively the garment or skirt of the garment is used to denote protection for a loved one. (Ruth 3:9; Ez. 16:8) Likewise, there are two ways the garment here is used in connection with sin. One is that it is used as a covering for sin. In this case the garment is ignorance and is used as an excuse for their sin. (v. 14) The other way it is used defines sin as the garment. The individual wears sin as a garment, it covers him and until it is removed his actions are unacceptable to God. (Zech. 3:4)

“The figurative expression may be explained from the idea that the dress reflects the inward part of a man, and therefore a soiled garment is a symbol of uncleanness of heart” Keil

v.2:17 Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet, ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?

Malachi ends this discussion by telling them God is tired of hearing their whining and complaining. The people believe they have legitimate cause for their complaints but that God does not listen to them. They want to know how their words and actions are wrong.

At this point they are trying to justify their actions by comparing themselves to the rest of the world. Since their return from Babylon some 50 years or so ago their plight has not changed. The other nations and people around them are prospering and they are not. This prompts them to question the justice of God. Why, when they have the knowledge of the one true God, do the heathen who are evil, prosper. It seems to them that God delights in the evil doer. They are questioning God's judgment and want him to prove he is still there and true to them. (Hab. 1:2-4)

This leads to the next subject and that is the announcement of the coming of the Lord. It is ironic that they would call for a judgment of the unrighteous since that is the state they are now in.

v.3:1 Behold I will send my messenger. and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.

Answering the question of where the God of judgment was Malachi echoes God's words that he is coming. As a signal to his coming there will be a forerunner. One whose message will be that the Lord is on his way. His way was clear in that not a single prophet appeared from the time of Malachi until John the Baptist. (Mark 1:2-3) Malachi reinforces the prophecy of Isaiah of this first messenger. (Is. 40:3)

The promise would not be forgotten nor would it be broken. The coming of the Lord will not be immediate, 350 years pass, but it will be unexpected. This second messenger referred to here is the messenger of the covenant and is Christ, the one the Jews were waiting for, the one they would delight in seeing. Those who remain steadfast in the faith will be rewarded and those who see him will have their desire fulfilled. (Luke 2: 25-32)

v.3:2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like a fuller's soap:

The coming of Christ will bring judgment on the Jewish religion. Would they believe the Messiah had come? This would put a strain on everything they believed. Who will be able to stand up to this truth? The question is mainly directed to the ungodly who ironically were the ones desiring his coming.

The messenger of the covenant, Christ, will bring a cleansing. This cleansing is depicted in two ways. He will be like a refiner's fire separating the impure ingredients from the precious metal. And also as the fuller's soap used to wash clothes clean. (John 9:39; Is 4:2-4)

"With the coming of the Lord the judgment will also begin; not the judgment upon the heathen, however, for which the ungodly nation was longing, but the judgment upon the godless members of the covenant nation"
Keil

v.3:3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

Christ, by his coming, will be the refiner. He will purify the individual and his church. He will sanctify them by washing away their sin making them pure. (Is. 1:22, 25; Eph. 5:26)

Since he's been rebuking the priests throughout much of his writing he assures them, those who are devoted to him will be among those to receive his spirit. They will become the sacrifices of righteousness in that they will be sincere in their worship according to God's will.

v.3:4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

Having been purified and sanctified they will be able to give acceptable sacrifices according to God's will. By mentioning the "old times" Malachi is referring to the true sacrifices of

praise and worship given by their forefathers, Abraham, Moses, David ...etc.

"We must not infer ... that Malachi imagined that the Old Testament would be continued during Messianic times; but his words are to explained from the custom of the prophets, of using the forms of the Old Testament worship to depict the reverence for God which would characterize the new covenant." Keil

v.3:5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts.

Israel had wanted God's judgment to come and he assures them it will. There is no indication as to how soon he would come only that once he was here he would be the witness to condemn them. The law which Christ kept perfectly condemned all who did not believe him to be the Son of God. (John 7:19)

All the sins mentioned must have been prevalent at that time and so were noteworthy by the prophet, but they all stemmed from the fact that the people committing them had no fear of the Lord.

v.3:6 For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

God declares himself to be unchangeable. Since he is perfect he would have no reason to change. Because of this unchangableness Israel, as a nation, still existed. Because God does not change he kept his covenant with them made with their forefathers. If he would not have kept his covenant he would have destroyed them like the other heathen nations.

v.3:7 Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?

Following his announcement that he would come to judge the wicked he goes on to explain another reason why he was not accepting their offerings any why he withheld his blessings. As fat back as you'd care to go the people always fell away from obeying God's commandments and statutes. God always desired them to repent and return to his ways. However the people seldom were convinced they were doing wrong.

v.3:8-9 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? in tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

Unwilling to admit their guilt Malachi again confronts them with another of their sins. The image of God being robbed was highly unlikely yet this is what the people had done without them even giving it a thought. Withholding what was rightfully his was robbing God. Their sin was not giving their tithes and offerings to the temple and the Levites.

In English tithes means 'tenths'. The Jews were instructed on what portion of their possessions were to be given to the temple for use as offerings and support of the temple caretakers, the Levites. (Num. 18:21)

Tithing was established when Abraham gave a tenth of his spoils to Melchizedek and when Jacob promised a tenth of all his property to God for his safe return home. (Heb. 7:2; Gen. 28:22)

By not bringing their tithes to the temple the priests would have to quit their temple duties and go to the fields to work to support themselves and their families. (Neh. 13:10) This in turn deprived God of the sacrifices and worship of the people that he was due.

Not singling out any particular group of people Malachi puts the blame on the entire nation. The nation is cursed and although they may not know it going through hard times and not prospering as the others around them could be considered a sign that the curse was in affect.

v.3:10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

As part of their return, mentioned in verse 7, Malachi encourages them to fill the storehouse with tithes as required by the covenant. By doing this they would be showing their complete trust in him. This is God's challenge to them, to prove to him they trusted in him so that he in turn could prove his promises were true.

Opening the windows of heaven shows that great blessings would rain down on the nation if only they would do his will.

v. 3:11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.

To expand on the vastness of the blessings and prosperity to come God promises to prevent insects and other disease from destroying their crops. The devourer is most likely the locust or caterpillar which do so much damage to crops by eating them. Nature (frost, hail) plays an important part in ruining a harvest before it has time to fully mature. These are examples of what God would prevent to assure prosperity.

v.3:12 And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts.

Not only would the nation be prosperous and the people happy but they would also be a testament to the rest of the nations as to the greatness of the Lord.

v3:13 Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?

However, because of their situation the people criticized God. The word "stout" indicates boldness, pride and arrogance. Their contempt for God and the way he was running things was manifest in their murmuring with each other. When confronted with this they denied speaking against God.

v.3:14 Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?

The people thought it was useless to serve God. It was useless because the righteous had no advantages over the unrighteous. The Jew's big problem was that they did not know how to serve God. They observed everything outwardly. Feasts, fasting and sacrifices were not done out of love but done solely to get something from God. Since they weren't getting payment for their service they considered God to be unjust.

To "walk mournfully" was to put on sackcloth to show penitence. They were using it as an outward show of piety or humility.

v.3:15 And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.

Because God was not rewarding them but instead, in their eyes, rewarding the heathen who were prosperous the Jews called the heathen happy. They must have been God's favorites. The people that are wicked are built up or sustained and even delivered from any misfortune that might befall them.

v.3:16 Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him to them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.

Even though the nation had many problems in obeying God's statutes he does not turn a blind eye toward them. There are still some who trust and some who hear the prophet and take his words to heart. It is the attitude of the people that must change. This attitude of fear and trust in the Lord is encouraged and strengthened as they came together and spoke with one another.

v.3:17 And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

The faithful Jews will become part of the greater church of Jesus Christ. An implied judgment is coming identified by the sparing of some while the rest are cut off. The assumption made here is that the judgment being made at the time of Christ's first coming. (v.3:2) Many believe because there is a judgment it automatically means the end times.

v.3:18 Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

To the unfaithful Jew righteousness was measured in material wealth. This is why he believes the wicked are not being judged. Once he returns to trusting the Lord he come to an understanding of what it truly means to be righteous or wicked. Once they return and understand God's will they will be able to discern whether they are serving him or not serving him.

Outward appearances are not always, if not seldom, an indication of whether a persons heart is right with the Lord. (Eccl. 9:1)

v.4:1 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

With the mentioning of "the day" most commentators consider this a warning of the final judgment. Destruction will come for the wicked and they will be burned up as so much stubble. But, is this a prophecy of the final judgment or of the judgment of the Jewish nation that will not accept the coming of Christ, the messenger spoken of in verse 3:1? Could the fire be symbolic of the demise of the old system seeing that a new covenant would be established.

Leaving neither root nor branches represents total destruction (Amos 2:9) Again, is this destruction for all the wicked at the end of time or is it referring to the Jewish nation. Once the temple in Jerusalem is destroyed all records of lineage are gone. Who are the Levite priests if there lineage is not known? How will they know the true Messiah if his heritage cannot be established? They have no roots and therefore cannot have branches.

v.4:2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

"The day" will also come upon those that fear the Lord. To them the situation will be just the opposite then to the wicked. Whereas the wicked would look upon the day as a dark day the faithful will consider it a bright day. The future will look much more promising knowing the grace brought by Christ.

The word "Sun" being capitalized would tend to indicate it means Christ but it is only written this way in the KJV most other have it non capitalized. Sun can also mean light. Light provided by the Son. (John 1:6-9; 8:12) Light also represents knowledge, the knowledge of who Christ is. (2 Cor. 4:4-6)

Christ, while on earth, brought healing to those with physical pain. With the knowledge of what he did at the cross and his resurrection the faithful are spiritually comforted and healed. The spiritual growth of the individual with the knowledge of the new covenant is illustrated by the growing of a calf. Fed and nourished the calf grows from a wobbly baby to a full grown adult cow or steer. So to would those coming into the new covenant.

v.4:3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts.

Although it may look as if the wicked are triumphant the day will come when the righteous will rise above them. Being turned to ashes under the feet of the righteous represents this triumph whether it is as a final triumph or at any other time God makes a judgment favoring the righteous.

v.4:4 Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.

As the Old Testament draws to a close Malachi, its final prophet, wants the people to remember two things. The first is that they were to obey the laws and statutes given to

Moses at Mount Horeb. (Deut. 4:10, 13-14) By mentioning Moses the law was traced back through him to God as the author.

v.4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:

The second thing to remember was that the Messiah was promised to come. They are to look for the next great prophet which will be the messenger announcing the coming of the Lord himself. (v.3:1) The prophet Elijah, referred to here is John the Baptist. (Matt. 1:14; 17: 10-13)

Many Jews expected Elijah to physically return but the reference here is that the spirit and power that was instilled in Elijah would also be in the messenger to proceed Christ. (Luke 1:17) Why Elijah? The times of Elijah and John the Baptist can be considered similar in that there were not many faithful Israelites remaining so both were called to lead the people back to God (1 Kings 21-22)

The Old Testament points to Christ and his mission on earth yet some feel that either the prophet Elijah or someone like him will be sent before the second coming of Christ just like they first coming. This they point to as the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Might not that great and dreadful day of the Lord be the day he suffered and gave up his own life for ours.

v.4:6 And he shall turn the heart of the father to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

The mission of John the Baptist was to bring the people back to a right relationship with God. Both young and old, fathers and children would have to repent to avoid the curse.