

DECEMBER 30

Malachi 1-2

After all of the heavenly visions, we are back to reality on the dark planet. After Zechariah and Haggai wrote, Ezra arrived to lead the people into the Word, and then Nehemiah arrived and helped rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah helped repopulate the city and set the Levitical order of worship into operation. The end of Nehemiah shows that even with a godly governor, the people hardly obeyed. Malachi probably wrote after Nehemiah was gone. The word for governor is Persian, suggesting that whoever was running Jerusalem now was Persian. The temple service was running; in fact, it was now running so routinely it became corrupted.

Malachi's name means "messenger." Malachi's will be the last words God speaks to Israel until the events just before the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus. God did a clever job of wording this book through Malachi. God has Malachi listen to the people and record their gripes against God. As God answers these complaints through Malachi, God turns the answer against the people to reveal their very distant hearts. They were going through the motions of religion with no real love for God. This is always a danger. When we have a "problem with God," it is usually the result of our being lukewarm and indifferent toward Him. To follow God closely shows us His heart, but often people only want to appease Him and not really be bothered by Him. In the end, to be religious only leads to confusion, because religion serves us and our expectations. These people were disappointed with God, but as God will show them, they had no real idea of who He was and they misunderstood what would lead to blessing.

At the end of this document you will find two helpful charts, "The Three Returns from Exile" and "Chronology of the Postexilic Period."

Malachi 1

This is a great chapter and could be preached or taught for weeks. We only get one day.

Vs. 1-5 This is the most important part of Malachi. If you miss this you will not fully understand why the rest of these problems crept into the lives of the people. Everything we'll read in Malachi stems from this problem. I'm going to give you the basics very quickly.

Both Jacob and Esau represent countries, countries taken into exile. Only Israel returned. That return showed God's love. Now to understand all that God did to get them back into the land, you need to go back to the "born again" Manasseh returning to Israel, influencing Josiah, who influenced four families, who raised four sons, who God used to save the nation in Babylon. That is the book of Daniel. Think of all that God did in Daniel and Esther and Ezra and Nehemiah. The people missed all of this amazing and mighty love and said, "*How have you loved us?*"

V. 5 Especially when you read some of the things Nebuchadnezzar and Darius the Mede said and did, God received more honor outside of Israel than within it.

Vs. 6-14 This lack of understanding God's care and love led the priests to dishonor God and to allow the people to dishonor God. They thought, "If times are tough, God will understand if you bring Him lame and blind sacrifices, right? Any sacrifice is better than no sacrifice, right?" But here is the thing, if they had grasped God's love for them, they would have been willing to give Him the offerings He required. The offerings were a test of their hearts, of their faith and trust in God. All this proved they had no real trust or love for God. They were just religious, just punching the clock, just doing what they needed to do to be good religious people in their own eyes.

V. 8 They wouldn't have done this to their governor, but since their religion was routine, the invisible God was as good as not being there. And besides, anything is OK with God, right?

V. 10 You have to ask yourself why the priests kept accepting these sacrifices and why they didn't *shut the doors*. Imagine if a pastor did this on Sunday morning, blocking the door with his body, saying, "Hey, we're not taking this seriously." Soon he'd get no pay check. Guess where the priests got their food and their livelihood? That's right; they received their food from the sacrifices and their money from the offerings of the people. Who were the priests really serving and trusting?

Twice God reminds the priests of His majesty in vs. 11 and 14.

Vs. 12-13 The priests themselves were bemoaning the fact that the people were so sinful and bringing awful offerings. But hey, something is better than nothing, right? And besides, they had to eat.

V. 14 They were allowing the people to bring a curse upon themselves. That betrayed the entire point of the priesthood, simply so they could eat. In contrast to what these priests were doing, look at what Paul, a disciple of Jesus, did, said, and modeled for us.

But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:15-16

Malachi 2

Vs. 1-3 So God will turn the curse of the people onto the priests too. In fact, as we'll see, the curse had already begun. Remember in Haggai how God said the people were working in the fields and hardly bringing anything in? That was the curse. It happened there and it was happening now. Ironically, the more people held back from God because the times were tough, the tougher God made the times.

Since the priests were allowing the feasts and sacrifices so they could get food and further their livelihood, God would smear their faces in "end result" of their sacrifices. Note, that in 1 Samuel 2:22ff, Eli also didn't stop his sons from desecrating the tabernacle. The reason for that was that Eli was happy to be well fed. Notice the reference to Eli at his death (1 Samuel 4:18). In a poetic sense, the impure sacrifices he allowed helped kill him. Fear for our livelihood in the ministry makes us worthless shepherds. But can a disciple really believe that stuff Jesus said about not being anxious about our food and clothing? That's really up to each of us. It's a matter of trust.

Vs. 4-9 This covenant was really the covenant God made with Phinehas in Numbers 25:6-13. Phinehas saw the connection between the plague burning in the camp and the sin of the people typified in this one guy who was walking into his tent with a foreign woman, a cult prostitute for Baal. While everyone else stood frozen, Phinehas grabbed a spear, ran like crazy through the camp and killed the couple. Immediately the plague stopped. The priests in Malachi's day should have been this spiritually alert, brave, and passionate for God and should have taken a stand for the welfare of the people.

Through Phinehas' ministry alongside Joshua, the people were taught to obey and honor God, and that generation was the godliest generation of Israel. Phinehas was a hero and a model of what being a priest meant. God would punish these priests for leading the people astray.

Vs. 10-17 This section has a couple of sub-categories, but generally it all has to do with marriage. Looking at Genesis, first came the fall from God, and then the relationship between Adam and Eve crashed. Those "falls" are connected. The same can be seen in Romans 1:18-27. First the relationship with God was lost, and then the relationship between man and woman became corrupted. Ironically, one of the rebukes that Jesus delivered on the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees was regarding their view of marriage and their allowance for divorce. (Luke 16:14-18)

Vs. 10-12 Since God is their Father, how could the men marry women who worshiped false gods? But once you have lost your love for God, your faith, and trust in Him, and you've defined Him as a good-ol'-boy who accepts anything, anything is possible. Throughout Ezra and Nehemiah this problem is mentioned often.

Vs. 13-14 Yet the people wept because things were not going well economically and God didn't listen. Why? Because they were faithless toward their wives. They were breaking covenant with God which opened the door to men breaking covenant with their wives. God was a witness against them.

Vs. 15-16 God's plan was for godly men and women to raise godly kids. It is all one wonderful plan. When Ruth went to Boaz, she asked him to cover her with his garment. This was her asking for protection and care. For these men to divorce their wives was to pull away that garment in violence, forcing their wives (as Jesus said) to become adulteresses when they remarried (Matt. 5:32). All of this is why God hates divorce. God covers us with His love and "garment" of care. How dare we commit to protect and care for someone in the covenant of marriage and then withdraw that care. God doesn't like that. He makes allowance for the sin of man, but He still expresses His anger toward those who make divorce necessary.

V. 17 And all of this disobedience brings a darkness and bitterness of heart causing us to actually become bitter with God. Israel could look at its neighbors and say, "Hey, they don't have to do any of this stuff or worry about this and they are doing OK. This is totally unfair. This following God stuff doesn't make sense." But I was reading Jesus saying this morning, *And everyone to whom much is given, will much be required.* The privilege of knowing God requires we act like it. And as every parent has told their kids, "I don't care what they do in Joe's family. You are in our family and these are our rules." In Luke 12:48 (RSV), Jesus also said, *and to whom men entrust much, they demand the more.*

Especially with all we have read about the second coming of Christ, for us as disciples following in the harvest, our only responsibility before God is to love Him, trust Him, and obey Him. The more we give to Christ in following Him, the more we get of Him. There's a happy version of the old hymn, "Trust and Obey," by Big Daddy Weave. You can find it on YouTube. Actually, any version will do. That old hymn says it all.

Revelation 21

V. 1 Now it is time for *a new heaven and a new earth.* The heaven means that area above the earth, not heaven as in God's abode. In the judgments, there is some mention of the powers of the heavens being shaken and stars falling, etc. It could be that God did away with galaxies. Notice that this is not an extreme makeover. The old ones were done away with. These are completely new. This is a reference to Genesis 1:1. The one thing to think about is that this earth might have very little similarity to our earth. Obviously there won't be any oceans or seas, but also, there won't be a need for oxygen, heat or gravity. Will the earth even need to spin if gravity isn't necessary? The earth the Lord makes could be a thousand times bigger and have very different "physical laws," if in fact, "physical laws" are even necessary.

V. 2 The *new Jerusalem* could be the place Jesus said He was preparing back in John 14:2-3. There are some people who think this city will be orbiting the earth during the Millennial Kingdom and will be inhabited by those who are resurrected. They may work on earth, but they'll live there. For those people, the commute will be very quick. It's all speculation, but I thought it was funny. Notice that in this case, the city is the bride, not the church.

Vs. 3-4 God will be present and every aspect of hurt, regret or sorrow from our former lives on earth will be healed. Vietnam vets won't dive under tables every time they hear a loud sound, and children won't duck every time someone raises their hand quickly. All the emotional trauma of

divorce and betrayal, the pang of every act of violence done, will be removed. Loneliness and sorrow will be forgotten. We'll all be totally healed.

Vs. 5-8 This is the Lord making an offer, through John, to everyone reading this who has not made a decision to follow Christ. Notice the allusion in v. 6 to Isaiah 55:1 and John 7:37. It reminds me again, that in the harvest, if they are not thirsty, they will not come. Our job is to ask if they're thirsty and to tell them where the water is.

Vs. 9-14 Note that *the Bride* is the city. Note also that the names of the tribes of Israel and the names of the twelve apostles are a part of the city. So, who is the twelfth apostle? It is either the guy they chose in Acts 1:26, Matthias, or if God, as He often does, goes around our choices, it could be Paul. If it isn't Paul, I know he won't mind. Paul was just happy with the honor of being able to follow in the harvest.

Vs. 15-21 The description here defies anything that could be built on this earth. This leads me to believe that the size of that earth and the physical laws, if any, won't be anything like this earth. In v. 16 we could understand a city wall being 1400 miles long, but not 1400 miles high. Being spiritual with spiritual bodies will be so completely different that it will defy our imaginations. Physical laws will be irrelevant. Science and technology as we know it will be unnecessary. There will be no "falling" or weight. Travel will be "instant arrival," and communication will be intuitive. The necessity for a spinning earth or space will be gone. (And while we're thinking about defying physical laws, I like imagining that we'll get to eat all we want and not get fat!) The point is that there is no reason to doubt these dimensions, since so many things will be completely different.

Vs. 22-27 We have hints in the Bible about life after this earth history. There are heavenly rewards and there will be some similarities with life now. Life will be perfect as it was meant to be, but there will still be life and activity. There will be music. There will be love. There will be fun. There will be beauty. There will be eating. This description shows there will be no temple because we'll have access to the triune God Himself. Jesus will supply the light. And as Jesus said in John 14:16, the Holy Spirit will be in us forever.

V. 26 There will be nations, which means there will be some organization of people.

V. 27 Obviously, there will be no sin or bad stuff. The proof is that the only inhabitants of this eternal existence will be *those who are written in the Lamb's book of life*.

And then finally, what God intended life to be will begin. Finally! And knowing God, it will be a zillion times better than the best we've ever experienced here. This life is the bad dream. God's redeemed world will be the reality we have all desired.

Psalm 149

This is a great psalm to follow Revelation.

Vs. 1-4 Notice that the *new song* and this assembly are before the Lord in Zion. If there is this kind of joy mentioned in this psalm, I would expect it to be at least like this in the eternal life with God. If God took that kind of pleasure in His people in Zion, what will it be like in the new Jerusalem?

Vs. 5-9 Notice how vs. 6-9 sound like the fight in Jerusalem when the Lord comes. It sounds like Zechariah 10:7 and Zechariah 12:1-9 all wrapped together in joy and praise.

We don't often think that to withhold praise and open gratitude to God is sin. For all He has given us, we should have hearts of constant flowing praise, trust and adoration. In our Lord we finally know this, yet even the unbelieving world has been made by Him and their very omission of gratitude and praise will stand against them as a judgment. If someone left a car in your driveway with the keys and a note that it was a gift, most of us would seek to find out who gave

it and have a heart of thanks. Imagine just taking the gift and not trying to find or thank the giver or pretending the car just happened. God says that everyone who seeks finds.

Proverbs 31:10-24

This final section of Proverbs is different than other parts of the book in that the poem here is an acrostic; that is, each line begins with the next successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The human author is unknown, but God made sure this was included.

This is not the description of super woman or wonder woman, but a woman who is a help-mate for her husband. This collection of qualities probably doesn't exist in any one woman on the planet, but putting all of these pieces together you get the image of a woman who was a partner to her husband in life. Cultures change, and times, resources, and needs change; but the God-inspired union between a man and woman is the same. They are to be friends, lovers and partners in living life before the Lord and following Him in the harvest on this planet.

Vs. 10-12 This is probably the most universal and meaningful statement in the poem. A husband is blessed when he realizes how blessed he has been by the wife God has given him.

The following verses describe aspects of what has just been said.

Vs. 13-14 She seeks and brings.

V. 15 She rises and provides.

V. 16 She plans and plants.

Vs. 17-18 She knows how the Lord is using her and finds strength in that.

Vs. 19-24 This has to do with her working with her hands to provide for the poor and for her family. In this case, she is great with a sewing machine. Verse 23 in this context means that her husband wears her stuff. Inherent in this is that the community realizes that he is blessed to have a diligent wife. I don't think v. 24 is a requirement for every woman. Again, vs. 10-12 are the focus.

I would suggest that if a husband and wife are a "team" and deeply in love, she is already doing what God has designed for her that fulfills this blessing, even if she isn't dealing for land or sewing clothes. Today, maybe this woman is good with coupons, keeps her family fed and knows when the sales are on at the store.