

The concept of the Preachers' Study Papers originally came about through the needs of the Tamil Baptist Churches in South India. Since those early days the format of the studies has changed and they are now produced in booklet form.

The purpose of these Study Papers is to encourage preachers and pastors to present God's Word in its entirety. The apostle Paul was able to say that he taught the whole counsel of God. For us today that is the whole Bible, from its opening words in Genesis to the closing Amen in Revelation. Preaching on a text or a verse has its place, but it is difficult to cover the whole of the Scriptures in this way. When we think about this matter of teaching the whole counsel of God, does it not occur to us that the same Holy Spirit who inspired Paul also inspired other writers to present God's truth in a format that would lend itself to being preached and taught? By working through the different books of the Bible as they are laid out for us, a preacher will have, over a period of time, presented to his congregation the whole counsel of God.

These studies in Obadiah and Malachi are our first foray into the Old Testament. We hope that these studies will help in more preaching and teaching from the Old Testament. We need the Old Testament to understand many things that are found in the New Testament. This will become obvious as we realise that all 66 books of the Bible are the inspired Word of God. We must learn to treat the books of the Old Testament as God's living Word to us today and not only as historical narrative. God is unchanging and we can learn so much about him from the Old Testament through the eyes of the New Testament. This is because God's Son, Jesus Christ, has visited the earth and revealed truth that our Old Testament forebears were never privileged to know.

We have followed the same style as we have done with Galatians. Each Study Paper covers a passage that follows on from the passage considered in the previous study. First there is an introduction. Then the phrases of each verse are examined and explained. The study is concluded with a summary. A section follows with an outline of what could be preached on from the passage. These are only suggestions and there are many different sermons that could be preached. Some studies may include a Focus Point, which discusses in more detail a doctrine or other subject that arises out of the text. The study finishes with a series of questions for the reader to think about and consider within the context of his own situation.

We are grateful to Clifford Pond for providing the original material for these studies. He is a retired minister with a wealth of pastoral experience.

Grace Baptist Mission
2004

PREACHERS' STUDY PAPERS

OBADIAH & MALACHI

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Abbreviations for Bible Books

Old Testament

Genesis	Gen.	Ecclesiastes	Eccl.
Exodus	Ex.	The Song of Solomon	Song
Leviticus	Lev.	Isaiah	Is.
Numbers	Num.	Jeremiah	Jer.
Deuteronomy	Deut.	Lamentations	Lam.
Joshua	Josh.	Ezekiel	Ezek.
Judges	Judg.	Daniel	Dan.
Ruth	Ruth	Hosea	Hos.
1 Samuel	1 Sam.	Joel	Joel
2 Samuel	2 Sam.	Amos	Amos
1 Kings	1 Kings	Obadiah	Obad.
2 Kings	2 Kings	Jonah	Jonah
1 Chronicles	1 Chr.	Micah	Mic.
2 Chronicles	2 Chr.	Nahum	Nah.
Ezra	Ezra	Habakkuk	Hab.
Nehemiah	Neh.	Zephaniah	Zeph.
Esther	Esth.	Haggai	Hag.
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zech.
Psalms	Ps.	Malachi	Mal.
Proverbs	Prov.		

New Testament

Matthew	Matt.	1 Timothy	1 Tim.
Mark	Mark	2 Timothy	2 Tim.
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Philemon	Philm.
The Acts	Acts	Hebrews	Heb.
Romans	Rom.	James	James
1 Corinthians	1 Co.	1 Peter	1 Pet.
2 Corinthians	2 Co.	2 Peter	2 Pet.
Galatians	Gal.	1 John	1 John
Ephesians	Eph.	2 John	2 John
Philippians	Phil.	3 John	3 John
Colossians	Col.	Jude	Jude
1 Thessalonians	1 Thess.	Revelation	Rev.
2 Thessalonians	2 Thess.		

OBADIAH AND MALACHI

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Persia and **Esther** became his queen. During the reign of the next king, Artaxerxes, both **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** returned to Jerusalem, the former to carry out religious reforms and the latter to build the walls of the city. Thus Jerusalem was rebuilt and the nation was restored. However, sin could not be got rid of and the Jews continued to show that man could not keep God's Law.¹ Some time after this, therefore, **Mala-chi** delivered God's final message of the Old Testament. He spoke of a Day of Judgement yet to come but, like others before him, also revealed the coming of God's Messiah.

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Nehemiah

¹ The Law given through Moses in the book of Exodus.

Historical Context

Under King David the Lord established the twelve tribes of Israel as a strong and powerful nation. The majesty and renown of the kingdom were increased still further under his son, Solomon, whose chief task was to build a magnificent temple for the worship of God at Jerusalem. However, despite all his wisdom, Solomon took many Gentile wives who led him astray in the worship of their false gods.

1 Kings 5 - 10

Because of this the Lord pronounced that the kingdom would be divided. This came to pass shortly after the death of Solomon in 932 BC, when the northern tribes revolted to form the kingdom of Israel (or Samaria) under King Jeroboam. Only the tribe of Judah, with a large part of Benjamin and remnants of other tribes within the southern area, remained faithful to Rehoboam (Solomon's son) and formed the kingdom of Judah.

1 Kings 11

From its beginning, the northern kingdom was disobedient to the Lord, walking in the ways of the surrounding nations and worshipping idols. Every one of its nineteen kings was evil, the line of succession being frequently broken as a result of assassination. Judah, on the other hand, had a more varied history. Some of its rulers walked with the Lord, whilst others were evil like those in the north.

1 Kings 12

In 875 BC the throne of Samaria passed to Ahab, a man whose wickedness exceeded that of all who had gone before him. He married a Phoenician princess named Jezebel and, under their evil influence, Israel plunged deeper and deeper into iniquity and idolatry. During Ahab's reign the prophet Elijah condemned Israel's sin, calling upon the nation to repent. The next two kings, Ahaziah and Jehoram, were both sons of Ahab. During the reign of the latter, Elisha prophesied that the house of Ahab would be cut off and anointed Jehu king of Israel in his place. Jehu seized the throne and made an end of all of the sons of Ahab at Jezreel. However, having been given the throne, he too refused to walk with the Lord.

1 Kings 16

Sadly, King Jehoshaphat of Judah had made an alliance with Israel during the reign of the wicked King Ahab. One of the results of this alliance was the marriage of his son

1 Kings 22

Jehoram to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. After the death of Jehoram, his son Ahaziah became king. However, his reign was short-lived and, upon his death Athaliah sought to claim the throne of Judah for herself, ordering all of the royal seed to be put to death. However, Jehoiadah the priest preserved Joash alive and, when the boy was 7 years old, proclaimed him king and deposed Athaliah.

2 Kings 8

2 Kings 11

Around 785 BC Jeroboam II became king of Israel. He was an evil king but, notwithstanding this, God caused the nation to prosper during his reign as foretold by the prophet Jonah. Azariah (or Uzziah), the grandson of Joash, became king in Jerusalem around 783 BC, whilst Jeroboam II still occupied the throne of Samaria. During the reigns of these two kings the prophet **Amos** was raised up. He spoke primarily to the northern kingdom, warning of God's judgment and prophesying particularly of the captivity of Israel "beyond Damascus". About this same time God sent **Jonah** beyond Damascus to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, with a call for that nation to repent.

2 Kings 14

Two other prophets, **Isaiah** and **Hosea**, appeared on the scene towards the end of Uzziah's reign. Whilst their ministries covered a similar period, Isaiah's message was directed primarily towards Judah, and Hosea's towards Israel. Both called upon the people to repent, lest they should come under judgment because of their sin. Shortly afterwards **Micah** delivered warnings to both the northern and southern kingdoms.

Israel remained unrepentant and in 721 BC Samaria was conquered by the Assyrians, the people being either killed or taken captive into Assyria. Having overrun the northern kingdom, the Assyrians besieged Jerusalem. Its king, Hezekiah, laid the matter before the Lord, who delivered the city at this time. Nevertheless, Isaiah warned of future judgment upon Jerusalem, speaking prophetically of the captivity in Babylon. Whilst Hezekiah had been a good king, his son Manasseh was evil, causing God to pronounce irreversible judgment upon the nation. It was possibly not long after this that **Joel** issued his prophecy of doom to Judah.

2 Kings 17

2 Kings 18

2 Kings 21

Josiah, the grandson of Manasseh, came to the throne around 642 BC. He was a godly king, but judgment could only be delayed, not avoided. During his reign God raised up the prophets **Zephaniah** and **Jeremiah**, to warn of the coming "day of the Lord". **Habakkuk** also appears to fit somewhere into this period, speaking of the soon coming judgment of Judah. It was probably also about this time that the prophet **Nahum** foretold God's judgment against Nineveh (Assyria) because of her sin against God's people.

In 605 BC, a few years after the death of Josiah, Nebuchadnezzar (the king of Babylon) invaded Judah. Jerusalem surrendered without a fight and Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon taking money and captives, amongst whom was the prophet Daniel. The Babylonians made a second invasion into Judah in 597BC, when further captives were taken to Babylon, including the prophet **Ezekiel**.

2 Kings 24

As a result of insurrection against them the Babylonians returned again in 588 BC, laying siege to Jerusalem for 18 months before destroying both the city and the temple. Most of the population was now taken away to Babylon, leaving only a remnant in the land. Amongst the latter was the prophet **Jeremiah**. Shortly after the fall of Jerusalem, **Obadiah** issued his prophecy against Edom (the descendants of Esau) because of that nation's sin against the Lord's people.

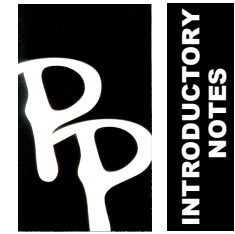
2 Kings 25

The Jews languished in Babylon until the Medes and the Persians took the empire in 539 BC. As prophesied some two hundred years previously by Isaiah, the new emperor (Cyrus) issued a decree that the Jews should return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Some 42,000 Jews returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel and, two years after the decree was given, construction of the temple commenced. Eight years later, during the reign of Artaxerxes, the Jews were forced to cease their labours, through the opposition of their enemies. For nine years the temple remained unfinished. Then, in the second year of the Persian king, Darius, God raised up the prophets **Haggai** and **Zechariah** who urged the people to complete the work.

Ezra

For a further four years they laboured and, eventually, the temple was finished. King Ahasuerus came to throne of

OBADIAH AND MALACHI



The Twelve

At the end of the Old Testament there are twelve short books that are often called **Minor Prophets**. This does not mean that their teaching is of less value than other parts of the Bible. They are just as much the Word of God as all the rest, as we are taught in 2 Timothy 3:16.

The term “Minor Prophets” refers only to the fact that they are very short compared with the others. Perhaps it is best simply to call them “The Twelve”. In nine of the twelve the message is addressed to God’s people in one or other of their two parts, Judah or Israel.¹ Of the other three, Jonah is personal, Nahum addresses the cruel pagan city of Nineveh, whilst Obadiah’s message is for the nation of Edom, sometimes called Mt. Seir, Teman or Bozrah, after places in the land of Edom.

Prophets and Chapters

Major		Minor	
Isaiah	66	Hosea	14
		Joel	3
Jeremiah	52	Amos	9
		Obadiah	1
Ezekiel	48	Jonah	4
		Micah	7
Daniel	12	Nahum	3
		Habakkuk	3
		Zephaniah	3
		Haggai	2
		Zechariah	14
		Malachi	4

That Day

In both Obadiah and Malachi we are told of a special day that is to come. In Obadiah it is called “that day” (Obad. 8), and “the day of the LORD” (verse 15). In Malachi it is called “the day of his coming” (Mal. 3:2), “the

¹ After the Israelites were released from Egypt, they crossed the Red Sea and wandered in the wilderness for 40 years because of their disobedience against God. Eventually Joshua led them into the promised land of Canaan to establish the nation of Israel. About 300 years later the nation was split into two kingdoms, Judah and Israel. This took place after the reign of Solomon and was a punishment for David’s sin of adultery and murder. By the time of Obadiah the northern kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians and only Judah existed as a kingdom.

day” (Mal. 3:17, 4:1-3) and “the day of the LORD” (Mal. 4:5). In Scripture this sometimes refers to tragedies such as wars, famines or earthquakes by which God brings about warnings and judgements (Obad. 8). These “days of the LORD” foreshadow the final day of judgement when Jesus Christ returns to the earth. Unbelievers will be sentenced to their just punishment, which believers will escape because they belong to Christ who receives them (Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 30:3, Rom. 2:5-6; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 20:11-15).

Prophetic Language

Sometimes there is picture language (Obad. 16-18; Mal. 3:2-3) the meaning of which is clear.

Example

Fire (Obad. 18; Mal. 4:1-2) means something that is destructive and painful or sun means light and joy.

Sometimes the prophets use terms familiar to the people to predict future events that they would otherwise not be able to understand.

Example

They would understand “purify the Levites” (Mal. 3:3), but they would not foresee that this would be a cleansing of the church of the New Testament. They would understand “Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion” (Obad. 21) to mean that sometime and somehow their nation would triumph; but they would not foresee that this would be fulfilled in the triumph of the gospel in New Testament days.

Two important things must be remembered :-

1. That pictures and symbols should be understood in the light of the plain teaching of other Scriptures
2. That the Old Testament should always be interpreted in the light of the New Testament.



A question for preachers

Do you always use words and illustrations that are easily understood by your hearers?

The people of God

The teaching, warnings and promises of the Old Testament addressed to Israel are to be applied to believers and churches in the New Testament

era. Israel (the children of Abraham) are those who trust only in Jesus Christ as Lord, whether Jews or Gentiles (Gal. 3:26-29). Peter confirms this when he applies the marks of the people of God to the church (1 Pet. 2:9). When the nation of Israel turned away from God, they put themselves in the same position as unbelievers. Then God’s covenant love applied to the few who were fruitful, the remnant (Is. 11:11; Rom. 9:6; 11:5).

“The dreadful truth is that not only are there two kinds of people on earth – the saved and the lost – but there are two kinds of people within the professed church – the saved and the lost. The awful truth is that when Christ returns, he will not only come to judge the earth, but also to judge the professed church. There were two kinds of people within Judah. There were those who gave God insincere worship with blemished, cheap ‘sacrifices’, and there were those who did their best honestly to revere God’s name because they loved him. Malachi is telling us that Jesus will return to judge between us all.” (*Losing Touch with the Living God*, John Benton - Evangelical Press)



Biblical principles

1 The purpose of the Old Testament

In the Old Testament

- God shows his character
- Sin is exposed
- The impossibility of salvation by human effort is clearly demonstrated.

Thus – it prepares for the coming of Jesus Christ

2 How to discover God’s message for us from the Old Testament texts

First be clear about God’s message for the people at that time

then

See how that message applies to:-

- Jesus Christ and his work
- the gospel
- the church
- Christian experience
- the world

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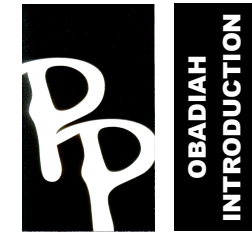
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INTRODUCTION TO

OBADIAH



What is special about Obadiah?

In looking at the book of Obadiah and thinking how relevant it is for us today, consider the following statistic;

“There are 200 million persecuted Christians world-wide
and a further 400 million suffering from discrimination ...”

This is given as a statement of fact in a Prayer Guide for August 2002 published by a Christian organisation known as CARE.

The book of Obadiah is about the persecution of God's people in Old Testament days, so its message has meaning for us today.



What questions do your people ask?

Perhaps you have to face questions like these

- Why are Christians persecuted?
- Does God care about Christians suffering?
- What is God doing about these persecutions?
- What is the future for suffering Christians?



A question for preachers

How can I minister to those who are persecuted?

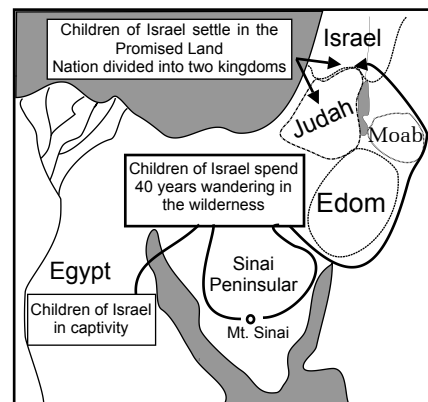
Edom

The people of Edom were descendants of Esau, who was twin brother to the patriarch Jacob. When they were young, Jacob tricked Esau out of his father's blessing and then he had to run away to escape his brother's anger (Genesis 27:1 – 45). As time went on, Jacob proved to be a man of faith in

God, and he returned to live in the land of Canaan which God had promised to his people. His descendants became known as Israelites. Esau settled in Edom and he and his descendants had no place for God (Heb. 12:16).

A story of hatred

When they were older, the two brothers made peace between themselves (Genesis 32-33), but Esau's descendants, the Edomites, never forgave Jacob. They were a constant trouble to the Israelites despite being closely related to them. Later in their history the Israelites escaped slavery in Egypt and travelled to the Promised Land. They very politely asked to be allowed to pass through Edom, but they were angrily refused (Num. 20:14-21). King Saul (1 Sam. 14:47), King David (2 Sam. 8:11-14); King Solomon (1 Kings 11:14-16) and King Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 20:1-23) all had to fight against Edom. But God would not let Edom escape punishment for the trouble they caused Israel, so he warned Edom of the judgement he would bring in Amos 1:11-12, Jeremiah 49:7-22, Ezekiel 25:12-14 and in this book of Obadiah.



Map: Edom in relation to Israel and her history. Diagrammatic only

Occasion

The book of Obadiah is about God's anger with the Edomites especially because of what they did on one occasion when Jerusalem, the capital city of the Israelites, was being attacked and destroyed. Instead of helping them, they went so far as to ridicule them, rob them and even to help those who were attacking them. This is also mentioned in Psalm 137:7.

It is possible that this happened when Jerusalem was attacked by Philistines as described in 2 Chronicles 21:16-17, but it is more likely that Obadiah's prophecy refers to the later destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, and the taking away of its people, recorded in 2 Chronicles 36:15-19.



Book outline

PASSAGE OVERVIEWS OF THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

1.	verse 1a	A message from God by Obadiah to Edom
2.	verses 1b-4	The message is of judgement for Edom
3.	verses 5-9	The destruction of Edom will be complete
4.	verses 10-14	The reason for the judgement
5.	verses 15-21	Two different destinies – one for Edom, the other for God's people Israel



Preaching from the book of Obadiah

- The main theme is the persecution of true believers. We will see how this arises from a common hatred of that which is spiritual by those who are ungodly. This in turn will give lessons about the conflict between the spiritual and the natural in the professing churches and in Christian experience.
- There are many other themes to explore for believers such as being good neighbours and their final deliverance.
- Since the book is addressed to ungodly Edom, we will also find themes for evangelistic sermons to unbelievers, such as the folly of trusting in their own resources and the certainty of punishment for their sins.



Concluding thoughts

Take to heart

Obadiah means the Lord's servant.

Do you know that none of us are any more or less than this?

We can understand what the Lord is saying in verses 7-9 like this:-

My judgement will be carried out by your own friends and allies who will turn against you and deceive you. No matter how clever you think you are, you will be totally destroyed.

Verse 7

All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you; those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it.

Edom had made friends and allies through their trading partnerships. There is some doubt about what is meant by “those who eat your bread”; probably it is another reference to the friends who, in the end, betrayed them.

Verse 8

“In that day,” declares the LORD, “will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, men of understanding in the mountains of Esau?”

The “wisdom” of the Edomites was seen in the success of their trading, and their making alliances with other nations to their own advantage. But God’s wisdom would make theirs look like ignorance.

Verse 9

Your warriors, O Teman, will be terrified, and everyone in Esau’s mountains will be cut down in the slaughter.”

The Edomite soldiers (Teman was a main city of Edom) were more used to terrifying others, but they will themselves be limp with fear. The judgement God would bring on the nation would be total and complete as described in Malachi 1:3.

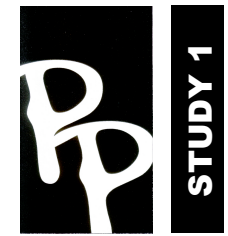


Summary

The vision Obadiah had was a revelation from God. It concerned the nation of Edom. Not only was Edom a neighbour of Judah but they shared the same forefather, Isaac. In these opening verses Obadiah sets out the hostile mood stirring amongst the surrounding nations. This is the work of God. The Edomites prided themselves in their fortresses and strongholds. Some seemed so inaccessible, protected by the mountains. Yet they are not beyond the reach of God. When God acts in judgement everyone and everything will be affected. The terrorising Edomites will be terrorised with fear. There is no place to hide, nowhere to escape.

THERE IS NO DEFENCE

AGAINST GOD’S JUDGEMENT



Obadiah: verses 1-9

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction
- 📁 What these verses mean
 - Passage overview 1 (verse 1a)
A message from God by Obadiah to Edom
 - Passage overview 2 (verses 1b-4)
The message is of judgement for Edom
 - Passage overview 3 (verses 5-9)
The destruction of Edom will be complete
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 Some suggestions of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: The doctrine of judgement
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction

In every period and type of civilisation people appear to have got away with various forms of wickedness. This raises a number of questions. Do the wicked prosper? Do they get away with their evil? Are they too powerful for the State to deal with? Is there any justice? Are the perpetrators beyond the reach of the law and justice? Wickedness can be carried out by a nation just as easily as by an individual or a group of people. In the days of the Old Testament Edom committed sin. She seemed strong and impenetrable. For the people of the surrounding nations Edom appeared to have got away without having to face punishment. But Edom was not beyond the reach of God. Obadiah is the man God uses to be the messenger to tell what was to happen to Edom.

What these verses mean

Passage overview 1 (verse 1a)

A message from God by Obadiah to Edom

Verse 1

The vision of Obadiah.

The “vision” Obadiah had was not a dream or a spirit appearance but a message from God. Obadiah was a common name in Old Testament times. We know absolutely nothing else about this man apart from what we find in his book.

This is what the sovereign LORD says about Edom—

Obadiah did not think out the message himself but it came from someone else. This, he tells us, was none other than “the sovereign LORD”. The name Edom means “red” and may refer back to the red pottage for which Esau exchanged his birthright (Gen. 25:30).

Passage overview 2 (verses 1b - 4)

The message is of judgement for Edom

We can understand what the Lord is saying here like this:-

- I have already prompted your enemies to attack you.
- You think that you are big and strong and so well defended that you cannot be defeated, but you are very seriously mistaken.

Verse 1 (continued)

We have heard a message from the LORD:

An envoy was sent to the nations to say, “Rise, and let us go against her for battle”—

The prophet and those associated with him have been made aware that God is already stirring up opposition to Edom among its enemies. The “envoy” is most probably a way of describing God’s ability to bring powerful influences to bear on the nations.

Verse 2

“See, I will make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised.

Edom has thought that it is big and strong enough to defend itself. It will be made to realise that it has been mistaken.

Verse 3

The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’

One reason why Edom was confident in its own security was its ability to shelter in the high mountains and fortresses that were very difficult to penetrate. The great city of Sela was itself perched high up in the mountains. But such defences would be useless against God.

Verse 4

Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the LORD.

Even if they were able to do the impossible and try to find refuge in the very stars in the sky, God would drag them down, even from there. There is no possible defence against God’s judgement.

Passage overview 3 (verses 5 - 9)

The destruction of Edom will be complete (verses 5-9)

We can understand what God is saying in verses 5-6 like this:-

Even robbers leave some things behind them, and grape pickers leave some fruit, but my judgement on Edom will leave nothing untouched.

Verse 5

“If thieves came to you, if robbers in the night— Oh, what a disaster awaits you— would they not steal only as much as they wanted? If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes?

The Edomites would be very familiar with the activities both of thieves and fruit-pickers so they could not possibly misunderstand what God was saying to them.

Verse 6

But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged!

The Edomites gathered much treasure from trading with other nations. Edom was on much-used trade routes, and they became rich by claiming taxes as well as through their trading activities. What they did not need immediately they hid in secure places in the mountains. But this was not safe enough to save it from those who would attack them.



Some suggestions of what to preach about from these verses

God is sovereign over all nations

In this prophecy God addresses the ungodly people of Edom. This teaches us that people are mistaken if they think that God will ignore them if they ignore him. It also teaches us that no matter what their culture, their religion, their traditions or opinions, these must all be submissive to God's Word, the Bible. For this reason Christians are commanded to take the teaching of the Bible, its warnings and its good news, to all nations (Luke 24:47).

Further material from this passage can be used to develop the message or a number of separate messages

1 Theme: that God loves to use “ordinary” people. (verse 1)

We know nothing about Obadiah apart from what we read in this book. This teaches us that God loves to use “ordinary” people for his work (1 Co. 1:26-29).

This also teaches us that God wants us to serve him for his glory and not ours, and that none of us should ever think that God cannot or will not use us.

2 Theme: it is useless to try to fight against God. (verses 1-4)

Edom thought it could defend itself against God's judgement, but it was greatly mistaken. People who are not Christians try to set up all kinds of defences to escape God's judgement, for example, they complain that God is not fair, or that their good lives should be adequate to please God. Such defences are useless because God is just and his justice cannot be escaped. People must submit first to God's verdict about themselves and then to his mercy (Ps. 51:1-10; Rom. 3:23-24).

3 Theme: the folly of human pride. (verses 1-4)

Edom was proud of its own resources. There is a common tendency still for nations and individual people to rely on their own resources of wisdom, strength, or wealth. Jesus taught the folly of pride and said that humility was the only way to God's blessing (Luke 14:11). The way to humility is by serious thought about God's love in Jesus Christ.

4 Theme: the folly of trying to find security and satisfaction in material things. (verses 5-6)

The Edomites, like many people still, thought that their wealth would give them security and satisfaction. This is foolish because we can easily be robbed of material possessions by illness, accident or tragic circumstances, and at death we will have to leave them behind. Remember the words of Jesus (Matt. 6:19-20). We need to have and use material things for reasonable living, but our trust should be in the Lord.

5 Theme: the importance of having trustworthy friends. (verses 7-9)

The friends of Edom would prove untrustworthy: they would betray them just when their help was needed. Deception is a fact of life of which we need to beware. This is especially necessary when we are entering into intimate relationships, marriages and business partnerships. The best friend to have is Jesus, who proved his love for us by giving his life for us.



Focus Point:

The doctrine of judgement

Men and women are born in sin and therefore cannot live up to God's righteous standards. As a result God condemns us in accordance with his justice. This declaration of our guilt and blame is fully deserved. However, no Old Testament believer in God (i.e. in the promised Messiah) or New Testament believer in Christ will be condemned. Condemnation comes to the wicked and unrepentant. God will judge all people, nations and angels at the end of history. This divine judgement is God's method of displaying his mercy as well as his wrath.

Jesus calls attention to the day of judgement. This will be the final separation of the evildoers from the righteous. This day is referred to in the Old Testament as well. The day of the LORD, Obadiah 15, sometimes called "that day" or "the day", refers to God's final Day of Judgement. In the prophets the term is sometimes used for a day of judgement that will soon happen (Obad. 8). Such occasions foreshadow the final day when unbelievers will be sentenced to their just punishment. (See Jeremiah

46:10; Matthew 25:46; Romans 2:5-6; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2 Timothy 4:8; Revelation 20:11-15.) This day of the Lord will be when Jesus Christ returns to the earth (Matt. 24:30-51). On that day believers will escape punishment since their trust is in Christ who suffered in their place.



Over to you

Obadiah is very graphic in the way he presents the vision God has given him. Do you always use words and word-pictures that are familiar to your hearers?

Do you shy away from the unpleasant subjects of God's punishment and judgement because it might offend some of your hearers?

How thorough are you at understanding God's message for the people they were originally written for and then applying it to the situation of your hearers? (See Biblical principle 2 - page 11.)

promised them, the promised land. Also, God will give them, in the destruction of Edom, the house of Esau.

Verse 17

But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance.

“Mount Zion” means Jerusalem, which will be restored to its former glory. The “house of Jacob” means the nation of Israel who will be restored to the land God promised them. Spiritually this points to the effect of the preaching of the gospel, the inheritance of eternal life for those who come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Verse 18

The house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau.” The LORD has spoken.

After the reign of Solomon God’s people were divided into north and south. The north was often referred to as Israel or Ephraim, or, as here, “the house of Joseph”. The south included the city of Jerusalem and was sometimes called Judah, or, as here ‘the house of Jacob’. The restoration of God’s people would include their being re-united and together they would have the victory over Edom. In the end some Edomites found refuge in the south part of Palestine and were gradually absorbed into the Jewish nation, like the three Herods who were descended from the Edomites and were bitter opponents of Christ and the apostles. Spiritually we have here a forecast of the church, on fire with the gospel, gaining complete victory over all opposition to Christ.

Verse 19

People from the Negev will occupy the mountains of Esau, and people from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines. They will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead.

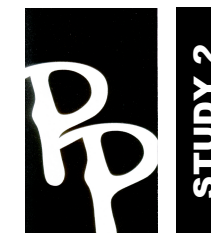
Verse 20

This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess the land as far as Zarephath; the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev.

These verses describe in detail how God’s people would come to possess their inheritance. The time would come when they would occupy all God had promised them and even more.

THE WICKED PREVAIL

BUT NOT FOR EVER



Obadiah: verses 10-21

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction
- 📁 What these verses mean
 - Passage overview 4 (verses 10-14)
 - The reason for the judgement
 - Passage overview 5 (verses 15-21)
 - Two different destinies
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 Some suggestions of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Israel in the New Testament era
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction

In the first study we discovered that Edom is to be judged by God and there is no place she can escape to. What had Edom done to warrant such action? Edom prided herself in her fortresses and inaccessible cities (verse 3). These next verses reveal that it was more than just pride. Edom had committed a greater sin. It was Edom’s attitude towards Israel. Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom) were brothers, yet Edom hated the Israelites, who were God’s people.

What these verses mean

Passage overview 4 (verses 10-14)

The reason for the judgement

We do not know exactly when the events described in these verses took place, but the situation was that the Israelites were being punished by God because of their unfaithfulness to him. When this happened, Edom took advantage of them in their trouble. Even though God was angry with his people Israel, he would not forgive Edom for adding to their misery.

Verse 10

“Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed for ever.

God reminds the Edomites that Israel is their close relation. He stresses this by calling Israel ‘Jacob’. God calls what Edom did against Israel “violence”, which is explained in the next four verses.

Verse 11

On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them.

This was probably the occasion when Jerusalem was attacked by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians as described in 2 Chronicles 36:15-19. In God’s sight, doing nothing to help was as bad as helping the attackers. It was a denial of their family relationship.

Verse 12

You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble.

Worse even than doing nothing to help Israel the Edomites laughed to see them suffer. The Edomites thought that they were better than the Israelites because they were prospering and not suffering. In this they were greatly mistaken.

Verse 13

You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster, nor look down on them in their calamity in the day of their disaster, nor seize their wealth in the day of their disaster.

Even worse, the Edomites actually joined in the attack on Israel, and made themselves richer by their plunder. Probably the plunder was treasure from the Jerusalem temple.

Verse 14

You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of their trouble.

Even worse, the Edomites murdered Israelites who tried to escape, and handed over Israelite captives to the Babylonians. The meaning of the word ‘day’ in these verses is not necessarily a day of 24 hours, but an ‘occasion’ which may cover a number of 24 hour days.

Passage overview 5 (verses 15-21)

Two different destinies

A. The destiny of Edom (verses 15-16)

We can understand what God is saying to Edom in these verses like this:-

All the nations will be subject to my judgement, and you will not escape. Just as you were drunk with wine in my holy temple, so you, and all ungodly nations, will one day drink my wrath to the full.

Verse 15

“The day of the LORD is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.

God’s judgement will reverse what has been happening. Those who have been violent toward others will discover for themselves what violence feels like.

Verse 16

Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all the nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been.

We do not know when the Edomites “drank” on God’s holy hill – that is, in the temple, but we saw in verse 11 that they entered Jerusalem at a time when its people were under attack. At that time the taste was very sweet for the Edomites, but the taste of God’s judgement would be very bitter.

Nations that opposed God’s people in those days, like Edom, no longer exist. The prophecy was fulfilled.

B. The destiny of God’s people Israel (verses 17-21)

The message of these verses can be put like this –

In contrast to the destiny of Edom, God’s people, the house of Jacob and the house of Joseph, will be restored to the possessions God

man's angle). In other words it is God's record of God's own dealings with the world. We view the events recorded in the Bible as being the purpose of God. God is using the Bible to communicate to human beings his thoughts. That means that the details of events we read are governed by theological meaning rather than by military or political significance.¹

By understanding the Bible as God's expressing his thoughts and purpose, we must see the unity of the whole Bible, the Old and New Testaments working together. This has not always been the case and there have been periods in history when the OT has been looked upon as separate from the New. It meant that the OT was not understood in its natural sense but was spiritualised; a hidden meaning was drawn out that fitted in with New Testament thinking. It was the Protestant Reformers of the 16th century who helped the Christian church to see the importance of the historical and natural meaning of the Scriptures.

As an example, how should we interpret matters concerning Israel in the OT? The teaching, warnings and promises in the OT addressed to Israel are not to be applied to the Jews in the New Testament era. They are to be applied to the church. The reason for this is that the New Testament teaches that the true children of Abraham are those who trust only in our Lord Jesus Christ no matter whether they are Jews or Gentiles (Gal. 3:26-29). Peter confirms this when he applies the marks of the people of God to the church in 1 Peter 2:9.

See also Study 7, The Prophetic Passage, in Preachers' Study Papers on Preaching



Over to you

Are you faithful in your preaching both about the eternal punishment of the ungodly and about the eternal bliss of those who are truly repentant?

How careful are you in interpreting the Old Testament for your people? Are your people able to see the relevance of the God of history in their lives today?

¹ *Gospel and Kingdom* (A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament), Graeme Goldsworthy (The Paternoster Press).

Verse 21

Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD's.

Many 'deliverers' arose to rescue Israel from these enemies in the years before the coming of Christ. Spiritually such people are those who have spread the gospel. The final word is "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).



Summary

The reason for the destruction of Edom was her attitude towards Israel. This was a greater sin than her pride. Jacob and Esau were brothers, yet Edom hated God's people.

Edom actively helped the enemy with great joy as they plundered the Israelite people. They should not have done it and God does not allow such action to go unpunished. Edom's end as a kingdom is predicted. But the Israelites too have sinned against God and her calamities came because of that. However, the Israelites are God's people with whom he made a covenant. Whilst they too are punished they will continue after their punishment. The Israelite captives shall return, but Edom will be inhabited by strangers.



Some suggestions of what to preach about from these verses

1 Theme: the prosperity of the wicked should not disturb the faith of the believers. (verses 10-14)

Edom is an example of the arrogant prosperity of the ungodly. Throughout history this kind of thing has tested the faith of God's people, such as the writer of Psalm 73. So often the ungodly seem to have an easier life than Christians who are faithful to the Lord.

Christians should remember that they are being prepared for heaven, and this may well involve poverty, persecution or even chastisement in this life (Rom. 8:35-39; 2 Co. 4:16-18).

Also Christians who have a glorious future should be content with what God allows them to have here and now. Remember that at the judgement the situation will be reversed.

The ungodly will perish, but God's people will be wonderfully blessed, and that for eternity.

2 Theme: we must recognise that there is an ongoing conflict between the natural and the spiritual.

Edom, in its proud reliance on its own wisdom and resources and in its hostility to God and his people, is an example of the natural. This is in constant conflict with the spiritual, which means trust in God, his mercy, his wisdom and strength. This conflict began immediately Adam fell into sin (Gen. 3:15) and will continue in various forms until our Lord returns. For example –

- A.** The opposition to evangelical believers by “liberal” churches, which deny evangelical doctrines such as the final authority of Scripture, the deity of Jesus Christ and the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and by churches that rely on ritual rather than the Spirit's power.

This is clearly seen in the opposition to Jesus Christ by the Jewish religious leaders including the three Herods (Matt. 2:1-12, Luke 23:6-15; Acts 12) who were Edomite descendants.

- B.** The inner conflict, experienced by Christians, between their old nature and their new nature. The old nature is sometimes called “the flesh” or the “sinful nature”, and it has all the deception, self-trust and pride of Edom (Gal. 5:17). This explains why we are sometimes confused, in two minds or severely tested.

Note – you may think it best to handle this theme in two sermons rather than one.

3 Theme: true Christians are to be good neighbours.

The Edomites were neighbours to Israel but were far from being good neighbours.

Jesus reminded the people of God's command, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” and he told a parable to explain what this would mean (Luke 10:25-37). We can use it like this:

- A.** The Edomites were violent like the robbers. We are to be kind, even to those we dislike (Matt. 5:43-44).

- B.** The Edomites were like those who “passed by”. We are to offer help to those in need.
- C.** The Samaritan could have been like the Edomites and laughed at the plight of the Jew but, instead, he took pity on him.
- D.** The Edomites made things worse for the Israelites, but the Samaritan helped the injured man to recover.
- E.** The Edomites aimed at the destruction of Israel, but the Samaritan aimed to save the man's life and provide for his future survival.

A good Christian is always a good neighbour.

4 Theme: the Day of Judgement will certainly come.

The message of the book of Obadiah is that there will be a judgement day which will mean destruction for Edom and deliverance for God's people.

In the complete teaching of Scripture this judgement will involve all people without exception. It will be absolutely fair and will leave the ungodly without excuse and sentenced to everlasting punishment.

The godly will be acquitted on that day because Jesus Christ has suffered the punishment they deserve. They will enter their inheritance of eternal life and citizenship in the new heaven and earth (see 2 Pet. 3:8-13).



Focus Point:

Israel in the New Testament era

Reading and understanding the Old Testament (OT) raises a number of difficulties for us today. We may follow the historical narrative as interesting incidents but we can so easily miss the point of why such events are recorded. Then there are the prophecies and poetry. Our difficulties are made worse because of the time lapse between the OT times and the days we live in.

The interpretation of the OT for Christian believers today is not easy. There are different views held by Christians that lead to a diverse understanding and teaching of the Bible. Such differences arise from the way the OT is handled. In our study papers we view the OT as theological history (i.e. from God's point of view) rather than religious history (from

CONTENTS OF STUDIES ON MALACHI

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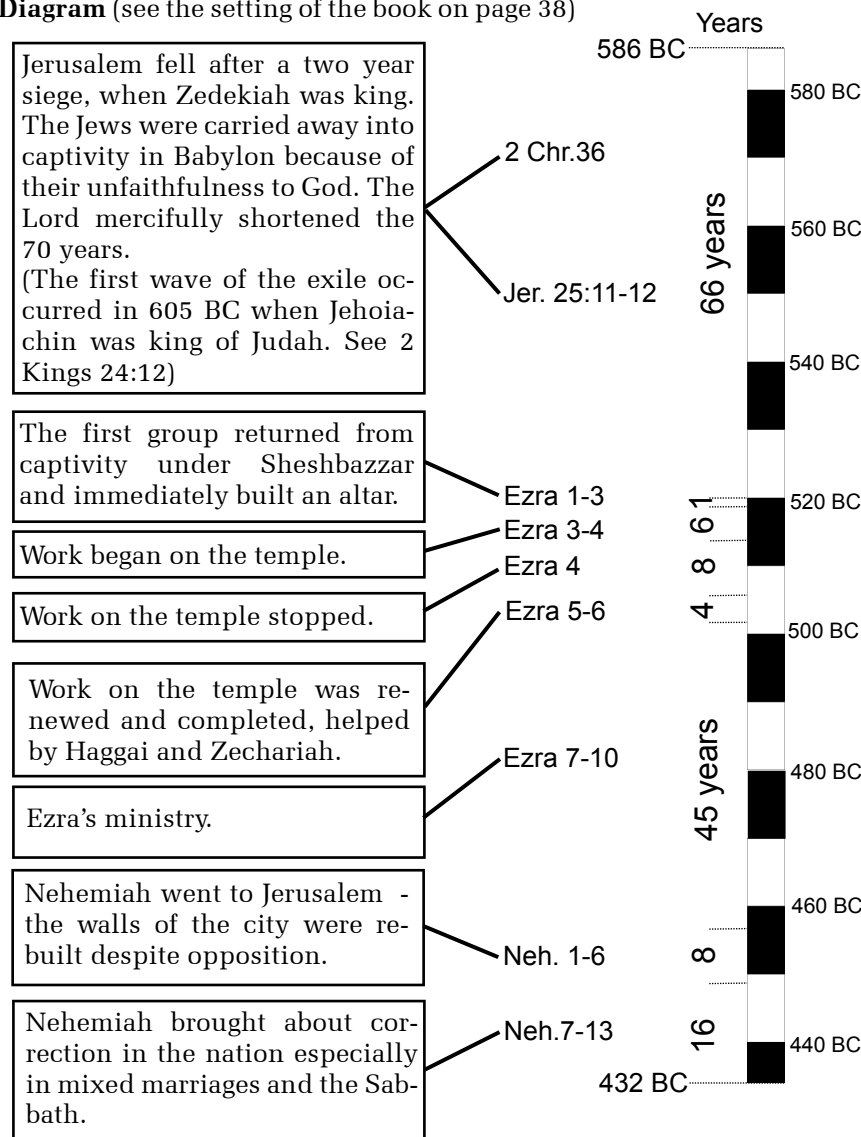
PREACHERS' STUDY PAPERS

MALACHI

Grace Baptist Mission
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OX14 3JD
United Kingdom

2004

Diagram (see the setting of the book on page 38)



Nehemiah returned to his work in Persia and then, some time later, he paid another visit to Jerusalem (Neh. 13:7) when he found the people had yet again returned to evils he had earlier corrected.

It was about this time that Malachi delivered his messages.

INTRODUCTION TO

MALACHI



The Message of Malachi

The message of this book is for Christians and churches who have lost their love for the Lord and their zeal for his work. The Lord exposes the condition, reasons with those involved, warns of the consequences of its continuing, and yet promises future blessing.

This book compels us to examine ourselves to discover our spiritual condition and the state of our relationship with the Lord.

Malachi

The name Malachi means “the Lord’s messenger”. Scholars are divided about whether this was the name of the prophet or if an unknown and unnamed prophet is telling us that he is but a messenger from the Lord. It is not important for us to try to settle this question. The message is always more important than the messenger.

“When I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey – speak about Dr. Carey’s saviour.”

(William Carey – Pioneer Missionary)

The Situation

We can best understand the situation in the time of Malachi if we trace the story leading up to it. The diagram on page 40 will give us an idea of what happened over a period of about 154 years. The number of years given is not exact, but it gives us a picture of the time-span between the first return of God’s people from captivity and the situation faced by Malachi.

Israel

Before they were taken into captivity, the people of God were divided into North (Israel) and South (Judah, with its capital Jerusalem). Those who returned from captivity formed one nation whom Malachi addresses as “Israel”, and they have been one people ever since then.



The setting for the book of Malachi

After their captivity in Babylon those who returned were inspired by such teachers as Ezra and Nehemiah to rebuild the temple and the city and its walls. There were times when their zeal waned and they wilted in the face of opposition. The Lord sent prophets like Haggai and Zechariah to revive their spiritual and natural energies.

But now that the rebuilding work was finished, the nation fell into spiritual apathy which led to carelessness about obeying God and living for his glory. Enter Malachi!

This is the constant experience of God's people. Throughout the Old Testament, times of zeal for the Lord were followed by spiritual decline and unfaithfulness. Then God sent his messengers, through whom he revived his people, until a further period of decline set in.

This pattern has continued throughout the history of the church and is often seen in the lives of individual Christians. Distressing as this is, it nevertheless proves the church is God's work and not man's. Left to us the church would have disappeared long ago, but its continual existence can only be explained by the power of God.

The last book in the Old Testament

Not only did the Holy Spirit oversee the context of each book in the Bible, he also made sure that their order fulfilled his purpose. So why then is Malachi placed at the end of the Old Testament? The answer must be that the poor spiritual condition of the people after centuries of God's teaching, helping, correcting and leading them, proves the need for a new beginning. Malachi foretold the coming of Christ, heralded by someone named Elijah. It is not surprising that Mark began his Gospel with a quotation from Malachi, "I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way" (Mark 1:2 quoting Malachi 3:1).

Themes we will find in this book

Here are some sermon themes we will find:-

- ✍ The importance of love in Christian service
- ✍ Qualities required of Christian ministers
- ✍ Christian marriage

- ✍ Our unchanging God
- ✍ Christian fellowship
- ✍ The eternal punishment of the ungodly and the eternal happiness of true believers



Book outline

Passage overviews of the book of Malachi

The people were giving offence to God

1.	1:1-5	By forgetting his love for them	Study 1	Page 43
2.	1:6-14 2:1-9	By forgetting reverence in worship • The people • The failure of the priests	Study 2 Study 3	Page 49 Page 57
3.	2:10-16	By widespread abuse of marriage	Study 4	Page 63
4.	2:17-3:5	By accusing him of injustice	Study 5	Page 71
5.	3:6-12	By withholding tithes and offerings	Study 6	Page 81
6.	3:13-18	By harsh talk against him	Study 7	Page 89
7.	4:1-6	The final reckoning	Study 8	Page 97



A hint for preachers

Malachi knew the minds of the people and the questions that they would ask (1:2, 6-7, 2:17 and 3:7-8,13). This is a good example for preachers. We should know what questions and arguments will arise in the minds of our people as they listen, and we should take time to answer them in the course of our sermons.

What these verses mean

Verse 1

An oracle: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.

“Oracle” means a burden. The spiritual state of the nation was like a heavy weight on the prophet’s mind and heart. The prophet wrote and spoke quite naturally, but the Holy Spirit ensured that the result was exactly what God would say. The name for the Lord is JEHOVAH, reminding the people of their covenant relationship to him. In this book he is very critical of them, but he is still their God and they are still his people.

Verse 2

“I have loved you,” says the LORD.

The Lord did not begin with harsh words about their faults and failings, but with a reminder of his love for them in the past, his provision, patience, protection and mercy.

“But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’

Malachi used a question and answer method to probe into their failings. Here he sets up a question as if the people responded by asking, “In what way have you loved us?” The prophet knew he was dealing with a perverted and debased people, who had failed to recognise God’s continuing love and favour to them. Having posed the question, Malachi now begins to answer it.

“Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” the LORD says.

The people Malachi was addressing did not need any explanation of Esau and Jacob. They were the twin boys of Isaac and Rebecca, the grandsons of Abraham. The trio of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are constantly referred to in the writings of the Old Testament as the patriarchs of the Jewish nation. Esau was born first and by rights the family lineage and the blessings of God’s covenant with Abraham should have continued through him.

“Yet I have loved Jacob,

But God loved Jacob whilst Esau, the first-born, was rejected. The order of nature was overturned. God does not follow convention but shows his love to whoever he chooses. Jacob did not merit this favour. In fact when we study Jacob’s life we do not find a very pleasant character. The Jewish nation descended from Jacob. Now they are reminded that God had loved them not because of the things they had done but because God chose to love them.

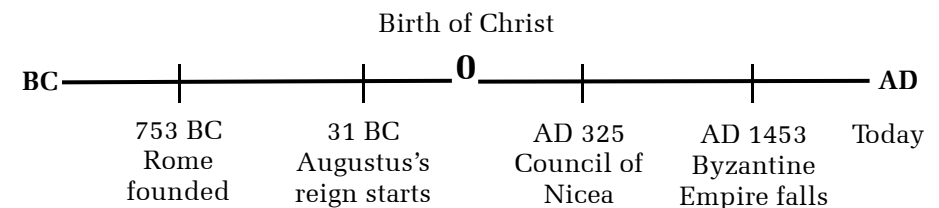
Note on BC dates

The letters **BC** used in the diagram on the previous page stand for **Before Christ**. That means the bigger the number the further back in time we go. In our diagram we show the time period beginning in 586 BC and ending in 432 BC.

The earliest event in our diagram is the captivity of the Jews and their being taken to Babylon. The latest event is Nehemiah’s bringing about correction in the nation. All these events happened before the coming of Jesus Christ. The captivity took place further away than Nehemiah’s work. When we are using BC dates, the larger the number the further away it is.

When Jesus Christ came the dating of the years changed from BC to AD. **AD** stands for **Anno Domini**, which is Latin for “in the year of the Lord”. We are living in the period in which the years are dated as AD. With AD numbers, the smaller it is the further away it is from us. Usually we do not bother to put the letters AD in front of a year which comes after the birth of Christ.

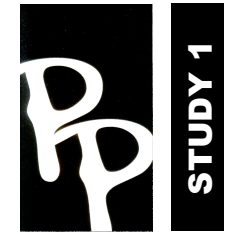
The time line diagram below may help to understand the use of BC and AD dates.



Source: 2000 Years of Christ's Power; Volume 1, N. R. Needham (Grace Publications Trust)

OFFENDING GOD

BY FORGETTING GOD'S
SPECIAL LOVE FOR THEM



Passage overview 1

Malachi 1: 1-5

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 Two suggestions of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 A note about corrective ministry
- 📁 Focus Point: The doctrine of election
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction

Things were not as they should have been. Some of the Jews returned to the Promised Land after the 70 years of exile in Babylon. The temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt and the walls of the city were reconstructed together with many other landmarks. However, the spiritual state of the people was wrong. They did not love or fear God. These people were special to God because he had chosen them to be his people. He was their Father but the Jews gave him no reverence nor did they acknowledge him as their Father. Imagine the hurt an earthly father would feel if his children did not love or respect him, after all the love and care that the father had shown. The Jews needed to be reminded of God's love to them.



Focus Point : The doctrine of election

In our study of the opening verses of the book of Malachi we see God choosing to love Jacob in a special way, but not Esau his brother. We find God acting in this sovereign way throughout the Bible.

The apostle Paul used the words from verses 2 and 3 in Romans 9:10-13 to support his teaching that God elects, or chooses, those whom he saves from their sins. Paul points out that, even before they were born, God had set his love on Jacob and not on his twin brother Esau.

The great mystery of election is that it does not depend on us at all. It begins entirely in the mind and heart of God. Before the world began, God chose his people to be holy and objects of his love and mercy (Eph. 1:3-16; 1 Pet. 2:9,10).

See also Focus Point 1 in Study 16 of Galatians (Book 2 pages 145-6).



Over to you

Have you had to deal with any of your people whose lives have slipped back to old ways?

- How did you approach this difficulty?
- Would you now deal with such a problem differently after this study?

How do you think you should motivate people into spiritual action and Christian service?

How will you minister to those who are in situations where they cannot easily leave their home to be with the Lord's people?

Closing thought: read 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

Verse 3

but Esau I have hated,

To “hate” here does not mean “to detest”, but to prefer one thing rather than another, such as when we serve one master and so ignore instruction from any other (Matt. 6:24). God says that he had loved Jacob and his descendants more than Esau and his descendants. (See Focus Point at the end of this study for further comment - page 48.)

and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.”

After losing his birthright, Esau despised his family and deliberately went off to marry a woman that his father would disapprove of. His actions drove him away to Mount Seir in the land of Edom. This region was rough and surrounded by mountains. Esau was banished to the mountains and deprived of the land which God had destined for his people.

Verse 4

Edom may say, “Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.”

The Edomites were overthrown by the same enemy, the Chaldeans (or Assyrians) as the Jews. The Edomites too wanted the freedom to rebuild and repair what had been ruined. Ezra and Nehemiah were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city, but not the Edomites.

But this is what the LORD Almighty says: “They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD.

Proof of this difference in God's attitude to Edom, the descendants of Esau, was their destruction as a nation. Every effort they could make to recover had failed and would continue to be useless. By adding the phrase about God's anger, the prophet is emphasising the great privilege that the Jews enjoyed. The Jews deserved God's anger just as much as the Edomites yet God became pacified towards the Jews after a while. The Edomites would continue to know God's anger because their father, Esau, had been rejected. Isaac, from whom Jacob came, was the father of the Jews. There is this difference between those God has chosen and those he has not.

Verse 5

You will see it with your own eyes and say, ‘Great is the LORD — even beyond the borders of Israel!’

Israel would surely see the way God had loved them and restored them in complete contrast to his dealings with Edom. The meaning here is that

they would recognise the greatness of his power and mercy that overshadowed them even when they had grown cold towards him.



Summary

The people who had returned to Israel from the captivity in Babylon are being summoned by Malachi. It is as if they are to appear before God's tribunal on the charge that many sins had again begun to be practised. This was the very reason why their forefathers found themselves exiled. The description given to Malachi's message in verse 1, "an oracle" or in other translations, "the burden" signifies a warning with consequences of terror.

In these opening verses God is saying :-

You are in such a low spiritual state and, after all I have done, you doubt my love for you. Compare your situation with the destruction I have brought on Esau. Jacob was twin brother to Esau, but I have not loved Esau nearly as much as I loved Jacob and you who are Jacob's descendants. How can you doubt my love for you?

The Israelites were a privileged people because they were loved by God. They did not deserve God's love any more than the Edomites, but God chose to love them. Yet they were ungrateful and did not love God nor honour his name.



Two suggestions of what to preach about from these verses

1 Theme: the love of God for us is the great motivation for our service.

The spiritual decline of Israel in Malachi's day arose because they had forgotten his love for them, and so they had lost their love for him.

- We too will lose our zeal for the Lord if we do not keep his love fresh in our minds.
- God's love for Israel was especially evident in their rescue from Egypt and then in his faithfulness to the nation up to and including their release from Babylonian bondage.

- We can remember how God sent his Son to die for us, and how his Holy Spirit entered our lives to release us from the power of sin.
- If we forget this, we will be like the older brother in our Lord's parable, whose work for his father was formal and only out of a sense of duty (Luke 15:28-32). The church at Ephesus had the same problem (Rev. 2:4-5).
- If we remember it, we will be like the woman in Luke 7:36-50 or Paul (2 Co. 5:14).

2 Theme: the benefit of spiritual challenges.

By the time of Malachi the challenges of the ruined city, destroyed temple and devastated walls had been overcome, and now there was nothing to test their faith or drive them to God with urgent prayer.

- Such a situation will often lead to spiritual sloth and apathy and even to sheer disobedience.
- We should never be like this because spiritual challenges are always with us. We are always faced with the challenge of our own sins, failings and shortcomings.
- We must always remember the plight of unconverted people as a constant reason for seeking the Lord's help.
- We sometimes find ourselves in situations where we cannot be actively involved in the Lord's work, such as illness, caring for children or other dependants, or old age. At such times we need to be aware of the danger of spiritual decline and find ways of maintaining our fellowship with the Lord and his people.



A note about corrective ministry

When we are exercising a corrective ministry, we too might well begin with reminders of God's love rather than immediately trying to expose the failings we see. The Lord knew that the Israelites had forgotten about his love for them as his people, so he knew what their reply would be. The purpose of correction is to restore the person to right ways. A Christian believer who has erred needs to be reminded of how God has loved him (or her) and that if he does not stop he continues to grieve the loving Father. If he is a true follower of Christ, the reminder of his relationship with God will be more effective than just being rebuked. (See 2 Timothy 4:2 and notice the phrase "with great patience and careful instruction".)

when the gospel began to be spread throughout the world (Matt. 21:43; Luke 24:45-47; Acts 1:8; Rom. 10:16-21).

Verse 12

“But you profane it by saying of the Lord’s table, ‘It is defiled’, and of its food, ‘It is contemptible.’

The second charge against Israel is now made. God’s name was being treated as if it were not holy. This profanity was demonstrated in the quality of the animals brought for sacrifice. The priests were entitled to parts of the offerings brought by the people, for their food. This was God’s provision for them, but they despised it. Perhaps some of this food was not very good because of the defects in the animals being offered. The people in the desert also despised God’s provision for them (Num.11:4-6).

Verse 13

And you say, ‘What a burden!’ and you sniff at it contemptuously,” says the LORD Almighty.

The priests complained that the work was heavy. They may not have said this outwardly, but it was in their heart and attitude. God accused the priests of looking down on the food that God had provided as if they hated working for God.

“When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?” says the LORD.

The reason for bringing defective offerings was so that the sound ones could be kept back for personal gain. The people may have brought the blemished offerings, but it was the responsibility of the priests to teach the people and to reject what was not acceptable. Why did the priests allow sub-standard offerings to reach the Lord’s table for sacrifice on the altar? Were they weak leaders and afraid that if they insisted on healthy animals the people would not bring any offerings and they would starve? Better to have a lame animal than nothing at all! Whatever the reason, it was not acceptable to God.

Verse 14

“Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord.

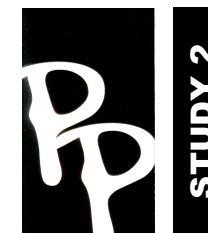
So low had their thoughts of God become that they foolishly imagined that they could cheat or deceive God in this way! They might deceive the priest, but God knew what they were doing. Ananias and Sapphira made the same mistake and suffered the same “curse” (Acts 5:1-11).

For I am a great king,” says the LORD Almighty, “and my name is to be feared among the nations.”

OFFENDING GOD

BY FORGETTING REVERENCE IN WORSHIP

THE FAILURE OF THE PEOPLE



Passage overview 2 (part 1)

Malachi 1: 6-14

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 Three suggestions of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point 1: Priests
- 📁 Focus Point 2: Offerings
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction

If you had been around in Malachi’s day and visited Jerusalem, you may well have been impressed with what you saw. The city’s buildings and walls had been repaired. The temple was full of activity; there were plenty of people with the animals and creatures they had brought to be sacrificed. You would have concluded that the nation of Israel had, after its tribulation of invasion and captivity, been restored to its previous glory. The people had learnt from the errors of the previous generations and were now following the way God had set before their patriarchs. However, your first impressions would be wrong because below the surface things were not good. If you had spoken to a priest he too would not have given an accurate report of what the real situation was like. People were living thinking everything was all right. But Malachi does not have good news for them.

What these verses mean

Verse 6

“A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due to me? If I am a master, where is the respect due to me?” says the LORD Almighty.

In some parts of the world at the opening of the 21st century there is a lack of respect by children for parents, and of workers for masters. The reason for this can be attributed to a turning away from God and his ways. It was God’s intention that such respect would be a mirror of our reverence for him. He is our creator and sustainer and so has the right to be our master. God had adopted the Israelites and become their Father but they showed him no honour. Even servants respect their master with fear because they are unable to escape from him. The Lord complains that they neither show him honour nor respect. He had become nothing to them!

“It is you, O priests, who despise¹ my name.

Malachi brings forward the first of two charges. (See 1:12 for the second charge.) The Israelites, and especially their priests, had forgotten that their God is “LORD Almighty”. All the people were to blame, but Malachi addresses the priests specifically because they were the leaders and teachers of the rest of the people. The priests were accused of despising God’s name. They no longer revered or honoured God’s name, showing their contempt by disregarding the ways God had instructed the priests to follow. (See 1 Samuel 2:12-17 for a full description of the way Eli’s sons treated God with contempt.)

“But you ask, ‘How have we despised¹ your name?’

Malachi uses the question and answer format again. It is as if Malachi anticipates the question they will immediately ask and is ready with the answer.

Verse 7

“You place defiled food on my altar.

The food was brought by the people for the priests to sacrifice in the temple. The people were not rich because they had not long returned from captivity. The land had been neglected in their absence. But the offering they brought was not the firstfruits of their labour. They brought to God the scraps, food of poor quality. The priests should have stopped this behaviour and insisted upon the best that people had grown or reared. In food preparation, such as bread, they should have used best

quality ingredients. The priests did not realise, nor care, that by treating these offerings as being unimportant, without meaning, they were offending God.

“Food” refers to the kind of offering (sacrifice) described in Leviticus 2 and 6:14-23.

“But you ask, ‘How have we defiled you?’

“By saying that the LORD’S table is contemptible.

The question and answer format is used again. Malachi anticipates the thoughts that would be in the mind of his hearers and readers. “The Lord’s table” was where the priests prepared the sacrifices to be offered on the altar in worship to God. The priests’ attitude is described as a wilful disrespect of God’s authority.

Verse 8

When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?” says the LORD Almighty,

The law of Moses (Leviticus chapters 1-7) had stated in detail what sacrifices were to be offered in worship. None were to be defective; only the best would be worthy of such a God. They would not dare to offer a poor meal to an earthly governor; how dare they offer anything less than the best to God? The priests should have known these things and taught them to the people, but they were as bad as the rest.

Verses 9 and 10

“Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?” – says the LORD Almighty.

“Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the LORD Almighty, “and I will accept no offering from your hands.

This is not a serious call to prayer, but a way of asking how they could expect God to respond to any prayer from them for mercy. It is more likely that it would be better if someone had the sense to shut the temple, and put an end to their empty and useless activities.

Verse 11

My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations,” says the LORD Almighty.

If Israel failed to honour the Lord, he would raise up others who would do so. This was fulfilled at the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost,

¹ In some NIV translations *show contempt* for is used instead of *despise*.

Christ would offer when he died on the cross (Heb.10:11-12). The defective actions of the priests and their careless offerings were, for this reason, offensive to God.



Over to you

Is the worship offered by your church acceptable to God? You may find it helpful to examine where the main focus of the gathered people is. Is it God- or man-centred?

Your people cannot absolve themselves from their responsibilities to God. But as their leader how well have you instructed them, given them a good example to follow?

If you detect that there is a coldness in the worship of God amongst your people, what would you do to try and remedy the situation?

The second part of this verse repeats what God had said in verse 11 about his greatness and his plan that the day would come when people all over the world would give him true worship (John 4:21-24). It was because the people and priests had forgotten God's greatness, and no longer were in awe of him, that their worship had become so careless.



Summary

The Israelites were so spiritually cold that they did not realise that God considered their offerings to be unworthy. Instead of giving God acceptable worship, their irreverence dishonoured God. God is not to be worshipped in an outward and formal way, for he looks upon the attitude and willingness of the worshipper. Being descendants of Abraham did not guarantee the Israelite people God's favour and blessing, unless they gave him that special place in their lives. They were cheating God out of the respect and reverence due to him. However, just because the people of Israel failed to bring God true worship, this was not the end of the matter. Malachi said the time would come when people all over the world would give God pure worship. Meanwhile, the ritual of the Israelite was worthless and deceptive, and unworthy of God's greatness.



Three suggestions of what to preach about from these verses

1 Theme: God is never frustrated by human failure.

God said that if Israel failed to give him the glory he would raise up others who would do so.

- This happened when God set aside the Jewish nation and caused the gospel to spread among the Gentiles (Matt. 21:43).
- We can apply this to ourselves as individuals. If we do not serve the Lord as we should, he will use other people instead of us. This was the challenge Mordecai gave to Queen Esther (Esth. 4:14).
- We can also apply this to churches, for example Revelation 2:4-6.

- In the history of the church worldwide, when countries that were once full of zeal for the gospel lose their spiritual vitality, God turns to others. In these days, countries in some parts of the world are being overtaken by others in obedience to God.
- God is never frustrated. One day the whole earth will be full of his glory (Isa.40:5).

2 Theme: our worship and service must be worthy of God.

Israel had so much forgotten both the love of God for them and his greatness, that their worship was unworthy of him and unacceptable to him.

- We need to examine our worship to see if our offerings of praise are acceptable to God.
- Are our minds and hearts totally engaged in our singing, praying and listening to God's Word?
- We need to be sure that our lives are in harmony with our words of worship. For example, if we have an unforgiving spirit God will not hear us (Matt.5:23-24).
- Our whole lives should be an offering to God (Rom.12:1). This means trying to please him in every aspect of life, family, church, work and leisure (Col.3:16-17).

3 Theme: unconverted people often try to deceive God.

The people Malachi addressed were so far removed from God that they were no better than unconverted people. As such, they foolishly tried to deceive him.

- This is still the habit of people who refuse to humble themselves before God. In trying to deceive him, they deceive themselves.
- They do this by going to church and observing religious rituals, and by giving money to churches or charities. In this way, they try to hide their lack of love for God and unwillingness to admit their need of the gospel.
- Others try to avoid admitting their need to trust Jesus Christ alone for salvation and claim how good and respectable they are.
- By this they deceive themselves, thinking that God does not see their pride and other inward faults (Ps.19:12-13; 51:6-10).



Focus Point 1: Priests

In the Old Testament priests were necessary for the approach of the people to God. Priests were required because of the universal sinfulness of man. The priests were to act on behalf of men to offer gifts and sacrifices for their sins to God. The Old Testament priesthood was only preparatory; it could not of itself achieve reconciliation between God and man. It was imperfect and aroused a longing for a perfect priesthood.

This function has been entirely replaced by Jesus Christ (1 Tim.2:5-6). He is now the only mediator between God and men, and there is no other valid priesthood for churches today. But there are two ways in which we can draw lessons for today from the Old Testament priesthood –

1. We see from chapter 2:1-9 (Deut.33:8-11; Heb.5:2) that those priests were religious teachers who were to teach the people and set them a good example. Likewise, elders in the churches are to lead and care for the people (1 Pet.5:1-4). Also, the people are called upon to follow their leaders and to supply their material needs (Heb.13:7,17; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).
2. The New Testament teaches that all true Christians are priests (1 Pet.2:9; Rev.5:10). They have access to God, to offer the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving (Heb.13:15; 1 Pet.2:4-5), and of themselves. (Rom.12:1). The term used to describe this doctrine is “The Priesthood of all Believers”.

The term “priest” is identical in origin with the word “presbyter”, which means elder. In the English language the word “priest” has in the most part become associated with a religious official, whose main function is to offer up sacrifices. This has led to a confused understanding of the role of biblical church leadership today. The New Testament never uses the term “priest” to describe a church leader, such as a pastor or elder.



Focus Point 2: Offerings

The sacrifices offered to God by the priests were intended to be “visual aids” preparing the way for the one perfect sacrifice for sin that Jesus

The Lord shows the priests of Malachi's day the lives and attitudes of the earlier generation of priesthood. How does the present generation compare? This is a good guide for church leaders today.

this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name.

"stood in awe" – this is an attitude that is determined to honour and please God and is fearful of offending him, out of love for him and awe at his greatness.

Verse 6

True instruction was in his mouth

"true instruction" – explaining God's truth in all its parts to the people, even if they do not like it.

and nothing false was found on his lips.

"nothing false" – openness and honesty in teaching and pastoring. Not changing the message according to the circumstances or who the hearers were.

He walked with me in peace and uprightness,

"walked with me" – to walk with God is to be in constant communion with God, and to live in a manner that pleases God.

and turned many from sin.

"turned many from sin" – the effect of his life and teaching was to save many from sinfulness and produce a large measure of godliness among the people.

Verse 7

"For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction — because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty.

"messenger of the LORD Almighty" – all these requirements can only be met by a constant sense of being the servant of God. The truth is God's and he gives the ability to teach it.

Verse 8

But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble;

The key word is "BUT". The priests of Malachi's day had the opposite effect to the one God looked for as seen in verses 5-7. They led people astray instead of fulfilling the law of God themselves.

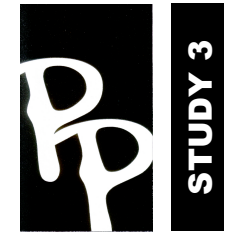
you have violated the covenant with Levi," says the LORD Almighty.

When the priests forsook the way of God (see verses 5 - 7) and caused many people to stumble, they had broken the covenant. The basis of the

OFFENDING GOD

BY FORGETTING REVERENCE IN WORSHIP

THE FAILURE OF THE PRIESTS



Passage Overview 2 (part 2)

Malachi 2: 1-9

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- Introduction
- What these verses mean
- Summary
- A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- Over to you

Introduction

No one will be excused by God. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Observe the rebellious nature of a baby and how quickly human self-centredness shows itself. It is the parents' role to teach the growing child to share and interact with other people, to conform to an acceptable social standard. What if the parents do nothing in training and preparing their child for life? They would be failing in their parental duty and the child will grow up ill-behaved and probably end up in trouble with the authorities. A crucial element of parenting is being a good example for the child. It was the same with the Israelites and it is the same today in the church. Spiritual leaders are there to teach, nurture, lead by example and rebuke, so that people are helped to understand and follow God's ways of salvation. Each person is responsible before God for their actions and life, and cannot make an excuse that they never had a teacher. However, God appoints spiritual leaders and holds them accountable for the way they lead the people. Failure to do so is very serious. In the nation of Israel the priests were the spiritual leaders. They were to blame for the spiritual state of the people and Malachi now

turns his attention to them. Here God exposes the failure of the priests to fulfil his purpose in appointing them. At the same time, we have the most detailed account in Scripture of the responsibilities of the priests, in addition to the offering of sacrifices (see also Deut.33:8-11; Heb.5:2).

What these verses mean

Verse 1

“And now this admonition is for you, O priests.

The priests, or teachers of the people, are reminded that they are accountable to God. New Testament church leaders must also remember this (Heb.13:17).

Verse 2

If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honour my name,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will send a curse upon you and I will curse your blessings.

The priests should have been a good influence upon the people. Instead they were leading them astray. God was angry with them and if they would not now listen, God would move against them. God was holding the priests responsible for the lack of reverence and true worship amongst the people of Israel.

“my name” = God himself

If God’s name continues to be dishonoured, the priestly blessing ¹ will be turned to curses. The people might think that the priestly blessing would be good for them. But they would be deceived; the “blessing” would be a curse. By reversing the blessing, the Lord would show the priests up for what they really were.

Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honour me.

Malachi shows how bad the situation has become by telling them that God’s wrath already rested on Israel because of the priests. Even with the people being cursed in place of blessing, still the priests continued in their dishonour of God. They were being shown up for their stupidity and coldness. Yet the opening word of this verse is “If”. God is showing his mercy. He is telling the priests, through Malachi, that the curse will

¹ See Numbers 6:22-27 for the instruction the LORD gave to Moses for the priestly blessing. It was to be pronounced on the people after the sacrifices had been offered.

be sent if they continue in not listening and further dishonour God’s name. God has left an opening for them to repent and return to a rightful relationship with him. If not the curse will come in its full intensity, greater than what is being experienced.

Verse 3

“Because of you I will rebuke your descendants;

This phrase can be read as follows, “Because of you I will blight your grain.” The evidence of God’s curse would be seen in two ways. The first way would be through **famine**. The text in the first part of this verse is uncertain. The reference to their descendants may refer to the wives of the priests becoming barren, which would lead to a steady decline of the Levite tribe, from which the priests were taken. More likely, it means that these greedy priests would be starved of food from corn seed because, if there were famine, there would be less food brought in by the people as tithes and offerings into the temple. Either way the priests would suffer severely.

I will spread on your faces the offal from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it.

The second way God’s curse would be seen is in their **shame**. The entrails of the animal sacrifices were normally taken outside the camp and burned. The shame to be suffered by the priests would be as horrible as if the entrails were spread over their faces!

Verse 4

And you will know that I have sent you this admonition so that my covenant with Levi may continue,” says the LORD Almighty.

There was mercy in God’s warning. His purpose was to restore the priesthood to the purity, diligence and zeal they had at first. The priesthood arose from the tribe of Levi (Num.3:9-12). It is this God-given appointment of the tribe of Levi to the priesthood that the phrase “covenant with Levi” refers to. Their zeal for the Lord is seen in two events early in their history (Ex.32:25-29; Num.25:6-13). See also Numbers 25:12-13 for God’s pleasure with the faithfulness of Phinehas the priest.

Verse 5

“My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him;

It was God’s purpose that the priests themselves would enjoy a life of communion with God and the peace that would follow. The priests of Malachi’s day knew nothing of this because, in contrast to their forefathers, they failed in their responsibilities. They had lost their saltiness, their influence for good. (See Matthew 5:13 for Jesus’ teaching on this.)

What these verses mean

Verse 10

Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?

This cannot refer to the fact that God is the Father of the human race by creation, or that all people are in that sense his children. If this were the meaning, there would be nothing wrong with the people of Israel inter-marrying with those of other races. (See verses 11 and 12.) “Create” refers to the founding of the nation of Israel as God’s people (see Is.43:1), so that God is in a special sense the “Father” of them all.

Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?

The nation was united to God both by “founding” and by “covenant” (Ex. 19:5-6). This should have knitted them together in a close unity, but their bringing in foreigners through inter-marriage (verses 11-12) and their habit of divorce (verses 13-16) were destructive of that unity.

Verse 11

Judah has broken faith.

God’s law through Moses was broken. Even the tribe of Judah was complicit in this. The tribe of Judah was greatly favoured by God and their name mentioned as transgressors showed that unfaithfulness had penetrated into all of Israel.

A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.

God was clear in forbidding any inter-marrying of Israelites with other nations (Ex. 34:15-16; Deut. 7:1-4).¹ The whole idea was detestable to God and brought dishonour on him. The reference to Israel is to the dispersed nation as a whole, whilst Jerusalem describes the Jews who returned from exile. Those at the place where the temple was situated were guilty as well as the Jews who were in exile amongst foreign people.

sanctuary = God and his holy character

The sin committed is detestable because inter-marriage was with people who followed other gods.² This showed that holiness and purity of God

¹ The principle is carried over to New Testament believers (1 Co. 7:39 and 2 Co 6:14-18).

² The Bible is not forbidding inter-racial marriages. There are examples in the Old Testament where marriage between two people of different races takes place. What made such marriages acceptable was the submission of both partners to the God of Israel. See Boaz

covenant was the appointment of the tribe of Levi to the priesthood and their rôle of bringing sacrifices before God on behalf of the people. They were guided by God’s law. Verse 5 describes this covenant as one of life and peace. Going outside of the covenant brought serious consequences.

Verse 9

“So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law.”

The priests had only taught the people the parts of God’s law that did not condemn themselves. Church leaders are not to play around with God’s truth and select the parts that suit their needs or that will please the people. All of God’s Word must be preached and taught. (See Acts 20:20 where Paul preached all of God’s Word to the Ephesian believers.) In the end leaders who only please themselves will be shown up before the people for what they really are. They will be disgraced.



Summary

God appoints those who are to be the spiritual leaders of the people. Such leaders have responsibilities which are not to be taken lightly. They are to act in accordance with the way that God has prescribed. In the nation of Israel of the Old Testament the leaders (priests) were to come from the tribe of Levi. This was part of the covenant God had made with Israel. In the New Testament church, God prescribes the way that elders are to be chosen (see Titus 1:5-10 for example). When leaders do not act in the way prescribed by God there are serious consequences. The priests of Malachi’s day were under God’s curse because they had broken God’s covenant with Israel. God’s covenant required reverence on their part, the instruction of his people with the truth and an example to his people of godly conduct. Instead of this the priests had strayed and caused God’s people to stray with them.



A suggestion of what to preach
about from these verses

Theme: God's requirements for Christian maturity and service.

The requirements God laid down for the Old Testament priests can be rightly applied to New Testament pastors and to all Christians.

Reverence – this is “the fear of the LORD” (Ps. 111:10) which means that we so love the Lord and so respect his greatness that we hate the thought of offending him (Heb. 12:28-29).

Sound teaching – Paul was able to claim, “I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God” (Acts 20:27). We must be true to the Bible whether or not people are willing to receive and follow it. (See also 2 Tim. 1:13).

Honesty – we are not to alter the message to please certain people. We are to believe and practise what we say (Matt. 7:15-20).

Godliness – we are to spend time with the Lord and with his Word (Acts 6:4; Col. 3:16-17; Gen. 5:22).

Zeal for the salvation of others – a proof of our own salvation is zeal for others to be rescued from God's wrath. (Dan. 12:3; James 5:19-20; Jude 22-23).

Representatives of God – we are God's messengers in our lives and in our words. We are not to promote ourselves or our own ideas, but to represent God in the world (Acts 1:8; 2 Co. 5:18-20).



Over to you

Read again the six requirements set out in verses 5-7 for spiritual leadership; how do you measure up?

How would you respond if some in your congregation objected to some of the subjects raised in your preaching?

OFFENDING GOD

BY WIDESPREAD ABUSE OF MARRIAGE



STUDY 4



Passage Overview 3

Malachi 2: 10-16

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Guarding our spirits
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction

The priests were lazy and had little reverence for God. They went through the outward forms of ritual and ceremony, but there was no inward, spiritual longing to follow God's ways and bring glory to him. This contributed towards the spiritual barrenness that dominated life in Israel. The priests were admonished by Malachi in 2:1-9; now the prophet turns his attention to the people. He focuses on the deterioration of the spiritual condition of the ordinary people. Why were the people at such a low spiritual level? What had happened? From the passage before us we read that God no longer pays attention to their offerings. For God not to answer his covenant people signifies that things are bad. Malachi focuses on the problem — unfaithfulness.

- Christians are able to pray for grace to persevere in their marriage, for strength against temptation and for patience, love and self-control.
- Christians, submissive to God, will do all they can to make their marriage to be for life.
- A stable, loving, lasting Christian marriage is a wonderful picture of the union of Christ with his church (Eph. 5:22-23).

Note: This could be enough material for two sermons, or even more if the local situation demands.



Focus Point: Guarding our spirits

The concluding instruction of this study's passage is "guard yourself in your spirit" (2:16). How can we do that? We have to recognise that it is from our spirit that all sin begins. Protecting our spirit from the first risings of sin will regulate our actions and behaviour. Our thoughts are an integral part of our spirit. The mind is so easily invaded by things we see and hear, which then affects our thoughts and our spiritual demeanour. In the relationship of husband and wife, purity and being dedicated to each other must be within the basic thinking of the couple. How do they protect their minds from contradictory thoughts entering? In some societies today, promiscuity is portrayed as the norm.

Here are four suggestions that may help in "guarding your spirit" in the area of marriage.⁴

1. *Recognise the problem of these thoughts*

Face up to the situation and admit that you have a problem. You will never master it unless you look upon it as the enemy. We will know the deadness and barrenness of spiritual life if we treat sin lightly in any way.

2. *Recognise the kind of family situations which promote disunity between you and your partner. Then do something about it*

It is the small irritations between marriage partners which can be the cause of bitter and then adulterous thoughts. If there is a regular source of irritation, it needs to be sorted out in some way and avoided. Partners need to understand and help each other. The devil is always looking to exploit situations. Disturbing and ruining a Christian marriage is high on the enemy's hit list.

⁴ These suggestions are taken from *Losing Touch with the Living God* by John Benton (Evangelical Press).

did not matter. God was no longer the centre of their lives; they substituted him with other gods.

Verse 12

As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob — even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty.

No matter who is guilty of this sin, God will exclude that person from access to himself. Offerings to God from such a person would be meaningless and unacceptable. "The tents of Jacob"³ means the people of God and so being cut off from God himself.

Verse 13

Another thing you do:

The Israelites' disrespect for God was not just limited to the marrying of women who followed other gods. Through that action they had polluted themselves and then, when coming into the temple (sanctuary), their presence in the place of worship was displeasing to God. This was not all — there was something else within the nation that angered God.

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.

Not everyone married women of foreign gods. There were many who married from within their own people. They did not neglect their religious duties of coming to the temple with their sacrifices. Yet their spiritual lives had become dry and barren. It concerned them to the point where they recognised that something was wrong.

and Ruth in the book of Ruth as an example. What is being taught is that for the people of God to marry outside of God's people is wrong. Today, when a person becomes a Christian, they are joined to the body of Christ (God's people). It would be treachery to all the brothers and sisters of Christ if that Christian then married a non-Christian. Such a Christian could never be totally committed to God, his kingdom and his people without ignoring the marriage partner.

³ The patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob etc.) lived in tents. In some translations the word tabernacle is used. It wasn't until the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua that the people lived in more permanent dwellings. Jacob was the father of 12 sons, from whom the 12 tribes of Israel were formed. Jacob was also given the name Israel, which was then adopted for the nation. Jacob was looked upon as the physical father of the nation, though it was with his grandfather Abraham that God made the original covenant. In the exodus from Egypt and the wanderings in the desert under Moses, the Tent of Meeting (tabernacle) was where God dwelt amongst the people. The "tents of Jacob" is the representation of God's people being together as a community, with God amongst them. To be cut off from the tents of Jacob meant God will no more own them and they would not belong to him under the covenant.

Verse 14

You ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

Marriage vows were being broken, and those who did this were surprised that their conduct hindered fellowship with God. The men were using the signs of ageing in their wives as an excuse to desert them for younger women. God would not ignore such despising of his purpose in the beginning (Gen. 2:21-24) that marriage was for life.

Verse 15

Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

This verse is uncertain and there are a number of different translations and interpretations. The meaning that seems best to follow from what has gone before is this: God intended husband and wife to be one both physically and spiritually. One reason for this was the birth and nurturing of children in godliness. This would be hindered by a breakdown in faithfulness of the parents to each other.

Verse 16

“I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel, “and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,” says the LORD Almighty.

God’s attitude of hatred to the whole idea of divorce could not be more clearly stated. It is true that God allowed divorce (Deut. 24:1-4), but this was to prevent a husband leaving his wife without good reason. Jesus put the Pharisees right on this in Matthew 19:1-9. Violence seems to refer to the hurt that unfaithfulness gives to a deserted wife.

So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

The problem begins in the mind and heart. God’s people must be self-controlled. The purity of marriage has to be maintained in the believer’s thought life as well. (See Matthew 5:27-30.)

See Focus Point on page 68 for practical suggestions to help in “guarding your spirit”.



Summary

People cannot hide behind their leaders and blame them for the failures in their own lives. The leaders will answer for their responsibilities, but the people must face up to their own shortcomings. Malachi identified the reason for their low spiritual state - unfaithfulness. This was seen in two ways. Firstly by intermarrying with people who followed other gods. Secondly, by unfaithfulness within Israelite marriages. The message from God, through Malachi, can be summed up like this: You are all members of my family, but you are destroying the family identity by inter-marrying with people of other nations. You wonder why I am not listening to your prayers; it is because you are divorcing your wives for no good reason, and I hate divorce.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: Christian marriage.

God detested the whole idea of any of his people marrying those who did not share their faith, and he hated any idea of unfaithfulness within marriage. From this, and in the light of the New Testament, we can work out a Christian approach to marriage.

- Christians should marry partners within the Christian faith in submission to the Lord. “He must belong to the Lord” (1 Co. 7:39).
- Those who marry non-Christians tend to become spiritually stunted, and often depart from the faith altogether.
- It is better to remain single than to be married to unbelievers (2 Co. 6:14-15).
- Single people should look for partners who are Christians and who will help them to mature in their faith.
- Where both parents are Christians their children will be reared in a stable spiritual setting (Eph. 6:4).
- Disobedience in this will lead partner and children to think obedience to God is not important.

patience and longsuffering in the Psalms and other passages of Scripture, we come to realise the gravity of the situation. God has reached the point when his patience with them has reached its end. After Malachi God is silent for over 400 years. Israel will have no further revelation from God through prophets. The Old Testament Scriptures are closed.

“How have we wearied him?” you ask.

We notice again the question and answer format. Having made the statement that the people are wearying God with their words, Malachi anticipates the thoughts that would cross the minds of the people. It is not clear whether Malachi was actually asked this question in response to his accusation but he uses the question and answer method to good effect to get the message over. This is a practice which preachers can adopt, anticipating the thoughts that would be on their hearers’ minds.

By saying, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them” or “Where is the God of justice?”

Here is something else about which they did not realise they were giving offence to God. The ungodly practices of the priests and the people that Malachi has exposed have denied them God’s blessings. From this they have ignorantly drawn the conclusion that God loves the godless nations and not them. So they accuse God of injustice to them!

Chapter 3

The chapter divisions are not always helpful; they were not part of what Malachi wrote, but were added to help us find our way in the Bible.

Verse 1

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.

How does God respond to the people’s accusation that he is unjust? By telling them that he will send a messenger. We know who this messenger was, because Jesus quoted this verse from Malachi in Matthew 11:10. Jesus was making reference to John the Baptist. Mark opens his Gospel with John the Baptist, quoting from Isaiah that John was the messenger sent ahead of Jesus (Mark 1:2). Luke similarly does this in his Gospel (Luke 3:4-6).

Then suddenly the LORD you are seeking will come to his temple;

“Suddenly” – the coming of Jesus Christ was totally unexpected by the majority of the people (Luke 2:1-14). “Temple” – our Lord was often in the temple (Luke 20:1), but this also stands for “his people” (Matt. 1:21) who are his temple (1 Co. 3:16). “The Lord . . . will come” – the people were foolish to demand God’s justice. If he gave them what they asked for, there would be no hope for them. God’s dealings with them would be

3. Take any appropriate action to remove the sin

Jesus’ teaching on this subject is radical. If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away (Matt. 5:29). We must not interpret this literally. Jesus uses the illustration to demonstrate the seriousness of sin. He goes on to say that it is better to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If sin is not removed there will be serious consequences. There may be certain places or people which stimulate sinful thoughts in you. Then avoid them. There may be thoughts from a sinful past that continue to plague you. Ask God to deaden these thoughts. Reading Scripture, meditating and praying is a great help. There are many warnings accompanied by the consequences if ignored. Train yourself to think on good things (Phil. 3:8).

4. Work at improving the loving relationship within your marriage

The basis of marriage is friendship and companionship. The friendship blossomed in youth. Over the passing of years this friendship can become a little jaded if not cared for. Couples experience many events of life together, some of which can bring stress and sadness. These can be testing times for their companionship. In some societies a long and happy marriage is often viewed as a matter of luck. Such marriages do not just happen. They are made by perseverance, patience, thoughtfulness and love. Christian couples, from as early as possible in their relationship, ought to learn to read the Scriptures and pray together.



Over to you

What do you do when a couple (or their families) ask you to marry them, but only one of them is a Christian?

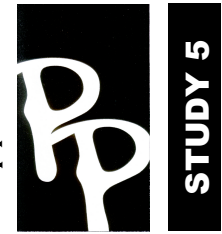
If you are a married church leader, what is the state of your own relationship with your wife? Do you need to give attention to any part of your marriage? The pressure of leadership ministry can so easily isolate the wife and make her feel lonely.

What do you think is the spiritual state of your congregation? Is there a dryness, a barrenness? If so, can you identify the cause of this?

Note: The passage of this study shows us a problem that existed in Malachi’s situation. Unfaithfulness may not be the only cause for the low spiritual state of a church. Much wisdom and discernment is required in these matters.

OFFENDING GOD

BY ACCUSING HIM OF INJUSTICE



Passage Overview 4

Malachi 2:17 - 3:5

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 Three suggestions of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Cleanliness and Purification
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction

The book of Malachi is a sad commentary on the state of the Jewish nation. Yet, despite the low and dry spiritual condition of the people, there is still hope because God is merciful. The passage of this study shows us how bad the situation had become. The people are wearying God. They accuse God of injustice. God brings an answer — he will act. But when he does, the Jewish nation as the old covenant people, will not like it. Why? They will discover that he is a just God and it is all their practices that are unjust. A painful, purifying process needs to take place.

What these verses mean

Verse 17

You have wearied the LORD with your words.

The prophet Malachi makes a very serious accusation. They have worn the Lord out with what they have been saying. When we read of God's

is a Judgement Day coming, which none of us can escape (Rev. 20:11-15).

- God's way is the way of mercy. The only reason we are still alive is God's mercy, giving us time to repent and turn to Christ (verse 6; Rom.2: 1-4; Titus 3:4-7).
- Coming to Christ for salvation includes admitting that we are helpless apart from God's mercy (Ps. 51:1-4).

God's mercy to us is based on the fact that Christ suffered God's just punishment on our behalf (1 Pet. 3:18).

2 Theme: those who belong to Christ must submit to his cleansing.

Here, the coming of Christ is seen to involve a painful process of purifying.

- Those who trust in Christ are already cleansed from the guilt of their sins (Rom. 8:1) and have new life in Jesus Christ, which is called "washing" (Titus 3:4-6).
- There remains a work of cleansing to be done to rid our minds and hearts of such evils as pride, envy, lust, temper, selfishness (Rom. 8:13; 1 Thess. 4:3; 5: 23-24). This is called **sanctification**.

This process of cleansing is the work of the Holy Spirit, using –
the preaching of the Word – Eph. 5:25-27
things that happen to us – Ps. 119:67,71,75; Heb. 12:7-11
the discipline of church life – Phil. 2:1-16; Heb. 10:24-26

3 Theme: praise God that he does not change.

Here, the changelessness of God meant that he was faithful to his covenant with Israel despite their unfaithfulness to him.

- In the world there is constant change, much uncertainty and insecurity for many people.
- Those who trust in God find him to be unchanging and trustworthy. He is like a rock (Ps. 18:2; 40:2; Is. 26:4), unmoved by the winds and storms of life. He does not tire or wear out (Ps. 121:3).
- This does not mean that God is like a stone idol without feeling or unable to hear and answer our prayers. In a way we cannot explain, God includes our prayers in his unchanging purposes.
- That God does not change means he is always true to his promises, and will always forgive those who seek his mercy (1 John 1:9).

through the coming of "the Lord", Jesus Christ, who would also bring God's mercy. He would be the Lord – none other than God in human flesh (John 1:14).

the messenger of the covenant,

God's mercy would be in terms of the New Covenant ¹ (Jer. 31:31-34) based on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Matt. 26:27-28).

whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

They expected that "Messiah" would bring them blessings, but that would certainly not be the whole story; there would be painful lessons to learn also.

Verse 2

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?

"Who can endure?" – "Who can stand?" – the self-righteous people Malachi was dealing with were only thinking of justice for others, but the coming One would be no respecter of persons. None would escape his scrutiny as the Pharisees ² discovered (Matt. 3:11-12; 23:13-39).

For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap.

"Refiner's fire" – the metal was brought to a high temperature so that it melted and all the pieces of rubbish would float and could be disposed of.

"Launderer's soap" – a cleanser used in washing clothes that penetrated deeply into the fabric. The idea is a ministry that is searching of hearts, minds and conduct, which would be uncomfortable, even painful.

Verse 3

He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.

The Levites were the tribe from which the priests came. No-one from another tribe was allowed to become a priest. See 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 as an example, when King Uzziah burnt incense to the Lord and was duly punished. The priests in Malachi's day were unfaithful to God. During the 400 plus years between the closing of the Old Testament and King Herod of Judea (Luke 1:5), the Levitical priesthood hardened its attitude and by the time of the birth of Jesus had become so hypocritical and self-righteous. Jesus was always having trouble with the Scribes and the

¹ For an explanation of the New Covenant and other covenants in the Bible, see Study 19 on Galatians, page 178 (Book 2).

² See Focus point in Study 20 on Galatians (Book 3) for Pharisees and Sadducees

Pharisees. But the coming of Jesus Christ would result in a purified priesthood, bringing offerings to God worthy of him.

Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness,
A purified priesthood is fulfilled every time someone is converted, cleansed from sin and given new life. Such a person becomes a priest offering spiritual sacrifices of praise and worship to God (1 Pet. 2:4-5).

Verse 4

and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

These offerings are acceptable because they are brought in union with Christ and covered by his righteousness. “As in former days” – refers to examples of acceptable sacrifices recounted in the Old Testament – see Joshua 5:10-12; 1 Samuel 7:3-17 and 2 Chronicles chapters 30-33.

Verse 5

“So I will come near to you for judgment.

They were accusing God of injustice, but when Christ came, they would discover that such justice would fall heavily on them because of all their social injustices!

I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice,

The covenant God made with Israel should have resulted in their being different from other nations. Instead of being a witness to the surrounding Gentiles, they had behaved shamefully like everyone else. The list includes social and industrial sins, which means that they were sinning against each other. They also did not deal justly with aliens. “Deprive aliens” – any people from other nations who came to them sharing their faith were entitled to the same standard of justice as was given them (Ex. 22:21; Deut. 24:19).

but do not fear me,” says the LORD Almighty.

The judgment of God was falling upon Israel. It was commencing now with Malachi as the last of the prophets. From now God would be silent until the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. But judgment will be with mercy. The primary purpose of Jesus’ ministry would be to purify the worship of God. Jesus would be the High Priest who would purge, cleanse and purify. People’s sins would be dealt with. For those who will experience forgiveness there will be no need to fear the Lord coming to his temple. There will be a preparation through God’s messenger. In one sense Malachi was the first messenger for his generation of the Jews. John the Bap-

tist, who immediately preceded Christ, was the messenger Malachi referred to as preparing the Jews for the coming of the Lord.



Summary

The people God had made a covenant with were wearying him with their words. God’s patience was being tested to the point where he would withdraw from them. God was dealing with the disobedience of his people, but instead of recognising their chastisement, they complained that God was ignoring them and showing preference to the surrounding nations. God’s response is that the Lord, Messiah, will come to administer justice. However, when that happens, the covenant people will discover that they will not escape scrutiny and will find their sins exposed as the Gentiles do. All is not grim and darkness. God’s judgment will expose all the sins, but the result will be a purged and cleansed priesthood. The worship of God would be purified. God’s judgment would start immediately, at the closure of Malachi’s ministry. There would be silence for over 400 years. Then God’s messenger would come and prepare the way. Malachi’s prophecy was quoted by Jesus himself with reference to John the Baptist. Jesus was the Lord, Messiah, messenger of the new covenant, the refiner’s fire and launderer’s soap.



Three suggestions of what to preach about from these verses

1 Theme: the folly of wanting God to deal with us on the basis of his justice.

The people here thought that if God dealt with them justly, life would be better for them. They were much mistaken because, but for God’s mercy, he would have been just in destroying them long before.

- When people first realise that they need to be put right with God, they often think this will be on the basis of his justice. They think that if they try hard enough to be good, then in justice he will receive them. But we can never be good enough (Rom. 3:20; James 2:10-11). There



Focus Point: Cleanliness and purification

Malachi's announcement that the Lord will come to refine and purify would have been a shock to many of the covenant people of Israel. After all, the exile was over and the temple and city of Jerusalem were being repaired and restored. The problem lay in the way Israel, priests and people alike, had come to understand the laws of Moses concerning cleanliness.

Cleanliness was associated with the holiness of God. When God chose Israel to be his people, he required them to be holy. That meant being separated, kept apart. Other nations were tainted with sin and close integration with them would result in contamination. Morally God's chosen people were to be clean in order to maintain communion with him.

To help the Israelites understand the importance of this principle, laws were given to teach them about moral purity and the need to be purified from sin (Lev. 16:30). These laws had to be expressed in a physical way. They dealt with touching something that was unclean (Lev. 5:2), bearing a child (Lev. 12) or having an infectious skin disease (Lev. 13). These laws concerned the body, what the body touched or something that touched the body. It was not a matter of moral purity.

The law and its requirement for the purifying of the body was misunderstood. The ceremony for the more serious forms of uncleanness included the sacrifice of animals or creatures. This was the substitute for the defiled person. God accepted the sacrifice of the creature instead of the person. The death was the punishment of sin and the fragrance of the smoke was the sign to God that the sacrifice for sin had taken place and the person was ceremonially clean. These sacrifices had to continue because of the impossibility for man to maintain a perfect and holy life. Also the sacrifices themselves were insignificant to take away sin as they only pointed to Christ's once-for-all sacrifice. See Hebrews 10:4 and v. 12.

These purification laws covered the various ways in which the body became unclean. The purification ceremonies included the physical washing of the body. The person had to separate himself from the congregation for a period of time. The length of time depended on the nature of the uncleanness. However, people paid attention to the outward observance of these laws but ignored their inward, moral condition.

As God revealed himself more as time went on, the concept of holiness deepened. We find references in Psalm 51:6 and Ezekiel 36:25 which draw from the purification ritual to describe the cleansing of the heart from sin.

When Christ came he taught the same as the prophets did in the Old Testament era. Uncleanliness is a matter of the heart and not what the body touches (Mark 7:14-23). A pure heart belongs to a person who is totally devoted to God. Such people want to obey God in every part of life. The Lord abolished the uncleanness of certain foods and Paul affirmed this of every object formerly designated as unclean (Rom. 14:14, 1 Tim. 4:4). In the New Testament purification takes place through cleansing by Christ's blood. This took place when he died on the cross, when he shed his blood for the sins of his people. Sinners are made pure by Christ through confessing their sin in prayer to God and by submitting to the truth of God's Word.

The principle of God's refining and purifying his people continues through the Old Testament. In the New Testament era the temple at Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, whilst believers of the Lord Jesus Christ met in homes and their numbers multiplied. The Reformation of the 16th century that took place in Europe followed a dark period when the Christian church sank to a low ebb. The popes and priests were submerged in deep immorality and burnt men at the stake who challenged their condition.

What of today? How is God refining and purifying? He is looking for sincere worship and adoration. Is this what he is finding in us? Or does he see general conformity to outward correctness. A full church is not necessarily a sign of God's pleasure. Are the people gathering together to be entertained and to worship their own desires and fantasies? Do churches have leaders who behave more like celebrities than shepherd servants, expecting people to follow them rather than God. These are matters for church leaders and all true believers to seriously consider.

God may use different ways to refine the Church. Persecution can be used as refining fire. A local congregation can be sent trouble and the candlestick is removed because they have lost their first love (Rev. 2:4-5). Today the Church seems to be plagued by false sects and teachers, man-centred approach to worship, moral perversity and a weakening voice in the world, as leaders deny the essential truths of Scripture. These may be the instruments of God in the refining and purifying of his people.

Reference source:

Losing Touch with the Living God; John Benton (Evangelical Press)

A Dictionary of Bible Knowledge (Grace Publications)

Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Paternoster Press and Baker Books)



Over to you

If you are a preacher, pastor or hold some other office in church leadership, how deep is your devotion to God in your life? Do you give that your priority before your responsibilities in the church?

Examine what you and your congregation do when gathering for worship. What is your aim and expectation? Is reformation necessary?

How will you deal with the situation that the above questions raise?

Concluding note

Worship is often interpreted today to describe only part of the church service, which is dominated by music and song. Worship is our whole devotional life toward God. The central part of a worship service where believers are gathered is the reading and preaching of God's Word.

in the final stage. By repenting of their sins and not robbing God of what is due to him, the Israelites can be sure that their harvest will be secure and not destroyed. God is promising that it will not be snatched away, even at the last minute. Their trees and crops will be protected from pests. The blessing will be secure, which they will enjoy to the full.

Verse 12

“Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the LORD Almighty.

How would their land become delightful? The blessing of God would reflect his covenant with their father Abraham (Gen.12:2-3). The fulfilment of these things is in the blessings of the gospel, carried by God’s people throughout the world (Acts 1:8; 1 Pet. 2:9-12). The land became a source of great delight for many, as the New Testament church came into being in Jerusalem. That joy and delight continues with all who step out in faith on God’s promise, that in his son Jesus Christ is to be found forgiveness and inner peace.

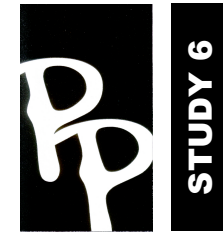


Summary

Malachi has warned the nation that, because of their spiritual carelessness and pride, God would come in judgement to carry out a cleansing and purification. God does not delight in such things; he would rather bless the nation than judge it. If Israel only pulled back, repented of its sin, then God would yet bring them marvellous blessing. God is unchanging, his standards are always the same. God had to deal with one of the nation’s forefathers, Jacob, because of his deviousness. The people had inherited Jacob’s characteristics and were robbing and cheating God of what was due to him. Outwardly the people were religious and attending the temple, but they were dead on the inside. They were going through the outward form of religion. They were following rules in giving their tithes and so were giving them grudgingly and not from the heart. “Change and repent from this formalism, follow me with your heart,” is the message from God. If they did, God would bless them and the land abundantly. They had to trust God, to test him that what he said was true. If they obeyed God by repenting, then the floodgates of heaven would open. The call is to practical faith in God. Such faith comes out of repentance.

OFFENDING GOD

BY WITHHOLDING TITHES AND OFFERINGS



Passage Overview 5

Malachi 3: 6-12

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus point: Tithes and Offerings
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction

The nation had wearied God with their words, accusing him of showing favour to other nations and neglecting them. In their mistaken blindness they demanded justice from God. If God were to give them justice they would be utterly condemned. In declaring his judgement, God shows his mercy. It will be painful, but a necessary process to purify and refine in readiness for the coming kingdom of God. The presence of Jesus, in human form, would signify that the kingdom of God was here on earth. That would not be for another 400 years. Though God would not speak for that long period, yet God would rather that his silence and judgement would not happen. The Lord God still wanted to bless the nation, if they would repent of their ways and return to him.

What these verses mean

Verse 6

“I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

The nation may be trying God’s patience and God must act in accordance with his perfect ways and administer justice, but he is an unchanging God. He is fixed in his intention for the purpose of the nation. Through Abraham’s physical descendants the Messiah would come and the whole world would be blessed. Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, was a devious, cheating and selfish man. God had a struggle with him to cure him of his ways. The people of Malachi’s days were descendants of Jacob and they too had inherited Jacob’s ways. Because God is unchanging and has set his plan for the coming of the Messiah, the people are spared and not destroyed. That in itself shows God’s unchanging nature. If God were to deal with the people of Malachi’s day on the basis of justice only, they would certainly be destroyed like Edom (1:1-4). But he is “the Lord” – Jehovah. They are his people with whom he has made an everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:2; Ps. 105:8), to love them and care for them. Despite their unfaithfulness to him, he would always be faithful to them.

Verse 7

Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them.

There were a few improvements in the nation’s spiritual state during the reigns of such kings as Hezekiah (2 Chr. chapters 29-31), but this verse describes their history as God saw it. (Ex.32: the Book of Judges; 2 Chr. 33:21-25; Neh. 9). Once again they are blind to the seriousness of the situation and cannot, or will not, see their faults.

Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty.

Here is an amazing example of the longsuffering of God. Despite their obstinate self-righteousness and unfaithfulness, the door of God’s mercy is still open to those who repent.

“But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’

Again we have the question to draw out a certain response. Did the people actually ask the question or was Malachi adopting this style to bring out the Lord’s charge of robbery from which they can repent and return to God?

Verse 8

“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.

The charge is made by God. The people have stolen from him.

“But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’

Malachi could have continued from “Yet you rob me” with “in tithes and offerings”. The question between the two phrases brings out the details of their wrongdoing more dramatically.

“In tithes and offerings.

In verse 5, Malachi lists a whole range of evil practices in the nation that robbed the people. But here God points to something in which they are robbing him. Despite their pretence, they knew that their tithes and offerings fell short of what they owed to God. They thought God would not notice it.

“Tithes” – see Lev. 27:30-33; Num. 18:21-28

“Offerings” – see Lev. 1-5

Verse 9

You are under a curse — the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me.

God had committed them to his judgement. The following verses show that God had sent them poor harvests. They had diseases in their crops and were affected by pests.

Verse 10

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.

The temple had storerooms in which, among other things, the proceeds of the tithes not needed for immediate use were kept. This included money for building repairs and food for the priests.

Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty,

God was challenging them and putting them to the test. They were not well off and giving God all their tithes would have left them with precious little food until the next harvest. Would they step out in faith on a promise from God?

“and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have enough room for it.

If they were tempted to ask what benefit there would be in meeting God’s full requirements, God put them to the test with the promise of a greater harvest than they could cope with.

“floodgates of heaven” – overflowing blessing – Ps. 78:23-24.

Verse 11

I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,” says the LORD Almighty.

Many a farmer has watched the crops and fruit grow to what would promise to be a great harvest, only to see the blessing snatched away by pests

A wrong use of this teaching

Some Christians teach a gospel of prosperity. They use Scriptures like this one to tell people that if they give money to God's work he will make them rich and prosperous. Sometimes people are urged to give more than is really sensible. This is a terrible deception.

- In this Scripture, God is asking only for what the law required, and this was fair and reasonable.
- In the Old Testament crops and herds were the sign of God's favour. In the New Testament the blessing is in terms of joy in the Lord, the unity of God's people and success to the gospel.



Over to you

In your society what would be the ways that Christians could rob God?

As a church leader, how would you deal with a situation where you considered God was being robbed? (Note that this is not necessarily a money issue but one of attitude)

In what way do you think God opens the floodgates of heaven and pours out his blessing? How would you explain such things to your congregation and not be making promises that would easily disappoint?



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

What to do when God's work is in a poor state

The situation here was that God was not blessing the nation. The reason was not unwillingness on his part, but faults on theirs. In these verses we can trace steps we need to take when we are spiritually low as individuals or churches.

- We must "wake up" to the seriousness of the situation. We must realise that we are grieving and dishonouring the God who loves us (verse 7; Rev. 3:14-22).
- We must return to the Lord, which means pleading for his mercy and forgiveness, and the renewing of his blessing. We can do this in the assurance that he will hear us (2 Chr. 7:13-16).
- We must search out the areas of disobedience and determine to obey his Word in every part (1 Co. 10:31; Col. 3:17). If we do this we have his promise of abundant blessing. In one sense this puts God to the test, but at the same time, it tests our love for him and our trust in him. One area of obedience may be in our giving to God's work, and this is important; pastors and missionaries need to be honourably financed (1 Co. 9:12-14; Gal. 6:6).
- We must look to the Lord to fulfil his promise, especially in terms of the conversion of sinners and their protection from the evil one. Our expectation will go beyond our own lives, our own church or country, to gospel success all over the world (Acts 1:8).



Focus Point: Tithes and offerings

In verse 8 of our passage of study the accusation is made that the people robbed God. They did this through not bringing all their tithes and offerings. The consequences of their action of withholding was that the nation would be cursed. How do we understand this principle in the situation of today? Are tithes and offerings an Old Testament requirement that does not apply to the New Testament era? In other words, is it possible for Christians today to rob God?

The general principle that Christians must apply is that all creation belongs to God. In today's world money is at the centre of business and commerce. In Malachi's day the economy of Israel was agricultural. The pace of life was slow and peaceful. Much of commerce was done through the barter of crops and produce. This was reflected in the tithes and offerings that were brought to the temple. In some parts of the world this agricultural pattern still exists and operates. But in the industrialised societies things have changed. Not only is money the key to business but time itself has become a precious thing. Whatever type of society we find ourselves in, the Christian's starting position is that all belongs to God.

The principle that the Bible teaches is that when God created the world, man was given the responsibility of taking care of the earth, its plants and creatures (Gen. 1:28-30). That responsibility was not taken away after the fall of Adam and Eve. But now that sin was in the world, this task would be harder (Gen. 3:17-19). As soon as man disobeyed God, God promised that one will come to crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). The plan of rescuing man from his condemned situation was announced publicly. This is what the message of the whole Bible is about. We can call this rescue plan the work of God.

God has entrusted the management of this earth to man. Man has been corrupted by sin, which has affected the way the earth has been and is cared for. Alongside this the work of God takes place. The result is that many people are spoken to by God and their lives are changed. An early example of this in the Bible is Abraham. Today there are many who have been spoken to through God's Word and have trusted in Jesus Christ. God has decreed that a portion of his resources, which man is looking after, should be used for this work of God. God is good to man. By taking care of this world, man is able to feed himself and live. In his sinful corruption, man complains that he never has enough, but this is a result of his greed. Many people do not have enough because of the greed of others. But the person to whom God has spoken comes to accept that all that they have belongs to God and that some of what they have God requires for his work.

The first example we have is in Genesis 14:20. Abraham gave a tenth of everything to Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High. This principle is formalised in the law given by God to Moses. When Israel gained the Promised Land, it was divided up amongst the tribes, except for Levi. The reason the tribe of Levi was not to have any land was because they were to serve God in the work of God. The other tribes were to maintain and support the Levites in this task through the bringing of tithes and

offerings to the temple. The tithe was not to be some last portion, the leftovers or the unwanted rubbish. It was to be the firstfruits, the best of the crop, the unblemished animal.

If we take the principle of God's requiring a portion to be given to him for his work, then we see this working through the New Testament and today. Christians though are divided on the question of whether New Testament believers are under an obligation to tithe (give a tenth) of their income for the work of the gospel.

- Those who think we have an obligation to tithe our income point to the fact that Abraham gave tithes before the law of Moses (Gen. 14:20). They argue that this means tithing is not part of the civic laws that applied to Israel, but is to be a continuing practice by believers.
- Those who think we have liberty in the matter argue that the New Testament does not confirm tithing as a continuing practice, but rather exhorts us to generosity in the light of Christ's sacrifice for us (2 Co. 8 and 9).
- All tend to agree that many Christians can and should give much more than a tenth of their income.
- Many who think it is not an obligation nevertheless use the tenth as a basis for their giving.

In the light of the study in Malachi, every Christian needs to ask themselves the question, "Am I robbing God?" Can we rob God by just withholding money? If time is precious and life is lived at a very fast pace, is it possible to deny God our time, our best time? Even if I have been generous with what is given to God's work, can I still rob God by the way I use the rest of my money, time, materials? It is possible for me to waste my resources on the things of this passing world, when I could use them for things that will have eternal blessing. In a world that is becoming very materialistic, these are serious matters for all Christians to consider. It is a subject that church leaders have to think through and help their congregations with.

The wrong use of this teaching continues on page 88.

probably despised by the priests. What great words of comfort Malachi brings to them. To know that your name is written in the Lamb's book of life brings great joy to Christian believers today. "Scroll" – a good example of the keeping of records for future use is seen in the story of Esther 6:1-3.

Verse 17

"They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession.

Their names were contemplated by God and never forgotten. Here is God expressing his love for his people. They belong to him and he looks after them as if they were the most precious of jewels. On the day of judgement God will set these people apart from others.

I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him.

God will "spare them", ensuring that they do not come under his judgement and that they are seen to be his special people. God looks upon those who fear him as his sons. The apostle Paul tells the Galatian Christians that they are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26). But all this comes at a price. God sent his own Son in order that these people would escape his wrath and have their names recorded in the scroll.

Verse 18

And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

The accusation that God's favour was on wicked people who were wealthy and comfortable (verses 13-15) will be seen to be false. We may not now be certain of who are true believers and who are not, but on judgement day all will be clear and be seen to be right.



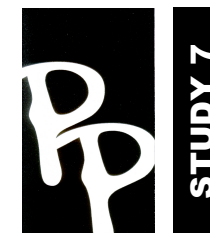
Summary

There are people who publicly appear to be religious, but it is just an outward pretence. In their hearts and in private they grumble and complain. Nothing bypasses God and he says, "I have heard you when you have talked among yourselves, complaining that it is a waste of time to serve me. I am not impressed by your feeble service and pretended repentance. You

Continued on page 93

OFFENDING GOD

BY HARSH TALK AGAINST HIM



Passage Overview 6

Malachi 3: 13-18

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 Two suggestions of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Speaking against God today
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction

Malachi has been using a method where, after stating the problem, he anticipates a question from his hearers that denies any possible guilt against the charge being made. It is a way of making people identify themselves with the problem by setting out the very thoughts that would go through their minds. Once the question has been posed, claiming all innocence, Malachi is then able to give a detailed response. We have seen this approach used by Malachi all the way through the book.

- | | | |
|-------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1:2 | "I have loved you." | "How have you loved us?" |
| 1:6-7 | "Despised my name." | "How have we despised your name?" |
| 2:17 | "Wearied the LORD." | "How have we wearied him?" |
| 3:7-8 | "You rob me." | "How do we rob you?" |

Now we come to the last charge that Malachi makes. The people have spoken harshly against God. But not everybody was critical of God and

his ways. There were some who feared the Lord and trusted him as being right and just. To such Malachi brings great and comforting news. This passage brings before us two kinds of talk, one that is evil and one that is good.

What these verses mean

Verse 13

“You have said harsh things against me,” says the LORD.

“Yet you ask, ‘What have we said against you?’

This verse reflects a spiritual condition that is so out of tune with God that it has become arrogant and even defiant to his face. They foolishly imagined that they knew better than God, and that he did not know what they thought about him.

Verse 14

“You have said, ‘It is futile to serve God.

Straightaway we see where the problem is. They claim that they have worshipped God, but that it has come to nothing. The assumption is that their worship was perfect and therefore God should receive their worship and help them in accordance with their wishes. When this does not happen, they conclude that it has been a waste of time because God should have responded to their very desires. The essential point they had failed to grasp was that in the service of God men need to deny themselves in order to be ruled by God.

What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty?

Their attitude of “what do we get out of it?” reflects the very condition of heart that makes their service unacceptable to God. These were people who belonged to the nation that had a special relationship with God. Outwardly they observed the attendance at the temple and brought their sacrifices. But they were hypocrites. Even their “mourning” was a pretended repentance. How arrogant of them to think God would treat them seriously! How many people today are regular attendees of church services and have such thoughts within their hearts?

Verse 15

But now we call the arrogant blessed.

To be “blessed” signifies that God’s favour rests upon a person causing that person to be happy and contented in the purest and highest way. The Jews here complain that in their miserable state of not receiving anything

from God (which they think they should), God has turned his attention and favour instead to the proud. In many parts of the Bible the unbelieving are called proud. So the accusation levelled at God is that instead of showing his favour to his chosen people for their perfect worship of him, God is ignoring them and giving attention to the unbelievers.

Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.”

That evildoers prosper is a true statement. Asaph in Psalm 73 comments on the prosperity of the wicked. They seem to have no struggles, are carefree and increase in wealth. However, the people’s analysis is wrong. The wicked do not prosper because God is blessing them. The Psalm describes how they gain their wealth; violence, callous hearts, the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. But their prosperity is but for a short while. Further on in the same Psalm we read that God has placed them on slippery ground and casts them down to ruin. Suddenly they are destroyed and completely swept away by terrors. The conclusion of the people of Malachi’s day, that God was more favourable to godless evildoers than to truly godly people, was a slander on God’s character.

Verse 16

Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard.

The conversation of the people in verses 13-15 offended the Lord, but here is a very different group of people.

“Feared” – not a fear of punishment, but a fear of offending one whom they loved and highly respected.

“Talked” – the Hebrew word has the idea of “talked much”. Some translations have “talked often”. They used every opportunity to speak about God, honouring his name, proclaiming his faithfulness and goodness. The purpose of such talk was to help each other, renew their faith and love for God. See Deuteronomy 6:6-7.

A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence, concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name.

The Lord enjoyed listening to them so much that he made sure that their names were put on record (Rev. 21:27). The names that are on the scroll are not there because of any good deeds done by the people. Rather it is a book of names of those who fear and honour God. Jesus told his disciples not to rejoice that the spirits submitted to them, but that their names were written in heaven (Luke 10:20). The joy stems from the knowledge that God has determined that those identified in the scroll will be with him in heaven. In Malachi’s day these people were only a small group,

thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess. 5:16, 18). A faithful Christian should not be looking back at the road of his life and complaining, “What if this had happened.” We cannot change the things of the past, but we are to be thankful if our names are in the scroll of remembrance (Mal. 3:16). That fact has established our route for the future.



Over to you

Have you been faithful in bringing God’s truth before your people? Maybe some of their talk is a result of their lack of understanding of who God is and what he is really like.

What example do you set before your congregation? Is it one of complaint or complete satisfaction and joy in the service of God?

What encouragements can you give to your people, so that their talk is of God and his goodness?

Continued from page 92

think you would be better off siding with those who oppose me. This is how you slander me. In contrast to those whose conversation is full of unjust complaints, there are those whose conversation pleases me. I will remember them and I will spare them on the day of judgment. On that day everyone’s true spiritual state will be revealed.”



Two suggestions of what to preach about from these verses

1 Theme: a right attitude to Christian service.

Here, the attitude was like a paid servant who expects an agreed amount of work. Such a servant may soon complain that the work was too demanding, or the payment too little, and threaten to look for work elsewhere. The people and priests in Malachi’s day overlooked the fact that their work for the Lord was very shoddy. Their attitude is sometimes described as “legalistic” – which is service on the basis of law, or legal agreement.

- Christian ministers can drift into this attitude when they complain at their standard of living, that they could earn more in industry or commerce. They forget the teaching of Jesus in Mark 10:35-45; Matthew 20:1-16 and Luke 17:7-10, and the example of Paul (Rom. 1:1; 1 Co. 3:5; 2 Co. 12:15).
- Christian people can drift into this attitude when they begin to resent the time and money they spend in the Lord’s work and to think of the kind of life they could live if they were not following Christ. They forget the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 19:28-30.
- We must resist every temptation to complain. Our Lord is not hard, without feeling. He loves us more than we love him.
- We must be sure that our Christian service is the best we can make it, and then leave the rest to the Lord.
- We must be sure that we serve on the basis of love – how much we can give, not how little.

2 Theme: the beauty of Christian fellowship.

These people used every opportunity to talk together about the Lord. We can imagine this would mean things like his love, long-suffering and faithfulness.

- This anticipates Christian fellowship which centres on Jesus Christ and all we know about him.
- If we enjoy such fellowship this is a proof that we are true believers (Acts 2:42-47).
- Church prayer meetings can be occasions of such fellowship, but it can be enjoyed also when we meet informally (Heb. 10:24-25; 1 John 1:7).
- The Lord promised to be with us when we have fellowship together (Matt. 18:20).
- In fellowship we can strengthen and encourage each other (Col. 3:16).



Focus Point:

Speaking against God today

Malachi was addressing the people of Israel, the nation God had made a covenant with. Malachi's charge of speaking harshly against God was not made of the heathen or pagan, but against the very people who were to be found in attendance at the temple. Are God's people today, that is Christians, guilty of the same sin? John Benton ¹, in his commentary on Malachi, suggests four areas where speaking harshly against God occurs in the Christian church today. This is not an exhaustive list, but it may help you to recognise and identify such trends in your community.

1. Liberal Theology

There are those who profess the Christian faith yet deny the Bible as being the inspired Word of God. The virgin birth, the resurrection of Jesus or even his deity is denied. They do not treat the events recorded as historical records of fact, rather as myths or legends. What are such people doing? They are saying that God could not possibly have come down from heaven to this earth in the flesh to die for us. They would not accept that the resurrection of Jesus is proof to us that one day Christians

¹ *Losing Touch with the Living God*; John Benton (Evangelical Press)

will be raised from the dead to eternal life. They are denying God's grace, his mercy and his goodness. They, of course, would place the emphasis on man's being able to earn eternal life. They are therefore talking against God by taking away his majesty and splendour, reducing God to be an observer and not an initiating and active God.

2. Cynicism

A cynic is someone who believes and expects the worst about people and their motives. As far as they are concerned, nothing is ever done with good intention. When something does not work out, they will say, "I told you so." For example, someone in the church suggests that a particular form of evangelistic work should take place in an area. The cynic would say that the person was only suggesting this to impress the elders, or to hope to be given a responsible position in that outreach work. After a while, there does not appear to be much fruit from this ministry. The cynic comments that of course he could have predicted this would happen. What has taken place? The church has tried to follow the instructions of Jesus, but the cynic, in effect, is accusing God of letting the church down. It follows the doubts of the cynic that God is unable to act in given situations.

3. Materialism

This is to do with the possession of wealth. It affects Christians in rich countries as well as those in poorer countries. In the case of the people living in Malachi's day, they had wrongly accused God of blessing the wicked, because they seemed to be rich and enjoying life. It shows up an attitude of what rewards a person can get out of following God, rather than serving God through a love for him. Christians in rich countries can so easily slip into thoughts about their own circumstances and how they lack things because they have followed God. Christians in poor countries may conclude that the work of God is not progressing because they are not receiving material help from Christians in the richer countries. In such cases there is usually a misreading of the particular situation and a misunderstanding of God's ways. The harsh complaint against God is that he is blessing others with material things and not me.

4. If only

This attitude is a reflection of a dissatisfaction of a person's current situation. The person continually thinks, "If only I had done this" or "if only this had not happened." This is an accusation against a sovereign God who has wasted their lives. A Christian believer will recognise many failures in his or her life, some of which will have led to the person's present situation. The failures are ours and not God's. The apostle Paul tells us that it is God's will in Jesus Christ for us to be always joyful, giving

Malachi was addressing the Israelites, the nation with whom God had made a covenant. Within God's chosen people there would be those who would be the stubble to be set on fire. The closing verses of the Old Testament are to help the Israelites prepare for the final day. For godly Israelites this would mean obedience to the law of Moses. This does not mean that they would become godly through perfect obedience to the law.¹ If they studied the law of Moses honestly, they would see their sin and failure and cry out to God for mercy and trust the promised Saviour. For New Testament believers this means honouring the whole of Scripture in the light of the teaching of Christ and his apostles.

Verse 5

“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.

In preparing the Israelites for the Judgement Day, Malachi sets out a second way in which God will help them. God is not talking about the prophet Elijah himself, but a prophet similar to him, of his type. The New Testament identifies who this person was. It was John the Baptist. See Luke 1:12-17 where the Angel of the Lord tells Zechariah of the son he and Elizabeth will have. Then in Matthew 11:14 Jesus himself describes John as the Elijah who had come. What Malachi and the other Old Testament prophets did not know was that the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would be two events. Both the first and second comings of Christ are seen as one great movement of the final reckoning. John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord Jesus. In this he was preparing the people of Israel for the day of the LORD. This Day of Judgement, the last day, was brought forward in the history line of the world with the first coming of Jesus. Jesus declared that whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe stands already condemned (John 3:18). When people receive or reject Jesus they are passing a Judgement Day verdict upon themselves. The verdict will be enacted on Judgement Day when Jesus returns for his second visit. It will be a great day for some and a dreadful day for others.

Verse 6

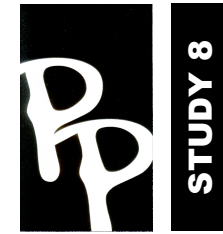
He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers;

How would people know if they had rightly remembered the law of Moses and the way of Elijah? The answer is that Elijah's (John the Baptist's)

¹ The New Testament gives teaching on the purpose of the law of Moses. See Study 14 of the Preachers' Study Papers on Galatians (Book 2) which deals with this very subject.

OFFENDING GOD

THE FINAL RECKONING



Passage Overview 7

Malachi 4: 1-6

This Study Paper contains the following :-

- 📁 Introduction
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 Two suggestions of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point: Speaking against God today
- 📁 Over to you

Introduction

Malachi closes his prophecy and the pages of the Old Testament with an insight into the day of the LORD. This is also called the Day of Judgement¹ and is the final day of this present world. Other passages in the Bible also deal with this event, such as 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 and Revelation 20:11-15. What is the significance of such teaching at this point? It is to state very clearly that being part of a privileged people does not exempt us from being held personally responsible for our standing with God. In Israel spiritual deterioration had set in and religious life was mostly empty formalism. Things must change drastically, otherwise destruction would come, individually and for the nation. But the God of mercy and grace gives one final reminder to prepare the people for the day of the LORD. There will be a way in which people can tell if their spiritual relationship with God is restored and they can be properly prepared for the day of the LORD.

¹ Matt. 6:11; 12:36; 2 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 4:17;

What these verses mean

Verse 1

“Surely the day is coming;

There is a day marked out in God’s calendar that will be different from every other day that has come before it. It is coming, but we have no idea when it will be. In other parts of the Bible this day is described as coming suddenly, without warning. But it should not come as a surprise, because this day will be the Day of Judgement and we have continual reminders of this day, as we see wars and famine taking place throughout the earth. This day will mark the end of the world as we know it and herald an eternal era of a new heaven and a new earth.

it will burn like a furnace.

This Day of Judgement will stand out because the normal climatic conditions will no longer prevail. The cold parts of the earth will experience heat which they have never had. It will be a heat that even regions that are normally hot will not have lived through. The day will burn like a furnace. Those who work with furnaces cannot get too near; otherwise the heat would be too strong and overpower them. The opening description of this day is very frightening.

All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty.

The picture is of terrible punishment for all the arrogant and evildoers, from which there is no escape. Whom exactly is Malachi describing? In 3:13-15 the people were accusing God of favouring those who proudly disobeyed him. Here God answers that accusation, with the unspoken warning that the destruction would include also his accusers if they did not repent. We have here a description of everyone who has not repented of their sins, nor turned to Jesus Christ in faith. By refusing to follow the way God has provided through his Son, such people show their arrogance to God because their refusal shows that they think they know better. We must not think that the punishment of the wicked now means that they will no longer exist. (Note Matthew 25:46.)

“Stubble” – spent and useless – in contrast to how they think of themselves. “Fire” – terrible suffering – we do not know the exact form of the punishment, but fire suggests awful agony.

“Not a root or a branch will be left to them.

“Root and branch” means a completeness. There will be a total loss of all that has meaning or gives pleasure. There will be no second chance. There is no root left to start again.

Verse 2

But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.

Here is a complete change of picture to show that the same day of reckoning that would be disaster for the ungodly would mean light, liberty and joy for the godly. “Sun of righteousness” is a description of Messiah (Is. 9:1-2; 42:5-7; Jer. 23:6), who will bring light and comfort. “Healing” is telling us that all the effects of sin in body and soul will be done away with. Malachi is using the sun as a picture to describe the Lord Jesus and the wings could well be the rays of the sun. When Jesus returns to the earth on the Day of Judgement, he will bring righteousness and complete healing to his people.

And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.

Some calves have been confined in a dirty and smelly shed for a long while. It seems as if the farmer has forgotten about them. He has not, for the day comes when he finally lets them out for the first time into the sun and the fresh air. They start to leap around in their new found joy. This is what it will be like for the followers of Jesus Christ, the people described in 3:16-18. They are released from the sin and dirt of the present world. They themselves will be completely healed and cleansed, and now on this day there are no people to harm, mock or persecute them. Where will these people be?

Verse 3

Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,” says the LORD Almighty.

As the godly people are released from the present world, they will be running and leaping for joy over the ashes of the burnt out fields. The ashes are from the ones described in verse 1.

wicked (verse 3) = arrogant, evildoers (verse 1)

Malachi has been using a picture from nature to describe teaching that we find in the New Testament. This is about the followers of Jesus sharing the throne of Christ and the great work of judgement. (See Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:30 and 1 Corinthians 6:1-3.)

Verse 4

Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

The closing verses remind those who hoped for deliverance on the Day of Judgement that their hope must be supported by lives of obedience.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

Theme: the final judgement.

This chapter ends the Old Testament with teaching about the Day of Judgement (see Introduction, page 97 and Focus Point on page 24).

- That will mean joy for the godly as well as misery for the ungodly.
- There are many different ideas about the course of this world's history. Some people believe there is no pattern or direction in what is happening. Others think that history simply repeats itself in a series of circles.
- The Bible teaches that human history is following a line that has been mapped out by God from the creation to the return of Jesus Christ, and the final judgement.
- This is an essential part of the Christian message in a world full of oppression and injustice. We declare that there will be an end, a final reckoning, when every wrong will be put right and justice will be seen to be done.
- This is where the Old Testament leaves us, proving our need of the gospel of Jesus Christ – John 3:16.



Over to you

Are you faithful in your preaching, both about the eternal punishment of the ungodly and the eternal bliss of those who truly repent?

Are there people in your church who come out of duty, but have never trusted in Christ?

How does this book of Malachi become relevant to you and your congregation?

ministry will produce clear results. The hearts of the fathers will be turned to their children and the children to their fathers. There will be a transformation of the heart, which the New Testament describes as love. It is love to God, love to others. It comes about because the person believing in Jesus Christ as God's Son, recognises the love of God to them. True faith in Christ will be characterised by Christ's love showing itself in that person. It will be a self-sacrificing love, where a believer's love is to another and not to self. This love is not natural to sinful human beings; it can only come about through God's grace. Through the ministry of John the Baptist and the Lord, the teaching of the past would find fulfilment in those who come to repentance and faith. Also the latter, far from being critical of the past, would be united with the past – true children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

These are the final and remarkable words of the Old Testament. The collection of 39 books that concentrate so much on God's chosen people and the promised land where God himself dwelt closes with these sombre words. Unless the Israelite people follow the teaching of John the Baptist, God will be finished with them. Sadly the people rejected John's ministry and the coming of the Messiah in Jesus Christ. This is seen in the final rejection of the nation in AD 70 (Matt. 23:37-39). Just as in Israel there were the godly and the ungodly, so in the professing church today there are those who are unrepentant and unmoved. Being amongst God's people is no guarantee of escape on Judgement Day. Only true repentance and faith in Christ, demonstrated through a life of godly love, will bring an exemption from the curse.



Summary

There will be a day of reckoning, which will mean the total destruction of all those who are against God. But for those who love and honour God it will mean joy and final victory.

Before that final day arrives, the Lord will make his first entry into this world and with that bring forward elements of the last day. He will be preceded by the prophet Elijah, John the Baptist. Through this first coming of Jesus all his people past, present and future will be united in him. Israel will have the reminders of Moses and the ministry of Elijah to prepare them, but if Israel does not turn to God, they will be abandoned to judgement and the land cursed. This prophecy was fulfilled in AD 70.