

Dickson
Teacher's Bible

MALACHI



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MALACHI

WRITER

As with most of the minor prophets, we know nothing about the prophet Malachi other than what is revealed in the book itself. Malachi is a shortened version of the name Malachiyah, meaning “the messenger of the Lord.” Malachi’s name defines the nature of his prophecy in reference to the messenger of the Lord that would be sent before the coming of the Messiah. In fact, the word “messenger” refers to three different individuals in the book. It first refers to Malachi himself as the messenger who delivered this message to Israel. The second messenger is a reference to John the Baptist who would announce the coming of the Messiah. The third messenger is a reference to the Messiah. As the immediate messenger of God, Malachi was a straightforward prophet of the Lord in that he was direct in approaching the negligence of the people.

DATE

The book was written to those who had returned from the captivity in 536 B.C., and were offering sacrifices at the altar (1:7-10). Since the people were under a governor (1:8), the audience Malachi addressed would have been living while Palestine was still under Medo-Persian control. Some of the priests were setting the wrong example by marrying foreign women (2:11), which was a problem that existed during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. The book, therefore, would have been written sometime during the 5th century B.C. when this problem was prevalent among the returnees.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The book may have been written during the middle or latter part of the 5th century. At this time in history, the Near East was still controlled by the Medo-Persian Empire under Artaxerxes (465-425 B.C.). However, the expansion of the Persians to the east was thwarted by the Greeks. The Greeks dealt a stinging blow of defeat to the Persians at the battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. In 480 B.C. the Greeks made a heroic stand against the Persians at Thermopylae. And then Xerxes was defeated at Plataea in 479 B.C. With these major defeats of the Persians, the Greeks were beginning to rise as the third world empire of the prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7 (See comments Dn 2 & 7).

Led by Zerubbabel, the initial exiles returned in 536 B.C. to reclaim their homeland possessions in the land of Palestine. Through the encouragement of both Haggai and Zechariah, the temple was rebuilt between 520 and 515 B.C. Ezra then rose up in order to reinstitute correct behavior and worship according to the law of God. In

444 B.C. Nehemiah, who was appointed governor of the land, led another group of exiles from the land of their former captors in order to encourage the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. In 432 B.C. Nehemiah made a second visit to Jerusalem. Since Malachi does not mention Nehemiah, we would conclude that his ministry took place before the arrival of Nehemiah, possibly between 460 and 450 B.C. (See comments Er and Ne).

It was a time when the ceremonies of the law were conducted by a heartless people. They offered animals that were not fit to be offered to God (1:8). The priests were neglecting their duties (2:7,8). There was intermarriage with foreign women (2:11). It was an economic time when the people were struggling, and thus they complained that God had blessed the nations, but had ignored them. There is no message in Malachi against the old problem of idolatry that was characteristic with those Jews who had been taken into captivity. Rather, the message was against those returnees who had forsaken the Sinai law and covenant concerning their behavior as the chosen people of God. Through their insincere sacrificial ceremonies and intermarriage with foreign women, they were working against the efforts of God to reestablish Israel in the land as the people of God.

**Remember, Repent
and Return To God**
(1:1 – 4:6)

Outline: (1) God loves Israel (1:1-5), (2) Rebuke of the religious leadership (1:6 –

2:9), (3) Marriage to foreign women (2:10-16), (4) God's judgment day (2:17 – 3:5), (5) Robbing God (3:6-12), (6) Triumph of the righteous (3:13 – 4:3), (7) Exhortation for faithfulness (4:4-6)

CHAPTER 1

GOD LOVES ISRAEL

1:1 The word “burden” is derived from a Hebrew word that means “to lift up,” and thus could also be translated “oracle” in reference to the prophet lifting up his voice to speak the word of God. **Malachi:** The name Malachi means “the messenger of the Lord.” Some have suggested that the name was descriptive of the message of the book. Since the contemporary prophets of Haggai and Zechariah made no mention of Malachi, some have suggested that the word “Malachi” would refer only to the fact

that the oracle was the message from God. The Septuagint rendered the word “my messenger,” indicating that Malachi was not a proper name, but reference was to the oracle that came through God's messenger. Since all other prophetic books of the Old Testament carry the name of the prophet, it would be unique if this book did not do the same. We would conclude, therefore, that “Malachi” was a proper name, though the name also meant that Malachi was a messenger.

1:2-5 I have loved: God chose Israel as the nation through whom He would

bring the Messiah and Savior into the world. All the work among the nations throughout the history of Israel was done for the purpose of preserving Israel until she had fulfilled her destiny of bringing forth the Messiah. The ministry of Malachi was to continue the preservation of Israel. God sent Malachi in order to correct the behavior of the people and to encourage those who feared God. The purpose for their faithfulness to God was to maintain the identity of the people of God through whom the Messiah would come in the future. ***In what have You loved us:*** Having gone through the captivities of the Assyrians and Babylonians, the returnees to whom the book was directed had become skeptical of God's work through them as a nation. They were suffering while the nations prospered. At the time the book was written, the Israelites were a community of poverty-stricken residents. They were thus disheartened and disillusioned concerning God's work through them. ***I loved Jacob:*** God chose Jacob over Esau in order to carry out His eternal plan of redemption (Dt 7:8; Hs 11:1). Since He knew the future of the descendants of both sons of Abraham, He chose Jacob who would produce a better heritage for a nation through whom would come the Blessing promised to Abraham (Gn 12:1-3). ***Laid waste ... his heritage:*** This was the proof that God was with Israel. The Edomite nation was discontinued, but Israel was preserved when God returned the people to the land of their heritage. Throughout the struggles of Israel during the years of their captivity, the Edomites

revealed their unacceptable character (See Ps 137:7; Lm 4:21,22; Ez 25:12; Ob 21). Some time before the writing of these words, the Nabatean Arabs dislodged the Edomites from their mountainous stronghold. They were driven from Mount Seir. ***They will build:*** Though the Edomites might try to reclaim their territory, and reestablish their identity, God would work against every effort they made in order to become a nation. Because of her wicked behavior against Israel, Edom would forever be terminated as a nation. God's judgment against the Edomites for their wickedness was that they would never again exist as a nation. The termination of the Edomite nation would be God's proof to Israel that He was still working in the lives of His people in order to preserve them for the purpose for which He had chosen Jacob. Though Edom would never again exist as a nation, the Idumeans (Edomites) as a people would reside in the southern part of Palestine. From them would eventually rise the family of the Herods. Herod the Great, who would be designated by the Romans as the king of Judea before the birth of Christ, would come from the Idumeans.

REBUKE OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

1:6-10 ***A son honors a father:*** Because God was the Father of Israel (Ex 4:22,23), He deserved the honor that was due a father. God created the nation of Israel by bringing it out of Egyptian captivity (2:10; Is 64:8; Jr 31:9). He redeemed Israel with a strong arm (Dt 32:6;

Is 63:16). He thus deserved their honor because He was the Father and Creator of the nation of Israel. **Master:** Israel was the servant, but did not give obedience to God as their Master. Since God was their Creator, then He was to be honored. If He was their Master, then He was to be obeyed. **In what have we despised Your name:** The religious leaders showed disrespect for God as their Creator and Master by not obeying His laws concerning the offerings at the altar. They disregarded God's laws, and by doing such showed no respect for God as their Master. **Table of the Lord:** This was the altar where the animals were sacrificed. By allowing the people to bring blemished animals as their sacrifices to the Lord, the priests were showing disrespect to God by violating the laws concerning sacrifices. **Offer the blind:** They brought blemished animals to be sacrificed on the altar (Dt 15:21). According to the law, only the best of the animals were to be offered as sacrifices to the Lord. **Evil:** That which they possibly thought was only a minor violation of the law, was actually considered evil by God. The offering of that which was according to the law of God was the responsibility of the priests. They were to check to see if an animal that was to be offered at the altar was without blemish. **The governor:** This would have been the governor of Palestine who was commissioned by the Persians who controlled the land at the time Malachi delivered this message (See Ne 5:14; Hg 1:1). **Shut the doors:** It would be better not to offer the sacrifice than to offer that which

was contrary to the law of God. God does not allow substitutes for that which He requires (Compare Gl 1:6-9; 2 Jn 9,10; Rv 22:18,19).

1:11,12 My name will be great: The words "will be" are in italics, and thus do not necessarily need to be in the texts in the future tense. Some students feel that reference in this text is to be taken metaphorically, and thus reference was to the time of the Messianic era during which those of the church throughout all nations would offer praise to the name of God. But the passage could be understood to refer to the time of those Israelites who were living at the time of Malachi's ministry. The contextual understanding would be that God does not depend solely on Israel for praise and glory. Even at the time of Israel's existence, God was receiving praise and worship from others who were not of Israel. There were those Gentiles by faith who had converted to the faith of Israel. Since the Israelites had been scattered throughout the nations during the captivities, then certainly we must assume that they did their work in converting Gentiles to the faith of Abraham. Since the problem that Malachi approached was with those Jews who were in Palestine at the time of writing, we must not assume that the same problem prevailed with those Jews who were still living in the lands to which they had been taken during the captivity. Those who were living in the land were violating the ceremonial laws in reference to sacrifices, but we must not assume that all Jews throughout the Persian Empire were doing the same.

1:13,14 By their violation of that which was required by the law of God, they were manifesting their feelings that the law of God was a burden to bear (See comments 1 Jn 5:3). Some were bringing stolen animals to the altar, and the priests were condoning their behavior (See Lv 3:1,6; Hs 4:9). Since the priests

manifested a life-style of deceit, the people followed their example. What they were offering manifested the fact that they were being stingy with God. They gave God the leftovers and that which they rejected. In doing so, they manifested their lack of reverence for God.

CHAPTER 2

2:1-9 When God instituted the priests among Israel, He promised them the blessing of the support of the people if they carried out their duties according to His law. However, in this case, if they continued in their inequity and indifference, God would command a curse upon them. They would lose the support of the people. However, if they repented, God would not bring this curse upon them. ***I will curse your blessings:*** Reference was to their benefits that they enjoyed in their service at the temple (See Nm 18:8-19). When the people brought sacrifices to the altar, they had the privilege of taking some of the offering for their own sustenance. In their insincere service, however, it seems that the curse had already begun. The poverty-stricken people could not bring sacrifices to the altar, and the sacrifices they brought were blemished. ***Rebuke your seed:*** What would possibly happen was that the offspring, or the descendants of the priests, would be removed from being priests. ***Refuse:*** Reference was to the intestinal contents of the slain animals at the altar. The existing priests would be removed as the refuse of the offerings was taken away (Lv 4:11,12; see 1 Sm 2:29,30). In

order to correct the people, the intention of God in this context was to correct the religious leadership (See comments Js 3:1). ***My covenant might be with Levi:*** This covenant is not specifically stated in the Sinai law, other than the fact that Levi was in a mutual covenant relationship with God as a part of the entire Israelite family (Compare Dt 33:8-11). In God's covenant with Israel, the Levites were given a special intercessory relationship with the people as ministers to God on behalf of the people. In the context, Levi stands for all the Levitical priests of Israel who stood before God. ***The law of truth was in his mouth:*** The Levites were to be the teachers of the law. They were to set an example of purity and obedience before the people. They were to exemplify in their lives the nature of the commandments of God. The Levites were to administer justice and be peacemakers among the people. They were to be known for the truth that proceeded out of their mouths. ***He is the messenger of the Lord:*** Through his teaching of the law of God to the people, the Levitical priest communicated the will of God to the people. ***Messenger:*** Malachi was God's messenger to the people (1:1), as

well as John the Baptist who would be the messenger sent before the Messiah (3:1). As the messengers of God, both Malachi and John delivered to the people the message of God. ***Departed out of the way:*** The priests of Malachi's day had forgotten their way. It may have been that they had forgotten the law of God (Hs 4:6), and thus did not know what to do according to the law of God. Or, it may have been that they were indifferent to the law of God. Whatever the case in the historical context, they were still under the condemnation of God for not functioning as priests according to the law of God. If anyone would presume to be a leader for God, he must know what God requires of His leaders. Those who presume to be leaders, but do not know the word of God, are blind guides. ***Caused many to stumble:*** Those who would presume to be leaders for God's people take upon themselves a grave responsibility (Js 3:1). In this case, the spiritual leaders led people away from God. Through their behavior, they became blind guides in the sense that they did not honor the commandments of God (Mt 15:14; see comments Mk 7:1-9). ***Corrupted the covenant:*** They violated the conditions of the covenant of the priesthood. ***Have been partial in the law:*** In their application of the law of God, they became partial to the wealthy. God had given them the blessing of enjoying the support of the people through offerings. But now they had taken advantage of their full-time support, and thus became partial to the rich in order to maintain their office as priests. If the ministry of Malachi took

place during the drought about which Haggai spoke, then there were no offerings, or at least the offerings were few in coming. The full-time priests would thus be cursed for the lack of offerings. It may have been that the full-time priests catered to the rich in order to receive some offerings. In doing so, they ignored the poor.

MARRIAGE TO FOREIGN WOMEN

2:10-12 The background for the rebuke of this context is God's purpose for the restoration of Israel to the land, and the Israelites' renewing of their identity as the people of God. In order for the promises to the fathers to be identified as fulfilled through Israel, the people of God had to be identified as Israel at the time of fulfillment. For this reason, the people were dealing treacherously in that they married foreign women. They had repented of their idol worship that was the cause for their going into captivity. However, when they returned, they were marrying foreign women, and by doing such, they were destroying the identity of God's people among the nations. They were marrying themselves out of existence as Jews. ***Did not one God create us:*** The one God created the nation of Israel by bringing them out of Egyptian captivity (See Is 43:1-21). God had created them as a nation and race of people, but they were destroying their identity through intermarriage with foreign women. ***Profaning the covenant:*** God had established a covenant with Israel. But their assimilation into the local people

through marriage of foreign women violated the conditions of the Sinai covenant (See comments Dt 7:3,4). The priests were allowing such to happen among the people, for they were also putting away the wives of their youth in order to marry younger, foreign women (See comments Er 9:1,2). **Profaned the holiness of the Lord:** Israel was a people that was separated from the nations of the world. They were thus a holy people (Lv 20:24). But in their marriage of foreign women, they violated the sanctity of their holiness. Their practice was an abomination to the Lord, something that was detestable in His sight. They had been created as a nation. But through their intermarriage with foreign women, they were working against the plan of God to reestablish Israel for the purpose of bringing the Messiah into the world (See 1 Kg 11:4). **May the Lord cut off:** God will cut off the males of the household who profane the covenant relationship between God and Israel through marriage of foreign women. With the men being cut off from the household, there would be no one who could bring the offering to the Lord.

2:13-16 Another thing: As previously mentioned, the first sin they were doing was marrying foreign women. The second abomination was that they forsook their Jewish wife in order to marry the foreign women. They already had an Israelite wife, but then they put this wife away in order to marry foreign women. **Cover the altar of the Lord with tears:** With the offering of sacrifices came the common practice of mourning. In order to make their sacrifices more acceptable,

they would pour out more tears. However, what God wanted was an obedient behavior of life. They needed to change their behavior, not pour out more ceremonial tears. **Wife of your youth:** The older men were putting away the wives that they had married when they were young in order to marry younger, more beautiful wives in their older age. **Wife of your covenant:** When one marries another, he or she comes into a covenant relationship with his or her partner. It is a covenant that is made in the eyes of God, and thus honored by God (See Gn 31:50; Pv 2:16,17). When one puts away his or her mate, he or she has broken the marriage covenant. **In flesh and spirit they are His:** When two are joined together in marriage, they become one in order to bring forth children to the glory of God. Parents who exemplify godliness before their children bring forth offspring who will continue their spiritual heritage (See comments Ep 5:22 – 6:4). In the historical context of this passage, the Jewish men were putting away the Jewish wives of their youth in order to marry foreign women. In doing so, they were bringing the influence of idolatry again into Israel, and thus influencing the children away from God. **I hate divorce:** Moses gave revelation concerning the certificate of divorce (Dt 24). However, the certificate of divorce that was revealed through Moses was given in order to bring the Israelites into conformity to God's law concerning marriage, that one man be married to one woman for life (See comments Mt 5:31,32; 19:3-10). In the context here, God hated the putting away of

their first wife in order to marry another woman. The divorce here was based on the desire the man had toward another woman other than the wife of his youth. The detestable thing that was happening was that the wife of his youth, who was now as old as he was, was rejected for the sake of his marriage to a younger, more attractive woman. The man, therefore, was thinking selfishly, and thus not giving honor to his wife with whom he had been in a covenant relationship for many years (See comments Ep 5:25-33). God hated this practice of divorce for such reasons. **Covering himself with violence:** The ancient custom was when one claimed a woman to be his wife, he would cast his garment over her (See Dt 22:30; Rt 3:9; Ez 16:8). When a man put away the wife of his youth, he was dealing treacherously with his wife by taking an-

other to be his wife. His treachery was in the fact that he had promised a lifetime covenant with his first wife, and then broke the covenant by spreading his garment over another woman.

GOD'S JUDGMENT DAY

2:17 This verse introduces the subject of those who had wearied God through their complaint that it appeared that He prospered the unrighteous, while He neglected His people (See Is 1:14; 43:24). The struggling Israelites looked to the nations from which they had come from captivity. They wondered why those nations were prospering, and yet they, as the returnees to the land of Palestine, were struggling to survive. Their struggles led them to doubt whether God was actually with them.

CHAPTER 3

3:1-5 The complaint of 2:17 came from those who perceived that living unrighteously would not hinder one's prosperity. But this belief was to be corrected with the coming of the messenger of the Lord. **My messenger:** This passage is quoted in reference to the coming of John the Baptist (Mk 1:2,3; see Is 40:3-5; 52:7; 57:14). The priests of Malachi's audience were partial to the wealthy, as those priests of Jesus' time (Lk 16:14). The historical background, therefore, would indicate that the coming of the Messenger would be in a time similar to what Malachi was experiencing in his own generation. When Jesus visited the temple during His ministry, and cast out the money chang-

ers, the fulfillment of the prophecy in John the Baptist would have been verified (Jn 2:13,14). **The Lord:** This is from the Hebrew word *Adonai* (Lord), not the word *Yahweh* (Jehovah). It was the Lord whom Peter announced on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 (At 2:36; see 1 Co 12:3; Ph 2:11). Jesus was God in the flesh coming to His people (Jn 1:14). **Even the Messenger:** This Messenger is a different messenger than the one who was previously noted at the beginning of the verse. This is the incarnate Lord Jesus, the Messenger of the new covenant (Jr 31:31-34; Gl 3:17; Hb 9:7-13). He is the Mediator of the new covenant (Hb 12:24). He came to ratify the new covenant with

His blood offering (Mt 26:28; Hb 13:20). Jesus was the revelation of the mystery of God (Ep 3:1-5). **Come to His temple:** The judgment of God would first come to His people. He would first cleanse His people (Ez 9:6; 1 Pt 4:17). **He will purify the sons of Levi:** The Lord would come to purify the priesthood. After the gospel was initially preached on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, there were many priests who were obedient to the faith (At 6:7). However, the meaning here is beyond the physical sons of Levi, for in the Christian community all those who have obeyed the gospel are priests before God (1 Pt 2:5,9). The priesthood of disciples was cleansed by their obedience to the gospel by baptism (At 2:38). As they walk in the light of the gospel, they are continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7). **Like launderer's soap:** A launderer was one who bleached and cleansed the clothes. **I will come near to you for judgment:** The Lord would come in order to execute judgment upon the unrighteous. Jesus came into the world for judgment (Jn 9:39). Judgment came according to how one responded to Jesus. If one rejected Him, then they judged themselves unworthy of eternal life (Jn 1:11; 3:18; see comments At 13:46). When John the Baptist spoke of the baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire, he certainly had this prophecy in mind (See comments Mt 3:11,12). Those who would receive the Lord Jesus, would receive the benefits of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. However, those who would reject Jesus, would receive the baptism of fire in the destruction of Jerusalem in

A.D. 70 (See comments Mt 24). They would be consumed in the fire of judgment that would purify the people of God (Hb 12:29). **Witness against:** Verse 5 answers the question of 2:17. Once the temple of God's people was cleansed, then would be set right the injustices that prevailed among the people at the time of Malachi's ministry. In the community of God's people, there would be no sorcerers, adulterers, or those who dealt unjustly with employees. Widows and orphans would be cared for in the church of God's people (At 6:1-7). Those social sins that prevailed at the time of Malachi would be corrected in the community of God.

ROBBING GOD

3:6-9 I do not change: Men change in reference to their obedience to God. God does not change His commandments in order to comply with the behavior of men. He does not change in reference to His promises (Hb 6:17,18). The Jews were still claimed by God, and thus God did not cast off His people as He did the nations that surrounded them, including the nations that took them into captivity. God could have justly cast off His people because they broke the conditions of the Sinai covenant. But because He does not change, He maintained the covenant in order to preserve His people. **Return to Me:** Returning to God through repentance is more than a change of mind and sorrow for sin. It is a change in behavior. It is a return to obedience to the will of God (See comments Mt 3:8). **Will a man rob God:** According to the law, a

tenth of the produce and livestock was to be given to God for the sustenance of the Levites (Lv 27:30-32; Nm 18:21-24; compare Ne 9:38; 10:32-39; 13:10-14). The people were robbing God in that they were not giving that which was required by the law. **You are cursed:** During the days of Haggai, the land was suffering from drought because the people were being indifferent concerning the reconstruction of the temple. The same situation may have prevailed at this time because the people were being stingy in their offerings. They were consuming the offerings on themselves, rather than bringing the tithe to the temple for the priests.

3:10-12 Bring all the tithes: The people were evidently holding back part of the tithe for themselves, thinking that they needed it more than the priests. The situation may have been that only a few were offering their tithes, and thus the support of the priests depended on the support of a few. Others were robbing God by not tithing at all. Malachi's exhortation was that everyone must bring their tithe in order that the priesthood be supported (See Ne 13:10-12; see comments 1 Co 9:14). **Storehouse:** The grain offerings were stored in the temple. **Open to you the windows of heaven:** God had held back the rain in order to generate repentance. If they were obedient in bringing their tithes, then God would bring forth the rain. In their poverty, therefore, they were to manifest their obedience to the law of God in reference to tithing. It was not the principle that God would first bless them with rain for their crops, and then they would give out of their abun-

dance. The lesson was that they must first give out of their poverty, and then God would send the abundance (Compare Hg 2:19; Zc 8:9-13). **All nations will call you blessed:** The prosperity of the land would be the signal to the nations that God was blessing His people because of their obedience to His will. We must keep in mind that the bringing of the tithe in order that Israel prosper was a promise that God had made in His covenant with Israel as a nation. The promise of prosperity as a result of obedience is not a promise to the church, or any individual member of the church. God prospered Israel in order to preserve the nation for the coming of the Savior. The Christian lives under a covenant wherein the Savior has already come. His prosperity will come at the end when Jesus comes again. One's poor conditions as a Christian, therefore, are not directly the result of some sin in his life. Poverty is more often the result of one's economic environment. However, if a nation lives according to the principles of the Bible, these principles will lead to the development of the country.

TRIUMPH OF THE RIGHTEOUS

3:13-15 Because of their struggles in poverty, the people seem to have become skeptical concerning the presence of God's help among them. The people had been talking among themselves and complaining about their circumstances. In their complaining, they were actually murmuring against God. **It is vain to serve God:** As they compared their struggle in poverty with the surrounding

nations, they wondered if God was working among them. It seemed that the nations were blessed in their unrighteous idolatry, while they suffered in poverty as God's people. They thus concluded that there was no benefit in being faithful to God, for God was not bringing any blessings to their lives. **Kept His ordinance ... walked mournfully:** They had ceremonially performed the outward appearance of keeping the ordinances of God. However, inside they were grumbling against God because He had not prospered them. At the same time, they saw the proud of the nations go undisciplined by the Lord. The idolatrous nations went unpunished, while they were punished in their poverty. What seems to be the situation was that they were feeling sorry for themselves in their unrepentant state.

3:16-18 Those who feared the Lord: This would be a different group than those who previously complained against the Lord for their depressed situation. The godly group harkened to the

words of Malachi, understanding that their situation was caused by their unrepentant behavior. They thus turned from their wayward ways in obedience to God. The confidence that was revealed by Malachi was that they would be remembered by God in His book of remembrance. It was not that God would forget. The thought is that when God remembers, He is taking action to bless and protect. His remembrance is not simply a recollection of one's existence and identity. **My peculiar treasure:** God treasures those who serve Him. It is for this reason that the church of God's people is His unique possession (1 Pt 2:5-10). **I will spare them:** Not only is the promise to preserve those who fear Him valid in this life, but also in the eternal life to come. **Return and discern:** Once the godly applied themselves to repentance and a change in their behavior, they would be blessed by God. The blessing of the formerly promised rains would be an indication that they had turned to God.

CHAPTER 4

In order to understand this final prophecy of the Old Testament, and the final written prophecy that was given to the Jews, two points must be clearly kept in mind. First, the prophecy was to a people whom God had used since the days they were delivered from Egyptian captivity in order to perpetuate the promises made to the fathers (Gn 12:1-3). National Israel was the vehicle through which God would bring into the world the Blessing, the Redeemer and Savior. The Old Testament prophets were sent

to preserve national Israel as long as possible until the Assyrian (722/21 B.C.) and Babylonian (586 B.C.) captivities. The prophets who came after the return of the captives, beginning in 536 B.C., were sent in order to move Israel to reestablish herself in the land of Palestine. Israel as God's people had to be reestablished in order to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah in fulfillment of the prophecies.

Second, once the purpose for which Israel was called as a nation was fulfilled,

then it would be terminated as a peculiar people that was in a unique covenant relationship with God. This happened in A.D. 70 with the termination of national Israel in Palestine when the Roman Empire, the fourth kingdom of Daniel's prophecies, destroyed Jerusalem (See comments Dn 2 & 7). Before the fall of national Israel, God would send forth the Redeemer in order to call out of Israel those who feared God. Once those who feared God were called out of national Israel, then God terminated national Israel.

4:1-3 *Burn as an oven:* In the destruction of Jerusalem, those who had rejected Jesus were consumed. All the Jewish genealogical family records were destroyed in the burning of the city and the temple (See comments Mt 24). ***To you who fear My name:*** Those of Israel who would be living at the time the Sun of Righteousness would come, would be called out of national Israel through the preaching of the gospel (1 Th 2:12; 2 Th 2:14). ***Sun of Righteousness:*** Jesus was the rising light that brought hope to those who feared God and were living at the time of His coming (See Jn 1:4-9,19; 8:12). ***You will go forth and grow:*** The spiritual Israel would grow exceedingly as a result of both men and women accepting Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God (See comments Mk 16:15-20; At 6:7; 8:4). ***Tread down the wicked:*** The disciples of Jesus would crush the head of Satan by the preaching of the gospel (Gn 3:15; Rm 16:20).

EXHORTATION FOR FAITHFULNESS

4:4-6 *Remember the law of Moses:*

This statement forces the interpreter of this message to remain in the historical context of national Israel, for the Sinai law was given only to Israel, not to the church. The historical fulfillment of the prophecy, therefore, was in reference to Israel, not the church at the end of time. The exhortation here was that Israel continue to abide in the statutes of the Sinai law in order that she be preserved as a nation unto the coming of the Messiah at the end of national Israel. Those who feared God, continued in the law (Ec 12:13). However, those who rejected the word of God when the Messiah came, were consumed in the oven of the destruction of Jerusalem (See comments Mt 24; Mk 7:1-9). ***I will send you Elijah:*** This statement refers to John the Baptist (Mt 11:14; Lk 1:17). It clearly identifies the time of the historical fulfillment of this prophecy. John the Baptist, as the forerunner of the Messiah, went forth in the power and spirit of Elijah. ***Before the coming of the great and terrible day:*** This coming of the Lord in the prophecy was a clear reference to the coming of the incarnate Son of God. His coming was a terrible day for those who rejected Him (See comments Jn 12:48). Those who rejected Him would be burned in the oven of the destruction of Jerusalem, the baptism of fire upon national Israel (See comments Mt 3:11,12). The great and terrible day of

the Lord was the terrible day of the termination of national Israel (See comments Mt 24; compare comments 2 Pt 3). It would not be contextually consistent to assume that the period of time between the coming of Elijah and the day of the Lord would be over two thousand years. The fulfillment of the events of this prophecy must be in the 1st century with the coming of the messenger and forerunner of the Son of God, and the actual coming in the flesh of the Son of God (Jn 1:1-14). It was a coming of the Lord in time, not at the end of time. **He will turn the hearts:** The coming of Jesus at the end of time will not be a coming and call for repentance. It will be a coming of finality and destruction (2 Th 1:6-9). It will be a coming to call God's people out of this world (1 Th 4:13-18). However, at the end of the purpose for which God created national Israel, Jesus came to call those of Israel unto repentance (Lk 13:3).

It was a time in history when God was about to terminate national Israel, and thus Jesus came to call those out of Israel who feared God. **Strike the earth:** When Jesus comes in His final coming, He will strike the earth with destruction. But the striking in this context was to be a striking of drought and suffering, as the curse that was delivered to the Jews who had insincerely offered their ceremonial sacrifices and robbed God during the ministry of Malachi. It was a striking in the destruction of Jerusalem. **Curse:** The curse that was to come in the history of national Israel was termination. Jesus came to the Jews, but the majority at the time of His coming did not accept Him (Jn 1:11). God's blessing was thus forever taken from them because they rejected the Blessing of all the world that was promised to and came from Abraham (Gn 12:1-3).