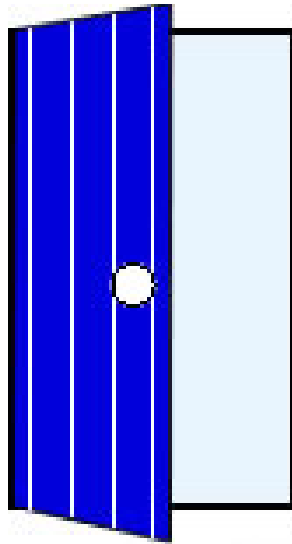


BIBLE STUDIES



Mill Lane Chapel

Malachi

(3) "My name shall be great among the Gentiles"

Read Chapter 1: 6-14

We have noticed that Malachi Chapter 1 can be divided into two sections: **(1)** Unappreciated love, V1-5, and **(2)** Unacceptable sacrifices, V6-14. The first is addressed to the people generally, and the second to the priests particularly.

1) UNAPPRECIATED LOVE, V1-5

Israel's spiritual and moral decline began when they doubted and questioned God's love for them. "I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?" But it did not stop there. Their failure to appreciate God's love reflected in their failure to worship Him "in sincerity and in truth." This brings us to

2) UNACCEPTABLE SACRIFICES, V6-14

The lesson is clear. We will not give our best to God, in worship and in service, if we forget His great love for us in the Lord Jesus. This section of the chapter contains the first of two messages to the priests, and exposes their failure **Godward**. They had failed to offer proper sacrifices to God. We shall see, however, that whilst the priests were particularly culpable, the people were far from blameless. The second message to the priests, contained in 2: 1-9, exposes their failure **manward**. Their failure to give proper instruction had been accompanied by failure to display the teaching of God's word in their own lives.

We must remember that whilst in the Old Testament, the priesthood belonged exclusively to the sons of Aaron, in the New Testament **all** believers are priests. Read 1 Peter 2: 5 & 9, with Hebrews 10: 19-21, and notice to whom these epistles are addressed. **1 Peter** is addressed to "the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythinia", 1: 1. Peter describes his readers as "newborn babes", 2: 2, as those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious", 2: 3, and as those "which believe", 2: 7. **Hebrews** is addressed to "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling", 3: 1. The words, "hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water", refer to the consecration of the priests in Exodus 29: 4 & 21. Very clearly, both epistles are addressed, not to a select few, but to **all believers**. The word "priest" means 'one who offers sacrifices', and those sacrifices are described in 1 Peter 2: 5, and Hebrews 13: 15.

Bearing in mind that in the Old Testament, the priests were responsible for leading and guiding God's people, this section of Malachi also has powerful lessons for assembly leaders. It is the responsibility of the elders to ensure that God is honoured in the assembly by worship and service.

Their example and teaching are, therefore, most important. Whilst, then, there are important lessons for **all** the Lord's people here, there are **particular** lessons for assembly leaders as well.

After the **introduction** (V6A), the message in these verses is divided into two parallel sections. The **first section** is represented by V6-11, and the **second section** by V12-14. **Both** sections commence with the way in which Israel had dishonoured God's name, V6 & V12A. **Both** sections next refer to their low opinion of both the altar and the sacrifices, V7 & V12B. **Both** sections continue by describing their offerings, V8 & V13A. **Both** sections continue further with God's refusal to accept their offerings, V10 & V13B. **Both** sections conclude with the recognition of God's name among the Gentiles, V11 & V14.

Whilst there is certainly a similarity between the two sections, and this could be to emphasise the solemnity of the charge against God's people, closer examination will show that there is a difference of emphasis. The first section, V6-11, reflects the the question, "If then I be a father, where in **mine honour?**", and the second section, V12-14 reflects the question, "And if I be a master, where is **my fear?**" The first section concludes with the Gentile nations **honouring** God's name (V11), and the second section concludes with the Gentile nations **fearing** His name (V14). We might also notice that whilst the first section refers particularly to the priests, the second is a little wider in scope and includes the people. See V14.

We can therefore divide the passage as follows: **(A)** They failed to acknowledge His claims, V6A; **(B)** They failed to honour His name, V6B-11; **(C)** They failed to recognise His majesty, V12-14.

A) THEY FAILED TO ACKNOWLEDGE HIS CLAIMS, V6A

"A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is Mine honour? and if I be a master, where is My fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise My Name." (Notice the order: "father [devotion].....master [duty]." Compare John 13: 13-14). Bearing in mind that in the Old Testament, the fatherhood of God is used in a national sense, rather than in a personal sense, the priests are charged with failure to lead God's people effectively. The spiritual leaders 'had failed to teach the character and claims of God, and this was largely the reason for the deplorable condition of the nation', D.E.West (*The Minor Prophets, Their Relevance for Today*). The need for good spiritual leadership has not changed. Paul stressed its importance as follows: 'A bishop (overseer) must be blameless.....holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers', Titus 1: 7-9. "Sound doctrine" does more than inform the mind: it conforms our lives to the will of God. But this is strikingly absent here. The devotion to which God was entitled as Father, and the duty to which He was entitled as Master, were lacking. But does God say to **us**:

a) "If I....be a father, where is mine honour?" This emphasises the **devotion** to which He is entitled. 'God had treated the people of Israel as a son: have they honoured Him as Father?' C.L.Feinberg. Israel was commanded, "Honour thy father" (Exodus 20: 12). If they were to honour their earthly father, how much more their spiritual Father. See Deuteronomy 32: 6, "Is not he thy father that bought thee." See Isaiah 63: 16, "Thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer." Notice the following: Exodus 4: 22, "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn"; Isaiah 1: 2, "I have brought up children, but they have rebelled against me"; Hosea 11: 1, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." As their Father, and therefore the source of their life, He was entitled to reverence and respect. We must remember too, that as their Father, He loved them "with an everlasting love."

He is entitled to **our** respect and devotion for the same reasons. We are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Peter 1: 2), and have been "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1: 23)." We are therefore to act as "obedient children", 1 Peter 1: 14.

b) "If I be a master, where is my fear?" This emphasises the **duty** to which He is entitled. 'The servant honoured his master because he belonged to him by right of purchase, and had no option but to obey', J.G.Baldwin (*Haggai Zechariah Malachi: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*). Israel was God's servant. See, for example, Is. 41: 8, 43.10 etc.

We must recognise His entitlement to authority in **our** lives. **We** belong to Him by right of purchase. See 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20, "Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price." We should, therefore, be "vessels unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the **master's** use, and prepared unto every good work", 2 Timothy 2: 21.

It is all too easy to give nominal assent to these things. God expects reality from us. Words can be cheap. We can so easily pay mere lip-service to God as Father and Master, and describe ourselves as sons and servants without accepting the obligations involved. The priests themselves gave God scant honour, and were not constrained by "the fear of the Lord." To the contrary, they "despised" His name by debasing His ordinances. Failure to recognise God's claims upon us as Father and as Master, will mean sub-standard worship, and this follows:

B) THEY FAILED TO HONOUR HIS NAME, V6B-11

This section can be divided as follows **(i)** Unworthy sacrifices, V7-8; **(ii)** Unfulfilled pleasure, V9-10; **(iii)** Universal worship, V11.

ii) Unworthy sacrifices, V7-8

"Ye offer **polluted** bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted **thee** (note: not 'polluted the altar', but "polluted **thee**")? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible." The word "contemptible" is rendered "despised" in V6. The significance of this is inescapable. If we "despise" God by failing to recognise His claims over us, we will "despise" His right to our worship. J.G.Baldwin is probably correct in saying: 'Clearly the priests would never have said that it was permissible to despise the Lord's table, but Malachi is trying to bring to the surface subconscious attitudes by drawing out the implications of unworthy actions.' Malachi uses some interesting terms here:

a) Notice that the "**altar**" is called "**the table of the Lord**", V7 & V12. The altar is described in this way because it provided food for God. Not literally, of course! But, in ideal circumstances, God found pleasure and satisfaction in the offerings of His people. At the same time, the altar provided food for the priests. See, for example, Leviticus 6: 26, 7: 28-38. This enables us to understand 1 Corinthians 10: 21, "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the **Lord's table**, and the cup of devils." The Lord's table is therefore the place of fellowship with God, and we are always there! The basis of our fellowship with God is the blood of Christ (this is why the cup is placed first in 1 Corinthians 10: 16), and "the Lord's table" describes the benefits which we enjoy through His death for us. The altar is the place of fellowship. See Hebrews 13: 10, "We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle."

b) Notice that sacrifices on the altar are called "polluted **bread**", V7. Compare V12: "Ye say, The table of the Lord is polluted; and the **fruit** thereof, even his **meat**, is contemptible." The sacrifices are called "bread" to emphasise that God fed upon them. Notice the following in Leviticus 21: "The offerings of the Lord made by fire, and the **bread** of their God, they do offer", V6. "He offereth the **bread** of thy God", V8. See also 21: 17, 21-22; 22: 25.

The expression, "**polluted** bread", obviously, refers to the sub-standard sacrifices offered to God. 'These sacrifices are polluted in the first place by the attitude of mind of the offerers, and only secondarily by ritual imperfections', J.G.Baldwin. The "polluted bread" is defined in V8: "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts?" Compare V13. Leviticus 22: 21-24 sets out God's requirements in this connection. See also Deuteronomy 15: 21.

Are **we** giving our **best** to God, not only in worship, but in every other sphere as well? Or are we just doing enough to 'get by' in the eyes of other people? Giving our best to God involves the presentation of ourselves to Him. See Romans 12: 1 and 2 Corinthians 8: 5. Israel's second-rate offerings to God are described, twice, as "evil", V8. They would not be acceptable to an earthly dignitary, **let alone to God**. Our secular employers rightly expect good work, good attendance, and good time-keeping from us. Dare we give **God** any less? David, with the offer of Araunah's threshing-floor without cost, replied: "Neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing", 2 Samuel 24: 24.

ii) Unfulfilled pleasure, V9-10

"I have no **pleasure** in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand", V10. These verses emphasise that their sacrifices were totally unacceptable. 'And now intreat the favour of God, that He may be gracious unto us. With such a gift from your hand, will He shew favour to any of you? says the Lord of hosts', V9 RSV. C.L.Feinberg suggests that 'this is probably ironical, and means, "Do you think that with such unacceptable offerings God will be pleased with you?" Their prayers could not avail as long as they were presenting such sacrifices.' God's utter disgust with their sacrifices is stated even more emphatically in V10: 'Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire upon my altar in vain!', RSV. C.L.Feinberg comments, appropriately, 'It is better to have no sacrifices, than vain ones.' Compare Isaiah 1: 11-15.

At the end of the Old Testament, God exclaims, "I have no **pleasure** in you", Malachi 1: 10. At the beginning of the New Testament, God exclaims, "This is my **My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased**", Matthew 3: 17. The Old Testament ends with God's desire for a **shut** temple. The New Testament begins with **opened** heavens, Matthew 3: 16. (Note: in Mark 1: 7, the word "opened" means 'to rend or split', W.E.Vine: hence the RV, 'rent asunder'). The Old Testament ends with some undesirable people in the temple, but the New Testament commences with some very desirable people there! See Luke 1: 5-23, 25-40.

iii) Universal worship, V11

"**For** from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same (see Psalm 113: 3 & Isaiah 59: 19), **My Name** shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto **My Name**, and a pure offering: for **My Name** shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts." We must not miss the connecting word, "For....." God's own people, Israel, had **(a)** despised His Name (V6), and **(b)** offered "**polluted** bread" (V7). In the millennial age, the Gentiles would **(a)** recognise the greatness of His Name and **(b)** offer a "**pure** offering." What condemnation of Israel! What condemnation of ourselves! Do we

honour Him **now**? Bearing in mind Romans 11: 11, there is a sense in which it is true today that "in every place" incense is offered to His Name!

As o'er each continent and island
The dawn leads on another day,
The voice of praise is never silent,
Nor dies the strain of praise away.

The words "My Name" occur three times in V11, and six times altogether in V6-14. See Psalm 72, "His **Name** shall endure for ever", V17. "Blessed be His glorious **Name** for ever", V19. Let's remember, too, that in the Bible, names signify character. We are to "do all in the **name** of the Lord Jesus", Colossians 3: 17. This means that we must act in a way which reflects the character of the Lord Jesus.

The words, "My Name shall be **great**", recall Luke 1: 32-33, "He shall be **great**, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." The Lord Jesus is "great" in every sphere. It has been often said that no one attribute of the Lord Jesus is greater than any other, because He is great in every way.

a) He is "**a great prophet.**" "And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That **a great prophet** is risen up among us...." Luke 7: 16.

(b) He is "**a great priest.**" "Having **a great priest** ('an high priest' A.V.) over the house of God." Hebrews 10: 22 R.V.

(c) He is "**a great high priest.**" "Seeing then that we have **a great high priest**, that is passed into ('through') the heavens, Jesus the Son of God...." Hebrews 4: 14.

(d) He is "**the great king.**" "Jerusalem.... is the city of **the great King.**" Matthew 5: 35. (This quotes Psalm 48: 2).

(e) He is "**the great shepherd of the sheep.**" "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that **great shepherd of the sheep....**" Hebrews 13: 20.

(f) He is "**the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.**" "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of **the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.**" Titus 2: 13.

Israel, which had every reason to give their best to God, missed the opportunity to honour Him in a world where He was generally unrecognised. That opportunity will terminate in the day when His Name "shall be great among the Gentiles." We

too have the privilege to honour God and His beloved Son in the same hostile world. It is a unique opportunity. It will not exist in heaven!

Whilst V11 anticipates the millennial reign of Christ, when Israel will be supremely blessed, none the less at the **present time**, Israel, with all its privileges, is set aside in favour of the Gentiles. This reminds us that some assemblies, through failure to honour God by self-sacrificing worship and service, have forfeited divine blessing, whilst other believers are evidently enjoying His presence and help. We must 'consider our ways', Haggai 1: 5 & 7.

C) THEY FAILED TO RECOGNISE HIS MAJESTY, V12-14

As already noted, V12-14 are similar in structure to V6-11, but emphasise the greatness of God. "I am a **great** King., saith the Lord of hosts." We have also noted that these verses include the role of the people in the awful decline. If the priests were not averse to offer "polluted bread", and so "despise" God's Name, it is hardly surprising that the people followed suit. "Cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing." We cannot, after all, expect the people to rise above the level of their leaders. Note:

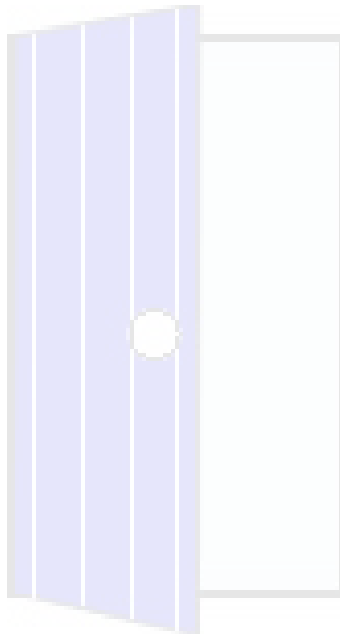
i) They offered the worst to God, V13. "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it!" They were bored with the whole thing. "And ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts." "Snuffed" means 'sniffed': they complained by snivelling: they 'pooh-poohed' it; they 'turned their nose up' at it. In consequence, they "brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord." As D.E.West observes, 'the service of the priests in the temple brought them no joy; it should have been their greatest delight to be engaged in such ministry towards God. Instead, they found it utterly wearisome. And what of the application to ourselves? We have been constituted "an holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ", 1 Peter 2: 5. Worship ought to be the highest expression of spiritual devotedness to God.....How sad if we find such spiritual sacrifices irksome!' But it wasn't a case of bringing deficient offerings, because that was all they possessed:

ii) The retained the best for themselves, V14. "But cursed be the **deceiver**, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and My Name is dreadful among the heathen." These words evidently refer to Leviticus 22: 18-20, which deal with the payment of a vow. (This might include, for example, a vow of thanksgiving to God for deliverance: see Genesis 28: 20-22). But, here, they had offered a cheap substitute when the time arrived to fulfil the vow.

Their transgression was heightened by the majesty of God: He is "a great King." The words, "And my name is dreadful (feared) among the heathen", could refer

to the attitude of kings like Cyrus and Artaxerxes. See also Joshua 2: 9-11, Ruth 1: 16, Jonah 1: 16, 3: 5-9. Note Psalm 47: V6-7, "Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is **King of all the earth**", V6-7. It is an insult to God, "a great King", to offer Him anything less than our very best. The word, "deceiver", reminds us of Ananias and Sapphira. See Acts 5: 1-11.

The zeal of Zerubbabel's day had gone. See Ezra 3: 3: "They set the altar upon his bases.....and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord." But what about **us**? Have **we** declined too? Failure to give God our best, **(a)** Insults His love, V1-5; **(b)** Impugns his Name. He is "Father.....Master.....the Lord of hosts.....a great King" V6-8 & 14; **(c)** Invalidates prayer and worship, V9-10; **(d)** Ignores His coming glory, V11.



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