

A. ISRAEL'S SIN OF DOUBTING & SKEPTICISM

1. God charges them with wearying Him (2.17)

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a. The people again challenge God about His charge !!

- 1.) They wanted proof of how they had wearied God
- 2.) An outright failure to accept God's authority and that He never lies

b. God gives them an example through Malachi

- 1.) The perpetual rant that the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer
- 2.) Assumption = blessings come from God
- 3.) If the wicked are blessed, then God must be on their side

4.) The people's conclusion

- a.) Either evil pleases God

OR

- b.) the God of justice doesn't exist

c. This skepticism was more pronounced in the OT

1.) God had promised Israel prosperity IF they obeyed His commandments

- a.) This was as a nation, not to each and every
- b.) Israel had mixture of righteous and wicked, as we do today

2.) It's a failure to understand God's plan

- a.) God does bless the wicked and the righteous (Matt 5.45, Acts 14.17)
- b.) Both the wicked and the righteous suffer as a result of the Fall (Gen 3.16-19)
- c.) There is also the problem of the background fight with Satan and its continuing effects

First He answers one of their deepest doubts

1.) (3.1a) "Behold. "I will send my messenger."

- a.) An astounding fact is to be revealed
- b.) God will send His messenger (they doubted the coming of the Messiah)
- c.) The messenger was John the Baptist
- d.) "he will clear the way before Me"
 - The way was always cleared before kings would come
 - "before Me"
 - .. The people's sins stood between them and God
 - .. John would clear the way by convincing people to confess their sins

2.) (3.1b) "will suddenly come to His temple"

- a.) This answers the question of "Where is the God of justice ?"
- b.) The return of the Lord to His temple will be sudden
 - The priests should be fearful of this
- c.) the One coming is also called "the messenger of the covenant"
 - This is the only place this title is used
 - "messenger" = "angel"
 - .. Angel of the Lord = manifestation of the Lord frequent in the OT
 - Jesus will bring with Him the New Covenant established by His blood
 - "in whom you delight" > a sarcastic comment on the skepticism of the people about His coming

b. God then states the purpose of His coming (3.2)

1.) This would be a shock to the Israelites

- a.) They thought Messiah was coming to judge the heathen
- b.) But there is no mention of other nations here

2.) Messiah would come to purge wickedness from Israel

a.) "he is like the fire of the refiner."

- He will burn out all of the corrupt wicked people that were mixed in with the righteous

b.) He would act "like fullers' soap"

- Fullers were the laundrymen of the day
- They used "soap" (borit) is lye and alkali on the clothes and treaded on them
- Messiah will clean out the sins from among the people

c.) A description of the results follows

1.) (3.3-4) The priesthood will be purified

- a.) The refining began in Christ's 1st advent, and will continue in His second advent in the Millennial Kingdom
- b.) It continues during the church age (1 Pet 2.5,9)

2.) (3.5) God will judge those that can't be refined

- a.) Messiah will serve both as judge and witness
- b.) Five classes of sinners are given as examples of those judged
 - Sorcerers
 - Adulterers
 - "those who swear falsely" > take oaths naming God as their witness to what isn't true
 - Those who oppress others
 - Those who do not hold God in awe and respect Him

3.) (3.6) Israel mistakes God in siding with the wicked

a.) Israel had changed, but not God

- His covenant promises didn't change either
 - .. So they are fortunate that they haven't been consumed for their sins

-- But His nature is unchanged as well

- .. He cannot tolerate wickedness forever
- .. And they should have realized that
- .. Israel should have faith in God, not be skeptical about Him & His actions

b.) As an added bit of sarcastic condemnation "O sons of Jacob"

- Jacob's nature was to be deceitful
- His descendants were living up to his nature

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B. ISRAEL'S SIN OF DISHONESTY AND THEFT

1. (3.7) God begins with another accusation
 - a. He begins with a general statement that Israel has been sinning "From the days of your fathers..."
 - 1.) This could be referring back to the days in the wilderness
 - 2.) At minimum, they should see it as a reference to the literal days of their fathers that sent them into exile in Babylon
 - b. He immediately tells them to repent and He will forgive them, and be with them
 - c. But they again arrogantly/ignorantly ask why and how should they repent > self-righteousness
2. (3.8) So God bluntly tells them they have defrauded Him
 - a. He poses a rhetorical question "Will a man rob God ?"
 - b. And yet again, they don't think about their sins
 - 1.) They blatantly ask where they have robbed God
 - 2.) This is asking God to prove He isn't lying !
 - c. And He responds that they have robbed Him in their tithes and offerings
 - 1.) Tithe = 1/10 of the annual yield of the field to the Levites
 - 2.) Offering = the offering in general, or the heave offering to be given to the priests
 - 3.) So God's ministers, and therefore God Himself, was being robbed of these two lawful provisions
 3. (3.9) The result of this robbery was Israel was under a curse
 - a. The priests were under a curse for their unfaithful attitude and exercise of their duties
 - b. The people were under a curse for defrauding God
 - 1.) Likely in the form of drought, poor crops yields
 - c. The order of the Hebrew words stress God's incredulity

"and *Me* you are robbing... this whole nation" !

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4. God now offers a plan of repentance and blessing

a. (3.10a) A challenge to the people

- 1.) God instructs the people to follow the tithe laws and bring them into the temple storehouse
 - a.) Rooms were set aside in the temple to store the tithes
 - b.) Tithe results were then used to support the priests & Levites

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b. (3.10b - 11) He issues this as a test for the people against Himself

1.) If they would do this, He would bless them abundantly

- a.) "open the windows of heaven" > rain
- b.) He would pour out other blessings to overflowing
- c.) "I will rebuke the devourer for your good"
> He would stop pests from attacking their crops
- d.) "nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes"
> their crops will grow to maturity

2.) (3.12) As a result, Israel would be admired by other nations

- a.) They would return to being God's example of the benefits of honoring & obeying God to others
- b.) "you shall be a delightful land"
> God will be pleased with Israel

3.) Consider these promises are related to a specific sin

- a.) The people were promised this if they repented of defrauding God
- b.) The key was returning to obedience, and God's blessings would flow
- c.) A key lesson to our society today !

C. ISRAEL'S SIN OF ALLOWING CYNICISM TO BECOME DISILLUSIONMENT

1. Certain Israelites were expressing cynicism toward God

- a. (3.13) God says that they have been speaking strongly against Him

- 1.) Again, those accused arrogantly challenge God to prove it

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- b. (3.14) God spells it out for them
 - 1.) "You have said, 'It is vain to serve God'"
 - a.) They saw no profit in serving God
 - b.) There was no apparent sense in observing His commandments
 - 2.) "we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts"
 - a.) They saw no use in behaving like they were at a funeral in their observing the laws > exaggeration
 - b.) In fact, it had become boring to them
 - c. (3.15) They thought that God blessed the wicked more than the righteous
 - 1.) "So now we call the arrogant blessed"
 - a.) What a false accusation against God !!
 - 2.) "not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape."
 - a.) These skeptics claimed those happiest defied God
 - b.) There was no punishment for disobeying God in their view
2. But there were some still faithful toward God (3.16)
- a. The Hebrew word for "then" is emphatic
 - 1.) It indicates that what follows came from what was before
 - 2.) Some think these repented under the Lord's accusations
 - b. There is always a remnant that believes in God
 - 1.) These are like the 7,000 of Elijah's trial vs Baal priests
 - 2.) Believers must remember to encourage one another under trials and threats (Heb 3.13)
 - 3.) Fire coals separated soon go out !
 - c. "a book of remembrance was written before Him"
 - 1.) The kings of Persia kept a record of those aiding them
 - 2.) This is apparently a record of those standing with God for future reference - God does not forget His supporters

3. God comments further about four coming days

- a. (3.17-18) The day of the Lord
 - 1.) This is the day of judgement on the wicked and redemption of the righteous
 - 2.) Israel will be able to see the difference between them
 - 3.) The punishment will be extensive
 - 4.) God will gather His righteous to Him in heaven
 - 5.) This will be final proof of God's moral judgement

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b. (4.1) Elaborating further: The terrible day

1.) The judgement will be by fire

- a.) "burning like a furnace"
 - Not like a wildfire
 - A fire burning with intensity & a purpose

2.) It represents a complete exclusion of the wicked from God's kingdom

- a.) Relative to the kingdom, they are left with nothing to stand on, are like stubble

(4.2) A day of healing vs the day of fire

1.) That same day will be healing for the righteous from the trials and woes of life

- a.) All of those who maintained faith in the Lord

2.) "sun of righteousness will rise"

- a.) An apparent reference to the Messiah
- b.) "with healing in its wings"
 - Wings again show swiftness of His coming
 - Just like the sun's rays give healing
 - A picture of the contrast Christ will bring
 - .. light after darkness
 - .. warmth after cold
 - .. beauty after bleakness
 - .. joy after gloom

3.) "you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall"

- a.) Animals which have been penned up burst out when given their freedom
- b.) A wonderful picture of the righteous finally freed from the constraints of the wicked world
 - They will rejoice at the Messiah having freed them

d. (4.3) A day of victory

1.) The unfaithful Israelites had the question in essence ... "What do we gain by carrying out His requirements?"

- a.) Here is their answer
- b.) The faithful triumph completely

2.) They will tread on the ashes of the wicked from the burning fire

- a.) Not that they are consumed
 - A picture depicting the devastating state of them
- b.) This indicates the finality of their judgement

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D. GOD'S CONCLUDING WORDS THROUGH MALACHI

1. (4.4) Remember God's commandments

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a. God has charged them with major sins

- 1.) But He has given them opportunities to repent
- 2.) If they do, He has promised them rich blessings

b. He now exhorts them to remember the commandments that are intended to guide their lives and keep them out of trouble

1.) This is the last book of the OT

- a.) There is no prophet to remind them after Malachi
- b.) Matt 11.13
- c.) "remember" is used 14 times in Deuteronomy

2.) Malachi reasserts the importance of the Pentateuch

- a.) Given on Mt. Sinai in the Horeb range
- b.) This would remind the people of two things
 - The display of God's awesome power there
 - That the Law came from God, Himself
- c.) To prepare for the coming day of the Lord, keep the Law !

2. (4.5-6) A warning

a. Who is "Elijah" ?

1.) To the Jews

- a.) Elijah the Tishbite (THE Elijah)
 - They set a cup for him at Passover and a chair at circumcisions
- b.) Catholic interpretation agrees that this is he

2.) The New Testament indicates it is John the Baptist

- a.) (Matt 11.14, Lk 1.17) > John as type of Elijah in spirit
- b.) "before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD."
 - Some scholars believe that John came to prepare the people for both the First and Second Advents of the Messiah
 - But others think that he was preparing the people for the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70

b. He will "turn the heart of the fathers to children and the heart of the children to their fathers."

- 1.) He is not aiming at family disputes
- 2.) He would lead the people to repent and close the gap between them and their godly forefathers

c. Those that did not repent and return to God experienced the "curse"

- 1.) The nation rejected Messiah, although many believed
- 2.) The Roman war with Israel 66-70 AD was the result
 - a.) Jerusalem destroyed
 - b.) Israel decimated

E. SUMMARY OF MALACHI'S MESSAGE TO TODAY

1. The message was aimed at the hearts of a troubled people

a. They were beset by many oppressive conditions

- 1.) Financial insecurity
- 2.) Religious skepticism
- 3.) Personal disappointments

b. Very similar to today's people

2. God emphasized several key points through Malachi

a. He has a glorious, unchanging purpose for His people

- 1.) He calls His people to ...
 - a.) Genuine worship of Him
 - b.) True faithfulness to Him and to each other
 - c.) True faith in what He says He is doing and will do

b. God's character is loving and holy

1.) God's love is paramountly shown through Malachi

- a.) It is shown by His calling of Israel to be His people
- b.) It is verified by His constant protection and disciplining of them to live to His standard
- c.) Since He does this out of love, He expects them to return that love by obedience

2.) This picture is the loving relationship model for believers

- a.) To have that relationship with God, based on obedience
- b.) To have that relationship with each other, based on common kinship as believers

3.) This creates a responsibility for believers in this life

- a.) We enjoy His protection and blessings
- b.) If we fail to live to His commandments and hold Him in awe opens us to ...
 - The natural consequences of a wicked society
 - God's judgement

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