

# **An Isagogical Treatment of the Book of the Prophecy of Malachi**

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The word Malachi is the Hebrew word Mal - a - ki and it means "angel" or "messenger". The word Malakijah, from which this may well be a contraction, means "messenger of the Lord". In 2 Kings 18:2 we read: "His mother's name also was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah" and in 2 Chron. 29:1 "his mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zachariah". There are other similar examples of contractions of proper names.

Because the word can mean "messenger of the Lord" there is some doubt whether this was the family name of the author or not. The Targum Jonathan, an Aramaic paraphrase of the prophetic books, written during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century A. D. adds the words, by Malachi, whose name is called Ezra the scribe. With equal probability Malachi has been identified with Mordecai, Nehemiah, and Zerrubabel. To show to what extreme conjectures interpreters will go, there were those who said that Malachi was an angel in human form. On the other hand there is a tradition, preserved in the Pseudo-Epiphanius, that Malachi was of the tribe of Zebulun and born after the captivity at Sophia (Saphi) the territory of that tribe. He died young and was buried with his fathers in his own country. The most reputable interpretation is that of the Talmud that Malachi was a distinct person who wrote this book and he was a contemporary of Nehemiah, the great reformer. Neither his ancestors nor his descendants are known.

Since he was a contemporary of Nehemiah, and we shall also bring internal evidence from his book to support that, the time of his writing must have been after 432 B. C. It is very possible that the book was written after the second return of Nehemiah in 432 B. C. and the prevalent opinion sets the date of writing at 420 B. C. This is also the conclusion reached by Vitranga that Malachi delivered his prophecies after the second return of Nehemiah from Persia (Neh. 13:6) where Artaxerxes Longimanus reigned as king. Nehemiah found very sordid conditions at Jerusalem in 432 B. C. and you may be sure that they did not improve with age. Malachi goes into more detail and describes the prevailing wickedness.

For setting the date 420 B. C. Vitranga introduces the following internal evidence from the book. "The offenses denounced by Malachi as prevailing among the people, and especially the corruption of the priests by marrying foreign wives, corresponds with the actual abuses with which Nehemiah had to contend in his efforts to bring about a reformation. Compare Mal. 2:8, "But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts" with Neh. 13:29, "Remember them, O God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites." The sin of priests marrying foreign wives is also described in both of these passages.

The alliance of the high-priest's family with Tobiah the Ammonite (Neh. 13: 4,28) and Sanballat the Horonite had introduced neglect of the customary temple service and the offerings and tithes due to the Levites and the priests were not forthcoming, in consequence of which the temple was forsaken (Neh. 13: 4-13) and the Sabbath openly profaned (13:15-21). The short interval of Nehemiah's absence from Jerusalem had been sufficient for the growth of those corruptions, and on his return he found it necessary to put them down with a strong hand, and to do over again the work that Ezra had done a few years before. From the striking parallelism between the state of things indicated in Malachi's prophecies and that actually existed on Nehemiah's return from the court of Artaxerxes, it is all accounts highly probable that the efforts of the secular governor were on this occasion seconded by the preaching of "Jehovah's messenger", and that Malachi occupied the same position with regard to the reformation under Nehemiah as Isaiah held in the time of Hezekiah, and Jeremiah in that of Josiah.

Another internal evidence may be found by way of comparison of Chapter 2:10-16 read with Nehemiah 13:23. "In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon and of Moab." Chapter 3:7-12 (read) with Nehemiah 3, 10. "And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work; were fled everyone to his field."

That he prophesied after the time of Haggai and Zechariah is inferred from his omitting to mention the restoration of the temple which had been accomplished and was taken for granted. There is no allusion made to him by Ezra.

The existence of the temple service is presupposed in:

I. 1:10 "Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? Neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of Hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hands." When a new church is being built every member wants to work for nothing and contribute his or her services. Later on everyone wants to get paid and they do not even have pride enough to shut a door when it is left open.

II. 3:1 "Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, etc."

III. 3:10 "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, etc."

Internal evidence is also found in the terms used. The Jewish nation still had a political chief distinguished by the same title as that borne by Nehemiah. 1:8 "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto the *governor*; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts." Neh. 12:26 "These were in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua the son of Jozakak, and in the days of Nehemiah the *governor* and of Ezra, the priest the scribe." Gesenius assigns a Persian meaning to this word.

The whole burden of Malachi's book is the desecration of the temple service by the priests as the leaders, and the people as the followers. This was not merely being ungrateful, this was a terrible ungratefulness. They should have realized the great love which God had manifested toward them. Not only had he restored the temple worship, restored the priests, restored their sacrifices to obtain his favor, but he had restored their land, had brought them back, given them a good government. And they should be doubly grateful because he had not done this for the descendants of Esau who was of the same parents as Jacob, their progenitor.

We might also spend a few minutes in answering this question: Was this actually the last book of the Old Testament written by inspiration? The second book of Esdras lists the 12 minor prophets naming as the last three, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The style of the prophet is not that of the fiery prophetic eloquence of Isaiah, nor the poetic style which had greatly declined at that time. Rather here was more of the reasoning approach as seen in the direct questioning of the Lord, and the equally direct questions by a recalcitrant people. It was a kind of a dialogue which was carried on between God and the priests and the people, whose half mocking questions are enlarged upon and finally answered with scorn by the mouth of the messenger.

The prophet seems fully aware of being the last of the messengers. 3:1 "Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in; behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts." Again 4:5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." The people by God's grace and power had been restored to the land promised to Abraham and the next step would be the fulfillment of the promise "unto you a child is born, unto you a son is given, etc." and that son would be born in Bethlehem. Even Malachi knew that from the prophecies although he said nothing about it, the people could read Micah 5:2, and if they would not in faith accept this as an evidence of God's love toward them, then they indeed deserved to be smitten with a curse.

The claim of the book of Malachi to its place in the canon of the Old Testament has never been disputed, and its authority is established by the references to it in the New Testament. Mt. 11:10 "For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold I send my messenger before thy face which shall prepare thy way before thee." Same in Mark 1:2, Mark 9:13 "But I say unto you, that Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him." Same in Luke 1:17. Romans 9:13 "As it is written? Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Philo, Josephus, Melito, Jerome and other ancient authorities, mention the book and quote from it.

There is nothing either in its language nor the circumstances of its times, the manners and customs touched upon, nor its topographical and geographical allusions, that could give rise to the slightest critical suspicion. Its text is one of the purest and best preserved, and no glosses to it are found in the dodices such as had to be added to correct the corruption of other books. The differences in the various ancient versions arise only from the differences of the vowels assumed or found by the translators in their copies. The few variants which occur in the different texts are so unimportant that they do not call for any detailed remarks.

Entering now into an examination of the book and its contents, we find that it is divided into 4 chapters while the Hebrew Bible absorbs chapter 4 into chapter 3. The general theme of the book is a call to repentance. God has always been faithful to Israel, why are they not faithful to him? The first part of the book sets forth the fact that the Lord (Jehovah) is the father of Israel, therefore give him a father's due. This section embraces Chapter 1 and chapter 2 to v.9. The section is further divided into two parts. In the first part, chap. 1:1-8 Jehovah addresses the people and asserts his love for them. In the second part 1:6-2:9, he especially addresses the priests who had been the chief movers in the defection from his worship and covenant.

In addressing the people he makes a positive declaration of his love for them. Even though he punished them with wars, even though he punished them with captivity, even though he took away their prosperity, it was always for their own good. The principle of "spare the rod and spoil the child" in dealing with the family is also to be applied to God and his family. Without this chastening, Israel would have destroyed itself by going the easy way to perdition, but when they repented the Lord always accepted them again as his people even though there were times when he might have destroyed them utterly and been blameless.

But the people in their short-sightedness did not see this as a corrective chastening, when they suffered reverses, they thought that they were being abused by the Lord and so they ask, "Just show us where you have loved us."

This the Lord through the prophet proceeds to do by the example of the two nations which came from the twin sons of Isaac, the son of Abraham. Jacob was the ancestor of the Jews while Esau was the father of the Edomites. Surely since both claimed Abraham as their grandfather, and God had promised Abraham a great nation, Esau should have come in for a share of the blessings and he did, because Isaac said: "Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; and by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck." Gen. 28:39-40.

Now at this very moment viz. about 450 B. C., while the Israelites were in the land of their fathers, their temple restored, their cities rebuilt by Ezra and Nehemiah through the grace of God; nor that they had every reason to rejoice as a nation from whom the Savior would be born, the Lord said through the prophet, Malachi, look at your relatives, the Edomites, and make a comparison. They have been driven out of their land by a very remarkable people, namely the Nabataeans.

These people were shrouded in mystery. They sprang from the Arabian desert, they were builders, tradesmen, engineers, architects, farmers and the ruins which they left behind them testify to their skill. They drove the Edomites out into the desert country south of Judea, known as Idumaea. Look at Esau's descendants, saith the Lord, they are impoverished and desolate, their heritage is laid waste. Now says the Lord, would you like to take their place? When you look at them, would you say that I treated you so shabbily by bringing you back to your land, restoring your cities, rebuilding your temple and above all accepting your worship, after all the wicked things which you did? That is the answer to their question.

As further proof, remember I loved your ancestor, Jacob, and I hated Esau. Those words have been a stumbling block to some and a proof of predestination to damnation to others. Neither interpretation is correct. The comparison is found between the bestowing of greater and lesser favors. Neither Esau nor Jacob deserved any favors as you know from your Bible history. The Lord deliberately used the word "Jacob" now, because Jacob was the supplanter—the deceiver. Gen. 27:36 "And he said, is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times."

Jacob's deceptions were not left unpunished even though the Lord said, Jacob have I loved. In Hos. 12:4-6 Jacob's remorse is described. "Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made

supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel and there he spake with us: even the Lord God of hosts; the Lord is his memorial. Therefore turn thou to thy God; keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.” This same thought is taken up in v. 14, “But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flocks 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.” It is more or less like father, like son or like ancestor, so nation.

These people had all the deceptive characteristics of their ancestor Jacob, and the Lord says, I loved that scoundrel (herein God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us) and I love you his descendants even though you ought also to confess with your ancestor Jacob: “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shown unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.” Gen. 32:10.

On the other hand I have also every justification and right to hate Esau. Did he not sell his birthright for a mass of pottage? Did he not despise my promises and forfeit the inheritance for about the most trivial thing you can think of, a bowl of soup? Of course it was savory. And because he forfeited the blessing he could only get a lesser inheritance and he did get a nation. The Edomites dwelt in a good land when Israel was wandering in the wilderness, in fact it was the refusal of Edom to let them pass through their boundaries, even though they promised to pay for any damages, that caused the children to return to wandering. “They had to compass the land of Edom.” The mills of God grind slowly but they grind exceedingly fine. Now you are in the land and see the Edomites, they are in the wilderness, impoverished and desolate. Does that not answer your question, Oh Israel, does that not prove that I love you?

But the Lord adds proof to proof. You have returned, you have rebuilt. Your temple is where it originally stood, your priests are of the lineage of Aaron, your sacrifices are accepted, “and your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, the Lord will be Magnified from the border of Israel.” v. 5. Now look at Esau’s descendants, they too cherish the hope of destroying their conquerors and returning to their inheritance. They too want to rebuild their cities and they will not be allowed to.

The descendants of Esau never regained their homeland, but upon their expulsion occupied the Negev, the semi-arid southern portion of Judea, south of Hebron. They were henceforth known as Idumeans and their new dwelling place as Idumea. In 185 B. C. the Jewish leader Judas Maccabeus defeated the Idumeans and slew 20,000 of them. Fifty years later the Idumeans were compelled to adopt circumcision and to obey the Mosaic law. When the Romans came and conquered the land both the Jews and the Idumeans became subject to them but where the Jews resisted, the Idumean leaders collaborated and as a result the Herod family (and remember they were Idumeans) rose to political prominence and Herod became king, and his son succeeded him and his son, but the prophesy of the Lord remained v.4 (read).

Herod built the temple, the magnificent temple, the pride of all Jerusalem. The disciples looked upon this temple and city and one of them said: “Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him, seest thou these great building? There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” Mk. 13:1-2.

v. 4 fulfilled. They shall build and I will tear down, saith the Lord. Herod’s temple was utterly destroyed and the one remaining wall standing, I believe to this day, (“the wailing wall”) was not built by Herod. That was one of the original foundation walls from the temple of Solomon.

Now the children of Israel did not see all this at the time of Malachi, 400 B. C., but they saw enough prophesy fulfilled to show that the Lord loved them. And today with our added evidence we can agree with the statement of the Lord. “Israel I have loved you.”

But that does not answer our question about this phrase “Esau I have hated”. Were Esau and all of his descendants doomed to eternal damnation? Certainly not! I. The promise of salvation is universal: Gen. 3:15, “I will put, etc.” Gen. 13:3, “And I will bless them that bless thee and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall *all families* of the earth be blessed.” Also Gen. 22:18, Is. 42:1ff., (read) Is. 49:6: “And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.” II. Esau and his descendants are especially included in Jer. 49:10-11. (read) Amos 9:12 “That they may possess the

remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this.” Obadiah v. 19-21 compare with Mark 3:8. “And from Jerusalem and from Idumaea and from beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him.”

Rather the hatred toward Esau manifested itself in two ways. 1. They lost out on the ancestry of the Messiah and so they could never be as fortunate as blessed Israel. 2. Their material blessings were also lesser than those of Jacob. Cf. Gen. 27:37-40 where Isaac gives Esau the best that he can under the circumstances.

We do not have a predestination to damnation problem in these words “Esau have I hated.”

But returning to our theme, God says, “I love you, Israel,” and he finds no joyous appreciation of his affections, no grateful return of love for love, but cold-blooded contempt for his grace, and ungrateful self-righteousness and grumbling dissatisfaction with his ways. Who is to blame for this? He, or the people or the priests? Read v. 6.

The same mocking question and this time from the mouth of the priests. Again the Lord through the prophet recites two examples in answer to their mockery. The first is retroactive, i.e. it is the same as he answered the people. A son honoreth his father, that is a natural thing and the priests would be the first to agree and to reprimand their own sons if they showed them disrespect. Now in the temple they address him as father. Do they remember the 4th commandment? Thou shalt, etc. This they well understood, as Luther gives it in his explanation, to also mean superiors, it meant respect to God, they should honor him as children honor their father. If they have servants, and the priests did have servants, would they put up with disrespectful service, would they tolerate slothful, unprofitable servants? No they would discharge them with ignominy and give them no recommendation, but ye acknowledge the temple as mine, saith the Lord, I am the master, the Lord of hosts, and you call me father, you call me master and despise my name.

Ah, they say, we speak thy name, why we even speak thy name with reverence, how then can you say, we despise thy name? The Lord answers with the second example “polluted bread”. “Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar.” Your deeds belie your words. The ordinances for sacrifices were laid down in the Pentateuch and no man had the right to change them. Especially clear was the command that the sacrifice be unblemished, but what were they doing? Offering blemished sacrifices, and don’t think that the people were averse to this. Actually this suited them fine also, inferior sacrifices were cheaper. An animal was blind, no good for the pasture, half-starved, would not command a good price at the market, but what is wrong with making it an offering to the Lord. The eyes are not important in a sacrifice. That to pretty good logic, and if an animal is lame, well the meat is good. And what if the animal is sick, since it is going to die anyway why not slay it on the altar. It does not take much arguing for the priest to convince the people to do this, they are generally agreeable (witness gambling, raffling, shoddy offerings etc. in the church). But says the Lord, if you offer such tainted things to your governor will he be pleased with you and your person? To the governor they offer the best, but to the Lord they bring the inferior and then they say in open eyed innocence “Wherein have we polluted thee?”

A man goes into a tavern, would he offer the bartender a penny or a nickel or even a quarter. He would be laughed out of the tavern by his worldly friends. He slaps down a \$10 or a \$20 bill on the bar. Here he shows the biggest denomination that he has, but to the Lord he brings pennies and nickels, some times a quarter and thinks wonders what he is doing.

Oh, but I’m a good Christian, people will say, and ministers will say, we have given up many things, doesn’t that prove that we do not profane the Lord? This was the answer of the priests, we are good priests working and slaving in your temple, long hours, monotonous work, bloody sacrifices, we do all this and you say we are profaners. Why everyone looks up to us, and the Lord replies, “I look down on you” v. 9. And now I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us; this hath been by your mean (hands): will he regard your person. You brazenly offer polluted bread and animals, forbidden, rejected by the Lord’s clear ordinance, will he accept them? The answer is an emphatic “No.”

## **Deceivers and Victims Both Condemned by the Lord**

In v. 9-14 the Lord shows his displeasure for the priests in particular because they are the prime movers and also for the people who dare not excuse themselves either. The priests thought that because of their office they had special privileges from God and that would be true indeed if they served the Lord without deception. The priesthood was an honored estate and the person of the priest is to be honored and respect shown to him, but these priests had offered polluted sacrifices, they were deceivers and so the Lord had no regard for such persons. In fact he even wished that one of them was man enough to close the door of the temple, stop the worship and the sacrifices and say, let's be honest. We don't believe in these things anymore, therefore terminate them. Offerings such as they here bringing were not acceptable to the Lord, rather they were an insult to him.

Of course the people went right along with the priests and brought inferior offerings to the Lord thus playing along with the priests in a show of religion, but the Lord said I am not pleased and I will not accept such sacrifices from your hands.

Did that mean that the Lord would now have no sacrifices brought to him, no worship because without Israel and its priesthood he would have nothing? On the contrary read v. 11.

Again and again this thought is brought out in Scripture. Isaiah said: 60:3 "And the gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

The Lord Jesus said: Mt. 8:11 "And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and from the west and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."

The Apostle Paul, obeying the Lord's command went first to his own people and then said: Acts 13:46-49 (read)

The people were not doing God a favor in bringing their sacrifices even when they were good ones, God was doing them a favor in receiving them. The Lord has made it quite plain to everyone, and that includes us today, that he is not dependent on the inhabitants of the earth for his wealth when the gold and silver are his as well as the cattle and beasts of the field.

Not that he wanted it that way, but it was inevitable from their actions. Here was the beginning of the end, terminating when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. No more would sacrifices be brought by penny-pinching, self-righteous, bargaining worshippers who brought little and sought much in return, but in every place there would be offered incense and a pure offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken and a contrite heart. Grateful for God's unmerited love, the heathen converted shall go away rejoicing. (The eunuch "and he went on his way rejoicing.")

Still carrying out the thought of profaning God's name, the sad thing is that this name of Jehovah, joyfully revered by the Gentiles had been known for centuries and revealed to the Jews, and they spent their years profaning it. And much of the result of this profaning was of their own making. Even the priests were becoming tired of this polluted food. They had closed an eye when the people brought a lamb that was not according to specifications. A blemish was not too bad, the meat was good. What if an ear had been torn, there were still some very fine lamb chops and roasts for their table as their share (the word translated "torn" could mean stolen) and so the priests and the people were getting along splendidly. But as time went on the people became more stingy and they brought lambs where the meat was so tough that the priests could not eat it, and once in a while they smelled an odor in the temple and sure enough some nasty congregation member had brought a lamb that was in the first stages of decay

Then the priests set up a howl, stinking meat, rotten fruit haven't you people any respect for our office, and the people could rightly say you taught us how to deceive the Lord and we thought he could pull the same tricks on you. The priests had taught apt pupils. They now blamed each other but the sad thing is this, that they all came under the judgment of God. Read v. 14.

The Lord has the right to demand the best, just as a great earthly king. He uses the same title that the Persian kings used. Cyrus called himself the king of the world, the great king, and the term is applied to others, now the Lord of hosts is the great king and his name shall be dreadful, we might say, powerful, among all

people. cf. Peter's healing the lame man in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and Peter's defense of that name before the magistrates. And Paul's high estimate, Phil. 2:10. "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth."

Thus far the burden of the prophet's message is to warn against the doom that was in store for such hypocrites and deceivers, but the burden of the message of Malachi is not only to prophesy doom, rather to avert the doom by calling to repentance and a change of ways. The Lord still will accept them if they now heed his messenger. The priests were divinely appointed, *they were the mediators between God and his people* Ex. 28:1 "And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel that he may minister unto me in the priest's office..." *They were the teachers of Israel*, Lev. 10:11 "and that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses." *They were a court of appeals*, Deut. 19:17 "Then both the men; between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days."

And so they had a divine obligation which, if fulfilled, would bring them blessings, yes great blessings. But by the same token, if they were false and unfaithful their curse would be enormous. Even their blessings would be cursed. With dung on their faces they are only fit for one place, the dung-heap.

The threat of punishment ought to be warning enough to them, but now the prophet describes the character of the true priest to show how these rebels had departed from the sacred office.

God had made a covenant with Levi and though Levi did not receive any land for an inheritance as did the other tribes, his was the greater honor. "Therefore he feared me and was afraid before my name." He had the issues of life and peace and he had the law, God's law. The priests did not teach their own views nor human speculation, they did not twist the Word of God to suit their fancy. They were reliable, trustworthy witnesses of God's will and they walked in his ways, remaining on his paths. True they had many temptations, they had many a battle against evil, but they walked with the Lord and his continual presence gave them peace.

What a lesson for religious leaders today, especially for seminary faculties who are molding and shaping the theology of tomorrow. The very thought of losing this high gift and calling by disdain or carelessness ought to send cold shivers down the spine of every priest and prophet and teacher and move him to preserve God's covenant inviolate. (There is no room here for exploratory theology.)

However if I were to say here today: The Lord God is saying through me: "Ye pastors of the Southern Conference are despising my name," your first reaction and question would be, "Wherein have we despised thy name?"

Now I am not omniscient, nor am I inspired like Malachi, but I am sure the Lord could say, "You have despised my name by your pettiness and jealousies. You have been lazy in your mission zeal for my name's sake." I know that each of you and that includes me can find some fault in your fellow pastors, but do you recognize the same faults in yourselves? Very often the faults which you find so offensive in others are just as evident to others in your conduct.

This did not happen in our conference, nor in our district, no not even in our Synod (at least I am not aware of it) but it might happen, in fact the way the world is getting into high places, I expect it very shortly. A few years ago I saw the ministers from a certain district meeting in Milwaukee gathering at the Old Forster. The big brass hobnobbing with the lesser clergy were at the bar ordering and drinking one martini etc. after the other. There was loud talking, laughing, back slapping and who knows how many synodical plums were being shaped up there for the glory of the church. If the Lord would say through his prophets "You ministers are offering polluted bread," they would answer in astonishment, "Where-in have we polluted thee?"

Have they forgotten their function? It is to turn many *away* from iniquity, not show them *how* to perform it. Only by rightly knowing and correctly dividing the Word of truth, by applying the Law and the Gospel can they remain as faithful messengers and priests of the Lord of hosts.

Evidently the priests of Malachi's time did not measure up to this high standard. 1. They departed from the way and they caused many to stumble. Laxity in applying the law leads to further contempt of it and not only their salvation, but the salvation of the people was endangered. 2. They violated their oath of office. God had made a covenant with Levi, he and his descendants were to be the priests and they agreed to his covenant,

as we would say at their ordination, and they have corrupted this covenant. Such revolters against the covenant shall be punished saith the Lord and a visible evidence of such punishment was seen in the attitude of the people toward the priests. As said before they gave them polluted food, they listened to none of the words, they winked slyly, when the priests spoke. They knew and despised their shenanigans even though they themselves profited by this easy religion. How the priests objected to this, they were willing to wink at the shabby treatment toward the Lord, but shabby treatment of his priests in his temple, that was a horse of a different color.

The people were likewise without excuse, they too had been set apart. Not only did they treat God shabbily but they had no regard for their own brethren in their dealings. They should be especially ashamed of their conduct toward one another because they were a chosen nation. God had begotten Israel, he was their one father and so they (the nation) were blood brothers. They not only despised the Fatherhood of God, they did not even observe the brotherhood of man. This is not to be taken in the broad sense that the world takes it when they observe Brotherhood Week, otherwise the prophet would have no argument against the mixed marriages which he takes up next. This is that brotherhood which comes from a *common ancestry* and *united worship* and *one God*. They were in danger of losing this because of their defections from God and his commandments but also in a more practical way, by their mixed marriages with the heathen. Remember God is your father, ye are brethren. But since Judah was ready to divorce himself from God it was an easy step to divorce his wife. What if she had been faithful to him, what if she had been his bosom companion, what if the covenant was, 'til death do us part', what if she stands there weeping at the altar, the daughters of the false gods were more desirable and so they dealt treacherously with their own and asked in astonishment "well what is wrong with that?"

The second part of this first section v. 10 - 16 brings the serious charge of mixed marriages i.e. intermarriage with the heathen people and divorcing their own faithful wives. Here was a nation that could claim Abraham as a father, here was a nation created by God as his own chosen people, here were real brothers and they dealt treacherously with one another, and by intimation honorably with the heathen.

(There is a lot of truth here. The world is often a better friend to us than our own fellow Christians.)

Nehemiah and Ezra had outlawed mixed marriages, but here people and priests were again falling into the same sins that had threatened their national existence before, and would threaten it again.

That was the reason why God did not answer them from the altar. Even if they now brought the best offering, even though they offered in accordance with God's precepts and fulfilled the letter of the law, even these offerings would not bring God's blessing because they were sinning in mixed marriages and divorces and all their tears would not avail. They must repudiate their heathen wives and return to their own wives.

v. 15 is a rather difficult verse because of the term "Make one". I will read what is written in Laetsch, *The Minor Prophets*, page 528. The interpretation of verse 15 presents the most controversial problem in Malachi's book ("Make one"). After all that has been written on this subject, we believe that Luther's translation and interpretation of this verse is substantially correct. According to him, the Lord here foresees and foretells another attempt of the Jews to justify their conduct, as they had done in chapter 1:2,6,7; 2:14,17; op. 3, 7, 8, 13ff. They might try to defend their action by pointing to the example of their father Abraham, whose offspring they boastfully declared to be. Abraham took a foreign woman as his wife, Hagar (Gen. 16:3). Why should not Abraham's children be permitted to do likewise? Abraham had repudiated Hagar (Gen. 21:7-14). Why should not the Jews have the same liberty? The Lord shows the irrelevancy of their appeal even before they advanced it. Luther also makes a very practical application, "It is disastrous to follow all the deeds of the fathers without divine call, and equally harmful to teach such a practice. One should rather imitate their faith and their obedience to God's Word. We must observe what God has commanded us to do, not what some other person does."

The objection raised by many that the Jews of Malachi's time could not have understood this allusion without further explanation is groundless. This is not the only passage in which Abraham is called "one". Cp. Is. 51:2; Ezek. 33:24 where "one" "alone", also refers to his singleness, his childlessness. Abraham, who was to be made a great nation, many nations (Gen. 12:2; 15:5; 17:4-6,16; 18:8), was called when he was 75 years old and childless, and Sarah, ten years younger, was barren. Humanly speaking, there was no hope for a son and heir, and every passing year made the fulfillment of this promise the more impossible. In their intense desire to bring



about the fulfillment they had resorted to various plans. (Cp. Gen. 15:2; 16:1-4,16). The promise was renewed when Abraham was 99 years old. A year later Isaac was born. For 100 years Abraham was the one forefather of the promised Woman's Seed. For 25 years after he had received the promise Sarah remained childless. Abraham, of all men, was the great "lone man", the echad, in the history of Israel. This fact was not unknown to the Jews. Moses had recorded it very definitely and repeatedly. Isaiah had called attention to it (Is. 51:2). In Ezekiel's time the Jews based their vain hope of never losing possession of their homeland on the fact that they were many, while Abraham was "one", a single childless man when he inherited the land (Ezek. 33:24). Such Jews as had forgotten this fact were reminded of it by the prophet's words.

"Yet had he residue of the spirit." The Lord speaks ironically. Abraham, the lone man, had more than a remnant of the spirit, a small portion spiritually. He was a man of extraordinary spiritual strength, of powerful faith, unwavering trust, and unquestioning obedience to God's will. He did not marry a foreign woman as did the Jews of Malachi's time, to satisfy his carnal desire. He did it at the suggestion of his wife in an endeavor to seek "a godly seed," a "seed of God," promised to him by the Lord. And he repudiated Hagar, not because he hated her, but because her son Ishmael was continually mocking Isaac and persecuting him with his mockeries (Gal. 4:29). For the sake of the seed of God, Isaac, Abraham cast out Ishmael and his mother.

Therefore do not seek to defend your marriage with heathen women and your dismissal of your covenant wives by pointing to Abraham, but take heed to your spirit, your spiritual life, your faith and love of God, lest by willful persistent disobedience to his will, by your treacherous repudiation of your wives, you lose what spiritual life you still possess.

This section closes with the warning repeated, Do not deal treacherously with the Lord for you will come off second best, in fact you may lose everything.

## Part II

Part two of the prophesy announces that the Messiah will come and a remnant will receive him. Chapter 2:17 to 4:6.

The prophet leaves one parting barb with the priests and people by saying, ye weary the Lord. Again they respond with the question, Wherein have we wearied him? The prophet answers, In your self-pity. You seem to think that God showers the evildoers with blessings and rewards you evilly. What are the facts. 1. From what has been told you, you can see that you are no paragons of virtue, therefore have no right to expect, much less to demand, a blessing. 2. Temporal success and prosperity are no indication of God's love. They may be, but not necessarily. Some times poverty and disgrace are good gifts of God.

Bringing this up to date, we often have the same doubts and ask: Why does God, seemingly favor the children of this world? We may even express those thoughts now and then as we contemplate on our lot, that seems to be human, but the prophet has a more serious charge. The children of Israel were saying this so often and on every occasion that even God got tired of their constant complaining. They should have faith that in the long run everything would turn out right, but they were asking how long is long? God promises judgment and he delays. God promises blessings and he delays. How long must we wait for the deliverer and redeemer?

Peter answered the same complaint when the Christians were persecuted and the heathen seemed to prosper. The Lord promised to return, how long is it going to take him, 100 years? Peter answered. Remember that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Pet 3:8). When Malachi wrote his book only 1/10 of the time remained. Since Gen. 3:15 about 4000 years had elapsed, now there were only 400 years left. In that sense the time was rapidly approaching.

Therefore v. 1 of chapter 3 makes the positive statement, "The Lord whom ye seek, he shall come and suddenly (better, unexpectedly)." However the way will be prepared for him by the messenger. This refers to one messenger, not to many prophets. One man will appear and he will prepare the way for the promised Messiah. Remember this was written 400 years before John the Baptist said, "I am a voice in the wilderness etc." Malachi furthermore calls this messenger the second Elijah in 4:5.

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mt. 11:12-15)

Since this is not an exegetical but an isagogical treatment of the book let us analyze v. 1-6 in sermon outline form. This text is suitable for the Advent season.

### Outline I Text: Malachi 3:1-6

Intro: These words were written 400 years before Christ was born. They tell us of the messenger who would come, namely John the Baptist.

1. He shall come suddenly to his temple (unexpectedly)
  - A. This does not mean that he is not expected.
    1. He has been promised and the promise repeated.
    2. His way will be prepared by the messenger.
  - B. He will be recognized by his association with the temple
    1. Not only in his personal appearance
    2. but the messenger will announce (point to him)
2. He has a work to do.
  - A. The people have a false impression of his work.
    1. They think that he will reward them because they have the temple worship, the priests, the ritual, the promises (self-righteousness)
    2. They look for an earthly king, who would reward their piety and punish their enemies. Therein they would be sadly disappointed
    3. That was the trouble at the time of Jesus, and he was rejected.
    4. Too often that is our conception of Christianity too.
  - B. His work will be to refine and purify the hearts.
    1. Example of a refiner
    2. Example of a fuller
    3. Will show that the sacrifices of God are a broken heart.
  - C. Then the offerings will be acceptable to God.
3. Blessings will flow from his coming.
  - A. The evil-doers will be punished
  - B. The good rewarded.
4. And because he is the Lord who changes not, therefore the sons of Jacob will not be consumed. It is not their merit, but God's unchanging grace that will accomplish the results.

Conclusion: This grace is for all, therefore welcome the promised Savior

Outline II  
Text: Malachi 3:16-18

Jesus' Jewels

1. How they are mined
  - A. The jewels are in the ground, dark, worthless, helpless, waiting
  - B. So we are by nature enemies of God
  - C. The miner comes with the pick and shovel
  - D. God comes with his Word and Sacraments
    1. Describe how the children learn the 10 commandments, etc.
    2. Thus they become valuable jewels and they are to be displayed
  
2. How they are marked
  - A. They fear God (carry out the fear and love of God)
  - B. They avoid evil
  - C. They encourage one another
    1. Come together
    2. Make confession of their faith
  - D. They remain faithful to Word and Sacrament.
  - E. They are kept for the Judgment (in that day)
    1. They are engraved in his hand
    2. In his book of remembrance
  - F. They are spared as a father spareth his son

V. 7 - 12 pick up the mocking questions again. The Lord says you have departed from me and from my ordinances and sure enough comes the mocking question as an answer: "Why should we return, we have never been away from thy ordinances." In their self-righteousness they were sure that they were right there along side of God all the time. But were they rendering him his just due? No, like a thunderbolt it came—you are robbers and the worst kind of robbers, you are God robbers.

Now they answer, how can we rob God, can a man run up into heaven and steal away the pearly gates, or gouge out a chunk of gold from the golden streets? Is God so weak that he cannot protect his possessions? The prophet hews right through these foolish ideas and he says, I will tell you how you rob God; you withhold the just amount due to him. By your own admission you claim to be God's people and he has dealt badly with you, well then, if you are God's people bring him an offering, bring in your tithes. You acknowledge a king and therefore it is your obligation to bring him an offering to pay your taxes. What happens when you refuse to do this for your earthly king? He will send his army and destroy the wicked servants and the robbers. Should I do less, saith the Lord. v. 9. Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

America spends more for cigarettes in one year than all the mission work put together. One of our members out collecting for the church's building program met with a member who had such a hard-luck story that it seemed that the Lord was expecting the impossible. She had a roll of nickels (\$2.00) rolled up and was saving it, but she would give that. The collector was actually ashamed to take the money, but the next day he happened to pass that house again and he saw the workmen erecting a television tower (this was in the early days of television and it was expensive). He did not feel so badly now for having taken the \$2.00 which the lady so reluctantly gave in her self-made poverty, and I say it was self-made. The sad thing about this is that such children of God are not only bringing a curse upon themselves, but they are robbing themselves of riches and blessings. This woman never got out of a sort of hand to mouth living.

Try me, saith the Lord, You bring your tithes and I will open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it. v. 10. This was no idle promise, this had happened time and again in the history of Israel. When the people served God they had abundance, prosperity and peace. Their crops were good and they were safe from their enemies even though they still menaced their borders. But when they went after other Gods and robbed God of his tithes, then the calamities struck. How many times did God have to prove this to them? If at the time of Malachi they were in poverty it was not God's, but it was their own fault. Cf Mt. 18:22.

To prove it once more he said, Try me again, bring your offerings and I will give you more than you can store. It would be done in this way. The locust would not devour the crops, the weather would be good and favorable, and the seed would ripen properly. And so great will be your prosperity that all the nations around about will see it and say, the Lord surely delighteth in his people.

God will never be outgiven. He would not dare to be because then he would no longer be the superior being. A farmer who was noted for his generosity never turned a hungry man away from his granary without a sack of grain. Some of his friends became apprehensive because of the large number of applicants who lined up at the granary with their empty sacks. You had better cut down and shovel in less grain. The man answered, I shovel out of this granary and the Lord shovels in and his shovel is just a little bit bigger than mine.

Or to use this example. If the inlet pipe in the tank is 3/4 inch in diameter and the outlet pipe is 1/2 inch in diameter and both are flowing to capacity, there will always be water in the tank, in fact the amount will steadily increase.

Now in spite of all the evidence of God's love toward Israel they have spoken only words of complaint. Their words were stout i.e. harsh, actually offensive language, nasty words. And in their simulated innocence they ask, we didn't say anything out of the way, did we? It is like the children in school, the teacher driven to distraction by the whispering, cries out, stop that continual talking and they ask so innocently, why, were we making noise?

But here the Lord makes a very serious charge against their words. They were saying, now we have served the Lord so well, we have kept his ordinances (self-righteousness) we have even repented in sack cloth and ashes, we really did not see the necessity for this, because we certainly have done nothing wrong (self-righteousness) but the Lord expected it and so we humored him and we put on a long face, and what did it get us? A whack along side of the head. And those proud and happy evildoers, especially the heathen, they are set up and they are delivered. If that is what God calls rewarding us, we will have loss of that. God had said, I give so much and ask so little. They turned it around and said, you ask so much from us, and give us so little in return.

Now you and I may not have said it, but we have thought it many times, see how the gangsters profit and how the deceivers profit and how the deceived are preyed upon and got little or no protection neither from God nor from the government. But when Dwight Moody saw a drunk lying in a gutter he remarked, there but by the grace of God, lies Dwight L. Moody. The Psalmist expressed the thoughts of every Christian heart in Psalm 73:22ff.

In all of this the prophet could leave this lesson. God has been more than patient and his people have been more than wicked, yet on this dark background of their sins he builds his grace and he will not fail them even the they fail him. He helped Jacob through his dilemmas as he will help the descendants of Jacob and all the more so, because he is the changeless God. His promises have been made, they will be fulfilled.

However it is never so black as it is painted. There were some in Israel who had a fear and love of God. They lived as penitent sinners should, and they encouraged one another to remain faithful and wait upon the day of the Lord. In the case of Elijah, he never knew who the 7,000 were, but here Malachi speaks of such who in their conversation with others openly confessed that they believed and trusted in the Lord, and they openly encouraged one another. Just as God know the 7,000 so he knew these people and he shows that by saying, I have a book of remembrance and these names are listed therein.

The verses 16-18 make a good text for a confirmation address. Refer back to the sermon outlines, No. II.

The book ends with a vindication of God's ways in spite of what the people may do, think, or say. Then shall they return and they shall see that after all God has not forgotten his own in days of poverty and affliction, nor did he prefer the wicked to his own faithful children.

For the first time the title *Sun* of righteousness is used for the coming Messiah. Balaam called him the star out of Jacob, Num. 24:17, "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh; there shall come a star out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Joab, and destroy all the children of Sheth." Isaiah called him a great light, Is. 9:2, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light;..." Malachi, the last of the prophets calls him the sun, and as the sun gives light, gives life, and purifies, so this sun of righteousness will bring healing in his wings and life, such abundant life which is exemplified in the exuberance of young calves in a stall.

Zacharias takes up this thought in his prophesy at the birth of his son, John. Luke 1:78-79, "Through the tender mercies of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Peter takes up the same thought when he says in 2 Pet. 1:19, "We also have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."

All of these things are in the offing, they will surely come. In the meantime, remember the Law of Moses to live thereby, for the Lord says: "I am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that love me and showing mercy unto thousands of them that keep my commandments." In these verses the first and second coming of the Lord are intermingled and in the final judgment right will prevail, and that will be in heaven. The earth will end with a curse. The last word of the Old Testament is "curse", the last verse of the New Testament is a great blessing. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."

The Septuagint reversed the order of the last two verses in Malachi to have this last book of the Bible close not with a curse but with a blessing. The Masoretes repeated v. 5 after v. 6.

You do not get rid of a curse by rearranging the verses, and that is a good lesson for all of us.