

# THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF MALACHI

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The Book of Malachi is the last book in the Minor Prophets. It is quite short ... having only 55 verses, which are divided into 4 chapters. Let's examine this book very carefully.

1) It is the 12th and final book in the Minor Prophets and the last of the 3 restoration books. It completes the restoration of mankind having access to God and the restoration of the government of God over the Earth. It ends with a discussion of the lake of fire.

2) The book is addressed in the opening verse to "ISRAEL". A careful reading of the whole book shows that it addresses specifically "the PRIESTS", and in general also the people, to whom God sends His "MESSENGER". When we put this all together, the following picture emerges:

A) The nation of Judah was expecting the Messiah at Christ's first coming because of Daniel's 70 weeks prophecy. Christ was that "Messenger of the Covenant". The wise men from the east who came after Jesus' birth were in all likelihood representatives of "the lost 10 tribes" and in that sense Israel, and not just Judah, was exposed to the Messenger at His first coming.

B) The book, however, refers more to Christ's second coming, at which time God is working with His Church, the spiritual Israel. "The priests" refer to "the ministry of God's Church". The only people the ministry can teach and influence are those in God's Church. Physical Israel is overwhelmingly not influenced by the ministry.

So while the book is addressed to the nation (or nations) of Israel, it is addressed even more so to the Church of God. The CONTENT of this book also makes clear that it is addressed to those who don't see God's love for them. Again this refers to the two groups of physical Israel and also the Church of God.

3) The name of the book ( "MALACHI" ) means "MY MESSENGER" and is the Hebrew word "Malakiy". The word "messenger" is the Hebrew word "Malak". Both these Hebrew words come from the same unused root, which means "TO SEND AS A DEPUTY".

Of the 214 times that "malak" is used in the O.T., it is in the KJV translated 111 times as "ANGEL", 98 times as "MESSENGER" and 4 times as "AMBASSADORS" ... all of which express the function of someone being sent as a deputy by someone in higher authority.

Jesus Christ is the Messenger of God the Father (e.g. John 6:57;8:18; etc.). And Christ in turn has sent human messengers before His own coming. Before His first coming John the Baptist was such a messenger. And before the second coming another man will fulfill a role similar to John the Baptist (very likely one of the two witnesses). Both these human messengers (i.e. before the first and before the second coming) are compared to "Elijah".

In dealing with the nation, the collective body of God's people at that time, Elijah's most prominent activity and influence is encapsulated in 1Kings 18:21 ...

"And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, HOW LONG HALT YE BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS? IF THE LORD [BE] GOD, FOLLOW HIM: BUT IF BAAL, [THEN] FOLLOW HIM. And the people answered him not a word.

This was Elijah's own work of turning the hearts of the people to the true God. It is this example of Elijah's ministry that God uses to typify the messengers before Christ's two comings. It is a call to real repentance. And that is precisely what John the Baptist did ... point out the true "Lamb of God" and preach a strong message of repentance. The messenger before the second coming will have to do the same things. The Book of Malachi explains this further.

4) The FORMAT of the book is in the form of 8 statements by God, each of which is followed by a question from the people, and each question is then followed by an answer from God. The questions people ask clearly reveal the thinking of the people. The answers, in turn, clearly reveal the thinking of God. The whole presentation shows a very clear progression which culminates in the lake of fire.

In a way, this book is almost like an 'exclusive interview' where a prominent personality (i.e. God!) has made certain statements and the reporter asks 8 progressive questions and records the answers that are given.

5) The TIME-SETTING is clearly indicated at the end of this book ... it is just before ..."the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Malachi 4:5). So therefore the application is in all likelihood intended to be more for the Church of God than for physical Israel, since the Church is the body offering things up to God and being taught by "the priests" (i.e. the ministry) at the end time.

6) The THEME, that which is God's major concern, is also summed up in the concluding verses of the book. It is ... "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, ... with the statutes and judgments" (Malachi 4:4). So the teaching and observance of God's laws is at the centre of this discussion.

Now let's look at the book in detail.

#### QUESTION #1:

After identifying the author, the book opens in Mal.1:2 with a statement from God: "I HAVE LOVED YOU". Implied is that those being addressed do not reciprocate God's love ... they don't love God in return, meaning they don't keep some of God's commandments (see 1John 5:3 for a definition of loving God).

People respond to God by saying: what do you mean ... you have loved us? We can't see any evidence of your love. This question itself shows total ingratitude to God ... like a child demanding 'proof' that his parents really love him. God's response to this first question covers verses 2-5. God's answer is: look at all the blessings I have given to you ... you are not better off than other nations because you 'deserve' to be better off. The blessings I have poured out on you prove my love ... but you don't respond.

#### QUESTION #2:

God now makes the next statement in Mal. 1:6. It is addressed to the priests. This shows where God lays the blame for the condition described above. God's charge against the priests (i.e. the ministry) is that they don't honour, respect and fear God. In fact, they "DESPISE" God's name. The word "despise" means: to look down with contempt or aversion, to regard as worthless (see Webster's Dictionary).

The question is: HOW could the ministry of God's Church just prior to "the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD" possibly look down on God's name with contempt? It has to do with changing the meaning of God's name ... what God's name stands for and what God is like.

The ministry responds to God by saying: what do you mean ... we have despised your name? In what way? The Hebrew word translated "despise" here is used 5 times in Malachi. It is the word "bazah", and in Mal.1:6 it is twice translated as "despise"; in Mal. 1:7, 12; 2:9 it is translated 3 times as "CONTEMPTIBLE". The question shows that the ministers don't even "see" how they are despising God's name.

God's answer (verse 7) is a very short simple statement: you offer polluted bread upon my altar! Now think carefully! This "polluted bread" has the effect of despising God's name. How does this work?

"Bread" has to do with "feeding" (and this therefore also takes us back to Zechariah chapter 11). It is clearly not real physical bread that God is concerned with here. Spiritual feeding is by means of doctrines and teachings. Therefore the "polluted bread" God mentions must refer to "polluted teachings" or "polluted doctrines". "Upon my altar" refers to "in my Church".

In plain language: God's evidence that the ministry despises His name is that they teach polluted teachings to the people in God's Church ... and those polluted teachings must in some way be connected with "God's name". It seems obvious that this is a reference to the new teachings about "the nature of God"! They are an insult to Almighty God!

### QUESTION #3:

This statement by God becomes the basis for the next question by the ministry. The question is: what do you mean ... HOW have we polluted you (Mal.1:7)? Again, the very question shows a total lack of understanding and discernment by the ministry. It also shows that they think they are actually HONOURING God.

God's answer to this question covers about 20 verses, or almost half of the whole book. It goes from 1:7 - 2:13. This in itself should tell us that this covers the key issue in this book of Malachi. It is a long section that deals with the NAME OF GOD and the LAW OF GOD. As a matter of interest, in the whole book of Malachi God refers to His 'NAME' 10 times in 7 different verses: in 1:6 (twice); 1:11 (three times); 1:14; 2:2; 2:5; 3:16; 4:2. The 'NAME' of God is clearly of major importance in Malachi. When God refers to 'My NAME', He means: HOW WE IDENTIFY HIM! To identify God as "three Hypostases in one Being" is clearly a reference to God's 'NAME'.

God's answer to the question 'HOW have we polluted you' consists of several parts. The first charge God levels at the ministry is: you say 'the table of God is contemptible (or to be despised)'. The 'table' is the place on which things are offered ... the things we offer to God and the things God offers us.

1Cor. 10:21 shows that when we submit our lives to God (pictured by observing the Passover), then we become "PARTAKERS OF THE LORD'S TABLE" ... we receive access to what God is offering mankind. So God's charge in Mal. 1:7 covers two areas: firstly the ministry REJECTS (i.e. despises or holds in contempt) what God is offering us ... to be Gods with Him and Christ in His Family and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ in whatever Christ will inherit, to be just

like Christ (1John 3:2). The things God is offering us are rejected by the ministry in favour of some kind of vague existence "OUTSIDE OF TIME AND SPACE" ... whatever that may mean?! Secondly, the things the ministry offers to God (i.e. the doctrines it teaches) are to God like offering a sacrifice that is blind, lame and sick! Exactly what teachings would this represent? I'll give you just three guesses ... and any guesses that don't include the new 'nature of God' doctrine don't count!

In the same way as offering a sick, lame and blind animal to a king or governor would be a blatant insult, so also are the teachings that the ministry is offering to God ... that's the essence of Mal.1:8. Verse 9 says to the ministry: these insulting teachings have been "BY YOUR MEANS" ... from YOUR hand! And because these teachings are so insulting to God, you had better BESEECH GOD QUICKLY, before it is too late, that He will forgive and be gracious to us!

In verse 10 God says to the ministry: you are not prepared to work for Me for nothing ... you all want to be paid. You're in it for what you can get out for yourself, says God. God then says to the ministry in very plain terms:

**I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN YOU!**

Added to this God also says: I WILL NOT ACCEPT an offering at your hand ... the doctrines you are teaching my people are not acceptable. This verse is a very strong criticism of the ministry.

In verse 11 God refers to "My NAME" three times, showing how extremely important this is to God. It is "God's name" that has been brought into disrepute before the nations of this world. The way the ministers can detract from the greatness of God's name is by what they teach people about God's name ... God's nature and being!

In verse 12 God spells out that the ministry has profaned God's name by what they teach people ... by teaching that what God offers is polluted and showing contempt for the future God offers. It is "the fruit" and "the meat" that God is offering on His table that the ministry despises.

Verse 13 shows the ministry presenting observance of God's laws as a "weariness", something that can therefore be compromised with in the name of "balance". Ministers who bring offerings that are "torn, lame and sick" are clearly not adhering to God's laws!

Animal sacrifices pictured the dominant visible activity of the priests. But animal sacrifices have not been brought since the destruction of the Temple ... and they are not what God is concerned about anyway (see Hebrews 10:4- 9). The

dominant activity of the ministry is TEACHING! So verse 14 shows that those ministers who "teach" doctrines that detract from the greatness of God's name are "DECEIVERS"!

In chapter 2 and verse 1 God says: I am talking to you ministers! I have a commandment for you ministers, and it is this:

If you don't listen and set your hearts to give glory to My name by teaching the truth about My nature, then I will send a curse upon you; in fact, I have started to do so already because your heart is not right (verse 2).

God then proceeds to pronounce a penalty on the ministry in verse 3. When God says that His "covenant might be with Levi" in verse 4, this is God's way of referring to the faithful segment of the ministry. God made a covenant (agreement) with the ministry to explain the way to eternal life and to peace to His Church; and having the fear of God was a prerequisite for induction into the ministry (verse 5). The ministry should teach God's truth and help people to correctly identify sin (verse 6).

Earlier we looked at the Hebrew word for "messenger". It is used in only 2 verses in this book. The first place is Mal.2:7. Here God tells us that the ministry should preserve true knowledge and an understanding of God's law ... thereby effectively making a minister "the messenger of God". But by changing the teaching about God's nature and thereby corrupting the glory of God's name, the ministry has reneged on this responsibility of "messenger".

In verse 8 God says that the ministry "has departed out of the way". Notice this! It means that at some previous time the ministry was "in" the right way! What the Church calls "coming INTO new truth about the nature of God", God calls "DEPARTING FROM the right way". And this departure from the right way has caused MANY to stumble at the law of God. In departing, the ministry has "CORRUPTED the covenant" with God. Notice that it is the law of God that many stumble at as a result of the ministry's actions.

Verse 9 explains further that the ministry has been "partial" in applying God's laws. The ministry has "let go" of God's ways ... they have not "kept" them. Therefore God says He will make the ministers "contemptible and base before all the people" ... thousands of people in God's Church have already lost respect for their ministers, causing over 10,000 people to leave God's Church last year alone! Ministers who uphold as correct things they openly admit they themselves don't really understand, lose credibility in the eyes of members ... precisely as God says in this verse.

In verse 10 God shows that His plan to reproduce Himself is under attack. "Have we not all one Father?" ... in other words: isn't it BASIC understanding that God is in the process of BUILDING A FAMILY of multiple millions, of which He is the Father? "Father" is a meaningless term in a hypostatic trinity-concept! The very idea profanes God's role and position of "FATHER". The word "treacherous", used in this verse, identifies the way in which the new teaching has been introduced and the old done away.

Verse 11 shows the conditions extant in Israel at the same time as "the priests" profane God's name. The nations of Israel are filled with "abominable" deeds and Judah has dealt treacherously by "marrying the daughter of a strange god". The Judaism of today is certainly not the true religion of God. And within God's Church: by accepting the hypostasis- teaching, the Church of God has also married the daughter of a strange god!

It is very easy to show that Origen, the father of the hypostasis- doctrine, was himself the son of a "strange" church. And the Church of God today has "married" the teaching Origen put forward.

Verse 12 shows that God will "cut off" (the Hebrew 'karath' here means 'destroy') those who take up these ideas of a strange god ... without respect of persons. "The master and the scholar" literally means: him that awakes and him that answers. This is a clear warning from God to all who accept these false ideas.

Verse 13 talks about the effect the ministry's acceptance of these wrong teachings has: it has covered God's altar with "tears, weeping and crying". It has produced controversy and grief ... people leaving God's Church. So God says to the ministry: I will not accept any offerings from your hand!

This concludes the lengthy answer to HOW the ministry have "polluted" God.

#### QUESTION #4:

This last statement by God (that He will not accept the ministry's offerings) is the basis for the next question from the ministry: WHY don't you accept our offerings (verse 14)?

God's answer covers 3 verses (verses 14-16) and the answer is: because you have been unfaithful! And certainly, all those ministers who were ordained during Mr. Armstrong's lifetime and who now accept the changed doctrines, have been unfaithful to the Church of their spiritual youth.

The teachings God put into His Church through Mr. Armstrong have been treacherously dealt with! When new (changed!) teachings are presented, do we

really "take heed to our spirit"? Or do we accept the changes in spite of having reservations?

All these changes in the Church's doctrines hinge on changing the meaning of words ... endless striving about words! To this God says:

"You have wearied the LORD with your words!"

God hates all this striving about changing the meanings of words like:

- beget,
- in God's image and likeness,
- the Family of God,
- you are THEOS(John 10:34),
- turning clear statements into analogies or anthropomorphic pictures,
- the word 'hypostasis',
- the word 'Elohim', etc..

#### QUESTION #5:

This last statement by God prompts the next question from the ministry: IN WHAT WAY have we wearied God? God's answer is short and to the point in verse 17. It consists of two parts. After that God expounds for another 6-7 verses on this topic. The ministry has wearied God in two ways: 1) in condoning evil, saying that those who do evil are good in God's sight; 2) in questioning the return of Jesus Christ ... a "my Lord delays His coming"-attitude.

The condoning is done in subtle ways; for example by showing "understanding" for those who are homosexuals or break God's laws in other ways. It is always a partially disguised condoning. The issue of "where is the God of judgment" ("judgment" is what takes place at Christ's return!) is handled in the way of de-emphasising the imminence of Christ's return.

It is this last question (when will Christ return?) that God proceeds to address in the next 6 verses (Mal.3:1-6). When we look at them now, please keep this in mind ... that these verses are a response to those who question Christ's second coming.



In chapter 3 and verse 1 we have the answer to this question. It is: you ministers should have been 'My messengers' (see Mal. 2:7), preparing the way for My return. But since you despise My name, I will use someone else to be My messenger, who WILL prepare the way before Me. (John the Baptist fulfilled this job before Christ's first coming and another man will fulfill this same function before Christ's second coming.)

THEN, when this messenger has fulfilled his job, then Jesus Christ, whom we seek, will SUDDENLY return to His Church (the Temple, Ephesians 2:21). And Jesus Christ is, in turn, "the messenger of the covenant" God has made with us ... and we will "delight" in His return.

Verse 2 is a very clear reference to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Verse 3 shows that after His return Jesus Christ will "purify and purge" the ministry ... all those who despise and profane God's name (including the 'hypostasis-teachers') will be removed and those that are left can offer an offering "in righteousness". The physical priesthood of Levi will also be purged at that time, to prepare them for physical service during the millennium.

Verse 4 shows that God will then accept the offerings, reversing the condition found in Mal. 2:13. (Reversing existing conditions after Christ's return is also discussed in other passages, e.g. Hosea 1:4 - 2:1; etc..) Verse 5 shows Jesus Christ establishing a society based on God's ways, removing all the evils extant at His return.

Verse 6 is intended as encouragement. Even though Israel, the ministry included, really deserve to be 'consumed' for all these sins, God will not exact this ultimate penalty. God is dependable and He will fulfill His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That is the hope for Israel. (This verse is a reference to God's CHARACTER, not to His abilities!) In verse 7 God states that Israel has always gone off into idolatry.

#### QUESTION #6:

Apart from addressing Israel in Mal. 1:1, God has thereafter only addressed the ministry ("the priests") in Mal. 1:6 and again in Mal. 2:1. Therefore it is most likely that God's call to repentance in Mal. 3:7 is also addressed to the ministry. Real repentance must start with the ministry, the teachers of the people, and then extend on down to the people who are taught by the ministry. So God says to the ministry: if you will repent, then I will change towards you and not impose the penalties.

This statement forms the basis for the next question from the ministry (and by extension, all the people), which is: WHAT is it that we are supposed to repent

of? Again, this question reveals a lack of true understanding. They don't even see the need to repent!

God's answer to this question, in verse 8, is very brief. In effect God says: alright, to give you just one example, you are stealing from Me!

Now obviously, there are other things that the ministry and the people need to repent of ... like despising God, like dealing treacherously, like condoning evil, etc.. God has in this verse merely introduced a new example, something to add to all the things He has already mentioned.

#### QUESTION #7:

This charge by God becomes the basis for the next question: HOW have we robbed You (verse 8)? Again people don't see their responsibilities before God.

God's answer is: you have robbed Me by not paying the tithes and bringing the offerings on Holy Days that are due to Me!

Verses 9-12 now explain the penalty for this particular disobedience, as well as explaining the blessings when people obey the tithing laws.

In verse 9 God pronounces a curse for non-tithing. That curse will extend to the whole nation. Verses 10-12 expound on the blessings that God bestows, individually and nationally, on those who practice these financial laws. While the whole nation is guilty of non-tithing, it is the responsibility of the priesthood to teach these laws ... within the Church this is the ministry's responsibility.

#### QUESTION #8:

In verse 13 God makes the following statement to the priests (i.e. the ministry):

**YOUR WORDS HAVE BEEN STOUT AGAINST ME!**

HOW they are actually speaking AGAINST God! So God explains.

God's clear charge is: you have said that it is useless to serve God (verse 14). In other words, don't EXPECT a discernible blessing for obedience. This attitude is seen in the move away from Mr. Armstrong's approach of ...

**"FOR EVERY EFFECT THERE HAS TO BE A CAUSE!"**

Mr. Armstrong very vigorously taught this concept to God's Church. He closely linked our obedience to God with God providing blessings and open doors. He frequently said words to this effect: "Brethren, if at least 51% of us are pleasing God, then God will bless the Work". He showed that God had blessed His Work with approximately 30% growth p.a. for over 30 years. When this growth-pattern ceased, Mr. Armstrong saw the reason in the Church's drifting into a liberal approach towards obedience to God. When Mr. Armstrong, after his total heart failure, got the Church back on the track, there was an immediately noticeable improvement in the growth- pattern.

Today the Church has totally moved away from seeing the Church's spiritual condition mirrored in the blessings God provides or withholds. Decreases in the income are explained as being due to the financial conditions extant in the nation as a whole. Our serving God supposedly has nothing to do with the steady decrease in income. God says that this approach amounts to speaking "stout words" against Him.

You say: don't expect a benefit ("profit") from keeping God's laws. "What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance?" Mr. Armstrong repeatedly stated that when we walk humbly ("mournfully") before God, then God blesses His Work ... and God Himself has just said that He would "open the windows of heaven" ... but the ministry today conditions the members not to expect tangible blessings ... instead just "knowing Jesus Christ" is repeatedly held up as "the blessing" God has bestowed on us.

The problem with this is that everybody in every so-called "Christian" church can feel that he "knows the Lord". We have become oblivious to the fact that God has not only withdrawn His blessings from the Church, He has also started to pour out a curse upon the Church (Mal. 3:9) and we talk ourselves into feeling that we are still blessed because we "know the Lord". Listen, the ministry God is addressing in the book of Malachi doesn't really "know the Lord" ... they just think they do.

Verse 15 is a discussion of our society in general. Pride is our hallmark. Wickedness is our way of life. Life- threatening actions ("tempting God") are a favourite in our entertainment ... the more dangerous something is, the more exciting it is. That's what we pay to see.

Verse 16 presents the true Church in this context of a lawless and godless society; a small group whose names are recorded in "a book of remembrance". Verse 17 says that God will "spare them" ... obviously implying a time of trouble when the rest of mankind will NOT be "spared".

Now verse 18: at that time it will be easy to "discern between the righteous and the wicked" ... because God will supernaturally protect the righteous and the wicked will not be protected, an answer to those who say "it is vain to serve God" (verse 14).

There are no further questions from the ministry and so in the next 3 verses (i.e. Mal. 4:1-3) God takes this process to its ultimate conclusion ... total destruction in the lake of fire for the wicked and eternal life in God's family for the righteous. The last 3 verses (Mal. 4:4-6) summarize God's main concern in this book. That is: first, remember my law WITH the statutes and judgments (therefore including tithing, holy days, clean meats, etc.) and second, I will surely send My messenger, Elijah, before the second coming of Christ and he will preach a message of repentance, as did Elijah and as did John the Baptist.

This book of Malachi describes a clear process ...

- A) it starts out with people not seeing God's love;
- B) this leads to a lack of respect;
- C) this leads to despising;
- D) this leads to polluted teachings;
- E) this leads to utter contempt for God;
- F) this leads to immorality and robbing God;
- G) this leads to total outright rebellion;
- H) and the only place this can lead to is THE LAKE OF FIRE!

The book contains a major indictment from God against the ministry of His Church. It is the ministry that should have stopped this process by having and teaching respect, honour and fear towards God (Mal. 1:6). There is a close parallel between the message here and the message of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament.