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THE BOOK OF MALACHI

[Comment: Back in late 1994, immediately after attending my last Feast of Tabernacles with Worldwide, I wrote one of my very first articles, entitled "The Message of the Book of Malachi". That was a turbulent time. Since then a lot has happened in God's Church. This present article replaces that 1994 article.]

Chronologically the Book of Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament, and that is how it appears in our English language Bibles. Malachi represents **God's last revelations to mankind** before the start of the New Testament.

People sometimes point out that in the Hebrew canon of the Old Testament 2 Chronicles 36:23 is the last verse of the Old Testament. That verse speaks about the Persian King Cyrus making a decree to have a Temple built in Jerusalem for "the LORD God of heaven". Thus by the end of 2 Chronicles the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem had not yet been started, let alone been completed. It was only being decreed.

But in the books of Haggai and Zechariah the Temple is being rebuilt, and in the Book of Malachi the new Temple has been completed, because Malachi 3:10 shows God speaking about "His house" being in existence. Thus time-wise the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are all later than the end of 2 Chronicles.

The Book of Malachi really does represent God's final message to humanity in Old Testament times, irrespective of how the Old Testament books may be organized in the canon. From the end of the Book of Malachi it was **more than 400 years** until God again revealed information to human beings at the start of the New Testament period.

For a period of over 400 years there were no revelations from God, none.

Now **God's first revelations** that were to be recorded in writing were given by God to Moses in the 1400's B.C., when God was ready to start working with a whole nation. Those written revelations obviously include discussions of events that preceded the time of Moses (i.e. the Book of Genesis). But God's revelations had never been recorded in writing before the time of Moses.

Now from Moses to Joshua, to the Judges, to the kings of Israel, to the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets, there had never been a gap of say 100 years in God making contact with certain people in Israel (i.e. with judges, prophets and kings). In most cases it was at most only several decades after a previous episode of revelations from God, before God would again call someone to either lead His people, or to bring a message from God to God's people.

So a gap of over 400 years in God making contact with human beings in Old Testament times is highly significant.

If there had been a time-gap of this magnitude at any time from when God made the Old Covenant with the nation of Israel down to the time of Malachi, then Israel would very likely and very quickly have become a thoroughly pagan nation.

It required **a constant stream of prophets** to keep the people of Israel from becoming totally immersed

in Baal-worship and in similar forms of paganism. And even then, those prophets never managed to keep the people of Israel from rejecting God's ways for very long. The positive effect of inspired servants of God on the people of Israel, and later on the people of Judah, was always only short-lived. That was a major disappointment for God.

It was God who decided that He would not communicate with human beings for over 400 years after the Prophet Malachi. Then it would be time to prepare for the first coming of Jesus Christ. Now note! It was not a preordained decision that God would not communicate with human beings for over 400 years. In theory God could have continued sending prophets to the Jewish people until say 30 B.C. or 40 B.C., but that's not how God did it.

Now here is the point we need to consider.

God will do whatever it takes to achieve the best possible results for His plan of salvation for mankind. There are no constraints on God, that would prevent God from implementing things that would increase the success rate for God's plan of salvation for human beings. So my point here is this:

There must be one or more reasons why God broke off all contacts with human beings for a period of over 400 years before Jesus Christ's first coming. I believe that from God's perspective there was nothing to be gained for God, if God would have sent more prophets to Judah for another 350 years or so after Malachi. And so God didn't do that.

The reason why God did not send more prophets after Malachi is not revealed. But for everything that God does there is always a reason or a purpose. And there must have been some reason that made God decide to not have any contact with human beings for over 400 years.

So the Book of Malachi was to be **God's parting message** to the people God had chosen, a message designed to bridge a 400-year gap until God would resume contacts with mankind. It was a parting message that pronounced **the end of one particular way that God had dealt with mankind**, which about 400 years later was to be replaced by a completely new approach for God to deal with human beings.

Malachi is the bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. But it is actually more than that. It is also a book that bridges the time between Jesus Christ's first and second comings, because it refers primarily to Christ's second coming, but includes statements that also apply to the time of Christ's first coming.

And there is one further factor that enters this picture. Based on **Israel's unfailing past record** of always descending into paganism, if God did not send His prophets at short enough intervals, God knew in advance that the Jewish people would surely adopt pagan customs and traditions, if God did not send any prophets to them for a period of 400 years or more. That was simply inevitable, based on the past record.

So God knew in advance that if He did not send any more prophets to the Jewish people (the ten tribes of Israel had by then gone into a national captivity to Assyria, from which they never returned to the area of Israel) until Jesus Christ was about to start His ministry, then the Jewish people would surely pick up any number of pagan customs, traditions and ideas before Jesus Christ would even start His ministry. That's what had always happened in the past ... and there had never been a gap as long as 400 years between messages from God.

And that is indeed what then happened; the Jewish religion absorbed many pagan ideas.

The Jewish religion extant at Christ's first coming, and vividly represented by the scribes and Pharisees, was far removed from the religion of Moses and of Ezra. What the Pharisees called "**the tradition of the elders**" (e.g. Matthew 15:2-6; etc.) were nothing other than **pagan traditions**, which defied and transgressed the laws of God (see Mark 7:9, 13), pagan ideas that had been embraced by the Jewish religious leaders during the two centuries before Christ's first coming.

In combating the teachings of the Pharisees **Jesus Christ was combating teachings that came from pagan sources**. But that's another story, about which I have written extensively in the past. (Three articles that come to mind are: my 2007 14-page article "The Development of Jewish Laws Through the Ages", my 1998 23-page article "The Oral Law of the Jews", and my 1997 54-page article "Judaism and Baal Worship".)

In our context of examining the Book of Malachi we should note the following points:

1) With this last revelation God was providing a bridge to the New Testament.

2) At the same time God also directed the actual focus towards Jesus Christ's second coming.

3) God also wanted to expose the hostility of the carnal mind (and minds involved in pagan practices are totally carnal!) towards God Himself, by exposing how the carnal mind deals with "God's name".

With this background we are ready to take a closer look at the Book of Malachi.

AN OVERVIEW

It was God's intention in the Book of Malachi to describe conditions that will be extant at the time of **Jesus Christ's second coming**. Now some of the things that apply to Christ's second coming could also have some type of fulfillment at the time of Christ's first coming. But such fulfillments would be only a secondary application, deferring to the primary application intended for Christ's second coming.

A major purpose for this book was to **expose the thinking of the religious leaders amongst God's people** at the end-time, because they carry a great deal of the blame for God's people repeatedly letting go of God's truth in favor of heretical ideas. Back at Malachi's time those religious leaders would have been called "**priests**", and in our age today they are called "**ministers**". So we need to understand that indictments against "the priests" in this book are intended to convey "**indictments against the ministry of God's Church**" in our age.

This is a book of prophecy for the end-time. That is clear from the concluding two verses of this book, which focus on "the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD". And so **this book exposes a ministry that has rejected much truth and accepted heresies instead**.

Now one of the best ways to expose the thinking of the ministry that God is speaking about in this book is for God to let those particular ministers express their thoughts in their own words. Remember that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). And so that is precisely the approach God has taken in this book that was to provide a bridge to Christ's first coming, as well as to Christ's second coming.

Basically this book of 55 verses is presented in the form of:

- 8 statements made by God, addressed specifically to the priests.

- 8 questions from the priests regarding those statements from God.

- 8 answers from God to further amplify God’s 8 original statements.

(For "priests" in this book read "ministers" in our age.)

It is the 8 questions which the ministers ask God that expose the real problems within the end-time ministry and their attitude towards God. Their questions reveal how they think, and what premises they have accepted. They also reveal the lack of discernment on the part of the ministry to whom God’s statements are addressed.

In some ways we can compare the Book of Malachi to a famous person making 8 controversial statements, and reporters then asking that famous person to elaborate on the 8 statements the person has made, like an interview.

Now while the book is addressed to Israel in the opening verse, it very quickly zooms in to a specific group of people within Israel, that group being the priests, the religious leaders.

DIFFERENT "MESSENGERS"

The name "Malachi" literally means "my messenger". The Hebrew word "**malak**" is used 214 times in the Old Testament, and in the KJV it is translated 111 times as "**angel/s**", 98 times as "**messenger/s**", and 4 times as "**ambassador/s**". The word "malak" means "**one who is sent as a deputy**".

The New Testament Greek equivalent for "malak" is "aggelos", from which we get our English word "angel". The word "angel" also literally means "messenger", i.e. someone who is sent as a deputy to convey a message. Hebrew "malak" and Greek "aggelos" are identical in meaning.

The word "malak" is only used twice in the Book of Malachi: in Malachi 2:7 and in Malachi 3:1. We’ll examine both these verses shortly. The word "malak" can refer to spirit beings and to human beings. And thus:

1) **Jesus Christ** is "the messenger" or "angel" of God the Father.

2) **The angels** are "the messengers" of both God the Father and of Jesus Christ.

3) **Human beings** can be selected by God to be God’s "messengers".

And the Prophet Malachi was "God’s messenger" to deliver God’s closing message for the Old Testament.

It is not the Hebrew word "malak" itself that tells us whether it is speaking about a member of the God Family or about an angel or about a human being. It is the context in which the word "malak" is used that makes clear whether it refers to Jesus Christ or to an angel or to a man.

For simplicity, in this article I will refer to the 8 Statements, 8 Questions and 8 Answers as "SQ&A #1, SQ&A #2, SQ&A #3", etc. So let’s look at this book.

SQ&A #1

The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. **I have loved you**, says the LORD. **Yet you say**, **Wherein hast You loved us?** ... (Malachi 1:1-2)

God starts this book by saying **to Israel** "I have loved you". And while God very quickly addresses this book to "the priests" (i.e. the ministry), it would not have been appropriate to address this opening statement to the priests alone. Such a statement would have implied that God had not loved the people of Israel, and that would have been a wrong deduction. Nor could this opening statement have been addressed to Judah alone, because such a statement would likewise have implied that God didn't love the other tribes of Israel.

In this opening statement "I have loved you" God had to include all of the people of Israel, irrespective of which segment of the people of Israel the content of this book would actually be addressed to. In Old Testament times God had loved all the people of Israel. And therefore this opening statement could not really have been addressed to "the priests", because of the implications such a statement would have entailed for the rest of the people of Israel, even when "the priests" are really the people God wishes to address with this book.

Now this statement by God is viewed very critically by the people God is addressing. The question: "**what do You mean, You have loved us?**" shows a staggering lack of understanding and appreciation and discernment on the part of those who ask this question. In a few short verses God will show that it is actually **the religious leaders**, "the priests" who ask this extremely offensive question of God.

Here is the point we need to understand: this question by the religious leaders makes clear that they do not appreciate how God has looked after Israel for millennia, and continues to look after Israel. They are blind to how God has protected Israel and provided for Israel.

A consequence of their lack of understanding and lack of appreciation for what God has done for Israel is that **they don't reciprocate God's love**. They are totally ungrateful to God.

The way to reciprocate God's love is to **obey all of God's laws** conscientiously, and to **teach God's laws faithfully**. That is the way to love God "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (see Deuteronomy 6:5). **But that is not what the religious leaders were doing.** Oh yes, "with their mouth they show much love" (see Ezekiel 33:31), but inwardly they are totally covetous. As the Prophet Jeremiah spelled out:

Therefore will I give their wives unto others, *and* their fields to them that shall inherit *them*: for **every one from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest** every one deals falsely. (Jeremiah 8:10)

The society and the religious leadership described by Jeremiah 8:10 is obviously oblivious to all the things that demonstrate God's love for Israel. People who "deal falsely" clearly lack integrity, and they cannot be trusted.

The priests' question is much like a rebellious child demanding from his parents proof that the parents love the child, an absurd and very selfish question, one that demonstrates a complete lack of understanding and appreciation and gratitude on the part of the child.

God's answer to this question covers the last part of verse 2 and also verses 3-5. **Notice how God explains His love for Israel.**

Esau and Jacob were brothers. In theory God could have blessed them equally. But God didn't do that. The fertile land God gave to Israel, compared to the land God gave to Esau's descendants, proves God's love for Israel. In other words, the undeserved blessings God has poured out on Israel irrefutably prove God's love for Israel.

The same is true today. The blessings we are privileged to enjoy are proof of God's love for us. There is one more point here that we need to cover in this context.

THE TRANSITION IN GOD'S DEALINGS

At the start I mentioned that the Book of Malachi announces that the way God had dealt with human beings throughout the Old Testament was coming to an end, and that God was going to replace it with a new approach for dealing with human beings.

The end of God's old approach is hinted at in God's opening statement in verse 2. The implied message in God's opening statement is:

I have always loved you, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But you have never reciprocated My love for you. Therefore, for a certain period of time (i.e. for about 2000 years) **I will stop loving you** as a group of nations. Instead, I will pour out My love **on individual people of all national and racial backgrounds**, on all those who are willing to reciprocate My love, by faithfully obeying Me.

When God said: "I have loved you", God was not saying "and I still continue to love you". No, that's not what it is. Rather, God's statement "I have loved you" says: that's it; I've had enough of your rebellion and your disobedience. **So I am making a change!**

As the Apostle Paul put it: God did not spare "**the natural branches**" (i.e. Israel) (Romans 11:21), and so they "**were broken off**" because of unbelief and disobedience (Romans 11:20). And branches that are broken off are no longer loved by God.

God's new way of dealing with human beings is based on the minds and the attitudes of the people who hear God's call. It is those minds that respond with real repentance that God will love. And this is totally independent of whether the people with repentant minds are Israelites or non-Israelites. It is the repentant people who become "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16), even when ethnically some might be non-Israelites. And God's love is shown by God making His holy spirit available to those who repent.

In this present New Testament age it is the Israel of God that God loves!

They are the recipients of the love which God had in Old Testament times reserved for the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And Malachi 1:2 already hints at **this transition of God's love from one group to another**.

Paul asked: "has God cast away His people?" (see Romans 11:1). No, because when the millennium starts, then on the physical human level God's love for the physical nations of Israel will be restored. And furthermore, by no means are Israelites in any way excluded from being partakers of God's new way of dealing with human beings.

And I strongly suspect that the great majority of those God has worked with during this New Testament age are of Israelite stock. But let's understand that God is not working with them because they happen to be of Israelite descent; God is working with them because they were willing to repent and to change ...

and their actual ethnic background is immaterial. As John the Baptist put it, "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matthew 3:9), showing that **genetic heritage is not a major consideration for this New Testament age**.

So the Book of Malachi records the termination of the time when God's love was limited to the physical nations of Israel. The New Testament then spells out Jesus Christ's new approach to "**teach all nations** all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). (Comment: For the correct text for these two verses see my 2015 111-page article "Our Trinitarian Baptism Formula".)

Let's move on to the next statement-question-answer.

SQ&A #2

Now God makes another statement, and this one is addressed to the priests, the religious leaders. Since this book is focused on Christ's second coming, therefore this means that **this statement is addressed to the ministry of God's Church**.

A son honors *his* father, and a servant his master: if then I *be* a father, **where *is* My honor?** and if I *be* a master, **where *is* My fear?** says the LORD of hosts unto **you, O priests, that despise my name**. And you say, **Wherein have we despised Your name?** (Malachi 1:6)

God's charge against these religious leaders is that they do not honor, respect and fear God. In fact, these religious leaders actually "despise" God. That is a very serious transgression, which God will certainly punish with the lake of fire, if this transgression is not repented of. These individuals are guilty of highly offensive conduct towards God.

The Hebrew word here translated as "**despise**" is used five times in the Book of Malachi, twice in this verse, and also three times it is translated as "**contemptible**" (Malachi 1:7; 1:12; 2:9). This Hebrew word "bazah" means: to despise, hold in contempt, be despicable, consider vile and worthless, etc. It is a really bad word to apply to the Creator God, and it is surely something God will punish.

Now here is the point to note:

The ministry doesn't even recognize their attitude of contempt and disdain for God's name. They ask incredulously: what do you mean ... we have despised Your name? **How have we done that?**

God's answer is short and to the point, and God's answer then becomes the basis for the next question from the ministry. Here is God's answer.

You offer polluted bread upon My altar; and you say, Wherein have we polluted You? In that you say, The table of the LORD *is* contemptible. (Malachi 1:7)

So God's answer to the question "how have we despised Your name?" is: you offer polluted bread. Bread is a form of food that nourishes us. Spiritually "bread" refers to **the doctrines and the teachings** which the ministry presents to God's people. "Upon My altar" is here a reference to "the things you teach My people", to those who have My spirit.

So that should be pretty clear, right?

The ministry which does not discern God's love proceeds to insult God through the teachings they

present to God's people! **Those teachings are "polluted"**, meaning that they defile and desecrate God's status and position. And they also defile those people who accept these teachings.

Note also that the ministry "despising God's name" has nothing whatsoever to do with how people pronounce God's name. It is not an instruction to use Hebrew-sounding words for God (words like Yeshua, Yahweh, Jehovah, etc.). The way these ministers "despise God's name" is revealed by "the polluted bread" which they present to God's people.

For any minister to present any false teaching to any group of God's people is an active demonstration of despising God's name. That is what God Himself tells us in verse 7.

[Comment: As far as using "sacred names" is concerned, I have already thoroughly and very meticulously demolished that particular heresy in my 2002 lengthy article of about 130 pages, entitled "The Facts About Using Sacred Names", exposing the devious claims on which that heresy is based.]

SQ&A #3

God's answer to Question #2 becomes the statement that has the ministry presenting Question #3. That question is: "wherein have we polluted You?". God's immediate answer is: "In that you say, The table of the LORD *is* contemptible".

So we now have two charges against the ministry. Keep in mind that God has used the same Hebrew word several times. "Despise" and "contemptible" are both translations for the Hebrew verb "bazah". Thus God tells us:

1) The ministry **despises** (or **holds in contempt**) God's name.

2) The ministry asserts that God's table is **contemptible** (or **to be despised**).

The expression "**despises** God's name" refers to the ministry's **evil actions**. Those evil actions are demonstrated by the heretical teachings the ministry presents to God's people, i.e. the "polluted bread" they present. The expression "God's table is **contemptible**" refers to the ministry's **evil attitude** towards God. That evil attitude is demonstrated by the contempt they have for what is available on "the table of the Eternal". It is because **they don't like what is available on God's table**, that they then offer polluted bread, which will make those that eat it extremely sick, spiritually speaking.

What is available on God's table are the true teachings of the Bible, the teachings that explain how we need to seek to do those things that are pleasing in God's sight (see 1 John 3:22). **Those are the teachings which the ministry addressed in this book does not like**, and so they deviously and perversely set about seeking to replace those true teachings with heretical teachings instead.

Over the past three decades we have lived through a very methodical exercise of seeking to discredit one true doctrine of God's Church after another, a seemingly endless and viciously executed process of trying to stamp out all of the truth that God's people understood while Mr. Armstrong was alive. The perpetrators might as well have worn T-shirts emblazoned with the words "THE TABLE OF THE LORD IS CONTEMPTIBLE", because that was the underlying motivation for all the doctrinal changes they wanted to make. And this is what God told us in advance, in the Book of Malachi.

And the result of that deviously executed plan has in one sense been nothing short of devastating for

God’s Church, scattering the Church in all directions. The result is that the new doctrines that have been taught in place of the true doctrines are nothing other than **offering "the blind, the lame and the sick" to God** (see Malachi 1:8), meaning that those new teachings ("the polluted bread") are highly offensive to God!

Many, many people who used to be committed members of God’s Church have lost the fear of God. Their actions betray this loss of fear. Their consciences don’t bother them one bit, when they gladly go back into the ways of this world. And a major part of the responsibility for this loss of the fear of God goes to **the ministry that did not oppose the introduction of all those heresies**.

A positive example of what the ministry should have done was set by the priest Azariah and 80 priests with him, who unflinchingly opposed King Uzziah, when the king usurped the priest’s office (see 2 Chronicles 26:16-20). The ministry in our age should have followed that example in opposing the introduction of heresies. But instead, in our age many ministers went along with the heresies that were introduced.

No wonder that God excoriates the ministry!

Let’s understand that the initial leaders after Mr. Armstrong’s death only got the ball of rejecting truth and accepting heresies rolling. Once that ball was rolling, any number of seemingly "good guys" in the ministry made sure that that ball kept rolling; they made sure that it didn’t come to a grinding halt. They did this by taking the opportunity to quietly here and there introduce their own pet heresies into the mix.

And so today we are faced by **a cauldron of confusion** amongst the scattered people of God. You can find any number of weird ideas amongst some of the people who decades ago seemed to understand the truth. The Apostle Paul might as well have been writing about God’s Church today, when he wrote:

How is it then, brethren? when you come together, **every one of you** has **a psalm**, has **a doctrine**, has **a tongue**, has **a revelation**, has **an interpretation**. Let all things be done unto edifying. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

In other words, Paul was saying: **how is it that now everyone is suddenly an expert when it comes to understanding the Bible?** How come are there so many different doctrinal ideas floating around amongst people in God’s Church? How come do we now have all this doctrinal confusion? And that is also the situation we have in God’s Church right now, that there is a vast array of doctrinal beliefs and teachings to be found amongst the scattered groups that were a part of God’s Church during Mr. Armstrong’s time. There is a vast amount of confusion.

And the blame for this chaotic state of affairs within God’s Church lies with the ministry.

God’s answer to this Question #3 covers about 20 verses, or a good third of the whole book. God’s answer goes from Malachi 1:7 - Malachi 2:13. The length of this answer should tell us that **this Q&A 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 Malachi 1:6 (twice), Malachi 1:11 (three times), and in Malachi 1:14; 2:2; 2:5; 3:16; 4:2.

The "name" of God is clearly of major importance in this Book of Malachi. When God refers to "My name", God means **how we identify God**! God is not referring to some phonetic pronunciation for some transliterated Hebrew characters. It is proved beyond question that the Apostle Paul, a former Pharisee himself, consistently used the Greek words "**theos**" and "**kurios**" and "**Iesous**" and "**Christos**" to refer to

God the Father and to Jesus Christ.

In none of his epistles (except perhaps Hebrews) did Paul use any Hebrew names for God the Father and for Jesus Christ. And Paul didn't write most of his epistles himself; mostly he dictated them to a Greek-speaking scribe. This reference to the Book of Hebrews is thoroughly explained in my article about "Sacred Names".

[Comment: The Epistle of Hebrews is the only one of Paul's letters that may **perhaps** have been originally written in Hebrew, although that is far from certain. Keep in mind that very few Jews at Paul's time were still speaking Hebrew. Their language was Aramaic. Thus there would not have been much motivation to write them a letter in the Hebrew language. Be that as it may. But Paul's 13 other epistles were certainly written in the Greek language.]

God does not mean that the actual meaning of His Hebrew-language names cannot be translated into other languages. The purpose of a name is to identify someone. God's names are not defined by what they sound like when they are pronounced in the Hebrew language. God's names are defined by the meanings they convey, meanings that really should be translated correctly into the languages of the people who are listening to a message, or who are reading in their own language a text in the Bible.

Examples for **how people "despise" God's name** (or hold it contemptible) would include the following:

1) Claiming that Jesus Christ has not always existed together with God the Father, but that He was supposedly created by God the Father. One of Christ's names is "**the Eternal**" (i.e. the meaning of the Hebrew "YHVH"), and claiming that Jesus Christ was created by the Father shows an enormous amount of contempt for His name "the Eternal".

2) Claiming that God is supposedly "a Trinity", or even "three hypostases in one Being", is another extremely "contemptible" way of treating God's name. This pagan teaching despises God's stated goal to produce "**the Family of God**", with Jesus Christ becoming "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

3) Every false doctrine is equal to "polluted bread", and accepting false doctrines amounts to despising God's name. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians in the Church:

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: **you cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils**. (1 Corinthians 10:21)

False doctrines always put a person "at the table of devils". And that amounts to despising God's name, as per Malachi 1:6-7.

4) Making **a fetish** out of trying to copy the supposed Hebrew pronunciation of various Hebrew names for God and Christ is another form of despising God's name. **Insisting** on using Hebrew-sounding names to refer to God the Father and to Jesus Christ is really no different from students in the martial arts having to use Japanese words for all their communications. It is just a ritual. But using Hebrew names for God **by people who really know nothing about Hebrew** also detracts from the attributes those names are intended to convey, where the focus is just on some speculative pronunciation.

Today we are living in a time when **a large number of people**, who used to be a part of God's Church at the time when Mr. Armstrong died, have accepted one or more of the above four categories of despising God's name. And a lot of the blame for this once again goes back to the ministry.

Notice what **God says to the ministry** in Malachi 1:9.

And now, I pray you, beseech God that He will be gracious unto us: **this has been by your means** (Hebrew "from your hand"): will He regard your persons? says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 1:9)

The warning here is: these heresies have been introduced "from your hand", you religious leaders of My people. So we need to beseech God for mercy very quickly, before it is too late. Time is running out.

In verse 10 God says to the ministry: you're not prepared to work for Me for nothing. You're all just looking to get paid. God follows this rebuke with the statement "**I have no pleasure in you**", and then God states very bluntly "**neither will I accept an offering at your hand**" (Malachi 1:10). Wow!!

Where does that leave you, the average member of God's Church?

Your minister may say "you are supposed to give us seven Holy Day offerings in the year (God says "three Feast offerings", not seven). **What if** God in heaven says about that same minister "I will not accept an offering at your hand", as God says here in Malachi 1:10? Where does that leave you? If God is not willing to receive an offering at the hand of your minister, then your offerings never get through to God, do they? Your offerings have no chance of getting through to God, if you give them to any man from whom God is not prepared to receive any offerings.

Can you understand this dilemma?

Do you just tell yourself: God knows that I am trying to give an offering to God, and if God decides to not accept any offerings from the man or the organization to whom I give my offerings for God, **then that isn't my problem**, is it?

Well, in that case **why did God even bother to tell us** that "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Malachi 4:5) there would be a group of religious leaders, who seriously displease God, and from whose hands God is simply not prepared to accept an offering?

These are not my ideas! Understand that **Malachi 1:10 is a very, very powerful statement from God** about some of the religious leaders amongst His people at the end-time. And if God says that He is not going to accept an offering at their hand, should you be giving your offerings to them?

Making that decision is your problem, not mine. But if they are asking you for **seven** offerings every year instead of three, that's not a good sign to start with, is it?

[Comment: Lest you misunderstand, I myself do not accept money from God's people. There is no way to "donate" to me. And neither am I saying that "your minister" is necessarily in the Malachi 1:6-10 situation. That's for you to evaluate for yourself. But there are surely **some** ministers amongst the scattered people of God today, to whom Malachi 1:6-10 does apply.]

In Malachi 1:11 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, about God's nature and about His very Being**!

In Malachi 1:12 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 by showing contempt for the future God offers. It is "the fruit" and "the meat" that God is offering on His table that the ministry addressed in this book despises.

Malachi 1:13 shows certain ones in 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 Malachi 1:14 shows that those ministers who "teach" doctrines that detract from the greatness of God's name are "**deceivers**"!

In Malachi 2:1 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 (Malachi 2:2, paraphrased).

God then proceeds to pronounce a penalty on the ministry in Malachi 2:3. When God says that His "covenant might be with Levi" in Malachi 2:4, 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 people in His Church; and **having the fear of God was one prerequisite for induction into the ministry** (Malachi 2:5). The ministry should teach God's truth and help people to correctly identify sin (Malachi 2:6).

Earlier we looked at the Hebrew word for "messenger". It is used in only two verses in this book. The first place is Malachi 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, a segment of the ministry has reneged on this responsibility of being God's "messenger".

In Malachi 2:8 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 after Mr. Armstrong's death called "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.

Malachi 2:9 explains further that **the ministry has been "partial" in applying God's laws**. The ministry has "let go" of God's ways and they have not "kept" them. Therefore **God says He will make the ministers "contemptible and base before all the people"**.

This has happened ... thousands of people in God's Church have already lost respect for their ministers, causing over 10,000 people to leave God's Church every year back during the last half of the 1990's! Since then the ministry has lost a lot of credibility in the eyes of a considerable number of people, which is precisely what God says in this verse.

In Malachi 2:10 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 any kind of trinity-concept! The very idea of a trinity profanes God's role and position of "**Father**". The word "treacherous", used in this verse, identifies the way in which the new teachings were introduced and the old ones were done away.

Malachi 2:11 shows the conditions extant in Israel at the time when "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; it is in fact nothing other than "the daughter of a strange god".

And within God's Church:

By a section of God's Church **accepting the trinity-teaching**, that part of the Church of God has also married the daughter of a strange god! And that "marriage" ended their identity with the Church of God.

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

Malachi 2:12 shows that God will "cut off" 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.

Malachi 2:13 talks about the effect which the acceptance of these wrong teachings by some in the ministry has: **it has covered God's altar with "tears, weeping and crying"**. This is speaking about our age! The actions of some ministers have produced controversy and grief, with many people leaving God's Church. So God says to those particular ministers: I will not accept any offerings from your hand!

So God repeats in Malachi 2:13 the statement He made in Malachi 1:10, that He will not accept an offering from those particular ministers. God really wants us to get this point!

Malachi 2:13 concludes God's lengthy answer to Question #3, **how** the ministry has "polluted" God.

SQ&A #4

God's repeated statement, that He will not accept any offerings from the ministry addressed in this book, becomes the basis for the next question from the ministry.

Yet you say, Wherefore? Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously: yet *is* she your companion, and the wife of your covenant. (Malachi 2:14)

God's answer to this question covers verses 14-16. God's answer to the question why God doesn't accept their offerings is: **because you have been unfaithful**!

All those ministers who were ordained during Mr. Armstrong's time, and who have accepted one or more heretical teachings that were introduced after Mr. Armstrong's death, have been unfaithful. They have been unfaithful to the Church of their youth. And many of the teachings which God put into His Church through Mr. Armstrong have been dealt with very treacherously by those who took over the leadership after Mr. Armstrong's death. **There was no sincerity of any kind** on the part of those who introduced heretical teachings after Mr. Armstrong's death. It was all hypocrisy and extremely devious.

In this context God's instruction to the ministry is: take heed to your spirit (Malachi 2:15). In other words, don't be persuaded by heresies, the "polluted bread". Be sure to stick with and teach the truth of God. God repeats the warning "take heed to your spirit" in verse 16. This warning includes the admonition: beware of being drawn into immorality.

SQ&A #5

Now God makes the following statement.

You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, **Wherein have we wearied *Him*?** When you say, **Every one that does evil *is* good** in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them; or, **Where *is* the God of judgment?** (Malachi 2:17)

God is here still speaking to the religious leaders, the ministry. Now here is what God is saying. When God says "you weary Me **with your words**", God is saying:

I am fed up with all the garbage you are preaching to My people!

The problem is not just that someone is saying "every one that does evil is good". The problem really is that someone is saying "every one that does evil is good" **to the people God has called into His Church**! This concept is in a disguised way being preached in some parts of God's Church. That is God's charge in this verse.

And that is what wearies God, ministers finding ways to justify evil. People who commit evil are accepted without having to repent. That creates huge problems.

Now obviously, no minister gets up and says: I am here to tell you that it is okay for you to do evil. Obviously that is not what happens. No, what happens is that **ministers find ways to bestow approval on the ways of this world**. They find ways to show "understanding" for evil. The Pharisees did the same thing 2000 years ago, find ways to express approval for things that are actually wrong before God.

You can figure out for yourself examples of the ministry bestowing approval on certain ways of this world, where the Apostle Paul tells us "come out from among them and be you separate" (see 2 Corinthians 6:17). It is God who says that some ministers preach a version of "every one that does evil is good".

Another subject that makes God fed up is when ministers question God's commitment to send Jesus Christ back to this earth, to establish the kingdom of God. The question "where is the God of judgment?" is a barely veiled criticism of God. It implies that God is somehow not keeping His promises.

This question of "when will Jesus Christ return?" is what God then addresses in the next six verses, in Malachi 3:1-6. God's answer starts with:

Behold, **I will send my messenger**, and he shall prepare the way before me: and **the Lord**, whom you seek, **shall suddenly come to his temple**, even the messenger of the covenant, whom you delight in: behold, he shall come, says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:1)

As an aside here: The God who is speaking to Malachi, and who says "I will send My Messenger" has to be Jesus Christ! **There is no other option!** The reason is that this messenger "shall prepare the way **before Me**"! This statement makes absolutely clear that the Speaker here is the One who became **Jesus Christ**. There is no other possibility for the expression "**before Me**". And then "before Me" becomes "**the Lord whom you seek**". And the One speaking here is identified in Malachi 1:1 as "**the LORD** (YHVH)". When you think through Malachi 3:1 very, very carefully, then this verse all by itself presents irrefutable proof that Jesus Christ is "the LORD" of the Old Testament. This verse all by itself utterly demolishes the heretical teaching that Jesus Christ was supposedly created by God the Father.

Anyway, to get back to our discussion.

In Malachi 2:7 God had told the ministry that the ministry should be God's messenger to God's people, to prepare God's people for Christ's return. But since they despise God's name (Malachi 1:6), therefore God is going to use someone else to be His messenger (Malachi 3:1).

The statement "**behold, I will send My messenger**" refers to the man whom God will send before Christ's second coming. This statement "behold, I will send My messenger" is further refined at the end of this book as "**behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet**". So that end-time "messenger" will come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17).

When that end-time messenger does his job, then Jesus Christ will "suddenly" return. Saying that Jesus Christ will return "to His temple" is code language.

Jesus Christ will not return to any physical temple!

At His second coming Jesus Christ will not come back to anything that carnal human beings have produced or built! There is no way that Jesus Christ will return to some physical "temple" that a bunch of carnal people have built! And neither will Jesus Christ return to some building that converted members of His Church might theoretically put together.

Jesus Christ is not returning to any physical building, because **every single building on earth**, without a single exception, **is going to be flattened** by the events that accompany the return of Jesus Christ. There will not be any temple or palace or house or cabin or hut standing anywhere on earth when Christ finally sets foot on this earth.

Furthermore, if any group of human beings today decided to build some temple, be it plain or be it of the highest quality, it would most certainly **not** be "**His temple**". Anything produced by carnal human beings has no value at all for God!

No, **"the temple" Christ returns to is His Church**! The temple He returns to are the 144,000 in the first resurrection. That's what the Apostle Paul explained:

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; In whom all the building fitly framed together **grows unto an holy temple in the Lord**: In whom you also are built together **for an habitation of God** through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:20-22)

As Jesus Christ also said: "**I** (**will dwell**) **in them**, and You in Me ..." (John 17:23).

So here is what we have in Malachi 3:1.

1) In response to the critical question "where is the God of judgment?", Christ's reply is: I will send My messenger before I return.

2) That messenger will come in the spirit and power of Elijah, and he will prepare the way for Christ's return, announcing Christ's return in advance.

3) Then Christ will suddenly return to gather up all those in the first resurrection. They are "His temple" and Christ will dwell in them and with them.

4) Jesus Christ Himself, in turn, is "the messenger of the covenant"; He is God the Father's messenger to humanity for the whole millennium, and then also for the 100-year period. He is the Father's

messenger because no human being will see God the Father! They only get to see "the Father's messenger".

Malachi 3:1 speaks about two different messengers. A mortal man will be "Christ's messenger" to prepare the way for Christ's second coming. Once He has returned, then Jesus Christ Himself becomes the Father's messenger of the covenant that God the Father is making with humanity, to offer human beings immortal life in the Family of God.

Malachi 3:2-3 are clear references to Jesus Christ's second coming. The statement "He shall purify the sons of Levi" means that Christ will purify the physical Levites who survive into the millennium. They will be "purged" so they can then be fit for the services Christ has in mind for them during the millennium.

Malachi 3:4 pictures a scene during the millennium. And verse 5 shows that society will then be based on the ways and the laws of God. All evils will be removed. Verse 6 is then presented as a form of encouragement. "I change not" means that God's character never changes. God is dependable, and He will fulfill His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In Malachi 3:7 the subject switches back to discussing the time before Christ's second coming. God makes a new statement, and the priests then ask the next question.

SQ&A #6

Here is God's statement and the question from the priests.

Even from the days of your fathers you are gone away from My ordinances, and have not kept *them*. **Return unto me, and I will return unto you**, says the LORD of hosts. But you said, **Wherein shall we return?** (Malachi 3:7)

God states that Israel, including the priests, have always departed from God's laws and God's instructions. Then God says: repent and turn back towards Me, and then I will turn back towards you. God's previous statements make clear that God means: obey my laws and commandments. But the people don't get it. They ask: **what is it that we are supposed to repent of?** They do not see that they have to repent of breaking God's laws, of having contempt for God's name, and of despising God's table. They don't see the true self. In plain language: they don't really understand true repentance.

God's answer to their question here becomes the focus for their next question.

SQ&A #7

Will a man rob God? Yet **you have robbed Me**. But you say, **Wherein have we robbed You?** In tithes and offerings. (Malachi 3:8)

To their earlier question "what are we supposed to repent of?", God replies: **to give you just one example**: you are stealing from Me. Then people ask: how have we robbed You?

Obviously there are also other issues that don't involve robbing God where the people, including the religious leaders, also need to repent. Not giving God their tithes and offerings is just one example, an example of robbing God.

Let’s note the contrast:

Earlier we saw that God will not accept any offerings at the hands of certain religious leaders. But that doesn’t mean that God will not accept any offerings from anyone. Here God makes clear that He does accept tithes and offerings, just not from people who teach heresies and who despise His name.

The next verse pronounces a curse on the whole nation for not tithing. The way God states this implies that some nations are already cursed. This "curse" here is addressed to Israel, and not to the other nations out in the world. Israel should know better, but the nations in the world are clueless. So can we see any group or any nation that is cursed to whom Malachi 3:9 might apply?

Notice God’s next statement.

Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in My house, and prove Me now herewith, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall* not *be room* enough *to receive it*. (Malachi 3:10)

As mentioned at the start, this reference to "that there may be food in My house" tells us that the temple (i.e. God’s house) had already been built when this book was being written. This represents a later date than any other passage in the Old Testament.

It was the responsibility of the priests and the Levites to teach God’s tithing law to the people of Israel. Within God’s Church it is the ministry’s responsibility to teach this law. This is one of the many laws Worldwide rejected a few years after Mr. Armstrong’s death. Since then they have rejected pretty well everything else.

In the next verse God presents more blessings for obedience to the tithing laws (i.e. the tithing laws include second and third tithe). And verse 12 then talks about conditions in the millennium.

Then God presents the last statement that produces a question from the people in general and from the priests specifically.

SQ&A #8

Your words have been stout against Me, says the LORD. Yet you say, What have we spoken against You? (Malachi 3:13)

This statement by God is not just addressed to people in general, though they are certainly included. This statement is really aimed at those who teach God’s laws to the people, those who have the power to influence the congregation overall. This is addressed to the priests at that time, and to the ministry in our age.

The Hebrew verb "chazaq" is used 290 times in the Old Testament, and here in Malachi 3:13 is the only time it is ever translated as "stout", an old English word that means "strong, obstinate, bold, forceful", etc. The Hebrew word "chazaq", in turn, basically means: to strengthen, harden, be resolute, etc.

So God says that the religious leaders have spoken words that are "strong, hard and resolute" **against God**! That’s not the average Israelite or Church of God member. No, that is **the religious teachers**, the ones who control the doctrines being taught! They are the ones who have spoken against God, and in our age ever since Mr. Armstrong died that refers to some ministers. So this statement is once again

directed at a certain segment of the ministry of God's Church in our age. And you don't have to be a rocket scientist to recognize that.

Now once again these ministers don't see that their teachings are forcefully speaking against God. So they ask: **just how have we spoken so forcefully against You?**

God's reply is:

You have said, **It *is* vain to serve God**: and **what profit *is it* that we have kept his ordinance**, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? (Malachi 3:14)

The word translated as "vain" means: empty, vanity, nothingness, worthless conduct, etc. So here is the point for us:

It is extremely offensive to God for us or anyone else to challenge the value of keeping God's laws.

The statement "it is vain to serve God" exposes a totally wrong attitude for living by all of God's laws. With this attitude the motivation for obeying God is **utterly selfish**. That's not what God is looking for! We live by God's laws because they encapsulate the best possible way for anybody and everybody to live. God's laws are a huge blessing. Doing what is right for the wrong reasons never gets any credit from God.

The people addressed in Malachi 3:13 are highly critical of God, their Creator. That's never a good thing.

Verse 15 describes our world today, a society filled with pride, arrogance and wickedness. In that context of a wicked society God in verses 16-17 then focuses on the members of God's true Church, those who fear God. This is a focus on those who are faithful to God.

The word translated as "return" in Malachi 3:18 ("**then shall you return** ...") is also used in Malachi 4:6, where it is used for "Elijah" in the expression "**and he shall turn** ...". The Hebrew verb used here is "shuwb", and it is occasionally translated as "repent" (e.g. Ezekiel 14:6; Ezekiel 18:30; etc.). This Hebrew verb literally means "to turn, to turn back, to return". So when the subject is "turning away from evil", then it is appropriate to translate it as "**repent**".

So in Malachi 3:18 God tells the people who said "it is vain to serve God" in verse 14:

"**Then you shall repent** (when Christ is ruling), and once you've done that, then you will be able to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who don't." (i.e. unrepentant people can't make these distinctions)

And they will then understand that their assertion against God had been "stout".

By the end of chapter 3 all 8 questions have been answered by God. There are no further questions. In the last 6 verses of this book (Malachi 4:1-6) God then takes this process to its ultimate conclusion. In Malachi 4:1-3 God shows that the process described in this book, God's parting message for Old Testament times, ends up in the lake of fire for the wicked, and in salvation for the righteous.

Malachi 4:4 then focuses on God's main concern in this book. That main concern is: **remember My law** with the statutes and judgments.

And then God concludes this last message for Old Testament times with the encouragement:

I will surely send you Elijah, My messenger, before the second coming of Jesus Christ, and he will preach a message of repentance, even as the Prophet Elijah himself and also John the Baptist had done before this final messenger.

CONCLUSION

The Book of Malachi presents a clear progression, which goes as follows:

1) It starts out with people **not recognizing God's love**.

2) This leads to **a lack of respect** for God.

3) This in turn leads to **despising God**.

4) This leads to accepting **polluted teachings**.

5) This then leads to **utter contempt for God**.

6) This then leads to **immorality** and to **robbing God**.

7) This then leads to **outright rebellion** against God.

8) And the only place where this can end is **the lake of fire**.

We need to recognize this progression. There are people who are at various stages in this process, which is very sad. But we should recognize that this is the road that leads to the lake of fire. And we also need to recognize the ministry's involvement in this process.

Final Thought: I realize that some people will feel that in this article I am being too hard on the ministry. My reply to that statement is it is the Book of Malachi itself that is extremely strong in its criticism of the ministry. I am simply pointing out its application in our time.

We easily miss the powerful statements by God when we only think of this book as God's statements against some Levitical priests in Old Testament times. When we read this book as being addressed to the ministry of God's Church today, as speaking about us today, then God's statements take on a whole different meaning, a very uncomfortable one at that. I believe that God wants us to be aware of this "uncomfortable application" to our time.

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