

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
Red Bud, Illinois
Adult Bible Class
Malachi: God's Messenger for Us

I. Introduction

A. *Author*

This book is "The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi." Unlike with most prophetic books, there is no information given about the author such as the name of his father or his hometown. The name Malachi means "my messenger" in Hebrew. Is this a coincidental and appropriate personal name (like a pastry chef with the last name of Baker or a pastor with the last name Christ)? Is this a title for an otherwise unknown person? An ancient Jewish tradition connects this book with Ezra as its author.

B. *Date*

There is no date given for this book. The content indicates that the time of writing is during the Persian Empire. The exiles have returned from Babylon (535 BC). The temple in Jerusalem has been rebuilt (516 BC). Worship has been restored. Enough time has passed that abuses have crept into the worship and daily life of the people.

In 455 BC Ezra the teacher arrives in Jerusalem to correct abuses and institute reforms. In 445 BC Nehemiah leaves his job as a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes to oversee the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem. In 432 BC he returned to Jerusalem as the governor to institute his own religious reforms among the people.

The problems addressed in Malachi are the same as those addressed by Ezra and Nehemiah. Malachi's ministry can be dated either to the time before Ezra's reforms (around 460 BC) or right before Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem (around 433 BC). Either way, Malachi is most likely the last prophet of God in the Old Testament (depending on the date of Joel).

C. *Style*

Malachi uses the Disputation Method of debate and dialogue. Questions are asked by both God and the people. There are 22 rhetorical questions in 55 verses of text. "But you ask..." is a way of introducing the people's complaints against God. God has His own complaints against the people of Israel. This book is a collection of loosely connected oracles, yet there is repetition of phrases and thoughts. God is called "Lord Almighty" 24 times. The word "curse(d)" is used six times.

D. *Message*

The people of Malachi's day are calling into question the Lord's goodness and justice. The complaints of the people against God are that living a life of faith is just too difficult to do. They look around and see that evil people are blessed and prospering while they are struggling to make it in life.

God has His own complaints against the people. The priests are not doing their job in making sacrifices to God. The people are divorcing and the men are marrying pagan women. They all are holding back on their offerings to God. All of these are sins dealt with by Ezra and Nehemiah.

The prophet calls the people to repentance, to turn from their sin to their God who is longing to bless them. Malachi's message focuses on the faithfulness of God in contrast to the unfaithfulness of His people. God's law in Malachi is the exposure of the sins of His people. God's gospel in Malachi is a reminder of His covenant love giving them life and peace.

In the Hebrew Bible Malachi is the last book of the second section, the Prophets. In our English bibles Malachi ends the Old Testament. This helps us see the connection between the prophecies in Malachi

3:1 and 4:5 of the coming of “my messenger...Elijah the prophet” being fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist whose birth begins the New Testament some 400 years later.

II. Chapter One

A. *Verses 1-5*

The word “oracle” means a burden imposed by a master which one must accept and do his duty. While it weighs heavy on the heart of the messenger it also is to weigh heavy on the consciences of those who hear its message.

Jeremiah 20:9 But if I say “I will not mention Him or speak any more in His name,” His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.

1 Corinthians 9:16 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

Malachi’s message begins with an emphasis on God’s love. There is a contrast between Israel (descendants of Jacob) and Edom (descendants of his older twin brother Esau) in a way that has bothered interpreters and been misunderstood by those who teach a predestination to condemnation (“double predestination”).

The Edomites who lived in the hill country south of the Dead Sea were long enemies of the Israelites. They had sided with the Babylonians in the destruction of Jerusalem and the plundering of Judah in 587 BC. They themselves were attacked by the Babylonians under Nabonidus in 553 BC. They later were destroyed by the Nabatean Arabs. Part of Malachi’s message is that the Edomites would not be able to rebuild, now or in the future. This nation evolved into Idumea from which the Herods of the New Testament descended.

For God to say that He “hated” Esau is an example of Hebrew hyperbole or exaggeration to make a point. It is not used in an absolute sense but with the meaning “to love less.” It is the way Jacob looked upon his wife Leah while he loved Rachel more (Genesis 29:31 and 33). It is how Christian believers are to look upon their parents and others in the sense of loving Christ more.

Luke 14:26 (Jesus said) “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.”

Matthew 10:37 (Jesus said) “Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

Romans 9:9-13⁹ For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.”¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of Him who calls—¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.”¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

God’s people see His love in His protection of them. The enemies of God’s people see only His retribution and His anger as He is protecting His people from their enemies. The Lord Almighty stresses His role as the Savior, Protector and Judge of His people. He is an international God, not just the Lord of one nation or area.

B. *Verses 6-9*

As a heavenly Father and a spiritual master the Lord Almighty deserves honor and respect (Hebrew “fear, dread, terror”). His people are not showing God the honor that He deserves.

Who is leading the way in disrespecting God in verse 6? _____

Contempt for God’s name is a sin against which commandment? _____

Small Catechism, Question 25 What is God’s name? “God, as He has revealed Himself to us, His essence and His attributes.”

In verse 7 how are these priests showing contempt for God's name? _____

The Lord's Table, while in modern usage is another name for the Sacrament of the Altar, is used only by Malachi in the Old Testament to refer to the temple's altar.

Small Catechism, Question 285 What are some other names for the Sacrament of the Altar? "This sacrament is also called the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, Holy Communion, the Breaking of Bread, and the Eucharist."

In verse 8 what are the examples God gives of the defiled food that the priests were putting on His altar? _____

Why are these offerings not acceptable to God? _____

We are to offer our best to God because He both demands and deserves it. The Lord who has given His best to us in creation, redemption and sanctification should receive back from us the best of all with which He has blessed us.

Leviticus 22:20-22 Do not bring anything with a defect, because it will not be accepted on your behalf. ²¹

When anyone brings from the herd or flock a fellowship offering to the LORD to fulfill a special vow or as a freewill offering, it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable. ²² Do not offer to the LORD the blind, the injured or the maimed, or anything with warts or festering or running sores. Do not place any of these on the altar as a food offering presented to the LORD.

Deuteronomy 15:21 If an animal has a defect, is lame or blind, or has any serious flaw, you must not sacrifice it to the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 17:1 Do not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep that has any defect or flaw in it, for that would be detestable to Him.

God tells us to give to our earthly authority, the governor (taxes), what we offer to God and see if we can get away with it. How do our worship offerings and other charitable gifts compare to:

- 1) **What we pay in taxes each year?** (income, property, sales, business, fees, etc.)
- 2) **What we spend on eating out each month?**
- 3) **What we spend on soda, tobacco, alcohol, lottery tickets or junk food each week?**

(How we use the money God gives us is a faith issue. It is our response to the First Commandment.)

Besides money, how does this verse determine what we offer to God in terms of our time, our talents, and what we wear to worship?

In the Ancient Near East it was understood that gifts to God were not only to thank Him for His past blessings, but also to implore Him to be generous again in the future. A person's poor offerings to God when he could otherwise do better are asking for God to be less generous in His future blessings.

C. Verses 10-14

God lets these people know that He would prefer no worship from them rather than the false, hypocritical worship they are offering to Him. As the case with Cain (Genesis 4:5), God is not pleased with their lame (pun intended) offerings.

Isaiah 1:13 Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to Me. New moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies.

Hosea 6:6 For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

How might verse 10 influence our ministry to "inactive" members? _____

God is the Lord of all the world, not just Israel. The "nations" in verse 11 are the Gentiles on whom the coming Light of the world will shine. Their incense and pure offerings are signs of true worship.

Isaiah 42:6 "I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles"

Philippians 2:10-11 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The "you" at the beginning of verse 12 is emphatic. God is calling out the people led by the priests. Even though what the people were bringing as an offering to God was worthless, they still considered their sacrifices to be a burden. They "sniff" or "snort" at it with contempt, looking down at what they were giving to God. God repeats His accusation of verse 8 concerning the lack of quality of their sacrifices. The word "injured" in the NIV is translated as "taken by violence" in the ESV. Thus, they were stealing what they then offered to God.

How many hours does worship and Bible class take compared to the total number of hours in a week?

In verse 14 what does God call the person who has a good offering to give but brings less to God?

_____ **Would anyone like to be called this?** _____

Why should God get the best from us? _____ (This was a title claimed by Persian kings.)

Zechariah 14:9 The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and His name the only name.

God's name will be feared even more so than that of the governor. The Gentiles will be adopted by God's grace. Israel will be rejected for their contempt of this grace of God.

Disrespectful giving takes the Lord's name in vain and thereby breaks the Second Commandment. A test of our stewardship of time, talents and treasures is this: would you want to get from someone else what you are offering to the Lord? (Think of those "white elephant" gifts at Christmas parties; who really likes fruitcake?)

The priests were not satisfied with the people's offerings because that is how they made their living. Yet they bore some responsibility because they allowed the people to get away with offering poor sacrifices when they could have done more.

"In Malachi's time the priests regarded this divinely instituted office, one of the greatest honors the Lord could bestow on sinful men, as a mean, paltry, poorly paying job... Dissatisfied, they fault the Lord for conditions they themselves had brought about. The Lord tells these self-righteous, self-opinionated people that they were addressing complaints to the wrong party. Squarely He puts the blame where it properly belongs, on the shoulders of the faithless priests." (Theodore Laetsch, Minor Prophets, CPH, 1956, page 519)

How should a pastor feel when he sees what people spend money on but then have little to nothing for worship offerings? _____

What are people really telling their pastor when they say "I don't give to the General Fund"?

III. Chapter Two

A. Verses 1-9

Verses 1-2: Those whom God has called to serve as mediators between Him and His people are not doing their job.

According to verse 2, why would the Lord's curse come upon the priests? _____

What would be the "blessings" of the priests that God would curse? (two possibilities)

_____ (Numbers 6:22-27)

Verse 3: Don't blame God for what is going to happen to their descendants. It is the fault of the priests themselves. The King James Version translates "seed" as referring to crops in the fields, not their offspring. The "offal" (dung, manure, intestinal contents) were supposed to be removed from the sanctuary and burnt (Exodus 29:14). Instead, as part of God's curse upon their unfaithfulness, the feces will be upon their faces.

Verses 4-6: "Covenant" God's solemn promise with His people, "I am yours and you are mine." Levi was one of the twelve sons of Jacob and the tribe which God had chosen to be the priests throughout the Promised Land.

How does God describe this covenant in verse 5? _____ (only time in OT)

How was he (?) to respond to God's covenant? _____ ("fear" as in 1:6)

It is uncertain as to who the "him," "he" and "his" of verses 5-6 is. Suggestions are that it is Aaron's grandson Phinehas (Numbers 25:11-13), or the ideal Levite, or Levi himself.

To whom in the New Testament would the description of verse 6 fit? _____

"Instruction" translates the Hebrew torah which means the full revelation of God. It includes both God's law and God's gospel. "Peace and uprightness" indicates covenant loyalty. Such a person does not just talk the talk but also walks the walk, so much so that others pay attention and turn away from their sinful life.

Verses 7-9: The true priest proclaims the word of God that the true people of God want to hear. To "preserve knowledge" means to guard and protect the truth from error. Verse 8 begins with the ominous word "but" because it shows a contrast with the previous verse. The priests of Malachi's day have done the opposite of guarding the truth. They are teaching a false "torah." They are not measuring up to the ideal priest. "Laxity in applying the Law of God and partiality in its administration will naturally lead to contempt of the Law, to ever bolder transgressions and ever wider spread of illegal practices." (Theodore Laetsch, Minor Prophets, CPH, page 523)

People will despise the false preachers as they had despised the Lord. Currying the favor of some brings on them the contempt of all. The priests were to be like God in terms of impartiality in dealing with the people.

Deuteronomy 10:17 For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.

Acts 10:34-35 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right."

B. Verses 10-16

Verse 10: The prophet now focuses on the nation as a family of faith. The unity the people enjoy is founded upon their joint relationship to God. When the people violate this love relationship with God, the love relationship they have with each other also will be violated. Breaking faith (first time used) with one another is a slap in the face of their ancestors who passed faith down to them. (e.g. agony of parents over children who leave/ignore Christian faith)

In what two ways are they joined to God? _____

Deuteronomy 32:6 Is this the way you repay the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?

Isaiah 63:16 But You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your name.

Verse 11: Judah is the southern kingdom of the twelve tribes through which God's promise of the Messiah ran in the line of David.

God has a complaint against His people. What are the three descriptions of that complaint?

How have the people done this? _____ (heathen women)

(In many places throughout the Old Testament God warns Israel against marrying outside of His covenant people: Exodus 34:11-16; Deuteronomy 7:1-4; Joshua 23:12-13; 1 Kings 11:1-11; Ezra 9:1ff; Nehemiah 13:13-21)

Do these examples and warnings speak to single Christians looking to marry today?

What problem can happen from marrying outside the faith? _____

Verse 12: There is a text note here in the NIV which shows there are two different interpretations of this verse. It is either a wish that the man who marries outside the covenant people would not have children to carry on his sin into the next generation or it is applied to the one who defends this ungodly practice. The “tents of Jacob” is a figurative expression for the community. Jacob, also known as Israel, was the grandson of Abraham. The one who has disobeyed in this way cannot make up for that no matter what offering he brings.

Verse 13: This is another complaint of God against the people. They are acting like crybabies because they see that God is not accepting their prayers and offerings.

“It was not the sorrow of penitent sinners bewailing their sins. These outbursts of woe and anguish were the complaints of untractable children, who in stubborn self-satisfaction demanded the Father’s blessings and favors while refusing to give Him the love and obedience they owed to Him. Once more their stubborn self-righteousness manifests itself.”
(Laetsch, page 527)

Verse 14: This is the people’s complaint against God. Like whining children they ask “Why?” They want to know why God is not accepting their offerings. God is the witness of their marriages which they are now ending in order to marry women from neighboring pagan nations. The wife of one’s youth should remain the wife of one’s old age.

How does God describe their actions toward “the wife of your youth”? _____

This is the third time in this section that God uses this phrase “broken faith.” How can the people remain faithful to the God they don’t see if they cannot remain faithful to the wife He has given them whom they can see? The marriage relationship (“covenant” not “contract”) and faithfulness is a reflection of God’s relationship and faithfulness to us.

Verse 15: The Hebrew text is corrupt and difficult to translate so there will be various English translations. Luther supported the view that is in the NIV note. This would be a reference to Abraham who took Sarah’s servant girl Hagar in order to father a child.

“The Lord made them one” Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:6. Marriage is a relationship in both flesh and spirit (ESV- “with a portion of the Spirit in their union”).

In this verse what is the purpose of marital oneness? _____ (Ephesians 6:4)

How does the divorce of parents affect the (faith) life of their children? _____

Verse 16: This is a complaint of God against the people.

What two things does God hate here? _____

(The image God uses to describe violence is that of putting on clothes. We might say of a violent person that “he would shoot you just as soon as look at you.”)

What is the connection between “divorce” and “violence”? _____

Divorce is a sin against God's Sixth Commandment in that it is a rejection of God's gift recognized in marriage. Divorce also is the result of the sins of spouses against each other by not honoring that gift of God. In the Hebrew divorce = "to send away." In the final judgment God will send away those who are unfaithful to Him.

The translation in the English Standard Version has the man doing the hating and divorcing and in doing so covering his garment in violence (literally "spattered in blood")

To "break faith" is used four times in this section. It translates the Hebrew verb *bagad* which is used about 50 times in the Old Testament. It describes the one who deals treacherously. He is one who does not honor an agreement. The verb is used to denote unfaithfulness in several different relationships. It is used in connection with unfaithfulness in marriage (Malachi 2:14). It is used to describe Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord. Involved in this unfaithfulness to the Lord's covenant may be unfaithfulness to one's brother (Malachi 2:10ff.) "Thus the word is also used of breaching man-made treaties and the social responsibilities expected in normal human relationships" (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, page 90).

IV. Chapter Three

Verse 17: Since this verse introduces the fourth main section of the book the chapter division here is unfortunate. This could really be the first verse of chapter three.

What makes God "tired"? _____

This is a complaint of God against the people for their complaints against Him. They were charging Him with favoring people who did evil, because it seemed like such people were prospering in their ungodliness. "The Hebrew perfect (tense) describes this action in its completion. They have succeeded in making Yahweh tired of His people. He is ready to withdraw His blessings" (Theodore Laetsch, Minor Prophets, CPH, page 530).

Their question about God's justice is not new, nor is it unique. It is as old as Job's sufferings and is as timely as today's newspaper. Why do the godly suffer while the ungodly flourish in this world? Does God not see this? Does God not care about this? Does God have no power over this?

Psalms 73:3, 12 For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked...This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth.

Habakkuk 1:4, 13 So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted...You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do You idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

When God sends trials and sorrows people who do not recognize their natural depravity and unworthiness and do not see the grace of God that is otherwise active and overflowing in their lives begin to charge God with unfairness and injustice. As the children of God we tend to respond to suffering with the common question of children, "Why?"

Why does He permit the wicked transgressors of His Law to live and enjoy life, while we, His obedient servants, must suffer hardships, poverty, shame? That is not the language of faith and trust in God; that is the language of self-righteousness, of doubt, of unbelief, of selfish pride.... Yet the Lord has not pleasure in the death of the wicked. Once more He addresses and warns His dissatisfied, rebellious people in an urgent plea (Laetsch, page 531).

Verse 1: God answers their complaint with the promise of His powerful presence among them. "My messenger": This is what the name Malachi means but this does not refer to him.

Who fulfills the promise of the one who prepares the way before the Lord? _____

We know that this prophecy is fulfilled in John the Baptizer because Jesus quotes this verse when speaking about John (Matthew 11:7-10; Luke 7:24-27). Isaiah also prophesied about John's preparatory ministry, "A

voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God’” (Isaiah 40:3). John prepared that way for the Christ by proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

But then an even more distinguished messenger comes. Now the Lord Almighty (*Yahweh Sabaoth*) who is speaking says that the Lord (*Adon*) will come to His temple. The First Person of the Triune God is telling us what will happen when the Second Person of the Triune God appears.

How is the Lord who suddenly comes to His temple described?

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

How can we say that the coming of Jesus happened “suddenly”? _____

The temple, rebuilt by the exiles after they had returned from Babylon in 516 BC (about 50 years before Malachi’s time), is the place of God’s promised presence for the forgiveness of His people’s sins. It previews the One who is God dwelling among His people. It was this temple to which Mary and Joseph took Jesus for His dedication (Luke 2:22-38) and His first Passover celebration (Luke 2:41-50).

God’s covenant is fulfilled in the perfect life and innocent death of His Son, Jesus who gives us His body and blood as the sign of the new covenant. God’s ways are not our ways and His timetable is not on our schedule. The promises of this verse are not fulfilled in John and Jesus until about 450 years after Malachi’s prophetic ministry.

Verses 2-4: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). This truth of God’s Word will become obvious when the holy God of justice appears. The purpose of His powerful presence is the purification of His people.

What two earthly images are used to describe the Lord’s coming and why?

- 1) _____
For precious metals to be free of impurities they must go through a refining fire. This process of eliminating impurities is difficult but necessary for value to increase. Such is the case in our lives as well. God does the hard work of removing our sins from us so that we can live as His purified people.
- 2) _____
The launderer’s soap was made of lye. It was used to clean wool and make it white. The alkali used for this purpose was strong and biting. We have been washed white in the blood of the Lamb.

What group of people is first on the list for the Lord’s purification? _____

What will be the result of this purification in the lives of God’s people? _____

When a moral transformation of the priests has taken place offerings which are acceptable to the Lord will once more be offered in the temple. The offerings of God’s New Testament priests (all of us, 1 Peter 2:9) will fulfill God’s purposes in establishing the Old Testament sacrifices.

Hebrews 13:15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess His name.

Verse 5: The Messenger of the covenant comes to prepare people in advance of God’s Final Judgment. The first grouping is of three types of people who come under that judgment because they cover up the truth with a lie.

In what area of life do sorcerers (mediums, spiritists) lie? _____

In what area of life do adulterers lie? _____

In what area of life do perjurers lie? _____

The second grouping of four types of people are those who are defenseless and need God and His people to stand up for them and protect them from sinful oppression. Throughout the Old Testament the Israelites were to care for the widows, orphans and foreigners. In the New Testament the first “social ministry” of the Christian church was to provide for widows (Acts 6).

Ultimately, according to this verse, why do these types of people lie and oppress? _____

It is this lack of fear of God that makes them bold to spread their lies and evil deeds.

Verse 6: This begins the fifth section of Malachi’s prophecy. God will focus on the giving, or lack thereof, of the people. This is not because God needs their money. Instead, their offerings to Him are a response to His love for them and a reflection of their love for Him.

That God does not change (*immutable*) is good news. He remains true and committed to His covenant with His people even when they have forsaken it. If God were to change and go back on His promises, His people would be rightly destroyed in His wrath and justice.

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Verse 7: The people of Malachi’s day have come by their ungodliness and faithlessness honestly. They have inherited this spiritual disease from their ancestors. The history of their nation is the record of recurring rebellion against God. The solution for this is for them to return to the Lord Almighty. This is the term (Hebrew “turn”) that the prophets regularly used to express the idea of repentance. But the people have become so spiritually blind that they have to ask, “How?” With no sense of their sin they must ask what is to be the sign of their repentance?

Verses 8-9: Their repentance will be shown in their offerings. God answers their question of Him with His own question of them. It is a rhetorical question that should be answered “no.” The problem is that by their actions they are answering “yes.” The question acts as an accusation. They have been “robbing” God.

What happens to a person who is convicted of stealing from another? _____

What happens to a person who steals from the government by not paying taxes owed? _____

The nation of God’s people at Malachi’s time was “robbing” God by not returning to Him in offerings what He had commanded from them. Such an offering is described as a “tithe” or ten percent of what God had given to them. It went to support the ministry of the Levites. It was to be given even if the priests were not fulfilling their duties as they should. At the beginning of chapter two God had placed a curse upon the priests for dishonoring His name. Now He extends that curse (fifth of six uses in this book) to the people for their lack of offerings.

A quote from the Lutheran Cyclopedia (CPH, 1975, page 299):

"Tithing, giving a tenth, was commanded by God in the Old Testament, Leviticus 27:30-32. There were several sorts of tithes: that paid to the Levites and priests (Numbers 18:21-31); that paid for the Lord's feast (Deuteronomy 14:22-26); that given every third year for the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). In times of religious depression the people neglected to pay the tithe, Malachi 3:7-9 (see also verse 10). In the New Testament tithing is not enjoined (Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42 refer to past necessity); it would be contrary to Christian liberty. That does not mean that Christians should not give tithes; but if they do, it should be voluntarily."

Verse 10: It is not all bad news. The merciful and gracious God is ready, willing and able to bless His faithful people when they obey His will. We may hold back on offerings feeling that there may not be enough left for us. We may recognize that God has blessed us in the past but fear that He will not or won't also provide for us in the future. We may feel that it is up to us to take care of ourselves so we had better hold on to everything we now have.

But just as we cannot out-sin the forgiveness Jesus won for us on the cross, we cannot out-give God's blessings to us. We will not be able to give so much to God that we won't have any for ourselves. As God has blessed us in the past, He can and will do so again in the future as we put our trust in Him to provide for us. While we dare not manipulate God for our benefit, there are stories after stories of people who made an offering out of faith, not knowing what the future held for them, but then were blessed in ways they never imagined.

In an agricultural society like the time of this text, the tithe was an offering of food so the offering is brought into the storehouse (attached to the temple and presided over by the Levites for their livelihood) and the blessing is the opening of heaven's "floodgates" which would nourish the next crop with rain but is not necessarily limited to that.

Nehemiah 12:44 At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites.

How would these images apply to the culture of our day and age? _____

God invites His people to test Him in this way. This is the only example of such a thing in the Bible. Usually God is testing His people and forbidding them to test Him (Jesus to the devil at His temptation in Matthew 4).

Verses 11-12: There is a close connection between physical and spiritual blessings.

What three things will result from God's blessings in response to His people's faithful offerings?

- 1) _____ (locusts were a common problem; Joel 1:4)
- 2) _____ (drop before it is fully matured)
- 3) _____

What word does God use to describe their blessed land? _____

Isaiah 61:8-9 "For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In My faithfulness I will reward My people and make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the LORD has blessed."

Isaiah 62:2-3 The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Malachi's people lived with the law of the tithe. God's New Testament people do not.

Certainly today the changeless God does not command that each of His people gives such and such an amount, but He does demand that each determines how much he is going to give and then gives! (Eric S. Hartzell, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, CPH, 1994, pages 144-145)

Verse 13: Whereas the beginning of chapter three (verses 1-7) appears in our worship readings on the second Sunday in Advent in year C (Luke), the rest of Malachi serves as the Old Testament readings at the end of the church year in year C. Verses 13-18 of chapter three are on Proper 29 (when the Sunday is between November 20-26) and 4:1-6 is read on Proper 28 (when the Sunday is between November 13-19). Thus we heard these readings in worship this past November.

Here is another complaint God has against His “clueless” people. They do not even realize that they have spoken poorly of Him. God must be mistaken! They can’t be guilty of speaking against Him. This is the last example in Malachi of the back and forth between God and the people through the intermediary of God’s prophet.

How does God describe the things the people have said against Him? _____

At those times in our lives when we may have said “harsh” things against or about God and then later regretted that, it is good to know that God has heard it all before and forgives us for it as He has forgiven those before us who did the same thing.

Verses 14-15: The complaint of the people against God has been, “What’s the use?” Why have they served the Lord? What benefit have they seen by worshiping Him? God obviously is not fair! This echoes what we heard from them in 2:17 (and also Psalm 73:1-12).

How do the people describe the results of serving God? _____

Jeremiah 12:1 You are always righteous, O Lord, when I bring a case before You. Yet I would speak with You about Your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?
John 16:33 (Jesus said) “I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

This also may reflect our feelings at times. What good have we gotten from going to church on Sunday morning instead of partying all Saturday night? What benefit have we seen from attending a Bible class instead of staying home and watching TV? Why have we been faithful to our spouse all these years instead of sleeping around with anyone that catches our eye? Have we wasted our money supporting the ministry of a congregation instead of spending those dollars on “cigarettes and whiskey and wild, wild women” (or men, as the case may be)? How much have we denied ourselves the “pleasures” of this world in order to serve and obey a God who doesn’t seem to give us anything in return? (So our human nature thinks.)

How do the people describe themselves in verse 14? _____

(as if serving God means living a life of sackcloth and ashes)

Not only does it seem that we are not getting anything in return for our service to God, it also appears that those who are thumbing their noses at God in their lives are making out like bandits. They disobey God’s will and ignore His commandments but are living the lifestyle of the rich and famous. They have the big houses, drive the most expensive cars, wear the designer clothes, and walk the red carpet at all the elite social events. How can they be getting away with this?

In what three ways are these “unbelievers” described in verse 15?

Yet even with all that, how do the people describe these arrogant evildoers who challenge God?

Verse 16: Even when it seems that all is lost spiritually, there are still those who are faithful to the Lord. In difficult days of doubt, what should “those who fear the Lord” do? They should come together with one another and talk about it. We find strength in the company of fellow believers. Unlike the priests and many of their fellow citizens this group of people honors God’s name.

Hebrews 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Persian kings at that time kept written records of notable deeds. Often throughout the Bible the list of believers is written on a scroll or in a book at times described as “the book of life.” Perhaps if written in our time, God would tell us that He has our names saved on His computer’s hard drive or as a group on e-mail or on His cell phone. It is comforting to know that God is not going to forget any of us individually among His many faithful people (like we might forget one of our children when we go somewhere).

Daniel 12:1b But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.

Revelation 21:27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Verse 17: The Lord Almighty renews the promise He made to their forefathers at Mt. Sinai at the beginning of the exodus and also before they entered the Promised Land.

Exodus 19:5 Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession.

Deuteronomy 7:6 For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession.

The Hebrew word translated “compassion” here is the same word used of Pharaoh’s daughter when she looked into the basket in the Nile River and saw a Hebrew baby boy in it (Exodus 2:6).

What human image does God use here to describe His relationship with His people? _____

Verse 18: Doubt and despair currently are blinding God’s people to the difference that exists between the righteous and the wicked. The time will come when they again will see this distinction. While in this world it may seem like the unbelievers are prospering while the faithful are suffering, there is a great reversal to come.

In the end-time judgment there will be a distinction between those whom God has declared righteous through faith in Christ and those who have rejected His grace through unbelief. The sheep (believers) will be on the right side of the Savior while the goats (unbelievers) will exit stage left into everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:31ff.). Therefore it does make sense to serve God even in a day when it seems that the majority of His creatures have forsaken Him. Our service to God in the name of Christ is not in vain. We will be spared on the Day of Judgment.

IV. Chapter Four: In the Hebrew original these verses are considered as a continuation of chapter three and are counted as verses 19-24.

Verse 1: **What “day” is coming?** _____ (see also 3:2)

The “day of the Lord” is a technical term in the prophets for the end time appearance of the Messiah. Again, as in 3:2-3 the image of judgment at that time is one of burning and fire.

What is “stubble”? _____

Who will become it? _____

Why would someone described as “arrogant” be matched with one called an “evildoer”?

That not a root or a branch will be left to them describes total destruction. There will be nothing left of those who have rejected God in this life.

Isaiah 1:31 The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire.

Isaiah 47:14 Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame.

Isaiah 66:15-16 See, the Lord is coming with fire, and His chariots are like a whirlwind; He will bring down His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with His sword the Lord will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the Lord.

Verse 2: **“But”:** **What does this word indicate in terms of the tone of the message?** _____

Whom does the Lord address now? _____

What does this word “revere” mean? _____

God and His glory often are compared in the Bible to the brightness of the sun. Whereas heat and burning in the previous verse were images of God’s judgment and destruction, now the appearance of the sun with its warmth is a good thing for it brings from God healing, life and energy.

What kind of “healing” does this sun of righteousness bring? _____

Jeremiah 30:17 “But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,” declares the Lord, “because you are called an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares.”

Romans 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

What image is used to describe the results of this healing? _____

The new spiritual life and energy that God’s saving presence brings us is likened to that of previously penned-up calves now released to run in the pasture. We might compare it with small children who have been confined to a church pew for an hour now getting to leave the building once the service is over.

The wings spoken of here are the rays of the sun as it rises spreading its light across the horizon bringing life and warmth to the earth. Wings are used elsewhere in the Bible as a symbol of security and shelter.

Luke 13:34 (Jesus said) “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”

Verse 3: **Who is going to be trampled at this time?** _____

This is an image of God’s judgment upon unbelievers likening it to how grapes are trampled in a winepress. Such an image was made famous in *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*: “He will trample down the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.”

Isaiah 63:2-3 Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with Me. I trampled them in My anger and trod them down in My wrath; their blood spattered My garments, and I stained all My clothing.” (of God’s wrath against unbelieving nations)

What is the result of this trampling of the wicked? _____

Verse 4: “Law” here is the Hebrew torah which really means God’s revelation, His word of law and gospel. This revelation is a means of His grace, His blueprints for our redeemed lives in His name.

“My servant Moses”: He is one of the very few people in the Old Testament who are given this title by God (Deuteronomy 34:5; Joshua 1:2).

“Decrees”: these are God’s moral laws that are binding upon humanity for all time.

“Laws”: these are the customs, rites and regulations that God gave to the Israelites through Moses to distinguish them from other nations outside His covenant. These are what Jesus has fulfilled for us.

Galatians 3:24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

Colossians 2:13b-14 God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross.

“Horeb” is another name for Mt. Sinai. **When did Moses bear witness to Jesus?** _____

Verse 5: See 3:1 where God promises His messenger to come to prepare the way for Him.

Who was Elijah? (his ministry is recorded in 1 Kings 17 to 2 Kings 2) _____

Who fulfilled this prophecy in the New Testament? _____

This verse makes a connection from the end of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New Testament. *Luke 1:17 (Gabriel to Zechariah) “And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”*

Matthew 11:11-14 (Jesus said) “Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.”

Matthew 17:11-13 Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. ¹² But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” ¹³ Then the disciples understood that He was talking to them about John the Baptist.

When in Jesus’ ministry did Elijah bear witness to Him? _____

The “great and dreadful day of the Lord” is that end time appearing of the Messiah. Frequently in Old Testament prophecy the coming of Christ in the flesh and His coming for final judgment are seen in one grand, panoramic view.

Joel 2:11 The Lord thunders at the head of His army; His forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey His command. The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?

Verse 6: “Turn the hearts” God’s work upon us goes from the inside to the outside. The coming of the Messiah will result in restored family relations where parents and children talk about the Savior as well as join together in Christian education and worship (see Luke 1:17 again, but see also Matthew 10:35).

How does the Old Testament end in the NIV? _____

Why? _____
 “We peer into the future as Malachi and his people did, hands shading our eyes as we scan the horizon as Malachi and his people did.” (Eric Hartzell, People’s Bible Commentary, CPH, 1994, page 151)

“Malachi’s inspired word helped to produce those patient and pious hopers who meet us in the first chapters of the Gospel According to Luke...His word of hope reached its fullness when God sent His Son and Servant to fulfill all righteousness with healing in His wings for His nation and all nations.” (Concordia Self-Study Commentary, 1979, page 661)