

THE BOOK OF MALACHI
Lesson 5, Chapter 1 Continued 3

I have spoken on numerous occasions that the Bible books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachai form a kind of somewhat overlapping trilogy, and probably Haggai collaborated with Zechariah, and Zechariah with Malachai to some limited level. So, as we continue in Malachai, I want to (rather belatedly, I'm afraid) explain to you something significant that goes unnoticed in Bible commentaries. It is this: the New Covenant was already known and incorporated into Jewish religious thought well before the time of Malachai, so it was incorporated into his thought as well. The Prophet Jeremiah had prophesied several years before those 3 Prophets wrote (a few years before Haggai, but many years before Malachai), so, Jeremiah's prophecies had, by now, been well-distributed, and the contents had become known and digested by the Levite Priesthood, the Sages, the current Prophets and was taught to some unknown degree to the Jewish people. Why is that important? Let's read part of Jeremiah chapter 31.

CJB **Jeremiah 31:30-39** ³⁰ *"Here, the days are coming," says YEHOVEH, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah. ³¹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them," says YEHOVEH. ³² "For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days," says YEHOVEH: "I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³³ No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, 'Know YEHOVEH'; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more." ³⁴ This is what YEHOVEH says, who gives the sun as light for the day, who ordained the laws for the moon and stars to provide light for the night, who stirs up the sea until its waves roar- YEHOVEH-Tzva'ot is his name: ³⁵ "If these laws leave my presence," says YEHOVEH, "then the offspring of Isra'el will stop being a nation in my presence forever." ³⁶ This is*

what YEHOVEH says: "If the sky above can be measured and the foundations of the earth be fathomed, then I will reject all the offspring of Isra'el for all that they have done," says YEHOVEH. ³⁷ "Look, the days are coming," says YEHOVEH, "when the city will be rebuilt for YEHOVEH from the Tower of Hanan'el to the Corner Gate. ³⁸ The measuring line will be stretched straight to Garev Hill, then turn to Go'ah. ³⁹ The whole valley of corpses and ashes, including all the fields as far as Vadi Kidron, and on to the corner of the Horse Gate to the east, will be separated out for YEHOVEH; it will never be uprooted or destroyed again."

This is the announcement of the New Covenant that Christendom (or Constantinian Christianity, if you prefer) says is the basis for the existence of the Church, and (generally speaking) the Church says it actually had nothing to do with the Jewish people except in an oblique way. Rather, this new covenant resulted in establishing a new faith for gentiles. As a result, the Church carries out its preachings, teachings, and doctrines as though the process and manifestation of this New Covenant were delayed, and never arrived or began until Christ's birth.

As with so much in the Bible, those who seek to turn snippets of biblical passages into simplistic doctrines often omit the other parts of those passages, should those other parts dispute or complicate what it is they want to establish as a hard and inflexible truth. Likely nowhere in the Bible can this be more glaringly evident than Jeremiah's announcement of a new covenant.

Notice that this new covenant in Jeremiah is 1) given exclusively to Israel and Judah (not to gentiles). 2) Nowhere does this covenant announce a new and different law, but rather only speaks of transferring... a relocating... of the existing law from its external place, written on stone tablets and sheepskin scrolls, into the internal minds and hearts of the Israelites. And 3) this untitled new covenant goes on to explain that God upholds the continuing existence and acceptance of Israel as His chosen people, and rejects any suggestion that He would ever abandon them (or, as Christendom says, invalidate the covenant with Israel and then hand it over to the gentile Church). The Prophet relates that only when the Universe can be measured and the foundations of

planet earth be fully understood, that God might turn away from Israel. This is, of course, an idiom much akin to the standard Western “when Hell freezes over” that is intended as a strong expression of something that will never happen, because it is impossible to happen.

As concerns our study of Malachai, I want to highlight that Jeremiah’s announcement of another covenant to be added to the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants was by now decades old. It had become mostly common knowledge among the regular Jews, and well known within the religious leadership, and so it quite naturally already factored into Jewish thought and expectation. What this means is that when the Prophets that came after Jeremiah (like Malachai) spoke in their prophecies of “covenants” as a general and all-inclusive term, they included this latest covenant from Jeremiah 31. For the post-Jeremiah Prophets, Israel’s covenants were three: Abraham’s, Moses’s, and Jeremiah’s, and no longer two. So, even though the culmination... the final acts... of all that this new covenant brought with it didn’t happen until Yeshua came onto the scene, yet elements of it had already begun to manifest, not the least of which was that Jerusalem would be rebuilt after the Babylonian destruction. It is a biblical principle that only when a Prophet speaks a prophetic oracle from God, that that oracle is set into motion. But the initial inertial push happens immediately. Prophetic oracles do not come about to their fullest fruition, all at once. What is predicted is always more than simply one thing or one event, and so the contents of those oracles roll out step-by-step, a little bit at a time, and typically, this slow realization of whatever promises the covenants make is not perceived as they happen; rather, it is only noticed in hindsight.

Consider where we, as God worshippers, stand today in history, and the expectations about the prophetic future that we have. By the time of John the Revelator, all the Prophets had spoken. The biblical era of prophecy was over. Now, John’s God-given purpose right near the end of the 1st century A.D. was to help draw a better overall picture, and to add sequence and timing of the fuller manifestations of the several prophecies from the Old Testament Prophets that would eventually result in a worldwide Kingdom of God. John was inspired from Heaven with this information, but also he was alive when the prophecies that surrounded and followed the appearance of a Messiah

actually were fulfilled, which would bring about the seminal event...the main feature... of that new covenant spoken by Jeremiah. But, despite the usual thought that the main feature was the Messiah Himself, it was not. According to Jeremiah's new covenant, the main feature was for God to miraculously put His Law (the Torah) into the interior parts of God's worshippers. This had happened on a Shavuot, around 30 A.D., shortly after Yeshua had died and risen (around 60 years before John wrote Revelation), which concluded His mission that paved the way for the Holy Spirit to come.

It was a surprise to those Jews who comprehended what happened that it turned out that this main feature would manifest itself as the spectacular arrival of the Holy Spirit that would indwell God worshippers; and even more surprising, that such an indwelling only happens for those who trust in the departed Yeshua of Nazareth for salvation from sins. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachai were completely aware of the new covenant, but they were unaware of how it would play out. And now we, in the 21st century, look at all this information that has been assembled in our Bibles, most of which has been confined to recorded history, as we attempt to figure out where we are in John's timeline concerning the things yet to come. Especially in modern times, because of all these prior prophetic fulfillments, we try to identify world events that just might be some of the milestone events that these Prophets spoke of that would signal the entry into the End Times, and the return of the same Messiah, and all the horror that will be inflicted on earth, and the eventual joy that comes with it.

Therefore, it is important that as we study Malachai, we grasp that within the complex backdrop of his prophetic work, he already had the knowledge of this new covenant because it was no longer new to the Jews; it was at least 100 years old, and the inclusion of Jeremiah's new covenant alongside the Abrahamic Covenant and the Covenant of Moses was a bygone conclusion. Therefore, just as it is for us as we speak about the End Times, even creating some vocabulary to speak about it as time and technology advance, the prophetic messages and vocabulary of the Prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachai inherently included the reality of Jeremiah's new covenant. And part of that reality was an assurance that despite all of Israel's stumbling and faithlessness and troubles, God still loves them. Yehoveh remains their God

and they remain His people. Israel will survive and eventually thrive. There will be an operational Temple. There will be a fully functioning and revived Levite Priesthood, and Jerusalem will be rebuilt better than ever. Of course, the Israelites in ancient times didn't know the timing for all this to play out or what, exactly, it would look like, or what situations would necessarily arise to cause these various predictions to be fulfilled. They only knew that the manifestation of that prophecy of Jeremiah that we call the New Covenant was... as with the other and older prophecies already given... as much underway and in progress as the covenants of Abraham and Moses.

This is the perspective by which we are to understand Malachai. And this is also the perspective by which we are to understand the meaning and scope of when Malachai speaks of the "covenants".

Let's re-read the last half of Malachai.

RE-READ MALACHAI CHAPTER 1:9 – 14

Verse 9 was a continuation of Yehoveh chastising the Levite Priests for offering Him defective sacrifices. Already, He has asked the rhetorical question of if their governor would be willing to accept damaged or cheap goods as a gift. Even more, if someone wanted an audience with the governor or king would even get past the front door as his staff examined the gift for its worthiness. The expected answer to this rhetorical question is, of course, "no". So, if you can't even get your worthless gift past the front door, let alone to actually set it before the human king, why would you Priests think it would be different with God?

But even more, if the gift is an attempt to have the king reward you by answering your request for favor about something, why would you expect that a knowingly defective sacrifice would open the ears of God to your prayers? The problem with this is that such an attitude had, of course, filtered down to the common people. These priests had virtually encouraged the people to have no reverence or respect for God's Altar, upon which their very condition of holiness before God depended. It is appalling that the people who considered

themselves leaders who were set apart for God, were the ones behind this abomination.

The thing we must not do is to misconstrue what is being said. This is not saying that the better the gift to God, the better chance we have for God to pay attention to our needs. God has no needs and so He needs no gifts. Gifts are not the way to God's favor. It's the pagan world that believes that their gods MUST have these gifts to survive or to be comfortable.

CJB Psalm 40:6-9 ***⁶ How much you have done, Yehoveh my God! Your wonders and your thoughts toward us- none can compare with you! I would proclaim them, I would speak about them; but there's too much to tell! ⁷ Sacrifices and grain offerings you don't want; burnt offerings and sin offerings you don't demand. Instead, you have given me open ears; ⁸ so then I said, "Here I am! I'm coming! In the scroll of a book it is written about me. ⁹ Doing your will, my God, is my joy; your Torah is in my inmost being.***

To obey God is the way to God's favor. The offerings and sacrifices to Him were really all to the benefit of His earthly worshippers. In matters of sin, a sacrifice of an animal that had played no role in a person's sin could be used to satisfy God's insistence on justice, and to restore the worshipper to fellowship with Him. Who does that benefit? The sinner or God? But when God sets the standard for the offering or sacrifice, mankind has no right to downgrade it to something that costs us less. It is an insult; it is offensive.

God indeed has set the standard for our offerings. I'm not even going to waste my time telling it to you, because every one of you already knows what it is, just as the Priests and the common Jews of Malachai's day knew what the standard was. So, it's not an issue of education; it's an issue of dedication. And giving or not giving each has their consequences. And giving not what God says, but rather giving somewhat less, also has consequences. And trusting Yeshua doesn't relieve us from our responsibilities to give to the measure God has told us to. Just as for the Levites and the Israelite people to attempt to defraud God with worthless, lesser, or defective gifts was a sin, so is it for Believers in Yeshua to do the same.

Verse 10 says:

CJB Malachi 1:10 *Why doesn't even one of you shut the doors and thus stop this useless lighting of fires on my altar? I take no pleasure in you," says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot, "and I will not receive an offering from you.*

This verse has been interpreted in some odd ways that are head-scratchers. Some claim that this meant that the priests were asking for money to do even the slightest thing, including merely closing the Temple doors. Others say that sometimes, through laziness and thoughtlessness, this means they would forget to close the Temple doors at night. It means neither of those things. It means that since it is not only useless, but it angers God, for worthless and defective sacrifices to be placed on the Altar of Burnt Offering, the priests may just as well close the doors to the Temple grounds. In fact, doing that would show some actual reverence for Him and be less offensive than what they're doing now.

I think we have to consider just how radical of a suggestion God is making here. The idea that the Priesthood would take it upon themselves to stop the regular, and calendar-driven altar sacrifices normally would be unthinkable. Yet, compared to the level of blasphemy they have risen to in the complicit nature of offering defective sacrifices, stopping them altogether would be the better choice. When something is that broken, sometimes there's nothing left but to take an action that essentially ends that shattered institution and begin again. God already did that once by using the Babylonians to invade Jerusalem and destroy the Temple, putting those corrupt priests out of work. Then, hauling most of them off to Babylon, along with the people they had ruined with their false teachings and manmade doctrines.

After a couple of generations had passed in Babylon, God re-instituted the Temple with a new building and new leaders. It took no time at all for the Priesthood to fall right back into its corrupt ways. Part of what happened to the Priests was that they forgot their reason for existence. They lost their purpose, their goal. Their sacrifices had become nothing more than mechanical, vain

repetition. As modern Believers, we have to be on guard against our adoption of such an attitude.

One of the reasons that I regularly rail against the typical modern expression of worship as we know it in the West, is because of this general adoption of a lukewarm, middle-of-the-road, go along to get along, brand of God worship. It is said (by Preachers themselves!) that there are basically just 8 sermon topics. They are simply given over and over again with cosmetic changes, and almost all are about getting saved or tithing. Little is more popular among Pastors than to subscribe to websites where you can purchase pre-packaged sermons. Some complete with a slide show and even suggested music to go with it. This is religion. Being there for the sake of being there. Empty, fruitless, the goal now is to entertain, not to teach. Rousing music and light shows, comical sermons, coffee shops, and amazing sound systems. The aim is to be competitively equal with what the world can offer; not to be a pariah to the world as was Yeshua's instruction. The objective is to find common ground with secular society, not to offend it, and then offer a different and better way. I truly believe that God says that in too many cases, these institutions are broken beyond repair, so stop being part of it. Don't light that altar fire that is only going to offer more substandard sacrifices of praise, which God will reject anyway. Harsh? Yes. But no more harsh or radical than what God told those Levite priests to do: stop the sacrifices altogether. Don't even bother with it. They have made it a disgusting waste of time, wood, and the lives of innocent creatures.

Now, verse 11 might seem out of place considering the direction of Malachai's message, or even not intellectually honest, because God claims that His name is great to all nations. However, this is because verse 11 is a prophetic statement being thrown in here. It is not at all uncommon among prophecies to find God speaking to a Prophet in real time, but then suddenly throwing in a prophetic statement that can only come later. As of this time in Malachai, Yehoveh's name was NOT considered great in the Persian Empire. After all, nations and kings in that era saw wars as battles between the representative gods of each nation. The nation that won a war, therefore, had a god that beat their foes' god and therefore was more powerful. Since the Jews were living in a Persian province called Yehud, under the rule of a Persian king, then

Yehoveh would have been seen as weak, unable to bring His people to victory. Therefore, this verse is talking about a future time. The End Times after the Apocalypse and Armageddon, when God's name will, indeed, be great among the nations... all of whom will be defeated by Him. A different view about the intent of this passage existed in the early Church, and was spoken about by Justin, Irenaeus, Clement, and Augustine (among others). They said it revealed that the nations actually were already worshipping Yehoveh in their sacrifices and offerings to their gods, they just didn't know it. Rather, the names of those other gods were just other names for Yehoveh. Don't think this is entirely something believed and then abandoned in the past. I personally ran into a situation that involved a statement of the missions board of a very large American Church denomination that claimed that Muslims who worship Allah are really worshipping Jesus, they just don't know it. So, they encouraged Christians to go and worship with Muslims at their Mosques, using the name Allah in their prayers.

The opening words of verse 11, the way the CJB has it, are OK in the sense that it conveys the proper meaning, but literally the words are "from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same". This is a classic merism. That is, it is a standard literary technique of creating a pair of bookend terms, each representing the farthest limit (like A to Z). So, the technique of merism means "this, that, and everything in between". Totality. The sun rises in the east, and sets in the west, so from an ancient view that thought the earth was flat, then it means from one end of the earth to the other and everything in between. All inclusive. The meaning is that God says there will NOT be on earth a nation that hasn't made His name the greatest.

Maybe this is a good time to remind you that the Hebrew word usually translated as nations is **goyim**. It also means gentiles. So, when the Bible speaks of nations, it inherently means gentile nations, which, today, are all nations on earth except for one: Israel. And it means it that same way here in Malachai. This plays together with the preceding verses about defective sacrifices and offerings, because since His name will be great in all the nations of the world (which are gentile in their make-up) how ridiculous is the thought that with the pure worship and offerings of praise He is getting from the

gentiles that He would be expected to receive corrupted offerings and insincere praise from His own priests and set apart people!

After that prophetic vision of the future, God returns to the present. In verse 12, we read:

CJB Malachi 1:12 ***"But you profane it by saying that the table of Yehoveh is polluted, so that the fruit and food offered deserve contempt."***

Verse 12 is a bit difficult to decipher until we realize what it is about; in reality, it is a repetition of verse 7, both having the same essential meaning. The "you" is the Priests. In Hebrew, the word usually translated as profane is **mehallelim**. The idea is of desecration. To take something holy and sacred and subject it to something corrupt and demeaning, thereby defiling it. In modern times, we tend to think of profaning God in the form of our words, by what we say. In reality, it is meant more in what we do. In God's eyes, we profane His name by our behavior; this is what is being claimed here in verse 12. Thus, to use God's name in vain, or to use it impiously, can certainly be called profaning it. Yet, well more often than not, it is not in our speech but rather in our actions that the profaning occurs, as is the sense of it here in Malachai.

What is being described is what God says actually exists in the minds and hearts of the priests, despite all their pretend piousness and hypocrisy. It is Yehoveh saying what must be the priests' intentions by offering defective animals on the altar. So, He has them saying in response to God's allegations, "we're acting this way because it is the food for Yehoveh that is polluted, and so, it is the food that ought to be held in contempt. Its blemishes are not our fault, and we shouldn't be blamed for them. That is, they rationalize that God should hold the defective sacrificial items themselves responsible for their unsuitability and therefore He should be offended by the food items, and not by the priests who offer it. When it says that the fruit and food are to be despised, fruit and food are simply used in an ancient way of speaking about food and meals in general (that is, not fruit as the name of a plant category of edible food that grows on trees).

Verse 13 continues this same line of thought.

CJB Malachi 1:13 *You also say, 'It's all so tiresome!' and sniff scornfully at it," says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot. "Then you bring animals that were taken by violence, or they are lame or sick. This is the sort of offering you bring. Am I supposed to accept this from you?" asks Yehoveh*

It's interesting that the first stanza of this sentence is given with such emotion and intensity. Some translations, like the CJB, add an exclamation point, which is quite the right thing to do. Buried, but not translated, in those first few words is the Hebrew word **hinneh**. When **hinneh** is used in a verse in the way it is here, it is silent; the word goes unspoken. Normally, when spoken, it means "behold" or "indeed"... words that scream to the reader to "pay attention, it is certain !" Here, **hinneh** is used unspoken and behaves like punctuation (hence, when translating this unspoken word to English, adding an exclamation point is a must). So, we are to imagine some exasperated priest, throwing his hands to the heavens and bellowing, "I am so sick and tired of doing these rituals day after day, and I can't hardly stand to do them at all!" Yet, he is a priest; he is obligated to do his job no matter how much he is bored with it and despises it. As a result, says God, "you sniff scornfully at it". "Sniff" is an idiom expressing arrogant indifference.

What we take from this is that the priests "sniff scornfully" at their job of officiating sacrifices or perhaps at the food offering itself (somewhat like God's accusations in the previous verse). Yet, it is fascinating that in very ancient translations, sometimes we find the words are modified to "sniff scornfully at **me**". The "me", of course, is Yehoveh. That is, the priests scornful "sniffs" are directed toward Yehoveh and not so much to the sacrificial offerings or the job itself. The Syrian, the Arabic, the Ethiopic texts among other translations have it this way. I can't really say which way we ought to take this; who or what it is that is receiving the Priests arrogant indifference. Either way, the priests have bad attitudes, having lost all sense of their purpose and privilege that God bestowed upon them to be separated and set above all the other Israelites. Allowed to do something that no one else on earth is allowed to do.

The next words say that the priests bring animals for sacrifice that were taken by “violence”. What does that mean to be “taken by violence”? The Hebrew word being translated is ***gazal***. The sense of the word means to rob, to steal, to seize by force. So, the word “violence” that we find in many Bible translations doesn’t fit very well here. Nearly certainly, the idea is of the Priesthood misappropriating animals from people, virtually stealing them... poaching them... from the flocks and herds of local peasants. This matches much better the following words that speak of using the lame and blind animals, which are likely the animals from the priest’s own herds. After all, how simple and without consequence it would be for priests to reject a lame or blind animal from a common person bringing it for sacrifice (which they were highly unlikely to bring in the first place). What would motivate them to accept it, when it is easy to just say “no”? By this time in Israel’s history, more often than not, a person wanting to sacrifice would literally purchase an animal in Jerusalem from the Priesthood’s livestock. Not everyone had sheep or cattle. Having but one or two places that family above most others. So, it made more sense and was more convenient to travel to Jerusalem, and then go to the Temple and purchase one. On the other hand, when it comes to the Priesthood’s own animals, which had much monetary value to them, sneaking in some of their blind and lame ones to sacrifice from time to time, ones they could not sell, would have been tempting (especially when no onlookers would be around). This practice of robbery by the Priesthood was not new. Isaiah even speaks about it almost 300 years earlier.

CJB Isaiah 61:8 *"For I, Yehoveh, love justice; I hate robbery for burnt offerings..."*

Once again, as we discussed back in our first couple of lessons, this message from God through Malachai boiled down to a reprimand and call for the Priesthood and all Israel to return to authentic, genuine, sincere worship practices because no other kind was acceptable. Sacrifices and offerings that are defective, or that cost us nothing (because it was stolen from someone else), are equally worthless to God. Worship and praise that are rote, mechanical, and unthinking ritual habit and performance, are worthless to God. It’s a waste of energy, and it is a self-deception. Let me venture in where

angels fear to tread to try to bring this into the 21st century and make it applicable to us... because it is.

Simply showing up for a worship service because that's what you do, habitually, has little value. A pastor or Bible teacher preaching or teaching only because it is their profession and it pays the bills has little value. Any act of participation in a communal worship service in which one's heart isn't in it has little value. Better to not come at all.

Yeshua takes this to another level. He says that long, windy prayers (especially if they are loud and in front of others) have little value. If someone does not pray in sincerity but rather believes that the value to God resides in the length and eloquence of the prayer, they are mistaken (just look at the relative brevity and simplicity of the Lord's Prayer as a model). There is no prescribed length of a service, length of a prayer, length of teaching, or preaching, because the value of any of these is in the authenticity and genuine purpose to commune with God.

The final verse of chapter 1 is this:

CJB Malachi 1:14 ***"Moreover, cursed is the deceiver who has a male animal in his flock that is damaged, but vows and sacrifices to Yehoveh anyway. For I am a great king," says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot, "and my name is respected among the nations."***

The word "curse" is used regularly in the Bible, but I think that generally, most people don't really know what it means. Pronounced **arar** in Hebrew, a curse is a potent, perhaps the most powerful, decree that a person in authority can give out. In our present context, it is that whoever within a community has transgressed so seriously and blatantly against God or against God's people has, as a consequence, been delivered over to terrible misfortune, and there is no way to escape it. This is the meaning of a biblical curse. The much older Akkadian cognate word **araru** (from which evolved the Hebrew **arar**) further extends the meaning to include the result of a curse as paralysis of movement or of other capabilities. An impossible-to-cross barrier has been erected. I hope you get the picture. It simply doesn't get much worse when God curses

someone or something. So, when the deceiver, who knowingly brings a sacrifice of a damaged **male** animal from his flock, that person is cursed by God. Whether priest or layman, this applies. Male animals were always of greater value than female animals in the first place, primarily because so many more female animals were born compared to males. So, when the sacrifice called specifically for a male animal, the sacrifice was all the more important, making an unacceptably defective male sacrifice all the more serious.

The final words of verse 14 use an unusual epithet for Yehoveh, calling Him “Great king” (***melek gadol***). It expresses absolute universal power and rule. By tying this to the nations (meaning gentiles), then this is yet another time that God says that He is as much the God of gentiles as He is the God of Israel. Of course, these final words are in reference not to Malachai’s present, but rather to a future time. Despite that, when we realize the very nature of what a pronounced prophecy does (which is to provide that initial inertia for the processes of fulfilling that prophecy to begin), then it is easier to understand how God can see His name as being held great among the nations, as already accomplished.

We’ll begin Malachai chapter 2, next time.