

## **THE BOOK OF MALACHI**

### **Lesson 9, Chapter 3**

We concluded our study of Malachai's 3<sup>rd</sup> oracle of burden at chapter 2 verse 16. For reasons I can't fathom, our modern Bibles tend to then add a 17<sup>th</sup> verse before turning to chapter 3, yet that 17<sup>th</sup> verse starts a new subject: the 4<sup>th</sup> oracle. The material we'll be looking at is very dense. That is, there is so much nuance and principle packed tightly in it that it will require unwinding it and looking at it piece by piece before the bigger picture can come to light. That means, we'll have to examine a number of Hebrew words to see how they are used and what they meant. It also means that we'll literally only examine the first 2 opening verses announcing this 4<sup>th</sup> burden.

In review, the 3<sup>rd</sup> oracle or burden had been dealing with a most serious threat to the stability of the community of those Jews that had returned from Babylon to their former homeland, now called Yehud. Their time in Babylon had resulted in a great desire to return to God and to re-establish the Priesthood and Temple. But the returnees also brought with them a mindset that had been tainted by pagan practices and society; a distorted mindset that they didn't realize they had adopted. There was a reason that only around 5% of the Jewish exiles returned: they now enjoyed the progressive ways and comfortable lives that were afforded to them as citizens of Babylon. And one of the most destructive things they brought back with them, was the propensity of the male Jews to divorce their Hebrew wives in favor of acquiring foreign women. This had equally affected both the common Jews and the Priests. The practice had become so rampant that it was destabilizing Jewish society. The heart of Jewish society was supposed to be ruled and lived according to the covenants God had made with Abraham, then with Moses, and had recently been joined by Jeremiah's New Covenant. Since they were being unfaithful to those covenants (according to Malachai and other Prophets), their relationship with Yehoveh was being ruined.

As a covenant within a covenant, marriage of husband and wife was meant to mimic and be an illustration of God's relationship with Israel... but only to a point. That is, there was to be a mutual loving-kindness, there was to be a mutual faithfulness to the terms of the covenant, and the structure of the

covenant made one party submissive to the other. So, when the Israelite men broke covenant with their wives, they were also breaking covenant with God. And, yet, as God says, He remains faithful to Israel.

However, whereas from the human standpoint of marriage, the loss of faithfulness by one partner can bring on dissolution of the covenant between a husband and wife, that doesn't happen with the covenants God has made between He and the Hebrews. Rather than dissolution, penalties (called curses) kick-in to punish the unfaithful partner (Israel), but never is the covenant dissolved. The goal of the punishments is to get that unfaithful party (the Israelites) to repent and turn back to God in faithfulness to the terms of the covenant. Which leads me to a perspective about our lives.

As I look back, I realize more and more the patience of God. How often I had sinned, bore a consequence, could feel that dry desert I found myself in that seemed like God was nowhere to be found. And, once I recognized my own culpability and made a true heart-change along with behavior-change about it, there was God to take me back. How often this cycle had repeated in my life. Truthfully, sometimes I found myself repeating that same violation, and once again suffering for it. The reason is quite simple: I had not learned the lesson He was teaching me. Therein lies one of key concepts about our relationship with Yehoveh. The reality is that we are going to sin. We are going to suffer from it. That is why He gave us the sacrificial system based on a substitute paying the price for our trespasses. God will put a barrier between us and Him for a time when our behavior amounts to abandoning Him. But His goal is always for us to learn, repent, and grow from the experience. That is, rather than keep repeating the same sinful behavior, the smarter move is to learn from it. This is simply part of the Believer's journey for us all. However, those who wish to deny, deflect, and blame, we will remain right where we are... in a spiritual desert... in a no-man's land. This is what happened to Israel in an alarmingly repeating and familiar pattern.

Let's open our Bibles to Malachai chapter 3. However, we'll actually begin at chapter 2 verse 17. Please also note that some of you will not have as many verses as others do in chapter 3. Some Bible versions have taken the last few

verses of chapter 3 and created a chapter 4. However, the words remain the same, so no real harm is done to the passage.

### **READ MALACHAI CHAPTER 2:17 to 3 all**

The opening words of this 4<sup>th</sup> oracle are something none of us would ever like to hear about as pertaining to ourselves, but it is something that we certainly need to consider concerning our behavior. The ironic reality of this is that those who will respond and do some soul-searching are those least in danger, while the ones who are so very confident of their behavior as being righteous before God will think this must apply to others, but not to themselves. That is what is happening here.

Once again, we encounter some verses that are most challenging to correctly interpret, and this is reflected in nearly every Bible version having their own take on how to convert the Hebrew words to English. Yet, getting it right is important because each way defines a theological principle or rule... and in the case of the opening verses it involves prophecy that may or may not concern Messiah... each interpretation can't all be correct or they wouldn't read so differently. The opening words are: "You have wearied Yehoveh with your words." This much is nearly identical in all versions, so it is the easiest the part. Who is the "you" and what have they "wearied" God about? "You" are the Jews of Yehud in general as well as the priests forming the Levite Priesthood. Their religiosity, which characterizes the Jews of Yehud in general, is what they think and practice instead of sincere trust and the authentic worship they are supposed to do. They say what they all agree are the right things to say, they outwardly do practices that the community agrees is good in their own eyes, but they are utterly absent in sincerity, personal devotion, and actual Torah knowledge. Worse, it was their manmade doctrines that they lived by and not God's ordinances. At best, they put a popular spin on God's laws and then insist they are being obedient to them. That insistence goes beyond the human criticism by others who are so very bothered by their religiosity and even includes their disagreement with God and His Prophets that how they are behaving wrong!

When we read next: "How have we wearied Him?", we must not take this as a sincere matter of trying to search out God to find out what they have done wrong that it might be remedied. Rather, it is argumentative; it is a denial. It is very close to saying "how dare you falsely accuse us of such a thing". This is especially revealed when looking at the Hebrew grammar. In Hebrew it says: ***we amartem bamma***. The conjunction ***we*** is what is called an adversative. It means that there is a contrasting of the two clauses (one clause is an adversary to the other), one on each side of the word ***we***. It means "but" in the sense of someone defending themselves by deflecting whatever it is that is spoken against them. Bottom line: why should we repent and change when we have nothing to feel guilty about because we are doing things right despite what you say, God?

This dialogue is presented in the typical way of Malachai as a kind of back and forth between a representative strawman who speaks for the collective of Priests and/or common Jewish people in Yehud, versus the Prophet who is speaking for God.

Rather than responding with silence or just saying something like "you know full well what you are doing wrongly", ever-patient Yehoveh tells them what the problem is. The Priests and Jews claim that the evil they are doing in God's eyes is actually good. That they are certain that God takes pleasure, or at least ought to take pleasure, in their behavior. And it's not them God should be dealing with so severely. Rather God is being unjust to them... so, where is this God of justice?

It is quite interesting that from the youngest age, a child caught red-handed immediately points to another child and says: "Yeah, but they do it, too!" "What about them? Why are you coming after me, that's not fair". The question they are asking is still asked to this day, including among what ought to be "mature" Believers. If God is so just, why do the wicked seem to get away with everything, even prospering, while the righteous (usually meaning the person asking the question) seems to have everything go wrong in their life despite their claimed allegiance to God, and now you, God, are calling me out? Where's the justice in that, if you call yourself the God of justice? That sort of distorted mindset then leads to a rationalization for why it's OK for me

to do wrong things that the wicked do sometimes, and so if they can get away with it, why should I have to face consequences from God for doing those same things? Thus, this leads to the Jewish people and priests saying that “everyone who does evil is good in God’s sight, and He delights in them”.

The word translated as anyone or everyone is ***kol***. Indeed, it has the sense of all or every. Here, it is used as hyperbole by the collective strawman (the Jews and priests) in this dialogue. It’s like the teen who complains after staying out past curfew again, and getting caught, says that “everybody does it”; meaning, I’d be the only one who doesn’t disobey if I obeyed your curfew time. So, it’s not me that’s wrong, it’s you. This kind of hyperbolic chatter is run of the mill for the speech we find in the Prophets, but in real life it is also depicted as the general attitude of those God-worshippers (and others) who seem to be perpetually upset with what theologians called theodicy. Theodicy is a large word that simply means the philosophy of how it is that God deals with evil in what seems to be (on earth) a very light hand, at the same time that He claims of Himself to be good and perfectly just at all times, and out to protect the righteous and punish the wicked.

Therefore, Malachai takes up the fight and says that the counter-claim from the collective strawman (that is the strawman that is replying to the questions being asked) is saying that while God used to say that such and so is evil, in fact He has changed, or ought to change, the rules and agree with them that it is now OK (it is good) if they go ahead and do those formerly prohibited things. In fact, God draws pleasure from looking down up His priests and the Jewish population, and thinks their behavior is wonderful... calling what used to be evil, good, and vice versa. Why would they think this? We’ve covered this a couple of times, but it bears repeating. We must consider the historical setting in which this is being written, because such attitudes don’t exist in a vacuum or without context.

The Jews living in Yehud at this time were a disillusioned, disappointed, and now skeptical bunch about what God’s Prophets had to say to them in earlier times. They felt that the New Covenant in Jeremiah, now a century old, was a promise from Yehoveh that they would prosper in the land, fields and orchards would produce abundantly, their population would increase, the people would

be protected from their enemies, their Persian overlords would be defeated, and Yehud would become an independent kingdom of a restored Israel. But, this was not what they were experiencing. In fact, in some ways things were worse now than 50 years earlier. So, they decided that the problem couldn't be them, it had to be God. They suspected that Jeremiah's New Covenant promise to them had failed and who else could be responsible but God? Yehoveh had not showered them in abundance and prosperity (from their viewpoint), nor freed them from Persia, so where was the justice God promised when they see Israel's enemies (like Persia) prospering? In fact, they want to know what the standard is for God's justice; it seems to have changed (if one still exists at all). In reality they had become scoffers of God's laws and commands; cynics who questioned His ability to bring about what He promised, and so, concluded that He had let them down.

I'm not sure I have ever thought this way (maybe I've just forgotten): but I know people who have openly expressed this idea... including Believers. And, I have always wondered about this this underlying concept, that is actually addressed here in Malachai: what is an evil doer in God's eyes, and does that definition ever change? What typical human thinks of themselves as an evil doer... Believer or non-Believer... other than for the most hardened and vile criminals? After all, God has just announced that He even regards the priests who occasionally offer as sacrifices blemished and unclean animals, as being part of the camp of evil doers. And God regards Hebrew men who divorce their Hebrew wives so that they can go have a happier life by marrying a foreign wife, as evil doers even though divorce is not expressly prohibited by God. The comical irony is that the Hebrew evil-doers that have been doing evil are griping about the lack of justice against those whom they consider the evil doers! And there-in lies the rub: people who see themselves as God-fearers (and especially those who are Christ followers) often believe they are beyond rebuke and reproach and nothing they can do, or think could ever make them an evil doer in God's eyes. The mere fact that their claim of piety (often in the form of having said the sinner's prayer and claiming Jesus as Savior) ought to be taken as *de facto* proof that they *are* pious before God and any prospect of becoming an evil doer has been taken off the table. Therefore, their behavior (even their thoughts) is disconnected from God's commands or from the essence of obedience to Him as a display of their love for Him. In fact, the

Church has explained that God has indeed drastically changed the rules of what is evil and what is good with the coming of the new and replacement God, Yeshua of Nazareth. However, the view from Heaven remains just as we find it in that book of Wisdom: Proverbs.

**CJB Proverbs 17:15** *He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous- both alike are an abomination to Yehoveh.*

The more I have researched and studied, the more I'm realizing the blasphemy that engulfs our thinking when we dare to accuse God that He is not being just to us, and that it seems that many times He only winks at evil and sin... including our own. The thing that ancient Israel had set aside in order to adopt that mindset is the same thing that Christendom has also largely set aside: any belief that they (we?) have definable, God-ordained duties and obligations that cannot be redirected and reformulated by our religious authorities and according to our own thoughts and determinations. And, along with it, as God-fearers, that God has given us the right to redefine His laws and commands and even determine what evil and good amount to... at least to a point.

I will let that thought process give way momentarily to say that this once again builds the case that the Law of Moses was not abolished, and could not have been abolished, by Yeshua (which in Matthew 5, Messiah says He did not do, most plainly) because if that happened, we would have lost the very thing we need so desperately to rule our lives: a definable, tangible, objective moral code to refer to. Without such a code, discerning evil from good is simply not possible for humans. Sin goes undefinable, having lost any standard. The good news is that this supposed ending of the Torah moral code by Yeshua never happened. The bad news is that hundreds of millions of God worshippers have been led into a hellish oblivion of belief that such a moral code long ago was extinguished, that there is no universal standard of right and wrong other than what exists in each individual's mind, and now every Believer is given a personal customized moral code by the Holy Spirit and so each will be judged based on that and not any known standard. The day is coming when that grievous error will have to be faced collectively and individually, just as God (in Malachai) is bringing the hammer down on the Priesthood, the priests, and



the common Jews of Yehud that had adopted essentially that same unsound, unbiblical philosophy of life and faith.

As this oracle continues in chapter 3, verse 1, we read this:

**CJB Malachi 3:1** ***"Look! I am sending my messenger to clear the way before me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple. Yes, the messenger of the covenant, in whom you take such delight- look! Here he comes," says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot.***

I'll mince no words: this critical verse is awfully difficult to interpret. Yet, identifying who is whom in its words is important, because it is speaking of the End Times and laying out some of the characters involved in the wide-ranging event it speaks of. The event we already know from the wording of the previous verse is the Day of Yehoveh; both its process and its climax.

In Hebrew, the first two words are ***hinneh sholeh***. Used as it is here, ***hinneh*** is meant to denote immediacy. That is, a person is to pay attention to the Prophet because what is about to be told is going to happen either soon, or very suddenly (meaning, a surprise; without a lot of build-up to the event) when the time comes for its fulfillment. The next word, ***sholeh***, is a form of the root word ***shalach***. ***Shalach*** means to send something or, more usually, to dispatch someone. Used together, the phrase ***hinneh sholeh*** is meant as the sudden sending of something ominous according to many language scholars. When I look at it, and how it played out in history, I would prefer to modify the use of the word "ominous" to describe its tone, and have it lean a little more towards something "serious and weighty enough to be wary of".

This is, without doubt, a prophetic message of the future from the perspective of Malachi's era. As always, the exact length of time before we get to that future event is unknowable, and the hearers of this prophecy would have been unsure of how soon this might happen. The next Hebrew word is more familiar to us: ***malak***, which means messenger or angel. So, this messenger is to be sent (by Yehoveh) bearing great and serious weight in his purpose. And his purpose is to "clear the way before me". We'll continue to unpack the Hebrew because the nuances are most important to grasp.



The next words are **upinna derek**. **Upinna** is a derivative of the root word **pannu**. It means to clear, to remove. **Derek** means the way, or the journey... the highway or path. So, to clear the way is a correct rendering. But, in what sense is this meant? Interestingly, this 2-word pairing is borrowed from the 3 times it is used in the Book of Isaiah (40:3, 57:14, and 62:10). It carries a sense of straightening out a crooked path or clearing obstacles that lay in the way. It actually derives from a common practice in the era long before Malachai of people in a king's traveling retinue, a sort of royal procession, going ahead of the king to make the path smooth and passable so that it suffers no hold-ups. All the times of its use in Isaiah, it is in the context of restoration and deliverance, and thus there is no good reason to understand the borrowing of this rare biblical phrase from Isaiah than for it to maintain the same intent and meaning as used here in Malachai.

Clearly in both Isaiah and Malachai, we are to understand it as a metaphor. What is being cleared are not physical obstacles like rocks or underbrush or potholes for a procession, but rather it is to clear away the barriers and obstacles of people's hearts. It means to remove their spiritual ambivalence. To end their wicked behaviors that oppose the divine will (and remember; from the preceding verse, we learn that these people who are to be chastised no doubt think the wicked hearts they are unaware that they harbor are actually the result of what they think is their good behavior, despite God telling them it is evil). The "me" in whom the way is being prepared for is explicitly Yehoveh, as this verse ends with God saying He is speaking of Himself.

Where things begin to get confused and much more difficult to interpret, is when we read: "and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple". Whereas the term "the Lord" is inserted wrongly thousands of times in English Bibles, here it is the correct word to use. In the Hebrew we find **adon**, meaning lord or master. Let's pause and back away to get a view of a wider scope to see where this is leading. The idea of this lord coming to his temple of course speaks of God in some manifestation. And, since the Temple is a physical building on planet earth, in the city of Jerusalem, then this coming of the lord is but another way of speaking about the Day of Yehoveh; the day of judgment and wrath. I'll repeat: the appearance of God in such a

way is a depiction of the Day of the Lord of End Times stuff. This is the day and event that had long been foretold by various Prophets in which the present age concludes, and a new age dawns.

I have spoken numerous times of the naivety of especially Evangelical churches that jump up down in gladness, and happily sing “come Lord, come!”, as though it was going to be a time of great happiness and relief, if not fun. I DO want the Lord to come, and I know you do, too. But, nowhere in the Bible is the Day of Yehoveh pictured in such a happy way. It is always a day of terror, of destruction on a planetary level that has never even been imagined. A day of death and darkness. Its arrival was not going to solve all of mankind’s problems and ills. Mostly, it would involve a kind of terrible purification of the earth of its evil, not unlike Noah’s Flood. It includes a genocide against the ungodly of all races, peoples, and nations, and a separation of sheep and goats. The sheep and goats are representative of, on the hand, those who claim loyalty to the God of Israel, but who in God’s eyes are not, from those on the other hand who claim that same loyalty, but in God’s eyes indeed they are sincere. So, praying for the Day of the Lord is one of those “be careful what you wish for” cases.

The Prophet Amos famously tried to send this same message his own people. The Day of the Lord is going to be terrible for all; but for those who are prepared, they will be able to understand it and bear up to it better, while the experience will be entirely different and far more devastating for those who are not prepared.

**CJB Amos 5:18 *Woe to you who want the Day of Yehoveh! Why do you want it, this Day of YEHOVEH? It is darkness, not light.***

If application is important to you, then please hear me: using Malachai’s vocabulary, it is evil doers who are telling their people not to prepare for the horror and deprivation of the Day of Yehoveh, but rather to get ready to throw a party as God is coming in light and delight! The Bible tells us time and again the truth of what that day means; but most of Christendom (at least that part that even acknowledges an End Times) tells their people just the opposite. We just finished in Malachai 2:17 explaining that it is the evil doers among God’s

set-apart community who call what is evil, good. You see, evil (*rah* in Hebrew), carries a double meaning. It means wickedness, but also it means something (an event) that is harmful, destructive or catastrophic. That is, the religious leaders replace God's Word and His warnings of catastrophe with tidings of comfort and joy. The people perish for the lack of knowledge, we are told. I know this is harsh; but I don't want good people who have given their hearts to Christ to perish. To suffer needlessly. To think they are prepared, but they are not. Or, just as bad, to feel, (just like those Jews in Malachai's time did) that God has failed them. That He promised one thing but delivered another and so it has caused a loss of faith. This is not because that's what God said or did, but it *is* because of what their religious leaders wrongly taught and convinced them. And let's face it: which would you prefer to hear? That as a God worshipper on the Day of the Lord you, too, will likely suffer some measure of darkness and severe troubles, or that it is all going to be comfort and happiness?

What lay ahead of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for what remains of prophetic fulfillments arrives at joy and peace **only** in its final, climactic moment. But the road to get there is long and treacherous and biblically described as like nothing that has ever come before it (and, thankfully, nothing like anything that will come after it). The Day of the Lord (despite its name) is not a single 24-hour period or a single event. "Day" is meant in the sense of an era or a season, or of an undefined block of time during which something consequential or life altering unfolds. It is something that will go on, and play out, over weeks and months or even longer. The Day of Yehoveh will come in ever-escalating stages of troubles that confounds humanity. "Woe" to those (the misinformed God-worshippers, not the heathen) who think wrongly about this, says Amos. I urge you, as God-worshippers, to take heed. God and His Prophets are right; those religious leaders of our era, representing all those various denominations, are wrong! As it was in the days of Malachai, so it is again.

Verse 1 of Malachai chapter 3 continues with: "and the Lord whom you seek..." In order to discuss this critically, I want to read to you the YLT translation of this part of the verse.

**YLT Malachi 3:1** *Lo, I am sending My messenger, And he hath prepared a way before Me, And suddenly come in unto his temple Doth the Lord whom ye are seeking,*

The way the CJB and most other Bibles read, “the Lord” is a new and separate character introduced into this passage. But, when we read the YLT... a version that is, although awkward sounding at times, lays it out fully literally... a new character does NOT appear. Instead, the Lord is portrayed as but another title for Yehoveh; a rather standard title of respect. To be clear, according to the YLT version, “the Lord” is Yehoveh. This is all the more proved most likely to be so when we go back to Malachai chapter 1 verse 6. There we read:

**CJB Malachi 1:6** *"A son honors his father and a servant his master. But if I'm a father, where is the honor due me? and if I'm a master, where is the respect due me?- says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot to you cohanim who despise my name.*

In this verse, where we read the word “master”, most Bibles say lord. And in all cases, whether the English word lord or master is chosen, the Hebrew word being translated is **adon**. Thus, the passage reads like “and if I (Yehoveh) am master, where is the respect due me?” So, chapter 3 verse 1 is clearly using the same words, with the same meaning, with God speaking of Himself as “lord” as we find in chapter 1 verse 6. So far in chapter 3 verse 1, then, we have Yehoveh saying He is going to send His messenger in order to clear the way before He (Yehoveh) makes His appearance.

The final part of the sentence is much better stated in the YLT than in most any other version: “And suddenly come in unto His Temple doth the Lord whom ye are seeking”. “The Lord whom ye are seeking”, then, is still identified as Yehoveh. So, there are total of 2 characters being spoken of in verse 1. The unnamed messenger, and Yehoveh “the Lord”. And Yehoveh is coming to take His place in His earthly Temple. Naturally, Constantinian Christianity makes 3 different characters present in this verse. The messenger, then the Lord being identified as Yeshua, and finally Yehoveh. Some Christian scholars go back to identifying only 2 characters: first the messenger, but then goes on to identify the one who is doing the sending of the messenger as being the same as the

one the path is being cleared for (the “me”), as well as being the same one who is coming into the Temple, and they say that all these are Yeshua. That is, Yehoveh, the Father, doesn’t actually appear in this prophetic verse. And, this is despite the final words of this verse that reads: ***“says Yehoveh-Tzva’ot”***.

The primary reason Christendom goes in this direction is because of the use of the word “the Lord”. Most English Bibles end the verse with: ***“says the LORD of hosts”***. And, as we have discussed a number of times, Christendom uses the term “the Lord” as an alternate name for Jesus wherever we find that term used in the Bible... Old Testament or New. It ignores that despite the over 6000 times in the Old Testament that the Hebrew “Yehoveh” literally appears, they translate it as “the Lord” and then say it means Jesus. I realize this was a convoluted path to reach my conclusion, but this verse is either literally referring to Yehoveh or it is literally referring to Yeshua. The bottom line is that regardless of how one might claim that this actually eventually played out... or will play out in the future... what that passage actually and literally says is: “Look, I (Yehoveh) am sending My messenger, and My messenger has prepared a way before Me (Yehoveh), and suddenly I (Yehoveh, the one you are seeking) will come into My Temple”.

Now, when we try to untangle the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of this same verse we read in the CJB:

***Yes, the messenger of the covenant, in whom you take such delight-look! Here he comes,” says ADONAI-Tzva’ot.***

But in the YLT it is said this way:

***Even the messenger of the covenant, Whom ye are desiring, Lo, he is coming, said Jehovah of Hosts.***

So, do we have yet another character introduced, who is called “the messenger of the covenant”? Or is it just a more complete or complex title for the “messenger” of the first half of this verse?

This is where we’ll pause for this week and continue with our study next time.