

THE BOOK OF MALACHI
Lesson 13, Chapter 3 Continued 4
END

As we near the end of our study of Malachai, we paused last week at chapter 3 verse 17, which said:

CJB Malachi 3:17 ***"They will be mine," says Yehoveh Tzva'ot, "on the day when I compose my own special treasure. I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him."***

We discussed how that when God said "they will be mine", it revolved around the Hebrew word **segulla**. I explained that while "they will be mine" isn't necessarily wrong, it doesn't express the deeply personal and intimate nature of the meaning. The word more leans towards "personal property". That is, the people of Israel are so set-apart from everyone else in the world that they are to belong exclusively to God. Then the verse goes on to explain why He is going to spare them. He compares it to the way a man spares his own son who honors him.

All throughout the Prophets that we have studied, we see so many words that we would characterize as emotions or feelings to describe God's reactions. I try to play that down a bit because the basis of a God-worshippers relationship to God, and the relationship of God to His followers, is based on covenant allegiance and obedience... and decidedly not emotions. Yet, feelings and emotions cannot be dismissed as playing a role. For one reason, humanity did not conjure up the attribute of emotions on our own. Emotions were built into us by our Creator. So, the question of whether God has emotions is one that has stirred theological debate for centuries. At its core, that question touches on the very nature of divinity, the limits of our meager human understanding to comprehend the nature and substance of God, and the relationship between the Creator and His creation. While some traditions assert that God is incapable of experiencing emotions—others argue that Scripture and human experience point to a God who feels deeply.

Holy Scripture is rich with references to God's responses that are described in terms of emotions that are the same as humans use for ourselves. The chief one is love. And that cannot ever be discounted as it is one of God's core attributes. God is described as loving (1 John 4:8), joyful (Zephaniah 3:17), angry (Psalm 7:11), jealous (Exodus 20:5), and even grieving (Genesis 6:6). These portrayals definitively tell us that God, even at our human best or worst moments, is not a distant, detached cosmic force from us, but a personal being who engages with humanity in meaningful and compassionate ways. For example, in Hosea, God expresses heartbreak over Israel's unfaithfulness, using the metaphor of a spurned lover. In the New Testament, Yeshua, as God incarnate, shows compassion, weeps over Lazarus, and expresses personal anguish on his rapidly approaching march to the cross in Gethsemane. These moments are not incidental; they reveal a God who enters into our human suffering and joy and does not see His relationship with us through cold, hard, rigid rules and calculation.

Classical God-worship, especially in the tradition of the great thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas, holds that God is immutable and impassible. This means God does not change and cannot be affected by external forces, including emotions. The reasoning is that emotions imply vulnerability or impulsiveness or even reaction (or over reaction) to something outside oneself, which would compromise His divine perfection. However, many modern theologians challenge this view, arguing that using the term "impassibility" risks portraying God as cold or indifferent. They propose that God's emotions are quite real, but not like human emotions—subject to whims or instability—but are instead expressions of His unique perfect love, justice, and mercy. And yet these same theologians are prone to assign anger or severity to Old Testament divine reactions only.

One way to reconcile these views is to understand divine reactions that we label as emotions analogically. To think analogically means to relate or compare two different things because they share similar features or functions, even though they are not identical. It involves drawing a comparison, an analogy, to help explain or understand something by showing its similarities to something more familiar. That is, when Scripture says God is angry or joyful, it communicates something true about God's character, but we must understand

that God does not “experience” these things, but rather they are part of His nature. And, certainly not in the same way humans are said to “experience” such feelings as things that are often out of our control. For instance, God’s “anger” reflects His inherent divine opposition to injustice, not a loss of His self-control or sudden knee-jerk surge of His passion. Similarly, God’s “love” is not actually sentimental or affectionate, but rather it is His steadfast commitment to the good of creation, at least for those who love Him. God doesn’t experience love; love is at the heart of His nature and explains how He deals not only with humans but with all His created creatures. This distinction helps us to better grasp God’s unique transcendence while affirming His relational nature as something we mere humans can identify with.

The only proof we need that God is relational is that He created humankind. He already had a full and varied society in Heaven; He certainly was not alone. Yet, He determined that He wanted yet another complementary society of a different kind of beings: humans, meant to engage with Him in a different way. He wanted it for relational purposes. Even so, those relations had to be structured in a way that was acceptable to, and protective of, His holy nature. And so, through the means of covenant, He established that relationship’s terms, conditions, and boundaries.

The question about God and emotions is more than academic—it has profound implications for faith and life. If God has emotion-like qualities, then He understands our pain, celebrates our joys, and responds to our prayers not as a cosmic AI device might, but as a personal being. There is a reason we are to call Him Father. This makes His divine compassion towards those who love Him reciprocally much more than only a metaphor; it becomes a source of comfort and hope for us all. On the other hand, if God is beyond emotion-like responses, Believers may still find solace in His unchanging nature, knowing that divine justice and mercy, nor His standards for us to live by and therefore how we are to relate to Him, are subject to fluctuation or serendipity.

Ultimately, whether one sees God’s emotions as literal, metaphorical, or analogical, the consistent thread across all the faith traditions that are Bible based, is that God is deeply invested in His creation, and at the zenith of His earthly creation are humans. And that, perhaps, is the most resonant and

wonderful truth of all. So, as we continue today in hearing these words of Malachai, let us always picture Yehoveh in this light.

Let's re-read the last few verses of his little book.

RE-READ MALACHAI 3:18 to end

Verse 18 said:

18 Then once again you will see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between the person who serves God and one that doesn't serve him.

This verse is in reference to the several previous verses that spoke of how God would deal with the evil-doers among His people, versus those He views as righteous. I'll phrase this differently: God's set apart people, Israel, currently consist of two groups: evil-doers and the righteous. The righteous were described in verse 16 as those who got together, discussed what Malachai said, believed and took to heart God's oracles, and acted to reform themselves. These are those whom God called God-fearers.

You'll notice that as I mentioned in the opening part of today's lesson that dealt with whether or not God has human-like emotions, His love and thus how He deals with humanity is determined individually, based on reciprocal love... and that is based purely on a relationship defined by covenant. Therefore, the human expression of love towards Him cannot be emotion based, but rather on obedience to the covenant terms and conditions. The wicked are dealt with in one way, the righteous in another. It's fine to say that God is a God of love who loves everyone. But, that is only in the broadest sense of expressing value and worth. While God says all humans... wicked or good... have value, His love that is expressed comes in the form of blessings, and blessings are reserved for those that He deems as righteous. And righteousness is based on observing the universal standard of morality that He ordained, which is most thoroughly explained and codified in the Law of Moses. In verse 18, we are reminded of that reality that flies in the face of almost all doctrines of Christendom, when we read: "the difference between

the righteous and the wicked, between the person who serves God and one that doesn't serve Him". We are righteous ONLY when we serve God... and that service MUST revolve around our obedience to Him. We are wicked when we do not serve Him... which revolves around our disobedience to Him. There is no other biblical standard.

Verse 19 says this:

CJB Malachi 3:19 ***For the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the proud and evildoers will be stubble; the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot, "and leave them neither root nor branch***

The emphatic nature of the opening of this verse is not reflected in most English translations (including the CJB). Rather, it is mostly portrayed as a rather matter-of-fact statement. In Hebrew we read **ki hinneh**. If we translate these words separately and literally, they say "for indeed" or "for behold". I think a nice, neat way to get the point across is the word "surely". Thus, "for surely the day is coming" is the proper sense of it and (I would argue) is the proper translation. The beginning word **ki** (for) is used in the causal form, meaning that something that came before it is what is causing what comes after it. We've read the cause, now verse 19 gives us the effect. There's a reason "the day" is coming, and it has already been well revealed that it is due to the Jews of Yehud... from commoner to priest... becoming evil-doers, with but a remnant remaining righteous God-fearers. I'll repeat that this is concerning only those who claim to be God-worshippers. This is not God dealing with the pagan world at the moment.

As always "the day" is but another term for The Day of Yehoveh or The Day of the Lord or The Day of Judgment. And clearly "is coming" means it is in some indefinite future... a week, a month, a year, a millennium... who knows? But, no matter *when* it occurs, it is 100% guaranteed to occur. It had been understood for centuries, already, that "the day" would bring with it both disaster and deliverance as concerned Israel, but essentially entirely disaster for the nations.

It is at this point in some Bibles that a 4th chapter begins. While it makes no sense at all to end a chapter and begin a new one here, nonetheless it causes no real harm as the words remain the same. The problem is that chapters have meaning in the Western world and thus what is being said in chapter 3 gets separated from what is being said in chapter 4. A different setting or a different topic is inferred when chapters change or advance. That is simply not what is happening here in Malachai.

We'll again look at the Hebrew because of the nuance that it adds. Whereas in the English we read: "burning like a furnace", in Hebrew it is **boer kattannur**. **Boer** means to burn up, or to set ablaze or to consume by fire. A **tannur** is a fixed or portable stove or oven. The most common usage of this term in Malachai's era and earlier, referred directly to an earthenware oven... sometimes called a fire-pot, used to bake bread. So, one is to imagine a great heat so hot that it can bake bread. The fuel for the fire is a different matter.

The fuel for heating the oven is the stubble. Thus, the proud and evil-doers will be treated as though they are that stubble. The picture to be imagined is of the heat generated for the refining oven, or the refiner's pot, that was spoken of back in verses 2 and 3 as coming from the human stubble of evil-doers. Remember that this is somewhat poetic, so we shouldn't take this perfectly literally. Thus, the refining process to bring purity to the Jews is metaphorically envisioned as the wicked being destroyed as though they were worthless stubble, used only in order to further perfect (refine) the righteous.

To destroy the wicked so thoroughly that they cannot return or reemerge is what is meant by destroying them root and branch. Not just that which shows and is apparent above the ground (the branches), but also what is unseen below the ground (the roots), will be burned up. Before we move to verse 20, note how these last couple of verses are extensions of verse 18 that explains "the difference between the wicked and the righteous" in the sense of their very different fates.

Verse 20 is:

CJB Malachi 3:20 *But to you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will break out leaping, like calves released from the stall.*

Verse 20 is all about the righteous... those who fear God's name. It is better to look at this verse more literally as we find it in the YLT.

YLT Malachi 4:2 *And risen to you, ye who fear My name, Hath the sun of righteousness -- and healing in its wings, And ye have gone forth, and have increased as calves of a stall.*

The opening word in Hebrew is: **wezareha**. It means to rise or shine and is used to speak about the actions of the sun. Next is **lakem yire shemi**. And, as the YLT says, it denotes that what is to rise is intended for those few who fear God's name. So, this rising object is meant to illuminate ONLY a certain group; in this case, it's the righteous. The object that is to rise is now identified as the sun of righteousness. This is the s-u-n sun, and not the s-o-n son. This use of the sun in this verse, that lights our planet by day, has caused a fair amount of disagreement in theologians. Is it really referring to that solar object, or it is just an expression that combines metaphor to speak of a dawning of a new day in God's creation, when as the day breaks a new era of righteousness (at least among the righteous) dawns. It should be noted that the Constantinian Christians of Rome used the title from Malachai "sun of righteousness" to apply to the pagan Sol Invictus... the victorious Sun God... which they commemorated on December 25th. I have spoken on a number of accounts how Constantinian Christianity immediately threw off the Jewish observances as the Bible called for, and replaced them with icons and observances many of which were taken from the Mithrain Sun God religion that was a highly popular cult in the Roman Empire. This is where, for instance, the entire idea of haloes came from (haloes were merely the sun disc of the Sun God religion placed behind the heads of those whom the Church deemed as holy).

But, now, what is the meaning of the next words that speak of this rising sun providing healing "in its wings"? This gets a bit unsettling, but I hope to explain it well enough so as to calm those feelings. The phrase about the

wings is **biknapēha**. The first part "**bi**" means "in". The noun form of the next word is **kanap** and it means wings. What makes this difficult is that we find such a thing as a sun with its wings nowhere else so explicitly stated in the Bible. So, what is this saying about? What were people envisioning? This phrase comes from pagan symbolism concerning the winged sun disc that is ancient Assyrian in its origin.

The Assyrian winged sun disc carried the idea of its wings representing the protective presence of its deity (represented as the sun), usually protective of the king. So, under the shadow of its wings (a phrase we find also in the Psalms), it is referring to that same idea.

CJB Psalm 17:8 *Protect me like the pupil of your eye, hide me in the shadow of your wings*

CJB Psalm 91:1-4 *You who live in the shelter of 'Elyon, who spend your nights in the shadow of Shaddai, ² who say to Yehoveh, "My refuge! My fortress! My God, in whom I trust!"- ³ he will rescue you from the trap of the hunter and from the plague of calamities; ⁴ he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his truth is a shield and protection.*

So, in Malachai and in the Psalms, while the intent is to speak about Yehoveh's divine protection over His people, the image of the wings of the Assyrian sun god is the source of this concept. While it is true that the Hebrews did not see God as having wings, nonetheless the pagan expression of divine protection being described as "being under a god's wings", and because in Assyrian mythology when that god's shadow that came from his outstretched wings passed over an earthling, it was an indication that you were under that god's protection. From there it morphed into the Hebrew vocabulary. It's just a great illustration of how false religious doctrines and symbols and practices can sneak into our faith, without our being much aware of it. And the Hebrews, from their inception, had always been drawn towards elements of pagan religions. So, it's no wonder we find these things in the Bible, spoken by even some of our greatest Bible heroes.

As a result of God arriving with His protection over the Jews of Yehud, they will emerge joyful and energetic as stall-fed calves. It has the sense of being carefree once liberated. The same Hebrew word that is often translated as stall-fed calves, also in other instances is translated as fattened calves. So, when we read of the fattened calf, this is what is being related. It is a calf that has been put into a stall, protected, cared for, and given plenty of food. So, part of the benefit of being under God's wings is abundance of food (something that the Jews of Yehud have struggled with ever since their return). And this abundance is what makes them leap around so joyfully.

Verse 21 is:

CJB Malachi 3:21 ***You will trample the wicked, they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I take action," says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot.***

God continues to make a contrast between the treatment of the wicked as opposed to the righteous. The righteous will finally trample upon the wicked. An accusation of the evil-doers that we dealt with earlier in Malachai was that the wicked seemed to always trample on the ashes of the righteous. But, this situation will be vividly reversed such that no one can deny it. The "ashes" are, of course, all that remains of the stubble that has been burned up to heat the oven of refining of the righteous.

Whenever we read in the Bible of something or someone being "under the soles of your feet", the picture is of people being taken captive. It is equal to the mental picture of a victor placing his foot on the neck of the defeated. When is this going to happen? On "the day". The Day of Judgment that is coming. The End Times. So, what the people of Malachai's day, and what we in the 21st century have to accept, is that more often than not the current condition on earth of the wicked seeming to triumph over the righteous will continue. This will not change until the Day of Yehoveh arrives. Therefore, Believers, we must always keep in mind that the happening of the End Times is going to impact both the righteous and the wicked. We'll all "feel the heat" so to speak. It is NOT going to be pleasant as we go through the process. The joy

and relief only come at the final moments of victory. The path to getting there is going to be painful, and many of us will not survive it.

The next verse is:

CJB Malachi 3:22 ***"Remember the Torah of Moshe my servant, which I enjoined on him at Horev, laws and rulings for all Isra'el.***

This statement at the end of Malachai precisely sends the same message as Yeshua will 5 centuries later in Matthew 5:17:

CJB Matthew 5:17 ***"Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.***

God didn't abolish or change the Torah in Malachai's time, and He didn't in Yeshua's time, nor has He now while the current heavens and earth still exist. What is the Torah of Moses? It's another expression for the Covenant of Moses. So, this once again reminds us all that it is a covenant relationship that we have with God, if we hope to have any relationship with Him at all. The Church loves to sing "Victory in Jesus". But this victory only occurs within the framework of covenant obedience; not instead of it. Walter Kaiser, Jr. said this about this passage in Malachai:

New Testament Believers must also be careful not to erect a giant wall of partition between the Law and the promises of God, for Paul asked whether the promises of God had, as a matter of fact, abolished the Law. Paul sprang back with a resounding negative; instead, faith had "established" the Law of God. Let us be careful not to pronounce more than three-fourths of God's revelation in the Bible obsolete.

Something positively astounding is said in Malachai 3:23.

CJB Malachi 3:23 ***Look, I will send to you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible Day of Yehoveh.***

This prophecy was partially fulfilled by John the Baptist. But, only partially. He came in the *spirit* of Elijah, but he was not Elijah. And, after his appearance, the terrible Day of Yehoveh did not happen. So, to understand prophecy about the End Times, in some ways we have to work backwards... we start with the future and go back towards the past. The milestone that we can use as the truest marker of history is The Day of the Lord. The world will be one way before it, and entirely different after it. All else that comes before is preparation for our final redemption. All that comes after is the culmination of that full redemption.

Elijah did not die, as all mankind is relegated to do, once. Rather, he was translated into some other place and form (and I dare not offer conjecture on what that is). Upon the Day of Yehoveh... that block of time that is the final stage of the world as we know it... God will send the true, real Elijah back as the harbinger of Yeshua's return, just as The Baptist was for His advent. And God said this was going to be a wonderful and joyful day... right? NO! The day will be terrible! It is terrible for all, just as the Prophets warn over and over again, and the Church either intentionally obfuscates or flat out teaches the opposite.

The ending verse to the Book of Malachai is this:

CJB Malachi 3:24 *He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers; otherwise I will come and strike the land with complete destruction.*

Some Bibles will add a few more words to that final verse. They are: ***[Look, I will send to you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible Day of ADONAI.] (Mal. 3:24 CJB)***

This is what is called a gloss. It is something that a Bible editor added many centuries ago. While some glosses actually do harm the meaning (they are more often than not a blatant attempt of the editor to include their own thoughts or interpretations as though they were inspired Scripture), here this is but something that has already been stated. So, it is rather harmless.

The meaning of verse 24 is that it is the coming of Elijah that will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and vice versa. The “fathers” don’t mean fathers of families. This is a rather standard term used for the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The children are the Israelites who sprang from them, and now are in rebellion against God and the covenants that were made with the Patriarchs. From Malachai’s perspective, these children were the evil-doers of his generation; those who have perverted the Hebrew faith, polluted it with manmade doctrine, and become disobedient to the Covenant of Moses. Thus, in a poetic sense, the Patriarchs are estranged from their children, the Israelites. The coming of Elijah fills in the giant canyon that currently separates them.

Elijah comes to call apostate Israel back to the true biblical Hebrew faith. It is that last opportunity before Israel gets separated once and for all time and eternity between the wicked and the righteous.

The accusation of the corrupted Jews of Yehud and their Priesthood was that to serve God is meaningless. The response is that eventually the righteous will not only be vindicated but they will also be rehabilitated... purified. The wicked however are NOT put into a rehabilitation program. They are simply judged as they are and destroyed. There is no in between.

We are all a product of the age in which we live. Moses lived in one set of circumstances, Malachai in another, we of the 21st century yet one more. But at each stage along the way Malachai teaches us that while we might mold ourselves to our generational circumstances, God suffers no such thing. God remains unchanged, uninfluenced by circumstances. His rules and commands are the same because His is the same. And, human nature never changes as well. The historical trend of humanization that kicks against the spiritual, assures that the idea that human goodness will someday rise up and save the world is the utmost folly. Bad fruit doesn’t turn itself into good fruit by its own will and efforts.

Each age has found excuse to try to remold and reshape God’s laws... the Natural Laws that were codified and expanded into the Law of Moses... to suit themselves, and in accordance with what was believed to be their advanced

wisdom and knowledge relative to previous generations. The Israel of the Bible is a prime example of this. Malachai, as the final of a long series of Prophets sent by God to warn and correct His people, explained (once again) that their humanization of God's laws had led them into a state of perversion and evil. And, the consequences are catastrophic. Yet, for those who will repent and return to sincere faith and obedience to His laws and commands, blessings can be restored.

This concludes our study of the Book of Malachai.