

George Philip Bible Readings

Book of Malachi

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1:1

When studying the prophets we must remember that they spoke first to their own generation and therefore, if we are to benefit fully from their words, we must set the historical context as far as it is possible to do so. This reminds us that we must always set our own Christian work and service into the context of the past and the future. No piece of work is an isolated island. It emerges from what others have done before and it gives way to what others will do later. Jesus said this to His disciples in John 4:37-38 and His words are both a corrective to pride and an encouragement to go on in service. We must grasp that, whatever the immediate appearances, the work we do is more significant than we realise because it is part of something greater, namely God's on-going purposes of redemption. The end of that work is total victory and for that reason, as Paul declares in 1 Cor. 15:58, we must never lose heart. However, at any given time, we must seek earnestly to understand what God is saying to us as individuals and to the church at large, and to do this we must often look back to trace the course of events leading up to the present situation. Sometimes we need to look back many years to find the root cause of what is happening to us now. This is so in the case of the message of Malachi. The setting of this prophecy is clear but the exact date is not. It belongs to the time of Nehemiah. To grasp the significance of this we must survey history and go back to 2 Chron. 36:15-16, the time when the sins of Judah had finally led to their downfall. Their land was invaded; Jerusalem and its Temple were ruined, and the people carried away captive to Babylon, as Jeremiah had warned would happen (Jer. 25:11-12). The Captivity is dated BC 586 and the return of the Jews from Babylon to their own land took place in three phases: under Zerubbabel in BC 536; under Ezra in BC 458; and under Nehemiah in BC 446. The setting of Malachi is therefore that of a restoration and a new beginning for the people and work of God.

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The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple and record how that work went forward in phases, not in an unbroken flow of success. The reasons for this are found both in the oppositions and distractions from the enemies of God's work, and also in the lethargy of God's own people. Throughout the whole period God sent His prophets to minister to the people, and these prophets were Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Their ministry was both challenging and encouraging as Hag. 1:1, 3-10; Zech. 2:8-9 and 4:6-10 make plain. At one stage Haggai had proclaimed with great encouragement that the glory of the latter house would be greater than that of the former (Hag. 2:9). It was a prophecy set over against all the discouragements of the immediate situation. When Malachi began to preach, the high hopes and eager consecration kindled by the other prophets' ministry had given way to an attitude of casualness and carelessness and a significant loss of vision. This can happen to individuals, to congregations and to whole denominations. And, when we lose our awareness of being called under God to build and to serve His holy purposes on earth, we soon begin to degenerate. Now, what were the reasons for this spiritual decline? Two areas can be suggested and, even though they may seem contradictory, they can both be present at the same time. The first reason may be that of difficulty: opposition, long-term hard work, lack of excitement and no obvious signs of quick success. Someone said recently that the younger generation of Christians gets tired very quickly. If that is so, there is little hope for the future, because building work is hard work and needs staying power. The second reason may be the complacency that comes with success. When a work is at its beginning everyone has to be committed and willing, because there are so few. But after some years, and an increase in numbers, many begin to grant themselves concessions, and commitment is qualified. That was the situation Malachi faced.

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The 'oracle' of the Word of the Lord is sometimes translated the 'burden' of the Word, and undoubtedly Malachi had a real burden for his people. The great need was to get their eyes and hearts back on to God, not just to be aware of all God had done for them, but also to be aware of the danger of their situation. One hundred years previously God had dismantled Jerusalem (which they thought would never happen) and He had reduced

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the 'work' to nothing because of the persistent sins of His own people. Malachi was well aware that God could do it again. We must face the realism of God. He is not prepared to trifle with His work that is set for the salvation of the lost. Think of Jesus' words to the complacent and backslidden spiritual leaders of His day (Matt. 21:43), and the words of the glorious King and Head of the church in Rev. 2:1-7. We must take God seriously, marvel at His realism, power and love, and learn to humble ourselves under His mighty hand (1 Pet. 5:6). Remember that it was by Babylon, a secular empire, that the Jews were led captive, and it was by Persia, another secular empire, that they were set free to return. God referred to Cyrus as His 'anointed' (Isa. 45:1-6). No matter how atheistic secular world powers may be, they are under God's power to do His will. It is God who raises and casts down empires (Dan. 4:17, 25), and we must never forget this. We, who call ourselves by the name of the Lord, must never think we are His only servants. God would often be poorly served if that were so! God is not dependent on us, but He gives us the privilege of serving Him, and with privilege comes responsibility. We must be in a right spiritual condition if we are to be of any use. This was Malachi's burden, as we shall see. But we must also see that it was in the context of political upheaval that the work of God went forward.

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1:1-5

God's work was languishing because God's people were not right and Malachi plunged right in with his message. He had to do this because the people were oblivious of how for they had slipped spiritually. They were shocked by the suggestion that they were unspiritual and a heartbreak to God. They resented the prophet's preaching and again and again protested, 'How can you say this?' (1; 2, 6,7; 2:17; 3:7,8,13). The pattern of what we now begin to read is first a statement or affirmation (1:1a), then a protest or question (1; 2b) and then an answer (1:2c). Today's passage begins with a declaration of God's unqualified, unbroken love for His people. Whatever else is true, this is true. Whatever the condition, indifference, backsliding and failure of His people, God has loved them. He does not change. God's everlasting love (Jer. 31:3) means He has loved, He loves now and He will go on loving. Nothing can make Him change and no matter the deep desperation of persistent sin, He cannot and will not give up His people (Hos. 11: 7-9). God declared His love but the people threw His affirmation back in His face saying, 'How can that be so?' They were petulant and discontented, perhaps sulking like children, because God had not given them everything they wanted right when they asked for it. In answer to their complaint God compared Esau and Jacob, and these words have caused distress to many because they speak of God 'hating'. But remember that God was here answering a people who were complaining about how He had treated them. There is no harsh personal animosity against profane Esau, but a strong reminder to Jacob's descendants to consider how God had dealt with them. We return to this theme tomorrow.

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1:1-5

God reminded the people that Jacob and Esau were twin brothers and that Esau, being the elder, had a strict entitlement to have special favour. But the experience of the descendants of the two brothers had shown very clearly that God had deliberately set His choice on Jacob, not because he was a better man (he was a deceiver), but simply because God had chosen him for blessing, unworthy though he was. This is something we must also keep in mind. Without any deserving on our part, God has chosen us in Christ, called us through the Gospel, made us His people and blessed us in a way that He has not blessed others. When we forget our privileges in the Gospel, it is then that we complain about God's dealings with us. But God called His people to consider just what their story had been. Right down through history Edom (Esau) had taken the side of Israel's enemies and had taken every opportunity to smite them when they were down. But God was mindful of this, as Obadiah 10ff. makes plain. Edom should not have hurt Israel and they would pay the price. Even now in Malachi's time while Jerusalem was rebuilt Edom was being laid waste, and even if Edom rebuilt God would knock him down again. But what of Jacob? His descendants had gone through sore discipline in years of captivity, but that suffering was different. It was the chastisement of a loving father leading His children to have a share in His holiness (Heb. 12:3-11). It was the discipline of God working on a sinful people to give them a future of life, blessing and service (Jer. 29:10-14). If they had paid more attention to what God had said to them through the

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preaching of that earlier prophet they would not have had such confusion in their life and experience. Now, says Malachi (1:5), stop being sorry for yourselves. Stop being preoccupied with yourselves. Look up and look out and begin to see the greatness of your God.

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1:6-10

This passage really runs right to the end of the chapter but we take it in two sections for the purpose of study. The main theme is that God's name was dishonoured because of His people. Their attitudes and actions were casting a shadow on the character and reputation of God (cf. Rom. 2:24). God challenged His people on the basis that even common humanity, let alone the law of God, requires a father and a master to be honoured by sons and servants. But Israel had not revered God nor bowed before His majesty. But are we not often guilty in the same way? Is there not a tendency in the name of 'liveliness not formality' to make our worship a 'happy clappy' affair rather than something approximating to the Biblical call to worship, to bow down, to kneel and to keep silence before the Lord? (Ps. 95:1-6; Habak. 2:20) Of course the words 'Father' and 'Master' imply the right to expect honour and the right to administer discipline, and often our reaction to rebuke is a sign of whether or not we are in spiritual health. Here the priests, speaking for all the people, protested at the suggestion that they were not spiritual, nor honourable in relation to God. Then, as now, people felt that ministers should be careful about what they said to and about the congregation. People like to feel that they are spiritual, and like best the sermons that confirm their own opinion about their own spirituality. They still take the attitude of Moses' critics, saying that the Lord has spoken through all His people (Num. 12:2). If this be so, why does God raise up prophets to be His spokesmen? There are those today who say, in the name of the Holy Spirit, that no such special spokesmen are needed. The Bible seems to disagree. Malachi's congregation demanded that the prophet should justify his sermon, so he proceeded to do so.

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1:6-10

The people Malachi spoke to were oblivious of their backsliding and spiritual degeneration. If you can, read Murray McCheyne's sermon on backsliding from the text, 'Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not' (Hos. 7:9 AV). When we walk in the light with God, we know we are right, but when we stray we cannot see (Ps. 36:9). What the people did not seem to see was that they were taking the way of easy religion and cheap service, offering to God what an earthly master would certainly refuse. They were offering as a sacrifice to God animals that were sick and going to die. It meant they could do the 'expected' thing to God without any real cost and, besides, it would spare them the cost of disposing of the animal's carcass. Can people really be as base and unfeeling as that? Yes. In many churches Christian people give only a small part of their money offerings to the congregation to which they owe so much spiritually. They prefer to give it elsewhere, sometimes because every gift is acknowledged and they get the credit, whereas the money in the offering bag is anonymous. Some Christians give all their eager time and service to Christian work outside the congregation that feeds, nurtures, guides and cares for them, and often their home congregation is hard pressed to find helpers to minister to people young and old who have no-one to show them the way to Christ. All who use and are blessed by these notes, what do you do for the congregation that does so much for you? This was God's complaint against His people through Malachi.

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1:11-14

If we look back to verses 9-10 we see that Malachi is teaching the people that if they come to God with right words but wrong lives God will neither receive them nor listen to them. Isaiah had said the same a long time previously (Isa. 1:12ff). In v.10 the longing for someone to shut the doors is a powerful declaration of the fact that to close down the House of God and to stop its services would be in the best interest of the worship of God and the proclamation of the Gospel. If our lives are wrong, then we deprive the gospel of its power as we handle it; we make the cross of Christ of no effect (1 Cor. 1:17). The burden of the prophet's heart is that God's people, by their cheap religion, were giving a wrong impression of God to those who were outside. What can the godless of our generation think when, to a great extent, the church is always bleating about lack of money and eager to go to any unbelieving source to get it? But does not the church sing, 'Take my life and let it be

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consecrated Lord to Thee,' and 'Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all'? But it is the doing of it, not the saying of it, that constitutes true spiritual religion (Jas.1:22ff). There is a clear suggestion in this section that the Gentiles, lacking in great measure both teaching and revelation, had a greater concept of God and His holiness than the Jews who had been so favoured and blessed. This is the theme taken up by Paul in Romans 2:12-24 and it deserves careful consideration. The danger for all of us is that our religion becomes an outward thing of mere ceremonial and conformity, just as it was with the Pharisees.

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1:11-14

Read these verses slowly and carefully and imagine yourself sitting in Malachi's congregation listening to the sermon. You would object to v.12 and would protest, 'We don't say that.' No, we do not say it, but actions speak louder than words. Of course, sometimes the things we do not do are greater sins than what we actually do that is wrong. When we come to v.13 we are dealing with attitudes, especially towards holy things and spiritual duties. God charges His people with a spirit of weariness, the attitude expressed in the words, 'I suppose I had better do it' Think of the dedication, drive and enthusiasm that some have for sport, music, hobbies, careers and promotion. There may be excuse for some of those people because they make no profession of Christian faith at all and they must have something to live for. But when people claim to be God's people, and claim to have the light of life, and claim to know and to live by the truth, and then they cheat God (14), what can be said about them? Is that kind of religion valid? The Jews knew full well the strict rules about sacrifices. They were laid down in God's Law, which they claimed was their guide and standard. They knew that an animal mauled by another was not fit for human consumption (Ex. 22:31) and yet they would offer it to God. Something has gone very far wrong when we lapse into this kind of attitude. In our day we need to recover the attitude of an older generation who, if they belonged to Christ's church, had a glorious sense of duty, loyalty and dependability. If they did any work for God then it had to be the best. This is true worship, giving to God the best of our time, interest, love and enthusiasm. Why should we give less?

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2:1-4

In 1:10 the prophet had challenged the people and he now challenges the priests with their failure to lead the people in the ways of God. But we must note the final declaration of the previous chapter which declares the greatness of God, and which emphasises godly fear that must mark everyone's dealings with Him. We must take God seriously, but we must also learn to marvel that this great and holy God loves us with amazing love that sent His only Son to the death of the Cross (Rom.5:6; 8:32; 1 John 3:1-3). It is only as we see and know and feel the love that God has for us (1 John 4:16-19) that we begin to move away from cold duty to warm response and willing service. Now, it is in this frame of mind and heart that we begin to be aware of the privilege of service and of the responsibility that it brings. If God places us in a position of leadership over His people who are precious to Him, He will not hold us guiltless if we neglect that people and cause them to stumble. We will look tomorrow at some of the many Scriptures which speak of this and of the possibility of being laid aside as of no further use to God, disqualified in terms of reward (1 Cor: 9:24-27). Today we note the warning God gives that He will 'curse the blessings' of the priests, whether material or spiritual blessings, and they will recoil on them, not simply in terms of losing them but of making them worse off than at the beginning. That in itself is a solemn warning about unfaithfulness but God goes on to warn the priests that by their own unfaithfulness they were imperilling the future of their children after them. Those of us who have children or who work with children must do right by God even if only for the children's sake, teaching them and showing them an example, so that after we are gone, or after they are grown up and away from us, the godly and gracious influence will still do them good.

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2:1-4

We consider Scripture references in connection with yesterday's serious lesson and we do well to begin with Jesus' words about those who cause His little ones to sin (Lk. 17:1-2). In Ezekiel 34:1-10 we find God speaking

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sternly against the false shepherds who are more concerned with looking after themselves than God's sheep. Paul in 1 Cor. 4: 1-2 speaks of the faithfulness required of those who are entrusted with the stewardship of the Gospel, and in 2 Cor. 4:1-3 he speaks of the need to put away from our lives anything wrong or underhand lest these things, which can be hidden from view, act as a veil or a curtain to hide Christ from those who need Him. In 1 Pet 5:1-5 elders in particular are called to be examples to the flock and so to be trustworthy shepherds of God's precious people. We need to be able to exhort people to follow our example and way of life as we follow Christ (Phil. 3:17; 1 Cor. 11:1). In Malachi, God says that if the priests do not lay this to heart He will put them out of His presence (3). God can close the windows of heaven as well as open them (Mal. 3:10). God can, and does at times, send a famine of the Word (Amos 8:11ff.) as well as sending spiritual manna from heaven, Sometimes doing without food for a spell does wonders for our appetite and makes us more appreciative than we have ever been before of the rich spiritual diet we have enjoyed and taken for granted.

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2:5-7

Here is a picture of a true minister or servant of God. He stands in relation to God under a covenant of life and peace given to him as a blessing to enjoy to the full. God is no man's debtor and Jesus promised great blessings and compensations to those who sacrificed in order to follow and serve Him (Matt, 19;29). It is in receipt of God's blessing that the prophet or minister ministers life and peace to others, all the while standing in awe of God's name. It is manifest that this servant thinks well of his Master. It is evident in his words and tone and way of life. His business is to honour and glorify God in everything (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17). There is a practical element here in respect of guidance, which so many find difficult. If we can do it to the glory of God then it is right! But there is also here the 'secret' of fruitful service. This servant walked with God., keeping close company with God, with nothing to disturb the peace of fellowship and one-ness with God. This is the heart of Christian life and service: being right with God in ourselves We cannot really lead others further on than we have gone ourselves That is the essence of 'leading': we go first; and a godly example is both a challenge and an encouragement to others. Think of the testimony of three great figures in Scripture. Samuel, who single-handed turned the nation back to God in his time, said to the people, 'Testify against me, (1 Sam. 12:1-5). It was said of Daniel in the land of Babylon where the atmosphere was pagan that no fault could be found against him except because of his faithfulness to God (Dan. 6:3-5). And that was said by his enemies not his friends. Lastly we think of our Lord's own words, 'The prince of this world comes and has no power, or hold over Me.... Can any of you convict Me of sin? (John 14:30; John 8:46).

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2:5-7

We live in a generation when even Christians seem to have devalued going to church, sharing in worship and attending eagerly and earnestly on the preaching of God's Word. Listening to the sermon is often devalued or even despised and there is far more interest in getting involved in activity than in hearing what God is saying. Many Christians do not really have a positive attitude at all to church going and do not seem to be aware that when God's Word is being preached they are at the heart of God's activity. It pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save (1 Cor; 1:21 AV). It is by what is preached that faith comes (Rom. 10:14-17). And Jesus made it plain that we must take good heed to the attitude with which we listen (Lk. 8:18) because the hearing and receiving of the Word does not benefit us automatically (Heb. 4:1-2). But we must note here also the emphasis on true ministry being that of teaching and instruction: expounding the truth, guarding the truth, and keeping back nothing of the truth (Acts 20:20 27; 1 Tim. 6:20; This was a necessary counsel in Malachi's day because the emphasis was sacramental. The people made it their business to keep the ritual of services going, and in our own day we must guard against the tendency to make the Communion Table central rather than the pulpit. Put evangelically speaking we must also guard against that kind of preaching that is aimed at the emotions rather than at the mind, heart and will. Every preacher must be the messenger of the Lord to give the people what they need. not what they may want.

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2:8-9

These two verses may well give us the explanation on why ministers and their ministry are devalued, even despised, and patronised in our own day and generation, On the one hand, whether fairly or not, people outside as well as inside the church set standards for, and have high expectations of, those who are set apart and who claim to be ministers of God. But when such ministers fail to speak God's Word in its fulness (although they believe it in their hearts) and when they reduce the challenge and glory of the Gospel to a bland, innocuous appeal to 'do good', then they are despised and ignored. The people of the world expect Communists, Socialists, Conservatives and others to be bold in declaring their commitment to their creed, however unacceptable the others may find it. The world expects football fans to travel great distances to support and to cheer on their favourite club and they are not surprised when a team is jeered off the field because they have failed to come up to expectation. But somehow, the world no longer expects ministers (and other Christians) to be committed and enthusiastic like that. They are discredited, and God has had a hand in their humiliation (9). This does not mean that the world will accept and admire us if we stand firm by God's truth. The natural man does not find himself disposed to accept the things of God. But at least in the end of the day, we can stand before God and claim that we have been true to the truth and that we have not kept back the truth in order to be thought well of. But there is more than personal guilt involved. When a minister is unfaithful to the truth he causes many to stumble, leaving them in the dark with no knowledge of how to make their way to God. The meaning of 'violating the covenant' seems to be that if ministers behave in such a way that is contrary to God, what hope is there for the people.

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2:8-9

Pause to consider the relationship between ministers and their congregations. There is danger in formality, in ecclesiastical professionalism, and aloofness on both sides. But there is also a danger in the wrong kind of informality and chumminess, and this may be the greater danger in days to come since there is now a wrong understanding of the 'priesthood of all believers.' That phrase does not mean we are all the same in our calling and therefore do not need 'ministers' or 'priests'. It means we all have free access into the presence of God without the intermediary of a human priest. We enter in Jesus' name. But God gives His ministers and ministry to His church, and in the New Testament Paul urged that even a young minister should be received in fear and trembling (2 Cor. 7:15; cf. Heb. 13:17). Commenting on the verse in Corinthians James Denney refers to John Calvin having said that this is the true way to receive ministers of Christ Denney goes on, 'Sometimes with the most innocent intention, the whole situation is changed, and the minister, though received with the utmost courtesy and kindness, is not received with fear and trembling at all. Partly through his own fault, and partly through the fault of others, he ceases to be the representative of anything that inspires reverence, or excites to conscientious earnestness of conduct. If, under these circumstances, he continues to be kindly treated, he is apt to end in being, not the pastor, but the pet lamb of his flock. In apostolic times there was no danger of this, but modern ministers and modern congregations have sometimes thrown away all the possibilities of good in their mutual relations by disregarding it. The affection which they ought to have to each other is Christian, not merely natural; controlled by spiritual ideas and purposes, and not a matter of ordinary good feeling; and where this is for gotten, all is lost.' This will not make anyone idolise a minister, but it should make Christians pray for their ministers and treat them as they should.

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2:10-12

Malachi has challenged the priests and we all know that ministers are a good and convenient target. If you do not like the sermon think of something about the preacher you can criticise and make your escape that way! But now the prophet challenged the people, making plain that what we are in our secret, and practical dealing with God determines our usefulness in service. The area of life that is now examined is that of relationships and it is here that many get confused to such an extent that their service for God is limited, sidetracked and even stopped. The first area of relationships examined is that of the family of God. We who have believed and who worship together are not just a collection of individuals who gather at set times for religious exercises. We are a family-fellowship to which we belong by spiritual birth, and therefore the bonds that bind us together are the

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basic ones of love, loyalty and responsibility. We are, and we must be, committed to the family and to each other and we must in that family learn to love, to care for, and to minister to each other. If we do not learn to do this in the congregation we belong to, there is little hope of our being able to show God's love and grace to those who are outside. Think of these Scriptures: We are our brother's keeper (Gen. 4:9). Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2). We are all one in Christ (Gal. 3:28) and must make it our business to maintain this kind of unity (Eph. 4:3). We have been brought near to God and to one another (Eph. 2: 13,19) , and we should delight to commit ourselves to one another in some duly constituted congregation. We must not be mere passengers taking all the privileges and refusing the responsibilities. If we worship and work together we will grow in grace.

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2:10-12

Malachi probes deeply. He speaks of being faithless to one another in terms of disregarding and neglecting one another and so making less that spiritual covenant that binds us together. There is much in Scripture about wrong behaviour spoiling things for God. In the light of what was said yesterday about loving and caring within the spiritual family, we need to remind ourselves that love has to be expressed in the right way, at the right time and to the right people. A letter will not do if a personal conversation was needed. Praying for someone is no use if we should have spoken to them. Showing care to one or two to whom we may be attracted is no use if someone else is made to feel left out. Of course, real love and care will sometimes have to be strict and will refuse to be grasped and manipulated by greedy desire. This leads on to the consideration of relationships (11), the particular area being that of what we call mixed marriages. This was something which all along had undermined Israel's spiritual life and robbed them of dynamic in service. Most ministers could testify to the fact that they have many married women in their congregations who are faithful and dependable but whose husbands have no interest whatever in church or spiritual things. Sometimes the explanation is that rather than remain unmarried, they married men who simply did not share their faith. Theirs is a divided home and all too often the children of such marriages grow up to be decent pagans. Here it was the men who went wrong. They took into their lives in marriage the 'daughter' of a foreign god, introducing an element of life quite contrary to the God of Israel, and it does not take long to work havoc. Read 1 Kings 11:1-8; 16:29-33; Neh.13. 23-28 (where one of the defaulters was in the ministry), and think well about your relationships.

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2:10-12

Following yesterday's references read Paul's words in 1 Cor. 6:14-18. Now consider Malachi's words in v.12 where he says so clearly that these wrong relationships have no future as far as God's blessing and service are concerned. Indeed, the prophet prays that this wrong thing and these wrong people might be removed, taken out of the context of the life and work of God's people, because they would be a running sore of infection and a constant source of distraction. This is realism. How often we find Christians in wrong relationships saying when challenged about it, 'My friend married a non-Christian and he has since been converted. It could be the same with me.' It could be. But the happy outcome is the exception. How important it is that young Christians should be clear about this Biblical principle of relationships. How important it is that two Christians should seek and discern God's will before they get emotionally and romantically involved. Once a fellow and girl are in each other's arms, they may pray for guidance about their relationship but they are in no condition to receive guidance. They have assumed guidance. Their actions declare that they believe most surely that God has given them to each other. The complications have begun. Their hearts are fixed on their relationship and their 'uncertainty' about it. They are no longer fixed on God nor are they heart-free to serve Him in His perfect will, because they no longer know what God's will is. But we need to say that there are associations as well as relationships that should have no place in the life of a Christian because they qualify spiritual commitment and conceal Christian witness. How we need to 'earn to wait upon God, because He is never late or uncertain; and to seek His sweet and peaceful seal of approval on all we plan.

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2:13-16

The theme of relationships continues and it speaks of many tears covering God's altar and deep emotion being expressed. This can be understood in two ways. It may refer to people gathering for worship in God's House and stirring up emotion as if 'getting worked up' was the equivalent of being 'spiritual'. The people are aware that God's blessing was not with them as it had once been, but they had to learn that neither tears of emotion nor Hallelujahs of praise were a substitute for being right with God. On the other hand the tears may be those of wives divorced and put away by Jewish men who wanted more convenient and more profitable marriages with the women of the land who were very possibly daughters of wealthy Samaritans and who would not be prepared to be 'secondary' wives. What we are dealing with is the easy and harsh breaking of love relationships with no regard for the vows of love and loyalty once made before God.. Of course the attractions of the other woman need not be financial. But when someone sees and desires and says, 'I want,' all other considerations, including the well-being of children of a marriage, are simply brushed aside. Note how in v.14 the wife is spoken of as a companion or partner as well as a wife, and some commentators suggest that it refers to Malachi who was married young and whose marriage lasted. A God-given marriage is a God-blessed marriage and it gets better and grows sweeter and fuller as the years go past. This is to be expected because God does not plan abortive relationships. He brings the man and the woman together so that they will complement each other, standing over against each other in the perfect will of God and in human love, enabling each other to be and to become their true and full selves. Why should any Christian ever settle for anything less? (Gen. 2:18, 22).

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2:13-16

There is a tendency these days to sit lightly to vows and promises and even Christians can lapse into this wrong attitude. Vows are meant to be kept (Eccles. 5:1-6) and in the realm of marriage vows (and indeed ordination vows and membership vows) God is the witness to what is promised and He will not hold us guiltless if we break them (Gen. 31:50). In the marriage vow there is a commitment of trust, and to be unfaithful to one who has trusted you is a solemn sin which God hates. God testifies here that He hates divorce because it involves violence and hurt and has an effect on children far beyond anything that can be calculated. This meaning and message is clear, no matter how many and varied translations there are of v.16. After all, it is only as we stand by and live by the revealed truth of God that we can possibly commend the God of truth and His way of life to our children (Deut. 11:18-25). Divorce, violence and faithlessness to God and to men and women, are brought very close together in this passage. The principle applies not only to wives but to any girl whose deep feelings are awakened by someone who then casts her off because another more exciting person or thing has come on the scene. It is easy to say when a relationship starts, 'I'm sure it is of God.' Later on it is easy to say, 'I'm sure the Lord is saying to stop.' But the two parties seldom reach that agreement at the same time or with the same cost. What people have to face up to is that the relationship should not have started or developed in the first place. Our love affairs have to be Christian and that is more than just saying both must be believers. God hates putting away (divorce). God is also the best matchmaker. Take heed, is Malachi's counsel at the end of our passage

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2:17

Words can mean a lot or very little. Strongly expressed words, especially religious ones, can signify uncertainty or even guilt. Shakespeare was right on target when he said, 'Me thinks he doth protest too much.' God is not taken in by a flow of religious words, even when they are biblical and sound spiritual. Jesus said that, about long prayers (Matt. 6:5-8). But words can be very significant and at times it is vital to put what we think and feel into words, especially when we are dealing with God and seeking to make our way back to Him (Hos. 14:1-3; Heb.13:15). What we must do is to make sure that we speak words of faith, not cynicism and unbelief, and it is the resentful cynicism of the people that is being rebuked here. Snide comments, discontent, complaint and criticism are never a good sign. Like all the other things spoken of in this chapter they indicate a people's backsliding. What the people were complaining about was what they considered to be the absence of God's justice. In their own eyes they had done all that could be expected but God had failed to vindicate them. God had let them down. Remember, these are the people who were offering sick animals for sacrifice and playing

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fast and loose with relationships. If it was justice they wanted, it would not be pleasant for them. These were the people who excused their own wrongs and in practical terms were saying evil was permissible. They were saying that it was not their fault that things were bad. After all, God had promised through Haggai and Zechariah that wonderful things were to come and they had not happened (Zech. 8:3-8; Hag. 2:6-9). They wanted revival. They wanted God to act and manifest His power. They were discouraged. But were they ready for God? That is a question for all of us.

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3:1-4

God tells His people to take good notice because He is about to come to His Temple, and therefore they had better prepare for the confrontation. But we must keep in mind that in any given situation where the work of God has dried up because the people of God are adrift from God, there is always a remnant of genuine, dedicated people who are truly burdened for the good of the work and for its reviving. Such people may well be discouraged but they are neither rebellious nor complacent. They are, as far as they know their own hearts, looking for God and longing for Him to manifest His power. Such persons need encouragement, just as much as the complacent and complaining need rebuke and challenge. God speaks to all classes and conditions when He says He is sending His messenger to prepare the way for His coming amongst them in power. But what is the use of a messenger if he is not listened to? Sometimes God speaks very loudly and clearly but, because people have discounted or devalued the messenger, they do not hear what God is saying. Preaching and listening are not a game nor a diversion, and whether we are attending on God's Word in daily notes or in Sunday sermons, we should be alive to the fact that God is speaking to us. What is He saying here? God is calling His people to prepare for His arrival amongst them. When we are expecting visitors we get ready. When the visitor is an important one, someone we hope will think well of us, we prepare rigorously and in plenty of time. If we are meeting someone who is important to us we take pains to be at our best. Now, if we take this attitude on a human level, how much more should we be like this in our dealings with God! When as individuals or churches we complain that God is not manifesting His power nor is He answering our prayers, why do we assume so quickly that we are ready for God?

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3:1-4

God says to His people that when preparations are ready, and He is ready, then He will come to His Temple in a way that will be manifest and obvious. Note how it is emphasised that it is God's Temple; it is not theirs; they are only custodians. But what will God find when He comes? When Jesus, in due time, came to the Temple in Jerusalem He was anything but pleased with what He found (Mark 11:15-18). It may well have been that in Malachi's day the people had never got round to thinking that God would be anything but pleased with them. That kind of complacency is still with us. We, like the Jews of old, are good at seeing and criticising the manifest faults of worldly, godless people who never darken the door of a church. But what of us who claim to be God's people, privileged and blessed by His grace? We are taught in the New Testament that our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and that the church is built as a Temple for the living God where holy sacrifices will be offered (1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:20-22). What does God find when He comes? He does not look for perfection, but He does look for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matt. 5:6). Now, if there is reference here to a remnant of faith within a backslidden people, then however solemn these words are, they bring a message of hope. When we long for the reviving of Christ's church; when we grieve over the complacency of the church and over the worldliness that has concealed the gospel; when we are burdened by the denials of the Gospel that come from the public utterances of ministers and elders, we begin to long that, no matter the cost, God will come to cleanse and to revive. But to pray for revival is not the same as to hope for success. We must ask God to remember mercy in the midst of His necessary anger (Hab. 3:2).

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3:1-4

God messenger here was Malachi. But in Matt 11:7-15 and Mark 1:1-8 the prophet's words are applied to John the Baptist, and John's own words (John 1:19-23) are linked with this promise in Malachi. The Jews looked for

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the forerunner believing he would usher in the day that would solve all their problems and bring them blessing. They had no doubt that the One who would work this great salvation for them was Messiah, the Lord, the messenger of the covenant. As Heb. 12:24 makes plain the reference is to Jesus. It can be to no other. But the coming of the Lord, whether at the beginning of the New Testament era, or at the end of the age, or at any time in between when God works significantly, the purpose is to refine and purify God's own people. Both the soap and the fire have this objective in view. This speaks of God's concern for the purity and holiness of His people. He begins with those who are at the heart of the work and worship of the Temple, the sons of Levi. That is where the work always starts (1 Pet, 4:17). We must not look for revival starting among the godless of society, nor among casual Christians who choose to take their place at the edge or perimeter of the work. Revival is the revival of God's people in love, holiness and obedience, and when the heart of the work is right the impact will be known throughout the body. It is to this end that the refiner works. He concentrates all his attention on the metal because He sets value on it. He governs the heat of the fire, and we must remember this when trials are fierce. He continues His set task of purifying the metal until the dross is burned away and He can see His face reflected in the metal. Then it is at its highest value and usefulness. 'Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.' But that takes refining fire. Or, to change the metaphor, it needs the pruning knife John 15:1- 2).

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3:5

This is a very important verse especially if we link it with the previous one. When God's people are purified and begin again to be holy unto the Lord in their own persons, then the worship and service of the sanctuary are pleasing to the Lord. Malachi seems to be pointing back to the best of Israel's days, possibly as far back as Moses (4). In today's verse the prophet seems to go on to declare that when God's people are right, then the evils in society will be dealt with by God's direct intervention. The tendency nowadays, even in the evangelical church, is to get things the wrong way round. People tend to regard as priorities the obvious social evils, seeking to tackle them without going to the root of the matter which is spiritual. This is a tremendous challenge to the church and should drive us all to our knees in prayer. Look at the grim list of the evils of society in this one verse. These are the things that begin to blight the lives of men and women when the spiritual things of life are ignored and denied. When there is no fear of God (Ps. 36:1) and no vision of the judgment of God, the people cast off restraint (Prov. 29:18). It is always so. And, human nature being what it is, fallen and rapacious, these evils cannot and will not be remedied by legislation nor by sentimental, humanistic ideology. Nothing but God's salvation can make people new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), born again of the Spirit (John 1:12- 13; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23) to live in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4). To be right with God is what makes us channels of God's gracious power to others. But channels must be clear and clean, and it is to this end that God deals with us in and through the sore experiences of life. If our light is dim, society gropes in the dark.

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3:6-12

These verses require close study, are full of instruction and challenge, and speak basically of the God of love and patience. We must never think that the sternness of God and His anger against sin are a denial of His love or of His desire to bless. But He calls for repentance and for evidence of a change of heart. He cannot bless us if we hold on to our sins, nor can He go with us in happy fellowship if we are determined to walk in disobedience and carelessness. God does not change (6), and His opposition to and judgment of what has been spoken of in the previous verse have been His constant attitude down through the generations. He is always the God who will not look upon sin (Hab. 1:13) and who comes down among people to examine, investigate and to bring to right and necessary judgment (Gem. 18:20-21). But the unchanging and unvariable character of God (Jas. 1:17) has an application to His own people. Even though they have constantly shown the character of Jacob in his wilfulness and duplicity, God has not cast them off. God has put up with them, though vexed by their proud wilfulness, disobedience and backsliding, and they have not been destroyed. In spite of everything, His love has refused to give them up and He refuses to depart from His plans to bless them and to use them. He is the God who forgives seventy times seven (Matt. 18:21- 22) and He calls from the depth of His loving heart for His people to return to Him (7). It is almost unbelievable, but God wants to renew fellowship with them. He wants to return to the holy and happy companionship that once existed between them; with sin and failure put

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right away so that these can cast no shadow and steal no blessing. This is always the call of the Father of every prodigal. This is the word of Jesus to every burdened soul (Matt. 11:28-30).

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3:6-12

Two specific thoughts follow on from the close of yesterday's reading, It seems almost wrong to think of God pleading with His backslidden people to come back to Him. It is almost as if God were in the wrong. It is the people who should be pleading for restoration. But then, at the end of v.5, we see that the people were rather shocked by the suggestion that they were in fact in the wrong. They were somewhat hurt that God should suggest that they had spiritual defects. It is a terrible thing when God's own people have lost all sense of sin and shame. But this is the awful thing about backsliding, as we have observed so often in various daily notes: the backslider is unaware of his condition. He 'feels' all right. He 'feels' in fellowship with God. He 'feels' no cause for alarm as to his condition. Think of how Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Lk. 19:41-44), grieving because they did not see their need. Think of how God again and again in the Old Testament pleaded with His people to say why they were so unresponsive and so offhanded with Him (Isa. 1:2-3; Mic, 6:1-5). The insensitivity of the people here was so deep-seated that God had to take them to task in a most direct way and in very blunt language. He challenged the people and accused them of stealing from Him. The people were shocked by such strong and indelicate language. No doubt they protested that in hard times they gave what they could afford, or what they could spare. But is that the way to deal with God, whether it be in respect of money or of time? What do tithes and offerings signify? They are tokens of a people glad to be right with God; a people giving to God what is His by right: a people giving to God with glad love and not cold duty; and a people who acknowledge by their actions that all they have and are belongs to God.

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3:6-12

We do well to ponder whether in church we give to God the tithes and offerings worthy of His name. We sing, 'Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee. ... Take my moments and my days ... Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold,' and it is right so to sing. But, do we in practical terms accept and live by the principle that all we are and have belongs to God by right? We are not our own in any sense for we are bought with a price (1 Cor.6:19-20). We are called by God's mercies to present our bodies as a living sacrifice which is our reasonable service (Rom, 12:1-2). We sing that if the whole realm of nature was ours to give, even that would be too small an offering in view of the love of God shown in the wondrous Cross. But this must be practical. Whether it is in terms of money, time or energy, the principle of tithing is clear: the first is for God. Down through the generations many Christians have worked on the basis of tithing in terms of their Christian giving. Some calculate on the basis of their gross income and make that the minimum level of their giving. Some calculate after deduction of tax and national insurance, but some say '[that is](#) giving Caesar the first bite of the cherry'. Some even deduct a variety of other 'expenses' before considering what the Lord's tithe is. But should God come so far down on the list? On the other hand, does God find pleasure in grudging gifts? We are told in 2 Cor.9:7 that the Lord loves a cheerful (literally, hilarious) giver, and we have the account in Exodus 36:2-7 of a time when the people of God had to be restrained in their offerings because there was too much being given. Perhaps they were far more aware of the glory of salvation and deliverance than we are. This needs thinking about.

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3:6-12

Doing right by God is at the heart of Christian life and service. Two lessons are clearly stated. When God's storehouse lacks supplies it is an indication that something is far wrong spiritually. That is a lesson our own denomination needs to learn, and it needs to be learned by every society and organisation engaged in Christian work. The second lesson requires us to recognise that the tithes and offerings were specifically for the support of the Priests and Levites, and for the help of the needy (Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:21-24; Deut. 14:28-29). It is clear from Neh. 13:10-13 that after the return from captivity and in the ongoing building of Temple and city, that this provision for God's 'full-time' workers had been neglected. In today's passage (v.8-9) God identifies

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Himself with His neglected servants, and makes plain that withholding from them is withholding from Him, and therein is the explanation of lack of blessing. Since the writer of these notes is well provided for by his congregation he feels entitled to challenge congregations who do not deal rightly with their ministers, requiring them to live on a lower level than others in the fellowship and expecting them not to complain. In like manner a challenge is given to all missionary societies who accept candidates and send them out but do not take any real responsibility for their maintenance. What can God think of the kind of 'spirituality' that records in a missionary magazine, 'We praise God that this month we were able to send our missionaries 60% of their allowance.' Now read v.10-12 and see how God promises blessing (10), protection (11) and witness (12) as a direct consequence of His people's practical dedication. When the heart of the church is right with God there will be no lack in its on-going work.

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3:6-12

We have spent several days on these few verses but have used them in conjunction with many other Scripture references so our studies should not have been dull or repetitive. If any feel they have been so, then read the whole of 2 Cor. 8-9, two chapters that deal with the Christian's duty of handling money, without actually mentioning specific sums. Then consider v.10b of today's passage which was quoted by the late Miss Evelyn Sloan, a gracious and godly lady, as her prayer for the present ministry when it began in October 1956. In so many ways that prayer has been answered because God has blessed us, and every good thing that we have enjoyed and rejoiced in has come from Him. Without God's ever fresh blessing, with its life-giving power and sweet refreshing grace, a church is merely a religious institution which is no help to anyone. But when a church is more concerned with the honour of the Lord than with its own reputation, and when the Lord's people give themselves in glad and sweet surrender, then God sets Himself to protect, preserve and further that work. He will provide for its needs, and by His presence among His people there will be a 'spirit', the Holy Spirit, who will draw people in to share in God goodness. Without any human intervention people will come and will say, 'God is in this place.' They will find salvation and a spiritual home in which they can put down roots. All of us need to think fresh thoughts about our churches. Do we go there to meet with God? Are we sure He will be there to meet with us? Is He pleased with us, or is His heart grieved by our cold self-preoccupation? He has loved us unreservedly. He wants that kind of response from us. Go finally to the familiar words in 2 Chron. 7:12-15. How we need God's powers to heal our land!

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3:13-15

God presses home His rebuke by indicating that He has been listening to the unguarded conversations of at least some of His people. When we come to v.16 we shall see that there was still a remnant of true faith within the nation. But here, the speech of many indicated not only their disappointment with God but also their disillusionment. When things do not work out as we hope or wish, and when circumstances begin to press in on us, leading our lives in a direction we have not desired or expected, it is all too easy to become bitter in spirit. This is what afflicted Israel so constantly in earlier days when they murmured and complained and began to despise 'this manna' as they called it (Num.11:6). Now, in Malachi's days, when the restoration of a glorious work and Temple had not come as easily as they had hoped, and when the way was costly, the people felt sorry for themselves. They did not count it a privilege to suffer for the works sake (Acts 5:40-42). They did not rejoice in tribulation (Rom. 5:1-5). They did not see their faith being purified for their long-term good (1 Pet. 1:6-7). And consequently they did not reap the benefits of God's gracious discipline. They went sour and said, 'What's the use of serving God and trying to be good?' Their demoralisation is seen in their attitude in v.15. They said it was the arrogant not the meek who were blessed by God; that evildoers prospered by their wickedness; and that God was indifferent. Of course, their theology should have corrected their wrong feelings, but they had not taken time to think of the doctrine of God, who is good and nothing but good to His people (Ps. 119:68). When minds are confused, feelings hurt and spirits bitter there is only one thing to do: go to God. Read Psalm 73!

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3:16-18

These verses highlight something we mentioned in an earlier note, something we tend to forget when the church situation is dark and beset with many problems. There is a remnant of faith, men and women who are graciously and doggedly alive to God in spite of all that is happening. It is on such people that the present work of God depends and they are the hope for the future. These people may have held firm to faith and hope all through the bad spell, never thinking of becoming a 'break-away' group. Having held firm, they possibly found now that others who had received and responded to God's rebuke were joining with them in a new seeking after God. This is great encouragement to faithful souls who are holding fast in situations that are spiritually dead. When the present ministry in Sandyford began there were a few (only a very few) who knew what conversion meant and who had a desire for Bible study and prayer, and they formed the nucleus of the work that has gone on until now. What if they had lost heart and had departed to find an easier life in a 'safe' evangelical church? The contemporary cry for separation from so-called compromised denominations is hard to justify from church history and biblical experience. There may be a time when a church is no longer a church (cf. Rev. 2:5; 3:14-16), when the Spirit of God has departed, and then may be the time to shake the dust from our feet. But we must not jump to conclusions. As these notes are being typed, shoots of new green life are appearing in the garden in spite of the hard, harsh and prolonged winter. We must never underestimate God. The remnant here is described as those who feared the Lord. Their hearts and eyes were fixed on God, not on man or circumstances (2 Chron. 20:1-17). That is the lesson for today.

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3:16-18

To fear God does not mean that we are afraid of God, although if we are doing wrong then the thought of God should disturb us. The fear of the Lord is good and clean (Ps. 19:9); it delivers from the fear of man (Prov. 29:25) and it brings depth, reverence, stability and peace to mind and heart, no matter the circumstances. This godly fear is linked in our passage with two things. These people thought about God's name, that is they pondered God's character as it had been revealed to them by their own Scriptures, by the preaching of the prophets and by their own experience of His dealings with them. Increasingly they were learning what God is like and being made to think of His sure promises; and we need to do the same. Our God never changes (Jas., 1:17); He cannot lie (Heb. 6:18); He is faithful and His mercies are new every morning (Lam. 3:22-23); He has loved us with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3); and He refuses to give us up (Hos. 11:8-9); and He is not ashamed to be our God (Heb. 11:16). What is His name? He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the God of creation, providence and redemption; the all-sufficient God (El Shaddai) (Gen. 17:1); the Lord our righteousness who hitherto has helped us (Jer. 23:6; 1 Sam. 7:12); He is God the Rock and Refuge of His people (Ps. 46:1), the everlasting God who is our Shepherd (Ps. 23:1). But note the result of this preoccupation with the name and nature of God. They had fellowship one with the other. They spoke together about God, and this is something that many Christians never seem to get round to doing. It is so easy to speak about ourselves, our problems and about other people's faults and failings, and in consequence God is forgotten, fellowship diminishes and our souls grow dry. In today's verses we are told that God's book of remembrance was compiled. What pleasure He must have had in these people.

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3:16-18

Note that the people spoken of, the remnant of faith in a backslidden situation, spoke often with each other (v.16 AV; cf. Heb. 3:13: 10:24-25). It was the settled habit of their lives and the natural mark of their fellowship together that they spoke about the Lord and about His name. We sing sometimes about the name we love to hear, but do we talk about Jesus in the ordinary context of life? People talk about their interests, their work, hobbies, politics and love-affairs and their interest is obvious. What does it mean if we never talk about the Lord? Is He just an 'extra' in our lives? As these people talked they encouraged and strengthened each other in the Lord (1 Sam. 23:16); their hearts were warmed, bonds were created and they felt better. But more than that the Lord took note, heard, and recorded their names in His book of remembrance (Ex, 32:32-33; Ps. 56:8; Dan., 12:1).. We must not fail to note the emphasis on the eager response of God to His people's obvious seeking after Him. There may be some indication here of the people speaking to God in prayer and God hearing and

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answering their cry. God's response is clear: 'They shall be mine.' God was about to act in some significant way, making Himself, His salvation and His judgment known and at that time He would make it perfectly plain who were His people. They may have been a despised devalued remnant but they would be seen to have been God's key people throughout the days of darkness. Such is the emphasis on the word 'mine' that we must think of God's loving pride in His faithful people (Heb. 2:11; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). There is a particular relationship of love, fatherly love for a son or daughter, and all would see who were the people who served the Lord and who were those who just spoke about it (Mt. 21:28-32).

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4:1-3

In the previous passage God spoke about the day when He would act and now we have a further emphasis on that day. This reminds us that there is something specific about God's plans and timetable. In 3:17 the people of Malachi's day may well have thought back to the day, or night, of the Exodus when God certainly made clear distinction between those who were His and those who were not (Ex. 11:4ff). But in that story there was the need for vital faith, believing and responding to what God had said. Those who sat lightly to the 'Gospel' promise concerning safety, sheltering under the blood of the Passover Lamb, perished. Now, in 4:1, the emphasis seems to be on a day of judgment and according to Acts 17:31 that day is appointed and God has given notice by the resurrection of Jesus Christ that He intends judgment. Judgment is inescapable, whether in this life or the life to come (Heb. 9:27). Something of the deliberateness of this concept is seen in Rev. 9:15, in the specific timing indicated and in the pronouncement that there should be no more delay. It is God alone who brings men and nations to judgment. It is not the work of men or devils. But notice here that this judgment is not corrective, purifying or restraining, as it was in 3:1ff. We are dealing now with retribution; with stubble being burned. This is a solemn thought which we tend to give little heed to in much evangelical preaching these days. We need to consider our Lord's words in such passages as Matt. 13:36-43, 47-50; 25:31-33, 41, 46.

Against that background we lay hold on the words 'should not perish' in John 3:16. We are indeed in the business of rescuing the perishing. Note that Malachi speaks of the arrogant and evildoers. They are seen for what they are on the Day of Judgment, as Rev. 9:20; 16:8-11 make plain.

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4:1-3

The day of judgment is not a day of darkness to those who fear the Lord's name (3:16). It is the very opposite. This bringing together of the dark and the bright is seen also in Isa. 57:18-21. When the day of the Lord comes then the faithful who have looked and longed for His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8; 2 Pet. 3:12) will rejoice and be glad because it is the day of manifestation of the God for whom they have waited (Isa. 25:6-9). 'Like calves released from their stall into the sunlight they will leap about with sheer relief and exuberance that right has triumphed.' (Baldwin). The Sun of Righteousness speaks of the One 'who shall heal for ever the inconsolable ache that is in all our hearts, and bring us into the everlasting joys of His kingdom' (J. Philip). The glory of this prospect must not be and is not diminished or shadowed by what some people would call the sub-Christian sentiments of v.3. We must be honest enough to face the reality of evil and its terrible power and activity of destruction scarring the face of God's world and inflicting costly suffering on God's people simply because they are faithful to God and take their stand for moral and spiritual righteousness. The people of God are forbidden to take personal revenge, but are assured that retribution will be carried out by God Himself (Deut. 32:35-36). The faithful submit under suffering, committing themselves and their cause to God who judges rightly (1 Pet. 2:23). The Cross would have been a tragedy if the resurrection had not demonstrated the victory. Christian experience in the world and the faith of the Gospel would be mysteries and contradictions if the coming of the Lord did not demonstrate visibly the triumph of righteousness. Read the whole of 2 Peter 3, and lift up your eyes to the Day.

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4:4-6

Remember that Moses and Elijah, representing the whole Old Testament economy of Law and Prophets, were the two persons Jesus spoke with on the Mount of Transfiguration concerning His saving death (exodus) that He was to accomplish on the Cross. God's plan of salvation is one plan from beginning to end. There is a

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coherence and consistency about it as it proceeds and develops down through the ages of history. This is one reason why the people are told to remember, to look back and to consider again the marvellous story of all God's mighty words and actions. Nothing of what God has said or done has been cancelled out. He has spoken and His words are true, therefore hold to the Law of Moses. In our language, 'Hold to your Bibles', stand on and live by the God-given, God-revealed truths of salvation and life. Of course it is law, and it is commanded. It is not an optional extra for very enthusiastic believers. Obedience is incumbent on all who name the name of the Lord. If we love Him we will keep His commandments (John 14:15). There is no substitute for obedience, and a spirituality that does not issue in this is false. But there is in v.4 a great emphasis on the God-given nature of Scripture and we must never lose our confidence in Scripture even when we are wrestling with difficult passages that are hard to understand. God has spoken through the prophets, and that 'speaking' found its fulfilment in the sending of His Son (Heb. 1:1-3) to whom all the Scriptures testify (John 5:39; Luke 24:25-27,32). All Scripture is God-given, inspired, in the sense of being 'breathed out' by God (2 Tim 3:16-17). God's men, raised up for the specific purpose, spoke and wrote by the direct and controlled 'moving' of God. It was Jesus who said that scripture cannot be broken (John 10: 35). For a separate study we could, with the help of a concordance, look up all the references to 'scripture(s)'. It would help us to appreciate what one man called 'The impregnable rock of holy Scripture'.

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4:4-6

We have already noted the New Testament references to Elijah (Matt. 11:2-11; 17:10-13; Lk. 1:17). The reference in Luke speaks of the spirit and power of Elijah as descriptive of the pattern and spirit of the ministry of John the Baptist, and this suggests that the reference in Malachi is not to a literal return of Elijah (although that idea was current in Jesus' day) but rather to the emergence of mighty prophetic ministry before the coming of the Lord. The Bible teaches that the 'end time' of history will be dark and grim, and it is in that context that this God-given ministry will be exercised, a ministry of proclamation and a call to repentance. If then we are feeling the pressures of evil in society, and if we are constrained to pray for revival, then this is the kind of ministry we should be looking for. Of course we must also remember that the first impact of Elijah's ministry was a three year famine which was to be seen as a judgment of God on the nation's sins (1 Kings 17:1). Are we willing for revival on that basis? A further focus of Elijah's ministry was the confrontation of the false God-denying, religion and morals of the Baal worshippers (1 Kings 18: 20ff). Are we willing to take a stand like that, single handed as Elijah was? Then there was the prolonged intercession of the prophet until the life-giving rain came from heaven. Are we prepared to give prayer for the revival and restoration of the church and nation that kind of priority? The ministry of Elijah established the schools of the prophets which were the hope of the 'church' for the next generation. Are we working towards this? Many want revival but how many are willing to pay the price and work in God's pattern?

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4:4-6

The ministry of John the Baptist heralded the coming of Christ but John himself denied that he was that prophet who was to come prior to the great and terrible Day of the Lord (John 1:21). We look forward to the prophetic preaching that reminds us of the coming again of the Lord and urges us to prepare for His coming. This is the true spirit of prophecy that urges people to repent while the day of grace lasts. God is always saying to, 'Turn, turn, why will you die?' (Ezek. 33:11). He sets before us all life and death, blessing and cursing, and urges everyone to choose life (Deut. 30:19-20). This is the crisis that confronts all who hear the gospel message. There are eternal issues to be settled. God so loved that men should not perish, but those who do not believe are condemned already (John 3:16-21). The forbearance of God, the reason why His righteous judgments are not already poured out on the earth, is that He is 'not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance' (2 Pet. 3:8-9). But the day of the Lord will come, and for the nation as well as individuals the final reckoning will have arrived (6b). Now, we have spoken of the kind of ministry that is needed to face such a critical situation, and Malachi speaks of that ministry as one that bridges the generation gap. Fathers and children alike are affected, not only turning hearts to God but to each other, and in that way reinstating the family unit, which in our day has been consistently attacked, deliberately so, by the so-called 'avant-garde' moralists inspired by

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superficial humanist philosophy. But Malachi's words have a wider application if we consider Lk. 1:16-17 which speaks of turning the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. It is with this note of hope and solemn warning that the Old Testament ends.

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