

A Study of
Malachi
and the **Inter-Testamental Period**

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Introduction to Malachi	page 2
Malachi 1	page 4
Malachi 2	page 7
Malachi 3	page 10
Malachi 4	page 13
The Inter-Testamental Period	page 16
For Further Study on Malachi	page 22
For Further Study on the Inter-Testamental Period	page 23

THANK YOU

There are so many rich lessons in God's Word that are often overlooked; many of those lessons come from the writings of the Minor Prophets. I consider it a privilege to teach the Word of God and enjoyed compiling these notes on the book of Malachi and the Inter-Testamental period. I appreciate so much the elders at Point Pleasant church of Christ, the parents, and the high school students who attend the class. The elders' support and encouragement of the young people should be imitated by other congregations, as they go to great lengths to be sure the youth are properly fed a spiritual diet of God's Word. Thank you John, Scott, and Trenton, for all you do for me and for the young people in the congregation.

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INTRODUCTION TO MALACHI

There is an old saying, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” As one reads through the account of God’s people in the Old Testament, the danger of forgetfulness presents itself. Time and time again, Israel was warned, but time and time again, Israel forgot, and time and time again, the nation paid the price.

Before we succumb to the temptation to say, “That will never happen to me!”, consider what the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:1-11: “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.’ Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

Mark Twain put a twist on the old saying, “History doesn’t repeat itself, but it does rhyme.” We may face different circumstances today than did the Israelites of old, but the temptation to forget God’s faithfulness and to fall into sinful and selfish practices remains (1 Corinthians 10:13). We must carefully consider the examples—both good and bad—of those who have gone on before us as we seek to please God in our lives.

What’s in a name? Names have meaning, and the names worn by men and women of God in the Scriptures often give insight to the character of those individuals. Abraham is the “father of many nations” (Genesis 17:5); God changed Jacob’s name to Israel “for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed” (Genesis 32:28); Sarah means “princess;” Joshua means “Jehovah saves.” As for the prophet Malachi, “it might have meant *My Angel* or *Messenger*, or it may be taken as an adjective *Angelicus*. Either of these meanings would form a natural name for a Jewish child, and a very suitable one for a prophet.”¹

It is generally accepted by scholars that the book was written sometime in the 400s B.C.; some place the date of writing as early as 475 B.C., while others date it around 432 B.C. “Inasmuch as the content of the prophecy fits well into the conditions described by Nehemiah, the most acceptable date for the prophecy is the period 445-432 B.C.”²

“Mighty Persia dominated the eastern world. Artaxerxes was monarch of the Fertile Crescent. In 536 B.C. a tiny remnant of Hebrews had returned from Babylonian captivity to rebuild their nation. Between 520 and 515 B.C. God’s temple had been rebuilt under the leadership of Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah had greatly encouraged that work. In 458 Ezra had come to help reorganize and

¹ Smith, George Adam. (1906). *The Book of Twelve Prophets, Vol. II*, pages 331-332. New York, NY: A.C. Armstrong and Son.

[<https://archive.org/stream/bookoftwelveprop028005mbp>]

² Hailey, Homer. (1972). *A Commentary on the Minor*

Prophets, page 401. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

reestablish the nation's worship. Nehemiah came in 445 to lead the Hebrews in rebuilding the walls of their beloved Jerusalem. He returned to Persia and then made a second visit to Jerusalem in 432. Malachi's messages seemed to have been delivered between Nehemiah's two visits."³

Despite the return from captivity and the resurgence of Jewish worship, the condition of the nation was in shambles. "Priests were corrupt and lax in their service. Unacceptable sacrifices were being offered to Jehovah. Skepticism pervaded society. Many Jews questioned if in fact they were God's chosen people. They were disheartened, disillusioned and decaying spiritually....Having sunk into a careless and sordid life style, they showed resentment and contempt towards their divine duties."⁴ How familiar does that sound when one considers Christianity in America?

"Malachi was the last loving promise and admonition that Israel would ever receive until the thundering voice of John the Baptist broke the silence of centuries with the lightning-stroke message: 'Repent ye, for the kingdom of God is at hand!' (Matthew 3:2). Alas, sinful Israel heeded neither Malachi, nor John the Baptist, nor any other prophet."⁵

Malachi's direct audience was Israel, but there are principles that children of God today can and should learn. "(1) Remember that God does not change (3:6). (2) Remember to obey the word of God (In their case, the Law of Moses) (4:4). (3) Faithfully perform God-ordained religious and moral duties (2:15, 3:10, etc.). (4) Wait upon the righteous judgments of God. (5) God will fully reward and bless the faithful (3:1ff)."⁶

³ Waddey, John. (2011). *The Testimony of the Twelve Minor Prophets*, page 309. Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company. [http://www.restorationlibrary.org/library/TTMP/TTMP_SIPDF.pdf]

⁴ Waddey, page 309.

⁵ Coffman, James Burton. (1983). *Commentary on the Minor Prophets, Volume 4*

(*Zechariah and Malachi*), page 231. Austin, TX: The Firm Foundation Publishing House. [<http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/malachi.html>]

⁶ Coffman, page 234.

MALACHI 1

Read Malachi 1:1-5. God declares His love for Israel, but the people question His statement of love. They had forgotten all of His blessings, even when they were in less than desirable circumstances. He brought them out of Egyptian slavery, provided for them in the wilderness, and delivered their enemies into their hands on numerous occasions, even when they were outnumbered and overmatched. And when the nation as a whole disappointed God, those who remained faithful were still exalted under foreign regimes. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah served Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon (Daniel 1:19). Esther was chosen to be Ahasuerus' queen because "she obtained grace and favor in his sight" (Esther 2:17). Nehemiah served as the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11). Yet the nation deigned to respond, "In what way have You loved us?"

Jehovah responded by reminding them of that nations that came from Jacob and Esau. "Both Israel and Esau (Edom) had sinned; and both had been severely punished; but Israel had been privileged to return to their homeland in the person of the remnant, whereas Esau would continue to suffer judgment till he was destroyed from the earth."⁷ God had long ago declared that He would fulfill His promise through the seed of Israel (Jacob), and that those who stood with Israel would be blessed, while those who opposed His people would be cursed (Genesis 12:3).

Edom stood against God's people and God's plan and faced the consequences (Obadiah 1:10-18; Amos 1:11-12). "With the same intensity that Jehovah loves the right and good, he hates the evil and bad. His attitude toward Edom had been demonstrated by His giving Edom into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 49:7ff.; 25:9,21) and not restoring them to their land as He had Jacob. Their land was becoming more desolate while Israel's was being cultivated. To give it to the jackals was to allow it to return to its primitive state, a habitation for wild animals."⁸

"Edomites would be the target for God's indignation as long as they lasted as a nation. In this order, the Chaldeans, the Nabataeans, the Maccabees and the Romans all captured and destroyed these wicked people. Israel would behold the exact fulfillment of all this toward Edom and would see God magnified as a result."⁹

Read Malachi 1:6-8. Despite God's love for Israel, they rejected and disrespected His authority as both Father (Isaiah 64:8) and Master (Hosea 2:16). There was no honor or reverence, there was only disdain for His name. "The name stands for the character or what a person is (Exod. 34:5-7). Moses wanted to know more about God's character and personality (Psm. 9:10; John 17:6). Rank is also involved (Heb. 1:4); authority (Mark 9:39; John 5:43; 1 Cor. 5:4); power (John 17:11-12)...So to despise or make light of his name means one does not respect his rank, authority, and character."¹⁰

God answers the priests who denied they despised His name by pointing to defiled food or bread—which referred to the bloody sacrifices demanded by the Law of Moses (cf. Leviticus 21:6; Ezekiel 44:7)—specifically blind, lame, and sick sacrifices. The Almighty clearly stated what He expected when He delivered His commands to Moses, and just in case there was any attempt to circumvent His positive command, He clearly stated what they must not offer. Consider Leviticus 22:17-25, particularly verse 20: "Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer,

⁷ Coffman, page 239.

⁸ Hailey, pages 406-407.

⁹ Taylor, Robert R., Jr. (1995). *Companion: 1995-96 Annual*

Lesson Commentary on Bible School Lessons for Churches of Christ, page 130. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company.

¹⁰ Clark, J. Winfred. (2001). *Expositions of "The Expositor," Volume 1*, page 72. Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications.

for it shall not be acceptable on your behalf.” They certainly would not offer such pitiful gifts to the governors they served on this earth, and God is rightly insulted by their blemished sacrifices to Him.

“Indeed, nothing could be more evil than the perversion of God’s worship through the offering of inferior and forbidden sacrifices. Christianity has fallen into the same abuse, offering to God as worship and obedience, all kinds of forbidden and inferior substitutes for what the Lord commanded. This warning to ancient Israel should be heeded today. Moreover, the practitioners of such abuses arrogantly deny that they do anything wrong, just as did these priests of old. We shall not attempt any elaborate list of such abuses; but, as an example, may we cite ‘a saxophone duet’ offered to God instead of the singing he commanded!”¹¹

Read Malachi 1:9-10. Sarcasm can be used as an effective method of teaching when used sparingly and explained properly. Dripping with irony, God tells the people, “But now entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us.” “Seeing that you have accepted and used all these worthless sacrifices and offered them upon God’s altar, why don’t you now pray for God’s favor? You really must have impressed God with the type of offerings you have placed upon his altar!”¹² He does not give them an opportunity to misinterpret His meaning, however, continuing, “While this (referring to the evil sacrifices) is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably?” The answer is a resounding, “No!”

God expresses His desire for a zealous servant, someone to stand up and slam the doors to the temple, objecting to and preventing any further vain offerings. “He cannot believe someone would not arise to say enough is enough. Surely somebody ought to be on fire enough to close the doors. Remember when Jesus went into the temple and drove out the moneychangers? This was because of his zeal (John 2:17). Quite a contrast.”¹³

Read Malachi 1:11-13. Jehovah, through His messenger Malachi, proclaims that He will be honored by the Gentiles, despite the irreverence of Israel. “In contrast to His people’s offerings, which should have been expressive of faith, devotion, and love, but which were an abomination to Jehovah, the Gentiles would offer a pure and acceptable worship....The prophecy looks to that time when, under the Messiah, not in any one locality, but from one end of the earth to the other, God’s name would be great among Gentiles. The ‘incense’ offered are the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8), and the ‘pure offering’ is the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of the lips, and the doing of good in a holy life (Heb. 13:15-16). Through the gospel of the Messiah Jehovah’s name would be revered as great.”¹⁴

Israel expresses “weariness” in worship, refusing to offer the best to the Almighty. “The lesson should be indelibly stamped upon worshipers of today who perfunctorily offer a meaningless religious service to God....Instead of their worship being one of joy growing out of gratitude for the Lord’s having chosen them to such an exalted honor, they found their work a boring chore.”¹⁵ May we guard ourselves against such an attitude in our worship today!

“Did you ever hear one speak of being bored in a worship service? Have we stopped to ask what that person’s estimate was of things sacred? How does the Lord’s Supper appear to such a person? How would the song service? If people are only going through the motions without the heart being in it, such will only be endured rather than enjoyed. That which should have been seen as a blessing has become a burden to them. Where they should have seen themselves as a blessed people with the opportunity to be a light in the nations around them, they see themselves burdened.”¹⁶

¹¹ Coffman, page 245.

¹² Coffman, page 246.

¹³ Clark, page 74.

¹⁴ Hailey, pages 409-410.

¹⁵ Hailey, page 410.

¹⁶ Clark, page 75.

The sneering or snuffing is a “metaphor taken from cattle which do not like their *fodder*. They *blow strongly* through their nose upon it; and after this neither *they* nor *any other cattle* will eat it.”¹⁷ If the people of God treat the worship of God in this manner, no one outside the church would ever want to join us in our service.

Read Malachi 1:14. Saying one thing and doing another is a sure way to develop a bad reputation as an untrustworthy person. However, when such is done against God, one’s reputation should be the least of his concerns. The man under consideration in this verse vowed the male of the flock, only to sacrifice a blemished beast in its place. God says of such a man: “Cursed be the deceiver.”

The lesson for us is humbling. “How many Christians are there today who do nothing at all for the work of God, except a few trivial offerings, lip-service, and perfunctory and irregular attendance at divine worship? There is a warning in this for those who receive the grace to see it.”¹⁸

Among the Gentiles—those who were outside God’s chosen people—His name was “to be feared” (NKJV), “dreadful” (KJV), “terrible” (ASV). Israel treated Him with contempt, but the Gentiles knew better. To some extent, they understood Jehovah. This is the impetus behind Malachi’s message. “He knows a proper concept and appreciation of God is necessary. Conduct will never rise above concepts.”¹⁹

Review and thought questions

1. Edom confidently asserted, “We have been impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places” (1:4). Is there anything wrong with such determination in the face of despair? Consider Psalm 127:1 and James 4:13-16 as you answer.
2. Identify some of the parallels between the religious people of Malachi’s day and the religious people of today.
3. How important is appropriate worship? What did Jesus say in Matthew 15:8-9?
4. How would you respond to someone who complains that “church is boring”? How can you guard yourself against developing a similar attitude?
5. Should a person make a vow if he has no intention of following through? What does Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 say?

¹⁷ Clarke, Adam. (n.d.). *Clarke’s Commentary, Volume 4: Isaiah-Malachi*, page 800. Nashville,

TN: Abingdon Press.
[<https://www.study-light.org/commentaries/acc/malachi.html>]

¹⁸ Coffman, page 253.

¹⁹ Clark, page 70.

MALACHI 2

Read Malachi 2:1-4. God continues His rebuke against the priests of Israel with a stern warning. “The ‘commandment’ given to the priests is not instruction or admonition enjoined on them, but it points to the threat of verses 2-3. It is a commandment because the fulfillment of it will be brought on them by Jehovah.”²⁰ Just as God’s promises are sure for the faithful, His punishments are certain for the disobedient.

He uses a conditional statement at the beginning of verse 2, but in the latter part of the verse it is affirmed, “Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take it to heart.” Isaiah prophesied, “And He said, ‘Go, and tell this people: “Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with the eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed”’ (Isaiah 6:9-10). The children of Israel and the priests of Malachi’s day were fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecies with their dull hearts.

Entire animals were not thrown onto the altar as an offering. The animals were first butchered, the fat being sacrificed to the Lord while the skin and entrails were taken outside the camp to be burned (Exodus 29:14; Leviticus 4:12; 16:27). The one who took this part of the bull out of the camp and burned it was required to wash his clothes and body before reentering (Leviticus 16:28). Included in the entrails, obviously, was the dung left in the animal when it was slaughtered. In verse 3, God paints a graphic picture of spreading the refuse on the priests’ faces, showing His opinion of their service. They were no longer honoring *God’s* solemn feasts; they had turned them into *their* solemn feasts. “This repulsive figure is an apt description of the final removal of the Jewish priesthood in the overthrow of A.D. 70, in which event the very institution of animal sacrifice was for ever terminated.”²¹ “It indicates an ignominious humiliation in which the priests are treated as dung, making them unfit for the service of the Lord, and fit only to be carried away without the camp from His presence.”²²

The fulfillment of this threat will be the proof that it was from God Himself. “Jehovah had made the covenant or agreement with the tribe of Levi that they should minister at His altar and to His holy service. God expected this covenant to be respected and observed by them so that it could continue with them. But it could do so only if they kept themselves fit for the service.”²³

Read Malachi 2:5-9. God contrasts the original intent of the Levitical priesthood to what it had become in Malachi’s day. Levi was promised life and peace, as he lived a life of reverence, speaking truth and knowledge, “for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.” Life and peace “are the *two* grand blessings given o men by the New *Covenant*, which was shadowed by the Old.”²⁴ “There was a covenant to respect (vs. 2-4); a copy to imitate (vs. 5-6); a character to develop (v. 7); a cause to uphold (v.7); a confidence to keep (vs. 8-9).”²⁵

Yet, because the priests perverted His Word, the covenant was no more. Instead of walking with God “in peace and equity,” they had “departed from the way.” Instead of keeping knowledge and directing the people who sought the law, they “caused many to stumble at the law.” In short, the priests of Malachi’s day had “corrupted the covenant of Levi,” bringing to an end God’s blessings. “They were not only despised by God but by the people they were supposed to represent.”²⁶ They had refused to abide by God’s standard, thus Jehovah justly terminated the covenant.

²⁰ Hailey, page 411.

²¹ Coffman, page 257.

²² Hailey, page 412.

²³ Hailey, page 412.

²⁴ Clarke, page 800.

²⁵ Clark, page 78.

²⁶ Waddey, page 314.

There can be no disputing that “all of God’s covenant blessings of Israel were contingent, absolutely, upon Israel’s maintaining a faithful and obedient attitude. This passage shows that the same applied to the Levitical covenant, as indeed it does to all covenants, even including the covenant of salvation in Jesus Christ!”²⁷

Read Malachi 2:10-16. Malachi shifts the focus in verse 10 from the corrupt priesthood to corrupt marriages in the general population of Israel. “As one looks at the folly of the priests in their failure to see their true position and meet their responsibility, one would expect the people to fail. They would never rise higher than their leaders.”²⁸ God commanded His people to “utterly destroy” the people of the lands delivered unto them; He declared, “You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son” (Deuteronomy 7:1-3). Sadly, many have misapplied passages such as these to our modern society, claiming that God prohibits interracial marriage. Such is not the case, as He continues, “For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly” (Deuteronomy 7:4). The charge was later repeated by both Ezra and Nehemiah upon the nation’s return from captivity, both recognizing such a disregard for God’s Law as “evil” (Ezra 9:10-15; Nehemiah 13:23-27).

The intent behind this precept was simple: to keep the nation pure and dedicated to God until the Messiah arrived. When the people of Israel mixed the worship of the true God of heaven with the pagan gods of Canaan and other foreign nations, they faced severe consequences. “The practice of inter-marriage with foreign women had brought Baal worship among the people and it was this which brought about the destruction of the northern tribes as well as the captivity of the southern tribes. If it again gained ascendance among the returned remnant, God’s covenant purpose would indeed be in jeopardy.”²⁹ There was, however, a faithful remnant through the history of Israel, and because of those that held true to His Word, “godly offspring” resulted.

Not only had these men of Israel married pagan women, they had done so at the expense of their original wives. Malachi tells of the man who has “dealt treacherously” with the “wife by covenant” and “the wife of his youth.” “Evil husbands who marry the young and the beautiful, and then, when the bloom of life has faded, shamefully and heartlessly divorce their wives to marry younger women do indeed deal ‘treacherously’ with their wives....When one deals thus treacherously with his wife, who has been his companion throughout life, he is automatically, of course, a traitor against God and every holy obligation connected with religion. The fact of our current godless society’s tolerance and even approval of divorce is an evil blight upon mankind.”³⁰

“‘Therefore take heed to your spirit’: beware, lest you completely lose sight of that spirit of righteousness toward God and decency toward one’s wife. Let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. Age does not change the relationship of youth’s love and pledge....Such a vigorous warning and exhortation from the Lord in a former decadent and permissive age should not be silenced; its principle should be heralded to the ends of the earth in our own time.”³¹

The message of Jehovah is clear: “He hates divorce.” God intended man to “be joined to his wife,” to “become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Jesus declared, “Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:6). There is but one exception for acceptable divorce

²⁷ Coffman, page 259.

²⁸ Clark, page 67.

²⁹ Gill, Clinton. (1971). *Minor Prophets: A Study of Micah*

through Malachi, page 391.

Joplin, MO: College Press.

[<http://www.restorationlibrary.org/>

[org/library/BSTSMP/BSTSMP_SI PDF.pdf](http://www.restorationlibrary.org/library/BSTSMP/BSTSMP_SI_PDF.pdf)]

³⁰ Coffman, page 266.

³¹ Hailey, page 417.

and subsequent marriage to another: “fornication” (Matthew 19:9, KJV). The looser translation of the New King James Version and other modern translations in this instance does harm to Jesus’ meaning; it is not just any “sexual immorality,” but specifically “fornication” that is given as an exception.

Read Malachi 2:17. Malachi turns his attention now to the murmuring of the people, wearing on God’s patience. They do not believe their complaints cause His weariness, but consider their words: “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them.” What a ridiculous sentiment! “They misread God’s dealing with men, or attribute to God those things which are not so.”³² Jesus explained in Matthew 5:45 that God “makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Good things are going to happen to good and bad people, just as bad things are going to happen to good and bad people. God does not delight in the sinful behavior of evil people, but neither does He prevent such from succeeding in worldly pursuits.

The people of Malachi’s day, though, demanded justice. But the justice God was about to mete out was not the justice for which they clamored. As the saying goes, “Be careful what you wish for, because you just might get it.”

Review and thought questions

1. How far-reaching is “the curse” of God? Read Deuteronomy 28:15-19.
2. Under the Old Law, the tribe of Levi served as priests for the people of God. Who are the priests today? Read 1 Peter 2:9-10. How must the royal priesthood keep themselves fit for service to the Lord?
3. In what three ways had the priests of Malachi’s day violated the covenant God made with Levi? How can we, as a royal priesthood, avoid the same mistakes under the law of Christ?
4. How careful should one be in choosing a spouse? What spiritual characteristics should be considered?

³² Clark, page 67.

MALACHI 3

Read Malachi 3:1-6. God answers Israel's question, "Where is the God of justice?" He is coming Himself! But first, His messenger, John the Baptist, would prepare the way before Him. God later reveals through Malachi, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:5-6). John was, in the inspired words of Isaiah, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken'" (Isaiah 40:3-5). John's identity as the fulfillment of these prophecies is affirmed in the New Testament on several occasions (Matthew 3:3; 11:10, 14; 17:12-13; Mark 1:3; Luke 1:17; 3:4; John 1:23).

His job of preparation was necessary because "Israel is not yet ready to receive the Messiah. The moral and religious condition of the whole nation is such that a further period of waiting is necessary."³³ One writer noted that they were not ready for the "suddenness," the "sifting and separation at His coming," nor the "sentence at His coming."³⁴

After the messenger, then "the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple." "To come suddenly did not mean immediately, but at once, instantaneously, unannounced. The temple to which He would come was not the temple built by Herod, but the temple of Jehovah, the spiritual temple."³⁵ The divine Christ would arrive as a second messenger after the first; the Son of God would be "the Messenger of the covenant."

God asks, "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?" The answer can be inferred from the second part of the verse, in which the Messiah is described "like a refiner's fire and like launderer's soap." Those who can accept His chastening, those who are purified and cleansed by the message He brings, are the ones who can endure and stand His coming. Those who continue to rebel and disobey, however, will perish.

"The day of the Lord...' refers to the Messianic age, from the first to last; it referred to the Day of Pentecost; it referred to the destruction of Jerusalem; it referred to the first Advent of Christ; and it refers to the second Advent of Christ. That is why some prophecies must be applied to one event, or situation, and other prophecies to still other events, with some passages, such as the one here, having reference to a mighty principle dominating the whole Messianic age."³⁶

God's justice would not be doled out upon the heathens only; it starts with those in charge of Israel. "The fact of the priesthood (Levi) being mentioned first here indicated that God's judgment would always begin with those of the greatest privilege. It is so even yet, and eternally."³⁷ Those who accept His purification will result in righteous, pleasant offerings. "This new refined priesthood is the spiritual priesthood under the New Covenant (I Pet. 2:5, 9), whose sacrifices are those of praise and thanksgiving. They are the fruit of lips that make confession to His name, a confession and praise that flows from a pure heart (Heb. 13:15-16)."³⁸

God's judgment would be shown against the wicked as well: sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers, and exploiters are those who would be punished because they did not respect the Lord's commands. God's commands were clear, but they continued in rebellion and disobedience. Despite the condemnation of the wicked among the nation, God would still

³³ Coffman, page 273.

³⁴ Clark, page 85.

³⁵ Hailey, pages 418-419.

³⁶ Coffman, page 276.

³⁷ Coffman, page 278.

³⁸ Hailey, page 419.

preserve a remnant until it was time for His Son to be revealed in the world. He made a promise, and God always keeps His promises. “Jehovah is the self-existing, eternal, unchangeable one.”³⁹

Read Malachi 3:7-12. God reminds the people that they have continually walked away from Him; “from the days of your fathers.” “For brief periods, following seasons of chastisement, they exhibited faithfulness and fidelity to Jehovah; but, for the most part, they walked in forbidden paths, adopted the heathenish practices of their neighbors, and conducted themselves in a fashion contrary to the wishes of Jehovah. If they took occasion to complain at their lot, they had only themselves to blame; God could not, and would not, bless them in their disobedience. He does not leave them in doubt regarding what course they should pursue in order to receive the divine favor.”⁴⁰ He offers a simple solution: “Return to Me, and I will return to you.” They failed to acknowledge their shortcomings, however. God explains that they have robbed Him.

“To rob one’s fellow man is a great sin, but to rob God should be unthinkable. Wherein had they robbed God? ‘In tithes and offerings.’ The tithe had been holy to Jehovah (Lev. 27:30-33); Jehovah had laid claim to ‘the heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth, with all that is therein’ (Deut. 10:14). Tithes and offerings freely given are acknowledgments of that ownership and of man’s stewardship. Because of this refusal to acknowledge Jehovah’s claim and of their disposition to rob Him, they had been cursed with the curse (cf. 2:2; Hag. 1:6; 2:15-17). Not just isolated individuals, but rather the whole nation is brought under the charge.”⁴¹

“This is perhaps to most popular of all verses in Malachi. But they are a part of the whole. If we go back to chapter one and remember their failure to appreciate the character of God and move to chapter two and see how they treat the covenant of God, we are not too surprised to see how they will react with their contributions to God.”⁴²

Were the people neglecting the tithe entirely? Verse 10 indicates that they were likely still offering *something* to God, but not what was required. “God is never satisfied with a partial, or incomplete, service.”⁴³ He says, “Bring all the tithes,” or, “Bring ye the whole tithe.” He issues this challenge, showing that if they fully followed His command on this matter, they would be blessed beyond measure and their crops would be protected against natural forces such as “the locust and hail, the blasting and mildew (cf. Amos 4:9; Hag. 2:17).”⁴⁴

“We may be sure that our God will provide for our needs when we perform our duty to him. If, because of faithfulness to him, there are instances of the loss of material gain today, it is because such loss is for our good, and will rebound to the salvation of our souls. To this end our Lord taught in Matt. 6:19, 20.”⁴⁵ There, the Lord said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.” We must be willing to use the resources we have in this life in the service of the Lord, recognizing that it all belongs to Him anyway.

Read Malachi 3:13-15. Jehovah then levels another accusation against the people: “Your words have been harsh against Me.” They, of course, deny this accusation, as they have denied all prior charges against them, but God does not relent. “Jehovah gives them a specimen of their

³⁹ Elam, EA. (1928). *Elam’s Notes on Bible School Lessons, 1929*, page 238. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company.

⁴⁰ Woods, Guy N. (1957). *Adult Gospel Quarterly: January, February, March 1958*, page 61. Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company.

⁴¹ Hailey, page 421.

⁴² Clark, page 86.

⁴³ Woods, page 62.

⁴⁴ Hailey, pages 421-422.

⁴⁵ Woods, page 62.

harsh words; they had questioned God’s moral government among men.”⁴⁶ They asked, “What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance.” “It is as if they were serving the Lord for hire and as if He were indebted to them for their service.”⁴⁷

Why do wicked men prosper in this life, while many Christians suffer and struggle? “If this life alone constituted the sum and total of all being, then it would have to be allowed that there are many situations in which the wicked clearly have an advantage. However, the word of God teaches that there is a judgment of Almighty God, upon which occasion the wicked will be punished and the righteous rewarded. The child of faith should therefore be established and grounded in the conviction that the Father will surely see to it that he receives all, and far more, than he could deserve.”⁴⁸

The people of Israel were shortsighted, looking only at the rewards of this life; they witnessed the proud and wicked allegedly escaping the wrath of God. In the end, in the very end, those who are proud and wicked will be punished; those who are faithful and obedient will be saved.

Read Malachi 3:16-18. It was not, however, all gloom and doom. There was a remnant of “those who feared the Lord.” “When those who are true to God see wickedness flourish, the tendency is for them to be drawn closer together. (Cf. Acts 4:23-35.)”⁴⁹ There is a definite contrast between the people of the previous verses and those now being considered. In verse 9, God refers to the people as “this whole nation.” They no longer belonged to Him, because they had gone away from Him. But of “those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name,” God says, “They shall be Mine.” The obedient and reverent people belong to God.

“Again, in the Bible there appears here the grand cleavage of human kind into two, and only two classes, a division that appears repeatedly throughout the Bible. The wheat and the chaff, the good and the bad, the right hand and the left, the keepers and the rejects, the wheat and the tares, the wise and the foolish—there are many examples.”⁵⁰ Each individual must decide into which category he wishes to be placed, and live accordingly.

Review and thought questions

1. Considering all the accusations being brought against Israel, how do you think they would have responded to the message that God was coming?
2. In what ways might Christians “rob God” today?
3. Should we expect recognition for doing the right thing in this life? What does Christ say about doing charitable deeds, or praying, or fasting, in order to be seen by men? Read Matthew 6:1, 5, 16.
4. What are some things upon which the people of God should meditate? Read Psalm 1:1-2; Malachi 3:16; Philippians 4:8-9.

⁴⁶ Hailey, page 422.

⁴⁷ Hailey, page 422.

⁴⁸ Coffman, page 287.

⁴⁹ Thomas, Leslie G. (1964).

*Teacher’s Annual Lesson
Commentary on Bible School
Lessons, 1965, page 82.*

Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate
Company.

⁵⁰ Coffman, page 291.

MALACHI 4

If one were to use the Scriptures to sum up the general message of Malachi 4, it might be these words from the pen of Paul: “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.” There are grand blessings available to those who walk in His paths, but destruction for those who refuse His grace and mercy.

Read Malachi 4:1. Here is the warning to “all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly.” The day of their destruction would come. Malachi made clear Israel’s pride throughout this prophecy, showing their stubbornness against God’s chastisement. Their sins were illuminated, but they remained blind to their shortcomings. This pride-filled, willful ignorance would not be tolerated.

We sing a song called, “There’s a Great Day Coming.” The lyrics speaks of a “great day” in which “the saints and the sinners shall be parted right and left.” For “them that love the Lord,” it will be a “bright day.” But it will be a “sad day” for others. The apostle Paul wrote that about that “sad day” for sinners: “And to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

The imagery of eternal punishment by fire is repeated in the New Testament. John the Baptist said, “He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12). Jesus called it “everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Note that it was not prepared for man, but for the devil and his angels. Yet, if man fails to obey the Lord, man will also be punished in this manner. Peter wrote, “But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7).

“As a tree dug up by the roots is burned, roots and branches, so will be Jehovah’s destruction of the wicked: total and complete.”⁵¹ “There would be no reverse for this. Their past is gone, and so is their future – root and branch.”⁵²

Read Malachi 4:2-3. Where the first verse demonstrates the severity of the Lord, here we see the goodness of the Almighty. A “bright day” is coming for the faithful. There were still some “who fear My name,” and for them “the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.” Both the wicked and the righteous receive the same message; their wickedness or righteousness is based on their response to that message. “What would be a burden to one group, such as those in verse 1, would be a blessing to those in verse 2 (1 Cor. 2:13). The same gospel that saves also condemns.”⁵³

There is some dispute among scholars over whether “the Sun of Righteousness” refers to Christ Himself or a non-personified righteousness. “Here is one of the most picturesque descriptions of the Messiah to be found in the Old Testament. To dissect it is to destroy it. Suffice it to say, that as the sun is the light and source of life to all the earth, so the Christ is the light and giver of life to the true worshipper.”⁵⁴ Coffman spends several pages in his commentary disputing the accepted modern scholarship that denies this as a Messianic prophecy, and I agree with his conclusion: “The depersonalization of this promise of the ‘Sun of Righteousness’ is widely advocated....However, there is no righteousness, nor was there ever any, apart from the

⁵¹ Hailey, page 424.

⁵² Clark, page 91.

⁵³ Clark, page 91.

⁵⁴ Gill, pages 403-404.

Lord Jesus Christ. ‘The righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ’ (Romans 3:22) is that righteousness revealed ‘in the gospel’ (Romans 1:17); and that must be identified as the only righteousness that ever arose to shine over the Messianic age. Thus, there is absolutely no way to get Christ out of what is plainly meant here.”⁵⁵

God says there would be “healing in His wings.” Does this not agree with Isaiah’s prophecy, where it is stated, “by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5)? Jesus compared Himself to a physician for spiritual ailments in Mark 2:17, when He said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

Remember Israel’s complaint in Malachi 3:15, that the proud and wicked “are raised up; they even tempt God and go free.” The ultimate victory of the faithful over the wicked is shown in Malachi 4:3. “Whatever may be the lot of the proud or of the meek at given times, the ultimate victory of the righteous and the defeat of the wicked is abundantly assured by the Lord.”⁵⁶

“Jesus’ rehearsal of the fate of the rich man and Lazarus is a fine illustration of this truth. (cf. *Luke 16:19-ff*) The unrighteous rich who lord it over the righteous poor will, in that day, find their situations completely reversed...eternally and completely.”⁵⁷

Read Malachi 4:4. At the time of Malachi’s prophecy, the people were still under the Law of Moses and were expected to keep it. The Law is called the Law of *Moses* because it was through this servant of God that it was given, but the originator of the Law was God Himself. It was not given for Moses alone to obey, but “for all Israel.” Horeb is “the name given in Deuteronomy for Mt. Sinai.”⁵⁸

Consider all of the blessings available to those who remembered the Word of God: it could keep one undefiled, upright, and upheld (Psalm 119:1,7,116). In a world darkened by immorality, those who seek to please God desperately need guidance. God provides divine direction through His righteous revelation, The Psalmist declared: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). “So long as Israel honored the Holy Scripture, she prospered. Whenever she turned away from it, disaster swiftly came.”⁵⁹

The keeping of the statutes and judgments of the Old Law was also important in the sense that it served as a shadow or type of what was to come in the better covenant. “These had much to do with the sacrifices that pointed to Christ. To fail to keep these would distort the type and lead away from Christ rather than being a school master to bring to Christ (Gal. 3:24).”⁶⁰

Read Malachi 4:5-6. God promises to send Elijah in advance of “the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” As discussed in the last chapter, God was not referring to the actual man Elijah who “went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11). Rather, one would come in the spirit of Elijah, and that one was John the Baptist. “As the David whom Jehovah will raise up to be king and shepherd over His people (Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23ff.; 37:24; Hos. 3:5) is not David in person, but fulfilled in Christ, so the Elijah here is not to be thought of as Elijah in person, but his spirit in another. John denied that he was Elijah in person (John 1:21), yet Jesus said he was the Elijah of promise (Matt. 17:11-13). The promise was fulfilled in John the Baptist, sent to prepare the way for Christ.”⁶¹

Sadly, many Jews did not understand God’s intent. “There was a strong tradition among the Jews that continues to the present day, to the effect that the literal, self-same Elijah the

⁵⁵ Coffman, page 296.

⁵⁶ Hailey, pages 424-425.

⁵⁷ Gill, page 404.

⁵⁸ Coffman, page 300.

⁵⁹ Waddey, page 318.

⁶⁰ Clark, page 92.

⁶¹ Hailey, page 425.

Tishbite, would in time return. The Feast of Purim among the Jews till this day sets a plate, goblet, and empty chair for 'Elijah'; and so the myth is perpetuated."⁶²

John the Baptist's "purpose would be the reconciliation of those present at his coming with the covenant faith of their fathers. Elijah, perhaps more than any other prophet of the pre-exilic period, had pled for a return to the pure worship of Jehovah as implemented in the law. The second Elijah would have the same purpose. Unless this be done, there would be not even a remnant in that day and the whole earth, which Jehovah had striven to redeem, would stand under a curse."⁶³

And with that, Jehovah silenced His revelation to the people for 400 years. Between Malachi and John, there were no other inspired prophets. The people still had access to the Law of Moses, and a remnant remained dedicated to upholding those precepts. Secular history is not lacking, however, and there is abundant scholarship in what occurred during those four centuries.

The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi "began with the prophet speaking of God's love (1:2). It comes to a close speaking of God's law and his longsuffering. With this book in hand, they would be ready for the coming Messiah if they would pay close attention to what was being said."⁶⁴

Review and thought questions

1. What imagery is used to describe the eternal punishment of the wicked in the Scriptures?
2. What is said of the faithful?
3. How do we know Malachi is not referring to Elijah the Tishbite in 4:5?
4. What was the purpose of Elijah/John according to 3:1 and 4:6?

⁶² Coffman, page 301.

⁶³ Gill, page 406.

⁶⁴ Clark, page 93.

THE INTER-TESTAMENTAL PERIOD

The period between the Old Testament and New Testament lasted approximately 400 years. This is sometimes referred to as the “inter-biblical period,” as there is no inspired history of the time period in the Bible. That is not to say we have no historical writings from the period; rather, the Holy Spirit did not move holy men of God to speak on the events that occurred (2 Peter 1:21). Secular history from Persia, Greece, and Rome, as well as Jewish historical writings and the Apocryphal books shed some light on what happened between Malachi and John the Baptist. “This history between the Testaments is made up of four distinct divisions....These divisions are: (1) Persian, 538 (400)-332 B.C. (2) Greek, 332-167 B.C. (3) Hebrew Independence, 167-63 B.C. (4) Roman 63 B.C.-70 A.D.”⁶⁵

While the Jews were in captivity in Babylon, Daniel prophesied about the Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires in Daniel 2. The Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams, and challenged the wise men of his kingdom to recount his dream to him, and then interpret it. He did not want to be misled by a false interpretation, but knew that if they could first tell him his dream, that he could trust their explanation. His servants recognized their predicament, saying, “There is not a man on earth who can tell the king’s matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh” (Daniel 2:10-11). Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction was a rage-filled decree to kill all the wise men in Babylon.

When Daniel heard this, Daniel and his companions decided to “seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret” (Daniel 2:18). He sought an audience with the king to explain his dream. In Daniel 2:31-45, Daniel tells the king what he dreamed, and what that dream meant. “This prophecy, however, was only a broad treatment of the years to come. Specifically, in chapters 8 and 11, Daniel would focus in on the events that were to occur during what we refer to as the intertestamental period.”⁶⁶

The First and Second Kingdoms of Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream

There are four parts to this image that Nebuchadnezzar sees in his dream. The first was the “head of gold” (Daniel 2:32,38), which represents the Babylonian kingdom ruled by Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian Empire lasted until 538 B.C., and the captive Jews then became subject to the Medo-Persians, which was the “kingdom inferior” (Daniel 2:39) to Babylon, the “chest and arms of silver” (Daniel 2:32).

“Now Daniel does not specify the second great world empire by name but there is enough symbolism and other details mentioned in Daniel chapter 7 and in history subsequent to these predictions of Daniel to make the task of discovering it rather simple.”⁶⁷ The Medo-Persian Empire lasted for about 200 years, and they were in control when Malachi prophesied. “When

⁶⁵ Hester, H. I. (1949). *The Heart of Hebrew History: A Study of the Old Testament*, page 312. Liberty, MO: The William Jewell Press.

⁶⁶ Hazel, Westley. (2016). “What Can Daniel Tell Us About the Intertestamental Period?” *Identity in Crisis: Daniel’s Vision for the Future*, edited by Douglas Y. Burleson, page 149.

Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company.

⁶⁷ Butler, Paul T. (1970). *Daniel*, page 82. Joplin, MO: College Press. [Online at <http://icotb.org/resources/Daniel.pdf>]

the Old Testament closed about 400 B.C. the Jewish people in Judah were still the subjects of Persia. This continued, apparently without any outspoken resentment on the part of the Jews, until the Persian power began to wane and finally came to an end with the swift conquests of Alexander the Great of Greece.”⁶⁸

The Third Kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream

Greece was third in Daniel’s prophecy, the “belly and thighs of bronze” (Daniel 2:32), “which shall rule over all the earth” (Daniel 2:39). “The power of the Medo-Persian empire built upon wealth was overcome by the force of arms wielded by a brave, idealistic and free people—the Greeks.”⁶⁹ The impact of the Greek culture is still evident today. “Ancient Athens was the intellectual center of pre-Christian history. Here all the arts flourished and reached the heights of attainment. The Greeks developed the most effective language the world has known. In philosophy, literature, sculpture, architecture and other liberal arts they made a contribution unequalled by any other people. They gave to the world such men as Thucydides, Aristophanes, Xenophon, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Diogenes, Alexander, Demosthenes and many others.”⁷⁰

Alexander the Great took over the Greek Empire after the death of his father in 336 B.C. Philip of Macedon’s “two great ambitions were to see Greece attain a place of leadership in the world, and to prepare his son to realize this dream. Both these ambitions were to an unusual degree attained.”⁷¹ As Alexander began his reign, he destroyed those who refused to submit to his rule. Apparently, “*Judea* would not renounce their allegiance to *Darius* so long as he lived. This brought upon them the wrath of the conqueror;...[who] then marches to Jerusalem to wreak his vengeance upon the Jews.”⁷² The Jews had heard barbaric reports of Alexander crucifying others who resisted, and the high priest Jaddua directed the people to welcome him. “*Jaddua* conducted him into the city; and, having offered sacrifices in the temple, showed him the prophecies of *Daniel*, concerning the overthrow of the *Persian* empire by a *Grecian* king. *Alexander* was well satisfied with his reception at *Jerusalem*; and at his departure granted the *Jews* a *toleration* of their religion, and an exemption from tribute every *seventh* year.”⁷³

It should be noted that this account is not verifiable in any Grecian secular histories. “The whole account is markedly legendary in character. Alexander’s visit to the temple in Jerusalem may well have a historical nucleus, in the light of his later action in Egypt, but it is equally conceivable that by analogy with this event Josephus created a similar story about Jerusalem.”⁷⁴

More than simple toleration, however, Alexander seemed to favor the Jews to some extent. “He admired their excellent qualities and granted to them in Alexandria and in other cities the privileges of citizenship. Apparently they were never the victims of discrimination as long as he lived.”⁷⁵

Alexander the Great succumbed to the vices that so often plague powerful leaders; it is against these very things that the apostle John warns in 1 John 2:15-17: “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” “He became vain and unreasonable and yielded to the temptations by which he was surrounded. He drank to excess and contracted a fever which

⁶⁸ Hester, page 312.

⁶⁹ Butler, page 84.

⁷⁰ Hester, page 313.

⁷¹ Hester, page 313.

⁷² Clarke, page 807.

⁷³ Clarke, page 807.

⁷⁴ Jagersma, Henk. (1986). *A*

History of Israel from Alexander

the Great to Bar Kochba, page 13. Translated by John Bowden. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.

⁷⁵ Hester, page 314.

brought on his death in Babylon in 323 B.C.”⁷⁶ Clarke noted his “drunkenness and gluttony,”⁷⁷ while Jagersma attributes his death to “malaria.”⁷⁸

Upon Alexander’s death, the tide turned against the Jews; one writer noting it was “an era of the bitterest suffering in their long history.”⁷⁹ The empire was split among four of Alexander’s generals, and two of those took a particular interest in the land. “The Syrian or eastern section under Seleucus lay directly north of Palestine. The southern or Egyptian section under Ptolemy lay southwest of the Jewish homeland. In reality Palestine was sandwiched between these two powers and was passionately coveted by both the Seleucids and Ptolemies.”⁸⁰ “Throughout the whole third century BC Palestine was a cause of dispute between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids.”⁸¹

It was Ptolemy Soter who gained control of Palestine about 301 B.C., and initially he “was very severe in his treatment of the Jews.”⁸² Ptolemy Soter took advantage of the Jewish religion, “understanding that the *Jews* would not so much as defend themselves on the *Sabbath day*, he stormed *Jerusalem*, took it without resistance on that day, and carried above *one hundred thousand* of them captives into *Egypt*.”⁸³ “This number may be on the high side, but the deportation may well be a historical fact given the different sources which mention it and the large number of Jews who later lived in Egypt.”⁸⁴ Over time, peace returned to Palestine and the Jewish people, partly because “Judeaea and Jerusalem in particular were politically and economically so insignificant that Greek writers had no need to pay much attention to them.”⁸⁵

It was during this time period that the Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures, called the Septuagint, was completed. “This translation was finished under the inspection of *Eleazar* the high priest, and is called the *Septuagint*, on account of the joint labour of *seventy-two* translators employed in it, B.C. 254.”⁸⁶ Translating the Scriptures into the Greek language was important as fewer people, even among the Jews, learned to speak the Hebrew language. “Devout Jews saw that if their children were to continue to study their scriptures these must be put in the Greek language. This was a most significant event, since with this translation available every person who spoke Greek could read the scriptures. It made the Old Testament with all its predictions of a Messiah available to hundreds of thousands of people who otherwise might never have had the opportunity of reading the Jewish scriptures.”⁸⁷

The Jews continued to be under the Ptolemies until about 198 B.C. Several wars were fought between the Ptolemies and Seleucids, but it was not until the Fifth Syrian War that the Ptolemies truly lost control of Jerusalem. The Seleucid ruler Antiochus III “recognized the privileges that Jerusalem and the Judaeans had enjoyed during Ptolemaic rule and moreover – for the moment – granted them a reduction in the taxes which they had hitherto had to pay.”⁸⁸

In time, though, taxation again increased, as well as religious persecution against those in Jerusalem. These persecutions took various forms in an attempt to Hellenize the Jewish worship, and Daniel referred to them as “the abomination of desolation” in Daniel 11:31. “One means towards this end was the adoption of the name Zeus Olympius in place of the ‘Lord of heaven’, which had been usual since Perisan times as a designation for God, and to set up a second altar, or perhaps a holy stone, on the existing altar of burnt offering in the temple of Jerusalem....In

⁷⁶ Hester, page 314.

⁷⁷ Clarke, page 808.

⁷⁸ Jagersma, page 11.

⁷⁹ Hester, page 315.

⁸⁰ Hester, page 315.

⁸¹ Jagersma, page 17.

⁸² Hester, page 315.

⁸³ Clarke, page 808.

⁸⁴ Jagersma, page 19.

⁸⁵ Jagersma, page 18.

⁸⁶ Clarke, page 808.

⁸⁷ Hester, pages 315-316.

⁸⁸ Jagersma, page 35.

connection with this, I Macc. 1.47; II Macc. 6.21; 7.1 report that the Judaeans were forced to sacrifice pigs.”⁸⁹

The Maccabean Revolt and Jewish Independence

It was through the Maccabean revolt, started by Mattathias and continued by his son Judas, that Jerusalem gained their independence from Greek rule. “Mattathias rebelled in Modein against the command of Antiochus IV to offer sacrifice there in accordance with the royal command. Mattathias refused to obey the king, and when another Judaeans was prepared to do so, he killed him and the king’s representative. After this he fled into the hills with his five sons, John, Simon, Eleazar, Judas and Jonathan, along with other fugitives. This event marked the beginning of the revolt.”⁹⁰

Following a number of skirmishes in which Judas and his rebels triumphed, the Seleucids withdrew from the area of Jerusalem. “Taking advantage of the absence of the Syrians, Judas and his forces entered Jerusalem and cleaned up the temple court. They wept as they saw the desecration and wreckage before them. They destroyed all pagan altars and gods, then set up an altar to Jehovah, repaired the temple and put the city in order. On December 25, 165 B.C. the temple was rededicated to the worship of God. This occasion was memorialized by the ‘feast of the dedication.’ (John 10:22.)”⁹¹

While the Jews continued to struggle for political freedom, they were granted the privilege of worshiping as they desired. Following Judas’ death, around 161 B.C., his brother Jonathan became the leader, followed by another brother, Simon. Simon was assassinated in 135 B.C. by his son-in-law, Ptolemy, after which John Hyrcanus, Simon’s son, seized control. “Under John Hyrcanus (135-105 B.C.) there was a period of rapid expansion. He annexed Idumea, Samaria and Perea to Judea. He beautified Jerusalem. He was the first Jewish ruler to issue coins. As high-priest he offended the strict Pharisaic party and later identified himself with the Sadducees, the rival religious party of the Jews.”⁹²

The Pharisees and Sadducees and More

The words “Pharisee” and “Sadducee” never appear in the Old Testament, but both groups appear firmly established when John calls them a “brood of vipers” in Matthew 3:7. Jesus warned His disciples, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees” (Matthew 16:6), showing that neither group had remained true to God’s revelation. They came into existence during the inter-testamental period.

The Pharisees developed from a group of Jews that stood with Judas during the revolt. “They were known at first as Hasidim. As soon as religious freedom was won they stopped fighting since they had no political ambitions. Out of this group came the Pharisees. The word means ‘separatists’ and is usually interpreted as meaning separation from unclean things and persons. Gradually they came to be regarded as conservatives, those who held steadfastly to the law of Moses and the traditions of the fathers. They represent the common people, and especially in New Testament times, were the majority party and were very influential.”⁹³ Despite being the majority party, their numbers were still relatively small. Josephus wrote of “the sect of the Pharisees: who were in a capacity of greatly opposing kings. A cunning sect they were; and soon

⁸⁹ Jagersma, page 52.

⁹⁰ Jagersma, page 59.

⁹¹ Hester, page 320.

⁹² Hester, page 321.

⁹³ Hester, page 322.

elevated to a pitch of open fighting, and doing mischief. Accordingly when all the people of the Jews gave assurance of their good will to Caesar, and to the king's government; these very men did not swear: being above six thousand."⁹⁴

While the Pharisees were very strict in their separation from the non-religious, or at the very least considered the religious implications of non-religious questions, the Sadducees believed that they could mix the Hellenism of the Greek culture while remaining true to their faith. "They were largely of the aristocratic class and, while not nearly so numerous as the Pharisees, they were very influential in national affairs. They were of the priestly class and were considered by the Pharisees liberal and even anti-religious."⁹⁵ The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead as well as angels and spirits, while the Pharisees believed in the reality of these things (Matthew 22:23; Acts 23:8). "Closely connected with all this is the fact that the Sadducees were very hostile to messianic and apocalyptic movements which brought innovations and in this way threatened the *status quo*. For the same reasons they did not have much time for the message of the prophets."⁹⁶

Two other groups are worth mentioning, though there is very little known about either: the Essenes and the Qumran community. It is possible that they are one and the same, but it cannot be known for certain. "The Essenes are never mentioned by name in rabbinic literature nor in any of the writings of the New Testament which have come down to us."⁹⁷ The Qumran community is significant because of their role in the Dead Sea Scrolls. "Very soon after the first discoveries in 1947 in the area of the Dead Sea it became clear that the writings found there must have belonged to a group which had spent a long time in this area. It was more difficult to identify the group in question. Most scholars think that the Qumran community consisted of Essenes or a group closely related to them."⁹⁸

The Essenes and the Qumran community seemingly had little to do with the political events in Jerusalem. They left that to the Pharisees and Sadducees. "The antagonism between these two strong parties became so bitter that it ultimately wrecked the Maccabean kingdom and forfeited the political freedom of the Jews. John Hyrcanus died in 105 B.C. and was succeeded by Aristobulus I who ruled for only a year. He was succeeded by Alexander Janneus, who lived until 78 B.C. Both these were Sadducees. Janneus was vicious in his actions and was very severe in his treatment of the Pharisees. Janneus was succeeded by his wife, Alexandra, who was strongly pro-Pharisee. Under her rule the Pharisees were merciless in their treatment of the Sadducees."⁹⁹ Civil War followed her death in 69, and neither side was able to reestablish control. Finally Rome took over in 63 B.C.

The Fourth Kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

The fourth and final earthly kingdom prophesied, the "legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay" (Daniel 2:33). This is the Roman Empire. "Iron is a very appropriate symbol to describe the Roman empire. And, as a matter of fact, we are passing, generally speaking, from the bronze age to the iron age when we pass from the third kingdom (Greece) to the fourth kingdom (Rome). To the Roman poets, Virgil and Lucretius, bronze weapons spoke of olden time....Iron swords and armor took the place of bronze weapons."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Josephus, Flavius. (1998). *Josephus: The Complete Works*, page 544. Translated by William

Whitson. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁹⁵ Hester, page 322.

⁹⁶ Jagersma, page 70.

⁹⁷ Jagersma, page 73.

⁹⁸ Jagersma, page 75.

⁹⁹ Hester, page 322.

¹⁰⁰ Butler, page 86.

The two players in the Palestinian Civil War were Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II. Rome took advantage of their disharmony and pitted them against each other. “Both these claimants, feeling that he could not succeed without outside assistance and realizing that Pompey was now ready to move into Palestine, resolved to appeal to this Roman general. Each laid his case before Pompey, offered his resources and pled for his support. In his favored position the Roman general could take his time. Finally he announced his preference for Hyrcanus. Aristobulus hastily prepared to defend Jerusalem against the advances of Pompey. After a siege of three months Pompey captured Jerusalem and seized Aristobulus whom he sent, along with some of his supporters, to Rome as a prisoner....he now set up Hyrcanus as ruler in Palestine, but without a crown. He also laid upon the Jews a heavy annual tribute to be paid to Rome. Jewish independence was at an end. The Roman ruled the Jews.”¹⁰¹

The leadership of Rome changed in 48 B.C. when Julius Caesar defeated Pompey in the battle of Pharsalus. The new leader of Rome “manifested a very lenient attitude toward the Jews, not only in Palestine, but elsewhere in the empire. He granted them special favors, among which was full religious liberty.”¹⁰²

It was, as Daniel prophesied, “in the days of these kings” that God established the church, “a kingdom which shall never be destroyed” (Daniel 2:44). So while we do not have an inspired historical description of what exactly happened between Malachi and John the Baptist, we have inspired prophecy that points to the succession of ruling empires.

“The question that has bearing today is in regards to why God revealed these things to the people through Daniel. In understanding the purposes of these predictive prophecies, it allows the modern reader to have his faith strengthened during the times of life when God appears to be silent....God gave the people what they needed to keep their faith in the midst of difficult times. After equipping the people, God was silent. He was silent for over 400 years. There are times in our lives when God may appear to be silent, but Christians should be encouraged that he has spoken in times past about the things we need in order to believe and trust in him. His silence was and will only be broken by the gospel of Jesus Christ!”¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Hester, page 323.

¹⁰² Hester, page 324.

¹⁰³ Hazel, pages 150-151.

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