

### Backslidden Israel is Rebuked

#### Malachi 1:6-14

**Malachi 1:6-14** - *“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?” says the Lord of hosts. To you priests who despise My name, yet you say, ‘In what way have we despised Your name?’*

*<sup>7</sup>“You offer defiled food on My altar, but say, ‘In what way have we defiled You?’ By saying, ‘The table of the Lord is contemptible.’ <sup>8</sup>And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?*

*Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?” says the Lord of hosts.*

*<sup>9</sup>“But now entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably?” says the Lord of hosts.*

*<sup>10</sup>“Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you,” says the Lord of hosts, “nor will I accept an offering from your hands.*

*<sup>11</sup>For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering, for My name shall be great among the nations,” says the Lord of hosts.*

*<sup>12</sup>“But you profane it, in that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is defiled, and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.’ <sup>13</sup>You also say, ‘Oh, what a weariness!’ and you sneer at it,” says the Lord of hosts. “And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick! Thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?” says the Lord. <sup>14</sup>“But cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and takes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished!”*

*“For I am a great King,” says the Lord of hosts, “And My name is to be feared among the nations.”*

#### Background Notes

The name “Malachi” means “my messenger.” Thus some commentators suggest that Malachi is not a proper name, and that either Ezra or Nehemiah is the real author of the book. However, reliable Jewish tradition holds that Malachi is a proper name.

Malachi was one of the “post-exilic” prophets. Post-exilic prophets preached and wrote their prophecies after the Jewish people began to return to Judah after their exile in Babylon. Malachi, written 400 years before Christ, was the last prophet of the Old Testament.

Malachi and Nehemiah were contemporaries. Malachi probably wrote his book after the revival that followed the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem. Nehemiah 12 & 13 tell us that there was serious backsliding in Jerusalem at some point after the rebuilding of the wall. Most likely it was during this time, maybe about 430BC, that Malachi wrote his book, rebuking the people for their backslidden and rebellious ways.

In the first part of chapter 1, Malachi rebuked the people for doubting and questioning God's love. God had stated that He loved His people in no uncertain terms - not just in Malachi 1:2, but all the way back in the books of the Law.

*Deuteronomy 7:6-8: "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples. But because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."*

All down through the Old Testament years, God reminded Israel of His covenanted love and His loving-kindness for them. In Jeremiah 31:3 God said, "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore with loving-kindness I have drawn you." God had reminded His people that He loves them, He loves them, He loves them! And yet the people of Malachi's day dared to question God's love, and they even challenged God to prove His love! For this defiant attitude, they were sternly rebuked.

In the second half of chapter 1 there are two more areas where the people - and especially the priests - were rebuked for offering defective sacrifices, and for despising God's way of worship. Both of these sins dishonor God - both then and today. Verse 6 indicates that they were showing honor and respect in their families and jobs, but showing no honor and respect for the Lord. It sounds a lot like conditions in our own nation today.

Before going on to doctrinal points, let me say something about verse 11: "*For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering. For My name shall be great among the nations,' says the Lord of hosts.*"

Some far out interpreters have suggested that this verse teaches that pagan worship is acceptable before God. **Wrong!** This verse is a prediction of the future time when believing Gentiles will worship the Lord. This prophecy has certainly been partially fulfilled with the spread of Christianity around the world. The "sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 13:15) ascends to the Lord from believers' hearts around the world even now! Verse 11 will be completely fulfilled when the Lord returns and sets up His kingdom here on earth. Then worship of the Lord by Gentiles around the world will indeed take place!

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Defective sacrifices dishonor God.

God said here that the people and priests were dishonoring Him by offering defective sacrifices on the altar. The *“table of the Lord”* (v7 & 12) refers to the altar of sacrifice.

What is a “defective” sacrifice? According to the Law, animals with defects or blemishes were not to be offered to the Lord. In reference to the animals for sacrifice, Deuteronomy 15:21 says: *“But if there is a defect in it, if it is lame or blind or has any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord your God.”* (Leviticus 22 gives more details about the regulations for defective sacrifices and blemished animals.)

The backsliders of Malachi’s day were bringing defective sacrifices – blind, lame, and sick animals. Look at verse 8: *“And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil?”*

*And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?” says the Lord of hosts.”*

And verse 14: *“But cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and takes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished...”*

If we were living then, would we have done the same thing? Knowing that we should offer a sacrifice to the Lord, we would look over our flock - but rather than giving Him our best, would we select a defective animal to bring to the Lord? Would we reason, “Why not sacrifice a sick animal, because after all, that animal will die soon anyway?” We may think that we would never do such a thing, but what do we offer to the Lord now? Do we offer Him the best of our time, or do we just give Him some leftover spare time? Do we use our best talents to serve the Lord - or to serve ourselves? Is our praise and worship on Sunday morning defiled and defective because of how we occupied our minds on Saturday night?

In 2 Samuel 24:24 David said, *“I will not give offerings to the Lord which cost me nothing.”* What about us? **“The Lord is a great King”** (v14)! Let’s honor Him as a great King! Defective sacrifices dishonor God.

### 2. Disdainful attitudes dishonor God.

The offering of defective sacrifices was not the only problem. The attitudes of the people and priests were a problem as well. The Lord said that they **despised His name** (v6)! They were saying that the Lord’s altar was **contemptible** (v7). Can you even imagine?

Look at the Lord’s rebuke: *“In that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is defiled, and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.’ You also say, ‘Oh, what a weariness!’ And you sneer at it,’ says the Lord of hosts”* (v12-13).

Again, we may think we would never have such an attitude! But wait! What about sleeping in on Sunday morning? Is this not belittling the “table of the Lord”? What about daydreaming and planning your week during the Sunday worship service? Is that not despising the name of the Lord? Do you see what the Bible is teaching here? Bored and disdainful attitudes dishonor God.

## Practical Application

**Let’s close the door of the church if we’re just “going through the motions.”**

That’s essentially what God was saying about the worship at the Temple in Malachi’s day: *““Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the Lord Almighty, “and I will accept no offering from your hands.” (v10).*

God would have preferred that they put out the fire on the altar and shut the doors of the Temple, rather than the people and priests just “go through the motions” of worship with bored and disdainful attitudes, and offering defective sacrifices.

What a lesson for us! It’s a sad day when a church has to close its doors. Unfortunately many churches that were once vibrant for the Lord are closed. There are all kinds of reasons, and many of the reasons involve sad stories.

Many unbelievers go through the motions for prestige - attending a prominent, socially acceptable church, and thinking they’re “worshiping God” - even though the Bible is watered down and salvation through the death of Jesus Christ is never preached. God would rather have a church shut its doors if the people are just going through the motions of “worship” through pride or tradition or desire for social status.

For some Christians, “worshiping” the Lord at Sunday services is a habit. Is that true of you? Are you in church just because it’s your Sunday habit? Even though you’re bored, you’re “putting in your time” for God?

I trust that you and your church have the right attitude. Not a pretense of worship. Not bringing unworthy sacrifices – or no sacrifice at all. I trust it will never be said of your church: “We might as well just close the doors. We’re not really worshiping God. Everything we do is just a performance - the boring motions of tradition and habit and social custom. It’s only a pretense of worship.”

Don’t ever let it be said of your church, that your “worship” is mere tradition, and you’re just “going through the motions” of worshiping God. May we all bring the “sacrifice of praise” and worthy worship to the Lord, with humility and true gratitude, because of His great love for us.