

December 6

Scriptures: Read Malachi 1 & 2

Key Verse: “... For I am a great King,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘and My name is to be feared among the nations.’” (Malachi 1:14b)

Overview

The people’s spiritual blindness, calloused hearts, and spiritual decay were evident in their questions and responses to the words of the prophet Malachi. Whether they actually voiced these questions is not known, but God knew what was going through their minds. After all that He had done for them, how could they have doubted God’s affirmation: “I have loved you” (1:2)? If they were going through difficulties, it was because God, in His love for them, was chastising them, just as a good father does to the child he loves (Heb. 12:6). The Lord wanted to put them onto the right track, which was that of seeking Him and worshipping Him with their whole hearts and being obedient to Him.

Through the prophet Malachi, the Lord condescended to answer their selfish questions. He explained to them that the very fact that He had chosen them to be His own special people was evidence of His love which was unconditional, unlimited, and unchanging (cf. Jer. 31:3; Hos. 11:4; 14:4). It was not based upon any merit on their part but upon His grace and divine purpose, for through the Israelites God planned to bless the whole world through Jesus the Messiah (Deut. 7:6-9). The love and hate spoken of here are not the emotions of a person, they are related to God’s sovereign will. He chose (“loved”, 1:2) Jacob to bless and fulfill His purposes, but He rejected (“hated”, 1:3) Esau (cf. Gen. 25:23; Rom. 9:10-13). Israel had been restored to her land, but the land of the descendants of Esau, the wicked Edomites, was a barren wasteland; this fact should have shown God’s people that He did indeed love them, but they were blind. Malachi foretells, however, that one day God’s people would understand how truly great their God is and how much He loves them (1:4-5).

Malachi continues his message by rebuking the priests of his day who had self-righteously questioned, “In what way have we despised Your name?” and “In what way have we defiled You?” (1:6-7). This is the main burden of Malachi’s message. Just as the people had not appreciated God’s love, so now it is revealed that they also do not appreciate His holiness and the sanctity of worship to Him. The Sovereign Lord, their Creator, Father, and Master of the Universe had not been shown the honour and reverence that these children of God gave to their earthly fathers and masters (1:6; cf. Deut. 32:6; Ex. 4:22; Isa. 63:16; 64:8). Although the whole nation was guilty in this respect, Malachi addresses the priests, since they were the representatives of the nation before God.

The priests’ disrespect for the holiness of God was evident in their disobedience to the law with regard to the sacrificial offerings in the Temple of God. Their job was to ensure that only unblemished animals were offered, but they did not care; they rather scorned their duty and found it wearisome. They offered the blind, lame, and sick animals to God (1:8, 13; cf. Deut. 15:21), but they would certainly not think to give such imperfect animals to their governor, for he would in no way accept them (1:8)! How could they have expected God, the “great King”, to

accept such offerings (1:14), and how could they think that their prayers for God's favour would be answered? (a note of irony, 1:9).

The priests were supposed to be examples of obedience and holiness to the Lord, as well as being the spiritual leaders and teachers of the law. They were to bless the people and their presence and work was to be a blessing to the nation (Num. 6:23-27), but they had failed; they actually had driven the people further away from God and had caused God's blessings upon the nation to cease. Because of their failures, the priests had lost the respect of the people (2:7-9), which in turn resulted in the people losing respect for God. Therefore, they are strongly warned that unless they repent, they would be cursed and disgracefully removed from their office (1:14; 2:2). These warnings were given with the hope that they, who had corrupted God's covenant of peace with the tribe of Levi, would repent and once again enjoy the blessing of the covenant as had their faithful and righteous ancestors (2:4-9; cf. Ex. 32:26; Num. 25:10-13; Deut. 33:8-11).

The Lord declared that their ceremonial rituals were so empty and vain that the temple doors should be closed (1:10). In His plan, however, God would raise up an undefiled priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9), and at that time His name would be continually hallowed and magnified among those Gentiles who would come to believe in Jesus; these ones will offer incense (acceptable prayers, Rev. 8:3) and the sacrifice of praise, and they will give Him a pure offering, the offering of themselves in consecration to Him (1:11; Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 13:15; Ps. 51:16-17).

The last half of chapter two is devoted to the serious problem of Jewish men taking heathen wives and thus profaning the covenant law of their fathers which forbade intermarriage with the heathen (Deut. 7:1-4). To make matters worse, and to add to their sins, many were divorcing their Jewish wives in order to do this! This was not only treacherous among the covenant community (2:10-11), but also treachery with regard to the marriage covenant they had with the wife of their youth (2:14-15; Prov. 2:17). In spite of their sin, these men had the audacity to bring offerings to the Lord and expect Him to bless them! Their weeping for answers to prayer, however, was to no avail (2:13). God declared "that He hates divorce" since it defiles a person, and He warns the people to repent and guard their spirits, lest they entertain this sin (2:16; cf. Neh. 13:23-30; Ez. 10:10-11; Mt. 5:31-32; 19:3-9; 2 Cor. 6:14).

Prayer

Lord God, because of Your love and devotion toward us, we purpose to set aside the firstfruits of our labours to give back into Your storehouse. Enable us to experience and know the joy of giving to Your work.