

# The Jewish remnant and the Messenger of the covenant: A study of the Book of Malachi

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## Introduction

This remarkable book was written almost 2 500 years ago to Jews who had returned to Israel after the Babylonian captivity. Having heeded the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, they had entered the Promised Land. The temple and the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt. But the most vital part of the restoration was lacking: many had lost their love for and fear of the LORD of hosts. Ezekiel's temple will ultimately be built in the city of the great King. Elijah the prophet will eventually restore the hearts of the fathers to the children and the true remnant will enter the Messianic kingdom. This remarkable book remains applicable not only to the Israel of God, but to all who seek the Lord, the Messenger of the covenant, who will soon return.

## Author

Nothing is known about the person who wrote this book; no one else in the Old Testament had this name. Many understand "Malachi" (1:1) to be a title rather than a name. "Malachi" means "my messenger" or "the messenger of Jehovah" (*Malachiyyah*). The Targum, an ancient Aramaic translation and paraphrase of the Old Testament, ascribed this book to Ezra; the Talmud said Mordechai wrote it (Constable 2015:1). But this is unlikely, because if Malachi was not the prophet's name, it would be the only prophetic book in the Old Testament that was written anonymously or pseudonymously (cf. Archer 1964:415). Malachi is not referred to in the third person pronoun ("his"), but rather as "my" messenger (Kaiser 1984:13). The "messengers" in this book are understood to (also) have a human nature (1:1; 2:7; 3:1). Even though he had an unusual name,<sup>1</sup> Malachi must have been a real person, one of three post-exilic prophets that God inspired to write.

## Date and place

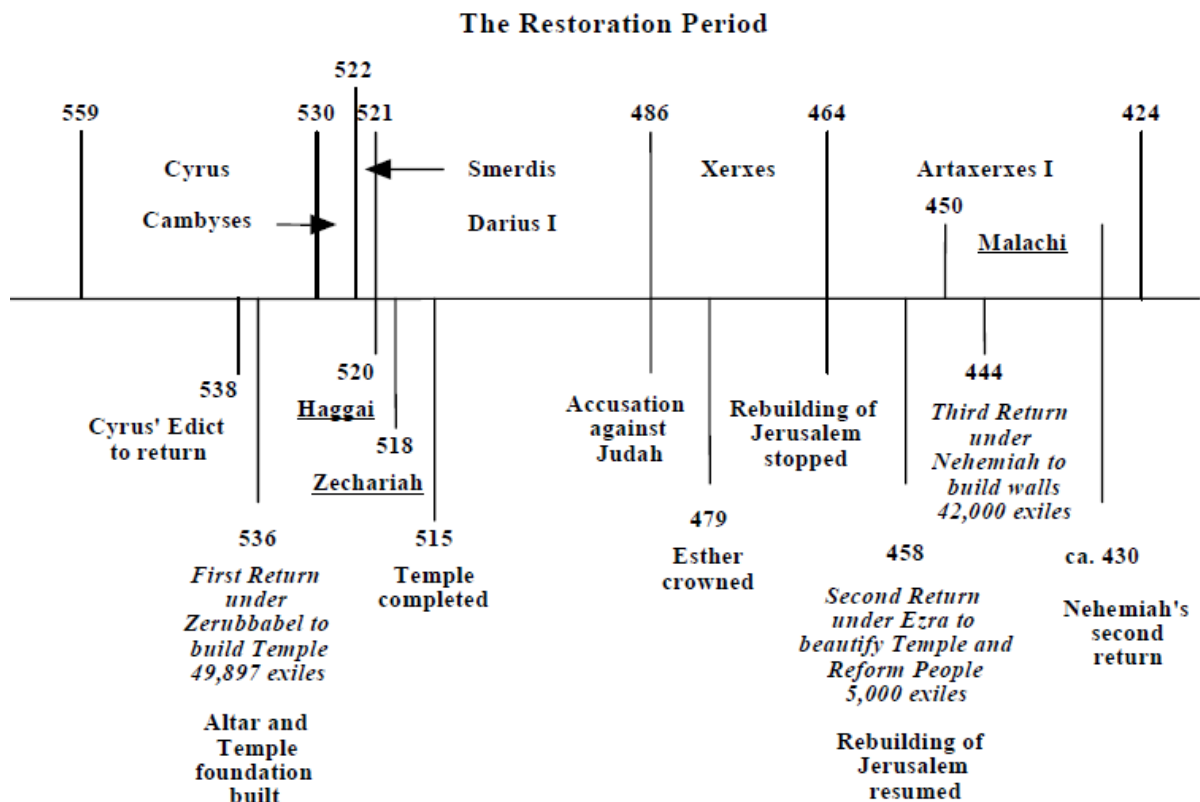
Internal clues help to estimate the date when this book was written. The LORD of hosts asks the priests, who were offering blind, lame and sick animals as sacrifices, whether they would present these to their "governor" (Malachi 1:8). This word is *pehah*, a Persian title (cf. Ezra 5:3, 6, 14: 6:6-7; Daniel 3:2-3, 27).

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<sup>1</sup> Jonah and Habakkuk also have unusual names.

Haggai urged the Jews to complete the rebuilding of the temple (Haggai 1:4-8) and Zechariah was written when the rebuilding of the temple had already started (Zechariah 1:1, 7). But in Malachi the temple in Jerusalem had already been rebuilt, for sacrifices and tithes were to be taken to the temple, i.e. the “storehouse” in Jerusalem (Malachi 1:10; 3:10). Malachi is therefore the last of the three post-exilic prophets.

Further clues about the date of composition are found by comparing Malachi and Nehemiah. As Kaiser (1984:16-17) notes, these books often share the same concerns: corruption of the priesthood (Nehemiah 13:7-9; Malachi 1:6-2:9), neglect to pay tithes under the Mosaic covenant (Nehemiah 13:10-14; Malachi 3:8-10), marriage of heathen wives (Nehemiah 13:23-27; Malachi 2:11-15) and other social wrongs (Nehemiah 5:1-13; Malachi 3:5). Not only was Malachi written after Haggai (about 520 BC) and after Zechariah (about 518 BC), but it was also written after Esther had become a queen in the Persian Empire (in 479 BC). After the rebuilding of the temple, a period of spiritual decline and malpractices set in, but this took time (Malachi 1:6-8; 2:1-9; 3:6-12). Without being too dogmatic about it, Malachi probably wrote during the years that Nehemiah served (445-420 BC), perhaps between 432 and 431 BC when Nehemiah was away from Jerusalem (Fruchtenbaum 2005:5; Coupar 2015:1). Constable (2015:4) compiled this insightful picture of Israel’s post-exilic restoration period:



## **Historical background**

In the second half of the fifth century BC, the times of the Gentiles had progressed to the second of the four Gentile empires. During the same night that the handwriting on the wall appeared, in 539 BC, the Persians captured Babylon (cf. Daniel 5). The Persian Empire existed until 333 BC when Alexander the Great captured Babylon.

Cyrus' edict allowed the Jews to return to Israel in 538 BC (cf. Isaiah 45). During the next 20 years or so, 49 897 exiles returned with Zerubbabel and Joshua to the land (Ezra 2:64-65; Haggai 1:1). Later, more Jews returned with Ezra (458 BC) and then with Nehemiah (444 BC). Haggai and Zechariah were prophets for Zerubbabel, but Malachi was a prophet for Nehemiah (Fruchtenbaum 2005:5). Malachi's audience is the Jews who had returned to Israel; the locale was probably Jerusalem.

The circumstances in Israel at the time were difficult. Initially, the returning exiles rebuilt the temple but would later experience severe opposition to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 4:1-6:19). The Jews had to be taught the Law of Moses all over again (Nehemiah 8:8). At the time of Malachi, the temple had been rebuilt but it did not have the splendour of Solomon's temple (cf. Haggai 2:3). There were locust plagues and the harvests were poor (Malachi 3:11). It is, however, the spiritual condition of the people of Israel that Malachi was especially addressing.

Israel may have had in her midst sorcerers, adulterers, false witnesses and those who treated their workers badly (cf. Malachi 3:5). "A nation that is prepared to serve God with sacrifices that they will not dare to offer to their heathen governor (1:8) is a nation that has lost its perspective of God as their Father and Lord (1:6)" (Verhoef 1987:160). The spiritual, ethical and moral tone of the nation was quite low (Constable 2015:4).

Even though some of the rituals of the temple were being adhered to in accordance with the Law of Moses, this was ritual without reality (cf. Fruchtenbaum 2005:5). God rebukes this formalism. It is this cold and dead formalism that would develop over the next four centuries into the "traditions of the elders" that would be elevated above God's Word (cf. Matthew 15:2).

The Jews considered Malachi to be the "seal of the Prophets" or, "the last among them" (Verhoef 1987:153). Malachi was also the last of the twelve Minor Prophets. God did not use another messenger until — more than 400 years later — John the Baptist thundered, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2; cf. Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1a).

## **Theological emphases and important themes**

According to Kaiser (1984:11), the Jews that returned to Israel may have expected a glorious temple (cf. Ezekiel 40-48; Haggai 2:9), a fruitful and blessed land (cf. Ezekiel 34:26-30), a large population (Isaiah 54:1-3) and the reign of the Messiah (cf. Jeremiah 23:5-6). Certainly the book of Haggai closed with a prophecy that the strength of the Gentile kingdoms will be destroyed (2:20-23). The book of Zechariah likewise ends with a wonderful prophecy of the reign of the King, the LORD of hosts from Jerusalem (14:16-21). The Jews had (and still have!) reason to have great expectations and hope.

But this is not what one encounters in Malachi. Spiritual lethargy had set in. God's love was doubted (Malachi 1:2-5). A corrupt and defiled priesthood existed (Malachi 1:6-2:9) and the people were likewise sinning (Malachi 2:10-16), even questioning God's justice (Malachi 2:17-3:6). They neglected the Law of Moses (Malachi 3:7-15). The land was producing poor harvests (Malachi 3:11) and only a few Jews truly feared the LORD (Malachi 3:16-18). The altar, the temple and the walls of Jerusalem had all been rebuilt, but Israel's relationship with God was still broken. If Israel does not turn to the LORD of hosts, God's judgment in the Day of the LORD will overtake them (Malachi 3:2-5; 4:1-6).

God takes the initiative, wanting to restore this relationship. Out of 55 verses in Malachi, 47 record a first person address of the Lord. Malachi frequently refers to God as the "LORD of hosts" or, in Hebrew, "Jehovah Sabaoth".<sup>2</sup> The name "Jehovah" (or "LORD") emphasises God's covenant-relationship with Israel as its Redeemer (Exodus 19:3; Jeremiah 31:31-34; cf. Verhoef 1987:181). God is thus the Father of Israel (Malachi 1:6; 2:10). But God is also the LORD of (warrior) hosts, where the word "hosts" is related to heavenly bodies, angels, saints, and sinners (Scofield 2002:382). God is King and his Name should be revered (Malachi 1:5, 11, 14; 2:2). By combining two title-names of God — the LORD of hosts — Jehovah Sabaoth stresses that He is the Covenant-Redeemer-Father-King of Israel.

This book emphasises God's unchanging love for Israel: "I have loved you" (Malachi 1:2) combined with "I the Lord change not" (Malachi 3:6).<sup>3</sup> Paul would later quote Malachi 1:2-3 in Romans 9:13 to show that, despite Israel's sins and infidelities, God's love for Israel will never change. "The primary thought in Malachi is that of

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<sup>2</sup> The name "LORD of hosts" appears 80 times in Jeremiah in connection with national judgment. In the post-exilic prophets, "LORD of hosts" appears 14 times in Haggai, 50 times in Zechariah and 25 times in Malachi.

<sup>3</sup> This explains the name of Walter Kaiser's commentary: "Malachi, God's unchanging love".

the unfailing grace of God to a calloused and ungrateful and unfaithful people” (Coupar 2015:2).

In Malachi, the audience’s response is clearly not exemplary. When God makes a statement, the audience would object (“How have we...?” — 1:2, 6: 2:14, 17, 3:8-9, 13-14) and then God would answer. Israel’s objections show hard heartedness, human failure and a worship that is somehow lacking. “The condition of the people is revealed in a curious way by seven questions being asked throughout this prophecy” (Coupar 2015:1). Through these questions, God reveals the spiritual condition of Israel at the time.<sup>4</sup> However, as is common to most prophets, some of Malachi’s prophecies refer to his contemporaries and other prophecies refer to a future generation of Jews.

Among the remnant of the Jews that returned from Babylon, there was a smaller remnant that feared the LORD (Malachi 3:16; cf. Romans 9:6-7). This fear “is the term that throughout the Old Testament refers to someone's reverence for the Lord that arises from awareness of His love, on the one hand, and of His wrath, on the other” (Constable 2015:11). Responding to God’s love, the Israel of God feared the LORD and revered his Name (cf. Malachi 1:6; 2:5; 3:5, 16: 4:2). The true remnant not only had fellowship with God restored, but they also had fellowship with each other (Malachi 3:16).<sup>5</sup> Their names are recorded in the book of remembrance.

The true remnant also had hope in the coming Messiah, whose righteousness will dawn on the earth like the rising sun (cf. Malachi 4:2; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:19). The Day of the LORD will have commenced before the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> But before that great and awesome Day of the LORD, Elijah the prophet will return to bring about the final and complete restoration of Israel (Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 17:11). At that time, the remnant will heed the forerunner’s message and all Israel will be saved (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Romans 11:25-27).

The theme of Malachi may be stated as: “Appreciating God’s constant love is the key to revitalizing present spiritual life and assuring future divine blessing” (Constable 2015:12). Kaiser (1984:13) describes the theme thus: “God has, and continues, to love

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<sup>4</sup> The Church, local churches and individual believers must heed the warnings in 2 Peter & Revelation 2-3: don’t regress into spiritual lethargy as Israel did (Malachi 1-4; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1-15).

<sup>5</sup> The Church has fellowship with Christ as we participate in the Lord’s Supper and remember the Lord’s death until He comes (McIntyre).

<sup>6</sup> “What is our attitude towards “that Day” [of the LORD]? The attitude of born again believers toward that Day which sees the return of the Lord Jesus Christ is never one of fear whereas for the unsaved it holds an absolute dread” (Coupar 2015:4). See also the *Appendix 1: The Day of the LORD*.

us, and no amount of doubting, objecting, or arguing the contrary will remove this fact". Archer (1964:416) says the theme is about "that sincerity toward God and a holy manner of life [that] are absolutely essential in the Lord's eyes... Israel must live up to her high calling as a holy nation and wait for the coming of the Messiah, who by a ministry of healing as well as judgment will lead the nation to a realization of all her fondest hopes." The title of this study emphasises that a Jewish remnant will indeed delight in the Messenger of the covenant (cf. Malachi 3:1, 16; 4:5-6).

### **Literary form and structure of Malachi**

How does Malachi convince his Jewish audience that God not only loves them, but that they have sinned and are not in fellowship with God? As noted, Malachi confronts his audience through the frequent use of questions and answers. "Essentially, the Israelites disputed God's love, His name, and His will concerning marriage and divorce, His justice, His demands regarding stewardship, and His service" (Constable 2015:7). Malachi's rhetorical approach moves from God's statements to their objections and then all the way back to God's answers. The following chiasmic outline of Constable (2015:7) captures how the oracles recorded in Malachi are carefully structured:

**A** Superscription (1:1): Yahweh has a message for Israel.

**B** 1<sup>st</sup> Disputation (1:2-5): God distinguishes between the good and the wicked. The proof of His love is His sparing the righteous and condemning the wicked.

**C** 2<sup>nd</sup> Disputation (1:6–2:9): Condemnation of improper, begrudging offerings, promise of reversal of blessing, and the greatness of Yahweh's name among the nations.

**D** 3<sup>rd</sup> Disputation (2:10-16): The Lord is witness to marital fidelity, and Judah is unfaithful.

**D'** 4<sup>th</sup> Disputation (2:17–3:6): The Lord is witness to marital fidelity, and Judah is unfaithful.

**C'** 5<sup>th</sup> Disputation (3:7-12): Condemnation of improper, begrudging offerings, promise of reversal of blessing, and the greatness of Yahweh's name among the nations.

**B'** 6<sup>th</sup> Disputation (3:13–4:3): God distinguishes between the good and the wicked. The proof of His love is His sparing the righteous and condemning the wicked.

**A'** Summary challenge (4:4-6): Yahweh has a message for Israel.

There is little doubt that Malachi is a hortatory discourse that "attempts to affect the future behaviour of someone" and thus it consists of the "essential features of problem, command, motivation, and authority" (Clendenen 1987:6). Viewing

Malachi as such a hortatory discourse, Clendenen (1987:7, 16) proposes a structure for the book that outlines three chiasmic movements or embedded discourses, as shown below:

I. First movement: Priests exhorted to honour Yahweh [theological angle] 1:2—2:9

- A. Motivation: Yahweh's love 1:2-5
- B. Problem: Failure to honour the Yahweh 1:6-9
- C. Command: Stop vain offerings 1:10
- D. Problem: Profaning Yahweh's Name 1:11-14
- E. Motivation: Results of disobedience 2:1-9

II. Second movement: Judah exhorted to faithfulness [social angle] 2:10—3:6

- A. Motivation: Spiritual unity 2:10a, b
- B. Problem: Faithlessness 2:10c-14
- C. Command: Stop acting faithlessly 2:15-16
- D. Problem: Complaints of Yahweh's injustice 2:17
- E. Motivation: Coming messenger of judgment 3:1-6

III. Third movement: Judah exhorted to return to Yahweh [economic angle] 3:7—4:6

- A. Command: Return to Yahweh with tithes 3:7-10a
- B. Motivation: Future blessing 3:10b-12
- C. Problem: Complacency toward serving God 3:13-15
- D. Motivation: The Coming Day 3:16—4:3
- E. Command: Remember the Law 4:4-6

## **Discussion of the Book of Malachi**

Malachi 1:1 (NKJV): The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

The word "burden" (*massa*) has a wide range of possible meanings, including to "lift up", the "carrying of a burden", a "pronouncement" or an "utterance". The messenger is constrained to bring a pronouncement of serious import: the words of the LORD (cf. Verhoef 1987:187-189). In Malachi, the burden concerns a "heavy message" because it includes a "threatening judgment" (Fruchtenbaum 2005:7). Note that Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God (or LORD), is neither addressing Judah and Benjamin nor the ten tribes, but He is addressing Israel. None of the tribes were ever "lost", not before the Babylonian captivity and not thereafter. Only a few Jews returned to Israel after the Babylonian captivity, but they nevertheless represent the whole nation. The LORD delivers his message via the hand of "my messenger", that is Malachi (1:1), one of many messengers referred to in this book (cf. 2:7; 3:1; 4:4-5).

Malachi 1:2-5: "I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the LORD. "Yet Jacob have I loved; but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness." Even though Edom has said, "We have been impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places," thus says the LORD of hosts: "They may build, but I will tear down; they shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, and the people against whom the LORD will have indignation forever. Your eyes shall see, and you shall say, 'The LORD is magnified beyond the border of Israel.'

The LORD emphasises first and foremost his love for Israel. This presupposes an existing covenant-relationship between God and Israel (Deuteronomy 4:32-40; 5:10; 7:6-9; Jeremiah 31:3). When did such a relationship start? God initiated and cut an unconditional covenant with Abraham who became the father of the Jewish nation (Genesis 12, 15, 17). Through which of Abraham's sons would this covenant be confirmed and the promises be fulfilled? The Abrahamic covenant was not confirmed with Ishmael or any of the other sons of Abraham (Genesis 17:18-22; 25:1-4, but through Isaac (Genesis 17:19,21; 26:2-5, 24). Moreover, this covenant was not reconfirmed with the first-born of the twins, Esau, but with Jacob, later renamed "Israel" (Genesis 28:13-15; 31). Even though they had been brought back from Babylon into the Promised land, witnessed the restoration of the temple and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, the community in Israel in Malachi's day evidently doubted this covenant-relationship.

But God loved Jacob and hated Esau. Coupar (2015:2) emphasises that the Hebrew verb for "love" is "a compound of tenses, past, present, and future and therefore a more accurate apprehension is "I have loved, I do now love, and I will always love you, says the Lord." Moreover, these words are spoken by the God who does not change (Malachi 3:6). The words "love" and "hate" can be understood as "to choose" or "not to choose" (Fruchtenbaum 2005:8; cf. Verhoef 1987:197). Later, Jesus used similar wording in Luke 14:26 (cf. Matthew 10:37) to stress that his disciples must choose Him first, that is, Christ must be preferred above father or mother, before sister or brother.

What did God chose Jacob/Israel and his posterity for (and not Esau and his lineage)? God chose or preferred Jacob as the person through whose lineage He would fulfil his promises to Abraham. These promises to Abraham include a specific land (cf. the Land covenant), a specific seed (cf. the Davidic covenant) and also blessings (cf. the New covenant).



Paul later anticipates a question: Was Jacob and his posterity preferred because they were better than Esau and the Edomites? There is ample evidence to the contrary: Jacob and his children sinned just like Esau and the rest of us. So that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls, Jacob was chosen or preferred even before these twins (Esau and Jacob) were born, not having done any good or evil yet (cf. Romans 9:10-13). God unconditionally chose to fulfil his covenant-promises through Jacob/Israel and his posterity not because of any merit on their part. When Israel would later sin grossly by rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, did they stumble so as to fall permanently, has God cast away his people completely (cf. Romans 11:1, 11)? Never! Perish the thought!

What about Esau? According to Genesis 27:38-46 and Malachi 1:3, Esau and his posterity were given a blessing, a purpose and a heritage. How did they respond? Esau's posterity did not allow the Israelites to trek through Edom during the wilderness wanderings (Numbers 20:14-22). They did not help Israel at the time of the Babylonian captivity; they even participated in the slaughter of the Jews.

Sometime in the future there will be a Jewish generation, even all Israel, who will all recognize that God loves Israel. When will this be? Not only will Israel during the millennium see how Esau's heritage shall be called the "Territory of Wickedness" (Malachi 1:4; cf. Isaiah 34:5-15), but they will also then see how the LORD is magnified "beyond the border of Israel" (Malachi 1:5). This is in accordance with a prophecy with which Malachi's contemporaries would be familiar with, the prophecy in Zechariah 14:16-21. "The phrase *beyond the border of Israel* means that Jehovah is to be magnified among the Gentiles. ...Let the Lord's Name be magnified or glorified even among the Gentiles" (Fruchtenbaum 2005:9).

What is the point of Malachi 1:2-5? Constable (2015:18) summarises it well:

The point of this section was to get the Jews of the restoration community, who were thinking that God had abandoned them and forgotten His promises to them, to think again. Even though they seemed to be experiencing the same fate as their ancient enemy, the Edomites, God would restore them because He had entered into covenant relationship with them. He would keep His promises, both to the Israelites and to the Edomites, for better and for worse respectively. This reminder of the Lord's love provided positive motivation for the priests to return to the Lord, and it should have the same effect on all God's people who read these verses.

If the above approximates a fair understanding of the text in Malachi's day, what applications can we make in our lives today? The following may be relevant:

- If we doubt God's love for us, do we also ask, "In what way have You loved us?" Some may even add: "If we are not Jews to whom the unconditional covenants belong, does God love non-Jews too?"<sup>7</sup> Let us never forget that God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). When one asks, "What more should God do before you will believe that He loves you", the problems with this line of reasoning become apparent. Scripture clearly affirms God's love for every person: The Lord is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God promised that through Abraham He would bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3). Has God not already made good on this promise through Jesus Christ, the Son of Abraham (cf. Matthew 1:1)? Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3; 2 Peter 1:3). In agreement with Constable (2015:14), let us not "demand fresh proof of God's love for us today", for God has repeatedly shown that He loves us, both Jew and Gentile, slave and free, both woman and man.
  - It is true that *spiritual* blessings are available to all believers in Christ, but some *physical* covenant blessings (the Promised land, the throne of David in the city of the great King, a millennial temple in Zion, etc.) are promised to the remnant of Israel, the Israel of God. The Church is not promised a specific piece of real estate, but such is indeed promised to the nation of Israel.
- If God is not finished with Israel, should we as non-Jewish Church saints, still bless the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob according to Genesis 12:3? Should this continue even during the Church age? The Abrahamic covenant is unconditional, still in force and not all its promises have been fulfilled. I am convinced that the obligation to bless the physical descendants of Abraham still stands today.

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<sup>7</sup> See *Appendix 2: Sons of Abraham – and sons of Jacob/Israel too?*

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?’ “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.’ 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 favourably?” says the LORD of hosts. “But now entreat God’s favour, that He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favourably?” says the LORD of hosts. “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. 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. “But you profane it, in that you say, ‘The table of the LORD is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.’ You also say, ‘Oh, what 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. “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.

The Levitical priests, who were supposed to represent or intercede for the Jews before God, are specifically addressed. The LORD of hosts says the priests have despised his Name. How did they do this? By neither honouring God as Father nor revering him as Master (Malachi 1:6). The priests also said the table of the LORD is contemptible by “offering defiled food on My altar”, sacrificing blind, lame and sick animals in clear contravention of the Law of Moses (Leviticus 22:20-25; Deuteronomy 15:21). They would not dare to present these animals to their governor (who reported to the Persian Empire), so why did they dare to bring it to the LORD of hosts (Malachi 1:8)? Will God accept these priests and their prayers if they continue in these ways (Malachi 1:9)? Ironically the LORD of hosts commands the priests to close the doors of the temple rather than continuing to offer defiled and blemished sacrifices (Malachi 1:10).

In the Messianic kingdom, God’s Name shall be great among the Gentiles; they will bring a pure offering and burn incense (Malachi 1:11; cf. Zechariah 8:20-23; 14:16-21). The Jewish priests of Malachi’s day, however, profaned God’s Name by calling the table of the Lord defiled and saying its food is contemptible (Malachi 1:12). They complained —“Oh, what a weariness” — not seeing their task as a work unto the Lord, but rather as a job to be finished as soon as possible. They brought inferior offerings when in fact they had healthy animals. Such deceivers brought a curse on themselves, for the LORD of hosts is a great King and “My Name is to be feared

among the nations” (Malachi 1:14). This is the first of four curses mentioned in the Book of Malachi.

Using many questions, God compels the priests to reconsider their ways (cf. Malachi 1:6-14). The various offerings of the Levitical system pointed typologically to Christ’s work (McIntyre 2015). If the altar typologically points to the cross of Christ, then it is clear why defiling it is such a sin. Since Christ is a perfect, unblemished and undefiled offering for the sins of the world, it is clear why God wanted acceptable sacrifices to be brought to the temple.

Applications for believers in Christ today may include the following:

- God is a Father who cares about all his children. He loves us. He is trustworthy. He is the great King over the universal and eternal kingdom of God.
- Our attitude towards and participation in the Lord’s Supper should be in accordance with God’s instructions.
- Are we offering God our best, from the heart, in faith; or are we going through the motions?
  - McIntyre (2015) pointed out similarities between Malachi 1:14 and Acts 5:1-11: Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit about their offering and they died (Acts 5:1-11).
- As priests according to the order of Melchizedek, we should bring sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Christ (cf. Hebrews 13:15-16).
- “As many as I love I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous [not lukewarm], and repent” (Revelation 3:19).
  - If the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 can also be viewed as representative of the Church age, then we may be living during the time of the Laodicean church. The exalted Lord Jesus Christ lovingly warned and rebuked this church, very similar to the LORD of hosts’ loving rebuke of Israel in Malachi’s day.

Malachi 2:1-9: "And now, O priests, this commandment is for you. If you will not take it to heart, to give glory to My name," says the LORD of hosts, "I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take it to heart. "Behold, I will rebuke your descendants and spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your solemn feasts; and one will take you away with it. Then you shall know that I have send this commandment to you, that My covenant with Levi may continue," says the LORD of hosts. My covenant was with him, one of life and peace, and I gave them to him that he might fear Me; so he feared Me and was reverent before My name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity, and turned many away from iniquity. "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But you have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people, because you have not kept My ways but have shown partiality in the law."

Whereas Malachi 1:6-14 emphasises the Levitical priests' *temple functions*, Malachi 2:1-9 stresses the covenant with Levi and the priests' role as *teachers* of the Law of Moses.

The essence of the command to the Levitical priests in Malachi 2:1 is the "duty and the privilege of the priests to honor the name of the Lord" (Verhoef 1987:238). They were to "give glory to My name" (Malachi 2:2). The command of the LORD of hosts is stated negatively: "if you will not take it to heart". Disobedience will result in God cursing them and taking their blessings away. To some extent this had already occurred, because the people had not been bringing their tithes and offerings to the storehouse, in which the priests were allowed to participate (Malachi 2:2c; 3:8-10). Curses for disobedience to the Law of Moses were spelled out in Leviticus 26:14-39 and Deuteronomy 27:11-16 and 28:15-57.

In Malachi 2:3, the LORD of hosts mentions three consequences for continued disobedience:

1. Rebuke or judgment of the priests' descendants (seed): This means that their offspring would become unfruitful (cf. Deuteronomy 28:32) and/or that the priests would neither be able to give a blessing nor receive blessings anymore (cf. Leviticus 7:32; Deuteronomy 18:3).
2. Dung or refuse spread on their faces: Instead of God accepting the sacrifices offered by the priests, He warns that continued disobedience would result in the contents of the bowels of the slain animals to be spread on the priests' faces. This humiliation would also "degrade the priests in such a manner that they would be unfit and unclean to perform their official duties" (Verhoef 1987:242).

3. The priests were at risk to be taken away with the refuse (dung) of these sacrifices and feasts to a place outside of the camp (Malachi 2:3c). Divine judgment would move the priests from their elevated position down to the dunghill.

If the above happens, these priests would know that God sent them this commandment (Malachi 2:4; cf. 2:1). “Malachi’s function was that of a reformer, leading back the priests and the people to the law” (McIntyre 2015). The purpose of these warnings is for the priests to repent and return to the example of their forefather, Levi (cf. Jeremiah 33:20-21). Levi lived long before the Mosaic covenant was given at Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 20). As one of the twelve sons of Jacob, Levi “stands as the representative head of the Levitical Priesthood” (Fruchtenbaum 2005:13). If the priests of Malachi’s day heeded the warnings, God’s covenant with Levi would continue (Verhoef 1987:244). Therefore, in Malachi 2:4-9, a distinction is made between Levi and the priests of Malachi’s day (cf. Fruchtenbaum 2005:12).

Constable (2015:25) describes the covenant with Levi (cf. Malachi 2:4) as follows:

The Lord’s covenant with Levi was a covenant of grant. In this type of covenant one individual, and perhaps his descendants, received a promise of continuing blessing for a special service rendered. The special service that Levi and his descendants rendered to God involved serving as His priests.

“From God’s side the covenant means life and peace, and from Levi’s side the obligation presupposes unlimited subjection in reverence and fear of the Lord” (Verhoef 1987:245). This is indeed what Levi did (notice the pronouns are in the singular – “he” and “his”): “So he feared Me and was reverent before My name” (Malachi 2:5b).

In contrast to the priests in Malachi’s day, Levi taught according to the law of truth and there was no unrighteousness found on his lips (Malachi 2:6a). Like Enoch and Noah, Levi walked with God in peace and equity and turned many away from iniquity (Malachi 2:6b; cf. Genesis 5:22-24; 6:9; Micah 6:8).

The task of the priests of Malachi’s day was not only to perform sacrificial duties in the temple but, with Levi as their example, also to be reliable and trustworthy teachers of the Law of Moses (Malachi 2:7a; cf. Deuteronomy 33:8-11). The priests of Malachi’s day should have known God’s revealed will in the Law of Moses and they should have taught it to the people. Previously, the people of Israel were destroyed for a lack of knowledge (cf. Hosea 4:6). Now, despite the ministry of Ezra some years earlier, the people of Israel at the time of Malachi were again at risk of being

ignorant of God's law (cf. Ezra 7:10, 25; Nehemiah 8:8-9). This teaching office of a priest is extremely important; he is called a "messenger of the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 2:7).

In contrast to Levi and the earlier, classical Levitical priesthood (notice the verse starts with "but"; see also the contrast with verse 6), the priests in the time of Malachi failed: They themselves deliberately departed from the way of truth, caused many to stumble at the law and thus corrupted the covenant of Levi (Malachi 2:8). The covenant with Levi provided "life and peace", but because of their disobedience ("you have not kept My ways but have shown partiality in the law"), the Lord of hosts will make the priests of Malachi's day contemptible and base. Instead of "giving glory to My name", the priests despised the Name of the LORD. They were now at great risk of themselves being despised. Verhoef (1987:253-254) summarises Malachi 2:1-9 well:

In this significant portion of Scripture the priests in the time of Malachi were hanging in the balance. They were reminded of their privileged position (vv. 1, 4, 5), contrasted with the attitude and conduct of the classical (or ideal) priesthood (vv. 5c, 6, 7), accused of violating the covenant with Levi (v. 8), and judged because they failed miserably in both their personal and professional life (v. 9).

What practical applications can we make in our lives today? This may be noted:

- Bring glory to God's Name (cf. Malachi 2:2). Serve and worship God; don't be self-centred.
- Take God's warnings about divine judgment to heart (cf. Malachi 2:3, 9).
- Study God's Word to show yourself approved (cf. Malachi 2:6; 2 Timothy 2:15).
- New Testament priests (the order of Melchizedek) should not take the LORD's Name in vain.
- Malachi 2:5-6 contain clear lessons for us in our walk with the Lord: fear the Lord, walk with God in peace and equity, seek the truth, do not depart from the Way (cf. John 14:6; Acts 18:25-26).
- Leaders in local churches should teach well and show no favouritism (cf. Malachi 2:6-7, 9).
- Don't be a stumbling block to others (cf. Malachi 2:8; Matthew 18:6-10).

Malachi 2:10-16: “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously and an abomination has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the LORD’s holy *institution* which He loves: he has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this, being awake and aware, yet who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts! And this is the second thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? Any why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. “For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,” says the LORD of hosts. “Therefore take heed to your spirit that you do not deal treacherously.”

A new section in Malachi starts in 2:10 where the Lord is addressing the whole nation of Israel. Constable (2015:26) says this “message deals with the same social evils that Ezra and Nehemiah faced: intermarriage with unbelievers (vv. 10-12), and divorce (vv. 14-16; cf. Ezra 9:2; Neh.13:23-28), plus hypocritical worship (vv. 12-13).”

The third question in Malachi 2:10 answers the first two in that verse: since God is the Father and Creator of Israel (cf. Malachi 1:6), why do Jews deal treacherously with one another, profaning the covenant of the fathers? Fruchtenbaum (2005:15) summarises the issues well:

Malachi began with the sin itself: many Jewish men in his day were marrying Gentile women who were worshippers of idols. This was a clear violation of the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law forbade Jews to marry Gentiles unless they had first converted to the God of Israel. This is what Ruth and Rahab did. When they adopted the God of Israel, even though they were Gentiles, they could be married by Jewish men. The problem here was that these Gentile wives continued to worship idols of foreign gods.

The Mosaic covenant was profaned in two ways: Jewish men married unbelieving women and then, notwithstanding their transgression, continued to bring an offering to the LORD of hosts (Malachi 2:11-12). This profaned (made common) the sanctuary (temple or the people) of the LORD; all men who did this would be cut off from the tents of Jacob.

While they treated their Jewish wives treacherously (divorcing them and/or then marrying heathen women — vv. 15-16), God would not accept these men’s offerings despite the altar being covered with weeping and crying (Malachi 2:13-14; cf. 1 Peter



3:7). The LORD is a witness that these men had broken the marriage covenant with their wives.

Regarding the difficult verse 2:15, Constable (2015:28) writes that no “individual Israelite, who benefited from even a small amount of the Holy Spirit's influence, would break such a covenant as the marriage contract. God Himself would not break His covenant with Israel.” Whereas godly offspring provides a positive reason not to divorce, verse 16 provides negative reasons: God hates divorce and it covers one’s garment with violence. Covering oneself with a garment was a Hebrew euphemism for marriage (cf. Ruth 3:9; Ezekiel 16:8). What was happening was that Jewish men sent their Jewish wives away in order to marry heathen women. “The sin was that, instead of covering the woman with a garment to claim her as his only wife, he covered the wife with violence, in contrast to what the Law commanded” (Fruchtenbaum 2005:17).

Practical applications:

- God hates divorce. We should keep our marriage covenants.
- Christ’s relationship with his bride is our example; we should become more Christ-like.
- Don’t be guilty of careless living. Avoid hypocrisy.
- Look at yourself before you blame others.

Malachi 2:17-3:6: You have wearied the LORD with your words; yet you say, “In what way have we wearied Him?” In that you say, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,” or, “Where is the God of justice?” Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts. “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness. “Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the LORD, as in the days of old, as in former years. And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts. “For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

It had been quite a while since the Jews had returned from captivity to Israel. The people rejoiced when sacrifices could be brought to the rebuilt temple (Ezra 3:10-13; Haggai 2:9; Zechariah 2:10). The LORD chose Zerubbabel to be “a signet ring” (Haggai 2:23) and Israel confirmed the Mosaic covenant with God (Nehemiah 8-10). Israel was waiting for the Messianic kingdom (cf. Zechariah 14:16-21), but as time

passed, “evildoers apparently had their way, without fear of punishment” (Verhoef 1987:284). According to Stuart (cited by Constable 2015:31), Malachi introduced his readers to three needs: “the need for messianic intervention, the need for a day of judgment, and the need for social justice”.<sup>8</sup>

In Malachi 2:17, the people as a whole is being addressed (cf. Malachi 3:5-6), even though certain segments/areas within Israel are specifically mentioned: “sons of Levi” (Malachi 3:3) and “Judah and Jerusalem” (Malachi 3:4). The people wearied the LORD. They did so with their words. They said that everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them. But of course, Israel was prohibited from doing evil in the eyes of the Lord and to provoke God to anger (cf. Deuteronomy 4:25-26; 9:18-19). How did the people arrive at such a mindless conclusion? If evil happened and God did not intervene, this supposedly showed that God approved of evil. They even claimed that God delights in evil. And if so, where then is the God of justice? “It was this sceptical attitude towards God’s ways, God’s justice, and God’s existence that had wearied God” (Fruchtenbaum 2005:18).

(Today we hear the same kind of complaint: If God is good and just (and He is), why does He allow bad things to happen or why does He not intervene to execute justice?)

In Malachi 3:1-6, God answers the Jews’ complaints: God does not change: He will execute judgment and evil will be punished.

Malachi (1:1) and the priests (2:7) were messengers of the LORD to the people in that day, but now the Lord is warning that He would send a messenger before the Messiah would bring judgment. Only in Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6 is it specifically prophesied that a forerunner would precede the coming of the Messiah; a similar idea of preparing the way of the Lord is also found in Isaiah 40:3 (Verhoef 1987:287). Malachi 3:1-5 deals with the First and Second advents of the Messiah, but it is a challenge to identify which parts of the text points to which advent.

Both Malachi 3:1a (Matthew 11:10) and Isaiah 40:3 (Matthew 3:3) was fulfilled by John the Baptist. The task of the forerunner John the Baptist was to “prepare the way before Me”: “The notion rests upon an eastern custom of sending messengers ahead of a visiting king to inform the inhabitants of his coming and to pave the way, to

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<sup>8</sup> Kaiser (1984:77) outlines Malachi 2:17-3:12 as follows: God is just — in his preparation (3:1a); in his coming (3:1b-2); in his refining (3:3-4); in his judgment (3:5); in his long-suffering (3:6); in his call (3:7); in his challenge (3:8-10); and in his promise (3:11-12).

make it passable, literally to remove all the obstacles” (Verhoef 1987:287; cf. Kaiser 1984:80).

The Lord, who is the God of justice whom the Jews were seeking, would suddenly come to *His* temple (Malachi 3:1b). Different views exist regarding Malachi 3:1b:

- Some commentators (cf. Fruchtenbaum 2005:18) say this was fulfilled during the First advent when the Lord threw out the moneychangers, sellers of sacrifices and chased out those who perverted the temple (cf. Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-47; John 2:13-22).
- Others (cf. Kaiser 1984:84) argue that this sudden coming to his temple will only be fulfilled at Christ’s Second Coming. The Hebrew word that describes this “sudden” (*pit’ōm*) coming has the meaning of “unexpectedly”, “surprisingly” and has an ominous tone of judgment to it (Verhoef 1987:288).

After the forerunner, then the Coming One will come, the divine Messenger, the Angel of the Lord. Christ is the Messenger of the covenant. Jesus Christ, the Son of David and Son of Abraham (cf. Matthew 1:1) will fulfil all the promises that God made in the Abrahamic, Land, Davidic and New covenants. Even though the New covenant is operative from Pentecost, Israel must still as a *nation* enter into the New covenant (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34; Joel 2:28-3:1). When all Israel is saved, the currently-estranged wife of Jehovah will be reunited with her Husband and be able to walk with the Lord as a result of the blessings of the New covenant (cf. Hosea 2:2; Romans 11:25-27).

In the day of the Lord’s coming, no one will be able to stand before Him (Malachi 3:2a). The Lord is compared to a refiner’s fire and launderers’ soap. The priesthood (“sons of Levi”) will be refined by burning away all impurities; they will be washed (purged) of all their sins. Then the priests will be able to offer in righteousness. These offerings will be made in Jerusalem during the millennium in the temple described in Ezekiel 40-48 (see especially Ezekiel 40:46; 43:19; 44:15). All Israel (Judah and Jerusalem) will at that time also bring acceptable sacrifices to the temple (Constable 2015:33). All this is in stark contrast to the blind, lame and unacceptable sacrifices that the people brought to the temple and which the priests in Malachi’s day offered on the altar (cf. Malachi 1:6-2:9).

Not only the priests, but all the people would be judged quickly, for the God of justice will be a swift witness against sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers and those who exploit wage earners, widows and orphans (Malachi 3:5). The main problem of these people is that they do not fear the LORD of hosts (cf. Malachi 2:17).

God does not change. God is indeed the God of justice. Despite the sins of the sons of Jacob, they will not be consumed because God will fulfil the promises He made to Israel. The LORD of hosts will execute judgment. But this unchanging God loves Jacob (Malachi 1:2; 3:6).

Practical applications include the following:

- Our testimony and witness should be lived out in fear of the LORD.
- We are not to weary the LORD with our words. God is just. God's Word is true.
- God is unchanging and his unconditional promises can be fully trusted.
- We are to bring an offering in righteousness to the Lord (cf. Romans 12:1-2).
- Avoid all sin, also those mentioned in Malachi 3:5.
- Since the sons of Jacob will not be consumed, non-Jews should continue to bless the descendants of Abraham (cf. Genesis 12:3).

Malachi 3:7-12: Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts. "But you said, 'In what way shall we return?' "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," says the LORD of hosts; "and all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land," says the LORD of hosts.

Even though God has not changed his love for Jacob, Israel did not keep God's ordinances (Malachi 1:2; 3:6-7). These ordinances were contained in the Mosaic covenant. Later, Israel was again reminded to remember the Law of Moses with its statutes and judgments which God gave to them through Moses in Horeb (Malachi 4:4).

"Israel's waywardness was a pervasive theme through their history. They have sinned habitually and continually" (Verhoef 1987:301). But just as "perpetual as their tendency has been to turn away from obeying the Lord, there has been a gracious offer from God: *Return unto me, and I will return unto you*" (Fruchtenbaum 2005:20). God called Israel to return to Him — and the Book of Malachi will end when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to Israel (Malachi 4:6). The way to return to God (cf. Deuteronomy 4:30-31) is through repentance away from sin and by trusting and obeying God.

Much can be inferred from the reply of the people (Malachi 3:7b): they thought they were innocent but instead they had little sense of their sin; since they thought they had never left God, they saw little reason why they should return to Him. But God provided examples of how the whole nation was to repent and return to Him (cf. Malachi 3:9). It sounds strange that the Jews could rob or defraud God in tithes and offerings, but they did (Malachi 3:8; cf. Nehemiah 13:10-12). Constable (2015:35) remarks: "How absurd it is for human beings to "rob God." ... Yet that is what the Israelites were doing, because God was allowing it. They were thieves of the worst kind: robbers of God."

The Mosaic covenant contained the following kinds of tithes and offerings:

- A tenth of the firstfruits of all produce and livestock (or its financial equivalent) were to be given to the Levites (Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:21-24).
  - In turn, the Levites had to pay a tenth of this over to the priests (Numbers 18:26-28);
- Of what remained the Israelites were to bring a tithe (or its financial equivalent) to the temple in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 12:5-7, 10-19; 14:22-26). Those living far from Jerusalem probably brought these tithes during the compulsory feast days (cf. Levy 1992:64); and
- Every third year, the Jews were to tithe for the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29).

Thus the total tithes amounted not to 10% of income as is commonly supposed, but closer to 22,33%. This is calculated as 10% plus 9% (100 less the first tithe of 10=90\*10%) plus 3,33% (10%/3).

The Law of Moses was a conditional covenant based on this principle: "If you will, then God will". If Israel will obey God, he would bless them; if Israel will disobey God, he would curse them. By not bringing the tithes and offerings as the Law of Moses commanded, the post-exilic nation in Malachi's day were cursed because they robbed God (Malachi 3:9).<sup>9</sup> This is the third of four curses mentioned in Malachi (cf. 1:14; 2:2; 4:6).

If Israel wanted to restore their relationship with the LORD of hosts, then they had to obey the command to bring *all* the tithes into the storehouse (Malachi 3:10a). The storehouse was in Jerusalem and part of the temple buildings (cf. 1 Kings 7:51;

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<sup>9</sup> Constable (2015:36) says that earlier, "the Lord criticized the priests for offering an inferior quality of sacrifices (1:7-14), and now He criticized the people for offering an insufficient quantity of sacrifices (cf. v. 10). Failure to adequately support the priests and Levites resulted in the breakdown of priestly service during Nehemiah's absence from Palestine (cf. Neh. 10:32-39; 13:10)."

Nehemiah 10:38). If the Jews brought all the tithes to the storehouse, then the priests who are messengers of the LORD (cf. Malachi 2:7), would have food to sustain them. Further, if Israel obeyed these Mosaic commands, the curse would be lifted and God would again bless them. God even told the Jews of Malachi's day to "try Me now in this". "According to Deuteronomy 6:16, God does not allow Himself to be proved or tested except in this instance" (Fruchtenbaum 2005:22). Constable (2015:36) summarises it well: "It is always wrong to test God's patience by sinning and presuming on His grace. It is another thing to hold Him accountable to His promises, and so test His faithfulness, which God asked His people to do here."

What blessings would have been received from God if the whole Jewish nation obeyed this command? They would have received rains and had more than enough (Malachi 3:10b); their harvests would not have been destroyed by devouring locusts; the land would have been restored to productivity; and fruit would develop fully and not fall to the ground prematurely (Malachi 3:11; cf. Levy 1992:67-68). Moreover, if Israel in Malachi's day heeded this commandment, all nations would have called them blessed because of their delightful land (Malachi 3:12; cf. Isaiah 62:4). During the millennium, there will not be a curse on Israel (cf. Malachi 4:6), the land will produce abundantly (Joel 3:18; Amos 9:11-15) and all the nations will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16; cf. Isaiah 2:2-4).

Practical applications:

- When we sin, we are to confess our sins and return to the Lord. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).
- Giving is part of our overall stewardship (cf. 1 John 3:17).
  - Our giving is unto the Lord, to be done in secret as far as possible (Matthew 6:1-4; 19-24).
  - Church age believers are under the Law of Christ (Romans 8:2; Galatians 6:2); we are not under the Law of Moses.
  - We are to give as the Holy Spirit leads (Galatians 5:18; cf. Romans 6:14).
  - Our giving should be cheerfully, regularly and proportionately as the Lord has prospered us (2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-14).
- Disciples of Christ must be prepared to forsake everything for the Lord, not just 10% (cf. Luke 14:33).

Malachi 3:13-4:3: "Your words have been harsh against Me," says the LORD, "Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?' You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts? So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free.'" Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this," says the LORD of hosts.

Within ethnic Israel the response of the non-remnant (Malachi 3:13-15) is first noted before the response of the true remnant of Israel is recorded (Malachi 3:16-18; Fruchtenbaum 2005:23). Earlier the people wearied the LORD with their words; now their words were harsh against the LORD (Malachi 2:17; 3:13). Earlier they said that God delights in evildoers; now they said it is useless and futile to serve God, there is no benefit in keeping his ordinances or to mourn for sins (Malachi 2:17; 3:13-14). McIntyre (2015) notes that they destroyed their worship, asserting it was vanity: "If they performed acts of worship, they should be nothing the better; and if they abstained, they should be nothing the worse". What was wrong?

"The fundamental error in the expectation of the speakers was not so much that their religious practices seemed to be in vain, but that they believed that the external performance of their duty belonged of itself to the very nature of religion" (Verhoef 1987:317; cf. Kaiser 1984:99). If the focus is only on the external, then ("but now") the people insinuated that it seemed better to call the proud blessed, for the wicked got ahead and prospered. Moreover, the wicked even presumptuously tested God, they did not fear Him and seemed to be getting away with it (Malachi 3:15b).

Then came the response of the remnant, the Israel of God (Malachi 3:16a). About these Jewish believers the following is recorded:

- Twice it is said that they truly "feared the LORD". They held God in awe and reverence for who He is (cf. Levy 1992:74). This is coupled with a holy lifestyle that grows out of this fear of the LORD; it is God that provides the meaning and enjoyment of life (Kaiser 1984:99-100). Where relevant to them, they would have repented of any sins that Malachi pointed out.

- The beginning of wisdom and knowledge is to fear the LORD (Proverbs 1:7, 29; 2:5; 8:13; 10:27; 14:2, 11, 14, 26; 15:33 19:23).
- It is of great theological significance to recognize that within those Jews that returned to Israel out of the Babylonian and Persian empires, there was a smaller group of Jews whose faith and trust was in the LORD God of Israel. Not all Jewish people are believers, but believing Jews are collectively referred to as the remnant of Israel, or the Israel of God. Paul would later elaborate on the doctrine of the remnant (Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-7; 11:1-6; cf. Galatians 6:16).<sup>10</sup>
- They spoke to one another (Malachi 3:16a). This implies that they fellowshipped together (cf. Hebrews 10:25). What they said exactly is either not recorded or one may infer it from Malachi 3:16b (Verhoef 1987:320).
- They meditated on the Name of the LORD, probably speaking to each other about the LORD of hosts (cf. Malachi 1:6, 14). They focused their hearts and minds on God: “the remnant set their highest value upon the name, i.e. the character and being of the Lord. They made an inventory of that name, and they concluded that it was their wealth, property, and greatest asset” (Kaiser 1984:100).

God responded as follows:

- He listened and heard them (Malachi 3:16).
- The names of these believers (“for those who feared the LORD”) were written before God in the book (or scroll) of remembrance (Malachi 3:16; cf. Esther 6:1).
  - At a time, the name of every human being was written in the Book of Life. However, the names of unbelievers can be blotted out from the Book of the Living (Psalm 69:28; cf. 139:16). Christ states in Revelation 3:5 that the “one who conquers will be clothed in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life”. Thomas (1995:432) states it well: “The Book of Life is a divine register for every loyal believer (cf. Isa 4:3; Ps 69:28; Dan 12:1) (Kiddle). It originally contained the names of all for whom Christ died, i.e., the whole world, but at the judgment of the Great White Throne many blank spaces will signal the removal of many names who never believed in Christ for salvation (Walvoord).”
  - According to Fruchtenbaum (2005:24), the Lamb’s Book of Life contains the names of all those human beings who have been born again. Since a

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<sup>10</sup> See also Appendix 2.



case should be established by two or three witnesses (Matthew 18:16), then the names of unbelievers will neither appear in the Book of Life nor in the Lamb's Book of Life (cf. Revelation 13:8).

- What about the "Book of remembrance" (Malachi 3:16), perhaps better translated as "memorandum" (Deuel 1996:108)? In the context, this book contains the names of Jewish believers, not Jewish unbelievers. Is this memorandum or book of remembrance the same as the Lamb's Book of Life (Fruchtenbaum 2005:24) or does it perhaps only contain the names of the remnant of Israel, the Israel of God? Does it contain only the names of the Jewish believers who responded to Malachi's message? One can only speculate.
- In the day that the LORD of hosts will make, these believers "shall be Mine" (Malachi 3:17). This day is the Day of the LORD.<sup>11</sup> According to Fruchtenbaum (cited in Scholtz 2015:2), when the Scriptures refer to the actual phrase *the Day of Jehovah* or *the Day of the Lord*, it always refers to the seven-year Tribulation Period, but other non-negative references to *that day* or *in that day* may be used for both the Tribulation Period and the millennium. The Tribulation Period is understood as a seven-year period immediately preceding the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. The Tribulation Period thus transitions this age into the age to come.
- In *that day* the remnant of Israel shall be God's special treasure, his peculiar people (Malachi 3:17; cf. Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Psalm 135:4).
- As for the Jewish remnant of the Tribulation Period (which is part of the Day of the LORD), God will spare them (Malachi 3:17). After the Tribulation Period but before the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, the bodies of Old Testament saints will be resurrected and these saints will be rewarded (Daniel 12:2-3). Certainly the remnant of Israel will be spared the Great White Throne judgment. Will the Jewish remnant living during the Tribulation Period be spared?
  - According to Verhoef (1987:323), amid the "tribulations of the day of judgment God will bestow his compassion on the pious by delivering them from the ordeal..." Kaiser (1984:101) is likewise of the view that God will spare the remnant in the day that He punishes the ungodly.
  - "During the Great Tribulation, God will spare a faithful remnant of Israel and bring them safely into His kingdom" (Levy 1992:76; cf. Fruchtenbaum 2005:25).

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 1 for a discussion of the phrase "Day of the LORD".

In that Day of the LORD you shall be able to discern between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and who does not serve Him. Only the righteous will be allowed to enter the Messianic kingdom. Verhoef (1987:324) writes: "It is typical of Malachi's representation of the Day of the Lord that it will be essentially a crisis (from *krínein*, "to divide") within the covenant people itself. This thought is further and more strikingly expounded in vv. 19-21 (Eng. 4:1-3)".<sup>12</sup>

The day that Malachi 4:1a notes is coming, is the *Day of the LORD* or the *Day of Jehovah*. This period of time includes the seven-year Tribulation Period, also known as the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7) or Daniel's 70th week (Daniel 9:24-27; 12:1). The Tribulation Period is a time of judgment of the whole earth.

The last global judgment was at the time of the flood in the days of Noah. The motif used in Malachi 4:1, however, is that of "the day" burning like an oven, or a fiery furnace. The effect of "the day" is that all the proud and all who do wickedly will be made stubble and the day which is coming shall burn them up (Malachi 4:1; cf. Isaiah 2:12; Matthew 3:12). By the end of the Tribulation Period as well as the judgment of the sheep and the goats immediately thereafter, "neither root or branch" will remain, meaning that the wicked will be entirely and totally removed before the Messianic kingdom is set up (Malachi 4:1; Matthew 25:31-46). As for the final judgment of unbelievers, Constable (2015:41) notes that later "revelation clarified the time of this judgment, namely, the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:11-15)." After the thousand reign of Christ, at the Great White Throne judgment, all unbelievers of all time will be thrown into the lake of fire.

A huge contrast ("but") follows in Malachi 4:2. For *you* "who fear My name", referring to the remnant (cf. Malachi 3:16-18), there will be righteousness, healing and joy. Citing Psalm 37:6 and Isaiah 58:6, Verhoef (1987:328; cf. Constable 2015:41) views *righteousness* as the key word and *sun* to be its nearer definition: "On the Day of the LORD righteousness will become apparent just like the shining sun in all its brightness and glory." However, other commentators view the words "sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2) as a Messianic title. Kaiser (1984:105) notes that the context in Malachi 3:1 had "led us to expect the righteousness and justice the proud sought (for their own reasons) in the "messenger of the covenant" whom the Father would "send". This view was perpetuated in the Jewish community by the priest

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<sup>12</sup> The Hebrew Bible does not have chapter divisions like the English translations we have today. Malachi 4:1-6 in our English translations is Malachi 3:19-24 in the Hebrew Bible.

Zecharias who blended Malachi 4:2 and Isaiah 9:2 in the messianic situation of Luke 1:76-79." Similarly, Fruchtenbaum (2005:26) states that whereas the "forerunner was like the day-star or the morning star that announces the coming of the day. ...This sun of righteousness, this Messenger of the Covenant, is the Messiah, who will be the One who preserves the Remnant [cf. Psalm 107:20]." The healing is not only deliverance from judgment, but also spiritual healing from sin. The righteous will joyously go forth like calves released after being penned up, for the "breaker" has come (Micah 2:12-13; Kaiser 1984:106).

According to Malachi 4:3, it will become evident that there *is* profit in keeping the ordinances of the LORD of hosts, for those who do wickedness will not be raised up, but instead the righteous will trample the wicked like ashes under their feet (cf. Malachi 3:13-14; Matthew 3:12). The LORD of hosts will see to it that this happens "on the day that I do this".

Based on the meaning of the above text, what practical applications can be suggested for our lives today?

- Jesus' disciples are to have the same focus on God's Name, attributes and Person as the remnant of Israel had in the days of Malachi. In Matthew 6:9-10, Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray and the prayer starts with a similar focus on God's Name ("Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your Name"), God's kingdom ("Your kingdom come") and God's will ("your will be done on earth as it is in heaven").
- It is not vain to serve God. On the contrary, godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6; cf. 1 Timothy 4:7-8; 6:11; 2 Peter 3:11). Further, disciples of Christ will be rewarded with crowns and different levels of authority for service in the Messianic kingdom. As Jesus explained in the parable of the tares in the field, the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13:43).

Malachi 4:4-6: "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. 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."

The Book of Malachi opened with an illustration from Genesis (Jacob and Esau) and numerous references to the Mosaic and other covenants; the book closes with an exhortation to Israel to remember the Law of Moses and to expect Elijah the prophet to come before the great and dreadful day of the LORD (Malachi 4:4-6). If Israel

heeded the Law of Moses, given to them through God's servant Moses at Horeb, then blessings would follow; if Israel disobeyed the Law, curses would follow. With the benefit of hindsight, this is the last call to Israel to heed the "Law and the prophets" before the John the Baptist would preach about 460 years later.

Malachi 4:5-6 has generated much discussion. Wolf (cited by Kaiser 1984:107-108; cf. Kaiser 1982:227) identifies a relationship between Malachi 3:1 and 4:5-6 as can be seen in the repetition in both contexts of the word "Behold" (see also Malachi 4:1), the participle "I am sending", the clearing of the way and a restoration (as found in verbs that imply a "turning") and references to the great and dreadful day of the LORD. What Elijah the prophet will do is to "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 4:6).

Did John the Baptist fulfil all the prophecies relating to the forerunner(s) mentioned in Malachi? Kaiser (1982:230) shows that three basic answers are proposed: (1) Many amillennial commentators (Verhoef 1987:340-341; Hagner 2000:305-308) are of the view that John the Baptist fulfilled all that was predicted of the messenger who would prepare the way and so Elijah will not come again; (2) Elijah the prophet will personally come again just before the end of this age (Peters 1972:566; Barbieri 1983:44, 60; Fruchtenbaum 2005:28); or (3) an 'Elijah-like prophet' will come before the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth (Pentecost 1958:311-312; Kaiser 1984:107-109; Constable 2015:43).

Reasons why one could hold the view that Elijah the prophet will personally reappear before the great and dreadful day of the LORD (Malachi 4:5-6) include the following:

- Few would dispute that, as the forerunner to Christ's first advent (Matthew 3:3; 11:10), John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1a. But contrary to Hagner (2000:308), what is said in Matthew 11:14 is that only *if* (the conditional Greek particle *ei*) "you are willing to receive it", will John the Baptist have fulfilled the role ascribed to Elijah the prophet "who is to come" (cf. Malachi 4:5-6). As the immediate and larger contexts in Matthew make clear, not only did the kingdom suffer violence, but John the Baptist was rejected by the majority of "this generation" (Matthew 11:12, 16-19). Since the condition was not met, John the Baptist is not the Elijah who is to come in the future (Matthew 11:14; cf. 17:10-11).
- Was it *possible* that John the Baptist *could have* fulfilled the prophecy mentioned in Malachi 4:5-6 relating to Elijah the prophet? "As there is only one Messiah but

two comings, contingency is evident when considering the role of the forerunner" (Scholtz 2014:3). Even though John the Baptist was not literally Elijah the prophet (John 1:21), but only "Elijah-like", the Gospels affirm this possibility in terms of *contingency* but also show that this contingency was not met (cf. Matthew 11:12-24). John the Baptist shared many characteristics with Elijah (cf. Matthew 3:4), going before the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17a). John the Baptist even turned "many" of the children of Israel to the Lord their God (Luke 1:16). But what John did not do is to restore "all things" as Jesus said Elijah must still come and do (Matthew 17:11; cf. Malachi 4:5-6). As the forerunner to the first advent of Christ, John the Baptist is an almost perfect type of the antitype, Elijah the prophet, the forerunner to the second advent of Christ.

- If it was possible that an "Elijah-like" person could have fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6 during Christ's first advent, why insist that near the end of this age this prophecy must be fulfilled by the very person Elijah the prophet? Firstly, Jesus affirms plainly that indeed "Elijah is coming first and will restore all things" (Matthew 17:11). The plain meaning of Matthew 17:11 is not contradicted by the next two verses, but rather explains what happened to the first forerunner and what would also happen to Christ during his first advent (Matthew 17:12-13; cf. 12:39-40; 14:1-12; 16:21). Secondly, Malachi 4:5-6 contains a literal prophecy about a literal person who will come before the great and dreadful day of the LORD. This prophecy will be fulfilled when Elijah the prophet returns. Thirdly, citing the martyr Victorinus as well as Tertullian, Commodianus and even Augustine, Peters (1972:565-566) notes that the early Church held that Elijah will still come in the future. Fourthly, the Day of the LORD did not come during or after Christ's first advent (cf. Malachi 4:5). In the Gospel of Matthew, when "this generation" in Israel's history rejected the Messiahship of Jesus on the basis that Christ was Satanically possessed (Matthew 12:23-32), not only was the establishment of the Messianic kingdom in terms of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants "postponed" (viewing this from a human perspective), but the great and dreadful Day of the LORD was also postponed. Jesus explained this in the parables of the tares in the field and the dragnet (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50). Note that the events surrounding AD 70 did not fulfil the prophecies relating to the Day of the LORD.

For the reasons noted above, I believe that Jesus said that Elijah the prophet will indeed come before the great and dreadful day of the LORD to restore all things (Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 17:11; cf. Toussaint 1980:211; Barbieri 1983:44, 60; Fruchtenbaum 2005:28-29).

When Elijah the prophet comes, he will not only restore the Jewish social order, but the Jewish remnant of the Tribulation Period will return to the faith that characterised their fathers as in the days of old, as in the former years (cf. Verhoef 1987:342). Their faith in the coming Messiah will be the same as that of Jacob, Levi, Moses, Elijah and Malachi — all believers mentioned in the Book of Malachi. With regards to the curse mentioned in Malachi 4:6, Constable (2015:43) remarks:

If the Lord will not send *this* “Elijah,” and if *he* did not turn the hearts of the Jews back to God, the Lord would have to come (in the person of Messiah) and strike the earth “with a curse.” Because the Jews will turn to Jesus Christ in faith (Zech. 12:10), blessing will come to the earth, not a curse (vv. 2-3; cf. Zech. 14:11; Rom. 11:26). This is another reference to millennial conditions.

Genesis 3 reveals the entrance of the curse and the last word in the Old Testament still refers to a curse (Scofield 2002:1290). At the second coming of Christ to the earth, the remnant of Israel will acknowledge the Messiahship of Jesus and will in faith call on Him with these words: “Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the LORD!” (Matthew 23:39; cf. Hosea 5:15-6:3; Zechariah 12:10). It is not useless to serve God; there is much profit in keeping His ordinances (cf. Malachi 3:14). Everything under the sun will soon change, for the Messenger of the covenant will cause the curse to be removed and the Messianic kingdom will be established. To Christ be the glory, great things He has done — and great things He will yet do!

## Appendix 1: The Day of the LORD

How should the “day of the LORD” be defined? How does it relate to the rapture and/or the Tribulation Period and/or the millennium and/or other eschatological events — if at all?

The exact phrase “day of the LORD” appears 15 times in the Old Testament (Isaiah 13:6, 9; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18 (twice), 20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7, 14 (twice) and Malachi 4:5 — 13 of which are found in the twelve Minor Prophets. The Old Testament also frequently refers to “the day”, “that day”, “on that day” or variations of the exact phrase, for example the “day of the wrath of the LORD” (cf. Isaiah 2:12; Ezekiel 13:5; 30:3; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 3:17; 4:1, 3, etc.). New Testament references to the “day of the Lord” include 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2 and 2 Peter 3:10, to name but a few. As for references to “the day of Christ”, this appears in Philippians 1:10; 2:16 and 2 Thessalonians 2:2, but other variations of this term also exist (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:8; 3:9-10; Philippians 1:6).

Constable (2015a:12-13; emphasis added) notes that the day of the LORD “refers to a day in which the Lord is working *obviously*, in contrast to other days, the day of man, in which man works without any apparent divine intervention.” For example, in the time of Joel (1:2), there was a remarkable “day” when a locust plague destroyed fields and crops. But in a manner different from God’s providential dealings, God will intervene more directly in the eschatological “day of the LORD”. The “eschatological day of the Lord that the prophets anticipated includes both judgment (in the Tribulation) and blessing (in the Millennium and beyond)” (Constable 2015a:13).

Not all would agree with this general description of the day of the LORD. For example, Augustine said that the “day of the LORD” includes the return of Christ, the resurrection from the dead and the final judgment. For Augustine, this “day” does not refer to a 24-hour period, but is rather characterised by a process or series of judgments (cf. Blaising 2012a:4). Since Augustine thought that the Church age would last 1 000 years, his understanding of the “day of the LORD” excluded the blessings of a physical reign of Christ on earth over all the nations in the Messianic kingdom. “But when the year 1000 came and went without Christ’s return, Augustine’s chronology was discredited. It became necessary for a-millennialists to spiritualize the duration of the millennial kingdom as well as its meaning” (Crutchfield 1996:60).

I follow a pre-millennial understanding of what might be called the “long day of the Lord” view. According to this view, *the “day of the LORD” includes the rapture of the Church, the Tribulation Period (defined below), the millennium, the final judgment at the*

*Great White Throne and (perhaps also) the re-creation of heaven and earth* (cf. Pentecost 1958:229-232). If so, how can the various terms used to describe the day of the LORD and the various aspects of this day be reconciled?

Blaising (2012b:260) not only points out “that the coming of the Lord and the coming of the day of the Lord are related concepts in a numbers of texts” (Zechariah 14:1-5; Malachi 3:1-2; 1 Corinthians 1:7-8; 2 Peter 3:4-10), but he (2012b:259-270) also convincingly argues that Paul in his correspondence to the Thessalonians did relate the rapture to the day of the Lord (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11). “Paul was teaching a pre- or onset day-of-the-Lord rapture, with the day of the Lord being an extended event, as seen in Daniel’s seventieth week” (Blaising 2012b:264-265). It appears that the “day of Christ” is a specific, smaller aspect or portion of the day of the LORD (cf. Coupar 2015); the day of Christ can be connected to the rapture of Church age believers (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:9-10; 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The Tribulation Period is understood as a seven-year period immediately preceding the return of Jesus Christ to the earth, also known as the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jeremiah 30:7) or Daniel’s 70th week (Daniel 9:24-27; 12:1). How does the Tribulation Period relate to the day of the LORD? According to Fruchtenbaum (cited in Scholtz 2015:2), when the Scriptures refer to the actual phrase *the Day of Jehovah* or *the Day of the LORD*, it always refers to the seven-year Tribulation Period, but other non-negative references to *that day* or *in that day* may be used for both the Tribulation Period *and* the millennium. The Tribulation Period thus transitions this age into the age to come.

The Tribulation Period, which is certainly included in the day of the LORD, will be characterised by terror (Isaiah 2:19-21), by wrath, trouble, distress, devastation, gloominess and darkness (Zephaniah 1:14-18). Its effects will be global (Isaiah 2:10-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3); certainly this 7-year period is a time of judgment of the whole earth. Jesus refers to the last 3,5 years of this 7-year period as the Great Tribulation (*thlipsis megala* – Matthew 24:21; cf. Daniel 12:1). Fruchtenbaum (1996:88) relates five passages of the Day of the LORD directly to Israel: in relation to false prophets during the Tribulation (Ezekiel 13:1-7); to a time of darkness and invasion of the people of Israel (Joel 2:1-11); a time of refuge for Israel (Joel 3:14-17); a time of darkness for the people of Israel (Amos 5:18-20); and as a severe time for Jerusalem (Zephaniah 1:7-13).

How will the Tribulation Period start? Daniel’s prophecy of the 70 weeks describes the beginning, midpoint and end of the Tribulation Period (Price 1996:414). According to Daniel 9:27a, the Antichrist will enter into a covenant with Israel for



“one week”, which must be understood as a week of years, thus seven years. This week is the 70th week of that prophecy. When this agreement is signed, the seven-year Tribulation period will begin. Since Daniel 9:24-27 is about “your people and for your holy city” (Daniel 9:24a), this not only implies that some Jews must be back in their land, but that Israel must be a nation again. Since 1948, such a covenant (with death) can be signed; since 1967, Israel has more control over their capital city but such control over Jerusalem will not be total until such time as the Messiah returns (cf. Luke 21:24).

But when Israel signs this covenant with the Antichrist, “mega distress” will start. The apostle Paul likely referred to this event when he wrote that the Day of the Lord will come “as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3). This should not come as a surprise to believers (1 Thessalonians 5:4-6), but unbelievers will be caught off guard (1 Thessalonians 5:7). Even today international pressure is put on Israel to sign agreements (for example “land for peace”; cf. Joel 3:2b) that purportedly will bring “peace and safety”, but there will be neither peace nor safety until the Lord Jesus Christ returns to the earth.

In the mid-point of the seven-year period, that is after 3,5 years or 42 months or 1260 days, the Antichrist will enter the temple in Jerusalem (implying a temple structure will have been rebuilt in Jerusalem by that time; cf. Revelation 11:1b-2), declaring himself to be God (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4). It is at this stage that those in Judea must flee to the wilderness without any delay whatsoever (Matthew 24:16-22). The Tribulation Period will end after seven years, when the judgments mentioned in Revelation 6-18 end, when Christ returns in power and in great glory (Matthew 23:39; 24:29-30).

Price (1996:415) states that the Old Testament presents at least the following five purposes of the Tribulation:

- “The Tribulation Period will complete the decreed period of national Israel’s judicial hardening as punishment for its rejection of the messianic program, which the partial return from exile did not remove and which culminated in the national rejection of Jesus (Isaiah 6:9-13; 24:1-6; cf. John 12:37-41; Romans 11:7-10).
- It will produce a messianic revival among Jewish people scattered throughout the world (Deuteronomy 4:27-30; cf. Matthew 24:14; Revelation 7:1-4).
- The Tribulation will convince the Jewish nation of their need for the Messiah in order to produce a national regeneration (Isaiah 59:20-21; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 20:34-38; 36:25-27; 37:1-14; Daniel 12:5-7; Zechariah 12:9-13:2).

- It will end the time of the Gentiles and effect the deliverance of the Jewish people from Gentile dominium (Isaiah 24:21-23; 59:16-20 cf. Matthew 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Romans 11:25).
- The Tribulation will purge the earth of wicked people in order to establish the messianic kingdom in righteousness (Isaiah 11:9; 13:9; 24:19-20; Ezekiel 37:23; Zechariah 13:2; 14:9). This violent reduction of the world's unbelieving population will result from the divine judgment unleashed throughout the Tribulation (Revelation 6-18), climaxing with the Battle of Armageddon under King Messiah (Revelation 19) and His purge of rebel Jews and oppressive Gentiles at the end of the Tribulation (Ezekiel 20:33-38; Matthew 25:31-46)."

When Christ has returned to the earth, then after a 75-day interval (cf. Daniel 12:7, 11-12), the Son of David will establish the Messianic kingdom in terms of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. The Lord Jesus Christ will rule from the throne of David in the city of the great King for a blessed thousand years over Israel and all the nations (Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 7:13-14; Zechariah 14:16-21; Revelation 20:1-6). During this time, Satan will be bound in the pit and fallen angels/demons will elsewhere be incarcerated (Isaiah 13:21-22; 34:5-15; Revelation 18:2; 20:1-3). At the end of the thousand-year reign, a final rebellion will be quenched with fire from heaven, then the last enemy (death) will be defeated at the Great White throne judgment and then the Messianic kingdom (which is a phase of the Mediatorial kingdom of God on earth) will merge with God the Father's Universal and Eternal kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Revelation 20:7-15). There will be a new heaven and a new earth, thus completing the "day of the LORD" (cf. Revelation 21-22).

## **Appendix 2: Sons of Abraham — and sons of Jacob/Israel too?**

Who is a son of Abraham? And if you are such a son in some sense, does that automatically also make you a son of Jacob/Israel as well?

After the flood, all of humanity descends from Shem, Gam or Japheth (cf. Genesis 10). Among the posterity of Shem, an important development comes through Abram (cf. Genesis 12). Abram had many sons; all his biological sons are obviously 'sons of Abraham'. So Ishmael, Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah, they are all 'sons of Abraham' — biologically speaking (Genesis 17:18-22; 25:1-4). Of the descendants of Shem, only the line through Abraham can biologically be considered 'sons of Abraham'. A descendant of Gam or of Japheth cannot possibly be a son of Abraham biologically speaking.

The covenant that God unilaterally cut with Abraham (cf. Genesis 12:1-3; 15; 17:1-19) was confirmed only through one 'son of Abraham', namely Isaac (Genesis 17:19; 26:1-5). When Isaac had twins, namely Esau and Jacob — both obviously biological 'sons of Abraham' through their father Isaac — the Abrahamic covenant was confirmed not with the eldest twin, Esau, but it was confirmed with Jacob, later renamed 'Israel' (Genesis 28:13-15; 32:28). The Abrahamic covenant was later confirmed with all 12 of sons [the nation] of Israel (Genesis 49).

A Jew is a (biological) descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is the general definition. There is one exception: the children of a Jewish woman and a non-Jewish father can choose whether they want to be considered a Jew. If so, and if that person is male, he should be circumcised in terms of the Abrahamic (not Mosaic!) covenant. Timothy did this (Acts 16:3).

Consider what the LORD said to the Jews through Moses: "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer" (Deuteronomy 10:15). Clearly, all these Jews, these biological sons of Abraham, are told to be saved by grace through faith plus nothing, to become believers, to share in the faith that Abraham has (cf. Matthew 3:7-9). Many years after Moses, a despondent Elijah receives this answer from the LORD: "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18). Even though Israel is the elect nation — to whom the unconditional Abrahamic, Land, Davidic and New covenants belong — it does not follow that every Jew was or is a believer. After the Babylonian captivity, a 'remnant' of Jews returned to Israel, but in the days of Malachi, it is again clear that not every Jew is a believer, for only a remnant feared the LORD (Malachi 3:16).

How should one reconcile this? The apostle Paul, a Jew, provides the inspired answer when speaking about the Jews (“my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites”). He writes: “For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham, but in Isaac your seed shall be called” (Romans 9:3b-4a, 6-7). Who then is a Jew? Earlier in the same epistle, when Paul spoke to the Jews (“You are called a Jew, and rest on the law” — Romans 2:17), describing them as the people of the circumcision (cf. Romans 2:25-27), Paul writes: “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God” (Romans 2:28-29). The next verses clearly also focus on Jews (ex: Romans 3:1-8).

Paul is just confirming what Moses taught, what occurred in the days of Elijah and in the days of Malachi, namely that the ‘completed’ Jew is one that is *not only biologically* a son or daughter of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel, but one who is *also* a born-again believer, whose heart has been circumcised by the Spirit, one that is spiritually alive. Fruchtenbaum (1989:703) writes that the “true Jew are Jews who are so both outwardly and inwardly”, they are Jews not only ethnically, but also spiritually (Fruchtenbaum 2005a:4).

What about non-Jews, those that are not biological descendants of Jacob/Israel, can they become sons and daughters of Abraham? They can’t become biological descendants of Abraham, but they can, in a spiritual sense, become sons and daughters of Abraham *if* they believe in Jesus Christ. Abraham is the (spiritual) father of all who believe, whether those of the circumcision, meaning Jews, or those of the uncircumcision, meaning non-Jews (Romans 4:11-12).

Does this mean all distinctions have been erased? Galatians 3:28-29 says there “is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise”. Would you say all distinctions between males and females have been erased? Of course not. Do distinctions between employers and employees still exist? Yes of course. But when it comes to justification, sanctification and glorification, there is no distinction: we are all saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. In this there is no distinction.

(During the Church age (from Pentecost until the rapture), a new entity is formed in Christ whereby Jewish, Samaritan and Gentile believers are all baptised into the body of Christ. Still, distinctions remain in the body: some are leaders, some are not; some are women and some are men, one has this gift and another has a different gift.

Once Christ has come to take his bride, God will resume his plans for Israel and all the nations.)

When a non-Jew comes to faith in Christ, he or she becomes a son or daughter of Abraham in the *spiritual* sense only. But does such a non-Jew suddenly become a *biological* descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel? No of course not. Becoming a son or daughter of Abraham in the spiritual sense does not eliminate all other senses or different functions. When someone says it does, ask them what happened when they became a born-again believer: did they suddenly change from male to female, or *vice versa*? What changed is that because you have placed your faith and trust in Christ Jesus, the Holy Spirit regenerated your human spirit and made it alive unto God.

Does a Gentile believer become a “spiritual Jew”? Nowhere in Scripture does it say a Gentile believer becomes the “seed of Jacob/Israel” (cf. Fruchtenbaum 1989:702). A Gentile believer is a descendant of Gam, or of Japheth or even of Shem but then not from the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel. The nationality or biological pedigree of a Gentile believer does not change when you come to faith in Christ. What changes is that you become a spiritual son or daughter of Abraham, but that does not make you a Jew. Again, biologically considered, a Jew is a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob/Israel – and if such a Jew becomes a believer, he or she is part of the true remnant of Israel, the Israel of God (cf. Malachi 3:16; Romans 11:5-6; Galatians 6:16).

To whom belong the unconditional covenants? It belongs to the elect Jewish nation, Israel (Romans 9:4). Has God fulfilled the unconditional promises that He made with Israel? No, not all promises have been fulfilled. God will still do it, not because Israel is so obedient, but because God can be trusted, He is not a liar, He will perform his promises. He will do it through Jesus Christ, the Son of David and Son of Abraham (cf. Matthew 1:1).

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