

Malachi

Sermon preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on 3-15-2020

Introduction

The book of Malachi is generally considered to have been written after Nehemiah's second trip back to Jerusalem. And Nehemiah was so discouraged at how quickly things had degenerated that he wept. Malachi reacts to God's revelation of Israel's compromises by calling his revelation a "burden." We can identify with those two men. We look around us and see legalized murder in the form of abortion. We see perversion celebrated in libraries. We see government theft via socialist programs as a human right. We see all of the things in the church that Malachi and Nehemiah saw, and it makes us deeply burdened. Let me highlight just four of the social conditions that tie the books of Malachi and Nehemiah together.

1. Both books deal with marriage to unbelievers (Mal. 2:11-15; Neh. 13:23-27). Being unequally yoked was becoming a commonplace and the antithesis between God's kingdom and the world was being evaporated. We are seeing the same evaporation of antithesis through government education and politics.
2. Both books deal with neglecting to pay tithes (Mal. 3:8-10; Neh. 13:10-14). The kingdom was not being funded. And statistics show that the average Christian has no interest in funding the kingdom.
3. Both books deal with breaking the Sabbath (Mal. 2:8-9; 4:4; Neh. 13:15-22). It was the sign of the covenant, and people treated it as lightly as Christians do today. And God was burdened.
4. Both books deal with an astonishing corruption of the priesthood (Mal. 1:6-2:9; Neh. 13:7-9). My understanding is that when Eliashib wormed his way into the office of high priest, he surrounded himself with corrupt priests. These were pastors who were hirelings with no interest in sacrificing everything for the kingdom. And by the way, most commentaries say that the corrupted priesthood (who by the way, were in a temple that has been around for some time) means that this is in the time of Nehemiah's second trip. So Nehemiah 13 forms the background to the book of Malachi.
5. And both books deal with some of the same social evils (Mal. 3:5; etc; Neh. 5:1-13; etc.).

Overview of the book - God's answer to six questions

And this backslidden state of Israel in Nehemiah 13 is very cleverly brought out in this book by God interacting with six of the most burning questions of Malachi's day. Now, God has His own questions, making 19 questions in 55 verses. This makes Malachi feel like a fast-paced conversation between God's questioners and the prophet.

Let me quickly outline the six major questions that God answers.

1. Chapter 1:2-5 deals with the question about God's love - does God really love them? God affirmed it; the people doubted it.
2. Chapter 1:6 all the way up to chapter 2:9 deals with the question of what it means to honor God.
3. Then verses 10-16 of the same chapter handles the issue of what constitutes faithlessness. But the people get snarkier and snarkier as the book progresses.
4. Chapter 2:17 all the way to chapter 3:6 deals with the people really questioning God's justice.
5. Then verses 7-12 with repentance.
6. And the jeering contradiction of God by the people in the last section (chapter 3:13 to chapter 4:3) is over the top. Interestingly, God doesn't bother to answer them. He just starts comforting the remnant.

All of this unfaithfulness is contrasted with God's faithful love. You can see that by the heart of the chiasm - the illustration of a marriage covenant.

- A Superscription (1:1): Yahweh has a message for Israel.
- B **First 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 **Second 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 **Third Disputation** (2:10-16): The Lord is witness to marital fidelity, and Judah is unfaithful.
- D' **Fourth Disputation** (2:17—3:6): The Lord is witness to marital fidelity, and Judah is unfaithful.
- C' **Fifth 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' **Sixth 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.

Douglas Stuart, "Malachi," in *The Minor Prophets*, pp. 1246-47

And you can see that central theme by the very first question. It is God's spurned love that gets the cycle of questions going.

A question about God's love (1:2-5)

You could summarize the central theme of this book in chapter 1:2 - "I have loved you." If God is speaking His love to His people, why does verse 1 begin by saying that this was a

burden? And the answer is that Malachi's heart burden was a prophetic heart burden that reflects God's heart burden. It is a vision of a God who has been hurt by love spurned. God loved Israel, but Israel either took His love for granted, spurned it, or denied it. For example, the immediate response of some of the people in verse 2 is, "In what way have You loved us?" That's the first question out of their mouth! God has bestowed unbelievable love upon His people, and they say, "In what way have You loved us?" That question shows astonishing blindness. Walter Kaiser says "That God would even condescend to answer such brashness" is an illustration of God's incredibly patient love.¹

He starts the exposition of His love by looking at Jacob and Esau. Verse 2 again:

Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved; 3 But Esau I have hated,

Paul quotes that as a proof of sovereign unconditional election of one and sovereign unconditional reprobation of the other. This is not just that he loved Jacob more. The text says that He hated Esau. Psalm 5:5 says of God, "You hate all workers of iniquity." So it is no surprise that Esau was hated. The surprise is that God could love Jacob at all. They were two brothers who grew up in the same home and had the same privileges, but one was elect and the other was reprobate. As Paul words it, this happened before they were born or had done good or evil. Unregenerate people hate this doctrine of election, but those who have been plucked out of the fires of hell stand in awe of God's sovereign love. They know they don't deserve it. A woman once said to Charles Spurgeon, "I cannot understand why God should say that He hated Esau." "That," Spurgeon replied, "is not my difficulty, madam. My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob!" And I say, "Amen." How could God love me? It's not because of anything in me. Malachi defines God's love as a free love - and by that I mean that it was not earned by Jacob. It is a sovereign love that could not be demanded by Jacob. It is an unconditional love that loved the unloveable. And if you are unloveable today, I can assure each of you who have put your trust in Jesus that God has deep desires of love for you - a central meaning of the Hebrew word *ahav*. Though Jesus said in John 6, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who has sent Me draws him..." (v. 44), He had earlier said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will be no means cast out" (v. 37). Ultimately, if God's love for us depended upon us, we could never be secure since we are so changeable. But since His love for us rests on His sovereign election, those who put their faith in Him are totally secure.

But then God shows his love by bringing desolation to their mortal enemy, Edom.

And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness."

God's protection of His bride shows love. God's vengeance against His bride's enemies shows love.

¹ "That God would even condescend to answer such brashness is a further illustration of his patient love, but he did offer to give an illustration of that love." Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 26.

The third way he had shown Israel His love was by promising that Edom would not rise to be a threat again in the future:

4 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 throw down; They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, And the people against whom the LORD will have indignation forever.

Again, that is an appeal to God's sovereign election of one and His reprobation of the other. It is a sovereign love.

The fourth way that God had shown His love to Israel was by repeatedly promising that He would bless them way beyond the borders of Israel. He would grow them. He would prosper them.

5 Your eyes shall see, And you shall say, "The LORD is magnified beyond the border of Israel.'

What wonderful responses to Israel's doubts about God's love. Those first five verses form a fantastic introduction to the whole book. He anchors that love in God Himself rather than man. He shows the enduring nature of that love by showing that it was from eternity past, was sovereign, unconditional, and personal. And He takes them to the future to show that His steadfast love endures forever.

A question about God's honor (1:6-2:9)

But in the rest of the book God shows how this electing grace cuts down through the covenant itself. Not all Israel was Israel. And the actions of priests like Eliashib showed that they were not truly His people. Is the church of today full of wolves in sheep's clothing? It is. We can learn from Malachi not to get our sense of hope from the church. We get our sense of hope from God's love, and that God-centered focus enables us to love the unloveable and to serve even when others mock. If your sense of satisfaction came what humans think of you, you will forever be on a roller coaster of emotions. But if you anchor your vision in God's love, it will take you through the troubles of Malachi and the troubles of today.

So the second section (1:6-2:9) deals with the question about God's honor. It's a test of whether we are true sons or fake sons; whether we are Jacobs or Esaus. God states the obvious in verse 6:

6 "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.

This is the first reference to the priests in the book - priests who showed more concern about their own comfort and building their own empire than they did about God's sheep or about God Himself. Yet as obvious as the application should have been to these priests, they respond in the last clause of verse 6 with total cluelessness. They show a veil upon their minds. "Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'" They don't see their sin. This is one of the dividing markers between a Jacob and an Esau, or between a Joshua the High Priest and an Eliashib the High Priest. Jacobs recognize their sins and repent of them.

We saw Joshua the High priest recognized his sins and repented of them in Zechariah chapter 3. So God explains to these blind priests why it was obvious to Him that they had indeed despised Him and had indeed refused to truly honor Him. Verse 7:

7 "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.'

These priests claimed to honor God, but they dumped rotten food on the altar - for God! According to the law, defiled sacrifices defiled the altar and the temple. Why? Because it ruined the typology pointing to Christ. Only a perfect sacrifice could portray our Perfect Savior. But even beyond that, they showed no honor for God when they put sick animals on the altar. They seemed to think, "Who cares? It's getting burned up anyway." But God said that it revealed a heart that was not into honoring Him and bringing Him the best. Because they are so dense, he documents his accusation in verse 8,

8 And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts.

Obviously not. They wouldn't dare offer such an animal to the governor. So why were they doing it to God?

And so the whole book of Malachi is in a similar conversational style where God interacts back and forth with various segments of Israel, helping them to see whether they were Jacobs or Esaus.

But you will notice that these priests know how to play the grace card. They in effect say, "Well, we have asked for forgiveness. And God will forgive us even while we are doing these things." This is so brash. It reminds me of the Godfather movie that documented the early history of the Mafia in America. Michael Carleone has already paid several hit men to kill his competitors. And while they are doing their dirty work, he is pledging allegiance to God in a baptism - acting as a godfather to a baby. Between each statement in the church that he makes the camera goes back and forth between his hitmen killing his competitors and Michael making his vows.

The priest asks, "Do you believe in God the Father, maker of heaven and earth?" And he answers, "I do." There is killing. "Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord." And he answers, "I do" with more killing in the background. "Do you believe in the Holy Ghost. The Holy Catholic church?" I do.

"Michel Francis Rizzi, do you renounce Satan." While his men are murdering, he says, "I do renounce him." "And all his works?" "I do renounce them." "And all his pomps." "I do renounce them." "Will you be baptized." "I will." "Go in peace and may the Lord be with you. Amen."

We have a similar kind of blindness going on here. Not good Roman Catholics. Instead, good Jewish priests who are committing crimes against God's law and thinking God's grace will forgive them.

You may not do this on such a grand scale, but it is worth asking yourself, “Do I find my heart making excuses such as, ‘I know it is a sin, but I will just ask for forgiveness.’”? Jude calls that the heresy of turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. Malachi calls it acting like Esau. He is questioning their salvation.

But the dialogue gets even more intense. The next verse indicates that God is so sick of their worship that He would rather that someone closed the doors of the temple and stopped it all. You can imagine that the priests that Malachi is talking to are not very thrilled with him. Malachi says,

10 “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.

He is saying this to priests who professed to be evangelicals. He is saying this to people who claimed to believe in grace. We have churches like that today that show no discernment or evidence of regeneration. The whole Revoice Conference movement is just as much of a stench in God’s nostrils as the sacrifices of these priests were. In Omaha we have evangelical churches that justify government theft via socialism in the name of God. They justify an overthrow of male/female roles in the name of God. They justify rejection of the Regulative Principle of Worship in the name of God and think that their worship is a pleasing aroma when God calls it sickening. Proverbs 15:8 says, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.” Isaiah 1:13 says, “Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me... I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.”

Anyway, this systematic exposure of their lack of honor in their worship goes all the way up to chapter 2:9. I’ll just highlight a few. In verse 12 they turned their noses up at the Lord’s Table. They are thinking, “Do we really have to do this? This is boring.” It was exposing their heart. In verse 13 they could hardly wait for worship to end, saying, “Oh, what a weariness!” Are you able to focus on God and not the distractions? Are you able to sing praise to God with your whole heart? In verse 14 the priests allowed the Jews to offer substandard worship, thus bringing a bad testimony to the Gentiles. And all across the Evangelical world we have people who have rejected the fundamentals of the Regulative Principle of Worship, the Regulative Principle of Government, who fail to preach God’s law, and for sure fail to use God’s word to tear down the chief idols and high things that have exalted themselves against God in this nation. They are priests who are derelict in their duty.

In chapter 2 He says that He will curse their blessings because they have made such a bad testimony to God’s name. Later he will explain that their husband-wife relationships and their relationships to their kids blaspheme God’s name. The New Testament says the same about feministic paradigms of today. Any time you see the New Testament saying that God’s name is being blasphemed, you better pay close attention. Even in Reconstructionist circles God’s name is being blasphemed by overturning God’s authority structures.

In verses 5-6 He says that they are not like Levi who feared God and treated His name with reverence. Levi knew the law and spoke the law. He turned away from iniquity and

followed shalom and equity. The implication is that these priests had none of those things. A lawless church is a church that is in danger of evidencing the Esau character and not the Jacob character.

In verse 7 he condemns them for preaching in a way that was man-centered rather than God-centered. In verse 8 he says that their bad testimony has led many to stumble into sin. In verse 9 He basically says that they were a bad testimony to everyone and people didn't really want to go to the temple any more because of their evil. Actually, God didn't want to go to the temple anymore. It was just like the church of Laodicea, with Christ knocking on the door of the church. He's outside. What's the point of going to church if God is on the outside?

A question about faithfulness (2:10-16)

In the third section God starts with some questions of His own:

10 Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?

This verse has been horribly abused by liberals to teach the universal brotherhood of mankind and that all are saved. But that misses the immediate context. The "we" and "us" is not referring to some fake brotherhood of all mankind. It is referring to the professing believers of that day. In light of the fact that they all have one Father and that they are created by God, they have responsibilities to treat each other well. But verse 10 goes on to ask,

Why do we deal treacherously with one another By profaning the covenant of the fathers?

How did they profane the covenant? Verses 11-12 say that they married unbelievers - something also documented in Nehemiah. So God promises to bring a curse on them. Something also documented in Nehemiah.

But in verses 13-16 he says that adultery and divorce among believers was just as abominable as the marriage to unbelievers that was discussed earlier. The people ask why God does not listen to their prayers. And God's answer is that they had treated their wives treacherously - a word that can refer to adultery, unfaithfulness, mistreatment, or even divorce. They were not treating their wives as God's children and God's property. 1 Peter 3:7 uses very similar words. He says, "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." Their prayers were hindered because they dealt treacherously with their wives; they mistreated them. In verse 15 He gave His purpose for having a Spirit-filled marriage that is spiritually unified so that they would produce godly offspring. Godly offspring doesn't just happen on its own. It takes Spirit-filled husbands and wives who are devoted to God's purposes for the family. Anyway, that whole section is a section that speaks just as powerfully to the modern church.

A question about God's justice (2:17-3:6)

But let's move on to the fourth section, which is chapter 2:17 through chapter 3:6. Chapter 2:17 says,

17 You have wearied the LORD with your words; Yet you say, "In what way have we wearied Him?"

And now He explains how he was wearied.

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?"

That's an astonishing parallel to the modern carnal Christian theory. The carnal Christian theory claims that you can accept Christ as Savior but reject Him as Lord, and even though you are living like an unbeliever, you will get a ticket to heaven. They get that doctrine from a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 3:3-4, which says,

1Cor. 3:3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

Paul is not OK with carnality. He is not dividing up true believers into two classes - one class of carnal Christians and another class of spiritual Christians. No, he is questioning whether they are truly saved; whether they are truly Christian. He says, "You are acting like mere men; like the world." There have always been Esaus in the church who despise their birthright, who are wearied by devotions and worship, who ignore God's law, and who justify their sins. Well, what's God's answer? His answer is to point out that anyone should know that the coming Messiah will purge and purify the church. Christ illustrates that their carnal Christian theory was completely bogus. This is chapter 3.

1"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me.

This first messenger (with a small m) is John the Baptist. But the text goes on to talk about another Messenger (a divine big M Messenger) - the Messenger of the LORD, or often translated as "The Angel of the LORD."

And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, [In other words, the Lord God is being called the Messenger of the covenant here.] In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.

This refers to Christ's first coming. But Christ will also come in judgment upon Israel within that generation. Verse 2:

2 "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. 3 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. 4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the LORD, As in the days of old, As in former years. 5 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. 6 "For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

So there are certain people in Israel who are consumed - they are the Esaus. And there are others (called sons of Jacob) who are loved like Jacob and who are not consumed. And since this God who brings judgment against all these sinners does not change, we can expect the same judgments to come against Esau today. He allows them into the church, but those Esaus will eventually have an end.

And as we are coming off of an End Abortion Now weekend, this is such an important passage to think about. Too many proliferers misrepresent God's love when they make it a promiscuous love that does not distinguish between those who are repentant and those who are not. God's vengeance comes against all who exploit wage earners, widows, orphans, and other helpless people. His wrath against them is an evidence of His true love for His own. And the safest thing to do is to call all to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, in whom alone we can escape the judgments of hell.

But the God who defends the weak and helpless and who takes vengeance on the wicked wants magistrates to properly represent Him. Romans 13 calls them to be ministers of God inflicting *His* vengeance on criminals - and that would include murderers of babies. We cannot take vengeance into our own hands. Romans 12 is for the private citizens and Romans 13 is for the magistrate. We must keep the division between those two chapters clear.

A question about repentance (3:7-12)

But then in chapter 3:7 comes the next question. God calls for returning (a word that refers to repentance) and they ask the question, "In what way shall we return?" He's already told them. But the unregenerate have a veil on their minds and they don't tend to recognize their sins. The regenerate are sometimes too sensitive to their own failings, but the unregenerate have a hard time seeing themselves as sinners. So God exposes their sins in chapter 3:8-12.

8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. 10 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. 11 "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; 12 And all nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land," Says the LORD of hosts.

Wow! God curses people who cheat on their tithes and offerings, and he blows open the windows of heaven in blessing those who give. And the mention of tithes and offerings shows that tithing is the beginning of the joyful privilege of funding God's kingdom. Offerings can never be a substitute for tithing.

But how does this answer the question of repentance? It is simply an illustration of the three parts of true repentance. If repentance is not fake, it involves the mind, the emotions or affections, and the will. There is no true repentance if a person confesses the sin of not tithing but fails to follow through with action.

Repentance is a gift of God that comes from hearing the Bible. It is the flip side of faith. Faith turns to God, but repentance turns from something. But the turning starts in the mind when it recognizes (like the Prodigal did) that our lives are out of accord with God's Word. Here God takes away ignorance of their sin by exposing their sin and calling it sin. If they were willing to call it sin, that would be the first step of repentance.

Second, repentance involves the affections being turned to God. We should be grieved with the knowledge that we have robbed God, and our heart should be turned to pleasing Him.

Third, repentance involves the will engaging in action. We make a plan and implement the plan. This is true for all sins. Malachi's point was that it wasn't enough for those people to confess their sin and continue to not tithe. There is a reversal of action. The reason Christ is at the heart of this book is that such repentance and faith is impossible apart from God's grace. An Esau only turns into a Jacob when God gives a new heart.

A question about speaking against God (3:13-4:3)

The last question that this book answers is in chapter 3:13 and goes up to chapter 4:3. This is a very long and impudent question. By this time the people have gotten really mad. God had said, "Test Me now" on this issue of tithing and see if I don't bless you. Malachi says that they have contradicted God. And they respond in verse 13, "What have we spoke against You?" But God knows their inward thoughts and exposes their hypocrisy. In verses 14-15 he says,

14 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? 15 So now we call the proud blessed, For those who do wickedness are raised up; They even tempt God and go free.' "

Wow! These Esaus in the camp are so bold that they claim (at least in their hearts) the opposite of what God promised - that it is the wicked that will be blessed.

And in verses 16 and following God basically turns away from them as a hopeless cause and starts describing His humble remnant. This remnant constitute the current day Jacobs whom God loved. And these verses show that God is going to shower His love on them and turn from the Esaus who have been given their chance. Beginning to read at verse 16:

16 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. 17 "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." 18 Then you shall again discern Between the righteous and the wicked, Between one who serves God And one who does not serve Him.

This antithesis between right and wrong, between the wicked and the righteous, is a product of God's grace. And it flows from the grace that will be obtained from the coming Messiah, Jesus. He told the remnant that because they were willing to cling to the coming Messiah and to love Him, God's love would be showered upon them and He would treat them as precious.

Let's move to chapter 4, where God once again speaks of Messiah distinguishing between the Esaus and the Jacobs in the first century.

1 “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. 2 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. 3 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.

There is debate about when this is fulfilled, with some saying that it is at the end of history, and others saying that it is in the first century. Many church fathers said that it applied to the first coming of Christ. One said, “The Lord came in the evening to a world in decline, when the course of life was almost run; but when the Sun of justice came, he gave new life and began a new day for those who believed in him”² In other words, His focus was that the problems of constant apostasy would be reversed by Jesus in the New Covenant and the Sun of righteousness (that’s a title of Jesus) would eventually shine worldwide as the noonday.

Matthew Poole applies the judgment section to AD 70 and says of the ashes under the feet of the righteous, these comments:

...this treading seems to be intended of those who, after the sacking and burning of Jerusalem, should return either to view the ruins, or to dwell there, and so should, in going up and down, tread upon the wicked, either buried in the ruins or consumed to ashes. For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet: by this it appears that these preserved ones did not barbarously tread upon the entire bodies of the wicked, but upon the ashes of those bodies, by the fire consumed and turned into ashes, and mixed with the ashes of their houses and goods. In the day that I shall do this; burn Jerusalem and the temple, with the citizens and priests whose carcasses were slain by the sword, or their persons, surprised with the flames, shall be burnt up. And so both this and much of the first verse may be literally understood, and was so fulfilled by Titus and his soldiers, A.D. 73.³

And I think that he (and other commentators like him) are probably correct. Either way, God will carry through His promise of antithesis between the Esaus of the covenant and the Jacobs of the covenant.

Conclusion: God will restore the relationship of His people (4:4-6)

And God concludes the book with a promise of what the New Covenant will look like.

First, verse 4 says it will be a time when they remember the Law of Moses and all of its statutes and judgments.

Second, it will be a time when Elijah the prophet comes before the previous judgment day. If the previous judgment day was AD 70, then Elijah the prophet must have come sooner.

² (Origen, *Homiliae in Exodum*, 7, 8) as quoted in James Gavigan, Brian McCarthy, and Thomas McGovern, eds., *Minor Prophets, The Navarre Bible* (Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers, 2005), 351.

³ Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 1029.

John denied that he fulfilled the false ideas of Elijah that the Pharisees had, but Jesus makes clear that John was this Elijah. In Matthew 11:13-15 He said,

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

In Matthew 17:11 Jesus said,

“But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.”

And what was the commission for Elijah (or John the Baptist)? Malachi tells us (and John the Baptist affirms it for himself),

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.”

Apparently John the Baptist was not completely successful because God did indeed come and strike the *eretz* land with a curse and wiped Israel off the face of the map.

So that is the broad overview of the book. I just want to add a few take-home applications in addition to the ones we have already covered.

First, the questions of the Israelites shows how easy it is for us to forget God’s amazing benefits in our lives. It seems easy to remember what has gone wrong and very hard to remember the blessings. We need to work at reversing that trend by daily praising God for His blessings and asking Him to open our eyes. The negative thinking of Esau must be replaced with faith, hope, and love.

Second, the questions that God asks in response shows how effective question asking can be in the teaching process.

Third, chapter 2:13 shows how deep emotion in worship is not necessarily a sign of true worship. These Esaus had deep emotion (even weeping over the altar in prayer), but God measured these people by their mistreatment of their wives and rejected the worship as show. I remember a Buddhist who attended our worship and went to Christian concerts with our family. He would raise his hands while singing songs and have a face beaming with the best of Christians - but he wasn’t one. It struck me powerfully how easy it is to fool ourselves with emotionalism and miss the deeper things of the law.

Fourth, chapter 2:15 speaks to how critically important it is that we raise up godly seed rather than Esaus. Don’t think that Esaus are the norm in the covenant. Especially in *New Covenant* times it should be different. If the parents are Spirit-filled and we are using the Scriptural blueprints to train our children, we should be able to expect godly offspring. The ESV translates that verse, “Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.” The point is that godly offspring is the promise of godly marriages and godly upbringing. May it be so for each of our families.

Finally, chapter 3:13-18 speaks of God's people as being characterized by several things that others might think are contradictory. For example, they fear Yehowah yet are so filled with joy that they dance like frisky calves let out of the stall. The fear of God and joy in the Spirit *do* coexist. Indeed, the more we fear God, the more our joy should grow. Because we realize how awesome it is that we are friends and loved by the God of the Universe. We have many reasons to reverence God and to rejoice in Him and even to dance before the Lord. May each of us long to be a Jacob (not perfect, but clinging to God and not letting go, and longing to be more and more like Him.). Amen.