

Malachi Chapter One (vv.6-14)

Dispute Two: Dishonouring God's Name [vv.6-14]

The second dispute is the longest in the prophecy (1.6-2.9). It specifically concerns the *priesthood* and divides into two distinct sections: **1.** The priests had **dishonoured** God's name by offering inferior sacrifices (1.6-14). **2.** A warning of judgment for **disregarding** His law (2.1-9). The phrase "my name" is mentioned *eight* times in the section (1.6, 11, 14; 2.2, 5) suggesting a direct link between the appreciation of the greatness of God's Person and the quality of worship and service which is rendered to Him. The link with the preceding section (1.2-5) should not be lost: "*We will not give our best to God in worship and service if we forget His great love for us in Christ*" (John Riddle).

v.6: The opening statement describes *natural* relationships and draws a spiritual parallel to the *national* relationship between God and His people. Naturally speaking, every *son* is expected to "honour" their father (Exodus 20.12), and every *slave* his master. Yet, arguing from the *lesser* (and indisputable) to the *greater*, the people of God did not "honour" and "fear" Jehovah. They were acting in the (higher) *spiritual* relationship in a way that would never be expected in the (lower) *natural* relationship. The word "honour" literally means 'to be heavy' (i.e. important) and implies respect and obedience. A *father* or *master* must be given the proper weight of respect due to their authority by any *son* or *servant*. Although rare in the OT, the *creatorial* and *national* fatherhood of God is taught and implied (cf. Exodus 4.22; Deuteronomy 32.6; Isaiah 63.16; 64.8; Jeremiah 31.9; Hosea 11.1). The mention of fatherhood here could be preparatory for the full NT revelation of the Father in His Son. The word "master" is *'ādôn*, a word used translated "Lord" in 1.12, 14; 3.1. As their Master, the nation belonged to God by right of purchase (Leviticus 25.55), thus His rightful due was reverential "fear", i.e. shrinking from anything that would displease or dishonour Him (Deuteronomy 8.6). Although the people were not without blame, it was the priesthood that should have *taught* and *led* the people in their proper devotion to God. Like priest, like people (Hosea 4.9). David West says, "*The reason for Israel's condition was to be found in the declension of those who should have been their spiritual leaders. They had failed to teach the character and claims of God and this was largely the reason for the deplorable condition of the nation.*" Shepherds in the local assembly have the same responsibilities today (Titus 1.7-9). The behaviour of the priests betrayed their 'contemptuous' attitude towards God Himself – they continued to "despise" (scorn) His name and were therefore acting more like Esau than Jacob (Genesis 25.34)! The "name" stands for the whole Person as revealed in His actions and attributes – the actions of the priests showed they regarded God and His presence as *worthless* and *insignificant*. The standard response of "Wherein?" betrays their lack of spiritual perception (and arrogance). Believers today know God as **Father**, having been born into the family of God by new birth (children), and Christ as **Lord** (Master), having been bought with a price (servants). Do we show Him due honour and reverence by the way we act?

Defiling God's Table [vv.7-8]

v.7: This verse explains the charge of v.6. The evidence of the priests' contempt for God was the repeated offering of "polluted bread" (sacrifices) upon the altar. The outward form (routine) of worship continued, but it was merely a performance. Their substandard offerings were a true measure of their appreciation of God. There is a direct correlation between the heart (offerer) and the hand (offering). The word "polluted" refers to ceremonial defilement (unfit for the presence and service of God) and "bread" to the sacrifices placed on the altar (Leviticus 3.11; 21.6; Ezekiel 44.7). The "polluted bread" refers to the blemished sacrifices of v.8. Once again, the cry of "Wherein?" rises from the priests, having lost all sense of what was acceptable to Jehovah. It is likely Malachi is reporting what the priesthood was effectively saying by its actions, "The table (altar, Ezekiel 41.22) of the LORD is contemptible (despised)".

v.8: The repeated statement "is it not evil?" is probably better rendered as an ironic declaration by the priests, "there is no evil!" They clearly thought "blind", "lame" and "sick" (wounded or weak) animals were acceptable offerings to the Lord. The priests may have *allowed* or even *encouraged* these blemished sacrifices as "*the priests and their families were fed from the meat off the altar. After all, the economy was bad, taxes were high, and money was scarce. So, the priests settled for less than the best and encouraged the people to bring whatever was available*" (Wiersbe). But the Law did not allow the offering of blemished sacrifices to the Lord (Leviticus 22.18-25; Deuteronomy 15.21). How could such animals foreshadow the spotless sacrifice of Christ? God never required much from His people, however, what was brought had to pass the double test of the *first* and the *best*. Anything less was an insult to God. The Lord is worthy of our best and we should give Him nothing less! Furthermore, they would never dream of giving such animals (as a form of taxation) to the "governor". He would not be "pleased" with the offering, or favourably disposed towards the offerer! Thus, they were doing something in the name of *spiritual* service for God they would never do in their *secular* responsibility. It should be noted that the Lord's table was defiled in Corinth by their *appearance* (uncovered heads), *activity* (drunkenness) and *associations* (idol temple), cf. 1 Corinthians 10-11.

Despising God's Worship [vv.9-12]

v.9: This verse probably contains a note of *irony* as if Malachi is exhorting the priests to 'plead' (pray) that God (E^l, the mighty One in contrast to the governor) might be gracious towards them. Priestly intercession was supposed to result in divine blessing for Israel (cf. Numbers 6.24-26). But "with this kind of offering in your hands, how can He be pleased with you?" (NET). Their prayers were *ineffective* as long as their worship was *defective* and they were unwilling to repent. Given the little we give to God, we should be ashamed to ask from God. **v.10:** Things had gotten so bad it would have been better to "shut the doors" of the temple than to perpetuate 'worship' that insulted God. This would ensure 'pointless' fire was not kindled on the altar "for nought" (in vain) as these offerings were no longer *pleasing* (acceptable) to God. As to His purpose, Jehovah could say "I have loved you" (v.2); viewing them in the light of their practice He has to say, "I have no pleasure in you" (Hamilton Smith). The OT thus closes with *no* pleasure, but God will soon find *absolute* and *ultimate* pleasure in Another (Matthew 3.16). Sadly, Ahaz had shut the doors of the temple to forsake the worship of Jehovah for idols (2 Chronicles 29.3, 6-7). The Lord Jesus cleansed the temple in His day, the people having made it a "den of thieves" (Matthew 21.13). There is also a sense in which God permanently closed the doors in AD70 having rendered the physical temple in Jerusalem obsolete at Calvary (rending the veil).

v.11: The Great King will not continue to allow His name to be despised! He will raise up true worshippers. Though His own people had failed, ultimately the whole world (Gentiles) will render to God the worship which is His due. This has obvious reference to the Messianic millennial kingdom (Isaiah 2.2-3; Micah 4.1-2; Zechariah 14.16-21). "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same" refers to the *whole earth* (every place from east to west) and *at all times* (morning to evening) – no corner of creation will fail to honour (magnify) the "great" name of Jehovah (cf. Psalm 50.1; 113.3; Isaiah 45.6; 59.19). "In every place" can be translated '*from every place*' indicating Gentiles will bring their "incense" and "pure (acceptable) offerings" to be presented in Jerusalem (cf. Isaiah 2.2; Zechariah 8.22; 14.16). The word "pure" involves *moral* and *physical* purity, as well as the usual *ceremonial* purity. All will be in accordance with the character and claims of God in that day! **v.12:** This verse reiterates and further explains the sin of Israel's priesthood. "But ye" – in contrast to the future *pure* offerings of the Gentile nations, their offerings were *polluted*! This was "profaning" (to treat as *common* or *ordinary*) Jehovah's name. By allowing contemptible (disrespectful) offerings, they were suggesting it was acceptable to 'pollute' (defile) the Lord's table. "Ye say" is not the actual language of the priests, but rather what their *actions* declared. The "Lord's table" uses the name '*ādôn*' rather than *Jehovah* (cf. v.7) and thus traces their sin back to a lack of *reverence* for the Lord as Master (cf. v.6). The sacrificial offerings are described as "fruit", even "meat" or 'food' (cf. bread, v.7).

Deriding God's Service [vv.13-14]

v.13: The word translated "weariness" describes the attitude of the priests to their ministry – it was *boring*, *tiresome* and a *general nuisance*. The exacting requirements of the service of the temple and its sacrifices had become a drudgery. The priests did not value the privilege of their divine service, but rather thought it something to be done as quickly as possible – including the inspection of sacrificial animals. Mere religious service without heart affection for Christ will always become an arduous chore (Hebrews 12.3). Indeed, the priests had "snuffed" or *sniffed* (snorted) contemptuously at their work as demonstrated by their acceptance of inferior offerings. The word "torn" (*injured* or *mutilated*) is added to the list of v.8. The word derives from a verb meaning 'to steal' and possibly refers to animals taken by violence from others (Isaiah 61.8). How could the LORD be 'pleased' with (accept) such an offering?

v.14: Even the people were "deceitful" in the matter of their sacrifices. If an Israelite made a "vow" to God, they promised to give a gift to God in return for answered prayer (cf. Genesis 28.20-22; 1 Samuel 1.10). Some vows involved pledging an animal sacrifice, which, if it was a burnt offering must be a **male** without blemish or defect (Leviticus 22.18-20). It seems the people were substituting more expensive *male* animals for *females* (the word "corrupt" is in a rare *feminine* form). It could also be the people were vowing the "corrupt" (blemished) animal, as if they were making some grand offering – when they were keeping the best (superior) males of the flock for themselves. In all this the people were acting as **cheats**. They promised the best, then offered what was inferior. Thus, Jehovah pronounced a "curse" upon them – they would be removed from the place of blessing (whether *temporal* or *spiritual*). Such severe judgment is necessary for the "LORD of hosts" is a "great King" (Psalm 47.2; 95.3) – the grandeur of His Person demanded allegiance and devoted service. The title again points forward to the millennial reign of Christ when He shall be King over all the earth (Psalm 47.7). Then His name *will* (best understood with a *future* tense) be "dreadful" (revered) among the nations. If the heathen will fear His name, how much more should the people of God?! Are we cheating God? Do we make a profession of devotion, but keep back the first and best of our time, energy and resources for ourselves?