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**Day 278 - October 5**

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**Period of Restoration (535-425 BCE) -  
*Prophecies of Malachi***

**Readings: *Malachi 1:1-4:6***

***Reflections:***

- It will twenty years later before the written record resumes with the writings of the prophet Malachi. On the political scene, King Xerxes will finally be murdered in his own bedroom and his younger son, Longimanus, will ascend to the throne as Artaxerxes I. There is no real knowledge of what was happening within Israel during this period. It would appear by Malachi's prophecy that Israel has once again drifted far away from God. As we go from the height of Zechariah's prophecies and the experience of Esther bringing salvation to the people, one might think that the hope of God working in the future would be sustained a little longer. Yet, without the heart change the people needed, as soon as a few years pass, they again fall back into all the old habits that had brought so much judgment on their lives.
- Malachi's style is interesting one as he uses a question and answer approach to communicating the message God gave to him.
- An oracle in the Hebrew language carried with it a sense of burden. It could be translated "a burden." This would fit well with content of this revelation as no doubt Malachi is burdened for the people.
- Malachi's prophecy addresses a number of themes that reflect the people's cold heartedness towards God and keeping their covenant relationship with him. The first theme was their own overarching belief that God didn't really love them. One of the main reasons people drift away from God is because they believe God doesn't really care because his promises are taking more time than what they think they should. As people go through struggles (here Israel is still dealing with enemies around them) they feel like God doesn't care. As a result, they then start to do their own thing. They become their own saviors and rescuers. As they do this they walk away from God and begin to do things that offend him. God responds by saying that he does love them and that he will deal decisively with their enemies.
- Now in this passage, we must remember that the image of God loving Israel and hating Esau is a picture. God doesn't love one people group and hate another people group.

We see this in that God is constantly talking about bringing all nations into relationship with himself. Israel was a foreshadowing of a people of faith (the descendents of Abram, the man of faith). Esau is a foreshadowing of people who will live outside of faith and will reject God. Here in this passage it would appear that God is talking specifically about a national loyalty and defense of Israel as Israel saw played out in the story of Esther. Yet, as we see with the coming of Christ, all of this is transformed into a new higher, spiritual meaning.

- One of the ways the people were dishonoring God and saving themselves was by committing the sin that Cain committed. They were giving God their left over animals as their sacrifices for their sins. They were not giving God their first and their best. They were keeping those for themselves. Again this would make human sense as you would want the best animals for breeding purposes. Yet, this revealed their unwillingness to trust God as their provider.
- In responding to their lack of honor and respect, God uses both the image of father and master to describe his relationship with them. We see this carried on through Jesus as Jesus will clearly portray God as father and he as his son as our Lord.
- In this section, God makes it clear again that his dominion is over all people: “My name (identity) will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun.” God desires to have relationship with all people and here Israel who had the chance to have relationship with him was dishonoring him by giving him the worst animals they had as their offering, the crippled and lame.
- God then turns his attention to the priests for participating in these dishonoring sacrifices and failing to teach the people the right way to honor God in their lives. The image used is about as offensive as it can be. God said that he would spread the guts (entrails) or dung on their faces for having participated in these sacrifices. The priests would see the guts and mess as they slaughtered the animals and it was the most disgusting parts God would spread on their faces. This was to shame them and to disqualify them as unclean for service. What a horrible consequence!
- God then outlines the trust relationship he had established with Levi. “My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace....he stood in awe of my name...true instruction was in his mouth (or was all he said)...he walked with me (close friendship) in peace and uprightness (didn’t go to war and lived a life set apart to God) and turned many from sin (was used to bring others into relationship with God.)” This passage helps Christ-followers understand their role as the new spiritual priesthood of the planet (1 Peter 2:5-9).
- The priests were not fulfilling their role as spiritual mentors and leaders, stirring within people a desire in people to seek God and learn more about him. They were actually causing people to spiritual stumble and to break covenant with God. For this they faced humiliation before all the people.

- God then moves on to address the issue of intermarriage and divorce. This spirit of covenant breaking with God also impacted the home lives of the Israelites. Rather than remaining true to the laws prohibition against intermarriage, they were freely intermarrying and freely divorcing. They would be betrothed and married in their youth to another Israelite but then as they got older, they would want a foreigner as a wife and so would freely divorce their first wife. This casual approach to marriage relationships and their desire to intermarry with people of no faith in God but rather fully immersed in pagan worship was completely offensive to God.
- The section on divorce has some translation issues because of unusual grammatical issues. It could read as we see in the NIV text, but there is another reading of the Hebrew in this section that is equally plausible and is debated by scholars. It would be something like this for Malachi 2:13-16: “You also do this: You cover the altar of the Lord with tears as you weep and groan, because he no longer pays any attention to the offering nor accepts it favorably from you. Yet you ask, ‘Why?’ The Lord is testifying against you on behalf of the wife you married when you were young (arranged Jewish marriages), to whom you have become unfaithful even though she is your companion and wife by law (Torah). (Remember, divorcing a spouse was completely allowed under the law as was having multiple wives and concubines. So the divorce in and of itself was not the sin. It was the kind of divorces that were taking place. In fact, in Ezra which follows this account of Malachi, it apparently is God’s will for the Israelites to divorce and send away all the foreign wives and their children.). No one who has even a small portion of the Spirit in him does this (to divorce a Hebrew wife to take a Gentile wife). What did our ancestor (referring to Abraham when seeking a child through Hagar to fulfill the promise he had with Sarah – it lead to disastrous results with the birth of Ishmael) do when seeking a child from God? Be attentive, then, to your own spirit, for one should not be disloyal to the wife he took in his youth. He who hates (meaning “hates his wife”), divorces and is guilty of violence (the spread of injustice as all these Hebrew women were being abandoned by their husbands so that they could just have Gentile wives),” says the Lord who rules over all. “Pay attention to your conscience, and do not be unfaithful.” This translation differs significantly from the translation of the NIV. Yet, regardless of which translation is the best one, the text clearly stresses the significance of causal divorce and failing to understand the significance of keeping covenant.
- God then goes on to talk about the sarcastic way the people were speaking about God, “God loves people who do evil” and “Where is God’s justice?” God declares that he will send a messenger to prepare the way for this coming, a reference to the final great prophet before the appearing of the Messiah. And when God appears, he will come to purify his people. The image here is of God refining a true priesthood and a true people to offer acceptable worship to God. This aligns with the other prophetic messages which looks to the day when God would pour out his Spirit and change people from the inside out so that they can live in committed relationship with God.

- God warns that in this refinement, judgment is coming against all those who break covenant with him as well as those who break covenant with their fellow Israelites by committing injustice. Yet, God calls out to the people to repent and return to him. One day the severity of God's judgment would fall on Jerusalem (in 70 AD) but yet his heart was still to see the people repent and turn back to him. In fact, at the coming of the Messiah, many of the great "sinners" in Israel would be the ones who would follow him and repent. It would be the religious leaders who would reject the Messiah.
- God returns to the issue of Israel's failure to worship him properly. At first it was offering God defective animals. Now it is failing to tithe to God. In this section we see the great promise to all those who would honor God with their first and their best: "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house (for the priests and for those in need). Test me in this...and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." Although many have taken this to mean that if you give to God, you will get rich, again we must see this within the whole of Scripture and realize that the blessing God offers is holistic and spiritual. You may give financially but receive the blessing of joy not more wealth.
- This giving to God was to jump start generosity. Rather than you hoarding and trying to save yourself God wanted the people to learn to trust him as they started every aspect of their life with generosity. This way of living results in other people seeing the good life God intended. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land."
- Malachi's prophecy ends on the "day of the Lord" and the coming Messiah. God recounts again the sarcastic comments of the people, "It is futile to serve God" and then announces that God is taking note of whose heart is actually set on serving him. He refers to a scroll or book of remembrance (see Exodus 32:32; Isaiah 4:3; Daniel 12:1; Revelations 20:12-15) where he keeps record of who is in relationship with him. God declares that he will make a distinction in that final day between the righteous and the wicked and that those who are in real relationship with him will be his treasured possession (or the Hebrew could also mean that every single person will receive their treasured reward.) Although the wicked face judgment, those who are right with God will be fully restored: "the sun of righteousness (or the sun – bright revelation - that brings God's vindication) will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. This leaping calf will then trample down their enemies. Although Israel again would have read this as a literal promise that their righteous people would one day kill all their enemies, again we see with the coming of Jesus that this was fulfilled spiritually as Christ triumphed over the spiritual forces that opposed the will of God.
- The final promise in Malachi became very significant for the people of Israel as they awaited the coming Messiah: "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah (remember he was

taken away and never died) before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else I will come and strike the land with a curse (or this could read, 'so that I won't come and strike the land with a curse'). The people may have thought that just as Elijah left on an angelic chariot that he would return to Israel with the armies of heaven to vindicate their nation. As one commentator put it: "In light of the ascension of Elijah to heaven without dying (2 Kings 2:11), Judaism has always awaited his return as an aspect of the messianic age (see, e.g., John 1:19-28). Jesus identified John the Baptist as Elijah, because he came in the 'spirit and power' of his prototype Elijah (Matthew 11:14; 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36)."

- The work of this final prophet was restoring covenant faithfulness in the land. First, the fathers' hearts return to their children may refer to the father's freely divorcing their wives and leaving their children exposed and vulnerable. The children's hearts returning to their fathers may also refer to the children of Israel returning to their heavenly father.
- We see with the coming of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-17; Mark 1:2-11; Luke 3:1-23), that the people of Israel were looking for the great final prophet to prepare the way for the Messiah and as the Gospel writers affirmed, John would fulfill this prophecy as one like Elijah coming to turn the hearts of people back to God. What is striking about John is that he was the first to start the irreligious revolution as he began to baptize people for the forgiveness of sins so that they wouldn't have to go to the temple to offer sacrifices. What a way to usher in the Messiah, the ultimate irreligious revolutionary!