

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 68.8%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: Nehemiah 12 & 13

Monday: Introduction and Malachi 1

Tuesday: Malachi 2

Wednesday: Malachi 3 & 4

Thursday: Introduction & Joel 1

Friday: Joel 2

Saturday: Joel 3

Current # of email addresses in the group: 628

This is a bit of a surreal moment for me. At the Feast in Bend Oregon in 2022, I remember sitting at the dining table of the place we had rented for the Feast and I remember thinking; It's difficult to read the Bible in one year and have time to ask all the questions you might have and to try to truly understand what is happening in each verse. I thought, what if we slowed it down to 3 years, and essentially took a chapter a day, would anyone be interested?

I was blown away, and remain so, by the response of how many people wanted to be part of this journey.

We started the reading program on October 23, 2022 with 355 email addresses participating (some of which represent a husband and wife). By week 5, we had 520 email addresses reading alongside us. And over the last 100 weeks or so, more than another 100 email addresses would join in.

Here we are starting week 107, the very last of the old testament, which when finished will bring us to 69.6% finished (or 70% if we are rounding).

This October 23 will be 3 years since we began this program, so obviously, I was way off on how long I thought this would take us.

As I believe most of you are aware, UCG has not yet produced a New Testament Commentary/Reading plan. Really intelligent, well studied men, are working hard on that plan. So, as for now, you are stuck with me.

Due to a young adult weekend, my congregations are hosting next weekend, I will be taking a short pause to focus on that weekend, and then I will begin working hard on week 108. It's my hope to have it together after a one week pause, but I ask for your patience as I'm unsure the level of effort that will require, and the first week may be one of the hardest to determine how much to discuss each of the Gospel books, etc...before actually starting the verses chronologically.

I greatly appreciate your prayers, because as you know, this will only be a success if God blesses it.

I want to sincerely and deeply express my gratitude and joy for all of you going on this adventure together. Thank you for your patience, when I needed to take a pause, and for your encouragement all along the way.

Most of all, I hope it has been helpful and rewarding for each of you to go through God's Word at such a deep level.

A special thanks to my brother in Christ, James Malizia, who made sure this program was uploaded each week to the links below, and for the idea and the work, to provide weekly audio files for those who needed or simply enjoyed that format.

A special thanks to my brother in Christ, Giovanni Trosi, who tirelessly worked each week to translate this reading program from English to Italian.

I also thank all the elders, who joined the program, read the reading each week, and served as an extra set of eyes over the program.

I believe there are others, who have shared this program with others, maybe their congregations, or countries, and to all of you, thank you for helping others to read and connect to God's Word.

I hope none of this comes off as self-congratulatory. God gets all the glory! God is Amazing and God ensures His people are fed. He will do that through flawed human tools. The tools are nothing apart from God! I've never been more at awe of God's awesome Word than I am at this stage of my life having gone through His Word at this level.

This week we will finish Nehemiah and both start and finish the books of Malachi and Joel. The first several days are longer, but the week ends with several shorter readings. This will conclude the Old Testament! Enjoy!

Current and archive of this reading program is available at:

<https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/announcements/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep>

The audio archive information is also available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:

https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA_tacLBfv1XR3jH

You may actually prefer accessing it directly from this Playlist tab:

<https://www.youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792/playlists>

3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 107

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 722 – SUNDAY: August 17th

Nehemiah 12 & 13

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "This passage lists leaders among the priests and Levites in the time of the first return under Zerubbabel and the high priest Jeshua and in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Verses 12-21 give the later heads of the priestly families that arrived with

Zerubbabel, listed in verses 1-7. The following succession of high priests is given: Jeshua; Joiakim; Eliashib (high priest when Nehemiah arrives); Joiada; Jonathan; Jaddua (verses 10-11, 22). There is wide dispute over whether this list is complete or skips some generations.

Verse 22 mentions this record being kept during the reign of "Darius the Persian." This evidently refers to Emperor Darius II, also known as Ochus or Nothus, who reigned from 423 to 404 B.C.—though some argue for Darius III (Codomanus), who reigned from 336 until his overthrow by Alexander the Great in 330. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states: "The fact that a Jaddua is mentioned as the high priest [at the time of Alexander] by Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, chap. 7, sec. 2)...) has caused some scholars to favor the later king [Darius III]. A Johanan appears, however, as the high priest [of Jerusalem] in an Elephantine papyrus [from the Jewish community of southern Egypt] dated to 407 B.C....and this favors an identification with Darius II. The recently discovered Samaria papyri [illustrating the routine practice of alternating generations having the same name] has persuaded some scholars that the Jaddua in Nehemiah was not the Jaddua in Josephus but the grandfather of the latter" (note on verse 22). The latter seems most likely, as the same commentary details in its introduction to the book of Ezra.

The tradition attributing to Ezra the compilation of this book and the canonization of the Old Testament also argues for identifying Darius here as Darius II (whose reign came 34 years after Ezra's arrival in Judea)—and for Jaddua being an earlier high priest than the one referred to by Josephus. This is because Ezra would no longer have been living by the time of Darius III's reign and Alexander's conquest (as this would have been more than 120 years after his arrival).

Chronologically, the events of [Nehemiah 13:4](#) came before the events surrounding the dedication of the city wall that is mentioned over the rest of chapter 12. If Chapter 13, as we will see, describes problems

that Nehemiah faced when he returned from a trip back to the Persian court at the end of his initial 12 years as governor (see verses 6-7; compare 5:14).

The Dedication of the Wall and Separation From Foreigners

Many believe that the dedication described in this passage most naturally follows the 52-day rebuilding of the city wall in chapters 3-6. Others see it as occurring a little later if the book's arrangement is chronological. Yet still others recognize it as occurring many years later—following the events of our previous reading. Indeed, a straightforward reading of the text leads to this conclusion. For according to [Nehemiah 13:4](#), the reading from the law in verses 1-3 resulting in a separation from foreigners came *before* the high priest Eliashib provided Tobiah with quarters within the temple—which happened during Nehemiah's absence (see verses 6-7). And the reading of the law and resultant separation are said to have happened "on that day" ([Nehemiah 13:1](#))—that is, on the day of the events of the previous passage describing the dedication of the wall and Levitical appointments made at the same time.

It appears odd that the city wall would be dedicated more than 12 years—and probably more like 15 or more years—from the time of its completion. It seems more likely that this was a *rededication*. And there would have been a good reason for this based on our previous reading. Notice in verse 30 that the people, gates and wall were purified. They had been defiled. Consider what had transpired. The wall and gates of Jerusalem had been rebuilt to maintain the peace and sanctity of the people and temple within. Yet the defenses had been "penetrated"—not by force of arms but by permitting evil to flow in (through the admittance of Tobiah and the Sabbath-breaking merchants and the intermarrying with pagans). So there was a real need here to purify the city wall and rededicate it to the sanctifying and protective purpose for

which it was constructed. No doubt this would also have refocused the people on the great spiritual work and reformation of earlier years—helping to inspire a national recommitment to God and His ways.

As to the details of the ceremony, "There were two great processions, starting probably from the area of the Valley Gate ([Nehemiah 2:13](#), [Nehemiah 2:15](#); [Nehemiah 3:13](#)) in the center of the western section of the wall. The first procession led by Ezra ([12:]36) and Hoshaiah (v. 32) moved in a counterclockwise direction on the wall; the second with Nehemiah moved in a clockwise direction. They met between the Prison Gate and the Water Gate and then entered the temple area (cf. [Psalm 48:12-13](#)). 'To the right' [in [Nehemiah 12:31](#)] translates *yamin*. The literal rendering is misleading, as this procession went left to the south. The Semite oriented himself facing east; so the right hand represented the south (cf. the name of Yemen in southern Arabia; see [Joshua 17:7](#); [1 Samuel 23:24](#); [Job 23:9](#))" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on [Nehemiah 12:31](#)). Notice also that here we again see Ezra and Nehemiah together as contemporaries.

The specific mention of the prohibition of Ammonites and Moabites from God's national assembly as discovered in the law and the separation this brought about ([Nehemiah 13:1-3](#)) is directly related to what had happened in Nehemiah's absence—the admittance of the Ammonite governor to the temple (verses 4-7) and the intermarriage with women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab (verse 23).

Many would contend, and it could well be, that chapters 8-10 describing the reading of the law at the fall festivals and the renewal of the covenant that followed it actually follows after [Nehemiah 13:3](#) chronologically.

As to why the events of our previous and current readings are switched around from chronological order in the book's arrangement, we can perhaps see a logical reason. The first part of chapter 12 (verses 1-26)

lists the leaders of the priests and Levites. This is probably followed by a description of the dedication ceremony because it gives a further listing of the Levites and their responsibilities (verses 27-47). Next the reading of the law and resultant separation from foreigners is mentioned because this happened on the same day ([Nehemiah 13:1-3](#)). Finally, in the remainder of chapter 13, an explanation is given as to why this dedication ceremony and separation from foreigners was happening. This arrangement, probably chosen by Ezra in his compilation work, also allows the book to end with a prayer for God to remember all that Nehemiah had done in His service ([Nehemiah 13:31](#)).

In its note on this verse, *Expositor's* gives a great summary of Nehemiah's life and work: "Nehemiah provides us with one of the most vivid patterns of leadership in Scriptures.

"1. *He was a man of responsibility*, as shown by his position as the royal cupbearer.

"2. *He was a man of vision*, confident of who God was and what he could do through his servants. He was not, however, a visionary but a man who planned and then acted.

"3. *He was a man of prayer* who prayed spontaneously and constantly even in the presence of the king ([Nehemiah 2:4-5](#)).

"4. *He was a man of action and cooperation*, who realized what had to be done, explained it to others, and enlisted their aid. Nehemiah, a layman, was able to cooperate with his contemporary, Ezra the scribe and priest, in spite of the fact that these two leaders were of entirely different temperaments.

"5. *He was a man of compassion*, who was moved by the plight of the poorer members of society so that he renounced even the rights he

was entitled to (5:18) and denounced the greed of the wealthy ([Nehemiah 5:8](#)).

"6. *He was a man who triumphed over opposition.* His opponents tried ridicule ([Nehemiah 4:3](#)), attempted slander ([Nehemiah 6:4-7](#)), and spread misleading messages ([Nehemiah 6:10-14](#)). But through God's favor Nehemiah triumphed over all difficulties."

Returning Home and Finding a Mess

Nehemiah's first term as governor lasted 12 years—from the 20th year of Artaxerxes (444 B.C.) to the king's 32nd year (432-431 B.C.) (see [Nehemiah 2:1](#); [Nehemiah 5:14](#); [Nehemiah 13:6](#)). Either Nehemiah was recalled to the Persian court at this time or it was the agreed-upon term limit from the start (compare [Nehemiah 2:6](#)). Note that Artaxerxes is referred to in [Nehemiah 13:6](#) as the king of Babylon. This was accurate since Babylon was now part of Persia. It remained a significant fact since Babylonia was where most of the Jewish exiles dwelt. Moreover, it could be that the emperor was in temporary residence in Babylon when Nehemiah returned to him.

We don't know how long Nehemiah remained at the imperial court. It could have been several months or even a few years. Verse 23 seems to argue for the latter, as we will see. In any case, it was evidently long enough for some serious lapses to occur in Judea during his absence.

When he finally comes back, Nehemiah encounters some major problems. First of all, his old nemesis Tobiah has returned. Recall that Tobiah, evidently the Ammonite governor who was probably part Jewish and related to some of the priests—and to whom many in Jerusalem had been pledged in service—was one of the main enemies who had attempted to thwart the rebuilding of the city wall, even writing threatening letters to Nehemiah ([Nehemiah 2:10](#), [Nehemiah 2:19](#); [Nehemiah 4:3](#); [Nehemiah 6:10-12](#), [Nehemiah 6:17](#), [Nehemiah](#)

[6:19](#)). And now this wicked man has his own guest quarters in the temple compound itself as sanctioned by the high priest! ([Nehemiah 13:4-7](#)). It is an unconscionable outrage—an affront, in fact, to God Himself. Stunned and dismayed at what has happened, Nehemiah takes immediate action, having Tobiah's furnishings thrown out and the defiled rooms cleansed (verses 8-9).

What brought the high priest Eliashib down from his wonderful example of personally working on the wall (see [Nehemiah 3:1](#)) to this disgrace is unknown. It may have been an act of desperation to keep a failing priesthood functioning. Consider that in his investigation of the matter, Nehemiah realizes that the people of Judea have not been giving their tithes and offerings to the Levites. With no means to live, the Levites employed at the temple returned to farming as a way to get by (verse 10). With very little supplied to them, the Levites did not in turn tithe and give offerings to the temple for the priests (compare [Nehemiah 10:38](#)). Notice that Tobiah was actually housed in the area that had previously been used to store the tithes and offerings ([Nehemiah 13:5](#)). These rooms were evidently empty and unused. Perhaps Tobiah had used this situation as an inroad back into Jerusalem, particularly if some who had been formerly pledged to him called upon his help. It could well be that Tobiah struck a deal with Eliashib to provide for the needs of the priests if he were given the access to the temple complex. Perhaps there were certain other incentives such as renewed pledges of loyalty.

As to *why* the tithing and offering system had broken down, nothing is said. Perhaps the people simply let down in what they should have been doing. This matter could have been brewing even before Nehemiah left—coming to a head when the problem finally manifested itself in food shortages during his absence. In any case, the governor takes the leaders of the nation to task over this situation and finally gets the tithing system going again, appointing faithful overseers to

ensure fair distribution (verses 11-13). In contrast to the poor example of Eliashib, Nehemiah showed himself steadfast in God's way through all these years since we were first introduced to him. And he prays to God to reward his faithful leadership (verse 14).

It should be noted that if the covenant of chapter 10 was made years earlier, then the people let down in these areas despite its specific mention of maintaining faithfulness in tithes, offerings and providing for God's house. Yet, if the arrangement order of the book is not strictly chronological, it could be that the covenant was made *after* the events of chapter 13 *because* of them. The same applies to the other two major problems Nehemiah dealt with after his return—Sabbath violation (verses 15-22) and intermarriage (verses 23-28).

Concerning the first problem, foreigners were coming into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day doing work inside the city and hauling in provisions, which were then sold to the Jews. Yet the law had specifically forbidden even foreigners from doing work within the gates of the Israelites—that is, within areas they controlled (see [Exodus 20:10](#)). The Jews were in the wrong not only for permitting this but also for what they themselves were doing—going about their regular shopping for the coming days on God's Holy Day. Some see this passage as implying that it is wrong to pay for a meal on the Sabbath. Yet there is nothing in the Law that specifically forbids making a payment for something on the Sabbath. What the Law prohibited was *working* on the Sabbath such as doing regular business. Indeed, the Fourth Commandment is to treat the Sabbath as holy—distinct and separate, devoted to God. Yet here the Jews were engaging in routine commerce and stocking up on provisions for future use, thereby taking time and focus away from the observance of this special day.

Nehemiah's immediate solution to the problem is to close the city gates during the Sabbath. After a couple Sabbaths of merchants camping outside the city—obviously in an attempt to lure the Jews into a return

to shopping—Nehemiah threatens to take them into custody if they persist, leading them to stop (verses 19-22). Again Nehemiah prays for God to remember his service and to grant him mercy and salvation (verse 22).

As quick as Nehemiah is to deal with this matter, it seems highly unlikely that it could have been happening in the latter years of his prior administration. It must have started while he was away. A spiritual letdown that had been underway for some time, as evidenced by the lack of tithing, moved out of the shadows and became full blown in Nehemiah's absence. Yet there was probably a more immediate reason for the buying and selling on the Sabbath. This whole situation was very likely connected to the presence of Tobiah. Perhaps many of the foreign merchants were part of the contingent the Ammonite governor brought with him. Allowing large numbers of foreigners to set up shop in the city may have been part of the bargain struck between Tobiah and the high priest (and other city leaders). It was only to be expected that these merchants would operate with no regard for the Sabbath just as they always had—or, if they gave it superficial homage to start with, that they would do all they could to push the boundaries so as to gradually flout this inconvenience.

This all speaks to the consequences of Eliashib's terribly wrong decision. It is unlikely that he foresaw or intended these corruptions, but they teach a painful lesson. What seems like a small compromise at the time can often snowball into a cascade of sins.

The other problem Nehemiah encountered, intermarriage, was also probably a result of the reintroduction of Tobiah and his allies into Jewish society. Indeed, a grandson of the high priest had married the daughter of—of all people—Sanballat the Horonite, the Samaritan governor and archenemy of the Jews of Judea! (verse 28; see [Nehemiah 2:10](#); [Nehemiah 4:1-3](#), [Nehemiah 4:7](#); [Nehemiah 6:1-9](#), [Nehemiah 6:12-14](#)). This may have been part of cementing the alliance between

Eliashib and Tobiah. Nehemiah mentions some Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab (verse 23). The people of Ammon and Moab would have been from Tobiah's province. And the city of Ashdod was allied to Tobiah and Sanballat (see [Nehemiah 4:7-8](#)). This was a former Philistine city yet, as explained in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on chapter 4, its inhabitants were probably not full-blooded Philistines (compare [Zechariah 9:6](#)) as the city was destroyed by the Assyrians, repopulated by the Babylonians and given by the Persians to the people of Tyre and Sidon as an important port. Some of the Tyrian merchants of verse 16 may have been from Ashdod.

The "language of Ashdod" (verse 24) may have been Philistine, a Phoenician dialect or a local dialect of Aramaic, the international language of the Persian Empire. The language of Judea refers to either Hebrew or the Jewish dialect of Aramaic. Given that Judea was such a small province, it seems unlikely that the problem of intermarriage had been going on during the later years of Nehemiah's first term in office, for he would most likely have found out about it and taken steps to put a stop to it. Yet if these marriages took place during his absence, then he must have been gone a few years to allow enough time for children to be born to them and for the children to grow to speaking age.

There may not have been many such children. Perhaps there were relatively few offenders thus far. Nevertheless, intermarriage with pagans was a "great evil" (verse 27). This problem had faced Ezra upon his arrival in Judea. And here it was again. Ezra's initial response had been mourning and pulling out his own hair (see [Ezra 9:1-4](#)). Nehemiah's different temperament is illustrated in his more drastic reaction of pulling out the *offenders'* hair! ([Nehemiah 13:25](#)).

As with the Sabbath and tithing, it is not clear if the covenant to refrain from such intermarriage in chapter 10 came long before a resurgence of the problem in chapter 13 or if the covenant was made after Nehemiah's dealing with the problem in chapter 13. As the prophet

Malachi addresses some of the same issues dealt with in Nehemiah 13, many date his book to the time of Nehemiah's absence. Yet it could well have been earlier, prior to Nehemiah's initial arrival. Since the matter is unclear, we will wait until we have covered all of Nehemiah before reading the book of Malachi.

Yet again, Nehemiah prays to be remembered by God ([Nehemiah 13:31](#)). ” [END]

Day 723 – MONDAY: August 18th

Introduction and Malachi 1

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “As the last of the 12 Minor Prophets, which together make up the final book of the Prophets division of the Hebrew Bible, the book of Malachi brings the Prophets to a close. The Jewish Talmud and scholarly consensus place the book during Judah’s post-Exilic period under Persian rule, following a religious lapse some time after the restoration of the temple worship system during the days of Haggai and Zechariah. However, the book’s exact placement within this period is uncertain.

Some scholars date the book to the first half of the fifth century B.C., around 490-460 B.C., prior to Ezra’s 457 B.C. arrival and reforms. Others see it set around 450, after a lapse in following Ezra’s spiritual revival and shortly before the arrival of Nehemiah in 444. It is worth noting that during his term as governor, Nehemiah dealt with several problems addressed in the book of Malachi: marriages to foreign women, failure to pay tithes, Sabbath breaking, priestly corruption, and injustice. However, as Ezra had earlier dealt with the problem of intermarriage, it seems likely that the other problems were around earlier as well. That the book of Malachi was not written during Ezra or Nehemiah’s governorship seems clear from the implication of [Malachi 1:8](#)—that the person serving as governor expected personal tribute.

Recall Nehemiah's statement in [Nehemiah 5:14-15](#): "Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah...twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions. But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God." Ezra had the same fear of God, and Nehemiah's mention of former governors surely did not include him. *The New Bible Commentary* suggests: "In v. 8 the governor could be the governor in Samaria [who ruled over Judea prior to Nehemiah's arrival], and the point is that the priests were bringing offerings to the altar which they would not dare present to the civil ruler" (note on verse 8).

Many have suggested that the book should be dated to the period of Nehemiah's absence starting around 432 B.C.—when he returned for a time to the court of Persia and national corruption set in back home (see [Nehemiah 13:6](#)). However, Nehemiah would likely have left his trusted brother Hanani as interim governor while he was away, which seems to argue against this period based on [Malachi 1:8](#). Other scholars would put the book after Nehemiah's time, in the later 400s B.C. (which would mean that the problems Nehemiah dealt with resurfaced and that the scriptural account leaves them unresolved). Again, however, as mentioned in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on [Nehemiah 6:1–7:3](#), it appears from archaeological evidence that after Nehemiah's second term his brother succeeded him as governor.

This leaves the first two dates as more likely—sometime before Ezra's arrival or shortly before Nehemiah's arrival. Since the issue is uncertain, we are reading Malachi after Ezra and Nehemiah even though it may well fit earlier chronologically.

Even more unclear than the exact dating of the book is its author. Just who is the prophet Malachi? Malachi may not even have been his

actual name, as it means “My Messenger”—so that verse 1 could properly be rendered, “The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by My Messenger.” Indeed, the “messenger” of the Lord turns out to be a major theme of the book. A priest, it explains, is supposed to serve in this role ([Malachi 2:7](#)). Yet the priesthood is rebuked for failing in this responsibility. Malachi prophesies that God would send a particular messenger—“My Messenger” (*malachi* in Hebrew), God calls him—who would prepare the way for the “Messenger of the covenant” ([Malachi 3:1](#)). The New Testament explains this as John the Baptist preparing for the coming of Jesus Christ ([Matthew 11:10](#); [Mark 1:2](#); [Luke 7:27](#)).

In its introductory note on authorship, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states: “The suggestion that ‘Malachi’ is not a proper name but a title has ancient support in the [Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament], which reads ‘his messenger.’ To complicate the matter, the Targum [or Aramaic paraphrase] of Jonathan added after ‘Malachi’ the words ‘whose name was Ezra the scribe.’ [The Latin translator] Jerome concurred with this. In the Talmud (*Megillah* 15a) Mordecai [of the book of Esther] is credited with writing the Book of Malachi. Some scholars deny that Malachi is a separate book but affirm that it is actually only the last of three sections of Zechariah, which were cut off in order to make the Minor Prophets amount to the sacred number twelve. Though [the first-century Jewish historian] Josephus mentioned all the major characters of this period, he failed to include Malachi among them. The total obscurity of the author of the book is underlined by the absence of the name Malachi in all the rest of the Bible. Even where he is quoted in the N[ew] T[estament], his name does not appear ([Matt 11:10](#); [Mark 1:2](#); [Luke 7:27](#)).

“On the positive side, each of the other writing prophets is named in the opening verses of his book. If a man named Malachi did not write the book bearing this name, he would be the only exception. Moreover,

Malachi is neither an unlikely name nor an unsuitable one for the author of this last book of the prophets. After all, Malachi was the Lord's messenger. His trumpet made no uncertain sound. Clearly and unmistakably he indicted his people and the priests for their sin and summoned them to righteousness."

With the priesthood failing in its job, this man stood in the gap, proclaiming God's Word and law as God's faithful messenger. He exhorted the nation to faithful service and to heartfelt sincerity in that service. Whoever Malachi was, he served as a precursor to the messenger of [Malachi 3:1](#) who would prepare the way before the coming of the Lord. This figure is referred to in [Malachi 4:5](#) as "Elijah the prophet." Again, the New Testament identifies this figure with John the Baptist, who came on the scene during a period of spiritual letdown among the religious leadership and the people as a whole, preparing people for the first coming of Jesus. Yet Jesus explained that there would be an Elijah still to come ([Matthew 17:11](#))—evidently to prepare the way before His second coming. The work of this later messenger would also occur during a period of national spiritual decline. The book of Malachi is therefore quite pertinent to the time of the end and to the message the people of God are to proclaim. Note that chapters 3 and 4 refer to the end-time Day of the Lord (see [Malachi 3:2](#); [Malachi 4:1-6](#)).

The book of Malachi is a message to "Israel" ([Malachi 1:1](#)). On one level, this meant the book was addressed to the postexilic Jews of Judea. They are referred to in Scripture as Israel because they were the remnant of the covenant nation. (The later Jewish independent state under the Maccabees was actually named Israel.) Yet given the clear end-time focus in the book, Israel here may well also refer to the modern nations descended from ancient Israel, including the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the nations of Northwest Europe and the Jewish state of Israel. Furthermore, on

another level, the prophecy is also directed to the people of *spiritual* Israel—the Church of God.

Chosen but Unacceptable

God's message begins with a declaration of His love for His people. Yet they are quick to challenge this love, asking, "In what way have You loved us?" (verse 2). Whether or not this sentiment is actually voiced is not clear. It may just be that God knows the people think this way. The Lord's reestablishment of the nation in the Promised Land should have served as a testimony to His faithfulness. And the deliverance of the Jews throughout the Persian Empire at the time of Esther was clearly miraculous. Yet the people in Judea had experienced many problems.

The time frame here may have been prior to or shortly after Ezra's arrival—after many years of letting down in following God's laws and, as a result, a withholding of blessings. Or it may have been several years later, after a halt in Jewish rebuilding due to neighboring resistance (see [Ezra 4:7-23](#)). A time soon after Nehemiah's successful reconstruction of Jerusalem's wall does not seem to fit. But it could well be that not long afterward the same doleful self-pity gripped the people again.

Indeed, we should recall the awesome events of Israel's Exodus from Egypt. The people went out with a high hand and experienced the incredible and miraculous Red Sea crossing. Yet it was not long at all before they began to complain against God, even accusing Him of bringing them out to the desert to kill them. People often have a short memory when it comes to God's blessings. When things become uncomfortable or when mere boredom sets in, there is a tendency to forget all about the wonderful ways God has helped us and about the wonderful destiny He has in store for us. We today are not immune to such thinking and need to combat it. One way is by regularly pondering

the myriad things God has done for us, which helps us to place our trust in His great promises.

God is very patient in His response. He presents the contrast with Esau to exemplify His commitment to His people. Esau and Jacob were fraternal twin brothers, both of the line of Abraham. As the elder twin, Esau (also known as Edom), was in line to inherit the family birthright blessings. But he sold them to Jacob for a bowl of stew. While Jacob connived to obtain the blessings in this and a later episode, he at least saw the blessings as valuable. Esau sold the birthright away for almost nothing, basically showing contempt for what God gave—a bad example that Christians are warned against ([Hebrews 12:16-17](#)). God chose Jacob (later renamed Israel) and his descendants as His people and rejected Esau. The descendants of Esau, the Edomites, became Israel's constant enemy. Throughout the prophets, God declared that the people of Edom would suffer severe judgment for their terrible and ongoing hostility. And here He does so again.

God says He has "loved" Jacob and "hated" Esau (verses 2-3)—referring also to their descendants. This may well seem odd, given that Jesus taught us to love even our enemies as part of what it means to have godly character. "Hate" in Scripture sometimes has the hyperbolic meaning of "love less by comparison." Yet in this case it appears more concerned with God choosing the one as His people and rejecting the other. *The Bible Reader's Companion* says that "'hated' here is used as a legal term, meaning the decisive rejection of a claim" (Lawrence Richards, 1991, note on verses 2-5). The apostle Paul quoted this passage in [Romans 9:13](#) to illustrate his point about God's prerogative to choose whomever He wants as His people. Yet we understand from other verses that God ultimately intends to call all people—though not all in this present life.

(Few Bible students realize that Jesus spoke of bringing people back to life to give them a chance at salvation—a chance they did not have

before. For more information on this little understood truth, see our booklets, [What Happens After Death?](#), [Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?](#) and [You Can Understand Bible Prophecy.](#))

God next refers to judgment that has befallen Edom—national destruction and impoverishment ([Malachi 1:3-4](#)). While it was true that God's people had suffered these things at the hands of the Babylonians, the Edomites evidently did not escape either. And it would yet be worse for the Edomites. God had many times promised to restore Israel and Judah—and had taken powerful steps in that direction with the reestablishment of the Jewish nation in the Promised Land. But this was not to be the case with Edom. Instead, while the Edomites would attempt to regain what they had lost, God would not permit it (verses 4-5). The prophecy against Edom here seems to stretch into the last days, as in other prophecies. God's indignation against Esau lasting "forever" in verse 4 probably means that the judgment continues as long as the conditions under which it is given exist—that is, as long as Esau exists as a nation. Moreover, given Paul's example above, Jacob here could also represent all those called of God while Esau could signify the rest of mankind, which is presently rejected. Eventually, all gentile peoples must become part of the covenant nation Israel in order to have a relationship with God and escape perpetual indignation.

Despite His clear providential care for His people, God then points out that He is receiving neither the honor due Him as the nation's Father nor the reverence due Him as the people's true Lord and Master. Worse, this message is specifically directed not to the common people but to the priests (verse 6), who were supposed to be teaching the people God's ways and leading by godly example. While the priesthood of the fifth century B.C. was surely in mind, this message was likely intended for later times as well—continuing through the entire second temple period as problems resurfaced. While the prophecy is directed to the descendants of Levi, as chapter 2 makes clear, the priests here

may on some level, in a modern context, symbolize the religious teachers of the nation in general and perhaps even represent some among the ministry of the true Church—*spiritual* Levites, so to speak.

Instead of honoring Him, God says the priests are actually despising His name. In an ancient context, one's name signified all that he was and stood for. Again, the insolent retort comes: "In what way...?" (verse 6). God says the priests are offering defiled food on His altar—which means they are treating Him in a defiling way—to which they yet again respond with, "In what way...?" (verse 7). God explains that they show contempt for Him in the offering of blemished sacrifices. People were supposed to present their best to God when giving offerings (see [Leviticus 1:3](#)). Offerings were not to be blemished or unclean ([Leviticus 7:19-21](#); [Deuteronomy 15:21](#)). Even their human rulers would not accept such tribute, probably referring to taxation by Persian overlords (compare [Malachi 1:8](#)). Yet God is a "great King" (verse 14). Indeed, He is the King of all kings—the infinite and almighty Creator. "We can apply Malachi's test today. If we would be embarrassed to offer what we intend to give to God or do for Him to a person that we respect, our offering is unworthy of the Lord" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on verse 8). Furthermore, consider that a sacrifice of something with little or no value to the one offering it is really no sacrifice at all.

Verse 9 in the New King James Version is better understood with the following bracketed insert: "But now [if you] entreat God's favor that He may be gracious to us, while this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably?" (compare Moffatt Translation; New American Bible). The answer is obviously no (see verse 10).

Verse 11 looks forward to the future when God's name would be honored with proper prayerful praise and offerings—even by the gentiles. This perhaps foresees in small part the spiritual sacrifices of the people of God's Church today, yet God's name being truly great

among the nations is more directly applicable to the time when His Kingdom will be set up on the earth after Jesus Christ's return.

But for now, here were God's own people—His own priesthood in fact—profaning His name by their unholy attitude and service. Instead of having an attitude of humility and regarding God with awe, they had an arrogant attitude and regarded Him with contempt. These religious leaders view their duties as mere wearisome toil (verse 13). "Malachi put into words the thoughts of the priests. For them the holy service of God had become a bore, a labor of duty rather than of love, a yoke around their necks. The very men who were the mediators between God and his people ([Exodus 28:1](#), [Exodus 28:43](#)), the teachers of Israel ([Leviticus 10:11](#); [Deuteronomy 33:10](#); [2 Chronicles 15:3](#)), and the court of appeal ([Deuteronomy 19:17-19](#)) were, by their own choice, profaning their office and bringing shame on the name of Yahweh" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on [Malachi 1:12-13](#)).

Applying this prophetic message to today, we must give our best to God. While there are no longer animal sacrifices today, each of us is literally a "living sacrifice" and our service must be "acceptable to God" ([Romans 12:1](#)). We must not become casual or sloppy in matters such as keeping God's Sabbath, in tithing, in our commitment to the Church's work of preaching the gospel and in modeling God's way of life every day. There are some for whom participating in worship services and even typical Christian responsibilities such as prayer and helping others become tiresome chores. When the time comes for Sabbath services, we must make sure our attitude is not one of, "Oh, no, not church again." For indeed, God looks on all His people as a special, chosen priesthood ([1 Peter 2:5](#), [1 Peter 2:9](#)). Are we fulfilling our spiritual duties with proper care and reverence? Do we give God our best, or are we just going through the motions?

There is an even stronger application to those who have the responsibility of preaching and teaching God's Word. Those called to

the ministry must not wilt in their dedication to first living and then teaching it accurately. Their example and their message must be compelling, as they serve Christ. When they fail to do so, their bad example will over time infect the congregants as well. Let us all take to heart the criticism God levels in this opening chapter of Malachi and examine ourselves accordingly.

The next chapter pronounces judgment on the priests for profaning their office and leading others astray.” [END]

Day 724 – TUESDAY: August 19th

Malachi 2

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “Continuing on from the previous chapter, God warns the priests that even though they are part of His blessed chosen people, if they refuse to repent of their wrong attitude and behavior, He will curse their blessings. Indeed, He says He has already done so (verse 2)—showing that some of the problems the nation was facing were really their fault (despite the people's insinuation in 1:2 that God was unfaithful to His covenant, failing to bless as He promised).

The "refuse" of [Malachi 2:3](#) was the "offal" (NIV) or "dung" (KJV) still within sacrificial animals that should have been removed and taken outside the community prior to sacrificing. It may be that, in their careless attitude toward their duties, the priests were not removing it. In any case, they were certainly not removing the *spiritual* filth from *themselves*. So God threatens that this disgusting uncleanness will mark their faces so that they and their corrupt descendants, like such refuse, will be taken away and disposed of.

In verses 3-4, we see that God's judgment is intended for the positive effect of restoring His relationship with the priests. He recalls here His "covenant with Levi." The actual person Levi, the son of Jacob, was not

in mind here. Rather Levi's descendants collectively, the *tribe* of Levi, is meant—despite the use of the pronouns "him" and "he." The Levites were chosen for special divine service after their stand with Moses following the golden calf incident. Moses himself was a Levite. And from Moses' brother Aaron sprang the line of the nation's priesthood. So all priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests, the other Levitical sub-tribes having other responsibilities in God's service. Some see the covenant with Levi as a reference to the provisions of [Numbers 3:45-48](#) and [18:21-24](#). God refers to it as a covenant "of life and peace," which seems to refer to what God said of Aaron's son Phinehas: "Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel" ([Numbers 25:12-13](#)). God also refers to His unbreakable covenant with the Levites in [Jeremiah 33:19-22](#).

Verses 4-7 give an idealized vision of how the priesthood should be. It appears from this passage that in the early days there were times when the priests did perform their duties as they should have and with the right attitude. No doubt others through the centuries shared the convictions of Phinehas. But the ideal here was a far cry from the general picture of things when the book of Malachi was written.

The priests were to proclaim God's truth and law to the people, each serving as God's "messenger" (verses 6-7)—this word pointing back to the name of the book (as the book's author is fulfilling this responsibility that the priests ought to have been carrying out). Yet instead of turning people to the law and away from sin, the priests here are leading people to *stumble over* the law—that is, to sin! (verse 8). This is an atrocious and appalling situation, and God says He will bring these leaders down in humiliation. In the New Testament we are warned, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" ([James 3:1](#)).

Breaking Up the National Family

The book of Malachi next addresses a problem with the nation as a whole (see verse 11)—the issue of intermarriage with neighboring pagans and men divorcing their first wives.

Malachi first refers to all having one father and one God (verse 10). One father could refer to Abraham or Jacob as a common ancestor. But as God declared Himself the nation's Father in 1:6, He seems to be the One referred to. The point is that the nation is a family with a common system of values and that those who are part of this family should treat each other with the care and respect one would expect in a proper family relationship.

But the people of Judah have violated the sanctity of the national family "home." For one, they have "married the daughter of a foreign god" (verse 11). God had repeatedly warned Israel and Judah against intermarriage with pagans as these could influence His people into pagan false worship. Those who, knowing better, betrayed God in this way yet still persisted in forms of true worship were an utter affront to Him—and would be cut off from the nation either through death or expulsion (verse 12).

If this were not bad enough, God accuses them of making a great hypocritical show of repentance (verse 13). He informs them that He will not accept such worship. Once more, the people give an impudent retort—feigning as if they can't understand what the problem is: "For what reason?" (verse 14). God then calls them to account. Not only had the men of the nation married foreign wives, but they had evidently *divorced* their first wives in the process. "The reference to 'wife of your youth' in this verse suggests that the men were divorcing their aging wives in favor of younger women" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verse 14).

This callous betrayal wrought terrible evil throughout the land. Broken homes made a mess of families and served to rip the nation apart in countless ways—made worse by the introduction of a pagan value system to influence the next generation. In verse 15, God explains that in marriage two spouses are to become one—unified in mind and values, as well as in flesh so as to procreate. And the relationship is supposed to last until death separates them. This spiritually healthy environment enables the upbringing of godly children. Indeed, society is built on the foundation of the family. When families are devastated on a wide scale, a society's downfall is not far off.

In verse 16, God states unequivocally that He *hates* divorce. Some translators see covering one's garment with violence in the verse as a separate reference—that is, that God hates violence also. Yet it makes more sense in context to understand the verse as the New King James Version interprets it—that is to say, divorce itself does violence to people's lives. Indeed, note the reference to one's garment. Commentator Charles Feinberg explains: "The reference is to the old custom of putting a garment over a woman to claim her as wife. (Note particularly Deu[teronomy] 22:30; [Ruth 3:9](#); and Eze[kiel] 16:8.) Instead of spreading their garment to protect their wives, they covered their garment with violence toward their wives. The garment symbolized wedded trust and protection" (*The Minor Prophets*, 1990, p. 258).

"Take heed to your spirit," or as some translations have it, "Guard your spirit," is a richly informative phrase, for unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant begins in the thoughts and impulses of the mind, and they in turn produce the actions that break up the marriage. Conversely, one remains faithful in marriage by ruling his thoughts. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God,

bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" ([2 Corinthians 10:4-5](#)).

So this pointed counsel from God certainly still applies today in a culture filled with divorce. All of us should, as God says, take heed.

Two Messengers

Regarding [Malachi 2:17](#), Charles Feinberg states in his book *The Minor Prophets*: "The third offence of the ungodly in Israel was an evil skepticism. By their ungodliness and unbelief they had wearied God; they had exhausted his patience [and still they again are quick to retort with "In what way...?"]. They brought forward the old argument against the providence of God from the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous. They had endured so many trials in exilic and postexilic times, that they were ready to believe that God delighted in and favored the cause of the wicked, the heathen who enjoyed prosperity, over against the ungodly.

"They complained that God did not judge wickedness severely enough. And if such were not the case, where indeed is the God of justice of whom they heard continually. Many connect this verse with the next chapter (and it is related in thought), because the answer to [Malachi 2:17](#) is found in [Malachi 3:1](#) [or, rather, starts in 3:1 and continues through chapter 4 in the description of the coming Day of the Lord]. God never fails to answer such a question put forth in such skeptical spirit. It rounded out the tale of their misdeeds and revealed them to be ripe for judgment" (pp. 258-259)." [END]

Day 725 – WEDNESDAY: August 20th

Malachi 3 & 4

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "In [Malachi 3:1](#), God says, "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me." The beginning of this verse could also be translated as "Behold, I send Malachi..." Certainly, the work of Malachi, God's messenger, was one of preparing the people for the coming of God—and His work continues even today, for his words are so preparing us who read and respond to them. Yet the reference, as the New Testament explains, was more directly to another, John the Baptist ([Matthew 11:10](#); [Mark 1:2](#); [Luke 7:27](#)). The "Lord" whom the people sought was the long-promised Messiah. As the temple is said to be "His," we should understand Him to be the very God who was worshiped in it. Yet He Himself is also referred to as a messenger, having been *sent* by God the Father. He would come as "the Messenger of the covenant." He had presented the various covenants of the Old Testament, yet this probably refers to His coming to mediate the *New Covenant*.

"The phrase 'whom you [seek or] desire' [NIV] is interesting. Even in their sin, suggests 2:17, the people longed for deliverance through the Messiah. Amos, too, had people in his audience who 'desired' the Day of the Lord; but he bluntly told them that the Day of the Lord would be darkness and not light ([Amos 5:19-20](#)). So, too, Malachi asked in 3:2, 'Who can endure the day of his coming?' The coming Messiah would bring judgment—viz., vindication and exoneration for the righteous but condemnation and punishment for the wicked" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verse 1).

The question "But who can endure the day of His coming?" recalls [Joel 2:11](#): "For the day of the LORD [i.e., God] is great and very terrible; who can endure it?" This again identifies the messianic Messenger as being God. In this context, the question "Who can stand when He appears?"—essentially repeated in [Revelation 6:17](#)—also very clearly points to the coming of God. The likening of the Messenger to a refiner's fire and launderer's soap ([Malachi 3:2](#)) shows Him to be a

purifier of His people. The reference to His being a refiner and purifier of silver, purging the sons of Levi so that they may offer acceptable offerings, recalls Isaiah 1, where God decried Israel's unacceptable worship and offerings (verses 10-15) and proclaimed, "Your silver has become dross.... I will turn My hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross" (verses 22, 25).

In [Malachi 3:5](#), the word translated "judgment" is probably better rendered "justice" here. That is, God will set the nation on the right track again and then actively intervene to righteously deal with those who don't follow His laws. Again, this is in answer to the issue of [Malachi 2:17](#), where God is accused of rewarding evil.

[Malachi 3:6](#) provides great comfort. God is not fickle. His character is always constant. It is because of this that the people of Israel, both physical and spiritual, are not consumed. Though they often deserve to be destroyed for their sins, God's great mercy and compassion, as well as the working out of His plan and purpose, are unswerving.

Robbing God

But God's faithfulness has not been returned in kind. So He encourages the people to "return"—that is, repent. Yet they don't see the need, now asking, "In what way shall we return?" (verse 7). God then gives them an example of their disobedience—stating that they have robbed Him. "In what way...?" they come back with again (verse 8). Then He makes clear that the issue is their failure to tithe and give offerings.

Holding back from God what rightfully belongs to Him amounts to stealing. This brought the people of Malachi's day under a curse. The modern nations descended from ancient Israel experience this curse even still. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* notes: "Most churches still fall under this indictment [of robbing God]; their budgets are generally nowhere near 10 percent of the income of the members" (note on

verse 9). And God's tithing law applies to all, not only to those who choose to attend church.

If people complied with God's laws in this regard, they would be greatly blessed. After paying tithes and giving offerings, God would help their remaining income stretch to cover all their needs and more. They would experience no lack of provisions. And there would be many tangible and intangible blessings besides (verses 10-12). Indeed, God told the people of Malachi's day—and all people since, including us—to *test* Him in this matter (verse 10). God will demonstrate His faithfulness by keeping His promise. We, of course, must make sure we are remaining faithful to Him

The Righteous Spared, the Wicked Destroyed

In [Malachi 3:13-15](#), we again see the people having the attitude expressed in [Malachi 2:17](#)—that God rewards evil and punishes righteousness. But as the rest of chapter 3 and chapter 4 show, this notion is utterly false. The righteous will ultimately receive great reward. And those who persist in wickedness will be destroyed.

God presents the righteous, those with a proper fear of Him, in verse 16. Here it says that they "spoke to one another"—demonstrating the regular fellowship and communication that God's people are supposed to have with one another. God takes great interest in the fellowship of His people, listening to what they have to say. The implication of the end of the verse is that their conversation revolved around Him and His ways. And for their proper attitude and practice, God says that they are written up in a special book of remembrance before Him. He of course needs no records for recollection, so this is perhaps more for *our* encouragement. God further states that those who fear Him will be His special treasure and that they will be spared from destruction when it comes (verse 17).

God certainly draws a distinction between the righteous and the wicked—as the final outcome will make clear (verse 18).

Chapter 4 describes what will befall those who persist in rejecting God and His ways. They will be completely burned up and reduced to ashes (verses 1, 3), utterly annihilated during the reign of Christ (see also [Matthew 10:28](#)). This truth may surprise those who anticipate that the wicked will be tormented forever in a fire that never goes out. In spite of its widespread acceptance, that doctrine doesn't come from the Bible. (For more information, request, download or read online our free booklet [Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?](#)).

Blessing is again promised to the faithful, for whom "the Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in His wings" (verse 2). Many reject this as a messianic reference because the figure is not used in the New Testament. However, since the word "sun" here would seem to denote the *source* of righteousness, then God is most likely intended. It employs a simple metaphor, comparing the comforting warmth that the rising sun brings upon the cold earth to the comforting healing that the Messiah brings upon a world cut off from God. And His arising on the world to bring healing is certainly the mission of God the Son, Jesus Christ. As for healing in the wings, Christ is compared to "a bird whose comforting wings bring healing to the chicks that gather underneath (see [Psalm 91:1-4](#))" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on [Malachi 4:2](#)). Jesus, Himself used this analogy in [Matthew 23:37](#).

In verse 3 of Malachi 4, the righteous are shown to be ultimately victorious over the wicked.

The Coming Elijah

In closing, the book's message calls on readers to remember the law God gave through Moses (verse 4) and then describes the coming of Elijah in the future (verses 5-6). As stated in the Beyond Today Bible

Commentary's introduction to Malachi, the New Testament shows that John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy in part, preparing people for Jesus' first coming. However, Jesus stated that another Elijah was still to come ([Matthew 17:11](#))—apparently to prepare the way before Jesus' *second* coming.

This Elijah, we are told, would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers lest God strike the earth with a curse—that is, wipe out its inhabitants. In an end-time setting, the people to be prepared are those being brought into the Church of God. So the mission here would seem to involve the building up of families—teaching parents the importance of loving and properly rearing their children as well as providing godly training for the Church's young people, turning their hearts to their parents. Yet there may be more intended by the prophecy.

In the context of John the Baptist's mission, turning the hearts of the children to the fathers is specifically interpreted in Luke 1 to mean turning "many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God" and turning "the disobedient to the wisdom of the just"—again, to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (verses 16-17). This may be why immediately before giving the Elijah prophecy in Malachi 4, God says to remember the law He gave through Moses (verse 4). It could be, then, that the "fathers" in the prophecy are the patriarchs and prophets, whose hearts' desire was for their descendants to be blessed through obedience to God, which they taught. The coming Elijah would then direct the "hearts" (or hearts' desire) of the patriarchal fathers to the children by proclaiming the wisdom and instruction of the fathers about obeying God to the disobedient *descendants* of Israel in his generation—as the original Elijah did in his day among the Northern Kingdom of Israel and as John the Baptist did in his day among the Jews of Judea. Thereby, the Elijah would in turn direct the hearts of many of these "children" to the "wisdom of the just"—to obeying God. This is

the work that God's Church is to be carrying out today, as it preaches the gospel to the entire world and cares for those whom God calls.

With the close of the book of Malachi, we come to the end of the Prophets section of the Old Testament. We turn next to the Writings section. Having already read many items from this section, we will pick up those we have missed.” [END]

Day 726 – THURSDAY: August 21st

Introduction & Joel 1

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “Introduction to Joel

In its introductory notes on this prophecy, *The Nelson Study Bible* states: "Scholars have offered various dates for the writing of the Book of Joel, from early preexilic times [that is, before the exile of Judah to Babylon] to as late as 350 b.c. Some believe that internal evidence in the Book of Joel indicates that the book was written during the reign of Joash king of Judah (835-796 b.c.), and in the time of the high priest Jehoiada. This view is based on the following considerations: (1) The location of the book between Hosea and Amos in the Hebrew canon suggests a preexilic date of writing. (2) The allusion to the neighboring nations as Judah's foes rather than Assyria, Babylon, or Persia points to an early date for the book. (3) The book does not mention any reigning king, which may suggest a time when the responsibility for ruling rested upon the priests and elders—as was the case during the early reign of young king Joash (see [2 Kings 11:4-21](#), w Kings 12:1-21)." This dating seems reasonable.

Joel's Warnings

It is possible that the prophet Joel, prophesying during the reign of Joash, gave his warnings in chapter 1 during the time when, as we saw in our previous reading, the Levites and the people were slow in doing

God's work (see [2 Chronicles 24:5](#)). Although the prophecy is clearly for the end time, the "day of the Lord" ([Joel 1:15](#)), it does carry a secondary relevance for the days when ancient Israel and Judah would be overthrown by Assyria and Babylon.

Joel pictures the inhabitants of the land as being *concerned only with eating and drinking* (verse 5), and so it will be that the fields will be wasted, and the wine will be dried up (verses 10-12). Joel also admonishes the priests to lament and mourn, as the necessary sacrifices have been withheld from the house of God (verse 13). Such a message may well have stricken fear in the hearts of the Levites and priests, who were slow in gathering money to repair the damaged temple, and also in the hearts of the people who were apparently slow in responding to the king's appeal.

Of course, this warning should strike home today as well—and even more so, as we are fast approaching the primary time described in Joel's prophecies. We too must be concerned about the work of God. If our priorities are directed toward personal pursuits and pleasures, God will take those away from us. "Alas for the day," Joel writes, "for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty. Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God?" (verse 15). Terrible times are ahead. That is why Christ wants us to have the same sense of urgency that He had while here on earth. He told His disciples, "*I must work* the works of Him who sent Me *while it is day*; the night is coming when no one can work" ([John 9:4](#)).

Likewise, He tells all of us, especially those in His ministry: "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find *so doing*. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins

to beat his fellow servants, *and to eat and drink with the drunkards* [see Joel's admonitions above], the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of it, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" ([Matthew 24:45-51](#)).

Rather than straying into compromises, self-centeredness, apathy and indifference, an urgent sense of concern and genuine compassion for others are needed. Through His prophet, God exhorts people in this first chapter of Joel to weep and wail (verse 5), lament (verse 8), mourn (verses 9-10), lament, wail and wear sackcloth (verse 13), fast (verse 14), and cry out to God (verses 14, 19-20).

In verse 19, we find Joel's remarkable lament: "O Lord, to You I cry out." *The Bible Reader's Companion* states in its note on this verse: "Unable to move any in Judah by his urgent words, Joel sets a personal example. Others will not call on the Lord, but Joel does. What should you and I do if the leadership of our churches seems insensitive to God? How should we react if no one listens to our urgent warnings? Just as Joel did! We don't despair. We don't strike out angrily at others. We turn to God, and in so doing model the response that the Lord wants all of his people to make to Him."

As we approach the end of this age, it is increasingly vital that each of us develop a *personal* relationship with God, learning to obey Him and trust Him completely. It may even be that our example will lead others to do the same." [END]

Day 727 – FRIDAY: August 22nd

Joel 2

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Joel's warnings now turn specifically to the final trumpet warning to Israel and Judah ([Ezekiel 33:3-6](#); [Amos](#)

[3:6](#)). They have been warned repeatedly about not following God, but now their time is about to run out. It is clear from the evidence in this and the following chapters that much of the prophecy is for the end time. In addition to the expression "day of the Lord" ([Joel 2:1](#)), there is a strong indication of the end time in verse 2: "The like of whom *has never been; nor will there ever be* any such after them, even for many successive generations." This is reminiscent of other prophecies about a time of great distress like no other ([Daniel 12:1](#); [Jeremiah 30:7](#); [Matthew 24:21](#)). Verses 10 and 30-31 describe dramatic heavenly signs that are also mentioned in New Testament prophecies ([Matthew 24:29](#); [Acts 2:20](#); [Revelation 8:12](#)).

However, the strongest evidence here for this not being a prophecy for Joel's time is the latter part of the chapter that describes the outpouring of God's Spirit—which finds initial fulfillment in the New Testament Church age following Jesus' first appearance, greater fulfillment at the time of the heavenly signs preceding His future return, and ultimate fulfillment under the rule of the Kingdom of God on earth, when the way of salvation will be open to all mankind (compare [Acts 2:14-21](#)).

Some consider the "day of the Lord" to refer to the whole Christian era, from apostolic times onward. However, the references to it in Joel and other places generally refer to the time immediately surrounding Christ's return and beyond (compare Joel 3; [Zephaniah 1:18](#); [Zechariah 14:1-4](#); [Acts 2:20](#); [2 Peter 3:10](#)). Note especially this paraphrase of [Amos 5:18-20](#) in the New Living Translation: "How terrible it will be for you who say, 'If only the day of the Lord were here! For then the Lord would rescue us from all our enemies.' But you have no idea what you are wishing for. That day will not bring light and prosperity, but darkness and disaster. In that day you will be like a man who runs from a lion—only to meet a bear. After escaping the bear, he leans his hand against a wall in his house—and is bitten by a snake. Yes, the day of the

Lord will be a dark and hopeless day, without a ray of joy or hope." Clearly, this does not refer to the whole Christian era starting with the days of the apostles—and neither does Joel 2.

The invading army of chapter 2 is represented as a huge locust swarm—extremely loud, climbing walls, entering through gaps, darkening the sky and utterly devastating everything in its path. In this chapter, then, the locusts of chapter 1 (verse 4) are thus revealed to be an army of *people* ([Joel 2:2, 25](#)). Also interesting is the fact that though this is a foreign, gentile army, Joel refers to it as *God's* army (verse 11). This is because they are acting as the agent of His judgment. Similarly, God elsewhere refers to Assyria as "the rod of My anger" ([Isaiah 10:5](#)). As ancient Assyria was located to the northeast of Israel, its forces could rightly be described as the "northern army" ([Joel 2:20](#)). Yet while these prophecies apparently found some fulfillment in the destruction brought against Israel and Judah by Assyria in the eighth century B.C.—beginning less than a century from when it appears that Joel wrote—the ultimate fulfillment, for the end time, is yet to come. Later, when we come to Isaiah 10 in our reading, we will consider evidence showing that *modern* Assyria is located to the *northwest* of Israel—in Central Europe.

However, it should be pointed out that "God's army" of verse 11 is not necessarily synonymous with the "northern army" of verse 20—as it may be that "God's army" in this context is the 200-million-man army of [Revelation 9:16](#) reacting to the takeover of the Holy Land by the "northern" (i.e., European) army. Indeed, that event does occur during the Day of the Lord, as it follows [Revelation 6:17](#), whereas it is evident from other passages that the end-time European invasion of the Holy Land will occur *before* the Day of the Lord, at the beginning of what is termed the Great Tribulation (compare [Daniel 11:40-41](#); [Luke 21:20-24](#); [Matthew 24:15-22](#)). Still, there may be other possibilities regarding the identities of these armies.

In any case, Joel's message is a serious warning of great "doom and gloom." Yet it also reveals the loving, gentle and patient character of the Creator. He sends out a plea for repentance (a complete turnaround, not just an outward show, [Joel 2:12-14](#)) and assures everyone that "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm" (verse 13). Even when God has warned people of punishment for their sins, He is willing to change His mind if they repent ([Jeremiah 18:8](#); [Psalm 106:40-45](#); [Jonah 3:10](#)). Here is an example for all of God's people to follow—to be gracious, merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.

Joel continues with his serious request for change by pleading with *all* the people, from the priests even to the children, to take the warning seriously, to fast and pray.

After the call to repentance comes the reference to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (verses 28-31). This has enormous significance for the Church today as we near the end of the age. If we are prepared to heed the warnings and turn our lives around with the help of the Holy Spirit, we too can reap the promised blessings." [END]

Day 728 – SATURDAY: August 23rd

Joel 3

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "After God deals with Israel and Judah, He now turns to those nations that have abused them. He will now judge *all* the nations. Indeed, the Israelites of the end time will suffer a period that Christ called the Great Tribulation ([Matthew 24:21-22](#)). Jeremiah refers to it as the "time of *Jacob's* trouble" ([Jeremiah 30:5-7](#)). Yet notice this about the Day of the Lord, referred to in our previous reading: "For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion" ([Isaiah 34:8](#)). Thus, the *Day* of the Lord here appears to be the final *year* immediately preceding Christ's

return. Immediately following Israel's Tribulation, it is a time of divine punishment on the world at large for their sins, including what they have done to Israel. (However, it should be noted that in some contexts the Day of the Lord extends past this time to include the millennial reign of Christ and even eternity beyond.)

Some equate the "Valley of Jehoshaphat" (verse 2) with the area of "Armageddon," citing [Revelation 16:16](#). Yet this verse actually shows the area of Armageddon—i.e., the Hill of Megiddo overlooking the Valley of Jezreel (the modern plain of Esdraelon)—to be the *assembly point* for the final battle, not the scene of the battle itself. So where will the final battle itself take place? In Zechariah 14, God answers, "Behold, the day of the Lord is coming.... For I will gather all the nations to battle against *Jerusalem*.... Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives" (verses 1-4).

Concerning the reference to the Valley of Jehoshaphat in Joel 3, *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary* has this to say: "Parallel to [Zechariah 14:2, 3, 4](#), where the 'Mount of Olives' answers to the 'Valley of Jehoshaphat' here. The latter is called 'the valley of blessing' (*Berachah*) ([2 Chronicles 20:26](#)). It lies between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives and has the Kedron [i.e., Kidron] flowing through it." This depression is now known as the Kidron Valley, which runs north to south along the east side of the Old City. It stretches south for more than 20 miles through the Judean wilderness to the area of the Dead Sea. Continuing from the *JFB Commentary*: "As Jehoshaphat [righteous king of Judah] overthrew the confederate foes of Judah, viz., Ammon, Moab, etc...in this valley [see [2 Chronicles 20:16, 26](#)—and actually *God* overthrew them while Jehoshaphat and company merely despoiled the bodies], so God was to overthrow the Tyrians, Zidonians, Philistines, Edom, and Egypt, with a similar utter overthrow ([Joel 3:]4, 19). This has been long ago fulfilled; but the ultimate event shadowed

forth herein is still future, when God shall specially interpose to destroy Jerusalem's last foes, of whom Tyre, Zidon, Edom, Egypt, and Philistia are the types. As 'Jehoshaphat' means 'the judgment of Jehovah [i.e., Yahweh],' the valley of Jehoshaphat may be used as a *general* term for the theater of God's final judgments on Israel's foes, with an allusion to the judgment inflicted on them by Jehoshaphat. The definite mention of the Mount of Olives in Zechariah 14, and the fact that this was the scene of the ascension [of Christ], makes it likely the same shall be the scene of Christ's coming again: cf. 'this same Jesus... shall so come *in like manner* as ye have seen Him go into heaven' ([Acts 1:11](#))" (same note).

Of the Kidron Valley, *Smith's Bible Dictionary* states, "It is now commonly known as the 'valley of Jehoshaphat'" ("Kidron," 1986). Still, as the *JFB Commentary* points out, it may be that Valley of Jehoshaphat connotes more than just the Kidron. [Revelation 14:20](#) says that the "winepress," a figurative representation of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the "valley of decision" ([Joel 3:12-14](#)), is an area nearly 200 miles long. This is far longer than the Kidron Valley. Indeed, that's as long as the modern state of Israel. So perhaps the entire Jordan Valley is indicated. We can imagine troops stretching all the way from well above Megiddo, down the Jezreel Valley to where it connects to the Jordan Valley, then south to Jericho, and finally ascending to the Kidron Valley at Jerusalem. This seems reasonable when we consider that the forces of the kings "of the whole world" that will be present ([Revelation 16:14](#))—some of whom will shortly before have fielded an army of 200 million men ([Revelation 9:16](#)), more than two thirds the current population of the United States. "Multitudes, multitudes," Joel writes ([Joel 3:14](#)). And yet they are as nothing against God—indeed, their incredible numbers will only make for a very great slaughter.

The nations have never been kind to Israel (verses 2-3). Joel lists a number of them that have been cruel to Israel, some having plundered

God's people over many centuries. Slave trading (verse 3), common among ancient nations, will be practiced again before Christ returns (compare [Revelation 18:11-13](#)). And numerous other scriptures show that it is the end-time Israelites who will be slaves. God will repay the nations for the way they have treated His people.

Joel 3 is full of graphic imagery, often in stark contrast to similar imagery used elsewhere. The enemies of Israel are to turn their plowshares into swords and their pruning hooks into spears (verse 10)—that is, prepare for war—the opposite of what God says will happen after He does away with war ([Isaiah 2:4](#)). He likens the nations' sins to grapes ready for the winepress, as already mentioned ([Joel 3:12-14](#); compare [Revelation 14:17-20](#)).

Finally, Joel describes how God will replace man's wicked rule over the earth with His way of government ([Joel 3:17](#)). In the end, Israel will become beautiful once again (verse 18). Some claim that the return of the Jews to the land of Israel in modern times is the fulfillment of this prophecy, but the description given here shows that this prophecy hasn't yet been fulfilled. Indeed, the Jews are seen here receiving forgiveness of their sins (verses 20-21), which comes only through acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Messiah (see [Zechariah 12:10](#)). Furthermore, the Jews make up only a small portion of the modern descendants of Israel (see our free booklet [The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy](#).)

Finally, God says that He will live in Jerusalem ([Joel 3:17](#), [Joel 3:21](#))—another clear proof that Joel is a prophecy of end-time events and is yet to be fulfilled.” [END]