

# Minor Prophets' Major Gripes, XII

## *Malachi on Lame Worship*

September 14, 2003

### PARADE OF GRIPES

715 B.C. Hosea griped about spiritual infidelity. He married a prostitute named Gomer to make his point: Don't add on to God

815 B.C. Joel used a plague of locust to gripe about people who don't depend on God. His message: Don't take God for granted

750 B.C. Amos branded Israel's wealthy, high-society women as "Cows of Bashan" while griping: Don't be callous toward the poor

850 B.C. Obadiah griped about the false security of a city carved in rock (*Indiana Jones* location) and said: Don't be self-dependent

772 B.C. Jonah showed us that God may keep us under until we get the point. The point? Don't desire destruction over deliverance

742 B.C. Micah used a courtroom to challenge the foolish notion that God expects too much. His verdict: Don't feel burdened by God

635 B.C. Nahum said God (like Mel Gibson in *Ransom*) is filled with protective jealousy & anger. He warned: Don't return to your sin

612 B.C. Habakkuk learned that wickedness is allowed because it's tied into man's freewill. His gripe? Don't blame God for evil

640 B.C. Zephaniah griped that stagnant believers are like bitter, spoiled dregs of wine. His advice: Don't be complacent

- The Israelites were exiled in Babylon for 70 years.

520 B.C. Haggai griped about the halted progress on the Lord's temple, and he hammered this one home: Don't lose your priorities

520 B.C. Zechariah came alongside Haggai griping that right actions don't make up for wrong attitudes. Don't get in a *rutual*

- The temple was rebuilt and then 100 years passed

430 B.C. Malachi notices a universal blasé attitude toward temple procedures and practices. Malachi says: Don't offer lame worship

## THE LAST WORD

Malachi's name means *messenger*, and this is the last prophetic message the people will hear for 430 years. But he does pave the way for the next messenger to come:

See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. – Malachi 3:1 NIV

At the end of his book, Malachi says this messenger will be the prophet Elijah (4:5). 430 years later an angel appeared to John the Baptist's father (*Luke 1:17*) and said John will be:

... a man with the spirit and power of Elijah ... - Luke 1:17 NLT

And Jesus even quoted Malachi regarding John's identity:

This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." – Matthew 11:10 NIV

Before this event, believers had faith that the Messiah would come; after this event, believers have faith that He did come.

- Trusting He would come was no easier than trusting He did come

The people were losing their enthusiasm for worship because they felt they'd waited long enough for God's promises to be fulfilled.

"The time will come," says the Lord, "when the grain and grapes will grow faster than they can be harvested." ... I will bring my exiled people of Israel back from distant lands, and they will rebuild their ruined cities ... - Amos 9:13-14 NLT

Q: When are our grapes gonna grow like that?!

Malachi says pests were devouring their crops (3:11) and Haggai said they were disappointed with how the temple had turned out (*Haggai 2:3*). Malachi lays out their attitude at the beginning of his book:

"I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?'" – Malachi 1:2 NIV

The Lord points out: "Um, I just brought you out of exile?!" And then he reminds them that His promises did come with conditions.

If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me? ... But you ask, "How have we shown contempt for your name?" – Malachi 1:6 NIV

Now they're all innocent. "What've we done? We're following the rules." But, God's law required perfect animals to be offered.

"When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD. - Malachi 1:13 NIV

[Shifting eyes] "Oh, that. Yeah, well animals are expensive!" The Lord wanted their best. Remember this letter from King Darius?

Whatever is needed – young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem – must be given them daily without fail, so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven ... - Ezra 6:9-10 NIV

About 45 years before Malachi, this Persian funding ended. This created a greater financial burden on the people. So, they cut temple costs by "relaxing" the regulations.

"So the animals are lame ... who's it hurt?" Then the Lord says something sobering (and hilarious):

Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you? - Malachi 1:8 NIV

They respect, revere, and rely on a human institution more than they do on their God. There are two things wrong here:

1. They're mad at God for not following *their* timetable (which means they expect God to be serving them).
2. Their small investment has cheapened their faith (which in turn reduces the value they place on God Himself).

Q: And so the Lord is asking, "What am I worth - leftovers?!"

When we give God leftover time, money, or energy, we're repeating this same sin of not wanting to bring the valuable stuff to God.

Q: How cheap of an investment is your faith?

Q: Could you get into a movie with the offerings you tithe?

Q: Could you maintain a friendship on the time you give Me?

There's a semi-logical progression to what they believed:

- They figured their lame sacrifices were good enough.
- But, God wouldn't bless these dishonoring leftovers.
- They concluded He's not loving, fair, or dependable.

Where is the God of justice? - Malachi 2:17 NIV

Q: And then it's a downward spiral: once you start doubting God's goodness and faithfulness ... why bring Him your best?

Then everything just starts to slide. "I'll be more obedient when I see a some action on His part!"

- If He blessed me with riches – then I'd be really generous.
- If He'd change my wife – then I'd be a much better husband.

But it isn't the Lord who's letting down His end of the bargain.

... if you do not set your heart to honor my name," says the LORD Almighty, "I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings." – Malachi 2:2 NIV

It isn't the cost of the offering; it's having a heart set on inner devotion and outer obedience. The priests would bless the people as they exited the temple with "our" blessing:

The Lord bless you, and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace. – Numbers 6:24-26 NAS

The words hold no power; God is the power behind the blessing. And for those who offer "lip service" without "setting their heart to honor Him," this blessing will only cause more callousness.

"You are under a curse – the whole nation of you – because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "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." – Malachi 3:10 NIV

God says, "Test Me!" Do your part. Offer consistent worship that is whole-hearted, unblemished, worthy of Me ... and not lame! He doesn't need our money. But He wants our heart.

- Our hearts are securely tied to our wallets and our day-timers

Place God above these two things, and you'll experience the rich blessing of intimacy with your creator; a demonstration of His work in and through you; and healthy, happy relationships with others.

He may not bless us or rescue us the way we'd like; but come what may, we'll know that we've "set our heart" to honor Him. And in the end, we'll understand the fulfillment of His promises.