

## **Malachi 1:10-14**

Is our worship truly offered from our hearts, or are we just going through the motions?

### **Summary**

**In Malachi 1:6-14, the Lord brings his charge against his people that in their offering what was second best in their worship, they were not rendering to him the due honor and reverence he deserves as the great King**

#### **1. Vain Worship vv. 10-11**

The offerings the people of God brought to the Lord were so defiled by their attitude of heart that it would have been better not to offer such sacrifices at all.

The reason for these offerings was to please the Lord, but the Lord could hardly take pleasure in offerings which assumed that God necessarily owed a blessing in return for sacrifice, no matter how flawed that offering might be. If it was intended to be 'tribute' to a superior, it was a wasted offering, for it brought the Lord no delight.

The word 'tribute' recalls the offerings of Cain and Abel (**Gen. 4:3-4**). Cain and his token offering were rejected by the Lord, while the younger brother, Abel, was accepted along with his faith-filled offering. Though humanly speaking the older brother might have expected to be the favored one, God chose instead the less favored younger brother, just as he would later choose Jacob over Esau.

In this case, faithless Israel fills the role of the rejected brother while the nations throughout the world will undertake the role of the favored younger brother.

'From the rising of the sun to its setting' is a comprehensive merism, a literary feature that uses two extremes to incorporate everything in between: the Lord's name will be revered from the uttermost east to the most distant west and everywhere between those horizons. The purity of the future worship of the nations, which will flow out of a true appreciation of the greatness of the Lord's name, forms a sharp contrast to Israel's defiled and half-hearted offerings and should further compound their sense of shame.

This anticipation finds its fulfilment in the New Testament, where Jesus Christ comes to his own people and is rejected by them (**John 1:11**), yet through that very rejection the message of life comes to the nations, who gladly receive it (**Rom. 11:25**).

#### **2. Specific Charges vv. 12-14**

The evidence of the broken relationship between the Lord and his people lies in their defiled worship: the priests are going through the motions, and the worshippers are offering second-rate sacrifices.

The problem was not a flaw in the form of Israel's worship, but rather in its substance.

Merely fulfilling the form of godliness is not enough: the right attitude of heart must be there, or the whole enterprise is defiled and worthless (**Hag. 2:10-14**).

Often in ancient Israel, prayers for help were associated with a vow promising praise to God in the assembly when the Lord answered the petitioner's request. In this case, there were those who were making vows to sacrifice a fellowship offering when in need, but then reneging on their commitment. Such an offering had to be unblemished (**Lev. 3:6**), yet even though those who made the vows had such unblemished male animals in their flocks, they were instead offering animals that were in some way blemished, and therefore less valuable, or even ones that were 'stolen', and therefore did not cost the one offering them anything. This practice is a functional denial of the Lord's kingship and is in stark contrast to the reverence in which the Lord's name will be held among the Gentile 'nations'.

### **Application**

This passage challenges the casual attitude with which we often come to worship God. Is it possible that there are Sundays when it would be better for us not to go to church at all?

We too can be going through the motions of worship — even orthodox, correct motions — but none the less be wasting our time and wearying the Lord.

If this passage challenges ordinary Christians, how much more does it challenge pastors! Do we worship God ourselves, as well as leading others in worship?

This failure of true worship to engage the heart and mind invariably flows out of a failure to recognize and remember God's love to us in the gospel.

That is why this passage cannot simply be preached as law and used to shame the hearers for the poverty of their worship. Worship has to be drawn out of us as we contemplate the gospel and our hearts are stirred afresh by God's amazing grace to us.

The truth concerning all of us is that our worship is defiled and we are worthy of being rejected by God. Have we so quickly forgotten what our God has sent Christ to be the perfect worshipper in our place.

The result of Jesus' offering is not simply a restoration of God's own people to worship; it is the fulfilment of what Malachi foresaw: the extension of the true worship of God around the world. Jesus Christ came not merely to be a light to Israel, but a light to the Gentiles as well (**Luke 2:32**).

It is this undeniable love of God in Jesus Christ that, when properly understood, transforms our hearts from reluctant worship to joyful praises.

Grasping the gospel turns us from haters of God into those whose chief delight is to glorify and enjoy God.