

2 Chronicles 36:15-16 ¹⁵ And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: ¹⁶ But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

- The word “heckler” comes from the Middle English word “hackell,” which is derived from the Old High German word “hako.” The English has the meaning of a comb with long teeth for dressing flax, and refers to the rough and jagged appearance of the flax as it was combed out. It also came to mean the feathers on the neck of a bird or the hair on the neck and back of a cat or dog which were raised when they were aggravated (“got their hackles up”). Our word “hack,” from the same root, still has the meaning of cutting with repeated irregular or unskillful blows. The German has the older meaning of a hook, and refers to what we still call “baiting” someone or something.
- Therefore, a heckler is someone who harasses and tries to disconcert someone with questions and challenges, or one who badgers or baits someone. It implies persistent interruptive questioning of a speaker in order to confuse, embarrass, hamper or frustrate him. They are literally trying to “hook” the messenger in order to deflect the message and minimize its influence by dragging it off-course.
- Comedian Milton Berle once quieted a woman heckler in his audience by saying, “You did the same thing to me in 1946 - I never forget a dress.”
- Al Smith, a U.S. Presidential candidate back in 1928, was making a speech when a heckler yelled, “Tell ‘em what’s on your mind, Al. It won’t take long!” Smith grinned, pointed at the man and shouted, “Stand up, pardner, and I’ll tell ‘em what’s on both our minds. It won’t take any longer.”
- Richard Brinsley Sheridan once succeeded admirably in trapping a noisy member of the British House of Commons who interrupted every speaker with cries of, “Hear, hear!” In his speech, Sheridan alluded to a well-known character of his day that obviously had no sense. “Where,” he exclaimed with great emphasis, “shall we find a more foolish knave or a more knavish fool than this?” “Hear, hear!” was instantly bellowed from the accustomed bench. “Thank you very much,” said Sheridan with a bow, as he took his seat amid peals of laughter.
- In one of Dr. Carl F.H. Henry’s early street meetings during his college years, a heckler kept shouting, “Where did Cain get his wife?” When he could ignore the disturber no longer, Dr. Henry replied, “When I get to heaven, I’ll ask him!” “Suppose he isn’t in heaven?” shouted the heckler. Dr. Henry quickly replied, “Then you can ask him!”
- Wendell Phillips was one of the most polished and graceful orators of all time. He spoke as quietly as if he were talking in his own parlor, and almost entirely without gestures. He had great power over all kinds of audiences. During one speech in Boston, the majority of the audience was hostile. They yelled and sang and completely drowned out his voice. Phillips made no attempt to address this noisy crowd, but bent over the lectern and seemed to be speaking in a low tone to the reporters who were seated near the platform. The curiosity of the audience was aroused, so they ceased to clamor and tried to hear what he was saying to the reporters. Phillips looked at the audience and said quietly, “Go on, gentlemen, go on. I do not need your ears. Through these pencils I speak to thirty million.” Not a voice was raised again.
- **(Background to Malachi)** Just over 50,000 exiles had returned to Judah from the Babylonian captivity, beginning to trickle back to Jerusalem in 538 BC. A much smaller and less magnificent temple had been rebuilt under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who led the first return from Persia in 516 BC, and the sacrificial system had been renewed. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah ministered during this time, encouraging the people to finish their task. Meanwhile, a Hebrew girl named Esther became queen in Persia and saved the Jews there from total extinction. Ezra led the second return in 458 BC and worked diligently to restore morality and spirituality among the people. Finally, Nehemiah led the third return in 445 BC and governed the people while they rebuilt the city walls. Later, when he had to return to Persia for a decade, the people backslid once again and God called the final prophet of the Old Testament, a man named Malachi (“the Lord’s messenger”).
- After being back in the land of Palestine for only a century, the Jews had descended into ritualism; they had become hard-hearted toward God, and there was widespread departure from His Law. They felt justified from their perspective, since it had been 2000 years since Abraham, and none of the glorious promises of God’s Covenant with him had been fulfilled in their ultimate sense.
- In less than a century after returning from captivity, they had already sunk to a depth of sin exceeding the former iniquities that originally brought punishment through Assyria and Babylon.

- The long anticipated Messiah had not arrived and did not seem to be in sight; they had lost hope.
- It was at this time that Malachi wrote the capstone prophecy of the Old Testament. His message was one of judgment on Israel for their continuing sin, but it also contained a promise that one day in the future the Messiah would be revealed. He was the last true prophet to speak for 400 years, literally the last messenger of God before the Messiah's first advent. His job? To get them ready!

MALACHI'S DAY	OUR DAY
The exiles trickle back from their captivity in several stages	Doctrinal truth and Apostolic practice brings the church out of the Dark Ages, "line upon line"
In less than a century the people have backslidden and descended into mere ritual	In less than a century after the awakening of 1900, Pentecostalism has become just another religion
Many of them have sunk into worse sin than that which took them into captivity	False doctrine, ritualism and immorality abound, worse than that which commenced the Dark Ages
It has been 2000 years since God made His covenant with Abraham	It has been 2000 years since Jesus died on Calvary to open up a "New Covenant in His blood"
Many of God's promises to Israel had not been fulfilled in their ultimate sense	Though the church has been blessed, God's ultimate purposes are yet to be accomplished
The long anticipated Messiah has not arrived so the people are complacent	The long anticipated Messiah has not returned so His people are complacent once again!
God's true messenger preaches judgment and a call to repentance	God's true messengers still preach His judgment and a call to repentance!

- As Malachi concludes his prophecy (4:5), God says "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD." Jesus confirmed Malachi's prophecy as He explained it in Matthew 17:11-13 ... "11 And Jesus answered and said unto them, **Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.** (SECOND COMING) 12 But I say unto you, That **Elias is come already**, (FIRST COMING) and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. 13 Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist."
- The ministry of Elijah in Scripture is associated with the revelation of God: (1) John the Baptist's preaching at the baptism of Christ, (2) Elijah's appearance at the Mount of Transfiguration, (3) Most scholars believe Elijah will be one of the two witnesses who prophecy during the Tribulation.
- **John the Baptist's "Elijah-like" ministry preceded the first coming of Christ, and an "Elijah-like" anointing will rest on true last-day preachers just before the second coming of Christ!**
- The thrust of John's ministry was to turn the heart of Israel back to God, and the underlying theme of every message he preached was "Repent!" In his time, Israel's actions were very religious but their hearts were far from God. John's ministry exposed the actual condition of their hearts and the deception in which they were trusting. They believed they were okay, but they were not ready!
- **The preacher's only important job is to get you ready for the Second Coming of Christ! No matter what else he accomplishes, he has failed if he cannot do that. That is why there is a growing urgency in the voice of God's true ministry the closer we get to the Rapture!**
- Malachi's prophecy consists of a sixfold "burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi" (1:1), indicting the people and priests on six counts of willful sin. It takes the form of a dispute between God and His people, with no fewer than twenty-three questions asked back and forth.
- **Some scholars suggest that Malachi's method of writing may actually have originated because of disputing by hecklers as he first attempted to deliver his prophetic message!**
- In response to each of the "burdens" of Malachi, the people retort with sarcastic questions. Their brazenness in assuming to dispute with God Himself is frightening, but the parallel to our day cannot be missed. **THEIR QUESTIONS ARE THE QUESTIONS OF TODAY'S BACKSLIDER!**
- The people do not realize that they are "heckling" the last true prophet they will hear for 400 years!
- **The actions of a heckler are meant to interrupt communicator in order to deflect the message. A "spiritual heckler" acts desperately - though perhaps not verbally - to interrupt the communicator (CONVICTION) in order to deflect the truth about their spiritual condition.**

(QUESTIONS FROM THE NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

FIRST BURDEN: GOD LOVES YOU

Question: How have you loved us? (1:2)

- The people do not believe God loves them because of the circumstances He has allowed.
- God reminds them, "I loved Jacob and I hated Esau." (1:2-3) The word "hate" speaks of "relative affection" as Jesus indicated in Luke 14:26: *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*
- Israel is looking at the temporal wealth of the Edomites; God is looking at their eternal destiny.
- Edom (the world) tries to circumvent the punishment of God, but God decrees that they cannot. "They shall build, but I will throw down." (1:4) The world develops programs to rehabilitate drug addicts and alcoholics, cures for AIDS and STD's, etc. but they only treat the symptoms. Unless they repent of the cause (SIN), they will be destroyed forever.
- But God's people are blessed, not just in this life but for eternity, because they have a covenant!

SECOND BURDEN: YOU HAVE DESPISED THE LORD

Questions: How have we ever despised your name? (1:6) How have we defiled the sacrifices? (1:7)

- The people are offering blind, lame and sick sacrifices on the altar. God is getting their leftovers! They are offering to God things that they would not even dare to offer to their heathen governor. ("Offer it now unto thy governor" - 1:8)
- If you offered to your employer the service you offer to God, how long would you be employed?
- Do we work long and hard to maintain our standard of living, yet feel that it is too much of a sacrifice to give extra time to God? Are we sporadic in our attendance and apathetic in our worship? Are we frustrated by God's call for MORE? "**You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' and you sneer at it, says the Lord of hosts." (1:13, NKJV)**
- Haggai 1:9 also prophesies of the consequences of misplaced priorities: "*Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.*" In Malachi 2:2 God says, "I will curse your blessings."

THIRD BURDEN: GOD CANNOT ACCEPT YOUR WORSHIP

Question: Why has the Lord abandoned us? (2:14)

- Malachi 2:13 says, "And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth *it* with good will at your hand."
- Their weeping achieved nothing because they had shut the door of access to God through their persistent sin!
- When they ask why, God indicts them of the specific sin of adultery (2:14). "For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence." (2:16, NKJV) Like the blood of a murder victim splattered on the clothes of the murderer, divorce leaves horrible stains. **SPIRITUAL ADULTERY DOES THE SAME THING!**

FOURTH BURDEN: YOUR COMPLACENCY IS A WEARINESS TO GOD

Questions: How have we wearied him? (2:17) Where is the God of justice? (2:17)

- The people return to their complaint of God's unfairness because He blesses the wicked. "Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them." (2:17) They were disillusioned with God over problems they themselves had caused! Malachi tries to shake their complacency and self-righteousness by warning of judgment.
- **THEY HAVE BOUGHT INTO THE LIE THAT LIVING RIGHTEOUSNESS DOES NOT MATTER!**

FIFTH BURDEN: PLEASE RETURN TO THE LORD

Questions: How can we return when we have never gone away? (3:7) When did we ever cheat you? (3:8)

- One of the most shocking verses is 3:7, when God's pleads with them to return and the people declare that they have never gone away! They cannot see their own spiritual state! God then gives them an obvious example: TITHING.
- At the heart of tithing in Scripture is the notion that God owns everything, we owe to Him everything and we have nothing that we did not first receive from the Lord. God simply commands us to return to Him a PART in worship.
- **TITHING APPLIES TO MUCH MORE THAN MONEY! THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO ROB GOD!**
- God invites you to "prove me now" (3:10). He is waiting to "pour you out a blessing." You cannot outgive God!

SIXTH BURDEN: YOUR COMPLAINTS GRIEVE GOD'S HEART

Questions: How have we spoken against you? (3:13) What's the use of obeying God? (3:14)

- Imagine the grief of God's heart when He has offered His love to His creation and they have only looked for personal profit from the relationship! They do not love Him for who He is, but only for what He can do for them!
- In Malachi 3:14 they ask, "What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?" Literally they are asking, "What is the benefit to us for living according to God's Law?"

- Malachi ends his prophecy with a beautiful look at the future of the redeemed. "And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." (3:17) **THERE IS AN ETERNAL BENEFIT TO SERVING THE LORD!**