

**THE FUTURE OUTLOOK**

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## Tragedies Never Take A Holiday

Fire never takes a holiday. It is most destructive when one least expects it, especially when preparations are being made for occasional dates. When the Gibbs' of Greensboro, home was demolished by fire early Wednesday morning, November 29, six children were brought to safety by the mother, Mrs. Marie Gibbs. Mr. Gibbs suffered severe injury trying to escape. The church, school and community came to their rescue with a good-will contribution to them, making it possible for them to continue their Christmas plans.

In planning for Christmas celebration, be aware of hasty cleaning-up around the home. One often reads about fire resulting from clothes and rubbish piled up which easily takes fire from matches or spontaneous combustion.

One should make a memorandum when planning for Christmas, especially of people rendering services, as the police women who bring traffic under control while children travel to and from school in the rain, snow and sleet. They have stated that they stay over-time to permit teachers to travel through the least congested amount of traffic. These people don't even receive a Christmas card from the teachers to whom they have shown such consideration.

Christmas-giving is a matter of exchanging gifts to remind our friends that God gave His only son for our Savior, while many are still too busy to make a sacrifice to the shut-in and poverty-stricken children.

Many tragic deaths occur on occasional dates. Some are accidental. The most pathetic thing which happens during this time is to have neighbors, with their children, come into the house of the bereaved family for the sole purpose of eating. Many relatives and friends have come from out of town and are tired when they reach their destination and would appreciate a meal prepared by someone besides themselves, but when people from the neighborhood come into the house to eat, the matter is taken a little bit too far.

It has been publicized that the men in Vietnam are in need of articles for oral hygiene, deodorants, stationery and pocket games. This writing would not be complete without mentioning the many men in service, especially in Vietnam. Be sure that the regulations of the post office are followed closely as you mail your gifts.



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# This Week's Sunday School Lesson

## Keeping Life's Covenants

### WHAT IS OUR CONCERN?

The observant student of Scripture can point to a number of striking parallels between our day and Malachi's time

The various news media graphically report civil violence stemming from needs left unmet because of economic and cultural differences, failures in communication, and political expediency in places like Watts, Cicero, and San Francisco.

Popular periodicals discuss such lively and disturbing issues as those raised in the question, "Is God dead?" Simultaneously the same publications seek to analyze the revolution in contemporary morals.

Television documentaries portray the increasing problems involved in poverty, crime, and drug addiction even among juveniles. Many motion pictures, claiming to be "adult" films, are based on various means of exploiting personality. Almost universally, the secular press deplores the apathy of individuals who refuse to become involved in incidents and issues affecting both corporate and personal welfare.

At the same time, increasing impersonalism and increasing suicide rates go hand in hand. Meaninglessness has become a major problem. Many persons among us sincerely believe that they are completely alone and that the only meaning life holds for them is what they are creating for themselves. Even a prominent churchman, in resigning his high post, recently swept away any concept of divine guidance or intervention by declaring, "If it's not natural, it's not real".

### BEFORE YOU READ THE SCRIPTURE

At the outset of this unit we should note that the Book of Malachi is the product of an anonymous author. The word Malachi is not a proper name. Rather, it is a term meaning "my messenger."

An early editor applied this term to the prophecy as a title, lifting it from 3:1: "Behold, I send my messenger." The word is not used anywhere else as a proper name, and the oldest versions of the Scripture never treat it as such. Indeed, in the Septuagint (the Greek translation) Malachi 1:1 reads, "By the hand of his messenger."

Another indication of the anonymity of the author is the absence of any reference to his family or place of residence. Nevertheless, both the content of the book and its manner of presentation mark it as true Hebrew prophecy.

The style of the book indicates that it was first written, not spoken. Its spirit and aim parallel those of earlier prophets as the author speaks directly to the problems of his day.

In presenting his message, the writer used an argumentative approach that reminds us of Socrates. First, he stated the truth he wished to emphasize. Then he indicated the objection he anticipated to it. Finally, he answered the objection by restating and verifying his original proposition. In all, the book contains seven such formal arguments.

### WHAT THE SCRIPTURE SAYS

The Scripture for today is Malachi 1 and 2. Selected verses are printed below. See Hom Bible Study suggestions in the back of the quarterly.

Malachi 6:9

6 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. You say, 'How have we despised thy name?' 7 By offering polluted food upon my altar. And you say, 'How have we polluted it?' By thinking that the Lord's table may be despised. 8 When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that no evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that no evil? Present that to your governor; will he be pleased with you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts. 9 And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the Lord of hosts." Malachi 2:10, 13-16

10 Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? . . .

13 And this again you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. 14 You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15 Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. 16 "For I hate divorce, says the Lord the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless."

Memory Selection: Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another?

—Malachi 2:10

### HOW WE UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURE

The time in which the Book of Malachi was written cannot definitely be placed. Apparently the work comes from the Persian period, when Judah was under the rule of a governor. (Malachi 1:8) This seems to be attested by the author's use of the word *pehah* to designate the official in charge of the district, for the term is applied in other places to Persian officers. That it was a time of both spiritual and economic need is apparent.

The firm establishment of the Persian empire under Darius had ended any hope of the Hebrews for political independence. Their vassalage undoubtedly protected them from hostile neighbors, but it also brought them a limited and petty existence. They were reduced to the position of supporting a foreign governor and were faced with the galling obligation of paying tribute.

Farming, upon which most of the people depended, was prov-

ing difficult. Parasitism and premature fruit created vexing problems. (3:11) Poverty was increasing, and the complaints of the populace multiplied.

The restoration of the Temple failed to usher in the era of prosperity and glory that the people had expected would follow its completion, and religious skepticism developed as this dream was shattered. As a result, a state of apathy evolved among all classes; and the sense of moral duty sharply declined.

Foremost in the minds of the people was the taunting question, "What is to be gained by serving God?" Were they not paying their tithes and offering animals for sacrifice? (1:6-9; 3:7-10) Yet the most devout among them were also the poorer and more unfortunate members of the community. On the other hand, persons who made no pretense of serving God—and even defrauded their neighbors every chance they got—continued to prosper. (3:14-15)

Tricky dealings were commonplace. (2:10) Divorce was widespread. (2:14-16) Good and evil were confused. (2:17) Sorcery and perjury were widely practiced. (3:5) Yet defiance of God's law seemed to meet with reward. Apparently, obedience led only to misery.

The people were not alone in their attitude of complaint. The priests, too, were guilty of selling the Temple short by thinking slightly of it. (2:1-2)

### The Covenant

To understand this situation we need to view it in the light of Israel's idea of the covenant.

From the earliest times, the Hebrews were convinced that they had experienced with God a saving relationship that set them apart as his chosen people.

Time and again, by his mighty acts, God had led the nation into new and promising experiences, as when he called Abraham to leave his home (Genesis 12; 15; 17) and inspired Moses to produce the book of the covenant (Exodus 24). The dramatic Exodus deliverance loomed particularly large as an evidence of Israel's divine election, and the event left an indelible impression upon the mind and literature of the Hebrews. Both psalmists and prophets continually referred to it as the mark of God's redemptive purpose for a responsive people.

Basically, the covenant represented Israel's acceptance of God's sovereign rule. Thus it was not a bargain made between two equals.

Israel had not selected God. By his free grace God had selected Israel. In doing so, he had imposed moral and ethical conditions upon the nation. Through a free moral act of her own the nation had chosen to agree to these conditions. In return for this agreement God had promised, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." (Exodus 33:14)

The covenant thus established was no one-sided proposition by which God unconditionally committed himself to protect and guide the nation whatever happened. Instead, it constituted an exchange of vows between God and Israel.

Accordingly, the covenant could be maintained only so long

(Continued on Page 3)