

MALACHI - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. Are you encouraged or discouraged after reading the book of Malachi? How much difference do you see in these people of Malachi's time and the people four hundred years later in the time of Christ? Does Malachi add anything important to your understanding of God?

The name Malachi (*Mal'aki*) means "my messenger." However, the name may be a contraction of the *Mal'akiyah* meaning "messenger of Yahweh." This name is not found anywhere else in the Old Testament, so some feel that it is a title and not a name.

"Malachi has been called the Socrates of the prophets because he uses that style specialists in rhetoric call *dialectic*, "investigation through discussion and reasoning." The dialectic form used in the prophecy became a popular teaching style in later Judaism. The prophecy is a testimony to the graciousness of God in condescending to answer man's foolish and childish statements." (*King James Version Study Bible*)

"The Book of Malachi is about the error of forgetting the love of God. When people forget God's love, it affects their attitudes, home, and worship. With God's love and loyalty in doubt, sacred commitments no longer remain sacred. God sent Malachi to rouse the people from their spiritual stupor and to exhort them to return to the living God. But the Book of Malachi reveals a people who question the reality of their sin and the faithfulness of God, a people hardened through and through. Thus the book ends on a poignant note, a confrontation between a disappointed God and a disappointed people. In a sense, the Book of Malachi shows that the Old Testament comes to a chasm, with the bickering voices of the people on one side and the stern warnings of God on the other. Only the Lord Himself could provide a way out of this impasse. Malachi looks forward to this deliverance, for he speaks of the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah. The promised Messiah was the only One who could bridge that widening chasm between the people and their God." (*Nelson Study Bible*)

"Historical Setting. Malachi is later than Haggai and Zechariah. In those books the rebuilding of the temple is the central concern. We know from 1:7 and 3:10 that not only had the temple been finished in Malachi's day, but it had been in use for some time, and sin was corrupting the worship that took place in it. Further, the Book of Malachi must have been written after Nehemiah's first arrival in Jerusalem in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, in 444 B.C., probably after the walls had been rebuilt around the city, for Malachi addresses the same sins noted in Nehemiah: the divorcing of Jewish wives and marrying heathen women (cf. 2:11 with Neh. 13:23–31) and the failure of the people to bring their gifts to the temple (cf. 3:8–10 with Neh. 13:10–14). Nehemiah was recalled to the Persian court in 433 B.C., and another governor, who seems to have been a Persian governor, was placed over Palestine (cf. Neh. 13:6). Most likely, Malachi was written just before Nehemiah's second return to Jerusalem or during his presence there. Malachi ministered in support of Nehemiah's ministry, just as Haggai and Zechariah had ministered in support of Joshua and Zerubbabel nearly a hundred years earlier. The prophecy was probably written sometime between 433 and 425 B.C." (*King James Version Study Bible*)

It is not possible to date the book of Malachi precisely because no dates or date-identifiable events are mentioned. However, it is quite clear that the captivity in Babylon is not a major consideration in the people's minds. The Temple has been restored and its worship had been going on for some time. The problems that Malachi faced are very similar to those that Nehemiah faced

later in his ministry. (Some time after 432 BC) For this reason, the book is usually dated around 425 BC, soon after Nehemiah's time. It is possible that Malachi even worked during Nehemiah's time, possibly between Nehemiah's first 12 years in Jerusalem and his later term of office there or during his second term of office.

It was very clear by Malachi's time that the people were not fulfilling God's purpose for them after the captivity. Priests even despised the temple services. (See Malachi 1:6,13) God was weary of their unfaithfulness and found their worship of Him almost entirely unacceptable. (See Malachi 1:10,13; 2:13,17) Since they had obviously not fulfilled their side of their agreement with God why didn't He just forget about them at this point?

Eight times in this book God addresses the people and their leaders and points specifically to their transgressions. (See Malachi 1:2,6,7; 2:13,14,17; 3:7,8,13,14) The theme of the book ends up being a series of questions asked by God to remind them of their past and present wrongdoing coupled with progressively more vehement denials of any mistake on their part.

Malachi 1:2: *God:* 2 The LORD says to his people, "I have always loved you."

People: But they reply, "How have you shown your love for us?"

The LORD answers, "Esau and Jacob were brothers, but I have loved Jacob and his descendants, and have hated Esau and his descendants. I have devastated Esau's hill country and abandoned the land to jackals."

4 If Esau's descendants, the Edomites, say, "Our towns have been destroyed, but we will rebuild them," then the LORD will reply, "Let them rebuild—I will tear them down again. People will call them 'The evil country' and 'The nation with whom the LORD is angry for ever.'"

5 The people of Israel are going to see this with their own eyes, and they will say, "The LORD is mighty even outside the land of Israel!" (*GNB*)

Malachi 1:6: *God:* "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty. "It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name."

People: "But you ask, **How have we shown contempt for your name?**" (*RSV*)

Malachi 1:7-8: *God:* "By offering polluted food upon my altar.

People: "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." (*RSV*)

Malachi 1:10-13: *God:* ¹⁰ "Oh, that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire upon my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. ¹¹ For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. ¹² But you profane it when you say that the LORD's table is polluted, and the food for it may be despised.

People: ¹³ **What a weariness this is,**' you say, and you sniff at me, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? Says the LORD. ¹⁴ Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished; for I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name is feared among the nations."

Malachi 2:13-14: *God:* 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.

People: 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.”

Malachi 2:17: *God:* You have wearied the LORD with your words.

People: Yet you say, “**How have we wearied him?**” By saying, “Every one who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them.” Or by asking, “**Where is the God of justice?**”

Malachi 3:6-7: *God:* ⁶ “For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷ From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

People: But you say, “**How shall we return?**” (RSV)

Malachi 3:8-9: *God:* ⁸ “Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me.

People: But you say, “**How are we robbing thee?**” In your tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me; the whole nation of you.” (RSV)

Malachi 3:13-14: *God:* ¹³ “Your words have been stout against me, says the LORD.

People: Yet you say, “**How have we spoken against thee?**” ¹⁴ You have said, “It is vain to serve God. What is the good of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?” (RSV)

The message of Malachi is somewhat similar to the Laodicean message (Revelation 3:14-22) and thus is most appropriate for the church today. The people seem to think that they are fulfilling all the requirements of the law, even at some considerable effort on their part and God is not blessing them the way He should be!

“The history of the Jewish people is a story of a recurring pattern of captivity, exodus, and restoration into which Malachi also falls. There are two captivities in the Old Testament story, and two accounts of an exodus of the Jewish people from captivity. The first captivity and the great Exodus is Israel’s experience with Egypt at the beginning of Israel’s history; the second is Israel’s experience with Babylon.

“In the account of the first Exodus, Moses and Aaron occupy themselves to a significant degree with the issue of the proper worship of the living God, which was centered in the tabernacle. A significant portion of the Book of Exodus, the whole of Leviticus, and parts of Numbers and Deuteronomy provide guidance for worship at the tabernacle. The point of the Exodus was the creation of the people of God as a worshiping community (see Ex. 5:1).

“Similarly, two of the books of the second exodus, the return of God’s people from Babylon, concern themselves with the proper worship of God. These two books, Haggai and Malachi, focus on worship centered on the rebuilt temple. Haggai exhorted the people to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem in 520 B.C. Thus this book parallels the Book of Exodus in which God gave instructions for the construction of the tabernacle. Similarly, Malachi parallels the Book of Leviticus in that both are concerned with how the people and the priests should act in the temple. Yet there are significant differences. Leviticus emphasizes what the people should do, what offerings they should bring, and what calendar they should keep in their worship of God. Malachi’s emphasis is on the attitude of those who bring their worship to God. In Leviticus one reads about *how* to worship God; in Malachi the focus is on the *heart* of those who worship.” (Nelson Study Bible)

“Malachi spoke to a disillusioned, discouraged, and doubting people whose experience did not harmonize with their understanding of the glorious promises found in the earlier prophets. **Their vision of the coming messianic age did not materialize. Instead they experienced poverty, drought, and economic adversity, and they became disillusioned with God and their faith.** Malachi’s word confronts a people skeptical of the promises and therefore indifferent in their commitment to live in the light of those promises and to worship and serve the Lord with all their hearts.” (*New Geneva Study Bible*)

“After Malachi the prophetic voice was silent for some 400 (so-called silent) years. This fact makes it necessary for even the most destructive critic to admit that the hundreds of prophecies concerning the coming of our Lord are what they claim to be—prophecy—and not the deceitful writing of history in prophetic form.” (*KJV Bible Commentary*)

2. How could a God of love say, “I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau?” (See Malachi 1:2,3)

Sometimes people read this verse and think immediately of the prophecy that was made before the birth of these twins. But that prophecy said:

Genesis 25:23: The LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.” (*NIV*)

Malachi 1:2,3 is derived from many comments about the descendants of Esau (The Edomites): Genesis 36:1-9; Isaiah 34:5-17; 63:1-6; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:1-15; Amos 1:11,12; Obadiah 1-14, etc.

Isaiah 34:5: “My sword. . . descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed.” (*RSV*)

Jeremiah 49:17,18: ¹⁷ “The LORD said, “The destruction that will come on Edom will be so terrible that everyone who passes by will be shocked and terrified. ¹⁸ The same thing will happen to Edom that happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, when they and the nearby towns were destroyed. No one will ever live there again. I, The LORD, have spoken.” (*GNB*)

Ezekiel 25:12-14 ¹² “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: “Because Edom took revenge on the house of Judah and became very guilty by doing so, ¹³ therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will stretch out my hand against Edom and kill its men and their animals. I will lay it waste, and from Teman to Dedan they will fall by the sword. ¹⁴ I will take vengeance on Edom by the hand of my people Israel, and they will deal with Edom in accordance with my anger and my wrath; they will know my vengeance, declares the Sovereign LORD.” (*RSV*)

Ezekiel 35:3-9: ³ “and say: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out my hand against you and make you a desolate waste. ⁴ I will turn your towns into ruins and you will be desolate. Then you will know that I am the LORD. ⁵ “Because you harbored an ancient hostility and delivered the Israelites over to the sword at the time of their calamity, the time their punishment reached its climax, ⁶ therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I will give you over to bloodshed and it will pursue you. Since you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will pursue you. ⁷ I will make Mount Seir a desolate waste and cut off from it all who come and go. ⁸ I will fill your mountains with the slain; those killed by the sword will fall on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines. ⁹ I will make you desolate forever; your towns will not be inhabited. Then you will know that I am the LORD.” (*RSV*)

The descendants of Esau did whatever they could to bring trouble on the descendants of Jacob. Finally their time came to reap the results of their behavior and they disappeared as a people from the earth. God’s “anger” was upon them for what they did. He left them to reap their reward.

When God says he hates Esau, we must consider the rest of Scripture to understand what He is saying. In Exodus 20:12 we are told to honor and respect our parents. But we also read in the New Testament:

Matthew 10:37: “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (NIV)

Luke 14:26: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.” (NIV)

These passages should make it clear that what God means when He says “hate” is “love less.”

3. Do you see the people in Malachi’s time (about 425 B.C.) acting like God’s friends or do you find them complaining about everything that God says or wants to do? (Malachi 1:6) When God suggests that they get back together how do they respond? (Malachi 3:7)

There is essentially nothing in the dialogues we see above that sounds friendly. Why were they persisting in this attitude? They never complained about their other “gods” in this way! They even felt in Jeremiah’s time that the “queen of heaven” treated them better than the “God of heaven”! (See Jeremiah 44:15-30) They don’t even seem to recognize a need to come back to God.

4. Why does God say, “cursed be the cheat?” (Malachi 1:14) Can even a physician here on this earth heal a “cheating patient” who refuses to do anything the doctor tells him to do? Does God have to actively curse the “cheat” or is his curse the natural effect of his behavior?

God is here stating a universal truth. Cheats only destroy themselves by their behavior. They may temporarily “get away with” their cheating but sooner or later the results will show. God does not have to place a curse on the one who is cheating, he simply reaps the results of his cheating.

A patient who refuses to cooperate with a good physician simply doesn’t receive the needed help. The doctor may agonize with the patient, but it is the patient who ultimately suffers if the doctor really knows what he is doing.

On a deeper level, God is going through this terrible controversy and war here on planet earth in order to show us how important it is to learn to trust Him. It is only by really trusting Him, based on the more than adequate evidence that is available to us that we come to know Him as He is and develop real faith. If we are cheating, we are destroying within ourselves even the capacity to trust. This makes all of God’s efforts on our behalf a waste!

5. How does God feel about divorce? (Malachi 2:16) If this is how God really feels about divorce why did He give the divorce laws? (Deuteronomy 24:1-4; compare Matthew 5:31,32; 19:1-12; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18)

True Christian marriage is one of the ways in which God intends for us to learn about Him. (Genesis 1:27,28; 2:21-25; 5:1,2) Apparently, God divided His characteristics up between the sexes and intended that we learn from each other how to be more like Him. Thus two human beings actually become “whole” through marriage.

For example, men tend to have more of the characteristics of strength, determination, setting of high standards, and when necessary an aggressive approach to problems. Women tend to be more caring, loving, and accepting of others. All of these characteristics belong to God. We human beings tend to grow naturally bent toward certain characteristics that are more comfortable for us. In this situation, under ideal circumstances, God steps in and provides a spouse for us who balances our weakness with his/her strengths. Thus, when they act and behave as a unit, the couple tends to be more balanced than either one alone would be.

In light of this ideal, God weeps when we are torn apart by divorce. Nobody wins when the trauma of a divorce takes place. It may be necessary as Jesus said because of extenuating circumstances, but everyone gets hurt. God hates to see His children get hurt. Unfortunately,

divorce often takes place because of the selfish demands of one or both partners. When this is the case, God watches as the marriage union which is supposed to teach us about Him, actually enhances our selfishness.

6. How could God say “I am the LORD, and I do not change” when He has said repeatedly things like, “I will wipe out these people I have created, and also the animals and the birds, because I am sorry that I made any of them.” (Genesis 6:7, *GNB*)?

See **1 Samuel Teacher’s Guide #17**.

7. What is the meaning and purpose of “tithe” and why would God say that those who don’t “pay up” are cheating Him? (Malachi 3:8-12)

The English word “tithe” is derived from the old English word *teothe* or *teogotha* which mean one tenth. The word is used to translate the Hebrew word *maaser* which means one-tenth. It usually is used to refer to the tenth portion of one’s income whether from crops or salary or any other source that is returned to God as an acknowledgment that all we have and are belong to Him. Abraham paid a “tenth” to the King/Priest Mechizedek after God helped him rescue Lot and his associates. (See Genesis 14:20) Jacob promised to return one-tenth of his income if God would continue to bless him. (See Genesis 28:22)

Later, God instructed Moses and the children of Israel to set aside the tenth (tithe) as support for the tabernacle/temple and the descendants of Levi. (See Leviticus 27:30-33) Many religious organizations still suggest that a tenth should be set aside as support for the clergy.

In Malachi, God goes beyond just asking us to set aside the tithe. He doesn’t even just command us to do it. God in this passage actually suggest that we enter into a partnership with Him. He challenges us to test Him out. Shouldn’t anyone who is thinking clearly want God as a partner?

Some people feel that they don’t need to pay tithe or even make offerings to the church because, as they see it, some person or group in the church is not using the money correctly. This argument falls flat on its face in the light of the story told about Jesus in Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4. In the corrupt system of those days, all the money that was collected went to some of the richest people around. It was used to buy permission to continue as “high priest” year by year. These people were so wealthy that they gave “bags” of gold at offering time. They had no use for the poor widow’s small copper coins. But Jesus commends the women for her self-sacrificing gift, not because of what was going to be done with the money but because of the loving and generous heart that gave it. We need to give to the church as if we are giving to God. If there are problems in the church that need correcting, then we should become involved in helping to solve the churches problems, but not by withholding our money. That just separates us from God and the church.

8. Whom do you think is being referred to in Malachi 3:16? What scroll is this? Is this referring to a part of God’s records in heaven or is this scroll here on this earth?

We do not have extensive references in Scripture to such records, but Ex. 32:32; Ps. 56:8; 69:28; Daniel 7:10; Ecclesiastes 12:13,14; Revelation 20:12 and other similar references suggest that a complete record is being kept by God as a reminder of the consequences of sin. This record apparently contains the intimate details of each of our lives. God is not in any way threatening us with this record, He just wants us to realize that it will all be public information some time in the future and is already public information to all the universe looking on. It is not His intention to embarrass His children. He would love to have a record that would show that He could be proud of every one of us, but that is not likely. God must however, allow the record of sin to play itself out in full detail so that no will want to repeat this terrible sin experiment ever again.

On the other hand, for those who “fear the LORD” and are faithful to Him, He is delighted to brag about them. (See Job 1 and 2) Sometimes this results in their lives being made worse!

9. What does it mean to be one of God's "jewels" or His "peculiar people?" (Malachi 3:17) Does this mean that we are to be "strange?"

God's peculiar people are those who are "especially set apart" for Him. This is not to suggest that they are "peculiar" or "strange" in any bad way at all. It just means that they are His special possessions. That is why He refers to them as His "jewels!"

10. How will it be possible to "see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not?" (Malachi 3:18) The verse suggests that this has been possible some time in the past. If you were asked to set up the criteria to distinguish between the two groups in our day, what would you suggest?

Those who are righteous are God's friends according to John 15:15. When we all come to the day of final judgment, everything will be open before the eyes of the universe. (See Hebrews 4:12,13) At that time every knee will bow (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:10-12; Philippians 2:10,11) and recognize God's fairness. There will be no question about whether God has made a mistake in His judgments. God's judgment is based on a simple criteria: will this person make a safe person to admit to the kingdom and to live next door to for eternity? The entire universe will be given the opportunity to evaluate on the basis of the evidence that will be plain to all, whether or not each person has been judged correctly. But the system is foolproof. Even at the second coming, those who are God's friends will look upon and rejoice at His coming (Isaiah 25:9) while the wicked will call for the rocks and hills to fall on them. (See Revelation 6:16,17) So each person will in effect pronounce his own judgment.

11. What does Malachi 4:1,3 suggest is the final end of sin and sinners? Do these verses suggest an ever-burning hell? Does the expression "they will be ashes under the soles of your feet" suggest a conscious suffering? (Compare Exodus 15:7; Isaiah 5:24; 40:24; 41:2; 47:14; 66:24; Joel 2:5; Obadiah 1:18; Nahum 1:10; 2 Peter 2:6)

For a complete reference set on *The Final End of Sin and Sinners* see the handout by the same name. It should be clear from the references noted above that the wicked will be as if they had never been. There is no support in Scripture for a never ending burning called "hell." The idea of "hell" derives from the perpetual burning of the city dump outside Jerusalem. That dump came to be known as *gehenna* a contraction for "the valley of the sons of Hinnom." (See 2 Chronicles 33:6) There is a long and colorful history behind this valley going all the way back to the descendants of Lot who escaped the fires of Sodom! To a Jew, the worst thing that could happen to one was to be so despised or without family or friends so that at your death your body would be thrown out onto the rubbish heap in the valley of *gehenna*. It thus came to symbolize the total eradication of relationships and utter abandonment of the final destruction of sinners.

12. Is there to be an "Elijah message" (Malachi 4:5,6) for our day? If so, what is the message and who is to bear it?

It seems clear from the prophecy itself that it was intended for the time just before "the great and terrible day of the LORD." In Jesus' day he suggested that John the Baptist was a forerunner of His and a type of the "Elijah" who was to come. (Matthew 11:14) But we do not regard the first coming of Christ as being the "great and terrible day of the LORD!" Was Jesus mistaken in identifying John as a type of Elijah to come? Not at all! Just as Isaiah's son Maher-shalal-hashbaz was a type of the Christ child (See Isaiah 7:14-9:6) John is the type of a person or group of people who are to warn the world of the return of Jesus.

Those who are telling the world the truth about God and His character and thus really preparing people for the second coming of Christ are known by the generic term "adventist." Revelation 19:10 can be read to suggest that just such a group will arise who are "inspired like the prophets" to give the final message to the world. (See Revelation 19:10, *NEB*)

13. Knowing what you know of the Old Testament (which the people of Malachi's day had available) do you think you would be able to get the picture of God that Jesus came up with?

This is primarily a thought question. The picture we often think of when we think of Jesus is a picture largely determined by such passages as Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount. The ideals seem so high, and the logic of the arguments so clear and so different from what we read in the Old Testament. There are very few "sermons" in the Old Testament. No one seemed to feel it was necessary to explain the meaning of Scripture. Perhaps this was because those who went to the schools of the day spent almost all of their time studying Scripture and they were quite certain that they fully understood it and needed no help in making it clear. They even went to great lengths adding additional explanations on each of God's requirements. These came to be known as the *Mishnah*.

But if you look carefully at the Old Testament it becomes clear that much of what Jesus said had already been said in the Old Testament! Some of Jesus' most profound statements had actually been spoken by Moses! (See Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18) Did Jesus get these insights from his parents or from his own study? He didn't attend the schools of the Pharisees! (John 7:15)

14. Would it be easier for God to save the "wicked" people of the Old Testament who secretly went off to the pagan fertility cult ceremonies and got drunk and naked with the pagan temple prostitutes or the spiritually proud Pharisees who had memorized Scripture but didn't want to accept the idea that they might be misinterpreting it, or the Laodiceans of our day who are described as feeling "rich and increased with goods (spiritually), and have need of nothing?" (See Revelation 3:17,18)

In the days of Josiah (2 Kings 22:3-20; 2 Chronicles 34:8-28), and Ezra (Nehemiah 8) as well as at other times, there was a great revival and reformation among the people of Jerusalem and Judah when the Bible was "rediscovered" and read to them. There were other times of course when they felt that they were better off worshipping the "queen of heaven" than Jehovah.

15. What do the people's repeated questions imply about their relationship with God? (See Malachi 1:2,6,7; 2:17; 3:7,8,13)

Doesn't it seem clear that whatever God said to them, they disagreed? Is that a good relationship? These people were wearily "working" their way to the kingdom as they understood it. But it seems quite clear that their "religion" had little effect on their daily lives. Could that situation every be true for people in our day? Could it be true for us? What part of our religion is most important to God? 1) the profession that we make during the church service? Or, 2) the religion that is actually manifest in our daily lives in our associations with others?

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