

Malachi 1:11 – 2:7

Focusing on the incense, to correlate with the description of the Incense Altar in the Tabernacle in Exodus 30.

Just before this haftarah begins there is a remarkable verse:

Malachi 1:10 - "Who is there even among you that would shut the doors (of the Temple) for nothing? neither do you kindle fire on my altar for nothing. I have no pleasure in you, said the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand."

Better translation: "O that there were one among even you who would shut the doors, that ye might not light mine altar to no purpose."

or: "who is there among you that will shut the door of the house of my sanctuary, that ye may not kindle a fire on my altar to offer an abominable sacrifice?"

In the Temple there were three piles or rows of fire made every day upon the brazen altar; the first was a large one, on which they offered the daily sacrifice, with the rest of the offerings; the second was on the side of it, a little one, from whence they took fire in the censer to burn incense every day; the third had no other use for it but to confirm the command concerning fire; as it is said, "the fire shall ever be burning", Leviticus 6:13 (m) and this fire was kindled to burn the sacrifices, the daily sacrifice, and other burnt offerings, for which they were paid out of the tithes, and other oblations. - Gills Exposition

That God would no longer accept offerings from backslidden Israel was disastrous!

Christ, as the perfect sacrifice, fulfilled all righteousness, and put an end to the sacrifices, as this verse is calling for.

He's the one who shut the door - the veil was ripped and he "caused the sacrifice and the oblation to cease."

- **Daniel 9:27** - "And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate."

This week's haftarah begins with verse 11

Malachi 1:11 - "For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered to my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, said the LORD of hosts."

This could be present or future, since tenses are a little fuzzy in Hebrew. It is in a "vivid

present," which is often used to describe the future.

The Jewish translation is "my name IS great among the Gentiles" - i.e. it's all present tense. They say it refers to the Torah scholars scattered in all the Gentile nations offering up prayers.

Possibly referring to what Paul called "the unknown God" in Athens:

- **Acts 17:23** - "For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, 'To The Unknown God.' Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you."

More probably, it's future:

- **Zechariah 14:16** - "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles."

- **Zephaniah 2:11** - "The Lord will be terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen."

- **Matthew 8:11-12** - "Many shall come from the East and West, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, and the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness."

So it was understood by the early church -

Justin Martyr, circa 133 A.D. - "God has, therefore, beforehand declared, that all who through this name offer those sacrifices, which Jesus, who is the Christ, commanded to be offered, that is to say, in the eucharist of the bread and of the cup, which are offered in every part of the world by us Christians, are well-pleasing to Him. But those sacrifices, which are offered by you and through those priests of yours, He wholly rejects, saying, "And I will not accept your offerings at your hands. For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, My Name is glorified among the Gentiles; but ye profane it."

"incense" = *qatar* - means incense but also burning in a general way, so could refer to all the offerings. (But incense is the connection to the Torah reading in Exodus 30).

Malachi 1:12 - "But you have profaned it, in that you say, 'The table of the LORD is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible.'"

The rest of the passage speaks of the contempt of God's "table" by the priests and the people - i.e. the place of sacrifices and offerings. Polluted = not sacred or worthy of reverence. They offer cast-off things they don't want or need, instead of offering with self-sacrifice.

It was a cycle of dissatisfaction and careless neglect. The priests complain about their portion they are to receive, thus showing contempt toward the law of the offerings God set up. The people pick up on this lack of zeal, bring spoiled or blemished offerings, causing the priests to complain more, etc. Everybody's just going through the motions.

After chastising them, God explains the proper way of service for the Priest and Levite:

Malachi 2:7 - "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts."

When we translate this into our attitudes and activities as a church, it can get ugly.

If teachers show disdain, or boredom with the word, or treat it (and God) as unimportant, the people begin to volunteer nothing of themselves when we gather together, and start to believe it is "vain to serve the Lord." As they lose interest, the teacher has more reason to go inward, either in resentment or just "whatever." A cycle begins, we become an inward-sucking black hole and spiritual fellowship ends.

If God is not real, we all have better things to do with our time.

Since God *IS* real, and He's given us his Word and his presence, let's look at Him, and offer the incense, praise and prayer that He is worthy of, as we are empowered to give and love one another and our neighbor!