



God Pinpoints Israel's Sin Malachi 1:6-2:17

Introduction

In Malachi 1:2, God stated his love for His people, Israel. But Israel responded impertinently, *In what way have you loved us?* (Malachi 1:2). With great patience God answered through his faithful prophet, Malachi, explaining the history and basis of His love for His people. He called their attention to the contrast between His dealings with their ancestor, Jacob, and his twin brother, Esau. Reflecting on their history and remembering God's promises to their patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God's love was evident. In fact, God's promise of bringing His people back from exile to dwell safely in their own land had been fulfilled in them! As Jeremiah had so beautifully stated, *They shall be my people, and I will be their God* (Jeremiah 32:36-38).

Those who received God's message through Malachi were home in the land God promised to their forefathers. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt and the temple restored. One would expect rejoicing that they were God's people and that He was their God. But instead, they begrudgingly went through the motions of religious observance while blatantly sinning against their loving God. In this week's passage, Malachi 1:6 through 2:17, God declares Israel's sins. He begins with the priests, who were responsible for instructing the people and for upholding God's law. The priests were intended to be cleansed and pure examples to the people. Unfortunately, the priests were careless with their responsibilities to God and indifferent to the sins of the people.

Outline of Malachi 1:6-2:17

- I. Priests Despise God's Name - Malachi 1:6-14
- II. Priests Corrupt God's Covenant - Malachi 2:1-9
- III. Priests and People Profane God's Law - Malachi 2:10-17

I. Priests Despise God's Name - Malachi 1:6-14

The name of God (*My name, His name, Your name*), mentioned ten times in Malachi's prophecy, is a reference to God Himself. To despise God's name is to despise God. To honor God's name is to honor God.

A. Priests Fail to Honor God - Malachi 1:6

The prophecy of Malachi opened with an expression of God's great love for Israel and of His sovereign

power which magnified Him, *beyond the border of Israel* (Malachi 1:5). In light of this, the priests are asked why they do not honor Him. A son certainly honors his father and a servant respects his master and God was both Father (Deuteronomy 1:31) and Master (Psalm 31:16) to Israel. In His questions, *Where is My reverence?* *Where is My honor?* God also reminds them that He is *the Lord of hosts*. But instead of reverencing and honoring Him, God says they have despised His name!

The priests did not deny that they have despised God's name. In fact, they seemed to resent the accusation and answered with an insolent question, *In what way have we despised your name?* God did not hesitate to confront them with their sin.

B. Priests Show Contempt for God - Malachi 1:7-13

The priests were showing contempt for the *table of the Lord* (the altar of sacrifice) by offering blind, lame and sick sacrifices. According to God's law in Leviticus 22:18-25, any animal sacrificed to God was to be perfect, *without blemish*. An animal that was blind, broken, maimed, bruised, crushed, torn, cut, or possessing any bodily or skin imperfection was not acceptable to God. Nor was an animal which had been purchased from a foreigner. To offer such a sacrifice was *evil* (Malachi 1:8) in God's eyes.

1. Priests' sacrifices are defiled - 1:7-8

God asks if they would offer such an animal to their governor. The answer would be adamantly "No!" The governor was a ruling official appointed by the Persian king to oversee the territory of Judah. Nehemiah held the post of governor for a while but at this time, the governor was probably a Persian. The Persian officials were known to hold huge banquets where they served the meat of animals paid as taxes from the people. A Persian governor would never have accepted a blemished animal to serve to his guests! And yet the priests had the audacity to offer lame, sick, and blind animals to God!

What kind of sacrifices do you offer to God? Do you offer Him the best of what you have in the way of worship, time, service, study, and money to support godly ministries? God is worthy of your very best. Dr. Constable notes, "To give Him less than our best is to despise Him. Shoddiness is an insult to God. Shoddy holy is still shoddy" (Dr. Constable's Notes on Malachi, www.soniclight.com).

2. The priests' sacrifices are in vain -
1:9-10

The priests were foolish to request God's graciousness toward them when they were despising Him. They were unacceptable to God when they were treating Him with such disdain. They might as well shut the doors of the temple and let the fires of the altar burn out and go cold because God would never accept such sacrifices from them.

In verse ten, *the Lord of hosts* states that He took no pleasure in the priests and would not accept their offerings. What a sad statement this is, for in Psalm 149:4, where God's people rejoice and sing praises to Him, it is stated that *the Lord takes pleasure in His people*. The apostle Paul wrote that God is at work in His people *both to will and to work for His good pleasure* (Philippians 2:13). God took no pleasure in the priests because they refused to allow God to work in them. Are you allowing God to work in your life? How is God presently working in you for His good pleasure?

C. Priests Profane God's Name - Malachi
1:11-13

In these verses, God looks ahead to a time when His name will be honored among the Gentile nations. What a contrast to the priests of Israel who were profaning His name and complaining about their duties.

1. Gentiles will recognize God's
greatness - 1:11

Although the priests did not honor God, the time will come when all the nations of the earth will recognize the greatness of His name and honor Him. Unlike Israel's priests in Malachi's day, the Gentile nations will present pure offerings of praise and worship. God's glorious kingdom will certainly triumph and those who have not honored Him will be put to shame.

2. Priests recognize their own sin -
1:12

The priests knew that their sacrifices were unacceptable and offered them anyway! This showed contempt for the offerings and profaned the name of the Lord!

3. Priests complain - 1:13

Furthermore, the priests were complaining that their job of offering the sacrifices was wearisome. They were to joyfully and passionately serve the Lord. Instead, they scornfully presented animal sacrifices that were stolen, lame, and sick. How could they expect God

to accept such sacrifices? "They treated the sacrificial system with contempt since the ritual had lost all meaning to them, and their unbelief had divested it of all redemptive significance and reduced it to dead, meaningless ceremonialism" (Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament).

C. Those Who Vow are Deceivers -
Malachi 1:14

The priests and the people were cheating God when they made vows. God's instructions concerning vows are found in Leviticus 22:17-20 and Deuteronomy 23:21-23. Vows were strictly voluntary and it was not a sin to abstain from vowing. But if a person made a vow, he was to fulfill it and all freewill and peace offerings which accompanied vows were to be unblemished male animals.

Sadly, some who made vows were *deceivers*, sacrificing defective animals to their God, *the Lord of hosts*, the *great King* whose name was to be *feared among the nations*. Dr. Constable (soniclight.com) notes that these deceivers did not have a true heart for the Lord or for His service. They were hypocrites who thought God would not notice their evil actions and attitudes. These pretenders needed to examine their hearts before the Lord, as do you and I. It is essential to keep the motives of our hearts pure before Him.

NOTE: The Hebrew word for heart, "leb," refers to what may be called the command center of a one's life. It is the place where intellectual and experiential knowledge is stored and contemplated and where decisions are made which determine the direction of a person's life. The heart, in the Scriptures, is not an emotional center that is directed by feelings. The heart is a reasoning center. This is an important distinction to make. The priests were not guided by emotions in what they did. Their sin and their excuses for it were carefully reasoned out.

II. Priests Corrupt God's Covenant - Malachi 2:1-9

Malachi chapter two is a warning to both the priests and the people. In verses 1-9 the priests are warned about violating their covenant with God. Verses 10-16 warn all the people, including the priests, of their unfaithfulness to the covenant.

A. Priests Will be Cursed - Malachi 2:1-3

God tells the priests that if they do not listen to his rebuke, take it to heart, and honor His name, He will curse their blessings. In fact, He has cursed them already because of the condition of their hearts.

1. Cursed blessings - 2:2

If the priests did not listen and obey, God would turn all the physical and spiritual blessings He had bestowed upon them into curses. Read Leviticus 26 to see how God had clearly presented the blessings and curses.

The last part of verse two reveals that God had already begun to curse them because they did not take to heart what He was telling them.

2. Rebuked descendants - 2:3

Part of God's curse was to be a rebuke of the priests' children. They would be cursed because God would smear the priests' faces with the refuse of the animals they sacrificed. Since the refuse of these animals was considered unclean and was traditionally taken outside the city and burned (Exodus 29:14; Leviticus 4:11; 8:17), the priests would also have to be taken outside the city and disposed of. They would no longer be able to function as priests.

B. Priests Will Know the Reason for Rebuke - Malachi 2:4-9

God's purpose in rebuking the priests was to purify the priesthood so His covenant with Levi could continue. This covenant was a covenant of grant and a covenant of life and peace.

1. Covenant of grant - 2:4

The covenant God had made with the tribe of Levi was a covenant of grant. It was a promise of God, granting a continued blessing to certain individuals and their descendants, in return for a service performed. Levi and his descendants rendered service to God by serving in the tabernacle. See Numbers 8:14-26. God had chosen the tribe of Levi from the twelve tribes of Israel for the specific purpose of attending to His altar and assisting the high priest (Aaron and his descendants, also from the tribe of Levi) with the prescribed sacrifices. See Numbers 18:1-7. This gift of service set them apart from all the other tribes.

Furthermore, the Levites received no portion in the promised land when it was divided among the twelve tribes. Their inheritance was the tithe. (Leviticus 18:24). Thus, their relationship with God was designed to be special and unique among all the people of Israel.

2. Covenant of *life and peace* - 2:5-6

The sacrifices offered by the priests looked ahead to the Messiah who would bring eternal life and peace

with God. The priests were to teach the people the good news of the life and peace He would bring.

When God first made His covenant with the tribe of Levi, they were teachers of truth and righteousness. They practiced what they taught, and the result was that they *turned many away from iniquity*.

The former priests feared God and were reverent before Him. They guarded the truth, were trustworthy teachers of God's law, and declared the will of God to the people. The life of the nation depended upon the priests effectively and honestly carrying out their duties.

3. Punishment of unworthy priests - 2:8-9

Unfortunately, the priests of Malachi's day were not at all what they were intended to be. They had *departed from the way*, and *caused many to stumble*, thus corrupting the covenant of Levi.

Since the priests had despised God's name, God's law, God's altar, and God's covenant, He made them despised and humiliated before all the people. The priests had profaned the *holy gifts of the children of Israel*, a sin deserving of death (Numbers 18:32).

III. Priests and People Profane God's Law - Malachi 2:10-17

Up to this point in the prophecy, the Lord has spoken directly to the people (in the first person). Beginning in verse ten through verse fifteen and then again in verse seventeen, Malachi speaks for the Lord describing the treachery of the priests and people. They have profaned the covenant of their fathers by divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying pagan women resulting in pagan worship. They have *wearied the Lord*.

A. They Have Married Pagan Women - Malachi 2:10-12

Because God is the creator of all, He is also the Father of all (Acts 17:29 and Ephesians 3:14-15), but He is uniquely the Father of the nation of Israel (Exodus 4:22). God had chosen them to be His people because He loved them (Deuteronomy 7:7-9) and they were to be His *special treasure....above all people* (Exodus 19:5). They were to be holy to God and separate from other people (Leviticus 20:26). This included a command against intermarriage with pagan nations (Deuteronomy 7:1-3).

The people of Malachi's day were dealing *treacherously* by marrying pagan wives. This was an *abomination*, a detestable thing and abhorrent to God. Intermarriage

with pagan women had led to idolatry, just as God had warned in Deuteronomy 7:4, *they* (pagan wives) *will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you.* Intermarriage had profaned both God's holy institution of marriage and God's holy sanctuary.

1. Malachi's warning - 2:12

Malachi pronounced judgment on any Israelite involved in such an abomination. They would be *cut off from the tents of Jacob*. The curse of being *cut off* may refer either to being cast out of the nation of Israel or death.

2. The New Testament position - 2 Corinthians 6:14

The apostle Paul issues a similar command of separation for God's people today. He wrote to the church in Corinth, *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?*

Sometimes Christians argue that it is acceptable to marry an unbeliever because they will eventually be won over to Christ. However, statistics show that this is seldom the case.

B. They Have Divorced Their Wives - Malachi 2:13-16

The people were *weeping and crying* over the Lord's altar because He did not answer their prayers. Malachi rebuked them, saying that their weeping and crying would not move God because they had *dealt treacherously* with their wives. These men had shut off their access to God by violating their marriage vows, divorcing their wives to marry pagan women.

1. Marriage is a covenant - 2:13-15

The marriage relationship is a *covenant* (verse 14) and those who break the covenant should not expect God's blessing. In 1 Peter 3:7, a similar warning is given to husbands: they are to honor their wives as fellow heirs of God's grace, so their prayers may not be hindered.

Furthermore when a man and woman marry, they become one flesh in the eyes of God (Genesis 2:24). Malachi argues, *did He not make them one?* (2:15). Jesus added to this, as recorded in Matthew 19:6, *So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.*

2. Marriage is a picture - Ephesians 5:22-33

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, the apostle Paul wrote that the marriage relationship is to be an illustration of the relationship between Christ and the church. *Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.* In the same way, husbands are to *love their own wives as their own bodies*. Husbands are to nourish and cherish their wives just as Christ does the church. Conversely, wives are to submit to their husbands for *the husband is the head of the wife as also Christ is the head of the church*. The marriage relationship is to be one of mutual love and respect in order to illustrate the intimate and loving relationship between Jesus Christ and His church. This kind of marriage relationship is not just something to strive for, it is a command of God, and every believer should do everything in his or her power to obey.

3. A word from God - 2:16

Beginning in this verse, God again speaks directly, giving emphasis to what Malachi has been saying. God states that He *hates divorce*. Previously, God had permitted men to divorce their wives because of the hardness of their hearts (Matthew 19:8), but this was limited to cases of *uncleanness* (Deuteronomy 24:1), meaning that the woman had done something disgraceful or shameful. It was the present "capricious tyrannical divorce" (E. B. Pussey, Barnes Notes, The Minor Prophets, A Commentary) which God said He hated, *For it covers one's garment with violence*.

John MacArthur explains that these words picture the unwarranted divorce which was occurring as "a gross act of sin which, like blood spattered from a murder victim on the killer, leaves evidence of the evil deed" (The MacArthur Bible Commentary). To divorce one's wife was to cover oneself with wrong. It was a disgrace in God's eyes.

God warns men to guard their spirits in order not to deal treacherously with their wives! It would be beneficial for every husband to take this as a warning to guard against developing a negative attitude toward his wife. The same is true of a wife's attitude toward her husband. The apostle Peter wrote that husbands and wives are to honor one another as *heirs together of the grace of life*. See 1 Peter 3:1-7.

C. They Have Weared the Lord With Their Words - Malachi 2:17

Although they had rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem and were offering the prescribed sacrifices to the

Lord, the people of Israel failed to take right and wrong seriously. They were merely going through the motions and their hearts were not right. But they stubbornly persisted in maintaining their innocence. They assumed that God's lack of intervention was a sign that He approved of their sin. So they complained that God was not a God of justice. Their words were insolent, self-serving, and wearisome to the Lord. These people were sinners who had no intention of turning from their sin. Furthermore, they placed the blame on God rather than acknowledging their culpability.

Applications

1. Are you like the Israelites, persisting in some sin because God has not judged you? Are you taking advantage of God's longsuffering which is testing the Lord? *You shall not put the Lord your God to the test* (Deuteronomy 6:16 and Matthew 4:7) What sin will you now confess and turn away from?
2. In writing to fellow believers, the apostle Peter states *you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light* (1 Peter 2:9). This passage reveals that Christians today are God's priests. What kind of a priest are you? In light of what you have learned about the priests of Israel in this lesson, are you a priest worthy of blessing or rebuke?
3. Reading of the priests of Malachi's day offering defiled sacrifices, failing to honor God and profaning His name, one is reminded of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, who offered *profane fire before the Lord*. After fire from the Lord consumed these disrespectful and disobedient priests, God spoke the following words through Moses, *By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified* (Leviticus 10:3). Like Nadab and Abihu, the priests of Malachi's day did not regard God as holy, nor did they glorify Him before the people. How do you approach God? Do you humbly and worshipfully reverence God? How does your manner of living, giving, and worshipping glorify Him?
4. How do God's words admonishing the people for divorcing their wives inspire you to cherish and show kindness to your spouse?
5. Perhaps in reading God's words on divorce for the first time, you see that you have sinned and your heart is downcast. The good news is that God is willing and able to forgive all sin. *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9). Through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, *He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."* (Hebrews 10:14-17). All our sins are cast into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). Will you thank God that through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ He has forgiven your sins? Will you draw near to Him in prayer, and find strength to live your life for Him?