



Malachi - Chapter Two

c. Malachi 1:6-2:9 - Corruption of the Priesthood (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Two

The prophecy continues with a reminder of the covenant God had made with Levi and his descendants that made up the Levitical priesthood; it was a covenant of good life and blessing. However, the current priests had failed in their duty to God and had corrupted the covenant, thus bring curse and condemnation upon themselves.

The condemnation then falls upon all of Judah because they too are covenant breakers. They had turned away from the God who is their Father and aligned themselves with the ways of foreign gods, choosing the world over God.

Introduction to Malachi 2:1-9

Since the priests failed to guard the purity of the temple, the Lord threatens to punish them in a manner that fits their crime. Because they 'despised' (1:6) and failed to give honour to the Lord's name, they will be despised and abased before all the people. Because they 'polluted' God (1:7), he will figuratively pollute and disqualify them for service at the altar by spreading on their faces the dung taken from their rejected sacrifices (v.3).

Since the 'waste products' were to be taken away from the sanctuary and burned, for example: <<***But the flesh of the bull, and its skin, and its dung, you shall burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin-offering***>> (Exodus 29:14), and: <<***But the skin of the bull and all its flesh, as well as its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung – all the rest of the bull – he shall carry out to a clean place outside the camp, to the ash heap, and shall burn it on a wood fire; at the ash heap it shall be burned***>> (Leviticus 4:11-12), so they too will be taken away. Because they presumed to bless the people of God, as if Israel's sacrifices had been accepted and atonement made, God will now curse their blessings. As

Matthew Henry put it, “Nothing profanes the name of God more than the misconduct of those whose business it is to do honour to it.”

¹ And now, O priests, this command is for you. ² If you will not listen, if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse on you and I will curse your blessings; indeed I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. ³ I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and I will put you out of my presence.

[refer to the comments made on 2:1-3](#)

[If you will not listen](#). If the priests will not hear and repent God promises to [curse](#) their [blessings](#). This is either a reference to the [blessings](#) brought to the priests by the people, or the priestly [blessings](#) they gave to the people. Another prophet spoke of a time when they would listen to God: *<<At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the Lord in Jerusalem, and they shall no longer stubbornly follow their own evil will>>* (Jeremiah 3:17).

[If you will not lay it to heart](#). Their sin all goes back to a hollow formalism. It is a religion of surface emotions and outward signs, but not of the heart: *<<The Lord said: Because these people draw near with their mouths and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote>>* (Isaiah 29:13)

[Spread dung on your faces](#). Sacrificed animals still had excrement in their systems, and God said this should be burned outside the sanctuary. Here, God says he will ‘rub their noses in it,’ so that they will have to be taken outside the sanctuary in their unclean state.

⁴ Know, then, that I have sent this command to you, so that my covenant with Levi may hold, says the Lord of hosts. ⁵ My covenant with him was a covenant of life and well-being, which I gave him; this called for reverence, and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. ⁶ True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in integrity and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. ⁷ For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

Malachi 2:4-7

So that my covenant with Levi may hold. God had chosen the Levites from all the other tribes to serve him: *<<I hereby accept the Levites from among the Israelites as substitutes for all the firstborn that open the womb among the Israelites. The Levites shall be mine>>* (Numbers 3:12). This shows the motive for God's discipline against these ungodly priests. The Lord hoped that this would warn the priests back to a proper respect of his covenant.

My covenant with him was a covenant of life and well-being. God promised Levi that his descendants would be scattered in Israel. This was turned into a wonderful blessing when Levi was designated as the priestly tribe and the priests were sprinkled throughout Israel. They were to be a blessing to the people as they served God and were to ensure the everlasting covenant, both old and new: *<<All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees>>* (Psalm 25:10), *<<And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood>>* (Luke 22:20), *<<but this one became a priest with an oath, because of the one who said to him, 'The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest for ever"' – accordingly Jesus has also become the guarantee of a better covenant>>* (Hebrews 7:21-22).

He revered me. God uses Levi as an example for the priests in the days of Malachi. Levi is shown to be an example of:

- Reverence: he stood in awe of my name.
- Knowing God's Word: true instruction was in his mouth.
- Godly character: he walked with me in integrity and uprightness.
- Preserving and promoting God's Word: a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth.

True instruction was in his mouth. The priests had a special responsibility to hold and spread the Word of God: *<<He commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, so that they might devote themselves to the law of the Lord>>* (2 Chronicles 31:4), and: *<<Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, 'This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.' For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law>>* (Nehemiah 8:7-9). God's Word was given to the priests for life and peace, and so they would, or at least should, be reverent before the Lord.

A priest should guard knowledge. Because the priests had to hold and spread God's Word they had to do it with knowledge, so the people could seek the law from his mouth. Leaders should be knowledgeable messengers of God's Word. Elsewhere it is written: *<<My child, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding, so that you may hold on to prudence, and your lips may guard knowledge>>* (Proverbs 5:1-2), where one of the purposes of attending to wisdom is that the son's lips may guard knowledge; that is, his lips should not let anything go out from them that is inconsistent with true knowledge and wisdom. Such guarded speech has the best interest of both the speaker and the hearer in view. In Malachi's case, it applies to the priests specifically.

⁸ But you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts, ⁹ and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you have not kept my ways but have shown partiality in your instruction.

Malachi 2:8-9

But you have turned aside from the way. The priests should have held the Word of God in knowledge, reverence, and obedience. Instead, they departed from the way and therefore caused many to stumble by your instruction or at the law: *<<The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?' Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit>>* (Jeremiah 2:8).

So I make you despised and abased before all the people. Because the priests of Malachi's day fell so far short of God's ideal for them, the people held them in contempt: *<<Therefore the Lord the God of Israel declares: "I promised that your family and the family of your ancestor should go in and out before me for ever"; but now the Lord declares: "Far be it from me; for those who honour me I will honour, and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt>>* (1 Samuel 2:30), and: *<<Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonour cover us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our ancestors, from our youth even to this day; and we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God>>* (Jeremiah 3:25).

d. Malachi 2:10-17 - The Covenant Profaned by Judah

Malachi introduces his third disputation in v.10 with a general description of Israel's infidelity against one another, which profanes their covenant with God, the Father and Creator of Israel: *<<Do you thus repay the Lord, O foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?>>* (Deuteronomy 32:6). Malachi condemns two parallel although not necessarily related marital offenses: intermarriage with pagans, refer to the

comments made on v.11, an offense which led to the plea: **<<Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, the covenant of the priests and the Levites>>** (Nehemiah 13:29); and divorce based merely on aversion or incompatibility, refer to the comments made on vv.13-16. Some have suggested that the divorces were for the purpose of intermarriage; refer to the comment made on v.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 ancestors?

Malachi 2:10

Have we not all one father? This does not teach the idea of the universal fatherhood of God, the doctrine that all are saved or that God is everyone's Father in the same way. This is a simple assertion that because all are made in the image of God, all must respect and deal honourably with everyone else. Paul wrote: **<<yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist>>** (1 Corinthians 8:6).

Has not one God created us? Since there is only one Creator and he made all people then they have a duty towards him and towards each other. There is no one who stands apart from God: **<<Can mortals be righteous before God? Can human beings be pure before their Maker?>>** (Job 4:17), or who should not acknowledge his sovereignty: **<<But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine>>** (Isaiah 43:1), and: **<<Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father>>** (Philippians 2:9-11).

Why then are we faithless to one another? Malachi will apply this specifically to marriage, but their sin of treachery went beyond their unfaithfulness in marriage. The marriage relationship is primarily one that Malachi makes applicable to the relationship between man and God.

Profaning the covenant of our ancestors. God gave the covenant to Abraham and reiterated it through Moses, but it was always intended to be given to and kept by all their descendants. Therefore, those who do not honour the covenant given by God are guilty as covenant breakers. Another prophet gives equal testimony to the effects of such people: **<<The officials within it are roaring lions; its judges are evening wolves that leave nothing until the morning. Its prophets are reckless,**

faithless persons; its priests have profaned what is sacred, they have done violence to the law>> (Zephaniah 3:3-4).

¹¹ Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.

¹² May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob anyone who does this – any to witness or answer, or to bring an offering to the Lord of hosts.

The sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves. This reveals exactly how God feels about marriage. It is holy to him; it is an institution to him; and God loves marriage.

- i. When a person sins in their marriage or against their marriage vows, they sin against something holy to God. He has set apart marriage for a special meaning, a special purpose in the life of his people.
- ii. When a person sins in their marriage or against their marriage vows, they sin against an institution that God has established. Marriage is God's idea, not man's; he formed and established the first marriage as a pattern for every one afterwards; refer to Genesis 2:20-25. Because it is an institution, no one is allowed to define marriage any way simply to please themselves; God has established it and everyone must conform to what he has established.
- iii. When a person sins in their marriage or against their marriage vows, they sin against something that God loves.
 - God loves marriage for what it displays about his relationship with people.
 - God loves marriage for the good it does in society.
 - God loves marriage for the way it meets the needs of men, women, and children.
 - Most of all, God loves marriage as a tool for conforming everyone into the image of his Son.

Married the daughter of a foreign god. The first treachery and abomination God addresses is the intermarriage between the people of God and their ungodly neighbours. The dangers of an ungodly intermarriage are well documented in both the Old and New Testaments.

- i. Israel married women from Moab and brought the curse of God upon the people (Numbers Chapter 25).
- ii. Solomon married foreign women who took his heart away from God (1 Kings 11:1-10).

- iii. Ahab married Jezebel, a foreign woman, who led Israel into new depths of depravity (1 Kings 16:29-33).
- iv. Paul says that believers and unbelievers should not be joined together (2 Corinthians 6:11-18).

May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob anyone who does this – any to witness or answer, or to bring an offering to the Lord of hosts. God promised to punish the priests who married foreign, pagan wives and thought that it would not affect their service of the Lord. This applies equally to all the people of God who turn away from him: <<*Say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: I will profane my sanctuary, the pride of your power, the delight of your eyes, and your heart's desire; and your sons and your daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword*>> (Ezekiel 24:21)

God's command against mixed marriages in Israel had nothing to do with race, but with faith. There are several foreign women in the genealogy of Jesus including Ruth, who was a Moabite married to a Jewish man named Boaz; but she forsook Moab's gods for the Lord (Ruth 1:16).

¹³ And this you do as well: You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favour at your hand. ¹⁴ You ask, 'Why does he not?' Because the Lord was a witness 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 2:13-14

Malachi's contemporaries were distressed because God refused to accept their offerings, as evidenced by his withheld blessing. Malachi explains that God was acting as a witness against husbands who were unfaithful to their wives. Marriage is not just a contract, a two-way relationship between husband and wife, but a covenant, a three-way relationship in which the couple is accountable to God, for the Lord was witness to that covenant. For this reason, spousal fidelity is inextricably linked to spiritual well-being; a marriage must be in good repair, or else the couple's prayers will be hindered: <<*Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honour to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life – so that nothing may hinder your prayers*>> (1 Peter 3:7), as Jesus confirmed in a general principle: <<*So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser*>>

may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison>> (Matthew 5:23-25).

Malachi's view of marriage is as radical in conception, identifying marriage as a covenant between the spouses, and in the demands placed on the husband as that put forth in the NT. Other OT passages that support Malachi's identification of marriage as a covenant include Proverbs 2:17, Ezekiel 16:8-14, and especially Genesis Chapter 2, where covenantal vocabulary ('leave' and 'hold fast' in Genesis 2:24) is employed to describe a husband's duty, as confirmed by the covenantal use of 'leave' or forsake you, and 'cling' or hold fast in for example Deuteronomy 4:4, Deuteronomy 10:20, Joshua 1:5, and where Adam commits himself to Eve before God by employing a formula which is attested elsewhere in covenant-ratifying contexts: <<*This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*>> (Genesis 2:23), a sentiment confirmed by the Israelites to David as their king: <<*Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, 'Look, we are your bone and flesh*>> (2 Samuel 5:1).

For more on covenants in Malachi, refer to the Supplementary Material on the website.

You cover the Lord's altar with tears, he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favour at your hand. The neglected and divorced wives of the priests came and wept at God's altar. When their priestly husbands then offered sacrifice to God at the same altar it offended God.

¹⁵ Did not one God make her? Both flesh and spirit are his. And what does the one God desire? Godly offspring. So look to yourselves, and do not let anyone be faithless to the wife of his youth.

Malachi 2:15

Did not one God make her may be a reference to Genesis 2:24; if so, then perhaps Malachi derived his understanding of marriage as a covenant and the primacy of the husband's obligation from the exemplary marriage of Adam and Eve. The translation and meaning of this verse are obscure, and various translations have rendered the verse differently, such as the approach taken by the ESV which accounts for the dire warnings referred to in the comments made on v.15b and v.16b.

There is, then, a remarkable similarity between the logic of v.15 and the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 19:5-9, namely, that it is God who joins a couple together; Malachi says both flesh and spirit are his. Furthermore, this verse asserts that the Lord intends marriage to produce Godly offspring, literally 'a seed of God'. In Malachi's view, divorce may frustrate this purpose in a manner analogous to marriage to an idolater: <<*So now let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord*

and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law>> (Ezra 10:3), as well as passages such as Ezra 10:44 and Nehemiah 13:23-27. The expression ‘a seed of God’ reflects the imagery established in the comments made on v.10 and earlier in 1:6 of God as a Father to his people, in virtue of his redemptive acts and covenant, and it offers an intentional contrast to the phrase: <<*the daughter of a foreign god*>> in v.11.

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.

Malachi 2:16

For I hate divorce. The Hebrew text of this verse is one of the most difficult passages in the OT to translate, with the result that the two main alternative translations proposed for this verse are strongly disputed. Given the complexity of the linguistic issues involved, both alternatives are simply summarised briefly as follows, rather than presenting comprehensive arguments for each.

1. The ESV text reads, the man who does not love his wife but divorces her. This rendering understands the Hebrew and the Greek of the Septuagint in the sense of, ‘For he hates (or ‘does not love’) [and] he divorces.’ The action of ‘hating’ and thus ‘divorcing’ is seen also in Deuteronomy 24:3; further, the idea of a man ‘hating’ his wife appears in Genesis 29:31, Deuteronomy 21:15-17, and 22:13, with each case having the sense of ‘loving less’ or ‘ceasing to love.’

The expression covering one’s garment with violence is probably a figure of speech referring to the defiling of one’s character with violent wrongdoing. See the similar image in Psalms 73:6 and 109:18 and Revelation 3:4; and see the opposite in Job 29:14, Psalm 132:9, Isaiah 59:17 and 61:10. Although divorce based on loss of affection was recognised under the OT civic law, it is nowhere morally approved, unlike divorce based on a spouse’s sexual infidelity or desertion. This is so, as Malachi stresses, because divorce based merely on the loss of affection breaks the marriage covenant and defiles one’s character, since it is untrue to the creation ideal of faithfulness.

2. The ESV footnote reads, ‘The Lord, the God of Israel, says that he hates divorce, and him who covers (his garment with violence).’ This is similar to the rendering that originally appeared in English in the King James Version of 1611. If this alternative rendering is followed, the focus is on God’s hatred of the practice of divorce, rather than on the hatred of the divorcing man toward his wife. Also following this alternative rendering, the phrase covering one’s garment with violence is understood either:

- a. With reference to a second thing that God hates in addition to divorce, namely, the person ‘who covers his garment with violence’.

- b. Or, as some hold, that God hates divorce because the act of divorce itself ‘covers (one’s) garment with violence.’

In either case, this passage is clear in its recognition that the biblical standard for marriage derives from the creation account, as stated in the comments made on Genesis 2:23-24, which establishes the covenantal nature of marriage. Jesus, when discussing a question about divorce in Matthew 19:3-9, began with creation. Malachi starts from this creational base: he refers to creation, calls marriage a covenant (v.14), refers to the oneness of Genesis 2:24, and reminds the community of the purpose of marriage, i.e. to produce godly offspring (v.15). The man who would divorce the Israelite wife of his youth, perhaps even for the purpose of taking a pagan girl as his wife, thus commits a grievous offense: he violates the creation order, he breaks his covenantal relationship with his wife and, in so doing, he deeply damages his character, i.e. ‘covers his garment with violence’). However, the impact of divorce reaches far beyond the individual, for divorce has a ruinous effect on the vitality of the whole community (vv.13-15), and on its ability to fulfil its calling as God’s holy people.

God is opposed to the kind of divorce that is in view because of the destructiveness and pain that inevitably results when faithless husbands send away their wives. Refer also to the comments made on Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:3-9, Mark 10:10-12 and 1 Corinthians 7:15 on the website.

¹⁷ You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, ‘How have we wearied him?’ By saying, ‘All who do evil are good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.’ Or by asking, ‘Where is the God of justice?’

Malachi 2:17

You have wearied the Lord with your words. This kind of ignorant, unbelieving talk from God’s people is wearisome to God. It shows how much his people resist his truth and his work. Their response to God was just as wearisome for him: <<*Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them*>> (Isaiah 1:14).

The people of God in Malachi’s day were depressed and discouraged because it seemed like the wicked prospered and had it better than the godly. This filled them with doubt and unbelief, and they grumbled that all who do evil are good in the sight of the Lord.

Where is the God of justice? When they compared themselves with others, they thought it was unjust of God to bless others and not them. Nevertheless, their question shows that they do not understand what the God of justice would give to them.