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Malachi: The Pollution of the Priesthood
Malachi 1:1 to 2:17

Malachi: the pollution of the priesthood DIG: How did ADONAI show His love to Isra'el? What happened to that love? Who is the target of God's probing questions (Malachi 1:6-8)? What was wrong with their offerings? Why is Ha'Shem so harsh with the priests? What did they do to deserve it? What did the LORD's covenant with Levi require (Malachi 2:1-7; Numbers 3:12-13, 25:10-13). How had the priests altered God's ministry position for them? What had been the effect of their actions on others? How had Judah broken faith? With whom? What did that have to do with the creation and covenant? What sin was separating them from God? Why does YHVH hate divorce? What are we urged to do?

REFLECT: When have you asked the LORD to prove His love for you? What was His response? How might your attitude or actions honor or dishonor God? Are His commandments a burden to you or a joy? Has anyone ever stumbled in their faith due to what you did or didn't do? Explain. How often are your prayers unanswered due to unconfessed sin or a wrong heart attitude toward ADONAI or others? How could you "take heed to your spirit, and not break faith" (Malachi 2:16)? In what situations are you most on guard? Most vulnerable? Who can you help this week?

Malachi ministered during **the days** of **Nehemiah** (**to see link click Bt – The Third Return**), about twenty-five years after **Ezra's** reforms in 457 BC (see **Bl –**

Ezra's Reforms), and about twelve years after the dedication ceremony of **the walls** in 445 BC (see **Cl – The Dedication of the Walls of Jerusalem**). It is therefore amazing that the state of the **priesthood** could have deteriorated in such a short period of time. But deteriorate **it** did. The moral and spiritual conditions in **Malachi** were similar to those encountered by **Ezra** and **Nehemiah**. These included marriages to unbelievers **(Malachi 2:10-11; Ezra 9:1-2; Nehemiah 13:1-2, 23-28)**, lack of the people's support for **the Levites (Malachi 3:10; Nehemiah 13:10)**, and oppression of the poor **(Malachi 3:5; Nehemiah 5:4-5)**.[295] **Nehemiah** would have to return from Babylon in 432 BC **(Nehemiah 13:6-7)** to institute **his** final reforms (see **Cr – Nehemiah's Final Reforms**). As a result, **Malachi's** message was, for the most part, rebuke and condemnation. The spirit of **the priesthood** in **his** day would later develop into the sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

A prophecy, the word of ADONAI to Isra'el through Mal'akhi:

Jacob chosen, Esau not chosen: "I love you," says ADONAI (Malachi 1:1 CJB). One is reminded of **Hosea 11:1, 3-4, 8-9,** and **God's** tender words in **Isaiah 43:4**. But **His love** for **Isra'el** occurred before **her** existence; **He loved her** in that **He** sovereignly and graciously **chose her (elected her)** to be **His** own possession. This was clearly revealed at the time **He** gave the covenant at Mount Sinai **(Deuteronomy 4:37-40, 7:9-15)**. Acknowledging **YHVH's love** for **her, Isra'el** should have responded by **loving** and obeying **Him (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)**.

The judgment of Edom: But the Israelites asked: **How do you show us Your love?** By questioning **God's** claim, **Isra'el** was betraying **His** faithfulness to **His** covenant. **Her** failure to believe **His** Word caused **her** to fall into sin. **ADONAI answered: "Esav was Ya'akov's brother. Yet I loved [chosen] Ya'akov but hated [not chosen] Esav. I made his mountains desolate and gave his territory to desert jackals." Edom** says: **We are beaten down now, but we will come back and rebuild the ruins. ADONAI-Tzva'ot,** or **the LORD of heaven's** angelic **armies,** answers: **They can build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Land of Wickedness (Obediah 8-14), the people with whom ADONAI is permanently angry. Isra'el's borders** were borders of blessing. On the one side was **Isra'el** whom **God loved** and **chose** to set apart. On the other side was **Edom** who **God** had **not chosen**. Rather, **Edom** would be destroyed by **Him** in **His wrath** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Gi – Edom's Streams Will Be Turned into Pitch**). **Isra'el**, seeing **God's** sovereign dealings with **Edom**, should have had a better understanding not only of **God's love** for **her**,

but also of **His** greatness over all the earth: **ADONAI is great, even beyond the borders of Isra'el (Malachi 1:2-5 CJB).**

The pollution of the sacrifices: Malachi spoke of proper relationships in society, relationships **Isra'el** should have insisted on. **A son honors his father and a servant his master.** The question that follows compares **her** relationship with **the LORD**. So God's question was sharply presented. **But if I'm a father, where is the honor** (Hebrew: *kabod* can also mean *glory*) **due me? and if I'm a Master, where is the respect due me? says ADONAI -Tzva'ot to you cohanim who despise my Name.** This charge is doubly sad because after the return from the Babylonian captivity, **the priests** were responsible to teach **the people God's** covenant and turn **their** hearts to **Him (Ezra 6:16-22; Nehemiah 9:38 to 10:39)**. If **the priests** had failed to honor **YHVH**, what could be expected of **the people**? However, **the priests** were seemingly, and surprisingly, totally unaware that **they** had **despised His Name**. **You** ask: **How are we despising your name? By offering polluted food on my altar! Now you** ask: **How are we polluting you? The priests** had specific instructions on what constituted **defiled sacrifices (Leviticus 22:17-30)**. **They** were warned against **offering** such **sacrifices** or **they** would **defile God's Name (Leviticus 22:2** and **32)**. Yet, **they** were guilty of that very sin. **By saying that the table of ADONAI doesn't deserve respect; so that there's nothing wrong with offering a blind animal as a sacrifice, nothing wrong with offering an animal that's lame or sick. Try offering such an animal to your governor, and see if he will be pleased with you! Would he even receive you?" asks ADONAI-Tzva'ot. So if you pray now that God will show us favor, what your actions have accomplished is that ADONAI-Tzva'ot** asks: **Will He receive any of you? "Why doesn't even one of you shut the doors and thus stop this useless lighting of fires on my altar? I take no pleasure in you," says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "and I will not receive an offering from you (Malachi 1:6-10 CJB).** To emphasize **His** point, God said the whole Temple sacrificial service might as well be shut down. It was useless.

For from farthest east to farthest west my Name will be great among the nations. Offerings are presented to my name everywhere, pure gifts; for my Name will be great among the Gentile nations," says ADONAI-Tzva'ot (Malachi 1:11 CJB). The prophets predicted a time when **Gentiles** will see the light and become worshipers of **ADONAI (Isaiah 45:22-25, 49:5-7, 59:19). The Messiah** will become **King** for **a thousand years** over the entire earth (see the

commentary on **Revelation Fh – The Dispensation of the Messianic Kingdom**). Believers in all **the Gentile nations** will worship **Him (Isaiah 11:3-4; Daniel 7:13-14, 27-28; Zephaniah 2:11, 3:8-11; Zechariah 14:9** and **16**). **Malachi** also spoke of the day in **the far eschatological future** when **the Lord** will return and bring about pure **offerings** in **Isra'el (3:1-4)**.

After speaking of **the** pure **offerings** in the Messianic Kingdom, **Malachi** referred once again to the immediate condition of **the priests** of **his** day. **But you profane it by saying that the table of ADONAI is polluted, so that the fruit and food offered deserve contempt. They** didn't care enough to set things right. Being involved in **offering the sacrifices** on the bronze altar was just a burden. **You also say, "It's all so tiresome!" and sniff scornfully at it,** says **ADONAI-Tzva'ot. Then you bring animals that were taken by violence, or they are lame or sick. This is the sort of offering you bring. Am I supposed to accept this from you?** asks **ADONAI. Moreover, cursed is the deceiver who has a male animal in his flock that is damaged, but vows and sacrifices to ADONAI anyway. For I am a great King,** says **Adonai-Tzva'ot, and my Name is respected among the nations (Malachi 1:12-14 CJB).** Certainly no one would try to cheat a king for fear of being punished. Nor should one try to cheat **the Great King**, **the One** whose **Name is respected among the nations.** Therefore, **Malachi** ends **Chapter One** by emphasizing **God's** supreme authority.

The pollution of the priesthood: After giving and substantiating the charge against the priests, **Malachi** gave them a command. **Now, cohanim, this command is for you. If you won't listen, if you won't pay attention to honoring my name," says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, "then I will send the curse on you (Deuteronomy 27:15-26** and **28:15-68); I will turn your blessings into curses. Yes, I will curse them, because you pay no attention. I will reject your seed; I will throw dung in your faces** making **you** unclean**, the dung from your festival offerings; and** much like the waste material of **the sacrifices** is discarded, **you will** likewise **be carted off with it. Then you will know that I sent you this command to affirm my covenant with Levi,"** says **ADONAI-Tzva'ot. My covenant with him,** and **his** descendants **the priests, was one of life and peace, and I gave him these things.** This seems to recall how **Phinehas'** zeal for **YHVH** turned away **God's** wrath from **the people (Numbers 25:11)**. **It was also one of fear, and he feared me; he was in awe of my name. The true instruction [Torah] was in his mouth, and no dishonesty was found on his lips; he walked with me in peace and uprightness and**

turned many away from sin. The priests were to teach **the Torah (Deuteronomy 33:10). A Cohen's lips should safeguard knowledge, and people should seek Torah from his mouth, because he is the messenger of ADONAI-Tzva'ot.** However, since **they** were not giving **true instruction, they** were rebuked by **the prophet** whose very name, ironically, means *My messenger*. **But you turned away from the path, you caused many to fail in the Torah.** Saying that **defiled sacrifices** were acceptable had **corrupted the covenant of Levi,** says **ADONAI-Tzva'ot. Therefore, I have in turn made you contemptible and vile before all the people, because you did not keep my ways but were partial in applying the Torah (Malachi 2:1-9 CJB).**

Judah unfaithful: Don't we all have the same Father? Didn't one God create us all?
Isra'el was like **God's firstborn son (Exodus 4:22; Hosea 11:1).** The fact that **YHVH** had created **Isra'el** to be a distinct **people on the earth (Amos 3:2)** formed the background for the problem **Malachi** would now discuss. **Then why do we break faith** (Hebrew: *bagad*, meaning *to act unfaithfully with respect to a prior agreement or covenant*) **with each other, profaning the covenant of our ancestors (Malachi 2:10 CJB)?** In addition to **corrupting the covenant of Levi** by **offering defiled sacrifices (Malachi 1:6-10 CJB)** and neglecting to provide **true instruction** from **the Torah (Malachi 2:1-9 CJB), they** had **broken the faith with each other**. The consequence, or symptom, of **their** sin of **breaking faith with each** other is presented first **(Malachi 2:11-13 CJB)**, then **the sin** is stated second **(Malachi 2:14-16 CJB)**.

The consequence of **their** sin was marrying unbelievers (see **Cr – Nehemiah's Final Reforms: Nehemiah's handling Jews marrying unbelievers**). **Y'hudah has broken faith; an abomination has been committed in Isra'el and Yerushalayim. For Y'hudah has defiled the** holy **sanctuary of ADONAI, which he loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. If a man does this and presents an offering to ADONAI-Tzva'ot, may ADONAI cut him off from the tents of Ya'akov, whether initiator or follower.** This meant that **the man** would die or that **his** line would cease and **he** would have no descendants in **Isra'el**. **Here is something else you do:** because of **your** sin of marrying unbelieving wives, **you cover ADONAI's altar with tears, with weeping and sighing, because God no longer looks at the offering or receives your gift with favor (Malachi 2:11-13 CJB).**

Then the actual sin is stated. Once again **Malachi** stressed **the Israelites'** spiritual

sensitivity. Since **they**, surprisingly, couldn't imagine what the problem was, **the prophet** had to spell it out for **them**. **Nevertheless, you ask, "Why is this?" Because ADONAI is witness between you and the wife of your youth that you have broken faith with her though she is your companion, your wife by covenant. And hasn't He made [them] one [flesh] in order to have spiritual blood-relatives? For what the one [flesh] seeks is a seed from God. Therefore, take heed to your spirit, and don't break faith with the wife of your youth. "For I hate divorce,"** says **ADONAI the God of Isra'el, "and him who covers his clothing** (symbolizing marriage as in **Ruth 3:9** and **Ezeki'el 16:8**) **with violence,"** says **ADONAI-Tzva'ot. "Therefore protect to your spirit, and don't break faith" (Malachi 2:14-16 CJB). The Israelites** were not to **break faith** with one another by divorcing **their Jewish wives** and marrying unbelievers. That **defiled the covenant** promise **Ha'Shem** made with **Isra'el**. By **protecting their spirits they** would be acting in agreement with **God's** purpose and would help preserve the unity of the nation as well as **their** individual marriages.

The Day of Judgment: Though **the people** had changed in **their** views on **God's justice, YHVH Himself** had not changed: **For I am ADONAI. I do not change (3:6a).** Because **He does not change,** neither do **His covenant** promises. Therefore, **Isra'el's** faith and hope should have been stabilized. However, **she** was acting and talking as if **she** had no **God** to believe in or hope for. As a result, ironically, even though **God does not change or grow weary (Isaiah 40:28), Malachi** said: **You have wearied ADONAI with your words (Malachi 2:17a CJB).**

Once again, **the people** were portrayed as being oblivious to **their** sin. **Yet you ask, "How have we wearied Him?" YHVH** responded: **By saying that anyone who does wrong is good from ADONAI's perspective, and that He is delighted with them (Malachi 2:17b CJB).** The prosperity of the wicked is an age-old problem and discussed in at least five biblical writers **(Job 21:7-26, 24:1-17; Psalm 73:1-14; Ecclesiastes 8:14; Jeremiah 12:1-4; Habakkuk 1)**. Though answers to this problem are not given in these passages, in each case questions about **God's justice** are removed by **a far eschatological** assurance: **Ha'Shem** will come in **judgement** and punish **the wicked (Job 24:22-24, 27:13-23; Psalm 73:16-20; Ecclesiastes 8:12-13; Jeremiah 12:7-17; Habakkuk 2:3 and 3:2-19)**, and establish **the righteous of the TaNaKh** in **His** Messianic Kingdom forever.

Amazingly, **the priests** in **Malachi's** day had failed to learn such hope from the Scriptures. **They** questioned **God's justice** by saying that **He delights** in evil people and **by asking, "Where is the God of justice" (Malachi 2:17c CJB).** Yet ***they*** were the guilty ones; ***they*** were the ones who were unfaithful to ***Him***. Here also, **Ha'Shem** responded by referring to **His** future **judgment (Malachi 3:1-5)**. However, unlike the answers by the righteous biblical writers mentioned above, the **judgment** which **Malachi** referred to was to be against the hypocritical questionnaires as well.[296]