

Malachi

Chapter 2

The LORD Rebukes the Priests

“And now, O priests, this command is for you. 2 If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the LORD of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. 3 Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it. 4 So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the LORD of hosts. 5 My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He 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 peace 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. 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 do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction.”

2:1 *O priests.* The Lord continues His condemnation of Jerusalem’s worship leaders. (TLSB)

In the OT the priests were the mediators between a sinful people and a holy God. Priests get no preferential treatment from the one they claim as Lord for themselves and the one they proclaim as Lord to their people. (PBC)

That is clear in this section. In fact, the sin of the priests was especially grievous to the Lord because it led the people astray. “To whom much has been given, much will be expected” is an often stated axiom in the Bible. Much was given to the priests. (PBC)

command. Used again in v 4; refers to what the priests should be doing. (TLSB)

2:2 *not ... give honor to My name.* The nations would honor the Lord’s name (1:11), but the priests despised it (1:6). (TLSB)

send the curse. The judgment for sin is curses (Dt 28:15). (TLSB)

curse. Repeated three times, continuing the thought of 1:14. (TLSB)

curse...blessings. It was the function of the priests to pronounce God’s blessing on the people (see Nu 6:23–27), but their blessings will become curses so that their uniquely priestly function will be worse than useless. (CSB)

The priests’ duty was to bless the people (Nu 6:23–27). The Lord cursed even this blessing. Hus: “The priest who binds and looses others ought himself to be prudent and just, for otherwise he will put to death souls who do not die and revive souls which do not live, and in this way he turns his power of pronouncing judgment into an instrument of cursing” (*The Church*, p 104). (TLSB)

The dynamite of God's blessing is not defused because of evil men. The efficacy of the blessing does not depend on the faith of the person administering it. The valid check of God's blessing is never returned because of "insufficient funds" regardless of the hand that passes it on – providing it is a valid check in the first place, providing it comes from God and his Word and revelation. (PBC)

But people are cursed by hollow hearted leaders who pretend to bless them, by the priests who are not for the Lord but against him (and remember that those are the only two options). Then it is not God's blessing that is being cursed but the blessing that is being cursed but the blessing of the person giving it. (PBC)

not lay it to heart. The priests did not take the Lord's commands seriously. (TLSB)

2:3 The priests' children suffered for the sins of their fathers (cf 1Sm 2:27–36). (TLSB)

spread...your faces. To disgrace you (see Na 3:6). (CSB)

This is done as an expression of His extreme contempt. (Kretzmann)

dung. The entrails of an animal that were taken "outside the camp" and burned along with its hide and flesh (see Ex 29:14; Lev 8:17; 16:27). (CSB)

Hbr *peresh*, the intestinal contents from an animal slaughtered for sacrifice. Spreading dung on their faces is God's way of expressing disdain for these priests. (TLSB)

taken away. In Ex 29:14, the Lord ordered that this dung be burned outside the camp. (TLSB)

2:4 *Levi.* The priests were chosen from the tribe of Levi (see Nu 3:12–13; Ne 13:29). (CSB)

The Lord set apart the descendants of Levi, Jacob's son to "minister to Him and to bless in His name" (Dt 10:8; cf Nu 3:5-10). In vv 4-7, the Lord describes the service of the ideal Levitical priest. Luther: "The covenant made with the whole tribe of Levi, the command handed down through Moses (was) that they teach rightly and deceive no man." (TLSB)

2:5 *covenant...life and peace.* An allusion to the covenant with Phinehas, Aaron's grandson, in Nu 25:10–13. Phinehas defended God's honor by killing two offenders involved in the idolatry and immorality connected with the Baal of Peor (Nu 25:1–3). (CSB)

OT priests were to bring spiritual life and peace to God's people (Nu 25:12; Dt 30:19–20). (TLSB)

Proper worship and veneration of the Lord. (TLSB)

he stood in awe. Phinehas showed this by his zeal for God (see Nu 25:13). (CSB)

He stood in awe of My name. The ideal Levite, one like Moses, gave honor to the Lord's name. (TLSB)

2:6–7 *instruction.* Priests were responsible to teach the law of Moses (see Lev 10:11; see also notes on Zep 3:4; Hag 2:11). (CSB)

2:6 *peace and uprightness.* Linked together also in Ps 37:37, but here "walked with me in peace and uprightness" probably refers to covenant loyalty. (CSB)

The ideal priest not only talked the talk but walked the walk. (TLSB)

2:7 *guard knowledge*. To hold it carefully, to protect it from error, to preserve it among the people. Cf Hos 4:6. (TLSB)

messenger. As teacher of the law and as one through whom people could inquire of God. (CSB)

Priests and prophets were spokesmen for the Lord of hosts. (TLSB)

2:8 *corrupted the covenant*. By unfaithful teaching, but also, it seems, by intermarriage with foreigners (see Ezr 9:1; 10:18–22; Ne 13:27–29). (CSB)

God’s condemnation of the current priesthood resumes. They were not measuring up to what an ideal priest should be. (TLSB)

2:9 *despised*. In Hebrew the same word that is translated “contemptible.” (CSB)

show partiality. Forbidden in Lev 19:15. The priests were to be like God in this respect (see Dt 10:17). (CSB)

This was another of the priests’ sins. They showed favor to one group of people, perhaps to the rich. (TLSB)

2:1–9 The Lord condemns the priests in Malachi’s day for failing to live up to the expectations He presented in His Word. God has similar requirements for His pastors and teachers today (cf Ti 1:9). How blessed are those who have such servants of the Lord! And how important it is for us to pray that they remain faithful in their calling. For we all need what a devoted Christian leader proclaims: repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Christ, our Lord. • Thank You, Jesus, for servants who preach and teach Your Holy Word in truth and purity. Amen. (TLSB)

Judah Profaned the Covenant

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 fathers? 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 any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts! 13 And this second thing 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 from your hand. 14 But you say, “Why does he not?” Because the LORD was 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. 15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. 16 “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers [his garment] with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”

2:10–16 Malachi rebukes the people—in a passage framed by references to “breaking faith.” Two examples of their sin are specifically mentioned: marrying pagan women and divorce. (CSB)

2:10 *one Father*. See Isa 63:16. (CSB)

creatd us. As his special people. (CSB)

Malachi begins the third part of his prophecy with two rhetorical questions about marriage to foreign wives. God is the Father who created humans (Dt 32:6). In marriage, He unites husband and wife as one (v. 15; Gn 2:24). Luther: “These are also two outstanding statements for correcting the cruelty of husbands, namely, if they look at wives as God’s creation and as women who have a God in common with them.” (TLSB)

covenant of our fathers. The covenant God made with their forefathers at Mount Sinai. (CSB)

In the Scripture, time and again our God is portrayed as the faithful one in a relationship, the one who holds to His promise. Think of the times we read, “I am the God of your fathers, of Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob.” His record for keeping His promises is impeccable in His dealings with our fathers. Think of the times we hear, “This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled...” He is faithful to what He has said. In 2 Timothy 2:13 Paul maintained, “If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.” God is faithful and true, and He wants this to be a characteristic of His people, too. (PBC)

faithless. One could not even trust his own fellow Israelites or the national leaders—like the priests. (CSB)

Refers to the lack of commitment and fidelity in marriage (used also in vv 11, 14, 16). (TLSB)

profaning the covenant. Treating God’s covenant Law with disrespect. (TLSB)

2:11 *abomination.* The prophet charged the people with doing something horrible, completely opposite of what was good. (TLSB)

profaned the sanctuary. By continuing to worship the Lord while living in sin, they showed disrespect for the temple. (TLSB)

daughter of a foreign god. A pagan woman. Such marriages were strictly forbidden in the covenant law because they would lead to apostasy (see Ex 34:15–16; Dt 7:3–4; 1Ki 11:1–6; cf. Jos 23:12–13). Ezra and Nehemiah both wrestled with this problem (Ezr 9:1–2; Ne 13:23–29). (CSB)

God’s Law prohibited marriage to unbelievers (Dt 7:3). This law was being violated after the return from exile (Ezr 9:12). The NT provides similar warnings. (TLSB)

This is the sin against the first commandment which is spiritual adultery. And the adultery polluted the temple of God. It affected the church and still does. That “daughter of a foreign god” today might well be “the almighty dollar” or prestige in the eyes of the world. As a result of it prayers were not heard anymore, offerings were not received as Malachi the prophet here stated. (PBC)

2:12 *tents of Jacob.* A figurative expression for the community (see Jer 30:18). (CSB)

Malachi expressed the wish that the Lord would exclude from the community of Judah those who continued to bring offerings and yet were married to idolaters. (TLSB)

2:13 *second thing* – Evidently some were guilty of divorcing their Israelite spouses to marry foreigners. (TLSB)

weeping and groaning. Because the Lord does not respond to their sacrifices with blessing, they add wailing to their prayers. (CSB)

The people wept when they brought their sacrifices to the Lord's altar because He had no regard for their offering (cf Gn 4:5). (TLSB)

2:14 *witness between you and wife of your youth.* Marriage was a covenant (see Pr 2:17; Eze 16:8), and covenants were affirmed before witnesses. (CSB)

wife your youth – This first marriage was to an Israelite woman, a wife in accordance with God's covenant. (TLSB)

faithless. The husband divorced his first wife and married a foreigner. (TLSB)

This is so serious a problem that in the book of Ezra, who was contemporary of Malachi, that he (Ezra) has a long prayer (chapter 9) concerning what needed to be done. In chapter 10 of Ezra they people make a public confession and the men who married foreign wives returned them to their country.

2:15 *portion of the Spirit in their union?* Indicates how important marriage is in God's eyes. He wants to inspire love for spouse and for children. (TLSB)

Godly offspring. Marriage "sanctifies" the children. (CSB)

God has in mind not just the conception of human beings, but children who will be raised in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4). (TLSB)

2:16 *the man who ... divorces.* Some translations of these words differ. (TLSB)

violence. This means to be spattered with blood. It is grim description of how a husband's hatred for his wife might play itself out. (TLSB)

2:10–16 The people of Israel were guilty of breaking one of the covenant laws by marrying foreign, idolatrous wives. The Creator's first command to Adam and Eve was to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gn 1:28). After creating Eve, the Lord brought her to Adam and instituted marriage. He spoke the Sixth Commandment to guard this union (Ex 20:14). Yet throughout history, humans have violated God's rules for marriage. Christians today violate God's will concerning the marriage relationship in various ways. We need His admonition and His forgiveness. With the command and blessing of marriage, the Lord provides a rich portion of His Spirit, who is faithful and keeps us in good faith. • Heavenly Father, forgive my unfaithful desires and tainted love. Direct me by Your Spirit to think and do what is right in Your sight. Amen. (TLSB)

The Messenger of the LORD

17 You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone 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?"

2:17–4:6 The second half of Malachi's prophecy speaks of God's coming to his people. They had given up on God and had grown religiously cynical and morally corrupt. So God's coming will mean judgment and purification as well as redemption. (CSB)

2:17 *wearied the LORD with your words.* In Isa 43:24 Israel's sins had wearied God. (CSB)

This accusation introduces the fourth section of the Book. (TLSB)

who does evil is good. Such was the depth of their cynicism. (CSB)

The Lord was charged by some with actually favoring people who did evil, contradicting His statement in Dt 25:16. Similar complaints are expressed in 3:14–15. (TLSB)

Where is ... justice? Cf. the sarcastic taunts of Isa 5:19. (CSB)

Not a new question (cf Jb 21:7–16; Hab 1:2–4, 13). (TLSB)