

Malachi Chapter 2.

V 1. This is about priests. So let's read about priests in Hebrews 5:1-4, the role of the High Priest. Then read Hebrews 5:9-10. Given that we don't have priests and a High Priest, because now we have Jesus, is this chapter now obsolete? OK, so we don't have a person appointed High Priest but we have equivalents today. Maybe a vicar/minister/pastor, Sunday school teacher, preacher, Bible study or house group leader, church deacon/elder, worship leader, pastoral team member, brewer-upperer etc. Anyone tasked to teach or encourage church members.

This chapter is also about sacrifice. In the Torah, God gave the children of Israel several forms of sacrifice, divided into two types, sin offerings and thanksgiving offerings. Example, burnt offering Leviticus 1:1-5. The grain offering, Leviticus 3:1-2. The sin offering, Leviticus 5:5-6. Nowadays, there is no need for animal sacrifice to cover your sins, Hebrews 9:11-14. Which is a huge relief because you had to walk the animal to the Temple (Nazareth to Jerusalem is 100 miles or 33 hours walk, on today's roads), walking a bull or a sheep and once there, you had to kill it with a sword, slitting its throat from ear to ear and then the Priest would take it to the altar and burn it. Then the offerer would have to walk back home. So let's bear this in mind when we read about the Jews attitude towards sacrifice.

Today, we can't sacrifice animals because that could only be done in the Temple which was destroyed by the Romans. In any case, Paul tells us that God prefers the word of Christ to dwell in you, Colossians 3:16 which is vindicated in Psalm 40:6-8.

So, when the Old Testament talks about sacrifice, that's not obsolete, rather there's a New Testament equivalent, confession and praise.

V 2. In what way might the priests, and by extension, you, fail to honour God's name?

God via Malachi is threatening to curse the priests, in fact, He says, I've already done it. Have you ever been so angry with someone, you've totally lost it? Well, here God's come pretty close to that, He's telling them: 'I'm going to curse you - in fact, I already have!!! The penalty, a curse on them and on their blessings. Which blessings had been cursed? Is it possible that God will remove your blessings if you neglect Him or fall into sin?

V 3. What happened to Ezekiel 18:20? Maybe this was a warning that poor leadership is genetic, it affects future generations. Maybe, God was so angry with them, He wasn't even going to speak to them for 450 years. God tells them that He will rub cow dung in the faces of the priests. Read Exodus 29:14. The intestines, including the poo had to be burnt outside the camp but now it's being threatened to be repurposed as moisturiser! Then the age old threat of invasion, something Israel has endured since the days of the Judges. God's hope is that that will give them a jolt and that they will fall back into line and so enjoy the benefits of God's covenant with them. History tells us that shortly after Malachi's prophecy, the Greeks led by Alexander the Great invaded Israel and after that, the Romans.

V 4-6. The tribe of Levi was special to God. He appointed them to be the priestly tribe. To become a priest, you had to have been born into the Levite tribe, and if you weren't, it couldn't happen. If you look at a map of Old Testament Israel, you'll see it's been divided into 11 districts, named after each of the tribes. But there were 12 tribes. Well, the Levites missed out, because God wanted them to be a priestly tribe, to serve Him and to mingle

throughout the tribes, serving the people and not have the bother of running a district.

So let's look at the covenant with the tribe, Levi. Numbers 25:10-13. Deuteronomy 33:10. When you read the Numbers passage, you might ask yourself, there doesn't seem to be any terms in this covenant, it's more of a reward than a deal. So how can God claim that the Levites / priests have broken the covenant / deal? Maybe there were implied terms, remember it was given as a reward for good behaviour and so it's reasonable to assume that the covenant will be ripped up if they misbehave.

V7. Going back to our list of those with church responsibilities, Malachi says it's doubly important to know your Bible so that you can also be a messenger of God. In every day conversations you'll often express an opinion; but is that God's opinion that's shaped by what you've read in the Bible or is it your own opinion that's been shaped by your peers, the media and social media? You've been called to serve, just like priests, so let's pray and encourage everyone to come to our Bible discussion group.

V8. If you don't know the Bible, then as an ambassador of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:20, you'll probably, maybe unwittingly, misrepresent God and cause others to stumble. Do you think this is stretching the interpretation of these verses, or are they solely about Old Testament priests?

V9. In what ways might you show partiality? If someone says something that you disagree with but you either keep schtum or you just tentatively nod your head or shrug your shoulders because you don't want to offend or start an argument? Have you ever done that, and afterwards you think back and say to yourself: oh I should've said...?

V10. Two Bible truisms. The point being, that we're all brothers and sisters in Christ, 1 John 4:7. The point that the prophet is making is, if you defraud God in the manner He described in chapter 1, it's likely that you'll be equally hateful and unkind to your brothers and sisters and when you are, that grieves God. The covenant of the fathers, Genesis 17:1-9.

V11. God loves a holy and a happy marriage, centred on Him. To marry in any other way is much less of a delight to God, in fact it can even be a direct insult to Him.

Malachi singles out the country of Judah which is made up of the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. It seems that there was a high rate of 'marrying out', marrying gentiles which was contrary to Deuteronomy 7:3; this was a constant problem for Israel, Nehemiah 13:23-26. But if you look carefully it was worse than just marrying out, marrying the daughter of a foreign god. Genesis 6:1. This was depravity on a whole new scale.

If you look at the split of Israel into two countries after king Solomon died, Israel and Judah, they each had about 20 kings until they got carried off to Assyria and Babylon, respectively. Judah had 3 kings that were good and faithful to God and five that were a mixture and the rest bad. Israel had 19 kings, every one of them were a bad lot. So Malachi was pointing out that the table had turned and that the priests in Judah were even worse than the priests in Israel.

V12. If you're going to live a deliberately sinful lifestyle, so far as God's concerned, you're no longer Jewish, and don't even think about a sacrifice. So, is there a lesson for us there?

V13-16. Marriage guidance. There's a hypocrisy in worshipping God and being horrible to your spouse. Again, God does not want your sacrifice if that's what you're doing. More detailed advice can be found in 1 Corinthians 7:2-7. But Malachi is saying that there's a strong link between the way you treat your spouse and your relationship with God. If you're horrible to your spouse, He doesn't want to know you.

V17. Can you think of examples where we condone evil people for either political or personal expedience? The Orthodox Church in Russia is fully behind the war in Ukraine. But on a personal level, do you challenge evil or sometimes just avoid it, like the priest and the Levite, Luke 10:25-37.

We say; there's no such thing as a stupid question - we'll here's one. 'Where's the God of justice?' This is a stupid question that should never pass the lips of a believer and if it does, repent immediately. Why? When you're feeling alone and vulnerable in the face of personal tragedy, is it not human nature? If we've read Romans 8:18, the tenet of the question if you were to ask is, no, I simply don't believe it, it's a pipe dream. In fact, it's a wearisome insult to God.

It's actually a good question, if the questioner is a non-believer. But what's the answer? It's Romans 8:18 but only in the context of Romans 8:28.