

Healing a nation

** No other single foundational institution dictates the health of a nation more directly than the health of the marriages of the people who inhabit the land.**

Introduction

This is a study in the Book of Malachi, the closing statement to the Old Testament and a preview to the Holy Spirit's ministry in the New Testament. It is a collection of prophetic oracles (speeches, sermons, probably 6) compiled into a single document, around 430 BC by temple scribes, similar to court reporters. These prophetic messages were generally delivered by a prophet **outside** the recognized priesthood... a man tasked by God with the risky business of speaking plainly and boldly to the leading priests and the men of Israel. (*similar to those who crucified Jesus*) These messages were delivered in the temple (in church), in a courtroom like setting and also at the city gates, in public for all to overhear. Those not trained in Hebrew law listened curiously. But like ourselves today, in this room, these messages were not directly directed at those overhearing them, but the eternal principles, the overhead truths are just as valid for the bystanders as for those to whom the message was directed...like little children on the staircase listening to the midnight argument in the kitchen or like those in the balcony seats above a trial listening to the arguments, the things heard are not easily forgotten.

(A footnote to all you ladies hearing this: not one word of the entire book of Malachi is addressed directly at you. Instead, — it is written in your defense. It is directed at religious authorities, husbands, and fathers. He is your defender. He is your advocate.)

These publicly preached **oracles** are a **parenEsis** a style of communication intended to advise and warn. Like Sodom and Gomorrah and Ananias and Sapphira, these oracles are a "scriptural precedent" of the past used as a tool to encourage faithfulness through all generations. By hearing God's complaint about the moral condition of marriages in Judah against the priests and the heads of households, His **heart on the matter is revealed for all time and eternity** because God's nature on moral issues concerning the family **does not change!**

God...is very passionate about our families ...and especially about children. We may think God is only concerned about lofty eternal issues apart from earth...but your family and mine are the foundations of this nation! **Change your the family, change the nation! Heal your family, heal the nation!**

So God speaks through the prophet, whose words that are cutting to hear, (**Heb 4:12**) but intended to encourage a heart change, a **turn** back martial fidelity and restore their love for God and their wives and their children.

***In their defense, it important to know that they were war weary and disillusioned by years of unfulfilled expectations because they believed that the Davidic/Messianic Kingdom would accompany the rebuilding of the Temple which had happened **80 years** before this indictment was delivered. Their expectations of God after the temple was built, were very high. But in their time wearied disillusionment and bitterness, they began to mistrust that God's promises were still true! They lost their sense of urgency about daily devotion to the Lord. They still went to the temple, they still had the form, but their hearts were far from Him. They lost the will to resist the spiritual tension God gives us to fight the tugs of the world. They blatantly abandoned themselves, in Gods face, to sinful acts while still maintaining their forms of religious piety. Jesus warns us about this kind of **spiritual numbing**...about the slow slide into apostasy. The Malachi **begins** by stating God's deep love for Israel...then that he has something **weighty**, something **solemn** to share with His children:

So in **Malachi 1:1 NKJV**, He calls it a “**burden**”

*“**The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.**”*

The “**burden**” of Gods heart was their **love for Him** had grown cold...

Malachi had been impressed by the Holy Spirit to address Israel's:

- Their cold hearted religious works,
- Their fractured marriages,
- Their abandoned children
- Their moral confusion

These issues have at some levels re-emerged in our modern society here today, and the warning still stands....

In **Revelation 3:15-16** and **19 NLT**, Jesus says...

"I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! [16] But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth! [19] I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference.

So using 80 years (2 generations) as a metric, the same timeframe from the rebuilding of the temple to the delivery of these indictments, the United States has had a similar spiritual trajectory. In 1946, church membership was about 76%. Over 90% of Americans identified as Christian and barely 2% claimed no religious affiliation.

In 2026, approximately 30% attend church regularly, but still 62-69% identify as Christian depending on the survey. Those claiming no affiliation has reached 28% in just 2 generations. Among adults under 30, the religiously **unaffiliated** now outnumbers both Protestants and Catholics.

In **Malachi 1:2 NLT**, the Lord says...

"I have always loved you," says the LORD. (These are Words of affirmation before words of discipline) ***But you retort, "Really? How have you loved us?"***

This question indicates **disillusionment** and **cynicism**...or judging God's character by our circumstances. This is a breeding ground for unfaithfulness...an excuse to embrace selfish practices and our **silent unspoken anger at God about unfulfilled expectations can create bitterness and endanger us.** Here is why...

In **Malachi 1:12-13 NLT** He says...

"But you dishonor my name with your actions. By bringing contemptible food, you are saying it's all right to defile the Lord's table. You say, 'It's too hard to serve the LORD,' and you turn up your noses at my commands."

This is not the language of people who know God. Jesus later echoed the same warning to the church at Ephesus: **"You don't love me or each other as you did at first! Turn back to me"** (**Revelation 2:4-5**). As stated previously, Israel had not stopped worshipping; they had stopped worshipping from a heart of love and gratitude. They brought diseased, lame, and stolen offerings — not because they lacked better, but because they had quietly decided **God was not worth their best!**

2. Marriage covenant broken: the indictment

(Malachi 2:11-16)

Verse 11 says...

*“Judah has been **unfaithful**, and a **detestable** thing has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem. The **men of Judah** have **defiled** the **LORD’s** beloved sanctuary by marrying women who worship idols.”*

The men of Judah were divorcing the wives of their youth (*the mothers of their children*) and married exotic foreign women who worshipped other gods, much less restrained in their behaviors. Both the act of **divorce** and the willingness to associate themselves with the worship of **other gods** was startling. (“They all failed ME!”)

The word “**unfaithful**” (*bagad*) carries the idea of treachery — this is not a mindless stumble, but a deliberate betrayal. The “**detestable** thing” (*to’ebah*) is the same word used throughout the OT to describe acts that are incompatible with God’s character... His Holiness. (Sooner a fish live in a tree than a sinner in heaven!)

Verse 12 says...

*“May the **LORD** cut off from the nation of Israel every last man who has done this and yet brings an offering to the **LORD** of Heaven’s Armies.*

The hypocrisy here is so blatant...it was intended to be in God’s face! These men are bringing offerings to the Temple while violating the very covenant the Temple represents. (*Covenantal faithfulness to God and the institution of marriage.*) We must remember God can never be bought off with religious performance.

“**Cut off**“ means that God will humiliate through excommunication those men who think the sins occurring in their homes are unseen and the words spoken in private are not overheard by the Lord.

Malachi 3:16 NLT says...**Then those who feared the LORD spoke with each other, and the LORD listened to what they said.** (God sees our private life)

These men, priests and community leaders alike, had banished their wives, are now **themselves banished** from God’s house. As a byproduct of this discipline they will also take their idol serving wives with them, thus purifying the community.

Verse 13 says...

Here is another thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, weeping and groaning because he pays no attention to your (you or your) offerings and doesn't accept them with pleasure."

These men are genuinely distressed that God seems **absent...silent**. But God is not silent because their tears aren't real, it because but their repentance is not!

In Verse 14-15 he says...

*"You cry out, 'Why doesn't the LORD accept my worship?' I'll tell you why! Because **the LORD witnessed the vows** you and your wife made when you were young. But **you have been unfaithful** to her, though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows. Vs 15. Didn't the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? **Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth.**"*

(Men, fight the cultural objectification of women!)

This betrayal is entirely one-sided by men who were trusted to be protectors and the gatekeepers of the knowledge and wisdom of God. This is not a necessary divorce...a legal divorce, this is the destruction of a home and the lives of women and children for lust and convenience. It was an exploitation of the powerless, and not only are they destroying themselves, they are polluting the sacredness of the priesthood.

Gods idea of marriage is not just a social contract, it is a spiritual covenant with Him that creates godly offspring. Marriage not merely about the welfare of the couple — it is the foundational institution for the formation of the next generation.

Going back to our 80 year, two generation statistical comparison, in 1946 premarital cohabitation was so rare it was unmeasurable: fewer than 0.6% of couples who married in 1946-50 had lived together beforehand.

Eighty years later, the institution has been structurally dismantled.

Metric	1946	2026
Marriage rate (per 1,000)	16.2 — all-time high	6.1 — near all-time low
Premarital cohabitation rate	~0.6%	~76% of marriages
No-fault divorce availability	0 states	All 50 states
First-marriage lifetime divorce	~15-18%	~40-43%
Second-marriage divorce rate	Low	~60%
Third-marriage divorce rate	Very low	~73%
Adults currently unmarried (15+)	~35%	~49%

The men of Judah still brought offerings to the temple the morning after the betrayal. America still calls itself a Christian nation. History reveals that the relaxation of **covenantal marriage** in just 3 consecutive generations preceded the collapse of these nations.

In response to these things, the Lord says in **Verse 16...**

“For I hate divorce!” says the LORD, the God of Israel. “To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. “So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife.”

This is perhaps the most mishandled verse in scripture. God says plainly: **“I hate divorce.”** His meaning in context, is given immediately: because in these specific cases it is a form of cruelty. The word used implies violence — “hamas” in the Hebrew. To divorce a woman was to **clothe her in suffering**, to **drown her in harm**.

This verse has been both *weaponized* by leaders of the church and *suppressed* by progressive American Christianity. It has been used, wrongly, to shame abuse survivors who had no safe option but to leave — *it is a profound misreading, since the text is addressed to the one doing harm, not the one being harmed*. A faithful reading holds both truths: so let’s just honest. God hates divorce because it causes cruelty — which means He equally hates the cruelty (*the emotional abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse*) that in many cases necessitates it. God’s passionate and unapologetic statement here is directed at **men in power exploiting the women who trusted them**. In the passing 2456 years since this book was authored, **God’s heart on the matter has not changed!**

3. Children: the unintended victims

Scripture consistently elevates children as precious...the most precious heritage we can hope for from the Lord! The children are welcomed by Jesus personally and fiercely protected by His sternest warnings against causing them harm.

However, in a our morally declining society the evidence in the demographic data reveals Americans are less interested in raising children than ever in our past 80 year history:

Metric	1946	2026
Total fertility rate	~2.9-3.0 (surging to 3.77 by 1.599 — all-time low 1957)	
Relationship to replacement (2.1)	Well above and rising	24% below - falling
Births per decade	~32 million (1940s)	~36M on larger base
Children in blended households	Rare	~16%
Adults with a step-relative	Rare	~42%
Non-parents who never want children	Negligible	~20-29%
Avg. screen time, children 8-12	0 hours	5+ hours/day

4. What Now?

[However these sociological conditions are not a surprise to the Lord.](#)

The biblical record full of blended family households. **Ishmael** was expelled from Abraham’s home, the son of Hagar, a woman who was “*blended*” in to the household in an attempt to build a family with Sara and Abraham’s own ideas of “*doing God’s will*”. Then when Ishmael was 17, he and his mother were dismissed from the safety and security of the family unit (*she was divorced and abandoned*) abruptly with minimal provisions (**Genesis 21**). But not from God’s sight and provision! He cared for both of them and gave them a future.

Jacob, Abraham's grandson, had 12 sons by 4 women, a blended family who God miraculously used to create the nation of Israel!

God cherishes all children, and He, with unfailing love, tries to help us restore order in our lives when our families experience the pain of divorce and blending remarriages .

But **tragically**, our nations children do carry hidden scars and sufferings not always **evident**. They are silently overwhelmed, overlooked and marginalized in the crisis. They are left to solve the conflicts their parents could not. They experience:

- abandonment terror,
- identity confusion,
- loyalty conflict
- emotional grief

Fortunately, God is good, merciful and forgiving. He *did not destroy Israel or her leaders* — He **disciplined** them, and then He gave them a **promise**: the promise that He would one day indwell them and redirect their lives from the inside out at the advent of the Holy Spirit's indwelling.

Malachi 4:6 says...

"His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse."

In response to this promise, God calls every father and husband to turn:

- Turn — and make time for your children. Commit to know the Lord!
- Turn — and learn to serve as the spiritual leader of your home.
- Turn — and model to your children how to know and love God.
- Turn away — and reject anything or anyone that objectifies or demeans women.

This is how God — Heals a Nation — one family at a time!