

Malachi Lesson 3: Malachi 2:1-9

Lecture

- Malachi 2:1 loses its emphasis in some of our modern English translations.
 - In the NIV, it reads, “And now, you priests, this warning (or admonition) is for you.”
 - The ESV’s translation is closest to the Hebrew. “And now, O priests, this **command** is for you.”
 - Because what is about to be pronounced is a command from God, there can be no mitigation of the punishment.
- Malachi 2:2a appears to be conditional.
 - **If** you do not listen, **and if** you do not resolve to honor my name,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings.
 - However, we see very quickly from verse 2:2b that God has moved past waiting on the unrepentant priests to mend their ways.
 - “Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not resolved to honor me. “
 - There is still time for other priests to repent.
- God outlines the curses that he is bringing on the priests because of their sins:
 - Failing to honor God
 - Failing to follow God’s laws and commandments
 - Failing to honor God’s altar
 - Showing partiality in the matters of the law
 - Leading the people astray, instead of teaching them what the law required

- What are the components of the curses on the priests?
 - Their blessings will be cursed.
 - The Aaronic (priestly) blessing of Numbers 6:24-26 promised that the Israelites would be blessed by God's favor, presence, peace, and care.
 - The Israelites viewed this blessing as sacred, and it was one of the few times in which the name of God was actually said aloud.
 - God's favor included children, good harvests, and safety.
 - If the blessings are cursed, what will the Israelites get? They will suffer the miseries associated with God's absence, disfavor, and neglect.
 - The priests' descendants would be cut off.
 - This is a decimation/infertility curse.
 - God had made a covenant with Levi, through his descendant Phinehas, to establish a perpetual line of priests to serve him in his Tabernacle and later the Temple, to minister to the Israelites, and to bless the people on behalf of God.
 - The office of priest was hereditary. To the Levitical priests, lineage was everything, since only the descendants of Aaron could serve as priests.
 - A loss of descendants meant familial loss as well as a loss of honor and one's personal reputation.
 - Is God cursing all the priests, effectively ending the priesthood?
 - If God wanted to, he could curse all the priests. It is clear from reading the books of Ezra and Nehemiah that some priests repented of their sins. Both Ezra and Nehemiah reformed the priesthood. Nehemiah went further; he drove Joiada, son of Eliashib the high priest, out of Jerusalem, thereby preventing him from serving in the priesthood.

- The priests would be made ritually unclean and removed outside the city.
 - This is a curse of dishonor and degradation.
 - The word used for dung in the Hebrew refers to the contents of the stomachs and intestines of sacrificial animals, which were removed before the animals were burned on the altar.
 - Priests were expected to be cleaner than all other citizens. Their cleanliness marked their service to a holy God.
 - A priest could experience no greater humiliation than to have God throw animal offal at their faces. How would they ever become ritually clean again? They were fit only for the dump heap outside the city.
- Why is God making such a strong point about the priests' sins?
 - Because their sins threaten the existence of the priesthood.
 - Without priests, there can be no sacrifices.
 - Without sacrifices, there can be no atonement for sins.
- Malachi refers to the covenant with Levi, which is outlined in Numbers 25:11-13, which you read in your lesson this week.
 - Jeremiah refers to this covenant in Jeremiah 33:20-22:
 - “This is what the LORD says: ‘If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time,²¹ then my covenant with David my servant—and my covenant with the Levites who are priests ministering before me—can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne.²² I will make the descendants of David my servant and the Levites who minister before me as countless as the stars in the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore.’”

- What were the components of the covenant with Levi?
 - God would grant the priests life and peace.
 - Peace means continued life and protection.
 - Life means the continuation of the priesthood.
 - What did the priests owe God in return?
 - Fear of the Lord. Here, the context is to worship God, obey God, and put nothing else before him.
 - Reverence
 - Honor
- Malachi reminds the priests of his day about what the original priests from the house of Levi did.
 - They feared and honored the name of God.
 - They told the truth.
 - They walked in the path of righteousness, gaining peace with God.
 - The good fruit of their lives turned many away from sin.
- Man breaks God's covenants; God always keeps his covenants.
 - Thus, if the covenant with Levi is to remain intact, then the priests who have been guilty of violating the covenant must repent or be removed from office.

- Jesus warned his disciples about the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.
 - “Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Matthew 16:6
 - “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” Matthew 12:34
 - The teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees were hypocritical and self-righteous. The Pharisees focused on keeping the oral law to the exclusion of leading the people in moral and reverent living.
 - Paul warned that just as a little bit of yeast permeates a whole batch of dough. (Galatians 6:9). It only takes a small amount of bad teaching to ruin an entire community or generation.

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At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD to stand before the LORD to minister to him and to bless in his name, to this day.

Deuteronomy 10:8

1. If the priests failed to listen to God and failed take his rebuke to heart, what would be the result?

“And now, you priests, this warning is for you. ² If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honor my name,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not resolved to honor me. Malachi 2:1-2

2. Read Numbers 6:22-27. What do you learn about the priestly blessings?

- The LORD said to Moses, ²³ “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

²⁴ ““The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵ the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;

²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. ””

²⁷ “So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” Numbers 6:22-27

- The priests were the mediators between God and the Israelites.

3. What would the loss of the priestly blessings mean to the people?

- God would not bless the Israelites with good harvests, peace, children, and his presence.
- God would turn his face away from the Israelites. He would remove his presence.
- God would remove his peace from the Israelites.

4. What is a modern-day counterpart to the priestly blessing of the Old Testament?

The benediction at the end of a church service

5. Why did God say, “Indeed, I have already cursed them?”

The priests had resolved not to honor God.

6. What did the curses laid upon the priests entail, according to verse 3?

Because of you I will rebuke your descendants; I will smear on your faces the dung from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it. Malachi 2:3

7. From verse 3, “I will rebuke your offspring” reads as “I will rebuke your seed” in the Hebrew. How do you interpret the curse of rebuking the priests’ seed?
The priests would have no descendants.
8. What would have normally been done with the dung from a sacrifice, according to Exodus 29:14?
But burn the bull’s flesh and its hide and its intestines outside the camp. Exodus 29:14
9. If dung was spread on the priests’ faces, what would that make the priests?
The priests would be ceremonially unclean.
10. According to verse 4, why has God sent this command?
And you will know that I have sent you this warning so that my covenant with Levi may continue,” says the LORD Almighty. Malachi 2:4
11. Read Genesis 29:31-34, Numbers 25:10-13 and Deuteronomy 10:6-9. Who was Levi and what was the covenant with Levi?
- My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. Malachi 2:5
 - Levi was the 3rd son of Jacob by his wife Leah. (Genesis 29:31-34)
 - The LORD said to Moses, ¹¹ “Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites. Since he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal. ¹² Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. ¹³ He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites.” Numbers 25:10-13
 - (The Israelites traveled from the wells of Bene Jaakan to Moserah. There Aaron died and was buried, and Eleazar his son succeeded him as priest. ⁷ From there they traveled to Gudgodah and on to Jotbathah, a land with streams of water. ⁸ At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name, as they still do today. ⁹ That is why the Levites have no share or inheritance among their fellow Israelites; the LORD is their inheritance, as the LORD your God told them.) Deuteronomy 10:6-9

- The covenant that God made with Levi stated that the descendants of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, a Levite, would have a lasting priesthood. They would carry the ark of the covenant, stand before the Lord to minister, and would pronounce blessings upon in the people in God’s name.

12. According to Leviticus 16:2, why did the high priest have a covenant of fear with God?

The LORD said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover. Leviticus 16:2

13. According to verses 6 and 7, what were the characteristics and duties of the priests?

True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He **walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin.** ⁷ “For the **lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty** and people seek instruction from his mouth. Malachi 2:6-7

14. What sins have the priests committed, according to verse 8?

But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi,” says the LORD Almighty. Malachi 2:8

15. Since the priests have broken their covenant with God, what vengeance will God bring upon the priests?

“So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law.” Malachi 2:9

16. Both Ezra and Nehemiah had to deal with priests who failed to follow God’s commandments. What do you learn from the following passages?

a. Deuteronomy 7:1-14 and Ezra 10:18

- Among the descendants of the priests, the following had married foreign women: From the descendants of Joshua son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib and Gedaliah. Ezra 10:18
- Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, ⁴ for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. Deuteronomy 7:3-4

b. Nehemiah 9:34

Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our ancestors did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the statutes you warned them to keep.

Nehemiah 9:34

c. Nehemiah 13:1-3

On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God,² because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. (Our God, however, turned the curse into a blessing.)³ When the people heard this law, they excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent. Nehemiah 13:1-3

d. Nehemiah 13:4-10

Before this, **Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah,⁵ and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and olive oil prescribed for the Levites, musicians and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests.**⁶ But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission⁷ and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God.⁸ I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room.⁹ I gave orders to purify the rooms, and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense.¹⁰ **I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them,** and that all the Levites and musicians responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields. Nehemiah 13:4-10

e. Nehemiah 13:28

One of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib the high priest was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite. And I drove him away from me. Nehemiah 13:28

17. One of the duties of the priests was making sacrifices. According to Leviticus 5:14-16, what did the sacrifice accomplish?

The LORD said to Moses: ¹⁵ “When anyone is unfaithful to the LORD by sinning unintentionally in regard to any of the LORD’s holy things, they are to bring to the LORD as a penalty a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value in silver, according to the sanctuary shekel. It is a guilt offering. ¹⁶ They must make restitution for what they have failed to do in regard to the holy things, pay an additional penalty of a fifth of its value and give it all to the priest. The priest will make **atonement** for them with the ram as a guilt offering, and they will be forgiven. Leviticus 5:14-16

18. According to Hebrews 8:1-7, Hebrews 9:1-15 and Hebrews 10:1-14, why is there no longer a need for priests to make physical sacrifices?

- Christ atoned for all our sins, (past, present, and future), with his blood on the cross.
- Now the main point of what we are saying is this: **We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.** ³ Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. ⁴ If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵ They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” ⁶ **But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.** ⁷ For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. Hebrews 8:1-7
- Now **the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary.** ² A tabernacle was set up. Hebrews 9:1-2
- When everything had been arranged like this, **the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry.** ⁷ **But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood,** which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. ⁸ The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning. ⁹ This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshipper. ¹⁰ They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings —external regulations applying until the time of the new order. Hebrews 9:6-10

- **But when Christ came as high priest** of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. ¹² **He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.** ¹³ The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. ¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! Hebrews 9:11-14
- **The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.** ² Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. ⁴ It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Hebrews 10:1-4
- **We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.** ¹¹ Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² **But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,** ¹³ **and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.** ¹⁴ **For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.** Hebrews 10:10-14

19. What event happened in 70 AD in Jerusalem? Why was this problematic for Jews but not for Christians?

- In 70 AD, the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans.
- The Jews could no longer offer sacrifices for their sins.
- Christians believe that Christ was the ultimate and final sacrifice for our sins.

Malachi Lesson 3

Malachi 2:1-9

Malachi 2:1

- It loses Its Emphasis in Some English Translations
- NIV: “And Now, You Priests, This **Warning (or Admonition)** Is for You.”
- ESV Is Closest to the Hebrew; “And Now, O Priests, This **Command** Is for You.”
- Because What Follows is God’s Command, There Can Be No Punishment Mitigation

Malachi 2:2a-b

- Malachi 2:2a Appears to Be Conditional:
 - “If You Do Not Listen, And If You Do Not Resolve to Honor My Name, I Will Curse You and Your Blessings”
- However, Verse 2:2b Shows God Has Moved Past Giving the Unrepentant Priests Time to Mend Their Ways
- “Yes, I Have Already Cursed Them”
- Still Time for Other Priests to Repent

Why Are the Priests Cursed?

- Failing to Honor God
- Failing to Follow God's Laws and Commandments
- Failing to Honor God's Altar
- Showing Partiality in the Matters of the Law
- Leading the People Astray, Instead of Teaching Them What the Law Required

The Blessing Will Be Cursed

- Aaronic (Priestly) Blessing of Numbers 6:24-26 Promised That the Israelites Would Be Blessed by God's Favor, Presence, Peace, and Care
- A Sacred Blessing and One of the Few Times the Name of God Was Actually Said Aloud
- God's Favor Included Children, Good Harvests, and Safety
- If the Blessings are Cursed, the Israelites Will Suffer the Miseries Associated with God's Absence, Disfavor, and Neglect

The Priests' Descendants Cut Off

- A Decimation/Infertility Curse
- God Made a Covenant With Levi, Through Phinehas, to Establish a Perpetual Line of Priests
- The Office of Priest Was Hereditary; Lineage Was Everything
- A Loss of Descendants Meant Familial, Honor, and Reputational Loss
- Is God Cursing All the Priests, Thus Ending the Priesthood? He Could.
- From Ezra and Nehemiah, Some Priests Repented of Their Sins; Ezra and Nehemiah Reformed the Priesthood
- Nehemiah Even Drove Joaida, Son of the High Priest, Out of Jerusalem; He Could Not Be a Priest

Make the Priests Ritually Unclean and Remove Them

- A Curse of Dishonor and Degradation
- The Word Used for “Dung” in the Hebrew Refers to the Contents of the Stomachs and the Intestines of Sacrificial Animals; Removed Before the Animals Were Burned on the Altar
- Priests Were Expected to Be Cleaner Than Other Citizens; Cleanliness Marked Their Service to a Holy God
- No Greater Humiliation Than Having God Throw Offal at Their Faces; How Would They Ever Become Ritually Clean Again?
- They Were Fit Only for the Dump Heap Outside the City

What Is God's Point Here?

- The Priests' Sins Threaten the Existence of the Priesthood
- Without Priests, There Can Be No Sacrifices
- Without Sacrifices, There Can Be No Atonement for Sins

The Covenant with Levi

- Numbers 25:11-13
- Jeremiah 33:20-22
- God Would Grant the Priests Life and Peace
 - Peace Means Continued Life and Protection
 - Life Means the Continuation of the Priesthood
- What Did the Priests Owe God in Return?
 - Fear of the Lord: Worship God; Obey God; Put Nothing Else Before Him
 - Reverence
 - Honor

The Covenant with Levi

- Malachi Reminds the Priests of His Day What the Original Priests Did:
 - Feared and Honored the Name of God
 - Told the Truth
 - Walked in the Path of Righteousness, Gaining Peace with God
 - The Good Fruit of Their Lives Turned Many Away from Sin
- Man Breaks God's Covenants; God Always Keeps His Covenants
 - If the Covenant with Levi is to Remain Intact, the Guilty Priests Must Repent or Be Removed from Office

Jesus' Warnings About the Teachings of the Pharisees and the Sadducees

- Matthew 16:6
- Matthew 12:34
- Their Teachings Were Hypocritical and Self-Righteous
- The Pharisees Focused on Keeping the Oral Law to the Exclusion of Leading the People in Moral and Reverent Living
- Paul Said, "A Little Bit of Yeast Permeates the Whole Batch of Dough" (Galatians 6:9)
- It Only Takes a Small Amount of Bad Teaching to Ruin an Entire Community or Generation