

MALACHI: CALL TO OVERCOME SPIRITUAL APATHY

III: Overcoming Unfaithfulness As God's Messenger

(Malachi 2:1-9)

I. Introduction

- A. About 100 years after the Hebrew exiles had returned from Babylon and rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple, their "initial enthusiasm had worn off," with life and worship becoming mere routines. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the Book of Malachi: The Times," p. 1325)
- B. God raised up Malachi to call the people to repentance from spiritual apathy, and Malachi 2:1-9 addressed the issue of unfaithfulness in ministry by God's messengers, the priests. We view the passage for our application:

II. Overcoming Unfaithfulness As God's Messenger, Malachi 2:1-9.

- A. In Malachi 1:6-14, the Lord had addressed the temple priests for disrespecting Him in their ministry functions, so in Malachi 2:1-4, God told the priests to revere Him or face His humiliating removal of them from office:
 - 1. God commanded the priests to honor His name, where God's "name" stands for the Lord Himself, Malachi 2:1-2a; Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament, p. 1579. This honor would be seen in their offering Scripturally qualified animals for their sacrifices instead of defective ones, cf. Malachi 1:6-14.
 - 2. However, if the priests would not heed this order, if they would not apply it in heart, then God would send a curse upon them and curse their "blessings," Malachi 2:2a,b. These "blessings" could be the priests' income from tithes and offerings or the blessings they pronounced on the people (Numbers 6:22-27; *Ibid.*), and the ensuing context indicates that likely *both* kinds of blessings were in view!
 - 3. Actually, due to the hardened hearts of the priests, God's curse was already in effect (Malachi 2:2c).
 - 4. This curse involved several humiliating circumstances for the priests as described in Malachi 2:3-4:
 - a. First, God warned that His rebuke would fall on their descendants, what is here called "seed," *Ibid.*, v. 3a.
 - b. Second, God would figuratively spread the waste matter from the sacrifices on their faces, that just as the priests had offered defective animals to the Lord, He would cause their sacrifices to dishonor them as if ceremonially unclean dung had been spread on the priest's faces from the sacrifices that were meant for festive feasts. There is a play on words here where the verb "spread" from *zarah* is put as a pun for *zera*, "seed," the descendants who would be the object of God's rebuke, *Ibid.*; Malachi 2:3b.
 - c. Third, along with this dishonor of the priests and their offspring before Israel's worshippers, the priests would be taken away along with the unclean dung of the sacrifices, implying that they "would be cast out of service," Malachi 3:3c; *Ibid.* Then "they would realize that the Lord was speaking to them. His purpose in admonishing them was to purify the priesthood so that His covenant with Levi could continue," the covenant of having the tribe of Levi in its Levites and priests serve the Lord in the temple, v. 4; *Ibid.*
- B. In Malachi 2:5-9, God further explained this covenant with Levi, presenting His standard for the priests:
 - 1. The covenant with Levi was one of life, peace, and reverence for the Lord where his descendants were to stand in awe of the Lord's name versus what the priests in Malachi's day did in their ministries, Mal. 2:5.
 - 2. The description of the man who gave true instruction, who walked with the Lord in peace and uprightness, turning many away from iniquity may refer to Phinehas in Numbers 25:10-13 to whom God granted that his offspring would be an everlasting priesthood due to his zeal in slaying idolaters, *Ibid.*, p. 1579-1580.
 - 3. The priests and Levites were to have the law of truth in their mouths, iniquity not being found in their speech, they were to walk with God in peace and uprightness and turn many from iniquity, Mal. 2:6 ESV.
 - 4. God directed that the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, that people might then seek instruction from his mouth because he was the messenger of the Lord of hosts, Malachi 2:7 ESV.
 - 5. However, in Malachi's era, the priests had turned aside from God's ways, causing many to stumble in their walk in sin and by their faulty instruction, corrupting the covenant the Lord had made with Levi, Mal. 2:8.
 - 6. Consequently, God would cause these priests to be despised and abased before all of the people for their failure to keep His ways, and for their showing partiality in matters of God's law, Malachi 2:9 ESV, NIV.

Lesson: *Israel's priests were to function as God's impartial messengers of the truth of His Word to God's people while also demonstrating reverence for the Lord, and peace and righteousness in life and ministry. Failure in these assignments was punishable by God's publicly dishonoring and removing the priests from office.*

Application: *If we messengers of the Lord would desire that He bless us in our ministries, may we revere Him, may we live in peace and righteousness before all, and may we impartially teach His true Word to the people of God.*