

Comments on Malachi 2

1 AND now, O ye priests, this commandment [is] for you. 2 If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay [it] to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay [it] to heart. 3 Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, [even] the dung of your solemn feasts; and [one] shall take you away with it.

4 And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. 5 My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him [for] the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. 6 The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he [is] the messenger of the LORD of hosts. 8 But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. 9 Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.

v1-9 The Lord continues to address the priests (v. 1), maintaining the subject of the previous chapter. If they fail to hear the Lord's admonition and start honoring His name by offering acceptable sacrifices, He will curse them (v. 2). He will cut off their children from the Temple, and desecrate them so that they will be taken out with the rubbish (v. 3). The Lord then contrasts the righteous ancient Levites (v. 4-7) with the corrupt contemporary ones (v. 8-9)

See the general comments on Malachi for a review of the historical context.

V2 "I will curse your blessings", in other words, all of the blessings from the Lord will be replaced by curses.

v3 This verse contains two very specific references to laws concerning the priests. First, the "I will corrupt your seed" is aimed at the lineage-based rights of the priest. If a priest's genealogy was lost or defiled by intermixing they were precluded from service, cf. Ezra 2:61-63. The "spread dung upon your faces" and subsequent reference to being taken out with the trash is a reference to the granting of certain parts of the

sacrificial offering (cf. Deut. 18:3), but the disposal and burning of the entrails and fecal matter (cf. Exod. 29:14, Lev. 4:11, Lev. 8:17, Lev. 16:27, Num. 19:5). The Lord is stating He will take the refuse of the priest's portion, make them equal to it and cast them out along with it. Just as they are giving Him the refuse of the flocks, He is going to make them the refuse.

v4-7 As the Levite's rights to the Priesthood are lineage-based, the Lord is telling them to look back at their righteous fathers who brought about such a covenant, cf. Exod. 32:25-29 and Num. 25:6-13. The Lord is warning them that if they are not like their fathers, then the lineage-based covenant is broken.

v8-9 The contemporary Levites have profaned the Temple by abuse and false teachings which run contrary to the Law. Hence the need to purify them in 3:3.

10 Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers? 11 Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god. 12 The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts.

13 And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth [it] with good will at your hand. 14 Yet ye say, wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet [is] she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. 15 And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. 16 For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away:

v10-16 A new scathing accusation is thrown at the priests, namely that of violating the family (v. 10) by permitting mixed marriages (v. 11-12) and of condoning divorce (v. 13-16). Regarding mixed marriages, cf. Gen. 6:1-2, Exod. 34:16, Deut. 7:3-4. Regarding divorce, priests were to act as legal officiators in domestic matters (cf. Num. 5:15, Deut. 24:1) and therefore bore the responsibility. The preceding verses accused the priests of subverting the Law by introducing false

teachings. We may safely assume whatever justifications for these practices were among them. The doctrine of divorce is subsequently attacked by Jesus, cf. Matt. 19:3-6.

v10 The covenant relationship with the Lord is emphasized here, as well as the Fatherhood of God. All Israel has the same father, and all share the same blessings of Providence due to the covenants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus, the priests are violating this covenant by breaking apart the unity of Israel through non-Israelite marriages and breaking up Israelite families by divorce.

v11 This verse recalls the ancient patriarch Judah and compares him to his contemporary descendants. Judah married a Canaanite woman and had no end of troubles as a result of it, cf. Gen. 38. Bad sons ended up being cursed by the Lord, and he himself getting in trouble with Tamar. The message is "Like father, like son". Just as Judah was cursed as a result of his intermarriage, so will his sons be cursed for acting likewise.

v12 Those who deliberately marry outside the covenant will not enjoy the blessings of the covenant, and therefore will be cut off. The last line in the KJV is obscure. What the verse is saying is "The Lord will cut off the man who divorces his wife such that he will be left with no future posterity and therefore no tents among Jacob and no children to offer sacrifices".

v13-14 Note the reference to a covenant marriage in v. 14 enjoined at the altar in v. 13. The Jews were clearly practicing some form of marriage well beyond the secular.

v13 "And this have ye done again", steps to correct the problems of intermarriage are documented in Ezra 9-10. Thus, the people had been reprov'd and corrected, but shortly thereafter return to their sin again, cp. Nehemiah 13:23-31.

v15 The Hebrew in this verse is problematic. The KJV is obscure. Here is the New American Standard (NAS):

But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then, to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.

The NAS uses the accusatory tone of the passage to develop their reading. Here is the JPS:

Did not the One make [all], so that all remaining
life-breath is His? And what does that One seek but
godly folk? So be careful of your life-breath, and
let no one break faith with the wife of his youth.

The JPS reading follows the theme from v. 10. However, the Hebrew could also be rendered as Henderson does:

Yet did he not make one?
Though he had the residue of spirit;
And why the one?
That he might seek a godly seed;
Therefore take heed to your spirit,
That none act unfaithfully to the wife of his youth.

This reading favors the subject being "and the twain shall be one flesh" of Gen. 2:24.

I would tend to favor the JPS rendering as v. 10 emphasizes the One Father. Thus, the opening and closing argument for this section would be the common spiritual origin Israel shares and the covenant relationship. However, Henderson's reading has definite appeal and would be contextual to the marriage theme.

for [one] covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously. 17 Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, wherein have we wearied [him]? when ye say, Every one that doeth evil [is] good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, where [is] the God of judgment?

v16-17 An accusation leveled at Levites, this time for implying the Lord is unjust in His actions. Compare 3:13-15 for a similar statement in parallel.

The Levites were responsible for singing Psalms at the Temple and in its precincts, and as such should be very familiar with the content of the psalms. This verse contradicts the meaning and intent of Psalm 73, as well as numerous other statements to the contrary in the Psalms (cf. Ps. 18:19-20, 22:8, 37:23, 41:11, 51:6-19).

There are two rhetorical hooks in these verses connecting them to Ps. 73. The first is the "garment of violence" of the

end of v. 15, which connects to Ps. 73:6. The second rhetorical hook is the use of the word "delight" in the verse, as contrasted to how it is used in Ps. 73:25, and elsewhere in the Hebrew bible.

v16 The "violence" in KJV, "wrong" in NAS and "lawlessness" in JPS is the same Hebrew term used in Ps. 73:6, and also Gen. 6:11 and Gen. 6:13.

The priests are violating the marriage covenant, doing harm to the wives, and therefore insulting the Lord. The Hebrew is again problematic, and the KJV is again obscure. The NAS:

"For I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the Lord of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously".

And the JPS:

For I detest divorce--said the Lord, the God of Israel--and covering oneself with lawlessness as with a garment--said the Lord of Hosts. So be careful of your life-breath and do not act treacherously.

This garment of violence/lawlessness/wrong appears to be the antithesis to the 4:2 "healing in the kanaph". Making this assumption, the NAS reading would be better. The garment of violence is apparently a figure of speech in reference to the priests divorcing or permitting divorce and therefore doing violence to the wives.

The imagery is apparently derivative of the Eastern tradition that the husband was a garment to his wife and the wife a garment to her husband. This tradition is documented in Koran Sur. 183, speaking to husbands about wives, "they are your garment, and you are theirs". This symbolism is echoed in Hebrew tradition when the nakedness of the wife is considered the same as the nakedness of the husband, cf. Lev. 18:7-8, Lev. 20:11.

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