

# Malachi Chapter Two (vv.1-9)

## Dispute Two: Disregarding God's Law [vv.1-9]

The second dispute is the longest in the prophecy (1.6-2.9). It specifically concerns the *priesthood* and divides into two distinct sections: **1.** They had **dishonoured** God's name by offering inferior sacrifices (1.6-14). **2.** A warning of judgment for **disregarding** His law (2.1-9). The phrase "my name" is mentioned *eight* times in the section (1.6, 11, 14; 2.2, 5) suggesting a direct link between the appreciation of the greatness of God's Person and the quality of worship and service which is rendered to Him.

Being under Persian rule, the people of Israel were responsible to a Persian *governor* (cf. Nehemiah 5.14). Without a **king**, the *spiritual* leadership of the Jews was invested in the *priesthood* – who had miserably failed. Thus, the question posed in 1.6, "Where is mine honour?" is answered in 2.1-3 – they had failed to give "glory" (the same Hebrew word as "honour", 1.6) to His name. In addition, the question, "Where is my fear?" (1.6) is developed in 2.4-9 in reference to the Levitical priesthood of old (2.5). Clearly, there was great failure in suitable leadership in Malachi's day.

## Future Judgment Assured [vv.1-3]

**v.1:** Though the "priests" (primarily) have been in view since 1.6, the preceding verses have addressed the priesthood as those who were ministers of the altar (activity Godward). In 2.1-9, there is no mention of the altar or sacrifices. God is now speaking to them as leaders amongst the people (activity manward). As such, there is a plain application to overseers of any local assembly as those who hold the responsibility of leadership. David West says, "*The general spiritual tone of the assembly cannot rise above that of its elders.*" In addition, application can be made to the saints in general who, according to the NT, constitute a spiritual priesthood (1 Peter 2.5, 9). "This commandment" refers, primarily, to the 'instruction' (warning) in the following two verses to turn from evil and give glory to God.

**v.2:** The priesthood had failed to "give glory" to the name of Jehovah, that is, to exalt and magnify His person by their teaching and actions (behaviour) before the people. This is the desire of God for all those in the place of testimony. Today, the name of God is fully expressed in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, our lives should be carefully calculated to honour and exalt His name. He must be the *centre* of our gatherings, the *subject* of our preaching and the *pattern* of our walk. Despite their failure, terms of repentance were offered, though termed in a *negative* way as God knew the offer of His grace would be spurned. There is always a way back to the blessing and favour of God for the repentant sinner or saint. The priesthood was responsible to "hear", in the sense of *obey*, and "lay to heart" the admonition of the Lord. They must feel the weight of the message on their hearts and sincerely resolve to change their ways (cp. Psa. 119.11; Daniel 1.8). This was a matter of the will. "*It is not enough for the Christian to hear the voice of God through the word of God or to listen to ministry. One must lay it to heart and give glory to His name by living it out in one's life*" (Philip Harding). Failure to repent would invoke the "curse" of God and banish His blessings. Given similar language in Deuteronomy 28.15-68, this likely refers to the various curses of the law reserved for disobedience. In addition to the corporate blessings of the nation, such as rain, abundant crops, peace, and health (cf. Haggai 1.6), there were the blessings *enjoyed* and *pronounced* by the priesthood (read Numbers 6.24-26). All these blessings would be rendered *futile* or *ineffective*. Their lives, instead, would be plagued by misery and trouble (Amos 8.10). In addition, God would render them unfit for the ministry or even removed from office (cf. v.9). Indeed, God had already begun to do this for He knew the priests would not repent of their sin. The challenge is patent. Sin, and failure in leadership, worship or devotion, obstructs the blessing of God. Even in the day of grace, disobedience to the word of God places a believer under the chastisement of the Father (Hebrews 12.5-11). We damage ourselves when we fail to honour God in our lives.

**v.3:** The construction of "Behold, I will" describes an event as occurring with such certainty that it may be considered 'on the way', hence "I am about to" (NET). Thus, the immediate result of the curse would be *threefold*. **1.** "I will corrupt your seed" (which could refer to seed sown in the fields, i.e. crop failure) or "rebuke your offspring" (ESV, cf. 2.15). To 'corrupt' or 'rebuke' means to change, stop or replace. Since the message is primarily addressed to the priests, the likely meaning is the removal of the family line from the place of privilege as priests (as in the days of Eli). **2.** "Spread dung (excrement) upon your faces" refers to the entrails and internal waste of a sacrificial animal which was normally carried outside the camp and burned. Instead, this would be wiped on their faces, rendering them unfit for the camp, let alone the presence of God. Any "dung" would be more plentiful during the three great annual feasts. Note "your (not the LORD's) solemn feasts". **3.** The priests would also be 'taken away' and be removed from priestly duties in disgrace – having the status of dung themselves!

### Features of the Ideal Priest [vv.4-7]

**v.4:** Having warned the priesthood of their failure, God refers to the *original* Levitical covenant. He viewed their defection in the light of their original calling and behaviour. How do we stand in the light of the original calling and behaviour of the church in Acts and the Epistles? One reason for such judgment upon the priests was so they would realise (by experience) the LORD had spoken and repent! Though the present generation of priests had been rejected, God had not forgotten His “covenant” made with *Aaron* (the descendant of Levi) and his grandson *Phinehas* (Exodus 28-30; Numbers 18.1-7; 25.10-13; Nehemiah 13.29; Jeremiah 33.21-22). The present priesthood would be purged, and the covenant would ‘continue’.

**v.5:** The covenant was designed to produce “life” and “peace”. If the priesthood was serving faithfully as it should, the whole community enjoyed fulness of *life* (divine blessing) and *peace* – a sense of welfare in their relationship with God. It was the realisation of the Aaronic blessing of *Numbers 6.24-26*: “*The LORD bless you and protect you; The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*”

Malachi now describes the **features** of the ideal priest as exemplified in Levi – the representative head of his descendants. Do not miss the beautiful portrait they also paint of Christ, the Great High Priest.

- **Intimacy.** “He feared me” indicating a healthy *reverence* for God that shrinks from *dishonouring* or *displeasing* Him. Such conduct was well illustrated in the tribe of Levi at *Sinai* (Exodus 32) and *Phinehas* at *Baal Peor* (Numbers 25). He hated the *idolatry* and *defilement* that entered the camp through the fornication of the people with the daughters of Moab. “Afraid before my name” describes one standing in *awe* of the *presence* and *person* of Jehovah.
- **Integrity.** “The law of truth was in his mouth” (**v.6**). He spoke and taught the truth. For the ideal priest, the word of God is law. Negatively, “iniquity” (injustice *or* unrighteousness), anything that did not conform to the word of God, was “not found in his lips”. Indeed, “he walked with me” – enjoying close communion with God – in “peace” (harmony with the will of God) and “equity” (upright, moral integrity). The suggestion is a priest that not only *talks* but *walks* the truth! He is irreproachable in *lip* and *life*.
- **Influence.** The ministry of this priest had results. Many people were turned (signifies *repentance*) “away from *iniquity*” by the clear teaching of the law’s truth (Leviticus 10.11). Spiritual leaders should impact the saints for good.
- **Instruction.** The priest’s “lips should *keep* knowledge” (**v.7**) suggesting they preserve and guard the truth by studying and teaching it to others (cf. 2 Timothy 2.2). There is no place for an ignorant priest! The people will “seek the law at his mouth”, eager for *enlightenment* and *instruction* (Haggai 2.11). After all, the priest was the “messenger” of the “LORD of hosts” – an agent of divine revelation, not only by his teaching of the law, but also his communication of the divine will. This is the *second* messenger in Malachi, with two others to follow (cf. 1.1; 3.1).

### Failure of the Priesthood [vv.8-9]

**v.8:** “But” introduces the sad reality of the priesthood of Malachi’s day. They stand in sharp contrast to the Levitical ideal. They had “departed out of the way”, literally ‘turned aside’ (erred) from the straight “way” (path) of the word of God. They had purposely abandoned the word of God and taught what their audience wanted to hear. This had “caused many to stumble at the law” because of its misinterpretation by the priests. Their deficient teaching and instructions had caused many to *stumble* into sin and *falter* (fail) in their life of obedience. After all, they had encouraged *deficient* worship and even *divorce* (2.16). All this had “corrupted” (ruined) the Levitical covenant, being so damaged as to render it useless (inoperative). **v.9:** They had also been “partial in (administering) the law” giving different judgements for different people according to their wealth or status (cf. James. 2.1-7). They were therefore guilty of *prejudice* and *respect of persons*. The section closes with another resounding condemnation. God had already punished the priests for their breach of the covenant by making them “contemptible” (*despised*, as Isaiah 53.3) and “base” (to be ‘brought low’) before all the people who no longer had any respect for the priesthood – all knew they were *corrupt* pleasers of men rather than *holy* servants of God. They had dishonoured God in their ministry; now He would dishonour them. This is a plain example of the principle of sowing and reaping. Let us be careful to honour and glorify God in all things.