

Malachi Chapter Two (vv.10-16)

Dispute Three: Disregarding God's Covenant [vv.10-16]

The *third* dispute of Malachi brings the charge of 'treachery' (x5) against the people of God. The word means 'unfaithfulness' or 'deceit' in relation to a *person* (betrayal of trust) or *standard* (betrayal of truth). As to **truth** the people had "profaned" the covenant by intermarrying with pagan women (vv.10-12). As to **trust**, they had been unfaithful to their wives and the covenant of marriage by 'putting them away' (vv.13-16).

The attraction of pagan women was not a new problem in Israel. When they left Egypt, they did so as a 'mixed multitude' suggesting some had married Egyptian spouses (Exodus 12.38; Leviticus 24.10). Again, Balaam brought divine judgment on the nation by inciting illicit relations with the women of Moab at *Baal Peor* (Numbers 25). Ezra and Nehemiah had to contend with the same problem (Ezra 9.1-4; Nehemiah 13.23-31). "*Israel had been affected by the standards of the pagan nations around them, and thus forgotten the claims of the Holy One who dwelt in their midst*".

Sin of Unequal Yoke [vv.10-12]

v.10: The opening statement of the verse is best taken as a rhetorical question posed by Malachi, "Do we not all have one Father?" As in 1.6, the *national* fatherhood of God is in view – in *love* He had formed them into one *family*. In addition, "one God" (El) had "created" them – with *sovereignty* He had formed them into one *nation* (at Sinai). Thus, the people of Israel all belonged to one God and were bound together by common relationships and blessings. They should, therefore, have looked on the welfare and interests of one another (cf. Ephesians 4.25). But instead, they had dealt "treacherously". As noted above, the word is used *five* times in this section (vv.10, 11, 14, 15, 16) and means to deal *deceitfully* or *unfaithfully* in a variety of personal relationships including marriage. Every instance of intermarriage with a pagan woman (cf. v.11) was an act of treachery against their wives as well as the **unity** of the family (community) of Israel. On a wider scale, the 'treacherous' behaviour may embrace oppression of the poor, widows and fatherless (3.5). In summary, the 'private' lives of these people had impacted national unity. Likewise, the private life of every believer impacts the public life, unity and testimony of the assembly. A little leaven will develop to infect the whole lump, whether morally or doctrinally (cf. 1 Corinthians 5.6; Galatians 5.9). This treachery was a wilful disregard of the holy covenant made with Israel at Sinai (Exodus 24.8; Jeremiah 31.32; 34.13). They treated the word of God as *common* or *ordinary* by breaking the commandments through intermarriage with pagan women, something expressly forbidden by the Law (Exodus 34.16; Deuteronomy 7.3-4).

v.11: The charge of unfaithfulness is *repeated* and *specified* as having "married the daughter of a strange god". The Law did not allow for Jews to marry Gentiles unless they had first converted to the God of Israel, as in the cases of Rahab (Canaanite) and Ruth (Moabite), who *renounced* (rather than *retained*) their idols. Pagan women were committed worshippers of 'foreign' (strange) and false gods – and thus considered the idol's offspring (daughter). These marriages were therefore exposing the community of Israel to idolatry. For believers, Scripture forbids marrying an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7.39; 2 Corinthians 6.14). The language of 'unequal yoke' has nothing to do with *inequality* or *inferiority*. Rather, the concept comes from Deuteronomy 22.10 where the people of God were told not to plough with an *ox* (clean) and an *ass* (unclean) together. The different nature, size and temperament of these animals made them *incompatible* and *uncooperative* for ploughing. Thus, a believer who is coupled (through marriage) to an unbeliever will find they have incompatible *desires*, *aspirations* and *priorities*. They cannot walk through life in harmony one with the other. David West notes, "A yoke is a very powerful influence; human nature being what it is, it is almost certain that the controlling influence of the unbeliever will take precedence." Not only must a believer not marry an unbeliever, neither must they marry any believer! Paul counsels to "marry in the Lord", that is, subject to the Lord's will and direction. To marry outside this sphere is to compromise the *unity* (v.10) and *purity* (v.11) of the people of God.

The charge of treachery is applied to "Judah", "Israel" and "Jerusalem" – all of which are figures of speech for the people in these regions who had sinned. *Israel* refers to the whole nation (of which the returned remnant was representative), indicating the widespread nature of the problem. The focus on *Judah* and *Jerusalem* suggests the problem ran deep into the centre of the *religious* and *political* community. The word "abomination" is a term reserved for the worst of evils such as *witchcraft* or *idolatry* and describes something *loathsome* to God. These marriages had exposed them to idolatry and "profaned the holiness (*qōdeš*) of the LORD". The usual reference of *qōdeš* is the *temple*, but here likely denotes the *whole nation* – the people of God were His sanctuary, those amongst whom He desired to dwell (cf. 1 Corinthians 3.16-17). But their pagan intermarriage had compromised the holiness (separation) of the nation. A nation that was once "holiness unto the LORD" (Jeremiah 2.3) was reversing their original sanctification.

v.12: This verse seems to be a parenthesis which expresses the desire of Malachi for God to judge the guilty, “May the LORD cut off...” (NET). The verb “cut off” can refer to *execution* (death) at the hand of God, or *excommunication* (exclusion) from the covenant community of Israel – being ‘cut out’ of the covenant blessings (cf. Leviticus 7.20). The phrase “master and scholar” is literally ‘*him that wakes and him that answers*’ and could refer to “*watchmen in the camps, watchmen at either end of the settlement, one calling out and the other answering*. In any case, it is a figure to express the totality of the people (a merism), meaning everyone, from one extreme to the other (opposite).” No guilty party would escape this judgment even if they appeared devout in worship and brought an “offering” (sacrifice) to the LORD. Such hypocritical behaviour, whilst maintaining idolatrous associations, would not be acceptable.

Sin of Unlawful Divorce [vv.13-16]

v.13: A second related sin (offence) was uncovered by the prophet – they had divorced their Jewish wives. It seems they were wondering why the Lord’s hand of blessing had been withdrawn. They had “covered the altar of the LORD” with “tears” because He no longer *accepted* or *received* their offerings. The accompanying cries (prayers) for help remained unanswered, and it appears they were suffering from drought and crop failure (cp. 3.10-12; Haggai 1.10-11; 2.17). Yet these tears were the false tears of *hypocrisy not repentance* – an attempt to court God’s favour by audible “weeping” and “crying out” (groaning) rather than forsaking their sinful ways. It is possible to keep up an act or form of religion whilst living a life of sin. “*Our prayers [do not] go up to God unqualified and unchecked. We pray for something, but our sins cry out for something else, and the prayer is hindered*” (AP Ross), cf. 1 Peter 3.7.

v.14: “Wherefore?” or ‘For what reason?’ once more records the defiance of the people in justifying their sinful behaviour. This further act of ‘treachery’ against their Jewish wives was a *betrayal* of:

- **Presence** of God. The “LORD hath been witness” – observing not only the vile treatment of their wives but also their very marriage vows (Matthew 19.6). To divorce was therefore an insult to the face of God. The “wife of thy youth” implies they had been married at a young age and were now older in years.
- **Partnership.** “She is thy companion” – from a verb meaning ‘to unite’. A related word was used in architecture to describe a *seam* or *joint* in a building. Thus, there was a close bond (relationship) between them.
- **Promise.** She is the “wife of thy covenant”. Marriage is not a *contract* with non-compliance clauses and the right of cancellation! It is a legally binding *covenant* in which the parties obligate themselves to an *unalterable* and *permanent* relationship for life. Promises of *fidelity* and *loyalty* create an inseparable bond except by death (Romans 7.1-3). The ‘twain’ become ‘one flesh’, an illustration of the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5.22-33). If one flesh can be separated, so can Christ (the Head) and the church(His body). John Riddle affirms, “*The indissolubility of marriage in the sight of God is emphasised by the fact it is a picture of the relationship between God and His people in OT (Jeremiah 3.14) and Christ and the church in NT (Ephesians 5).*”

v.15: In a very difficult verse to interpret, Gleason Archer translates, “*But no one has done so who has a residue of the Spirit. And what does that one seek for? A godly offspring!*” That is, any who were even the least bit spiritual amongst the remnant (or led by the Spirit) had not done such a thing because they sought a godly offspring. However, the typical approach is to see “did not he make one” as a reference to the ‘one flesh’ relationship in the original institution of marriage (Genesis 2.23-24). The “residue” (remainder) of the “spirit” could refer to breath (wind) or the Spirit of God. If breath is in view, it may refer to the single ‘breath of life’ with which God made Adam a living soul (Genesis 2.7). Though breath remained, God did not create Eve in the same way. As husband and wife, they became one flesh, both enjoying one common breathing. Alternatively, the ‘remnant of the Spirit’ could refer to the remnant people that had returned from captivity in Babylon – God had preserved them for the grand purpose of bringing forth a “godly seed”. Any children resulting from mixed marriages would be idolaters rather than devoted worshippers of God! If, however, both parents were devout believers and faithful to the LORD, their children would likely be the same (cf. Nehemiah 13.24). The spiritual welfare of these children was at stake. What example do we set our children? In addition, mixed marriages would contaminate the preservation of the royal line which would ultimately produce the promised Messiah. Therefore, they must “take heed” in spirit – a call for constant vigilance and concern, like a night watchman, alert to protect the sanctity of their marriages from any treachery. **v.16:** For the LORD God (*Elohim* – plural, creator God) “hateth putting away” – He has a total abhorrence of ‘sending away’ or ‘dismissing’ out of the house – a *figurative* description of divorce. After all, Jehovah is a *covenant-keeping*, not a *covenant-breaking* God! In Jewish culture, to put a garment over a woman meant to claim her as wife and symbolised love, trust and protection (Ruth 3.9; Ezekiel 16.8). In contrast, for a man to send his wife away was to “cover” her with “violence”.