

MALACHI

MINOR PROPHETS SERIES

God Rebukes the Priests 2:1-9

God had asserted that the priests did not honour him because they made sacrifices which were blind, lame, and sick. The priests protested, but clearly did not show the honour and respect they would even give to an earthly leader. In chapter 2, the primary focus of priestly failure is shifted from their sacrifices to their teaching.

God gives what he calls a “*commandment*” to the priests in 2:1. This is really a pronouncement of judgment if they do not listen and change their ways. If they continue in their dishonourable ways they would receive a “*curse*.” The charge is for the priests to “*take it to heart*.” This was a call for them to seriously consider their actions and attitudes.

The only way the priests could fulfil the commandment and avoid the curse was to humble themselves and do right. In Hebrew the heart was the command centre of a person's life, the place where “knowledge is collected and considered and where decisions and plans are made that determine the direction of one's life.”¹ In both the Old and New Testaments the heart is primarily where the mental processes took place, but also contained both the emotions and the will. In modern English we typically only think of the heart as the seat of emotion.



1. What is the relationship between one's mind, emotions, and will?

The curse that is to come (and is already present) will be upon the priests and upon their “*blessings*.” If they were unable to pronounce blessings on the people their work would be completely ineffective. “Those under God's curse can hardly pronounce divine blessings on others. Blessing was the business of priests. The priestly blessing promised God's presence and peace (Numbers 6:23-27) as well as material prosperity (Deut 28:3-6). Yahweh, however, is sovereign over blessings and curses. The priests' blessings were not magical formulas that guaranteed well-being. That greedy priests and worshipers should receive an economic blow is altogether appropriate.”²

Verse 3 records three aspects of the curse upon the priests:

- I. God would rebuke their offspring (or seed.) The word rebuke means to restrain or eliminate. The word used for offspring can be literally translated “seed” and could refer to

¹ Constable, Thomas L. *Notes on Malachi*. Sonic Light, 2015. p. 23.

² Smith, James E. *Postexilic Prophets*. Lulu, 2007, p. 290-291.

the seed needed to father children or to the seeds needed to grow crops. Either of these diminished seeds would be tragic and costly.

2. God would spread dung on their faces. This figurative curse paints a vivid and disgusting picture of the “undigested food and stomach juices in the sacrificial animal” being spread on the faces of the priests. The priests at the Jewish feasts would be regaled in the finest of dress and were to be ceremonially clean. This curse depicts them as unclean and appearing before the people in the most unclean and repulsive way imaginable.
3. The priests would be taken away. Exodus 29:14 along with other Old Testament passages say that the dung of the sacrificial animals was to be taken outside the camp and burned. The priests bearing the animal dung on their faces would be carried outside the camp to be discarded. They no longer were fit to serve as Yahweh’s priests. The death penalty was what they deserved.

When the curses begin to take effect the priests will “*know*” the source and cause of their distress. These wicked priests will be punished and removed, but the priesthood of Levi would be preserved and the priesthood purified. The ideal priesthood of Levi and what God expected from the priests is explained in verses 5-7.

2. Define the word “covenant” as it is used in Scripture.

3. According to verse 5, what did Levi gain from his covenant with Yahweh?

4. According to verse 5, what did Levi give to Yahweh because of the covenant?

The proper priestly response to God will always be one of humble service and reverence. The early priests took the covenant seriously and served in a way that honoured and pleased God. The priests in the days of Malachi had forgotten the privileges and demands of the covenant.

Verses 6-7 provide greater detail of what is expected from a faithful priest while verses 8-9 outline some of the failings of the priests in Malachi’s day.

Early Levitical Priests 2:6-7	Priests in the days of Malachi 2:8-9
True and faithful teaching and the absence of falsehood	Turned aside from the way (The way of covenant truth and holiness)
A peaceful and obedient lifestyle	Their instruction caused many to stumble
Guided the people away from sin	Corrupted the covenant
Knowledgeable in God’s Word and godly living	Did not keep God’s ways
People confidently approach the priest as a teacher of God’s Word and Law	Showed partiality in their judgments
Recognised by the people as a messenger of Yahweh	

5. Why does Scripture place such a great emphasis on truth?

6. How was Levi able to turn back people from iniquity? (2:6)

| *Truth* |

7. How does incorrect teaching cause others to stumble?

Ezra 2:36-58 tells us that 4,289 priests, 341 Levites, and 392 temple servants returned to Judea in 538 BC and there is nothing to suggest that these priests were not faithful, but by the time of Malachi the priesthood had declined significantly. This is not to say there were not any faithful priests, but they were in the minority.³

The priests God addresses in Malachi had chosen to dishonour him, neglect and distort the truth, and lead people away from the covenant relationship. Their teaching had actually moved people farther from God and caused them to stumble in sin. When a teacher abandons and distorts truth his hearers are harmed. Because of the priest's misconduct they would now suffer the consequences of being despised and abased before the people.

The New Testament teaches that all Christians are priests (1 Pet 2:5-9) and all Christians are expected to live holy and upright lives while believing and professing the truth. Still, those who teach God's Word have a weighty responsibility and face a harsher judgment (James 3:1). The wicked priests in the days of Malachi stand as examples of those who thought so little of God that they did not offer acceptable sacrifices and lived and taught falsehood. The God of all Creation demands and deserves the honour and respect due him.



8. What are some of the ways Christian teachers today lead others to stumble through their actions and teaching?

9. What might God tell us that we need to “take to heart” in our actions and in our relationship with him?

³ Ibid. p. 299.