

MALACHI

MINOR PROPHETS SERIES

The Priests' Polluted Offerings 1:6-14

In the opening verses of Malachi, God described his love for Israel even though Israel denied that he loved them. Now God, through Malachi, focus his charges on the priests.

Here we find the second disputation that Malachi records against Israel. This assertion comes in multiple parts and describes how the priests claim to honour God, but do not.

Disputation #2

Assertion: God says: *"A son is honoured by his father, and a servant my his master. They claim that God is their father and master yet they do no honour or fear him. Instead they despise God's name."*

Objection by Israel: *"How have we despised your name?"*

God's Response: *"By offering polluted food upon the altar."*

Israel's Second Objection: *"How have we polluted you?"*

God's Second Response: *"By saying the Lord's table may be despised by offering blind, lame, and sick animals in sacrifice."*

The old adage that actions speak louder than words is displayed in stunning detail as God interacts with Israel. In Israel's mind they had done what God had demanded, but God sees Israel's priests as men who go through the motions while offering unsuitable and inadequate sacrifices. The most important duty of the priests was to offer sacrifices, but these priests provided inadequate sacrifices. Their actions and attitudes showed contempt for God. Yahweh was not honoured like a father and was not feared like a master. They were indifferent to God and ignored him in their priestly activities.

1. What two observations from daily life in 1:6 did God use to demonstrate that he deserved the honour of Israel?

2. Why did Israel deny despising God's name?



Throughout the book of Malachi the “messenger formula” is employed where the Old Testament prophet attests that these are the words of Yahweh. The phrase: “*says the Lord of hosts*” is used in 1:8, 9, 10. It is important for Malachi to convey to the priests that these are God’s words not his words.

Through Malachi, Yahweh addressed these words to the Israelite priests who God says, “despise my name.” The Hebrew participle used in this phrase denotes continuous manifestation of disrespect, a state of mind, and a characteristic trait. These religious leaders continuously mocked God and sneered at his name and will.¹ When confronted with their shameful attitudes, the priests denied that they had acted with dishonour to God.

3. From 1:7-8 describe the sacrifices made to God by the priests?

4. Read Leviticus 22:17-22. How were the priests violating these commandments concerning sacrifices?

5. Why does God call the sacrifices “evil?”

In 1:8 Malachi asks a rhetorical question about offering blind and sick animals to the governor. If these offerings are not good enough for an earthly leader how can they expect God to accept them? They should not expect God’s favour with such unsuitable and unacceptable offerings. Malachi repeats the rhetorical question in a slightly different way in verse 9, but the idea is the same. They should not expect God’s blessing when he has been treated with contempt. He will not hear and answer their prayers.

In verse 10 we have an amazing comment from God. He would rather see the temple doors shut and the offerings cease than to have them continue in such a disrespectful fashion. It would be better not to have sacrifices than to have corrupted ones. This is reminiscent of the words to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3 where the church is rebuked for being neither hot nor cold. God cannot tolerate a lukewarm or half-hearted effort from those who claim to honour and worship him. God desires the hearts of worshippers and is not pleased with second rate offerings made because of obligation or tradition.

6. In what ways can Christians today make unacceptable sacrifices to God?

Verse 11 is a prophecy of a future time when the Gentiles (the nations) would honour God’s name. “*From the rising of the sun to its setting*” reflects the universal nature of God’s future people who will encompass the globe. These people of God will offer pure and unpolluted sacrifices to God. The offerings of intense may refer to the prayers of the saints (see Rev. 8:3-4) and the pure offering is seen in Heb. 13:15-16 (a sacrifice of praise to God and the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.)”



¹ Smith, James E. *Postexilic Prophets*. Lulu, 2007, p. 279.

“Under the Mosaic system any offering made apart from the temple was illegal and unclean. Yet this prophecy announces that all over the world such sacrifice will be offered by sincere worshipers. Furthermore, they will be accepted by a holy God. The implication is that the Mosaic system was to be replaced by a new worship system. In that day Gentiles were to be included among the people of God.”²



In the future God will be honoured among the nations, but in the present the Israelite priests persisted in profaning the Lord's name by saying that his table is polluted and its fruit can be despised. The very place where they made offering and sacrifice to God was viewed with utmost disregard.

Furthermore even this incredibly poor and dishonourable effort on the part of the priests wearied them. Whereas worship and sacrifice should be joyous, it had become boring drudgery. They “snorted” at the sacrifice as something they despised. The New English Translation renders “snorted” as “You turn up your nose at it.”

7. What is meant by the English phrase, “to turn up the nose?” How were the Israelite priests displaying this type of attitude?

The sacrificial animals they brought were injured, or lame, or sick. These were animals unfit even to be used in an ordinary family meal. So God again asks a rhetorical question: “*Shall I accept that from your hand?*” The answer is a clear and resounding No!

In verse 14 the people were following the poor example and insincerity of the priests. Here a man had vowed to sacrifice a certain animal (which he had available), but instead takes an inferior one and offers it to the Lord. This person is called a “cheat.” He is dishonest in his dealings with God.



The one who cheated God has a curse pronounced against him. The exact nature of the curse is not specified. God expects the best man has to offer for he is the great King, the Lord of hosts, and his name will be feared among the nations.

8. What have Christians promised to God? How can we “cheat” him out of what is rightfully his?

9. What word does God use to refer to himself in 1:5, 11, 14 and how does this reflect on how he should be honoured?

10. How many times does God call himself “the Lord of hosts” in Malachi 1? (The Lord of hosts recognises Yahweh’s power in heaven and earth over all creatures.) Why is this phrase repeated so frequently?

² Ibid. p. 285.

The God of Creation expects his people to worship him in the ways he has prescribed and with attitudes and hearts that love and serve him without reservation. He deserves and expects the best from his people. God does not accept unfit sacrifices and worship offered half-heartedly or merely from obligation.

I I. What can we do to avoid developing a faith that keeps our best from God and which serves and obeys from obligation and tradition rather than love?