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**C1401 – January 8, 2014 – Malachi 1:6-2:9**  
**God's Fatherhood Of Israel**

Over a month ago we started the verse by verse of the prophet Malachi, the last revelation of the OT before God went silent for over 400 years. He was a contemporary of Nehemiah and probably ministered during Nehemiah's absence from Jerusalem after his first governorship sometime around 430BC. Strikingly, both men address the same concerns; namely, priestly laxity, failure to pay the Temple taxes and intermarriage with foreigners. Malachi addresses the returnees in six question/answer dialogues that give us the structure of the book. Each of the six dialogues involves the same three elements with some diversity in the flow of dialogue; first, God will make a statement of a truth, second, Israel will question the stated truth and third, God will give a proof of the truth. The question/answer dialogue format is designed to stimulate conviction of sin so that Israel will confess and be restored to fellowship so God can restore them to covenant blessing.

We know from 1:1 that the message is an "oracle" and since the Hebrew for "oracle" is *massa* meaning "a heavy burden" then the message of Malachi is a heavy burden. This establishes in general the content of the book as bad news. In general both the leadership and the people were in covenant violation of the terms of the Mosaic covenant given at Mt Sinai, and therefore they were experiencing the curses outlined in Lev 26 and Deut 28. They needed to be convicted of their sinful violations so that they could confess their sin and be restored to covenant blessing. The six dialogues are designed to accomplish that response. The six question/argument dialogues establish the specifics of the bad news.

In the first dialogue outlined in vv 2-5 the root sin is revealed to be a questioning of God's love for them. God states the truth that "I have loved you," but they said, "How have You loved us?" They doubted God's love for

them. This is always the chief issue. If you doubt God's love for you then how can you love Him? This is the issue at the heart of the so-called problem of evil. A creature questions whether God really loves him because of some suffering situation that God has allowed into his life. And if God really loved me then why would he allow this suffering? Embedded in the heart of the person is the hidden assumption that it's God's fault. Now at this point at least the person is admitting that God is sovereign. He recognizes that God controls history and therefore if some suffering comes into my life then God is sovereign over that suffering. However, to assign God as the cause of the suffering in an ultimate sense is always wrong because suffering is a consequence ultimately of human sin. So the fault ultimately lies with man and not with God, though God is sovereign over it in the sense of His allowance of it and His limitation of it. But in that situation the person cannot love God, not because God doesn't love him but because he perceives things wrongly by putting the fault on God and not himself as a member of the sinful human race. But in any case we have to be restored to an acceptance that our perception is wrong and God does love us. We love because He first loved us. When God gave the law the first commandment begins with a statement of how God loved them. The first commandment does *not* begin with the statement "You shall have no other gods before Me." It begins with the statement "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." God demonstrated His love for them by bringing them out of Egypt at the Exodus and setting them free from slavery. In return they were to love Him. At the very heart of the Mosaic law is love for God. In the NT, when Jesus was asked by the lawyer what is the great commandment of the Law how did Jesus answer? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. The whole Mosaic law depended upon it. And if you fulfilled that one law then you fulfilled all the law! And so here in verse 2 you see there is a serious situation because they are questioning God's love for them, which is the very basis for their loving Him.

Now the LORD sets forth to prove that He had loved them by asking in verse 2, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" And of course he was; the two were twins, both conceived in the same womb of the same woman by the same man. And yet the LORD made a distinction. He says, "Yet I have loved Jacob" but in verse 3, "I have hated Esau." These words trouble many Christians both here and where Paul quotes them in Romans 9. What the words essentially mean

is that the LORD covenanted with Jacob but not with Esau. The OT clearly states that the LORD chose Israel to be His own possession out of all the people who are on the face of the earth. The NT affirms multiple times that the sons of Jacob alone had the adoption, the glory, the covenants the Law, the temple service and the promises. No other nation on earth was chosen by God to be His covenant people. So then “Jacob I loved” means that the LORD put His affectionate love on Jacob that resulted in His choosing to shower blessings upon him by entering a covenant with him. This locked the LORD into blessing this people in a particular land. On the other hand, the LORD hated Esau and this means that the LORD did not put His affectionate love on Esau that would result in choosing to enter a covenant with him and bless him in a land. This becomes interesting because Herod the Great in the pages of the NT was a descendent of Esau, in the Greek referred to as an Edomite and he was not well-liked by the Jews even though he married a Jewess named Mariamne who was of the Hasmonean dynasty, but he disposed of her quickly as he did so many people when he suspected they were deceiving him. So this people of Esau gives rise to Herod the Great and that dynasty of rulers over Judea in the NT. God hated them in the sense that He did not have a covenant with them that secured a land destiny for them. This is proven by verse 3 that the land Esau did have before the Babylonian invasion was made a mountainous desolation in the wake of the destruction and the Lord appointed it for the jackals of the wilderness. God had no covenant with Esau that obligated Him to restore them to their land. Even though in verse 4 Edom says we have been beaten down by the Babylonians but we will return and build up the ruins. But the Lord says, “They may build, but I will tear down.” In other words, the LORD would frustrate their attempts to rebuild. He had no covenant with them, no covenant obligation and therefore, Edom’s time on the world stage had come to an end, their land would remain a perpetual desolation. In verse 5, the Israelites would see the Edomites try to rebuild their ruins and they would see the LORD frustrate all their attempts and this was proof that the LORD was at work beyond the border of Israel, indeed that He was sovereign over all the earth and not just the earth of Israel. At the same time they too had been beaten down by the Babylonians but they were enabled by the LORD to return, to rebuild the Temple and to complete the walls of the city Jerusalem. This proved that the LORD was working to fulfill His covenant destiny with them and their time on the world stage was not yet over.

Therefore, seeing the difference between how the LORD acted toward the twin brothers, when asked after this dialogue, “Has the LORD loved Jacob?” The unavoidable answer is, “Yes, He had.” When asked, “How has the LORD loved them?” The answer was obvious. The LORD had made a distinction between Jacob and Esau in the rebuilding after the Babylonian captivity. This distinction was based on the covenant. This is what it means, Jacob I loved, Esau I hated. The LORD had a covenant destiny for Jacob in the land but He did not have a covenant with Esau. So the first question/answer dialogue has set out to establish that the LORD did love them so that they could be in a position to love Him by obedience to His commandments.

Tonight in verse 6 Malachi turns to the second dialogue. This dialogue follows the same question/answer format with the three common elements; first, a statement of a truth, second, a questioning of the truth and third, a proof of the truth. But there is a great diversity in the dialogue and the discussion goes on much longer, it takes you all the way to 2:9. The statement of truth is found in verse 6, but before we look at it observe that it relates specifically to the priests and their service in the Temple. Remember that when Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in 444BC, about 15 years before this episode, he had looked around the city and noticed that it was very spacious because there was hardly anyone living there. In response he set out to re-populate the city by transplanting people from the hill country to the city. In the process some priests and Levites moved to Jerusalem while others remained in their cities. Then they all gathered in Jerusalem for the dedication of the wall which culminated on the Temple Mount with great trumpet blasts. At that time everything was set in order and the Temple was properly functioning and I suppose that as long as Nehemiah was the governor of Jerusalem the Temple functioned properly. It was during his absence that the laxities we’re about to see began to set in. Now to see where the priests were lax we have to know what the priests function was. They had three functions; first, the priests were to mediate between the people and YHWH. They did this through the offer of sacrifices in the Temple. Second, the priests were to judge the people of Israel. They were to judge on the basis of the Law to discriminate between who was in the right and who was in the wrong. Third, the priests were to teach the other Israelites the Law so that they knew how to live before God and men. So these were the three functions of the priest and in this question/answer dialogue it’s the priests who are being accused of failing to fulfill their functions.

In verse 6 we find first the statement of truth designed to convict the priests. **“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?” Says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say,** and here the priests question the stated truth, **“How have we despised Your name?”** In verses 7ff the proof of the truth follows. Now the statement of truth in verse 6 begins with the general principle that a son honors his father and a servant respects his master. These were principles that would have been insisted on in Jewish society. Then the LORD moves to the specific principle that if He was their father then where was His **honor**? So it’s an argument from the lesser to the greater. The lesser principle was the fourth commandment, that children should honor their father and their mother. This principle was so serious that under the law if a child did not honor his mother and father then he was to be executed. God takes respect for authority so seriously that in order to save a society the violators have to be completely removed from society. And this principle, whether they applied the death penalty or not, was nevertheless generally insisted upon in Jewish society. Yet that principle was nothing compared to the greater principle that the LORD was the father of Israel and they were to honor Him! That the LORD was the father of Israel is well-attested in the OT. First, He was their Father because He created them. He did this by begetting them out of the womb of Egypt. Isa 44:2, “The LORD made you and formed you from the womb” and Hos 11:1, “Out of Egypt I called My son.” Egypt was the womb, so to speak, out of which the nation Israel was born. God was like the midwife who helped them to be born. Second, the LORD was the father of Israel in that He guided them. When they left Egypt He led them with fire by night and cloud by day through the wilderness. He was like a father who leads His son along the way. Third, the LORD was the father of Israel in that He gave them His law, principles to live by. At Mt Sinai He gave them the law that would lead to life if they obeyed. A good father gives His son principles to live by. Fourth, the LORD was the father of Israel in that He reared them. Isa 1:2, “Sons I have reared and brought up.” So he created them, guided them, gave them Law and reared them accordingly. All these things show that the LORD was their father and the Israelites confessed that He was indeed their father. Isaiah 64:8, “But now, O LORD, “You are our Father, We are the clay, and You are our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand.” So it was a well-established idea in the OT that

the LORD was their Father and yet the Lord says in this passage, if I am your **Father**, where is My **honor**. A son should honor his father but they were not honoring Him.

Verse 6 also tells us that He was their **master**. He says, **And if I am a master, where is My respect?** A master deserves respect from his servant because the servant is indebted to the master. Israel as the servant was indebted to the LORD as the master because the LORD had first done for them by taking them out of Egypt and redeeming them by His great and mighty arm. Yet had the servant given the proper respect to the master in return? The LORD says they did not respect Him. He says specifically to the priests, **“O priests who despise My name.”** Now the **name** He is referring to is His covenant name, YHWH. During the OT period “the name” simply came to be an epithet for YHWH. This is why it is so significant in the NT when Jesus says, “Whatever you ask in My name will be done for you.” It’s not just a prayer formula; it’s invoking the name YHWH. So this charge is leveled at the **priests** that they were not honoring Him as a son should honor his father and they were not respecting Him as a servant should respect a master.

But at the end of verse 6 they question the truth that they had despised His name. **But you say, “How have we despised Your name?”** In other words, in one sense they act as if they are ignorant of the charges. How did we despise the name YHWH? Yet in another sense they are challenging the LORD to prove that they had despised His name.

In verse 7 the LORD takes up the challenge to prove the truth that they had despised His name. **“You,”** He says, **“are presenting defiled food upon My altar.** Now the altar being referred to is the bronze altar. It’s referred to later in the verse as **“The table of the LORD”** since in a way the altar was the Lord’s dining table where His **food** was placed. And yet they were **presenting defiled food upon this table. Defiled food** was food that was ritually unclean and not fit to be set before the LORD. You might think of the sacrificial system as a dining experience where the LORD sits down to eat from His altar. In Lev 21:6 the sacrifices are called God’s food even though we know that God does not eat food to be sustained since He is self-sustaining. Nevertheless, this is the imagery of the sacrifices, it’s a dining experience and the priests were responsible to set before the LORD the finest food, not

defiled food. So by presenting **defiled food** before the LORD they were despising His name.

The Lord continues to prove His point by asking a convicting question in verse 8, **“But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?”** Continuing the dining theme, when the governor came to sit down and dine would they set before him defiled food? Would the governor be pleased with it? The governor would not be pleased. The Hebrew word for **governor** is a Persian loan word. Since Nehemiah is not mentioned as the governor and Nehemiah admits that during his term as governor he fed all the people round about daily, then probably the governor at the time was not Nehemiah but a Persian official. Offering a high official food that was of low quality would not only be unsatisfying but it would be totally rejected. And if the food would be totally rejected by a human governor how much more would it be rejected by the LORD? In another sense, to offer a blind animal before the LORD or a lame animal was to offer something that was not valuable to the offerer. This meant that the offerer did not value the guest. So again by offering defiled food it proved that they were despising the LORD, they did not value Him. What the priests were doing was evil. By application, anything we offer God that is not our very best is despising Him. “This includes our ministries, our studies, physical objects, anything. The Lord is worthy of our very best offerings to Him, and we should give Him nothing less. To give Him less than our best is to despise Him.”<sup>i</sup>

The whole scenario was so evil that in verse 9 the LORD asks, **“But now will you not entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?”** In other words, you set this food in front of Him and then you entreat His favor. This is like setting a disgusting meal before a governor and then requesting favors from him. How foolish! The LORD was so disgusted with the food they were setting on His table that He would not answer any of their prayer requests with kindness. They were in no position to entreat God’s kindness. They were offending Him!

In fact, what they were doing in the Temple was so offensive that in verse 10 the LORD has a request of His own. **“Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you,”** says the LORD of hosts, **“Nor will I accept an offering from you.”** The offerings at the LORD’s temple were so disgraceful that it would be better to shut the entire operation down than to continue to disgrace His name. Nothing they offered was being accepted by Him. He hated it!

It was so despised that in verse 11 the LORD’s attention is directed forward in time to the millennial age when all the nations will worship Him correctly. **“For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations,”** says the LORD of hosts. Since a time is coming when all the nations will worship the LORD correctly, how much worse was it that the LORD’s chosen priests were not worshipping Him correctly?

In verse 12, in contrast to the future worship of the nations in the millennium, **“You are profaning it, in that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised.’”** The LORD’s dining experience was not good at all. The quality was so low that even the priests despised their portion.

Not only were they offering aberrant despicable food at the LORD’s table but verses 13 and 14 mention three more infractions. First, the priests were saying of their service **“My, how tiresome it is! And you disdainfully sniff at it,”** says the LORD of hosts. Since the offering of sacrifices was their worship then what this verse means is that their worship of the LORD was tiresome and boring when it should have been passionate and joyful. They disdained the worship. By application, like these priests our worship can become tiresome and boring. But such worship is not accepted by the LORD. Instead our worship of the Lord should be a time we look forward to and a time of enjoying Him!

Second, the priests in the middle of verse 13 he says were **“bringing what was taken by robbery and what is lame or sick and Should I receive that from your hand?”** says the LORD. The tone is sarcastic. Should I



receive stolen goods? Should I receive animals that you stole by highway robbery and animals that have broken limbs or disease? Is that what the LORD as a great King deserves? Should He accept road kill?

Third, the people in verse 14 were following the actions of the priests, **But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, “and My name is feared among the nations.”** The people were vowing to offer one unblemished male lamb from the flock, just as the LORD had commanded, showing that they knew the demands of the LORD, but in a bait and switch tactic they offered a blemished animal instead. They thought that by switching the animals they could slip one by on God. But the LORD is omniscient and He knew exactly what they were doing. It was foolish and is foolish to try and trick God. He knows exactly what we are doing. And anytime we try to trick the LORD by not giving Him our best we don't gain a thing. He knows fully what we are up to and instead of a blessing He issues a curse! These people were thieves, swindlers, deceivers who thought they could pull one over on God. And God is **a great King**. He is not just a human governor or a President. He is a great King! And is this how a great King should be treated? Would we treat a mere human king in such a way? Would we serve a human king poor food? And the LORD points out that His **name is feared among the pagan nations** more than among the priests of Israel. It's like the story of Jonah, when the pagan sailors discovered that the cause of the storm was Jonah's rebellion against the LORD. When Jonah described the nature of his LORD they said to him, “How could you do this?” They honored the LORD of Jonah more than Jonah. In the same way the LORD says that the pagan nations feared His name more than His own priests!

In chapter 2 the LORD gives a commandment, **And now this commandment is for you, O priests, 2If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name,” says the LORD of hosts, “then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already because you are not taking it to heart.** “The inevitable result of covenant unfaithfulness was the imposition of the curses that were always spelled out in covenant

texts”<sup>1</sup> like Lev 26 and Deut 28. Not only were these curses an imminent threat, they were already present. The nation was suffering agricultural and economic distress. This suffering may have been why the people questioned whether God loved them or not. As we mentioned before, many people fail to think God loves them when they are suffering. But the reason they were suffering was because of their own sin, not God’s lack of love and desire to shed blessing on them! They needed to stop profaning His name and **give honor to His name** by setting proper food before Him on the altar. If they did God would restore the blessing.

Verse 3, **Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it.** Rebuking the offspring was one of the curses. The **offspring** God was **going to rebuke** refer to the priest’s children. God often delayed the curse till the next generation leaving a gracious window of opportunity for that generation to repent and avoid the curse. But if not the priest’s children would be rebuked in the sense that God would close the wives’ wombs so that they could not have any children or they could not have many children. Barrenness was a curse from God. Also God would **spread refuse on their faces, the refuse of their feasts.** The Hebrew for **refuse** is debated but refers to the entrails of the animals being ripped out for sacrifice. At the **feasts** there were many animals sacrificed and the entrails filled the place of preparation. God would take these entrails and rub them in the face of the priests. The point is that the entrails of the unclean sacrifices would make the priests unclean and therefore disqualify them from continuing to function in their office. The priesthood would have to be disposed of just like the entrails. So by two means God would eventually shut down the sacrificial system; by lack of priests and by unclean priests. There was a real threat that the priesthood would be abolished at this time but it was not until AD70 that the priesthood was actually shut down.

In verse 4, when the priests saw this happening they would know **that** the LORD had sent this commandment. He says, **Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi,” says the LORD of hosts.** In other words, the signs of verse 3 would indicate to the Levitical priests that they better start giving honor to

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<sup>1</sup> Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Mal 2:1). Galaxie Software.

His name or else they would soon be abolished. God used this warning or threat to secure this eternal covenant He made with Levi.

This covenant, not often taught, is referred to in verse 5 and harks back to an event that occurred in the Book of Numbers. He says, **My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him as an object of reverence; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name.** The one referred to as him is a priest by the name of Phinehas. So hold your place here and turn to the origin of this covenant in Num 25. The background is the Moabites and the Midianites have been deceiving the Israelites to try and turn them aside from the LORD. The Moabites incited them to idolatry to Baal through the daughter of a Midianite prince named Cozbi. She preyed sexually on a man of Israel named Zimri. She was a practitioner of the religion of Baal. Baal was a fertility god and the cult emphasized ritualistic sex in order to increase fertility and thus get rich. They believed that the fertility of people, cattle and their crops depended upon the sexual link between a god and goddess. To stimulate the god and goddess to copulate in heaven and grant fertility to them, their animals and their crops on earth, they would enter into a pagan temple and copulate in view of the gods and goddesses. What happens here in Numbers 25 is the Moabites plot to incite the Israelites to enter into these sexual practices in the temple of Baal and in verse 3 you see that Israel had indeed joined themselves to Baal of Peor and that the LORD was very angry. In verse 4 Moses was called to take action to judge on His behalf. In verse 5 he followed through with God's procedure. Up to this time the sexual practices were being practiced only in Moab. However, in verse 6 the Midianite woman Cozbi and the Israelite man Zimri walked right into the camp of Israel in the sight of all Israel and went into the inner room of the tabernacle to have intercourse right in front of Moses. They did this according to the custom of Baal. They were trying to transform the worship of the Lord into the type of sexual religion that was the practice of the Canaanites. In effect they were turning the tabernacle into a brothel. In response, in verse 7, one of the priests, "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, 8 and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked." Phinehas' action was the kind of action God wanted. If the act had not been stopped right then and there there could never have been true worship in the tabernacle again

as it would have desecrated it. Phinehas' decisive action in the face of Moses' failure to act resulted in the LORD granting a covenant to the Levitical priests. Verse 10, "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 11"Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. 12Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; 13and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.'" Phinehas would not allow the true tabernacle and worship of God to be despised. Phinehas as a true priest acted like a priest by representing God's action before the congregation of Israel. By doing so he atoned for the sons of Israel and thwarted God's wrath. His actions resulted in God granting an eternal covenant with the Levitical priests that will be ultimately fulfilled through the Levitical line of Zadok in the millennial kingdom.

However, in Malachi's day the priests were the opposite of Phinehas. They were despising the true temple and worship of God. So despicable were their actions that the eternal covenant was threatened. In Mal 2:5-7 Phinehas and his generation of priests are being characterized to form a startling contrast with the priests of Malachi's day. God says of Phinehas in verse 5, **My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him as an object of reverence or fear; so he revered or feared Me and stood in awe of My name.** How did Phinehas stand in awe of YHWH's name? We just read how. He entered the tabernacle with a spear and made atonement for the sons of Israel by sacrificing the man and woman engaged in an act of religious prostitution.

Verse 6 makes a further contrast, **True instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips.** One of the functions of the priest, as we mentioned before, was the instruction of the people in the Law or Torah. The Torah was the rule of life for every Israelite. Quite literally, as we just saw, death was the penalty for not keeping it. Fortunately Phinehas stood up and made atonement for them so that only 24,000 were killed by the Lord on that day. Phinehas was a true instructor of righteousness. He communicated the truths of Scripture to the people as every priest should do. Teachers in the Church should also communicate true instruction only and righteousness from his lips. James 3 warns that teachers will incur stricter

judgment than all other believers. It is therefore extremely important to teach correctly. He also says of Phinehas in verse 6 that he **walked with Me in peace and uprightness**. So he not only talked the truth but he walked the truth. He not only had orthodoxy to his credit but orthopraxy. He not only had proper doctrine but He practiced the doctrine. This is what the LORD was looking for in the priests, men who taught the truth and lived the truth. This is also what the Lord is looking for in the pastors and teachers in the Church. They must preach the word of God and they must practice the word of God. It does little good to preach the word but not practice it. Hypocrites are a dime a dozen and it does no good and much harm. Phinehas was the kind of leader that walked the walk and talked the talk and as such the end of verse 6 tells us **he turned many back from iniquity**. Since he both talked the talk and walked the walk he was instrumental in turning many away from sin and to righteousness. But the priests in Malachi's day were not like Phinehas at all and the covenant God had made with Phinehas and his descendants was threatened because of them.

Verse 7 lays out a major function of the priests, **For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts**. The very fact that Malachi, who was not a priest, was chosen to give this instruction shows just how corrupt the priesthood really was. There was not even one priest whose **lips preserved knowledge**; there was not even one priest who was a true **messenger of the LORD**. Where was Ezra? He was a true priest and scribe. He had been in Jerusalem 15 years before but he was not there now. We suppose that he had died. With his absence no priest remained who spoke truth and Malachi had to be sent. The verse also shows that the people had a responsibility to seek him out that might be instructed from his mouth because he was the true messenger of the LORD. The rest of the priesthood was corrupt.

Verse 8 turns again to the priests in Malachi's day. Phinehas and his generation were true priests who honored the Lord and instructed in truth and righteousness, **But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts. 9So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the**

**instruction.** “The definite article on . . . (*tora*), ‘instruction,’ suggests that here it is not just any teaching in general but indeed *the* instruction, namely, the Torah, the law of Moses. The defection of the priests is all the more serious, then, for they are actually creating obstacles to the people’s access to the Word of God itself. To cause the people to ‘stumble in the Torah’ is to so mislead them in its meaning that they fail to understand and keep its requirements. There can be no more serious indictment against the man of God.”<sup>ii</sup> In the NT Christ indicts the scribes, priests and Pharisees for doing just this (Mark 7). They so maligned the word of God that they barred people from entering the kingdom. There was no crime that merited a harsher pronouncement of judgment than actually using the word of God to lead men away from it (see Matt 23). This is what happens when a teacher does not respect the normal, plain intended meaning of the text in its historical setting. It is bad enough when it is done by an ill-prepared or incompetent teacher; it is far worse when the leader is a wolf in sheep’s clothing, posing as the true but underneath false. In either case they will come under the mighty judgment of God. And how terrifying it is to fall into the hands of the living God.

One final observation on the terrifying nature of this passage before we close. If you noticed the name “LORD of hosts” was used a number of times, 1:6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13; 2:2, 4, 7 and 8, eleven times to be exact. The Hebrew “hosts” refers to “armies.” He is the LORD of armies and therefore has at His disposal any and every means of judgment at His word. This name used repetitively to warn the priests adds to the terrifying nature of the warning.

In summary, in 1:6 the LORD states the truth to the priests that sons honor their fathers and servants their masters. Since the LORD was their Father, where was His honor? Where was His respect? But they questioned the truth by asking how they had despised His name. In verse 7 the LORD proves that they had defiled His name by reminding them that they had been presenting defiled food upon His table of sacrifice. In verse 8, would they set such atrocious food before the governor? If they did, would He be pleased with them? In verse 9 they were all the while entreating the LORD’s favor but how could the LORD receive them kindly when they presented blind and lame and diseased food before Him? In verse 10 it would be better to shut down the entire Temple operation than to continue to present this trash. In wild contrast verse 11 reminds them that even pagan nations will worship God

properly during the millennial age. But in verse 12 His own nation that He set apart for His name's sake was profaning it. In verse 13 the priests also were tired and bored of worshipping the LORD. They even brought in what was taken by highway robbery. Should the LORD receive that kind of garbage from their hand? Further in verse 14 the nation was full of swindlers who would vow one excellent animal and switch it for another at the last moment. Even pagans wouldn't dare do this but the Israelites were.

In 2:1-2 the LORD commanded the priests to take what He said to heart and to start honoring His name by offering proper sacrifices. If they did not He would send the curses on them and in fact He already had because they were not taking what He said to heart. In verse 3 the LORD threatens to rebuke their children by gradually closing the wombs and spreading the entrails of the defiled sacrifices upon their faces such that the entire priesthood would disappear. In verse 4, when they saw these things happening they would know that the Lord had given this commandment to them, the purpose of which was that the covenant made with Levi in the time of Phinehas would continue. In verse 5 the covenant made with Phinehas was one of life and peace because he revered the Lord and stood in awe of His name when nobody else did. He struck down evil transgressors who tried to turn the temple of the Lord into a bordello. In verse 6 Phinehas was also a true instructor of righteousness and he walked with the Lord and consequently many followed his lead and turned back from iniquity. In verse 7 the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge for the people and men should seek out true teachers because they are the messengers of the LORD. But in verse 8, the priests in Malachi's day had turned aside from the Law; they had actually used the Law in such a maligned way that they turned people aside from the law and endangered the continuation of the covenant of Levi. Therefore in verse 9 the LORD made them despised and abased before all the people since it was obvious to the people that they were showing partiality in their execution of the law. God had proved his point, the priests were despising His name and they better get in shape or further curses were coming.

In conclusion what can we learn from this stunning rebuke? First, a true representative of God respects and honors the Lord. These priests did not. They offered ritually unclean food before a great King. They were bored and tired of the worship of the Lord. They even thought that they could slip actions by unnoticed by Him. These men are marked for judgment. The

LORD of hosts will not put up with it forever. A true representative of God respects and honors the Lord like Phinehas. Are you respecting and fearing the LORD? Second, a true teacher of God's word is well-prepared as well as a doer of the word. These priests were not. They put the Levitical covenant in danger of being destroyed. They distorted the word of the Torah such that it blocked the people from knowing the LORD and living lives that pleased Him. They perverted justice by showing partiality in their interpretations of the Torah. Their offspring were marked for cursing if they did not respond quickly. A true teacher of God's word is well-prepared as well as a doer of the word like Phinehas.

“The prophet's words should...challenge modern servants of the Lord and leaders of His people to examine our hearts.”<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Mal 1:8). Galaxie Software.

<sup>ii</sup> Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Mal 2:8). Galaxie Software.

<sup>iii</sup> Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Mal 1:14). Galaxie Software.

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