

## **The True Priest Malachi 2:3-9**

### **Introduction**

Malachi opens with the Lord's declaration to Israel: "I have loved you." The priests challenge God's claim, implying that they do not think He does (1:2). God lays out for them that His love is not because of who they are or what they have done. In fact, they have acted in such a way that He has no pleasure in them (1:10). In fact, because of their contempt for Him, He is turning their blessings into curses (2:1-2). In this next section, God lays out the complete failure of the priests. They were supposed to walk with God and turn others from iniquity by teaching the law and conveying God's covenant of peace to the people. This is what the priests failed to do, but it is what Christ accomplished (Eph. 2:14-18).

### **Outline of the Text**

- A – God will smear the faces of the priests with the refuse of their feasts (2:3)
  - B – God commands repentance so that His covenant with Levi might continue (2:4)
    - C – The covenant was of life and peace; Levi feared God (2:5)
      - D – The law of truth in his mouth; no injustice on his lips (2:6a)
        - E – He walked with God and turned many from sin (2:6b)
          - D<sup>1</sup> – His lips should keep knowledge; the law in his mouth (2:7a)
            - C<sup>1</sup> – The priest is the messenger of God (2:7b)
              - B<sup>1</sup> – The priests have corrupted their covenant with God (2:8)
                - A<sup>1</sup> – God is already making the priests contemptible (2:9)

### **Contemptible Priests (A, A<sup>1</sup>)**

The beginning of v. 3 is somewhat ambiguous—does "seed" refer here to grain or to children? Both cases have connections to later parts of Malachi (2:15, 3:11, 4:6). The priests' contempt for God in their hearts and in their worship bears fruit on the fruit of their bodies and their land (cf. 2:1-2, Deut. 28:32-33). Additionally, their contempt has made them contemptible (v. 9). God will take the offal or refuse (the contents of the gut) from their sacrifices and smear it on their faces. They will be carried out with the dung that is removed from the camp to be burned (Ex. 29:14, Lev. 4:11-12). They will be counted as dung themselves. The priests, the special servants of God (Num. 3:12), have held God in contempt (1:12-13). God will not be mocked, and He turns hypocrisy on its head (Gal. 6:7).

### **The Covenant with Levi (B, B<sup>1</sup>; C, C<sup>1</sup>)**

When the priests are justly dishonored in this way, they will know that it is God who sent the command to repent (v. 4). God strips Levi of honor so that He might continue covenant with him. Ultimately, it is continued in the Great High Priest, Jesus, and through Him, with all the saints. God's covenant with Levi was one of life and peace (v. 5). God had chosen the Levites as the substitute for all the firstborn males of Israel (Num. 3:12-13, 40-51), presumably because of their zeal for God in the episode of the golden calf (Ex. 32:28-29). The Levites were set apart to be a special tribe to serve in the tabernacle on behalf of the people (Num. 1:47-53). Then later, when Israel conquered the land of Canaan, the Levites were not given their own inheritance, but rather were dispersed among the other tribes (Num. 18:20, Josh. 21). They were to live among the people to teach them God's law (Deut.

33:10). God had a covenant of life and peace with the Levites as the representatives of all His people because they rightly feared God and were zealous for Him. Phineas the priest was another example of this (e.g., Num. 25:11-13). And so, having peace with God, the Levites were to be the messengers of God's peace to His people (v. 7b, cf. Num. 6:22-27).

The priests in Malachi's day had departed from the ways of God and had corrupted the covenant He had with them (v. 8). Instead of leading the rest of Israel in righteousness and to the blessings that come upon those who zealously follow God, they were causing the people to sin (cf. Matt. 23). God had no pleasure in them nor in their sacrifices. A priest can only truly pronounce the peace of God if he himself has it first. You cannot give what you do not have. Thus, even in Israel, there was no peace with God. Even the priests are not able to achieve it. This is man's fundamental problem..

### **An Upright Priest (D, D<sup>1</sup>; E)**

God reminds the priests what their faithfulness was like (vs. 6-7). The priests were to teach the people God's law. They were to guard and keep it so that the people could seek it from the messengers of God. Levi used to walk with God in peace and equity and led the people away from iniquity (v. 6b). This is the center of the chiasm and as such holds in high relief the failure of the Levitical priests (cf. 1:10). Thus, it also points to Christ because it states exactly what He has accomplished.

God's people are to be holy because He is holy (Lev. 19:2). Man is created in God's image, and our sin has marred that image of holiness. Our sin makes us unacceptable before a holy God. In order to be reunited with God, man must be renewed. He must put on the new man and be remade into the image of God's holiness (Eph. 4:24). The Levites, though they made a show of holiness in their worship, were utterly unholy and incapable of leading the people in holiness because they did not take God's word to heart. Apart from God's grace, all men, just like the Levites, hold God in contempt. We are not satisfied with His ways, and we prefer our sinful passions. And even our shows of holiness, if not in true fear of God, are just dung. We need the True Priest who lived perfectly, who substituted Himself for us, who offered a perfect sacrifice once for all, and who gives us His own righteousness so that we may have peace with God (Eph. 2:14-18). We need Jesus Christ. He walked with God in peace and equity, and it is He who turns many away from iniquity.

### **Conclusion**

God is holy, and as such no sin can come near Him. No sinner can approach Him. The Levitical priesthood pointed to this grim reality. In the end, because of their own sin, they could not provide the necessary bridge themselves. The priests would not fear God, would not worship Him from the heart, would not walk in His ways. Even though they served near God, they were far from Him (Matt. 15:7-9). But Malachi, this last prophet of the Old Testament, pointed ahead to the Messenger of the covenant who would come (3:1). And so we ought to hear the warnings given to the priests and turn in faith to the Great High Priest. In Him, we have peace with God. In Him, we have life with God. In Him, we can draw near to the holy Creator. And thus in Him, we understand and hear the Father say, "I have loved you" (1:1). In Christ, we know it to be true.