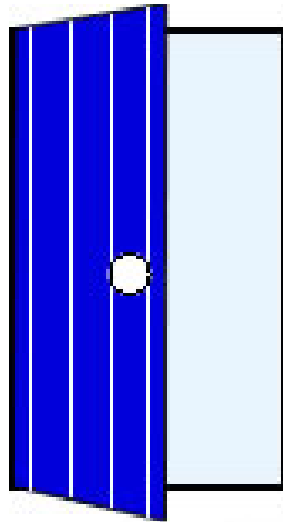


BIBLE STUDIES



Mill Lane Chapel

Malachi

(5) “Judah.....hath married the daughter of a strange god”

Read Chapter 2: 10-16

We have already noted that this chapter discusses three covenants: **(1)** The covenant with Levi, V1-9; **(2)** The covenant with the fathers, V10-12; **(3)** The covenant of marriage, V13-16. In each case, God's people had proved unfaithful. All three covenants had been broken. Notice that the word “treacherously” occurs five times in V10-16. We could therefore alter the heading of this study from “Judah.....hath married the daughter of a strange god”, to **'Treachery!'**

1) THE COVENANT WITH LEVI, V1-9

Quite clearly, the principle subject thus far has been the decline of the Levitical priesthood. It had declined Godward (1: 6-14), and it had declined manward (2: 1-9). As far as the latter is concerned, we have noticed that if the priests really fulfilled their ministry, they were required to do more than offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. They were to be ‘teaching priests’, 1 Chronicles 15: 3. “The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth”, 2: 7. The failure of the priesthood, and therefore the absence of proper teaching, opened the door to evil practices among the people. We must remember that our fellowship with God, and our submission to His word, will preserve us from evil. But failure here will open the door to further decline, and the following verses illustrate the effect. This brings us to:

2) THE COVENANT WITH THE FATHERS, V10-12

The failure of the priesthood, and the profaning of the covenant with Levi, is followed by the abrogation of a second covenant. The “fathers” were the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were the ‘founding fathers’ of the nation. See Genesis 12: 2 etc. This covenant involved the preservation and purity of national life. See Leviticus 20: 26. But the identity of the nation had been polluted and weakened. "Have we not one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously, every man against his brother by profaning the **covenant** of our fathers?" Two things had happened:

A) RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE NATION HAD BEEN WEAKENED, V10

"Have we not **all** one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously, every man **against his brother** by profaning the covenant of our fathers?" Notice:

i) The unity of the nation

God's people were a family, with "one father" (see 1: 6) and "one God. Hence "Why do we deal treacherously every man against his **brother**?" The expression, "one father", emphasises His love. The expression, "one God", emphasises His power and authority. "One father reminds us that all life derives **from** Him. "One God reminds us that all life should be directed **to** Him. Compare Ephesians 4: 4-6, "There is one body, and one Spirit.....one **God** and **Father** of **all**, Who is above **all**, and through **all**, and in you **all**." Through the Holy Spirit, God has brought believers into relationship with Himself, and with each other.

ii) The treachery of the nation

Since the nation was one, akin to a family, there should be family love and affection. Hence 1 John 5: 1, "Every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him." But here, "Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother by profaning the covenant of our fathers?" This could mean:

a) In view of V11-16, that by intermarriage with pagan neighbours, and the breakdown of married life, they were damaging and betraying each other. The purity of national life was endangered.. The lesson is clear: **our private lives have an effect on others.**

b) On a wider scale, it could refer to deceitful dealings. There was a lack of integrity between them. For example, the poor, the widows, and the fatherless were oppressed. See 3: 5, "And I will come near to you to judgement; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not Me, saith the Lord of hosts." There was a terrible breakdown in spiritual, moral, and family life. Brotherly love was not practiced.

On balance, the context (V11-16) suggests that national life was threatened by exposure to idolatry by intermarriage with pagan neighbours. Nevertheless, we must let the passage warn us against acting in **any way** that weakens brotherly relationships. Failure in our priesthood – our communion with God - will, inevitably, affect our relationships with each other. The words, "Why do we deal treacherously every man against **his brother**?", remind us that Paul was obliged to censure the lack of brotherly love at Corinth: "**Brother** goeth to law with **brother**, and that before unbelievers", 1 Corinthians 6: 6. The Galatians were no better: "For, **brethren**, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh.....But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another", Galatians 5: 13-15. Peter urges us to "love as brethren." See 1 Peter 3: 8, "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another. **Love as brethren**, be pitiful, be courteous, not rendering evil for

evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing." It is worth remembering as well, that something quite legitimate in itself could prove quite harmful to a fellow-believer. Notice what Paul says about this in 1 Corinthians 8: 8-12: "And through thy knowledge shall the weak **brother** perish, for whom Christ died. But when ye sin so against the **brethren**, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ."

Abraham certainly did not deal "treacherously" with his brother. "And Abram said unto Lot, let there be no strife I pray thee between me and thee, for we be **brethren**", Genesis 13: 8. "And when Abram saw that his **brother** was taken captive", 14: 14. "And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his **brother** Lot", 14: 16.

B) RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER NATIONS HAD BEEN STRENGTHENED, **V11-12**

"Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness (sanctuary) of the Lord which He loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange (foreign) god", V11. This is explained in Nehemiah 13: 23, "In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab." Past warnings had been unheeded. See Deuteronomy 7: 3-4, "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from **following Me**, that they may serve other gods." See Ezra 9: 1-2, "The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations.....for they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons; so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands." See also Ezra 9: 14, and Nehemiah 13: 23-31.

This isn't the first time that Judah had been accused of treachery. See Jeremiah 3: "And her **treacherous** sister Judah saw it (Israel's backsliding)", V7. "Her **treacherous** sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also", V8. "And yet for all this her **treacherous** sister Judah hath not turned unto Me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord", V10. The New Testament makes it perfectly clear that Christians are also vulnerable in this way. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God", James 4: 4.

Judah's treachery describes her infidelity. God's people had forsaken Him in favour of idolatrous women ("the daughter of a strange god"). God calls this "an **abomination**." Whilst the word "abomination" usually occurs as another name for an idol, it is used here in an indirect sense. Their entanglement with idolatry was an "abomination."

The Thessalonians “turned **to** God from idols, but Judah had turned **from** God to idols. We must be careful that we do not fall into the same snare. See 1 John 5: 20-21.

Note **Deuteronomy 7: 3-4**, "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from **following Me**, that they may serve other gods." See **Ezra 9: 1-2**, "The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations.....for they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons; so that the **holy seed** have mingled themselves with the people of those lands." See also V14, and Nehemiah 13: 23-31.

Their involvement with idolatry was accompanied by lack of interest in the temple. God's interests were of little concern to them. They devalued the 'house of God.' In the words of Malachi, "Judah hath profaned the holiness (sanctuary) of the Lord **which He loved**." If we turn away from God, it will not be long before we lose our interest in the place of fellowship with God. It's worth pointing out that whilst this verse evidently refers to the **place**, it is only 'the sanctuary' (or 'holy place') because of the sanctifying presence of **God**. The word 'profane' means to treat something sacred, as common and unhallowed. They had not abandoned the sanctuary, but they treated it as common and unhallowed by failing to recognize that **the holy place requires holy people**. They were guilty of compromise: they held the **sanctuary** with one hand, and **idolatry** with the other.

This is totally unacceptable to God. See V12, "The Lord will **cut off** the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the Lord of hosts." (That is, the man that "offereth an offering unto the Lord of hosts", whilst maintaining idolatrous associations). The words, "master and the scholar", have been variously understood. J.,G,Baldwin notes that the Targum (an Aramaic translation) interprets rather than translates with the paraphrase, 'son and grandson.' This does seem to be the sense of the verse: the man who "married the daughter of a strange god" would be left without succession. There would be no one to teach, and no one to learn. D.E.West suggests that it simply means that God is no respecter of persons. J.N.Darby's New Translation has: 'him that calleth and him that answereth', with the footnote: 'it is one of the Hebrew circumlocutions for 'all.'

To sum up: failure in our priestly communion with God, will mean compromise with the world, and loss of our distinctive character as God's people. But the downward spiral continues. Inter-marriage with foreign nations had a dire effect on Jewish family life (see Exodus 34: 12-16), which brings us to:

3) THE COVENANT OF MARRIAGE, V13-16

"The Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy **covenant**", V14. The word "treacherously" occurs three times in this section (V14, 15 & 16). These verses tell us **(A)** What God thinks about marriage, V13-15, and **(B)** What God thinks about divorce, V16.

A) GOD'S MIND ON MARRIAGE, V13-15

"And this ye have done again, covering the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand." See JND: 'And further (or, 'secondly') ye do this: ye cover the altar of Jehovah with tears....'

Whilst some commentators suggest that this refers to the tears and sorrow of the abandoned wives (V14), it seems preferable to regard this sorrow as **hypocrisy**. God would not accept their sacrifices, though attended by such apparent grief and sorrow, because their pious appearance only masked marital infidelity. "Because the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously." How could God accept the offerings of His people when they had abandoned their wives in favour of heathen women. Marriage is regarded as a covenant: "Yet is she thy companion, and the wife of the covenant." See Proverbs 2: 17 where, in connection with the "strange woman", we read, "which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God." We must notice the following:

i) The sanctity of marriage

a) "The Lord hath been witness." Marriage is before God. It is therefore binding. It has a spiritual dimension. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder", Matthew 19: 6. Compare Genesis 31: 49-50, "The Lord watch between me (Laban) and thee (Jacob), when we are absent one from another. If thou afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us: see, **God is witness** betwixt me and thee."

b) "The wife of thy youth." Because she is "the wife of thy youth", it is therefore grossly wrong, in later years, to forsake her in favour of another more physically attractive woman. 'I'm changing her for a younger model', might be the language of coarse comedians, but the practice should be totally foreign and obnoxious to God's people.

c) "Thy companion." The word "companion", used usually in the masculine, means a close friend with whom interests, good and bad, are shared. Whilst marriage may become less demonstrative as years pass by, mutual trust and confidence should become deeper and stronger.

d) "The wife of thy covenant." This combines the above three points, and adds loyalty and fidelity. We should add that this covenant can only be broken by death. See Romans 7: 1-3. Read these verses carefully. Remember, too, that the indissolubility of marriage in the sight of God is emphasized by the fact that it is a picture of the relationship between God and His people in the Old Testament (see, for example, Jeremiah 3: 14), and Christ and the church in the New Testament. See Ephesians 5: 25-33.

ii) The oneness in marriage

"And did he not make one? Yet hath he the residue of the spirit." Whilst, we are told, the Hebrew text here has given severe headaches to its translators, the message does seem quite clear! We start with the question, "And did He not make one?", which obviously refers to Adam and Eve. See Genesis 2: 23-24. "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Reflecting on this, Malachi observes, "Yet had he the residue of the spirit." God could have created Eve in the same way that He had created Adam. He "breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life." But He did **not** do this with Eve! God made Adam and Eve one flesh by taking one of Adam's ribs, and "the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made ('built') he a woman." So, whilst God "had the residue of the spirit", and could have created Eve in exactly the same way as He had created Adam, **He did not do so**. God only "breathed" once, and Adam and Eve were **both** involved. They enjoyed one common breathing from God. (Compare 1 Corinthians 6: 17). They were "**one flesh**." By abandoning their wives, the Jews were therefore overthrowing God's clear intention in instituting marriage which, we must notice, was revealed at creation. Centuries later, when dealing with the same subject, the Lord Jesus did exactly the same, and took His questioners back to "the beginning." See Matthew 19: 8-9.

iii) The purpose of marriage

"And did He not make one? Yet had He the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? **That He might seek a godly seed.**" Compare Ephesians 6: 4, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." M.C.Unger has an excellent piece here: 'That children belonging uniquely to one man and one woman in a family relationship, might have the benefit of the love and care of the home, and enjoy the discipline of being reared for the Lord.' The children springing from intermarriage with pagan neighbours "spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jew's language", Nehemiah 13: 24. If you are tempted to marry an unsaved

person, just think, amongst other things, about the spiritual welfare of your children, and that is only one of the issues involved.

Bible teaching is to be put into practice. We are to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1: 22), and this applies here: “Therefore take heed to your spirit (RSV, ‘take heed to yourselves’), and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. See also V16.

B) GOD'S MIND ON DIVORCE, V16

"For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously." The expression, “putting away”, refers to divorce. See Matthew 19: 3, “The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” This was followed by a further question: “Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?”, V7. We should notice at least two things here:

i) The effect of divorce Godward

"For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away." The pronouncement is made by ‘Jehovah the God (Elohim) of **Israel.**’ This stresses that God’s people owed allegiance to Him. They were not to be swayed by customs and practices elsewhere. They must recognise **His** will and **His** authority. **We** must remember this as well. We must not be swayed by the generally-accepted view of divorce in society, or by the way in which the law of the land ‘bends over backwards’ to make it so easy. Today, an increasing number of marriages end in divorce, and this has led to complex problems. We must go, not to the solicitor and the lawyer, but “to the law and to the testimony” of God’s word, Isaiah 8: 20. “What saith the scripture?” What does **God** say. The answer is totally unambiguous: “he **hateth** putting away.”

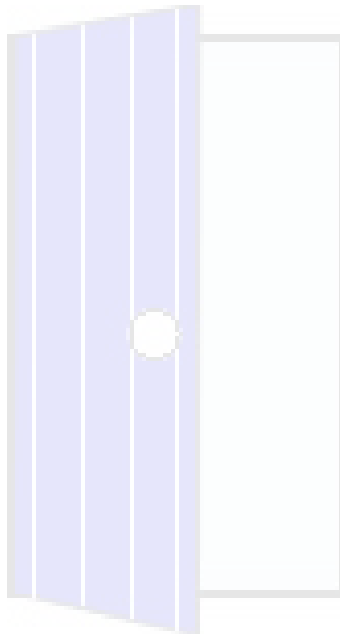
ii) The effect of divorce manward

"For one covereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts." See JND here: 'For he covereth with violence his garment.' This has been explained as ‘gross injustice publicly displayed.’ The “violence” here is not necessarily physical, but describes ‘the brutal treatment a husband inflicts on his wife whom he divorces’, M.C..Unger. C.L.Feinberg has a very helpful piece here: 'The reference is to the old custom of putting a garment over a woman to claim her as wife. See Ruth 3: 9 & Ezekiel 16: 8. Instead of spreading their garment to **protect** their wives, they covered their garment with **violence** towards their wives. The garment symbolised wedded trust and protection.'

Once again (see V15), Bible teaching is to be put into practice. "Therefore take

heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.” We must be good stewards of our affections. Remember that “to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”, James 4: 17. We should also remember that although Malachi risked the wrath of his hearers, he did not avoid the issue. This was equally true in connection with the condemnation of the priests. Truth is not always popular, and we must be willing to bear the reproach that sometimes accompanies loyalty to God and His word.

The last verse of this chapter introduces the next section of the book, which crosses four centuries to describe the ministry of John the Baptist, and twenty centuries to describe the coming of the Lord Jesus “like a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap” (Some AV Bibles have ‘sope’). Our next study will commence with this verse.



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