

# Prepare

A Vintage Holiday series through the Book of Malachi

vGroup  
Study



Prepare: vGroup Study

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# RIGHT WORSHIP

In the world of real estate, location is everything. Location, location, location. In the world of understanding your Bible, context is everything. Context, context, context. For most modern Christians, this is what makes reading the Old Testament so difficult sometimes. We are millennia removed from the cultural backdrop of the ancient world of the Bible. So, when prophets like Malachi start speaking on concepts and notions of worship that involve temples, priests, and sacrificial systems, we struggle to keep pace.

However, when properly viewed in their narrative context, these weird practices and seemingly outdated institutions of the Old Testament begin to reveal their deeper theological message. The temple, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system all point to something greater. They collectively mark out God's ordained way of right worship.

Each of the elements below represents something integrally connected with the worship of Yahweh in the Old Testament. Each is also directly or indirectly referenced by Malachi in today's verses.

- Briefly discuss each element's basic role and/or function(s) in the O.T.
  - The temple in Jerusalem
  - The altar of burnt offerings in the temple
  - The priesthood
  - The high priest
  - The unblemished sacrificial lamb/ram/goat

*<sup>6</sup>"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O*

*priests, who despise my name. But you say, 'How have we despised your name?' <sup>7</sup>By offering polluted food upon my altar.*

Malachi 1:6–7a

In the first disputation speech of the book of Malachi, the Lord addresses the disillusionment the nation of Israel has concerning their national status among the nations. Now in the second disputation speech (verses 1:6–2:9), the Lord calls out a specific group of leaders overseeing the Israelite community.

- The prophet Malachi sets-up the second disputation speech with a short parable. What is the main thrust or point of this parable? Who is being addressed?
- How do we 'despise' or 'show contempt for' someone's 'name'?

*<sup>7</sup>But you say, 'How have we polluted you?' By saying that the LORD's table may be despised. <sup>8</sup>When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts. <sup>9</sup>And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts. <sup>10</sup>Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. <sup>11</sup>For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>12</sup>But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. <sup>13</sup>But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. <sup>14</sup>Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.*

Malachi 1:7b–14

- With their words, the priests claimed not to be dishonoring the Lord, but their actions spoke otherwise. How were the priests guilty of dishonoring the Lord they claimed to worship?

- What made a sacrifice unacceptable?
  - Who brought the sacrifice to be offered by the priest? And why would they bring it?
  - Who determined if an offering was acceptable or unacceptable?
- Identify the common motifs of these verses.
  - Underline how many times the term 'accept' (and its derivatives) are used in these verses. Now do the same for the phrase 'my name' (and its derivatives)
  - What point(s) is Malachi trying to make about Israel and its priesthood by repeatedly using these terms? Discuss each.
  - Contrast how the priests honor the 'governor' (an appointed leader) versus their 'great king' (the Lord their God). What does this communicate about the heart of their worship?

Malachi's sees the dishonoring of the Lord through cheap worship as ultimately perverting the very calling of Israel as a nation. This calling was for them to be "a kingdom of priests and holy nation" (Exodus 19:1–6) amongst the other nations of the world (Malachi 1:11, 14). Meaning, Israel, through their faithful worship, was to represent The Lord, the One True God, to their pagan neighbors. And through them, the Lord's blessings would flow out to these nations.

*<sup>1</sup>“And now, O priests, this command is for you. <sup>2</sup>If you will not listen, if you will 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. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. <sup>3</sup>Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it. <sup>4</sup>So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>5</sup>My covenant with him was one of life and peace,*

*and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. <sup>6</sup>True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. <sup>7</sup>For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. <sup>8</sup>But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts, <sup>9</sup>and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction."*

Malachi 2:1–9

This second disputation speech of Malachi closes with the Lord challenging the priests with a warning. The basis of this warning is a call to repentance with the hope of a renewed covenant with his priests.

- In verses 2:1–3, what does the Lord ask of the priests? What will happen if they refuse to heed the Lord's warning?
- Does the goal of the Lord's warning seem more about judgment or reconciliation? (see verse 4)
- How do verses 5–7 characterize the Lord's special covenant with Levi (aka the priesthood)?
- In addition to their role at the temple, the priests were also charged with the administration of the law of Moses in the community (i.e, teaching and issuing judgements). In what ways had the priests failed the community in this role as described in verses 7–9?
- How might the priests showing of "partiality in the matters of the law" create the opposite of life and peace in the community? How does this devalue their position among the people?

So, what now? As Christians, we are far removed from the cultural context of these verses. We don't live in Jerusalem. We don't worship at a temple there. And we don't bring animals

before a priest to sacrifice on behalf of our sins. So, how are we to square these verses? The answer is Jesus Christ.

The temple, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system all point to something greater. They collectively mark out God's ordained way of right worship which finds its fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In this way, the principles of right worship remain the same for all eternity. Right worship is still God-honoring above all else. Right worship still requires a sacrifice for sin—a pure, acceptable offering. Repentance of sin and turning to God in obedience is still the heart of worship. And lastly, right worship is still a lifestyle that promotes life and peace in the community of believers through sacrificially living for others.

- This advent season, as we the church, Jesus' priesthood of believers, prepare for his second coming, how can we let the truths of these verses:
  - spur us on to true God-exalting worship?
  - draw us to a place of repentance of our sins?
  - reinvigorate us to engage in our true calling as Christ's representatives in the world?
  - lead us to live more sacrificially towards others?
- Coming out of a tumultuous American political season, is there anything we as a church need to repent of? Did our 'worship' of the Lord over the last few months do more to promote the causes of Jesus or the causes of a particular political party?
  - How can we press forward this advent season as people of truth, love, and community not bound to any particular political party?

Take some time tonight to specifically pray for our church leaders—our pastors, our VGroup leaders, etc.