

**March Teaching Theme: The Book of Malachi**

讲员 Speaker: Pastor Linghui Tian / Pastor William R. Horne

题目 Topic: 不从情欲、忠于婚约 / “Unfaithful”

经文 Scripture: Malachi 2:10-16

**Monthly Theme:** For the next two months (outside of Easter), we will be walking through the prophetic book of Malachi. Malachi is a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah; thus, the historical context for this book is the same as Ezra-Nehemiah's. It is debated if Malachi's prophetic ministry comes in between Zerubabel and Ezra's return to the land or if it is shortly after the ending of Nehemiah, which we just looked at last week. Either way, we know that God was speaking through Malachi to the people of Israel within the same storyline and context as Ezra-Nehemiah. Recall, in the Ezra-Nehemiah, the hopes were high upon the return to the land, but after it is all said and done, the people prove to be just as corrupt, unjust, and unfaithful as before the exile. Malachi steps on the scene to confront the sin, corruption, and injustice that has become characteristic of this new generation in the land. Something lurking in the background of the story of Ezra-Nehemiah that we did not mention in our last series is the pressures of mixed allegiances within the Israelite leadership. Recall that the temple and wall project and the paychecks of many Israelite leaders were being funded by the Persian government, which had other plans and agendas. So, for instance, the Persian government would have likely used the temple to collect governmental taxes, opening up the door for confusion and corruption. Thus, it is likely that these mixed allegiances to Yahweh and the Persian government contributed to the failings of Israel at the time. And this is the context that Malachi confronts - a lack of full allegiance to Yahweh, leading to corrupt, unjust, and unwise actions. The book is divided into six disputes between God and the people. Most of these disputes are formatted with God making a claim, the people responding in disagreement, and God responding with the final word.

**三月 March: 瑪拉基書 Malachi (四旬期 Lent)**

March 6th – 神的愛與信實 God's Love & Faithfulness (瑪拉基書 Malachi 1:2-5 – Dispute 1)

March 13th - 鄙視聖殿 Despising the Temple (瑪拉基書 Malachi 1:6-2:9 -Dispute 2)

March 20th – 拜偶像與離婚 Idolatry & Divorce (瑪拉基書 Malachi 2:10-16 - Dispute 3)

March 27th – 公義的神 God of Justice (瑪拉基書 Malachi 2:17-3:5 - Dispute 4)

**Structure of Book:**

Dispute 争论 1 - 1:1-5

Dispute 争论 2 - 1:6-2:9

Dispute 争论 3 - 2:10-16

Dispute 争论 4 - 2:17-3:5

Dispute 争论 5 - 3:6-12

Dispute 争论 6 - 3:13-18

Conclusion 结论 - 4:1-6

**Dispute Format 争论形式:**

1: God makes a Claim 神宣告一件事

- 2: The People Respond in Disagreement 百姓反驳
- 3: God Responds 神回应

**Resources:**

- [Sermon Video](#) (Pastor Tian)
- [Sermon Slides](#) (Pastor Tian)
- [Sermon Video](#) (Pastor Will)
- [Sermon Slides](#) (Pastor Will)

- [Overview: Malachi](#) (Bible Project) [English]
- [Overview: Malachi](#) (Bible Project) [Mandarin]
- [Map of Israel/Judah/Edom before Babylonian Exile](#)
- [Maps of Persian Empire](#)
- [Map of Judah \(Yehud\) under Persian rule](#)
- [Timeline of Rebuild under Persian Rule](#)

**Discussion Questions** (Pastor William R. Horne / Pastor Linghui Tian)

*Pastor Will:*

- (1) Read Malachi 2:10-16 together. What observations do you make, and what stands out to you? How would you summarize the passage?
- (2) The larger theme of this section centers on the “unfaithfulness” to one another in the community of God’s people. What are some ways we are tempted to act “unfaithfully” towards our brothers and sisters in Christ?
- (3) The other major problem in the text is the people of God’s mixed allegiance between Yahweh and “foreign gods.” What places today are we tempted to give our allegiance over King Jesus?
- (4) What are the two levels of a “culture of divorce” we see in the text? What are the results of this “culture of divorce”?
- (5) Share any of your reflections, thoughts, or questions regarding these application principles. What places do we struggle the most? How can we better flourish in each category?
  - (a) We Must Give Our Full Allegiance to King Jesus Alone.
  - (b) We Must Be Intentional in Our Culture Making.
  - (c) We Must Fight for the Good of Marriages.
  - (d) We Must Protect the Vulnerable.
  - (e) We Must Seek the Good of One Another.

*Pastor Tian:*

- (1) 以色列人休掉自己盟约的妻子和娶侍奉外邦神女子所带来的结果是什么 ( 玛2 : 12-13 ) ? 为什么上帝对行这两件事的人提出这么严厉的警告 ? What was the result of the Israelites breaking away from their covenant wives and marrying women who served foreign gods (Mal 2:12-13)? Why does God give such severe warnings to those who do these two things?

(2) 耶和華神所恨惡的兩件事是什麼 ( 瑪 2 : 16 ) ? 這對我們有哪些提醒 ? What are the two things that the Lord God hates (Mal 2:16)? What does this remind us of?

**Important Notes** (Pastor William R. Horne):

Notes on Q1: Please take note of the context, both recalling what we learned in Ezra-Nehemiah and using the above resources (maps, videos, etc.).

*Things to Note:*

- In terms of the **speaker in 2:10** - the two major thoughts are the prophet Malachi speaking or the people of Israel speaking. I believe it is best understood as the prophet Malachi speaking - open up the accusations with a set of rhetorical questions.
- The word the NIV translates “Unfaithful” throughout this section is a more robust word than the English word “Unfaithful.” It carries the ideas of “dealing with treacherously,” “to deceive,” and “to do harm” to the other. The Chinese Simplified Bible translation carries some of that “to deceive” meaning within it (correct me if I am mistaken).
- Here, many scholars view Malachi as presenting a critique of the divorce decree and exclusion choices of Ezra and Nehemiah. We must first notice Malachi’s purposeful and unique wording choice here compared to his contemporaries Ezra and Nehemiah.
  - “We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying **foreign women** from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel.” (Ezra 10:2 NIV). The phrase “foreign women” is used throughout Ezra and Nehemiah.
  - Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves by **marrying women who worship a foreign god.**” (Mal 2:11b NIV). Malachi shifts the foreignness from the women to the god. This phrase used by Malachi “foreign god” is a rare occurrence in the Hebrew Bible, indicating for us that this is strategic word usage by the prophet. Shifting the framing of the communities problem from “marrying foreign women” to “marrying women who worship a foreign god,” pins the issue as a matter of spiritual allegiance, not a matter of ethnic and cultural difference.
  - Also, note that divorce is never part of the solution, but the whole unit was to be cut off from the people of God for their mixed allegiances.

Notes on Q2: Again, the word the NIV translates “Unfaithful” throughout this section is more robust than the English word “Unfaithful.” It carries the ideas of “dealing with treacherously,” “to deceive,” and “to do harm” to the other. Malachi is confronting a community that, despite saying they followed the same God, were choosing to harm one another for selfish gain - betraying each other’s trust with little regard for the good of the other. This is not what the community of God’s people is supposed to look like. And here is where an essential connection is made in Malachi’s opening rhetorical questions - when we act deceitfully or self-seeking with others, we mock our Creator, showing we follow another god. Our loyalty to the one true God is directly tied with our love for others. So, in effect, when we harm others, we harm God. Malachi tells the people, “Your acting unfaithful to one another has defiled the covenant you have with God.” And Malachi does not place this blame on not just a few people but the whole community. The culture and fruitfulness of a community are on all community members. It’s up to us to foster a community that looks like Jesus.

Notes on Q4: First, we see a divorce between the people's religious practice and their lives. Though they participate in religious activities and bring a sacrifice to the altar, their sacrifice is rejected, as their ethics and actions do not match their religious proclamations. This is a continuous theme throughout the Scriptures, history, and into the present - that failure of the people of God to live a life that matches their religious proclamation. May we not be those people who divorce our lived actions from our religious practice. Second, we see that the epicenter of their mismatched lives is the literal practice of marital divorce. So here, the hypocrisy is explicitly seen in the brokenness of their married and family lives. These men's sacrifices were rejected because of their lack of care and faithfulness towards their wives.

*Results:*

- NOT "godly offspring."
  - We can see the culture we have created, whether good or bad, by looking at the next generation. And that is where Malachi points the people of Israel to look - their offspring. There is an emphasis here on what parents with mixed allegiances or a culture of divorce creates - and that is NOT 'godly offspring' or children who will NOT walk with and remain faithful to the one true God. And research tells us that this reality remains true today - that the most significant influence on a child's life is their primary caregivers - the parents. **So much of what you see in your children is formed by what they see in you.** Your priorities and patterns of living speak much louder than your words. If your priority is work and career over everything else, then it's likely your children will do similar. If your priority is money and material goods, then it's likely your children will prioritize the same. The way your marriage looks is likely how your children's marriage will look if they get married. If your loyal is to King Jesus alone, then it is likely your children will also seek after Jesus. The culture we create is manifest in the next generation. The question is, what do we want that to look like? And this is not a matter of control or an emphasis that the next generation must look like their parents - that is simply not true and won't be true. **But, it is a call to model a way of life that will be passed down to the next generation. And in some ways, it is a call for the next generation to act with grace and discernment on what to hold onto and let go of to follow Jesus.**
- "Violence" and harm towards the vulnerable
  - God wants to protect the vulnerable. In much of Malachi's time and context, women had little social power, thus were reliant on a husband for protection - economically, socially, physically. God says that the men who participate in this culture of divorce and lack of care for their wives are not only failing to live into their responsibility to protect, but they were doing "violence" towards the women in their actions. This is the ultimate end to a 'culture of divorce' - harm is done to others. In this culture of divorce - the marriage covenant is no longer a place of protection but a place of violence.

## Notes on Q5:

### **(1) We Must Give Our Full Allegiance to King Jesus Alone.**

For the people in Malachi's day, their lived actions didn't match their religious proclamations - showing that their allegiance wasn't ultimately to the one True God. Unfaithfulness and deceit towards their fellow human proved that they were unfaithful and deceitful towards God. Their visits to the temple and sacrifices on the altar did not matter, as their lives did not match the God they claimed to worship. The same could be true of us. Thus, we must examine ourselves and ask the questions - where does my allegiance truly lie?

### **(2) We Must Be Intentional in Our Culture Making**

Our collective actions have the power to form community cultures - whether that be in our churches, our families, or our workspaces. The responsibility then is on all of us to come together decided what type of culture we will create as a community - will it be a place of safety and protection or a place of violence and harm? This was the problem God confronted in his people through Malachi - their actions created a culture of divorce and harm, leading to a place of violence, a place that was not safe for the vulnerable. We have the power to form culture - we must be intentional in how we form it what culture we are modeling with our lives.

### **(3) We Must Fight for the Good of Marriages**

First off, this is not a condemnation on you if you have experienced divorce. Each situation is different and complex in its own right, and God's grace is sufficient in it all. This is also not prioritizing marriage over singleness. The Apostle Paul almost says the opposite in 1 Corinthians - that he wishes people would stay single like himself, further to devote themselves to the work of the Lord. But, for those who are married, there is a clear call to make that relationship a place of deep love, protection, and flourishing for both parties. And in the moments when marriage is at its best, we get a taste of the love Christ Jesus has for his Church. We must fight for the good of marriage - that our marriages and the marriages of those around us would be found to be the location of this profound love, this Kingdom presence of flourishing. It is from this place that "godly offspring," as Malachi says, arise. It is from this place that we can create Kingdom-shaped culture.

### **(4) We Must Protect the Vulnerable**

Again, this is one of the most consistent principles in the Biblical story - that God cares for the marginalized and the vulnerable and calls us to do the same. We have seen in our text today that divorce was, in effect, violence towards women—a lack of protection for the vulnerable in their society. We must be a people characterized by care and protection for the vulnerable both as individuals, and in the community culture we create.

### **(5) We Must Seek the Good of One Another**

This third dispute in Malachi is couched in the problem of harm in the community. There was a lack of care for the people you covenanted to be with; instead, you all are acting deceitfully and selfish for one's own gain. We must be a people and a community that seeks the good of the other. Under the new covenant of King Jesus, we all have made a covenant to be together as the body of Christ. When we harm one another or seek our own gain

at the cost of others - we do harm to the God we claim to serve. This is a core Christian principle that we must daily drink in, that it might transform our thoughts and actions towards others.