

THE BOOK OF MALACHI
Lesson 8, Chapter 2 Continued 2

We ended our previous lesson at Malachai chapter 2 verse 11, when we were dealing with the issue of forbidden intermarriage between the Jews and gentile foreigners. While this was directed mostly towards the Levite Priests, it included the common Jewish population who did the same. Whether it was the laxity of the priests first having the intermarriages such that the people followed by observing and doing the same, or the general population first doing it and the priests observing and then adopting the practice themselves, we don't know.

What we do know is that this intermarriage issue had always loomed large in Israel from its earliest inception as a set-apart nation, and right on into New Testament times. That, as well as the matter of fornication of Hebrew men with foreign women, many of them being prostitutes. It was a Torah law that Israelites were not to intermarry with foreign women. Nonetheless it happened with alarming regularity. Paul, post-Yeshua, approached the matter from a bit different angle.

CJB 1 Corinthians 6:16-20 ***¹⁶ Don't you know that a man who joins himself to a prostitute becomes physically one with her? For the Tanakh says, "The two will become one flesh"; ¹⁷ but the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit. ¹⁸ Run from sexual immorality! Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the fornicator sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or don't you know that your body is a temple for the Ruach HaKodesh who lives inside you, whom you received from God? The fact is, you don't belong to yourselves; ²⁰ for you were bought at a price. So, use your bodies to glorify God.***

Compare this to Malachai 2:11.

CJB Malachi 2:11 ***Y'hudah has broken faith; an abomination has been committed in Isra'el and Yerushalayim. For Y'hudah has profaned the sanctuary of Yehoveh, which he loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.***

In Malachai 2:11, we read “For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of Yehoveh...” and then explains how they profaned it “...by marrying the daughter of a foreign god”. One of course asks: assuming that the phrase “sanctuary of Yehoveh” means the Temple, then how does marriage affect the Temple sanctuary one way or another? The answer is Malachai is equating the God worshippers of Israel with the sanctuary of Yehoveh, in the same way Paul is equating Believers as that same sanctuary (only he uses the term Temple, instead). Both times the Temple is being used as simile with which to compare people to a building. In neither case is God meaning “the people ARE the Temple (or sanctuary)”. The common people and the Israelite religious establishment understood that rather simple literary feature, but Constantinian Christianity has ignored it and instead attempted to use it literally in order to advance the Church’s foundational faith pillar that all things Israel have been replaced by all things gentile.

The point is, as concerns Israel, God is a husband to Israel, so Israel is committing adultery by Jewish men marrying foreign women. And, for Believers in Yeshua, to have sex with or to marry a non-Believer is to join together a “sanctuary” of God (our bodies), with a “sanctuary” of a false god (the body of a non-Believer). So, Paul is but echoing Malachai, even using the same simile, but in a slightly different way.

Let’s re-read a portion of Malachai chapter 2.

RE-READ MALACHAI 2:11 – end

Since it is a Torah law that prohibits a man from marrying a foreign woman, then if he does so anyway, there is a corresponding punishment. Verse 12 explains that punishment.

CJB Malachai 2:12 ***12 If a man does this and presents an offering to Yehoveh-Tzva'ot, may Yehoveh cut him off from the tents of Ya'akov, whether initiator or follower.***

The CJB rearranges this verse in a way that perhaps makes it easier to understand, but I think is a less than satisfactory way to do so... and in fact, is unnecessary. Here is what it says more literally in the Young's Literal Translation:

YLT Malachi 2:12 ***Cut off doth Jehovah the man who doth it, Tempter and tempted -- from the tents of Jacob, Even he who is bringing nigh a present to Jehovah of Hosts***

Let's approach it from the YLT version. Cut-off is **karet** in Hebrew. This is a very severe term that in its most typical sense means to blot out the existence and memory of the wicked person, along with the ending of his family blood line. So, here is a definitive case of immediate family as well as future descendants bearing a punishment for the sins of an ancestor. It can even be a case where there will be no descendants as a result of the punishment, so those who may have been born and lived will never be born in the first place. The horror of such a thought to the ancient peoples was the stuff of nightmares. But, English language Bibles tend to water it down by saying "excommunicated" or "banished" or some such milder thing.

As we move further into the verse, most English Bibles will say something similar to the CJB, like: "may Yehoveh cut him off...". May, of course, sounds like the hope of a human wishing that this bad person would be cut-off. Or in other versions, it is that Yehoveh "may" cut-off that person, which to English speakers means God might or might not decide to. The correct understanding is that God WILL do this. "Doth" expresses the proper idea of inevitability with no chance of a different outcome. And, that is exactly what is intended.

Notice that the threat is directed to "the man who does this". The Hebrew word is **ish**, and while it can mean male or husband, the point is that it is gender oriented. It speaks not of mankind (male and female together) but only biological males. So, it is highlighted that the intermarriage issue is directed at Israelite men marrying foreign women, and less so Israelite females marrying foreign males. There are societal reasons for this, starting with divorce laws of the universally male-dominated societies in Bible times.

But then we get this strange phrase regarding who, exactly, will get punished. The older and more traditional English translations say “him that calleth and him that answereth” or “any to witness or answer”. Another long-standing translation is “everyone who awakens and answers”. Frankly, these translations are so cryptic as to be gibberish. Modern day experts in biblical Hebrew see this is an idiomatic expression, since otherwise it makes little sense. Perhaps it is some well understood cultural phrase associated with everyday life in a community. So, while we can’t be 100% certain of its meaning, considering the context it most likely is intending to implicate those who actually commit intermarriage, and those who were accepting or facilitating of it. And in both cases, these would mean Israelite men... more specifically in Malachai, Jews.

We next get a further clarification about those that will be cut-off for such a violation. It says: “...from the tents of Jacob”. This not only confirms that this concerns Israelite males, but that they will be disassociated from their Israelite heritage. Recall that the terms Jacob and Israel are synonymous. The phrase “tents of Jacob” isn’t meaning for the reader to recall Israel’s nomadic time in the wilderness. Rather, it is a common expression that means your home, your community. And, the verse culminates with the words “he who is bringing an offering to **Yehoveh Tzva’ot**.” Some believe this is intended to then direct us to thinking that this verse is speaking to the priesthood. However, this can just as easily be speaking of the individual common folks bringing their offerings and sacrifices to the Temple. I lean towards this intending to implicate the priesthood, since the first part of the verse implicates all Israelite males in general. In other words, the goal is to tie all Israelite males together... common men and priests... as the group from which the abomination of intermarriage is occurring. A most sad state of affairs.

I think it needs to be said that, of course, the underlying principle applies to modern day Believers in Yeshua. Men, we should avoid marrying non-Believing women, and especially if that non-Believer is an out-and-out atheist. It is my opinion that the 1st case (marrying a non-Believer, but who may at least acknowledge there is a God) is less a sin and more a matter of our turning a deaf ear to the crying out of wisdom not to do so. But, in the 2nd case (of marrying an atheist), it is indeed a sin. What is more, sadly the religious

leadership of our day is every bit as complicit in this matter as the laypeople, as well as in the commission of other sexual sins that almost always accompany it. It has long been known that the divorce rate among the clergy, and the moral failures for the religious leadership, pretty much mirror that of their congregations. And that the congregations pretty much mirror that of secular society. This is the same general condition of the Jews in Yehud in the days of Malachai.

CJB Malachi 2:13 *Here is something else you do: you cover Yehoveh's altar with tears, with weeping and with sighing, because he no longer looks at the offering or receives your gift with favor.*

Once again, let's turn to the Young's Literal Translation to get a more accurate sense of what is happening here.

YLT Malachi 2:13 *And this a second time ye do, Covering with tears the altar of Jehovah, With weeping and groaning, Because there is no more turning unto the present, Or receiving of a pleasing thing from your hand.*

The order of a Hebrew sentence is much like the order of an English sentence in that what comes first in a sentence carries greater weight than what comes second, or later. The first words are in Hebrew **wezo shenit ta asu**. The "**we**" or "**ve**" is a conjunction that connects two organically intertwined circumstances. Thus, this verse is a continuation of, and connects the indictment of, the previous couple of verses with, a new one. The previous indictment was intermarriage (we could extend this, to a degree, to include marriage in general), which is now connected to the issue of divorce. The Hebrew **zot** (which essentially means "this"), is given in a form that indicates a weighty matter. The next word **shenit** means second (with the issue of marriage to pagans in the previous couple of verses being the first thing). So, the idea being expressed is that the second trespass against God (divorce) is the nearly inevitable consequence of the first thing (intermarriage with pagans). And the second thing that is not yet precisely named (divorce) is alluded to with the covering of Yehoveh's altar with tears, weeping and groaning.

The thing to understand is that the divorcing being spoken about, is of Hebrew women married to Hebrew husbands. So, Hebrew men are divorcing their Hebrew wives in order to marry pagan women. Israelite men didn't need anyone's permission, nor was there some long process, to divorce. Mostly it was only a matter of the man unilaterally announcing it and sending his wife away. It happened fast and it happened frivolously, and for the worst possible reasons. The results were often catastrophic for the women. Divorced women were usually viewed as shamed and damaged. That made it difficult for them to get accepted back into their father's household to be cared for. The usual result was poverty.

The grammar used in this verse expresses the intensity of the tears and groaning of these abandoned Hebrew wives, which are at least as much about the poor futures for them that lay ahead, as much as the agony of losing the love of their husbands. And, how zealously they sought God (thus their tears fell on God's altar). Let me mention, as well, that the exact phrase used here is **mizbah Yehoveh**, which translates best to Yehoveh's altar or the altar of Yehoveh. The point is, this is an expression not normally found outside of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. That is, it is outside the Torah, meaning outside of speech about the covenant. I mention this, because it is further evidence that Malachai was likely a former priest whom God had called out of the Priesthood to be His Prophet. His knowledge and easy speaking in covenant terminology just keeps leading me to think that he had to have, at one time, been a Levite Priest.

The last half of verse 13 explains the cause of all this pain. It is because Yehoveh will not receive their offerings and sacrifices that relieves His anger towards their husbands, and also gives the family favor and blessing. What, then, do these divorced women want? They want God to return to them and to return to showing them favor, probably by getting their husbands to reverse course. But, just under the words, lies the sense that Israel must return to sincere worship first, otherwise God will not react by returning to the type of comforting behavior that these Jews hope will happen, just because it used to happen.

CJB Malachi 2:14 *Nevertheless, you ask, "Why is this?" Because Yehoveh is witness between you and the wife of your youth that you have broken faith with her, though she is your companion, your wife by covenant.*

Verse 14 continues with this conversational style of dialogue, and has the people responding as though they remain puzzled at why Yehoveh has removed His blessing and presence from them. Why don't you pay attention to us or accept our sacrifices any longer, they ask? That is, it is not unlike the way a teen responds after they have done something ridiculously irresponsible, have been assigned their punishment, but then in a tone that is more a demand, and a questioning of your sanity asks: "Why are you doing this to me? What could I have possibly done wrong?" While it may *sound* like genuine shock and disbelief, it is anything but. From Israel's standpoint, they are saying, "but I brought you all these wonderful gifts and sacrifices, so what difference does it make what I've done apart from that?". It is sort of the ancient version of falling back on the belief of once-saved-always-saved.

"But God, why am I suffering these things? Why won't you hear my prayers and pleas? After all I did go forward and pray the sinner's prayer. I tell people I believe in Jesus. So, what difference does it make what I've done apart from that? The deal is I live my life as I see fit, and you forgive me for whatever I do wrong." The Jews of Malachai's day thought their lack of sincerity, and lack of obedience, didn't matter so long as they mechanically brought gifts and sacrifices to the altar. Goodness, that was the really great thing about being a Jew in the first place! And, so, many Believers think exactly the same way. Where do you suppose those ancient Jews, and these modern Christians got such an idea? They saw it by example, and heard it from their religious leadership. But, then, when the consequences of their evil behavior and their bankrupt beliefs finally happened, and God pulled back from them, they were in disbelief, certain that whatever the cause was, it sure couldn't have been anything they did. After all, they had a Get-out-of-Jail Free card! So, why was it being rejected?

In the case of verse 14, the response to "why is this?" asked by the shocked Israelites, the answer given is: because God was the guarantor of the

covenant made between the Hebrew wife you married when you were young, and it is you that broke the covenant with her by divorcing her to marry a woman who worships a foreign god. Covenant. Covenant. Covenant. It is always about the covenant. Marriage is not only part of Torah law; it is of itself its own covenant. And covenant is not a contract; a covenant has a spiritual element to it that a contract does not. There is a depth to a covenant that is so much more than an agreement among humans. I think of all the places in the Bible that sums up best exactly what is being said here, and looks at this issue from both the earthly and the heavenly perspectives, it has to be Proverbs 2. I want us to read it all, so valuable is what it teaches us. All of Proverbs is called Wisdom Literature, but little has so much wisdom condensed into so few words as this Proverb.

CJB Proverbs 2:1-22 ***My son, if you will receive my words and store my commands inside you,***
² paying attention to wisdom inclining your mind toward understanding- ³ yes, if you will call for insight and raise your voice for discernment, ⁴ if you seek it as you would silver and search for it as for hidden treasure- ⁵ then you will understand the fear of Yehoveh and find knowledge of God. ⁶ For Yehoveh gives wisdom; from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding. ⁷ He stores up common sense for the upright, is a shield to those whose conduct is blameless, ⁸ in order to guard the courses of justice and preserve the way of those faithful to him. ⁹ Then you will understand righteousness, justice, fairness and every good path. ¹⁰ For wisdom will enter your heart, knowledge will be enjoyable for you, ¹¹ discretion will watch over you, and discernment will guard you. ¹² They will save you from the way of evil and from those who speak deceitfully, ¹³ who leave the paths of honesty to walk the ways of darkness, ¹⁴ who delight in doing evil and take joy in being stubbornly deceitful, ¹⁵ from those whose tracks are twisted and whose paths are perverse. ¹⁶ They will save you from a woman who is a stranger, from a loose woman with smooth talk, ¹⁷ who abandons the ruler she had in her youth and forgets the covenant of her God. ¹⁸ Her house is sinking toward death, her paths lead to the dead. ¹⁹ None who go to her return; they never regain the path to life. ²⁰ Thus you will walk on the way of good people and keep

to the paths of the righteous. ²¹ For the upright will live in the land, the pure-hearted will remain there; ²² but the wicked will be cut off from the land, the unfaithful rooted out of it.

Malachai says of the wrongly divorced woman: she is the wife of your youth, your companion, and the wife of your covenant. Solomon spoke in similar terms of her in Proverbs.

CJB Proverbs 5:15-23 *¹⁵ Drink the water from your own cistern, fresh water from your own well. ¹⁶ Let what your springs produce be dispersed outside, streams of water flowing in the streets; ¹⁷ but let them be for you alone and not for strangers with you. ¹⁸ Let your fountain, the wife of your youth, be blessed; find joy in her- ¹⁹ a lovely deer, a graceful fawn; let her breasts satisfy you at all times, always be infatuated with her love. ²⁰ My son, why be infatuated with an unknown woman? Why embrace the body of a loose woman? ²¹ For Yehoveh is watching a man's ways; he surveys all his paths. ²² A wicked person's own crimes will trap him, he will be held fast by the ropes of his sin. ²³ He will die from lack of discipline; the magnitude of his folly will make him totter and fall.*

God hates divorce. There is no way around it. Yet, because He knows humans so well, He has made laws and rulings to govern both marriage and divorce. What is interesting, if one thinks about it, is that Malachai and Solomon approach the issue as much from a wisdom standpoint as a legal standpoint. It is unwise for a man to put away a good wife for no good reason other than he wants a new and different one. In Bible times, in that region of the world, divorce was purely in the hands of the husband. But, wisdom says it is far better to feel greatly blessed by a good wife despite being seduced by an unknown female. Why go that route? It is almost certain to result in disaster and heartache for everyone involved. But even more, God sees. It is a wicked man that does this, regardless of what that man might think.

It is not my intention to turn this into a lesson about divorce. Neither can I leave it without saying that because the Western World has put women on a much more equal path with men, then we rightfully can add the wife as one

who might leave the marriage covenant wrongly, as much as the husband. The Apostle Paul also addresses the matter mostly reiterating previously written biblical thoughts about divorce by saying that if either party breaks faith with the other, then yes, that is grounds for divorce that is not viewed as sin for the aggrieved and otherwise faithful party. Neither can I sugarcoat it. The modern view of no-fault divorce, and claiming irreconcilable differences (meaning I just don't wish to be married any longer) might be fine in a secular environment if a covenant of marriage before God isn't involved, but it doesn't fly with God if you took your vows in His name. Then it moves from unwise to breaking His laws and commands. Sin. Let's move on to verse 15.

CJB Malachai (2:15) ¹⁵ *And hasn't he made [them] one [flesh] in order to have spiritual blood-relatives? For what the one [flesh] seeks is a seed from God. Therefore, take heed to your spirit, and don't break faith with the wife of your youth.*

As difficult to interpret as Malachai chapter 2, overall, verse 15 (at least the first half of it) is the most enigmatic of it all. Nearly every Bible translation has a different take on it. And, sometimes the words given are so senseless that it's like somebody dropped a Scrabble game and the letters landed and assembled themselves however they randomly did! As J.M.P. Smith once said: "This verse is hopelessly obscure". How, then, shall we approach this?

My thinking is that provided this verse 15 (and really the remainder of Malachai chapter 2) is legitimate and were actually there from the beginning (even if they may have become somewhat corrupted in their copying), then it is most legitimate to say that to whatever lengths we go to interpret it, it must align with the context and spirit of all that has come before it, and will appear after it, in Malachai's small book.

The first words in Hebrew are **welo echad asa**. These words are presented (according to the biblical Hebrew scholars) in a most rare grammatical form. **We** can mean "and" or "but". **Lo** is a negative that means no, non, or not. **Echad** is most generally used to mean the number 1. The way it is used in a sentence can mean literally the numerical 1, or one in a sense of something organically joined together, or meaning a union. The word **asa** is usually

interpreted as either “make” or “do”. Sometimes even “create”. The placement of **echad** makes the meaning ambiguous. In a nutshell, either it was intended that the “lo” (no or not) is meant to modify echad, or **echad** is meant to modify **asa** (make or do). The result? The JPS Bible translation says:

JPS **Malachi 2:15** ***And not one hath done so...***

But choosing the other word association produces:

RSV **Malachi 2:15** ***Has not the one God made...***

Two very different meanings, and yet, both quite legitimate. We won't go through the remainder of the verse in this technical fashion. I just wanted to show you what it is about this verse that makes it nearly beyond any confident way to interpret it that I can stand up for. In the end, I agree with Andrew E. Hill when he says: “Whatever the exact meaning of verse 15, the treachery and faithlessness of divorce as practiced in post-exilic Yehud stands diametrically opposite to the legacy of the covenantal oneness and faithfulness that Israel received from Yehoveh.”

To paraphrase Hill, the point of this verse is that God in His unity with Israel, and His unyielding faithfulness to the covenant that binds them together, was supposed to be how Israel not only responded in reciprocal love to God, but also how Israel responded together, human to human, within their Believing community. Further, it should be exemplified even beyond a general community oneness, to a virtual one-flesh type of oneness in the covenant of marriage. Thus, divorce is terrible even for legitimate reasons. But, for a Hebrew man to divorce his faithful Hebrew wife in order to join himself to a pagan woman who worships a foreign (a false) god, is off the charts in magnitude (it is called an abomination).

One of the most important takes that we must accept in this passage is that while God may remove Himself for periods of time from Israel, in the sense that He won't protect and bless them, never will He renounce His faithful covenant relationship with them. How quickly His presence and blessing returns depends solely on how quickly Israel learns its lesson, repents, and

returns to Him in obedience and sincere faithfulness. I say this with utmost passion and determination because the Constantinian Church has turned this completely on its head. The Church says that God has divorced Israel, that Israel means nothing to Him now or forever, and that the gentile Church is God's new wife. This a lie straight from Satan himself, that overturns the Bible, Old and New Testaments. If you have been following along with Torah Class as we study the Minor Prophets in depth, this fact repeats again and again and again.

Verse 16 says:

CJB Malachi 2:16 ***"For I hate divorce," says Yehoveh the God of Isra'el, "and him who covers his clothing with violence," says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot. Therefore, take heed to your spirit, and don't break faith.***

The first word of this verse is **ki** in Hebrew. It is used in what is called the "causal" form, meaning that what has come just before this word (that is, verse 15) happened because of what is said following the word **ki**. Thus, God said what He said in verse 15, due to the cause that "I hate divorce". So, yes, God can hate (as we've seen before in the Prophets). And, yet, we read this in Deuteronomy:

CJB Deuteronomy 24:1 ***"Suppose a man marries a woman and consummates the marriage but later finds her displeasing, because he has found her offensive in some respect. He writes her a divorce document, gives it to her and sends her away from his house.***

The next several verses of Deuteronomy 24 spell out a number of terms about what is to occur in a divorce. This isn't about God saying that divorce is to be expected and that He accepts it. Rather as omniscient God, He knows that it WILL happen in Israel, and so for the protection of the women and the children, He erects some guardrails without strictly forbidding divorce itself.

In fact, what seems to be happening in Malachai is that we have Hebrew husbands divorcing in a technically legal way as opposed to just throwing their wives out of the house without a **get** (a writ of divorce). Yehud was like a

cancer patient at this time; and the cancer was rampant divorce. Next we get to this statement about violence and garments. The Hebrew word used is **hamas**, and it is usually translated as violence. And, yes, there is a direct association between this Hebrew word and the Arabic word **hamas**, for which the terror group Hamas has adopted for its name. While the Hebrew **hamas** leans towards meaning violence and evil-doing, the Arabic **hamas** leans towards meaning zeal or enthusiasm. However, the Arabic **hamas** means zeal or enthusiasm in the sense of zeal to punish non-Muslims and enthusiasm to make war on non-Muslim nations.

So, what has violence to do with one's garment? A garment (clothing) is designed to cover a person's nakedness. But it is also an expression that is sometimes used to describe covering a person with their inner self and condition and attributes. Thus, a garment could, euphemistically, be a garment of righteousness, or wickedness, or in this case of violence as indicating that inner condition. We read a much earlier story in the Bible where the term garment (**lebusho** in Hebrew), is employed where Boaz is urged to spread his garment over the Moabite woman, Ruth. So, here in Malachai, the husband who covers with his garment of violence, is referring to the divorcing husband. He is acting in a terrible, unjust way towards his wife. Instead of covering her with a wedded garment of protection and trust, he is covering her in a garment of hostility.

Please also note that in the notice of God hating divorce, He says that He also hates the husband who does this. Do not confuse this with the human notion of hate, as meaning a severe psychological dislike. As concerns God, it is to be looked at more in a political sense. That is, one of allegiance and acceptance. So, for God to hate a person means to reject that person. To exclude them.

I want to sum up today's lesson in this way. While God condemned divorce, He didn't outright prohibit it. From the human-to-human interaction standpoint, God created some rules to control divorce from the sense of a proper and fair process. From the divine standpoint, divorce was a breakdown in covenant obligation between both God and man, and man and man. But from the historical aspect as concerned the condition of Yehud at the time of Malachai, it was an attempt to stop the chaos and build some stability in the Jewish

community of Yehud that the rampant divorce of Hebrew women was causing, and equally as serious, the importation of idolatry caused by those same Hebrew men marrying foreign women. The only remedy is to restore the proper approach of the Jews to the long-standing covenant relationship Israel has had with Yehoveh.

We'll end it here and not finish with vs. 17 since vs. 17 really ought to be the first verse of chapter 3, as it is the beginning of the 4th oracle of Judgment and not the final verse of the 3rd oracle of Judgment.