

# Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 30, Malachi

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his teaching on the Book of the 12. This is his final session, session 30 on the book of Malachi.

We are finally to the place where we're concluding our study of the book of the 12 and focusing in this last lesson on the book of Malachi.

You'll notice I'm smiling. We're at the end of this and if you have endured through all of the videos, thank you for doing that. I hope they've been instructive and helpful and you may be smiling that we're finally at the end as well.

Now what I wish is that as we came to the end of this and looked at these 12 books, I wish that we had a more joyful resolution in the message of Malachi himself. Because at the beginning of this book of the 12, remember our first book is Hosea. What do we have there? We have a fractured marriage and a fractured relationship between God and his people.

Then we have books that chronicle for us 400 years of prophetic activity through the Assyrian crisis, the Babylonian crisis, and into the post-exilic period. As we come to the end of this, we think surely, in light of all of the things that the people of Israel have experienced, they have returned to the Lord at this point. One of the things that seems humorous, but really, it's just human nature, is that as we look at the post-exilic community, they often repeat and do the same things that their fathers did.

They really haven't learned from their past history. How could they not learn that? Well, that's part of human nature and that struggle with sin and disobedience is part of our experience. It's going to be that way until the time that we're with the Lord.

But in Malachi, we have the idea that the marriage that God has promised to restore has not been resolved. Hosea begins the book of the 12 talking about the love between God and his people. The opening statement of Malachi is the Lord says, I have loved you.

The shocking part is that the people respond back, how have you loved us? Malachi, as he's ministering in the post-exilic period, has come back to the land, but the resolution to this drama, the final act in the story, has definitely not occurred. God is still working to bring his people back into a loving relationship with him. The amazing thing is that after all of the things that God has brought his people through, and they

still are not in the place where they need to be, they still do not have the right heart to know that God promises even at the end of this book, I am going to resolve this.

And so, we come to the end of the post-exilic period and God has promised in the book of Hosea, I'm going to heal their apostasy. God promises in the book of Joel, I'm going to pour out my spirit on all flesh. God promises in the prophecies of Zechariah, I'm going to pour out a spirit of repentance on my people and I'm going to purge away their sins.

But ultimately that doesn't happen at the end of these books. We are still eschatologically waiting for the ultimate restoration. And there is still, as we're at the end of the story here, there is still the need for God to raise up a prophet who will call the people back to their faithfulness to the Lord.

Malachi is the last of the post-exilic prophets, so let's just take a minute and review the history of the post-exilic period. The people returned, the first return in 538, Zerubbabel and Joshua, and in 520 BC, they finished rebuilding the temple, and it was dedicated in 515. The second return is going to take place under Ezra. He calls the people to spiritual reforms as a result of that.

That happens in 458. Then, in 445, Nehemiah is going to come back to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. They carry that out, and they accomplish it in 52 days.

Nehemiah also serves as the governor of Judah. But throughout this time, there's sort of this spiritual ebb and flow, and the people will turn back to God for a little while. When they come back to the land, they're enthusiastic about rebuilding the temple, and then they waver in that.

It's put on the back burner. The temple is not completed for 15 years. When Haggai and Zechariah challenge them, they repent, and they come back to the Lord.

There's a time of spiritual renewal. But possibly, as we look at the prophecies of Joel, by 500 BC, they're back to a place of spiritual malaise where they're disobedient against God. God has to bring a locust plague against them and is going to bring a further army to invade and repeat the judgment and destruction all over again until the people repent.

Then there are spiritual renewals that take place during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. There's this time when Ezra is going to stand in front of the people and read the law to them and explain the law to them. There's a national renewal and repentance.

But it goes back and forth and back and forth. The problem of apostasy and the problem of God fully writing the law in the hearts of the people so that they would

always follow him, those issues haven't been resolved. We definitely see that in the hard-heartedness of the people as Malachi dialogues with them and confronts them about their sin in his prophecies in this short book.

Where does Malachi, and the name Malachi simply means my messenger. Is this Malachi's actual personal name or is it simply a title that's given to him? We don't know the answer to that. But when does this man, Malachi, when does he minister? Well, part of the answer to this is that it seems to be that Malachi is dealing with, in many ways, the same problems that we see Ezra and Nehemiah dealing with in the years 458 to 445.

There is the problem of intermarriage with foreigners that is going to be addressed in Malachi 2. That is a problem in Ezra chapters 9 and 10. It's also a problem that Nehemiah is going to have to deal with in Nehemiah chapter 13 when it begins to recycle itself. There is the problem of the people failing to pay their tithes.

That's an issue in Nehemiah chapter 13, verses 10 to 14. Again, as a governor and leader, Nehemiah will have to confront the people about that. Malachi confronts the people with the fact that they have not paid their tithes as well.

In light of some of the financial problems and the deprivation and poverty that the post-exilic community had experienced, we can kind of understand that. There is also the problem in Malachi of social injustice. Some of the same sins that were being talked about in the 8th-century prophets before the exile are the same things that are happening in his day.

Malachi chapter 3, verse 5 says this. The Lord says I will draw near to you for judgment. There is still judgment looming in the future for the people.

I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord. So, there is a problem with social injustice in the book of Malachi. In Nehemiah chapter 5, verse 13, that is also one of the problems that Nehemiah, as governor, is going to have to deal with.

Even when the people join together and rebuild the walls, and they accomplish this and do this, in 52 days, there is still a problem of those who are influential or more wealthy taking advantage of the oppressed, the poor, and the needy. So, what does this mean about the timing of the ministry of Malachi? I think that it indicates to us that probably the best dates for the ministry of Malachi are going to be just prior to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. He is dealing with the same problems, but the reforms that they bring about have not taken place yet.

Or we could be looking at a prophet who ministers after the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. We could potentially date him to the year 400 BC, and the problems have recycled themselves because we have this issue where there is this ebb and flow, and it does not take the people very long to revert back to their sinful ways. Even after they have had a strong leader and even after someone has led them back to God, a few years later, God is back on the back burner of their lives, and they are repeating the same pattern of sins that were in the past.

So, Malachi, we could date him between the time of the first return and the second and near the time of Ezra and Nehemiah or immediately after that in 400 BC. Either way, Malachi's ministry marks the end of the classical prophets in the land of Israel. There is not going to be another prophetic voice to speak to the people until the birth of Jesus and, prior to that, the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist.

The Jews recognized in the intertestamental period that the blessing of the prophets, they were no longer experiencing that and that the office of prophet had essentially ceased. So, 1 Maccabees chapter 9, verse 27 says the prophets ceased to appear among the people of Israel, and so Malachi marks the end of that. So, we would wish that there is a resolution here where there is a great turning to God, there is a revival, and the people have learned the lessons of the past, but actually, the problem is that the Lord is still calling the people back to himself.

There is an interesting connection between the prophecies of Zechariah and the prophecy of Malachi. In Zechariah chapter 1, verse 3, the Lord says, return to me, and I will return to you. Then, in Zechariah chapter 1 verse 6, they repented, they returned to the Lord, and did as the prophet.

So, we have a repentance and the people returning to God and God returning to the people, but it is not a lasting repentance. So, in the book of Malachi over in chapter 3, one of the things that Malachi is going to have to say to the people is, return to me, and I will return to you. The same message of repentance that Zechariah was calling for, the same problem, the same need for repentance, it was just as real in Malachi's ministry as it was in the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah.

Joel had called the people to repentance, consecrate a feast, rend your hearts, not your garments. The people had responded to that, but again we are back at the place where God is having to call a rebellious people to repentance. Now, the genre and the specific form that the message takes in the book of Malachi, I think, represents just how severe the fracture is between God and his people at this point.

The primary prophetic genre in the book of Malachi is what we refer to as a disputation speech. So how close are the people back to God? Has the marriage been restored? No, Malachi is almost like a marriage counselor here because there is an argument between God and his people, reflected in the way that they respond to the

message of the prophets. Whenever Malachi speaks to them and says, hey, here is the issue that God wants you to deal with; here is what God wants you to change, the people will often respond back to God with some kind of sarcastic response.

I have loved you in the opening dispute, and the people are going to say, well, how have you loved us? So, we see these kinds of prophetic disputations all throughout the Old Testament prophets. In this book, again, there is a fractured marriage, and Malachi is trying to resolve the relationship between this husband and his estranged wife, and the people are still resistant to come to the Lord. Now if you want to look at some other passages in the prophets that reflect this genre of disputation, what you really have going on here is that the prophet is either engaging with the real or the imagined objections of the audience and trying to convince them of the truthfulness of the message.

Now, in Malachi, the people are actually defiant and brazen enough; they are going to just blurt out the objections, but often, the prophet will have to anticipate what obstacle is going to stand in the way of the people believing this. How am I going to convince these people who may not accept the message that I have, or they have a false belief or a false ideology? How am I going to correct that? We have an example of a disputation in Ezekiel chapter 18. The people are saying, our fathers have eaten the sour grapes and our teeth are set on edge. Their false belief is our fathers sinned; our parents sinned, and we're dealing with the consequences.

And so, what Ezekiel does is that he takes that very real objection, he addresses it, and he says, look, you're not suffering for the sins of your fathers. God will respond to you on the basis of the way that you respond to him. A righteous father is not going to be able to save a sinful son, but on the other hand, a sinful father is not going to bring judgment on a righteous son.

The soul that sins shall die. So, he corrects their false understanding. We have an example of a disputation in Isaiah chapter 40, verses 12 to 31.

The people say in the midst of this, our cause is hopeless. God has forgotten us. God has abandoned us.

And so, Isaiah presents a picture and says, no, the Lord is the one who created the world at his workbench. And you think that the Babylonians are too great, that God cannot keep his promises. Look to the Lord, wait on the Lord, and the Lord will take care of you.

The Lord is great enough and powerful enough to overcome the Babylonians. And the prophet corrects their false ideology. He says the nations are nothing but a drop in the bucket.

Look, you object to this promise. You don't believe that God can fulfill it. God will keep his promises.

So, there's a prophetic disputation. Jeremiah chapter 2 is kind of the combination of a prophetic disputation and a covenant lawsuit. Jeremiah is charging the people with spiritual adultery and infidelity to God, and the people are constantly talking back to him.

How have we been unfaithful to God? How can you charge us with being idol worshippers? But then they will also turn around and say, well, but we can't help it. We can't help it. We have to worship these idols.

We're drawn to them. We're compelled. So, there's a disputation and a dialogue that goes on throughout that chapter between the prophet and the people.

That dialogue and that type of dialogue is actually going to run all the way through the book of Malachi. And again, it's a strange conclusion to the book of the 12 because the marriage relationship that is fractured in the book of Hosea, there are still issues that demand the people's repentance, and they're going to have to fully return to the Lord. I think we have here, and I'll mention one other prophetic book.

I think we have here a contrast between something that we see in one of the other books of the 12. Note the contrast between the book of Habakkuk and the book of Malachi. Habakkuk represents the questions of a faithful servant of God who doesn't understand God's ways and who asks the question, God, when are you going to do something about the wickedness in the land? God says I'm going to do something.

I'm sending the Babylonians. Then there's another honest and sincere question. How can you use the Babylonians when they're more wicked than we are? God's promised that he'll ultimately deal with that and the just live by faith.

We can come to God with those kinds of honest questions and our doubt and our lament and our questions ultimately are designed to lead us to praise and to worship and to trust and to belief. The just will live by their faithfulness. However, in Malachi, we have questions as well.

I have loved you. Well, how have you loved us? You have been a burden to me, God says. Sort of the pious, well, how have we been a burden to you? It reflects questions that are, instead of questions from a person of faith who genuinely is seeking God and wants to understand God's ways, they are questions that reflect rebellion against God, cynicism, doubt, and I think even apathy where they've grown to the point where we don't know if God rewards the righteous or punishes the wicked.

To be honest with you, not sure that we really care. So that's kind of the backdrop to all of this. Let's go into the disputations.

Disputation number one is a dispute; chapter one, verses two to five, is a dispute over God's love. Now, we're going to start right at the beginning here. You think if a people have been rightly restored to God, one of the things that the people of Israel would affirm is that the Lord had loved them.

Jeremiah says, I have loved you with an everlasting love, and my love is reflected in the way that I have drawn you with my hesed. No one could bring charges or accusations that God had somehow been unfaithful to this relationship. And yet the cynicism, the doubt, the skepticism, the unbelief, the rebellion of the people in Malachi's day leads them to say, how have you loved us? Even this most basic thing about the Lord, they are challenging this.

Hosea and Malachi are the books in the Book of the 12 that specifically focus on the issue of the love of God for Israel and the lack of Israel's love for God. And so, the husband says, I have loved you. And sort of the unfaithful wife who has not lived up to her marriage commitment says, how have you loved us? So that's kind of the explosive starting point.

And how would you like to be the marriage counselor dealing with this couple? So, the Lord is going to remind them and answer this objection: how has God loved us? He's going to contrast to them their fate and that of the nation of Edom. And he says, is not Esau, Jacob's brother, declares the Lord, yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to the jackals of the desert.

So, we want to chronicle the marriage. Let's go all the way back to the very beginning in the book of Genesis. But God's point here is that I have demonstrated my love to you because I have saved you and preserved you through all the judgments that you've come through.

I mean, in some sense, I understand the question of the people at this point. Think about what's, what has happened in the Book of the 12. The Assyrians have come and invaded the land.

The Babylonians have invaded the land. There has been this great deportation and exile. There have been all kinds of other covenant curses.

And even in the post-exilic period, things haven't been that great. So the objection is, how have you loved us? Man, look at this history of destruction and devastation. But what the Lord says is, what you need to keep in mind is the fact that God has preserved you as his people and God has promised you and offered you a hope.

The contrast to that is, is that recently the Nabateans have driven the Edomites out of the land. That was God's judgment and they will not be revived and restored. If you want to understand God's love for you, think about how that relationship still exists 400 years after we've been through all of this.

So, God reaffirms his love for them and reminds them that he has elected them. He has chosen them. He has blessed them in ways that are not true of other nations.

However, this doesn't resolve this and this doesn't satisfy them. So, then there is the accusation that God says to the people, you have brought to me corrupt worship, and you despise my name. The kind of worship that you are giving me reflects that you do not realize and recognize and honor who I am.

And again, instead of accepting this prophetic correction, instead of listening to the Lord and saying, you know, well, what are the ways that we can change? The people say this: how have we despised your name, and how have we polluted you? And then later on, they're going to say, as they're talking about worshiping the Lord, what a weariness this is. And you snort at fulfilling your obligations to God. So, God says, you've despised my name.

How have you done this? The issue that the prophet is going to raise is that the kind of worship that you're bringing does not reflect the greatness of who God is and the glory of his name. First of all, one of the ways that you're dishonoring God is that you're bringing him inappropriate sacrifices. The first problem in all of this is that they're bringing sacrifices.

They're bringing animals that are lame. They're bringing animals that are crippled. Let's take this to the Lord.

It's not of any value or worth to us. He says the offerings and the sacrifices that you give to the Lord should reflect what you think about the greatness of God. Verse 8, when you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those who are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor.

Would he accept that or show you a favor? You want to know why God doesn't favor you and show his blessing to you. You claim that you've worshiped him and brought him sacrifices and offerings, but you're bringing him defective offerings that your own governor would not accept. Does your worship reflect the glory and greatness of God? And I think in tracing this theme, we could almost go back to the time of Cain and Abel.



Cain brings an offering to the Lord but then becomes angry when God does not accept his offering and accepts Abel's. But Abel brings the first fruit of his flock and seems to bring a superior offering. Cain brings an offering.

Abel brings the very best. And when we worship God and when we offer sacrifice or when we express our devotion to God, it's to be the kind of devotion that honors who he is and reflects his greatness. Verse 11 says, 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. So, this passage looks forward to the time when God is not just going to be worshiped in Jerusalem. The Lord will be worshiped throughout the world and all the nations are going to honor and reflect the greatness of God.

Malachi is saying you need to reflect that now. That's the God that you know. Bring him worship that reflects this.

Now, in verse 13, the other problem is that they are also practicing injustice as they attempt to worship God. And so, Micah and Amos and the message that those people preach, we're right back to that particular issue. They are offering sacrifices and performing their rituals to God, but they are not acting toward the poor and the needy, and the oppressed in a way that pleases and honors God or that obeys the commandments that he gave them.

So, verse 13 says, what a weariness this is, and you snort at it. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering. So now the issue is not just that they're offering defective sacrifices. They are offering animals that they have ripped off from their neighbors.

And I'm drawn back to Amos, who says, you come in to worship the Lord, and you lie down on the garment that you have taken as the pledge from your neighbor that you were supposed to return to him every night. You drink wine in celebration as you worship the Lord in the sanctuary, and it's wine that you have taken by the oppressive fines that you have imposed upon your poor neighbors. So how have they reflected contempt for God's name in their worship? They've offered him defective sacrifices and their lifestyle doesn't match up to what they are professing.

So, there's the question of God's love in the first disputation, chapter 1, verses 2 to 5. There is the question of corrupt worship in the second disputation, and this extends all the way to chapter 2, verse 9. In the midst of this, there is a call, especially for the priest, to assume the proper place of leadership and to lead the people to worship in a way that honors God. The reason that exile came in the first place is that Israel had corrupt leaders. They had priests that did not teach the ways of God.

They had priests who ministered only for their own personal gain. Well, there's still that issue and that problem, and if the people are going to worship God in a pure and proper way, they are going to need the right kind of leadership from their priest. So that's the second dispute.

There is a third dispute that arises in chapter 2, verses 10 to 16, and it is a dispute over the faithfulness of Israel. Again, we're back at the issue of worship, and the people are complaining to God. God says that Judah has been faithless to him, and the people respond back, well, we've offered our sacrifices.

It seems like God is being unfaithful to us. Why hasn't he accepted our sacrifices? Why has God not accepted our offerings? The answer is the faithlessness of the people of Israel and of the post-exilic community. This word, *bagath*, the word to be unfaithful or treacherous, is going to be repeated three times.

You're claiming to worship God, and you're angry that God has been unfaithful to you by not accepting your offerings. The real issue here is that God doesn't accept these offerings because you have not been faithful to him. The specific way in this passage that they have not been faithful to him relates to their behavior and their conduct in regard to marriage.

This is a very central passage. It's a difficult passage. There are some interpretive issues that we have to raise here.

There are some translational issues that I'm not going to raise. There are some difficult things here. But marriage is the issue.

Their unfaithfulness to God is specifically again reflected not just in their worship practices but in their social practices. There are two areas in regard to marriage where they have demonstrated they are not a people of covenant faithfulness, and they should not expect God to accept their offerings because they have not been a people that have been faithful to him. Here's the first issue in chapter 2, verse 11, and I think both of these issues are connected.

Chapter 2, verse 11. Judah has been faithless by God, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Judah, for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which he loves. God has provided a sanctuary, and the Lord has provided that sanctuary as a place where the people could enjoy and experience the presence of God and the love of God.

God loves that sanctuary, but what has happened is that as the people come and worship the Lord and are supposed to be enjoying this marriage relationship, they have married the daughter of a foreign god. And so, the issue of their marriages and

their fidelity to God and their marriage to God is definitely going to be intertwined here. And we're back again to the problem in the book of Hosea.

Their syncretism, or the allure of other gods and idols, is drawing them away from the Lord. And so, God confronts them about their marriages to foreign women who seem to be devoted to these other gods. And so, it is this inner marriage with foreigners that's being addressed here.

It's very important for us to understand. The issue here that is being addressed is not simply, it's not a racial one. This is not a biblical prohibition against interracial marriage.

And we see those kinds of marriages in various places in the Old Testament. But the issue here, the same issue that was raised when Israel came back to the land initially, is they were not to marry these foreign women when they were devoted to these false gods because the same thing would happen to them that ultimately happened both to Solomon and to the people of Israel at various times. As they intermarried with these other people, they would begin to worship their other gods.

And so, Judges chapter 3 verses 6 and 7 is going to talk about this. The problem was when the Israelites did not drive out the Canaanites, what happened as a result of that, in chapter 3, verses 6 and 7, daughters they took to themselves for their wives and their own daughters. They gave to their sons, and they served these other gods.

I mean, the prime example of this, the prime warning against this, you should look at the life of Solomon. First Kings chapter 11, he marries many of these foreign women and ultimately gives his heart away to these false gods. So, Israel has been false in their marriage to God because their marriage to these foreigners has led them away.

Ultimately, we know that the problem of idolatry was solved fairly early in the post-exilic period. Israel realized the danger of worshipping other gods. By the time of Jesus, the Jews had become pretty zealous about purging idol worship out here.

But here, there is the problem of the syncretism that is being caused by their marriages to these wives of other gods. So, they are violating, by doing this, they are violating the command that God gives that they are to be exclusively devoted to him. And the relationship that God was supposed to enjoy with these people, even though the sanctuary and the temple have been rebuilt, that relationship can't be enjoyed because the people have been unfaithful.

By bringing these wives of these foreign gods and bringing the allurements of syncretism and idolatry back into the picture, they have compromised their commitment to God. And so, again, in light of the exile, in light of what's happened both to the northern and southern kingdoms, how could they possibly do this? And

yet, ultimately, that's what has happened. Now, an alternate interpretation here, and again, we've got some interpretive issues, is that some commentators will interpret this passage where it says that Judah has married the daughter of a foreign god.

Instead of this being a reference to actual intermarriage and marriage to foreigners, they see this as talking about the worship of the pagan goddesses like the Asherahs, like what we saw in the time of Hosea and Jeremiah and all of the other prophets. However, the fact that the larger part of this passage, and in chapters 2 verses 13 and following, deal with actual marriages and divorces, it seems like the passage as a whole is dealing with real marriages. But either way, the issue here is the potential compromise that has happened as a result of this.

Now, this same issue will be addressed by Ezra in chapters 9 and 10. Ezra is going to do something fairly serious. He is going to order these people to divorce their foreign wives and to send away even the children that have been born in these relationships.

The reason that Ezra takes these extreme measures is that some people have accused him of bigotry and prejudice and going beyond the Mosaic law and all of those kinds of things. But the reality is that as the leader of these people, he realizes the seriousness of compromise with syncretism and false worship. That issue, I think, and that potential problem is behind why he goes to these extreme measures and says, look, you have to put these women away, and you have to send away your children.

That's not God's normal plan or God's normal design, but it was something that was needed to deal with this specific situation. Nehemiah, the problem is going to return during the time of Nehemiah's time as the governor of Judah. It says that he is going to have this kind of response in chapter 13, verse 23.

In those days, I also saw the Jews who had married of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab, and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. I confronted them, I cursed them, I beat some of them, and I pulled out their hair. This is not just Nehemiah becoming a crazed fanatic. It recognizes and reflects the seriousness of this compromise where they are taking these foreign wives.

Again, the issue is not primarily racial, and the issue is spiritual. Now, at this point in time in Judah's history, some of these measures are also due to the fact that it is very important as they're surrounded by these other peoples that they maintain their specific national identity and their ethnic identity as Jews and as the people of God, but ultimately the issue here is their fidelity and their commitment to God. They claim that they're worshiping God, they want God to accept their offerings, they're angry at God, and they accuse God of not accepting their offerings.

God's response back to them is, you are the ones who are being faithless to the covenant, and the way that you're being faithless to the covenant is that you've intermarried with these foreign women. Now that brings us to the second issue that is going to be addressed in regard to marriage, but the second problem and the second issue is that they were divorcing the wives of their youth. In verse 14, you say, why does God not accept our sacrifices? The issue that's related here is that the Lord was a witness between you and the wife of your youth.

They have divorced the wives of their youth and have put them away, and I think they have specifically put them away in order that they could marry these foreign women that are mentioned earlier in the passage. And so, there is a connection between the divorce of the wives of their youth and them taking the wives of these foreign gods. Perhaps the reason for this and the motivation for this is that intermarrying with people that are in the land will provide the opportunity for them to own land that belonged to those families.

And so, they were getting rid of the wives that they had committed themselves to at an earlier time and they were intermarrying for the purpose of gaining more land as they had come back. But either way, God looks at this and their betrayal of the covenant of marriage as a betrayal of the covenant with the Lord. I think there's a powerful reminder of that to us, how seriously God takes marriage and the commitments that we make there.

Marriage is referred to in this passage as a covenant. It is not a contract that these two parties agree with. It is a covenant and a promise that they make before God.

Now, there are also some interpretive issues related to translational issues that are related to a very well-known verse in this passage, verse 16. We all know the statement, I hate divorce, where the Lord gives his estimation of what he thinks of what they're doing. Literally, the Hebrew text, however, here says he hates divorce, third person, and the third person, the he who hates divorce, is the same person who covers his garment with violence.

So, the reference here to hating and divorce is likely not a reference to the Lord. It is possibly a reference to these husbands who were divorcing their wives so that they could marry the wives of these foreigners who worshiped other gods. What this passage perhaps is reading or perhaps is saying, and maybe something has dropped or fallen out of the text, it could be saying, he who hates, in other words, he who hates his wife.

We often see the word hate being used with reference to an unfavored wife throughout the Old Testament. Proverbs chapter 30, Leah is described this way in the

book of Genesis. So, these husbands who hate their wives, they are the ones who divorce.

In doing so, they cover their garments with violence. Here's another reflection of what God believes about divorce. A man who would abuse and mistreat his wife by putting her away and not keeping his covenant promises to her so that he could marry another woman for either personal or financial or even religious reasons, the one who has done that has committed a sin of social injustice.

He is no different than someone who perpetrates acts of violence because he has threatened the well-being and the livelihood of his wife. So God takes this issue very, very seriously. Unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant ultimately reflected on marriage to unfaithfulness to their marriage and their covenant with the Lord.

Andrew Hill, in his commentary on Malachi, draws a contrast between the prophetic understanding of divorce that is reflected in this passage and the practice of divorce in the Elephantine community of Jewish people that was roughly during the same period. In the Elephantine community, which was a group of Jewish people who were living as refugees there in the land of Egypt, they had begun to view marriage in a strictly contractual sense. In the documents that we have from Elephantine, from this Jewish group, the issues in marriage are not about fidelity and the commitment to that marriage, but they are about dowry and bride price and property rights and inheritance.

The relationship seems to be abandoned for these kinds of contractual issues. It seems as if the marriage relationship at Elephantine could be ended without any specific reason for doing so. This passage stresses the importance of marriage.

Deuteronomy chapter 24 did allow for divorce when a man found something that was sexually indecent in his wife that was short of adultery. But what is going on here is that these men are divorcing their wives apparently simply because they want to marry someone else or simply because of economic reasons. Ultimately, idolatry again was an issue that was dealt with fairly early in the post-exilic period, but that is still something that is part of the temptation that is alluring the people of God away from him.

That's a threat. That's one of the ways that Israel is reflecting their unfaithfulness toward the Lord as they're marrying these foreign women. We've talked a great deal about idolatry in this series of lectures on the minor prophets.

Before we pass this issue one last time, I want to give us a quote about idolatry. Again, we tend to read this and say, why in the world would Israel, why did they do this? Why did they worship these gods? Why were they constantly drawn away from the Lord, the true God, the fountain of living waters, for these broken cisterns that

would never satisfy them? How could they turn away from something that was true for something that is so obviously false to us? One writer has this suggestion. He says this.

He says an idol in comparison to God or in contrast to God is safe. An idol never challenges you. It doesn't judge or demand loyalty, but the Holy One of Israel is a jealous God.

He is a passionate and loving, but yes, unspeakably dangerous God as well. The actions of the Israelites throughout the time of the prophets may seem strange to us, but when you consider the challenges of worshiping the living God, the love of tame idols makes much more sense. Here I think likely that's what's happening here.

They're drawn back to syncretism. God demands, look, if you're going to worship me and if you're going to be in covenant with me and if you're going to have a relationship with me, that demands exclusive devotion to me as your God. It also demands fidelity to your marriages and to your relationships.

So that becomes the source of the dispute. The people want to know why God has not been faithful to them. The charge really though, and the accusation is the prophet says, you're the ones who have not been faithful to God. In chapter 2, verses 17 to Chapter 3, verse 5, the prophet is going to directly charge the people and say, you have wearied the Lord with your words.

And we think, well, wow, if a spokesman of God were to challenge you with that, the response that you would naturally expect to see from the people would be, well, how can we change? But what the prophet is going to say is that the people respond back to him: how have we wearied him? And the way that they have wearied God is that they have begun to challenge and they have begun to question the justice of God. The attitude of the people, the apathy of the people, has led them to say that everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them. God rewards evil people.

Why hasn't he rewarded us? Or where is the God of justice? The Lord's answer and the Lord's response to this is that the Lord is going to bring a judgment that will cause the people to realize just how sinful they are in their attitudes and their actions. And the Lord says, I am going to send my messenger, which is the same word for Malachi, but now we are talking about a future messenger. The role of Malachi, my messenger, anticipates this eschatological prophet and he will prepare the way before me.

And then, after God has prepared the way with his messenger, it says, and the Lord whom you seek will come to his temple and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight. And in light of the parallelism of this passage, the Lord and the

messenger of the covenant are likely both descriptions of God himself. So, the Lord is going to send an eschatological prophet, and then finally, the Lord himself is going to come.

The people were challenging the justice of God. Where is God's justice? Maybe even raising the question, has the glory of God even really returned to the temple after we built it? God says, ultimately, one day, I am going to return, but before that happens, I'm going to send my messenger. And he will warn you, and he will call the people back to God.

And then there will be a purging judgment. And this judgment, it says, it will, that God, when he returns, will sit as a purifier and a refiner of silver, and he will purify the people and their priests and their leaders. God has not abandoned justice the way that the people are charging.

God will ultimately bring justice. And the people need to understand the reason they are not experiencing blessings is that they are swearing falsely. They are not giving their workers their wages.

They are taking advantage of widows. They are the ones who have a problem with justice, not God. So, the accusation is turned against them.

The fifth dispute is the question of Israel's failure to pay tithes. And I want to focus on this one for just a couple of minutes because I think how we apply this today, we have to be careful that we don't make some mistakes here. But the Lord again brings an accusation, and he says, return to me, and I will return to you.

Lord, I'm waiting to take you back. But the problem is, is that you are robbing God. And they say, you know, we're robbing God.

How are we robbing God? And the Lord says that you are robbing God by not paying your tithes and your offerings. And as a result of that, you are cursed with a curse. God says in verse 10, bring the full tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house and put me to the test, and I will bless you.

So, the Lord says, the reason that you're being cursed and the reason that you have robbed me and the way that you've robbed me is that you haven't paid your tithes. You haven't brought your offerings. These were very important, especially at this time, to the support of the workers of the priest and the Levites at the temple.

And by failing to do this, they had, in fact, not just robbed the priest and the Levites, they had ripped off God. There is a promise in this passage that if they will pay their tithes they will, obey the law, and do what God has commanded them, the Lord will pour out his blessing on them. And it's very similar to the book of Haggai.



You have not built the temple, and God has cursed you and taken all of your wealth and livelihood away from you. But when they begin to build, note what happens here. God says, from this day forward, I will bless you. And the Lord says, put me to the test, and I will see if I will not open the window of heaven for you and pour down a blessing on you until there is no more food.

God promises them physical prosperity in response to their faithfulness in paying their tithes. So I think we can immediately see some of the applicational issues that come up here. First of all, there is the issue of the Mosaic Covenant that stands over everything that is being said here.

God is promising Israel specific promises that he gave to the people of Israel in connection with the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant is still in effect. If you obey me, I will physically bless you.

If you disobey me, I will curse you. And so the promise here and the idea, put me to the test, and I will bless you, and I will pour out just all of my abundant blessing and prosperity on you, has to be understood in the context of the Mosaic Covenant. God promised specific covenant blessings to the people of Israel that are not necessarily true for us today.

And there is a general spiritual principle here that God does reward those who are faithful in giving to him, but that blessing may not be the type of blessing always that God gave to Israel. God promised specific covenant blessings to them in that covenant that related to the enjoyment of the land. God will often bless us financially when we give.

And Paul will talk about the fact that God will bless you financially so that you can give more to the Lord, and the Lord will honor that, but a specific promise of physical prosperity or of wealth coming from faithfulness and loyalty to God is one of the ways that this passage is taken and abused, especially by prosperity theologians. One of them says this: in tithing, you are laying the foundation for financial security and abundance. You are establishing deposits with God that you can use when you need them.

And sort of this, like, you can demand, put God to the test, you can demand it. That's a false understanding of the application of this passage in light of the fact that we are not living under the Mosaic Covenant. I think sometimes, even as pastors, as we talk to people about giving, we may go beyond, you know, the ways that we should apply it.

The concept of tithing is basically, again, an Old Testament concept, and tithing as it's practiced by Israel here is something that is regulated and stipulated by the Mosaic

law. Now, whether we should continue to practice tithing as a principle is something that we could argue and discuss, but the New Testament is more going to emphasize the idea of grace-giving, and tithing may be a measure that we can sort of use to measure our faithfulness of God, but it is not something that is specifically commanded of New Testament Christians. Be careful how you apply this.

The idea of bringing the tithes into the storehouse, you know, in terms of the context here, they would actually present their crops and their tithes at the temple because, again, they were providing for the priest and the Levites. There's nothing in this that demands that we apply this by saying that you need to give your offering to the local church. That's not what this passage is talking about.

So, we can derive principles about giving from this passage. We can talk about the value of the spiritual discipline of tithing, but be careful that we do not legalistically impose this passage on people without a proper understanding of the Mosaic law. And so I think sometimes even faithful pastors, as well as prosperity theologians, can sort of misrepresent what this passage is talking about.

That was an issue. The final dispute is going to be the question of Israel's arrogance toward God. And again, the accusation, you have said harsh things to me and the people say, what have we said against you? And again, it's the idea that the people no longer believe that there is value and profit in obeying God.

And they say it is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge? Evildoers not only prosper, but they put God to the test, and they escape. So again, we're back to the place where they're challenging the goodness and the justice of God.

And the Lord says, you have wearied me, and you have said these harsh things against me. Now, the final example of a positive response to the prophetic message is found immediately just after this. And we have this tiny narrative interlude and we won't develop this, but it says that after he had preached this message, there was a positive response.

It wasn't on the part of the people as a whole, and we don't see a spiritual revival. We don't see a return to God, but it says those who feared the Lord spoke with one another, and then the Lord paid attention and heard them. And so, again, it's this reciprocal relationship.

When people respond to the word of God in the right way, they will enjoy God's blessing. When they return to God, God will turn to them. And the obedience of these people was so significant in the eyes of God that a book of remembrance was written, and the names of these people were specifically recorded.

They would enjoy God's blessing, even at this time when there is essentially a community-wide apostasy and the people that are under the judgment of God. And the Lord says, when you see the way that I bless my remnant in contrast to the way that I judge those that are wicked, you will know, and you will see that there is a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve him. So even in the post-exilic community, God's going to bless those who respond.

God is going to judge and curse those who do not, and they're going to ultimately see this. Again, though, as we've worked our way all the way through the book of the Twelve, the responses that are made to God, these limited examples of repentance, are not the full return, the full restoration, but the fact that there is this small group of people who listen to the word of the Lord, respond to this, are written down in the book of Remembrance, ultimately points forward to the final restoration that will occur in chapter four. And remember, the post-exilic period is just the beginning of the complete restoration and salvation of the people of Israel.

There is a return beyond the return. And then at this future time, when God again purges the wicked, when God judges them, it says, those of you who fear my name, the son of righteousness shall heal with, shall rise with healing in their wings. You shall go out leaping like calves, and you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet.

God is going to bless. God is going to restore. God is going to bring his people back.

And to accomplish this in chapter four, verse five, God is going to send the eschatological prophet Elijah. God is going to send a prophet like Elijah to prepare the way. The New Testament connects this to the ministry of John the Baptist, but God is ultimately committed to his work of restoring his people.

The Book of the 12, focuses so much on the need to repent, the need to turn back to God, and the failure of the people to do so. It closes with the promise that when the eschatological prophet Elijah comes in the future, he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction. There will no longer be generational conflict because there will no longer be a distinction between the righteous and the wicked. All of the people will be righteous, and God will purge his people.

I appreciate the opportunity that I've had to teach on the Minor Prophets to do this series. And for those of you who have listened and watched all that, I really appreciate that. And I hope we are reminded through all of this the power of God's word.

It is a matter of life and death, how we respond to God's word, how we listen to his prophets, and how we listen to the prophetic word that God has given to us in Scripture. And the importance of that word is reflected in the fact that it reminds us of a God who loves us with an everlasting love and who is absolutely faithful to the covenant promises that he's made to his people.

I pray that you will be encouraged and blessed by the message of the Book of the 12 as you continue to read it and study it as a part of your Christian life.

Thank you.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his teaching on the Book of the 12. This is his final session, session 30 on the book of Malachi.