

# Accountability

## ACCOUNTABILITY FOR LEADING JUSTLY

Focal Verses • MALACHI 2:1–9; 3:5–6

### Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: DETERMINE the significance of justice for spiritual leadership; AFFIRM the value of covenantal reverence of God for leadership; and PRACTICE just spiritual leadership.

### In Focus

It was the last Sunday Pastor Bob Jenkins would address his congregation before retiring as Senior Pastor. Sitting behind his desk, he reflected on the first time he addressed his congregation. Pastor Jenkins remembered how humble he felt that the congregation had chosen him as their leader after a two-year search. Forty years later, he was just as humble to have had the opportunity to serve the church.

Pastor Jenkins remembered he prayed that his new church would be a community of faith that would live just lives and pray. He prayed that God would keep him safe from temptation and scandal. Pastor Jenkins prayed for honest elders and deacons who felt accountable to God and who could help him lead the congregation. He prayed he would learn the personal stories of his congregants so he would feel the heartbeat of the congregation. Pastor Jenkins remembered that he also prayed that the congregation members would show compassion toward one another and strengthen and challenge each other. He prayed for a community of faith that would bear each others' burdens and help the oppressed, the fatherless, and the poor. Finally, he prayed that his leadership would bring others to Christ. On this last Sunday, Pastor walked out in front of the congregation feeling confident that God had answered all his prayers—God had done all he asked.

*How does God bless honest leaders in His church? What is His reaction to dishonest leaders? How can we hold our leaders accountable so that they receive God's blessings?*

### Keep in Mind

“If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart” (Malachi 2:2, KJV).



## Focal Verses

---

**KJV** Malachi 2:1 And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you.

2 If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.

3 Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.

4 And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

5 My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.

6 The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

8 But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts.

9 Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.

3:5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

6 For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

---

### The People, Places, and Times

**Malachi.** The book of Malachi is the last of the Minor Prophets and the last prophetic voice to God's people before John the Baptist. The book is believed to have been written between 450–430 BC, a century after Cyrus, the king of Persia, issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Judah after their Babylonian exile. The Temple had been rebuilt in 515 BC, and houses were reconstructed; however, their spiritual lives remained in ruins. It is debated as to whether Malachi, which means, "My messenger," is the name of an actual person or simply a title attributed to a prophet tasked with relaying God's message to His sinful people. The issues that Malachi addresses are similar to those found in Ezra and Nehemiah, which means he either preached during their time or in the generation following them.

### Background

One hundred years after their return, the Jews had expectations of how life should be for God's chosen people. They had rebuilt the Temple and reinstated Temple worship as instructed by Haggai and Zechariah years prior. And yet, they were still in economic turmoil, suffering from poor crops, and were a far cry from the major independent nation that they once were. There was little evidence of the blessings promised to Abraham and Moses. This suffering, though brought about from their forefathers' repeated disobedience, caused them to question God's love. As a result of their disappointment and disillusionment, their hearts were indifferent or hardened toward God. The priests and the people violated many requirements of the Mosaic Law—haphazardly making sacrifices, tithes and offerings, marrying pagans,

divorcing freely, and living morally bankrupt lives in general.

*Why do you believe people ask “Does God really love me?” in the face of trials? What can this indicate about a person’s view of God?*

## At-A-Glance

1. God’s Warning to the Priests (Malachi 2:1–4)
2. Priestly Examples (vv. 5–7)
3. The Priests’ Sins (Malachi 2:8–9, 3:5–6)

## In Depth

### 1. God’s Warning to the Priests (Malachi 2:1–4)

First, the Lord lays out His case against the priests (Malachi 1:6–11). There were specific requirements for offerings and sacrifices according to Mosaic Law. The priests, in their indifference to the Lord, failed to comply, complaining that His requirements were “too hard.” They allowed offerings that were not true sacrifices—from stolen animals to animals that were unfit for any other use, presenting “gifts” to God that would not even be appropriate for an earthly leader. These priests defiled the Temple and dishonored the Lord. Not only were they offensive, but also they failed to acknowledge their offensiveness, feigning ignorance and seeking to justify their actions.

In response, God commanded that they choose to honor Him. He warned them that failure to do so would lead to curses. These curses would be so effective that even those things that were expected to be blessings would be cursed, like the required provisions to the Levites from other Jews. However, this destruction would not stop with them; it would extend to their descendants. Ironically, the

cause of their current suffering stemmed from the disobedience of their forefathers, and they were on the path of continuing the cycle.

The graphic picture the Lord provides is that of smearing feces on their faces. Not only would they be made unclean and unfit for service, they would be desecrated and exposed. This would happen so that the priestly Levitical line could be purified and restored, and His covenant with them could continue.

*Why do some people believe it is “too hard” to follow God and His ways?*

### 2. Priestly Examples (vv. 5–7)

Following the incident of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32), the Levites came forward when Moses asked for those who were for the Lord. The Levites then obeyed Moses’ command to kill those who had rebelled. God instructed Moses to set these descendants of Levi apart for His service. Those who rebelled against the covenant with God died amidst the turmoil of sin and rebellion. The Levites, however, were obedient and faithful to the covenant. It is in this context that the Lord reminds these disobedient priests that the covenant He made with Levi was one of life and peace.

The prophet delineates the characteristics of those who are examples of positive and godly leadership. Truth, peace, and equity are benchmarks for the lifestyle that does not accept inequity. Faithful leaders seek God for the truth as His messengers. The Levites revered and honored the Lord, speaking truth, living righteously, and obeying the Lord. The Levitical priests of old did as they were ordained: they instructed the people and preserved the knowledge of God. While prophets were typically called messengers of God, here Malachi uses it for those priests.

*How can considering the examples of the past help us to live more faithfully in the present?*

### 3. The Priests' Sins (Malachi 2:8–9, 3:5–6)

In contrast to how the former Levites lived, these priests were not committed to the truth. Not only did they allow Israel to fall away from the Lord, but they caused them to sin with false teaching. They showed favoritism in serving, cheating, and oppressing the vulnerable, involving themselves in all types of ungodliness. The all-knowing, ever-present, self-existent God would be His own witness against them and the judge. There would be no escape. And because of the public nature of their sins and positions, the judgment would be for all to see.

*How can we resist temptation to abuse positions of authority, and how can we help those who are taken advantage of by those in power?*

### Search the Scriptures

1. What did God say about the blessings of those who are disobedient (Malachi 2:2)?
2. How did God characterize Levi (v. 6)?
3. What wicked groups are described in Malachi 3:5?

### Discuss the Meaning

In the Bible we see the detrimental effects of leaders who strayed away from the Lord. Throughout 1 and 2 Kings, Israel and Judah's kings are characterized by whether they followed in their forefathers' footsteps in obedience or disobedience. Here we see that even after exile, Israel still struggles to be who God called them to be. We see who they are, but what do we learn about God's character in these examples?

### Liberating Lesson

"We do not sin in isolation." This statement is applicable to everyone, but it is particularly impactful for those who are leaders. History has shown that one leader with a bent toward injustice, evil, and selfish ambition can have a devastating effect on the masses. Consider

Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act, which set the stage for the Trail of Tears. However, history has also shown that one leader, such as Alexander Crummell, who served as a missionary in Liberia for twenty years and planted the first independent black Episcopal church in Washington DC, can spiritually impact generations to come. God told the priests to "make up your minds to honor my name." We get to choose what type of impact we will have. It all begins with a sincere commitment to follow and obey the Lord.

### Application for Activation

Reflect on a few leaders in your life, past and present. How have their actions impacted your life—positively and negatively? Identify what you learned about being a godly (or ungodly) leader from them. Then evaluate your relationship with the Lord and influence over others—at home, work, church, and so on. How would God describe your current relationship with Him and others? More like the zealous Levitical priests of old, or like the resentful priests in Malachi?

### Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

---

---

---

### Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

---

---

---

**Sources:**

Hanson, P. *The Harper Collins Bible Commentary*. New York: Harper Collins, 2000. Hindson, E. *Liberty Bible Commentary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982.

Walvoord, J.F., and Zuck, R.B. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books. 1985.

## Say It Correctly

Malachi. MAL-uh-kay.

Haggai. HAH-guy.

## Daily Bible Readings

### DAY 211

Habakkuk, Zephaniah

Psalm 85:8–13

### DAY 212

Haggai

Psalm 86:1–7

### DAY 213

Zechariah 1–7

Psalm 86:8–13

### DAY 214

Zechariah 8–14

Psalm 86:13–17

### DAY 215

Malachi

Psalm 87

### DAY 216

Matthew 1:1–2:18

Psalm 88:1–9

### DAY 217

Matthew 2:19–4:25

Psalm 88:10–18

## Notes

---

---

---

---