

The Sin of Betrayal
Scriptures for Today

Malachi 2:10–17

Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers? 11 Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god. 12 The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts. 13 And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand. 14 Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. 15 And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. 16 For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously. 17 Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?

INTRODUCTION

There is a particular kind of sin that almost never announces itself. It doesn't kick down the door. It doesn't shout. It simply hides behind tears, behind good words, behind a covenant it has already broken in secret. The Bible has a name for this sin: treachery. And the prophet Malachi says it plainly — we deal treacherously, every man against his brother.

Most of us don't think of ourselves as treacherous people. That word feels reserved for spies, traitors, betrayers in old stories. But Malachi will not let us off that easily. He asks a question that cuts through every excuse we might offer:

Malachi 2:10

Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?

If that's true — if we truly share one Father, one Creator — then how do we explain the way we treat one another? How do we explain the gap between what we claim to believe and how we actually live, worship, and love the people God has placed closest to us?

That gap is where Malachi 2:10–17 lives. It is a passage about worship that looks sincere but isn't received. About covenants that look intact but have been quietly broken. About a people who wept at the altar and still wondered why God seemed distant. If you have ever wondered whether God notices the difference between real faithfulness and its imitation, this passage has an answer — and it begins not with the marriage bed or the altar, but with a simple, unavoidable question about the family we all share.

I. One Father, Divided Brothers

Malachi starts here on purpose. Before he names a single specific offense, he establishes the standard everything else will be measured against: one Father, one God, one people. That means treachery against a brother is never merely a personal conflict. It is a betrayal of the very God who made that brother and made you.

Think of siblings raised in the same home, by the same parents, who grow up and stop speaking to each other over something petty — an inheritance, an old argument, a slight no one quite remembers the origin of. Everyone around them can see the absurdity of it: they came from the same place, carry the same blood, and yet treat each other like strangers. That's the picture behind Malachi's question. It isn't abstract theology. It's the uncomfortable recognition that shared origin makes division inexcusable.

Examine a relationship where you have justified unfair or unkind treatment of a brother or sister in Christ. Shared spiritual family makes such treatment a betrayal of the God who made you one, not merely a personal conflict — that is the direct force of Malachi's own logic in verse 10. And as a matter of wise practical counsel, take one concrete step toward honesty with someone you have quietly wronged, rather than letting silence stand in for reconciliation.

If we betray our own brothers, formed of the same Father, it should come as no surprise that this treachery reaches all the way into how we approach God in worship.

II. Treachery in Worship

Malachi now names Judah's specific offense.

Malachi 2:11

Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god.

The people had compromised their devotion, joining themselves to those who worshiped other gods, and in doing so had profaned what belonged to the LORD alone. The consequence was severe.

Malachi 2:12

The LORD will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto the LORD of hosts.

Notice that last phrase — even the one still bringing offerings to the altar was not exempt. Religious activity did not cover the compromise. And then comes the verse that exposes exactly how far this treachery had reached into their worship.

Malachi 2:13

And this have ye done again, covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand.

Picture someone showing up to make amends with visible emotion — a trembling voice, maybe even tears — while still holding onto the very thing that caused the offense in the first place. The tears are real. The sorrow even sounds real. But nothing has actually changed. Anyone on the receiving end senses the difference between grief over consequences and grief that leads to change. Malachi says God senses that difference too, and He was not moved by the first kind.

Before you bring worship, confession, or prayer to God, examine whether you are carrying unaddressed sin into His presence. Malachi 2:13 teaches directly that God may not regard an offering brought by treacherous hands, however heartfelt it feels. And when worship feels distant or unreceived, let that be an invitation to search your own life for what remains unresolved, rather than assuming God is simply unresponsive.

The treachery Judah brought to the altar did not stay at the altar. It followed them home, into the most intimate covenant relationship they had: marriage.

III. Treachery in Marriage and Attitude

The people, feigning ignorance, ask why their worship has gone unanswered. Malachi answers directly.

Malachi 2:14

Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

Marriage, according to this verse, is not a private arrangement. God Himself stands as witness to it. Consider a promise, written and witnessed and signed, that one party quietly decides no longer applies to them — not because the terms changed, but because honoring it became inconvenient. The document hasn't changed. The witness hasn't gone anywhere. Only the commitment has. That is the picture behind a covenant treated as disposable, and it is why Malachi insists that God Himself is witness to what was promised.

Malachi 2:15

And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.

God's design in marriage was purposeful, aimed at raising up a godly seed. And so the warning comes again: take heed to your spirit. Then the verdict is stated without ambiguity.

Malachi 2:16

For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.

If you are married, treat your covenant with your spouse as one to which God Himself is witness, guarding your spirit against the small, cloaked forms of treachery that can precede outright betrayal.

The passage closes by exposing one more layer of treachery — not toward a brother, not toward a spouse, but toward God's own justice.

Malachi 2:17

Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?

When you catch yourself questioning God's justice or growing cynical about whether He notices wrongdoing, bring that doubt honestly before Him rather than letting it harden into the kind of complaint this verse describes.

CONCLUSION

Malachi's people asked, "Where is the God of judgment?" as if His silence meant He wasn't watching. But silence is not the same as absence. The God who witnessed every promise made at that altar, the God who witnessed every vow spoken to the wife of thy youth, was not distracted. He was not fooled by tears offered alongside a heart that had not changed. He simply had not yet spoken His final word — and Malachi tells us that word was coming.

That is the truth this whole passage presses on us. Treachery — whether against a brother, against a spouse, or against God Himself in worship — is never hidden from the one who calls us all children of one Father. He sees past our tears to our spirit. He sees past our religious activity to our actual loyalty. And He is not asking us to perform better for Him. He is asking us to take heed to our own spirit — to stop covering violence with a garment, to stop asking "wherein" when we already know the answer.

So examine what you have covered over. Examine what you have called peace when it was only delay. If there is a brother you have wronged, go to them. If there is a spouse you have failed to treat as a covenant partner witnessed by God, return to that covenant with integrity rather than excuse. None of this earns you a place before God — that place is secured only by faith in Christ, who kept every covenant we have broken. But for those who already stand in Him, this is the call: deal faithfully, not treacherously, with everyone God has joined you to.

God is not deceived by tears. He is asking for truth.