

**Major Messages from the Minor Prophets**  
**The Prophecy of Malachi**  
**“Confronting the Imperceptible Abrasion of Faith”**

**Intro:** Our study of the final Minor prophet takes us again to the post-exilic period. God’s people had returned from captivity and with the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah had rebuilt their temple. However in reading Malachi one quickly senses in the conversations between God and Israel in Malachi’s dialogue style that all is not well in Israel. Joyce Baldwin offers this insightful summary of what appears to be the spiritual background of this book:

*Whereas most of the prophets lived and prophesied in days of change and political upheaval, Malachi and his contemporaries were living in an uneventful waiting period, when God seemed to have forgotten His people enduring poverty and foreign domination in the little province of Judah. Zerubbabel and Joshua, whom Haggai and Zechariah had indicated as God’s chosen men for the new age, had died. True, the temple had been completed, but nothing momentous had occurred to indicate that God’s presence had return to fill it with glory, as Ezekiel had indicated would happen. The day of miracles had passed with Elijah and Elisha. The round of religious duties continued to be carried on, but without enthusiasm. Where was the God of their fathers? Did it really matter whether one served Him or not? Generations were dying without receiving the promises and people were losing their faith.*

**Sound familiar? What Israel was experiencing can be experienced by us as well. None of us are immune to what Baldwin called “the imperceptible abrasion of faith that ends in cynicism because it has lost touch with the living God”. Three key words or phrases stand out in this analysis of Israel.**

**Imperceptible**—when we look together at the dialogue between God and Israel, we will see God raise a charge against His people. In each case, the Israelites will respond with a question that will almost always begins with the same word “How?” i.e. they will ask God how it is that they are guilty of the thing God mentions. They cannot see how imperceptibly their attitudes have changed.

**Abrasion of faith**—Sometimes the best way to describe what happens to faith is not that it is lost in some instantaneous surrender; instead it is eroded little by little through undisciplined living and hard times.

**Cynicism**—This is not a word that we often use; but it best describes what happens to a people of faith when they lose faith in God’s ability to act in their behalf. Instead of hope, there is a sense of futility in trusting Him; instead there is the conviction that it is not really worthwhile to believe and do right.

Today I want to talk about how can we identify the imperceptible abrasion of faith in our own lives; and how can we keep that from happening to us? The book of Malachi will help with both questions. How did Israel demonstrate this imperceptible erosion of faith?

**They lost the ability to see God's love in their lives**

*"I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How hast Thou loved us?" (Malachi 1:2)*

God affirms that He has always loved Israel; but Israel's response to God's statement indicates that they had lost the ability to see God's love in their national life. They had forgotten the unique call and blessings that they had experienced as the Lord's chosen people. This was the first indication that their faith had imperceptibly eroded over time.

**They offered to God worship that was "second rate" and bored**

God's words are particularly addressed to the priests who had the privilege of serving in His temple. God charges them with not really honoring and respecting Him

*"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?" says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name.*

But once again this abrasion of faith had been imperceptible to them.

Perhaps they thought, "Are we not offering the sacrifices just as always?"

And so once again, they come back with a question:

*But you say, 'How have we despised Thy name?' (Malachi 1:6)*

**In the verses that follow God gives them the evidence that He is quite aware of what had been going on at the temple.**

He saw the second-rate offerings they had been presenting as if they were worthy of the God who created them.

*But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly? says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 1:8)*

Somehow the priests could not see that their standards for themselves and for their earthly rulers were inconsistent with their standards for God. For their rulers and themselves, "Nothing but the best!" For God, "Anything will do!" And so they even presented to God the stolen animals that people had taken from their neighbors and the blemished animals that had no value to their flocks and that they just wanted to get rid of! Imagine that!

But God not only saw their sorry offerings, he heard the boredom in their voice when they muttered under their breath that they were tired of it all!

*You also say, 'My, how tiresome it is!' And you disdainfully sniff at it, says the Lord of hosts, and you bring what was taken by robbery, and what is lame or sick; so you bring the offering! Should I receive that from your hand? says the Lord. (Malachi 1:13)*

The privilege of eating the Lord's food had become blasé and boring; and God said I wish they would just shut the doors of the temple rather than worship me with boring second-rate worship. This is another manifestation of the imperceptible abrasion of faith.

### **Surrendered their commitment to the importance of godly relationships**

**God's covenant legislation had a provision about marriage to preserve a godly race; the Israelites were instructed not to marry outside their faith.**

**The Israelite's sin in this respect was doubly bad.**

First they violated God's command to marry within the faith

*Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which He loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. (Malachi 2:10-11)*

But what's worse, to do that they had to put away the Hebrew wives they were already married to! The Israelites really couldn't see what the big deal was and when they offered their sacrifices and God didn't answer their prayers, they could only ask in frustration, "For what reason?"

*Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. (Malachi 2:14)*

**The action of substitution of godly relationships for ungodly relationships is a sign of the imperceptible abrasion of faith.**

### **Lost faith in the worth of godly living**

**As Israel's faith eroded, their values changed. If at one time, they had affirmed the worth of their relationship with God, now they began to verbalize doubts about the value of godly living. Malachi charges:**

*You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, "How have we wearied Him? In that you say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them," or, "Where is the God of justice?" (Malachi 2:17)*

*Your words have been arrogant against Me, says the Lord. Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against Thee?' You have said, 'It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the Lord of hosts? (Malachi 3:13-14)*

**They affirmed that God was just as pleased with the wicked man as the righteous man. That God did not execute justice against the evil doer. That there was no advantage or benefit to serving God; therefore, it was just as well to do evil!**

**Such statements were evidence that the Israelites' faith had been imperceptibly eroding or abrading.**

### **Demonstrated unwillingness to invest in God's work**

**If the Israelites had imperceptibly lost faith in the worth of living God's word, they simultaneously had lost their commitment to support those**

**who taught God's word. God broached the issue to Israel in a very provocative way:**

*"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?' In tithes and offerings. (Malachi 3:8)*

**God's command to the Israelites to tithe was His way of giving them ownership in the teaching work of the priests and the support of the needy to which the tithes might go. But it was more than that. It was repayment of what the people owed God for His many blessings. That's why God put the question the way He does. To fail to give was not merely to rob the priests or the needy; instead it was to take from God the gratitude that He was due; it was robbery of Him!**

**The Israelite reluctance to give of their tithes was an indication that their faith had imperceptibly abraded.**

**It can happen to us too!**

**We too may lose sight of the love of God. Like Israel we may begin to say, "What's has God done for me?"**

**We too can offer worship that is second rate and bored. I wonder what God would say to people who drag themselves out of bed on Sunday morning to get here, who look forward to worship about like they would getting a root canal, who yawn through the prayers and songs and snooze through the sermon. Don't you think He might take that personally?**

**We too can lose interest in godly relationships.**

**We too can lose faith in the value of godly living.**

**We too can neglect giving. And all these should sound an alarm in our hearts.**

**Conclusion: Let's first take a good hard look at ourselves. Does my description of Israel from Malachi resonate in your life too? If so, then I hope you will see the importance of acknowledging the problem and seek solutions to the problem. If not, then I urge you to keep nurturing your faith and keeping it strong and vibrant.**

**But how can we keep these things from happening?**