

*Promise?*  
*What is a Promise?*  
*Malachi 2:13-16*

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**Series Introduction:** We are beginning a new series of messages this morning. For the next four Sundays, we are going to consider several passages in the Bible that we will apply to our marriage relationships. I realize that not everyone is married, but I hope that even if you are not married, you will agree with me that the marriage relationship is something that is desperately needed to be talked about from a Biblical perspective. I hope that as an unmarried person, you will not be made to feel left out of this series. Rather, I trust that God will speak to you in a very significant way just as I pray that God will speak to all of us who are married.

I want to begin this series of messages by asking those among us who have been married 50 years or longer to stand.

I also want us to begin this series with prayer for our marriages in our church.

Now, we are going to build this entire series around one word—promise. That’s what we say in our marriage vows, isn’t it? “Do you so promise?”

The idea of promise in a Christian marriage is significant because of the idea of covenant. It is that idea of covenant that I want to share with you today. Our text is in the last book of the Old Testament—Malachi.

**Text:** <sup>13</sup> And this is the second thing you do:

You cover the altar of the LORD with tears,  
With weeping and crying;  
So He does not regard the offering anymore,  
Nor receive *it* with goodwill from your hands.

<sup>14</sup> Yet you say, “For what reason?”  
Because the LORD has been witness  
Between you and the wife of your youth,  
With whom you have dealt treacherously;  
Yet she is your companion  
And your wife by covenant.

<sup>15</sup> But did He not make *them* one,  
Having a remnant of the Spirit?  
And why one?  
He seeks godly offspring.  
Therefore take heed to your spirit,

And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

<sup>16</sup> “ For the LORD God of Israel says  
That He hates divorce,  
For it covers one’s garment with violence,”  
Says the LORD of hosts.

“Therefore take heed to your spirit,  
That you do not deal treacherously.”

**Introduction:** Malachi’s prophecy unfolds as a series of charges against God’s people. We examine one of those today. The charge concerns their marriages. In this charge is a word that will guide us in our journey to discover the Biblical meaning of marriage. The word is covenant.

### **A Background on the Biblical Word “Covenant”**

The concept of covenant is the key to strengthening your marriage relationship. I know that is true because the idea of covenant is the true source of all relationships—with God, our families, our friends, and especially our mates. “God loves us by covenant. He provides for us by covenant. He blesses us by covenant. He operates in our lives by covenant. In reality, every truly valuable thing in life is ours because of covenant. The truth is, our God is a covenant God, the Bible is a covenant book, and we are covenant people.”<sup>1</sup>

God made a covenant with Noah to protect through the flood and then a covenant not to flood the earth again in that same manner. God made a covenant with Abraham that he would become the father of many. In addition to these God made covenants with Moses and David. In the New Testament the sacrifice of Christ for our sins is referred to as a covenant. The basic idea in a covenant is that these covenants are absolutely binding. Notice these texts.

Deuteronomy 7:9 says, “Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments.”

God fashioned with us a covenant that can be summed up this way. “I will be your God and you will be my people.” (Exodus 6:7, Jeremiah 7:23, and Ezekiel 36:28)

It is an irrevocable covenant according to Psalm 89:34. “My covenant I will not violate, Nor will I alter the utterance of My lips.”

The conclusion is then that **God is a covenant God and if we are going to be God’s people, we must understand covenant and be willing to live, ourselves, in covenant relationships.**

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Lowery, *Covenant Marriage: Staying Together for Life*, Howard Publishing, 2002, pp. 43-54.

## **What Does Covenant Have to Do with My Marriage?**

1. Covenant is the Biblical **description** for the marriage relationship.

- Genesis 2:24—“one flesh”
- Proverbs 2:16-17
- Malachi 2:14

2. Understanding covenant gives us the best **foundation** for marriage.

- Your marriage is going to be built on something.

3. Understanding covenant gives you the right **determination** in marriage.

We all get tired, run down, and stressed out at times, and the future never looks very promising from that perspective. Those are the times when we have to rely upon knowledge rather than feelings, covenant rather than contract, and refuse to give up.

A story is told about Winston Churchill speaking to the boarding school he attended as a student. His message was simple. “Never give up. Never give up. Never, never give up.” And with that he sat down. Understanding your marriage like a covenant will give you that kind of determination.

4. Living in a covenant relationship with God is the best **preparation** for marriage.

Those persons living in a covenant relationship with God understand best what it means to be a covenant partner.

- Love—Ephesians tells us that as husbands we are to love our wives as Christ loves the church. (5:25) (Also 1 Corinthians 13 shows us the kind of love.)
- Forgiveness—We are to forgive as Christ forgave us (Eph. 4:32)
- You cannot do these things outside of Christ. You cannot do these things without the model of Christ loving you that kind of way.

A British soldier in the First World War became discouraged and disenchanted to the point that he decided to desert. Slipping away, he walked for miles hoping to find water and a boat back to England. Suddenly, he came to what he thought was a signpost, but it was too dark to read. Climbing up the post to get a closer look, he struck a match and found himself looking squarely into the face of Jesus. Instead of a sign, he had climbed a crucifix that had been placed on the side of a road. His mind raced back to the Christ who had died for him, enduring the cross—Christ refused to give up. Inspired by what he saw, the man returned to the trenches and continued to fight.<sup>2</sup>

### **Final Thoughts:**

Two final thoughts are necessary:

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

1. What about broken covenants? The issues are complex, but with God, all things are possible. Your life can be restored even if your marriage cannot be restored.
2. The success of your marriage is based on the strength of the promise.

Quote from Thornton Wilder play, *The Skin of our Teeth*. “I didn’t marry you because you were perfect. I didn’t even marry you because I loved you. I married you because you gave me a promise. The promise made up for your faults. And the promise I gave you made up for mine. Two imperfect people got married and it was the promise that made the marriage. And when our children were growing up, it wasn’t a house that protected them; and it wasn’t our love that protected them—it was that promise.