

The Call of Malachi

Malachi 1:1

The Jews called the book of Malachi the seal of the prophets. Malachi was a messenger of the LORD. His name literally means, 'my messenger'. In the prophecy of Malachi, *YAHWEH*, the covenant name of God, is used 47 times in total, with the form, the *LORD of Hosts*, used 24 out of the 47 times.

Date. Unlike most of the other prophets, no king is mentioned in Malachi to help date the book. However, Malachi fits perfectly into the situation between Nehemiah's first and second visits to Jerusalem. Here are some of the reasons for this conclusion:

- In 445 BC, Nehemiah received permission to restart the building of the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 8:9). He stayed in Jerusalem for 12 years until 433/432 BC (Nehemiah 13:6).
- After this period, Nehemiah returned to Susa for eight years, between 432 and 425 BC, under the rule of Artaxerxes Longimanus.
- In 425 BC, Nehemiah returned for his second visit to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 13:29).

Malachi addressed some of the same problems as Nehemiah's reform.

- Empty ritual and corrupt priests (1:6–2:9; cf. Nehemiah 13:1–9).
- Cheating on and neglect of tithes and offerings (3:7-12; cf. Nehemiah 13:10-13).
- Divorce and intermarriage with pagan wives (2:10-16; cf. Nehemiah 13:23–28).
- Indifference to the moral law (no real sense of sin).

When we look at the internal evidence from the prophecy of Malachi, we note the following:

- The name used for a governor (*pecha*) in 1:8 was only used during the Babylonian and Persian periods.
- The Temple had been rebuilt, since sacrifices were being offered there (1:7–10). The Temple rebuilding process started in 520 BC under Darius Hystaspes and was completed in 516 BC.

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Malachi 1:1-4:6

1. What is an oracle or burden? Malachi 1:1
2. Were these Malachi's own words? 1:1
3. To which specific group of people was Malachi sent as a prophet?
Malachi 2:11

Note: It is clear that in Malachi 2:11, the LORD is referring to Judah.

Malachi 2:11 Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.

4. What is the greatest task of the prophet? Malachi 4:4

Reflection & Application

1. How did the LORD call the prophets of old? cf. Hebrews 1:1
2. Was any biblical prophecy ever a man-made message? 2 Peter 1:21

The Love of the LORD**Malachi 1:2-5****Introduction**

When the Jews returned to the Promised Land, circumstances were really hard. The people quickly became disillusioned and doubtful. They looked for outward blessings, but there seemed to be none. In their hearts, they wondered if God's messianic promises would ever be fulfilled and whether it was really worth serving God after all.

They felt they had served and loved God to the same extent that he had blessed them. As far as they were concerned, God had neglected his part of the covenant blessings. Therefore, in return, they would worship God in the same manner he had blessed them, which was not much. They just went through the external motions of worshipping God. Malachi is sent as YAHWEH's messenger to challenge these problems and attitudes. He calls the people to a new commitment and obedience.

God's word through Malachi starts with the endearing words of YAHWEH.

Malachi 1:2 "I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" the LORD says. "Yet I have loved Jacob...

God had chosen Jacob the deceiver, despite who he was, as the child through whom his sovereign purposes would be fulfilled. Jacob's descendants would become Israel, with him as the father of the nation. Under the Old Covenant, Israel would be God's chosen people out of all the nations.

Deuteronomy 7:6 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Malachi 1:2-5

1. How do the opening words of YAHWEH describe His love for Jacob? 1:2 cf. Jeremiah 31:3; Hosea 3:11
2. What was their insolent reply? 1:2
3. What was the LORD's historical explanation of his love? 1:2-3
4. How does the New Testament describe this special love of God for Israel? Name eight things in Romans 9:4-5.

Note: Throughout history, God had been intimately connected with the people of Israel. This was true even when He afflicted them. Those whom he loves as children, he disciplines. Judah was unfaithful to him, and he chastened them by withholding blessings. This should have been a sign that they were not living as covenant children should (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). However, instead of exhibiting repentance, they challenged God by saying, "How have you loved us?"

It is the mournful proof of human depravity that the love of God is often least acknowledged, where it is most manifested. **T.V. Moore**

5. What does God's 'hate' as described in this passage mean? 1:3-4

Note: The word for hate is נִשָּׂא (sane), meaning *to hate*.

Usage: detest(1), enemy(3), enmity(1), foes(1), hate(78), hated(28), hates(19), hating(2), hatred(1), turned or turns against(3), unloved(7).

6. What is the word used to describe the difference between the love of Jacob for Rachel, compared with his love for Leah? Genesis 29:30-31
7. Considering this greater love of Jacob for Rachel, in what manner did God *hate* Esau? 1:3
8. How does Paul describe this contrast in Romans 9:11?
9. Does the word *hate* literally convey the idea of an active hatred? Or is 'hate' in this sense pointing to a positive contrast between the love for God and the love for your family? Luke 14:26
10. Does God withhold his love, or does He hate without reason? 1:4

Note: There are several possibilities to explain the phrase, "Esau, I have hated", such as foreknowledge, determinism, or the withholding of restraining grace.

Foreknowledge: God knows the beginning from the end, and he knows what will happen. He knew the evil Edom would yet do.

Determinism: God lets it happen because it is predetermined. He says it is so, and Edom could not do otherwise.

Restraining grace withheld: God hated Edom because Edom sinned, and as such, his restraining grace was withheld. Therefore, increasing evil was the result.

Whatever the reason, God's wrath is only against evil, sin, and rebellion. We are all under the wrath of God in our natural state. Yet despite our rebellion and unrighteousness, God still chooses to save some.

The basis of YAHWEH's salvation is always his mercy and compassion, not his justice.

11. How does Paul rebut the argument that an opponent could make that God was unjust? Romans 9:14-15

Note: This is probably one of the most difficult things to understand in the Bible. Humans have great difficulty in making salvation depend on the elective love of God. However, vastly insurmountable difficulties lie in making our salvation depend on the election of man, or anything else, for that matter. We have to admit that the sovereign eternal purpose of God is the only ground for salvation.

Salvation ultimately depends on God or on something else. **T.V. Moore**

12. Does the sovereign eternal purpose of God negate human responsibility?

Note: Jesus commanded in the call of the gospel.

Mark 1:14 ... Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.
15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

These two things, God's sovereign choice and human responsibility, do not negate or contradict each other. No, both are true. Something very difficult for us to understand.

13. Did the prophet make a mistake in speaking of Israel and Edom as proof of Israel's elect status? If God had chosen Jacob/Israel over Esau/Edom, why did he allow his people to suffer the Babylonian devastation and exile? 1:4

Note: 1:3. Esau's mountains. "Esau's mountains" was most likely a designation for the hill country of Seir (Gen 36:8–9, 21), which was in the eastern Negev.

The mountains of Seir are mentioned in Scripture (e.g., Genesis 14:6, Deuteronomy 2:1). It was most likely a designation for the southern portion of the Edomite state.

(Background Commentary on Malachi)

Note: The Edomites actively helped the Babylonian invaders by acting as informants and cutting off escape routes (Psalm 137:7; Ezekiel 25:12–14; 35:15; Obadiah 8–16).

14. What does the prophet mean by, “You will see it with your own eyes and say, ‘Great is the LORD--even beyond the borders of Israel’”? 1:5

Note: Edom experienced judgment through the agency of Nabatean Arabs who gradually forced the Edomites from their homeland in the period between 550 and 400 BC. The Edomites have all but ceased to exist. Ancient Edom fell in the land now called Jordan. While Judah would be restored, Edom’s judgment would be permanent and irreversible. Individual Edomites would continue to exist (as is implied by 1:4; cf. the Idumeans who later came to Christ in Mark 3:8), but they had permanently forfeited their national identity.

Reflection & Application

1. Is this true of you today? Are you failing to see God’s love in your life, especially under affliction? Are you worshipping and serving God according to the perceived material benefits you have received from his hand?
2. Do you realise God still says to the Christian: “*I have loved you*”? And often ungratefully, we may respond in mind or action by saying: “*How have you loved us?*”
3. God has shown you much love, just by the fact that you have heard the gospel preached to you. Do you realise the immense privileges that are available in Christ? Ephesians 1:3

4. What privileges have you received as a Christian to demonstrate God's love? 2 Corinthians 1:20

The Honour of the LORD**Malachi 1:6-10****Introduction**

Conditions were hard after the return from exile. The former glory of David's Kingdom had not returned. Jerusalem and Judea were a backwater economically. The second temple was not the glorious fulfilment of all that the pre-exilic and exilic prophets had predicted (Ezra 3:12). The dawning of the Messianic Age did not seem to be imminent.

Many thought that God had forsaken them. They failed to realise that it was their own sinfulness that had separated them from God in the first place. This was the reason YAHWEH's blessings were withheld. In return, the people thought they would serve God in the same way he had blessed them, which was very little. This meant they only gave God an outward show of religion.

They did not realise that God had loved them with an everlasting love (Malachi 1:2-5) and that they were his treasured possession. He chose them from among all the nations of the world to be his covenant people (Deuteronomy 7:6). He loved them despite their adultery with other gods. They had tremendous privileges. The adoption as sons, the covenants, the Law, the temple worship, the promises, the divine glory, the ancestry of Jesus who is God over all (Romans 9:1-6). This God had shown them the depth and riches of His love, yet their first rebellious reply to his tender statement, "I have loved you", was, "How have you loved us?"

How were they supposed to repay God for this love? The LORD demanded that his Name be honoured for who he was and what he had done. That is the centre or pivot of this passage. The centre of this passage focuses on the Name of the LORD. Notice the word of YAHWEH through the prophet.

The argument in this section flows as follows:

Accusation: Contempt for God's Name (1:6)

Reason: Blemished Sacrifices (1:7-9)

Threat: Cursed by God (1:10)

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Malachi 1:6-10

1. Did they honour the Name of the LORD in an acceptable way in response to his relationship to them? 1:6a
2. Why would the LORD use the name, *the LORD of Hosts*, seven times in this section to describe himself? What is the meaning of this name? 1:6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14

Note: YAHWEH is called by this Name, the LORD of Hosts or *YAHWEH tsebaot* (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת) from *tsaba* (צָבָא) meaning: *army, war or warfare*.

3. How did the priests of Judah treat YAHWEH instead? 1:6b
4. Was it only the priests who showed contempt for God's name? 1:6b
5. Instead of contrition, what was the insolent response? 1:6c
6. What was the reason for this charge by God? 1:7a
7. What was their third insolent response? 1:7b
8. How does YAHWEH answer by explaining his reprimand? 1:7c

9. In what way were they saying the LORD's table was contemptible?
1:8
10. Would they have treated a human governor in this disrespectful manner? 1:8b
11. What did they falsely assume from the LORD of Hosts? 1:9
12. How did the LORD show his indignation? 1:8-9

Note: What are some of the reasons for these 'costly' sacrifices? It was so that they would realise a few things:

- Everything belonged to God anyway, as everything it came from God in the first place.
- Giving to God at a cost to yourself would never leave you short, for he would bless you.
- So that they should realise the price of sin. The sheep and goats were like part of the family. The head of the family had to kill the sacrificial animal - not the priest. They would intimately experience the cost of sin. Death to something very dear to you.
- The sacrificial site of the temple was a picture of horror. Blood and bleating and the smell of death. This was to give all those partaking in the ritual a taste of the heinousness of sin. The price of sin, and in short, a picture of hell.

The people were intimately involved in the sacrificial system. The father had to kill the sacrificial animal, and the priests had to accept it. The priests could see if a sacrifice was defiled. Therefore, this accusation of contempt for the Name of God was against the priests and the people. They offered physically blemished animals, their rejects.

This was against God's command. The offerings they brought, they would not even offer as a present to a human being, such as their governor. Yet they offered these detestable sacrifices to YAHWEH Tshebaot (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת).

13. How did the LORD view such deficient sacrifice and worship? 1:10

Reflection & Application _____

1. Is it still the same for the Christian in the worship of God today? Mark 12:17; 30-31; 44
2. Does God ever expect from us that which we cannot give? Are we required to give beyond our means and ability? 2 Corinthians 9:6
3. Will the LORD ever leave us short? 2 Corinthians 9:10-11
No, he will make us rich in every way, so that we can be generous on every occasion.
4. Why does God expect our very best?

The Name of the LORD**Malachi 1:11-14****Introduction**

Ultimately, it was the Name of the LORD that was at stake. This is explicitly mentioned in 1:11 and 1:14. That is why Malachi is still so relevant today, for each individual believer, as well as for the church. If we do not honour YAHWEH's Name, he will raise up a people for himself who will honour his Name.

Believers often have it the wrong way round. We think that God is there to serve us, and he did so in Jesus, but the ransom was to God. Ultimately, everything in the universe is created for God's glory.

Psalm 19:1 ... The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. ² Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. ³ There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.

The authors of the Westminster Confession understood this and deduced, 'The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever'.

The offering of blemished sacrifices was an insult to God. It is not as if God needed sacrifices. He is without need of anything or anyone else in creation, but it is a recognition of who he is. YAHWEH chose the descendants of Jacob so that they would represent him to the world. They were to be a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

People would see the way they lived and how they interacted with YAHWEH and be attracted to him. But they rejected and forfeited their covenant privileges. What then happened was that God turned his attention to the nations, as foretold by the prophets.

The argument flows as follows:

Purpose: The Name of the LORD (1:11)

Reason: Blemished Sacrifices (1:12-13)

Threat: Cursed by God (1:10, 14)

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Malachi 1:11-14

1. Why is God worthy to receive honour and glory? Psalm 19:1; Revelation 4:11
2. What will ultimately happen to the honour of the LORD's Name if his own covenant people will not worship him acceptably? 1:11
3. If we do not honour God, what will he do, according to Paul? cf. Romans 9:25-26

Note: If we don't glorify God, he will find others who will! If God could turn from his covenant nation to those who would honour him, do not think he will treat those who dishonour his name today any differently. We see the decline in former so-called Christian cultures, where God is not honoured anymore. On the other hand we see a great turning to the LORD in places which did not honour him before.

4. What was the LORD's rebuke against the covenant people? 1:12

Note: 1:12. Lord's table. The phrase "the Lord's table" is found only here in the Old Testament. The term translated "table" is a common one used literally and figuratively to denote a table (e.g., Is 65:11). Tables were used in Ezekiel 40:39–43 at the gates of the inner court to slaughter sacrifices or for utensils. In the context of Malachi 1:12, the Lord's table appears to be synonymous with the altar, which has been defiled by the Israelites. It is figuratively described as a table because of the imagery of sacrifices being "food" for God. For discussion of this imagery see the comment on Leviticus 1:2.

(Background Commentary on Malachi)

5. Will the LORD accept unworthy sacrifices from anyone's hands?
1:13
6. Can we deceive God? What will the ultimate result be? What was and still is the LORD of Hosts' pronouncement on false or unacceptable worship? 1:14

Note: Cheap religion will always cost more in the end (1:10), as you will get nothing for it. You cannot drive a hard bargain with God. You cannot do a spiritual sum and work out the minimum of what is necessary to please God!

7. You might say: "*Yes, but that was the Old Testament.*" Is there a New Testament passage that should serve as a grave warning to us? Acts 5:1-11

Note: The minister is not a priest, as you do not have to bring sacrificial animals for him to examine before slaughter, to determine whether they are diseased or not. He also cannot see the condition of your heart, but, if he is faithful, must still warn you! Otherwise, he also displays contempt for the Name of God. And he will not neglect to do so if he fears God. It does not matter how you build for the Kingdom (1Corinthians 3:11-13).

Reflection & Application _____

1. What is the remedy to unacceptable worship? With what kind of attitude should we approach God? Hebrews 12:26-29
2. Can we ever fool God? Matthew 6:1-8; 16-18

3. What must we do to make sure that we are offering acceptable worship?
4. What helps us to gain the right perspective? Psalm 19:1-3; Psalm 57:5, 9-11
5. Exercise: Make a list of what you are giving to God. Use time, service, money, etc., as some categories to think about. Think about the way God sees it.

The Covenant with Levi**Malachi 2:1-9****Introduction**

This is the second part of YAHWEH's admonition of his people's deficient worship. It is a continuation of the theme of honouring the Name of the LORD. Those who worship God must do so in truth, reverence and awe.

Today, the pulpit is where God's Name is supposed to be honoured, revered, respected, and held in awe! Where the teaching of God's Word is at stake, truth should be non-negotiable. Sadly, the pulpit is often where God's Name is also defiled, shown contempt for, and even mocked. Many ministers, theologians, priests, and pastors dishonour the LORD's Name. When one reads the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, one understands that the corruption is closer to us than we think. The closer it gets to home, the harder this is to detect! What are the chief causes that lead to this?

Calling. The minister no longer has a calling; it is simply a job or a career, which is open to everyone and anyone with the right academic qualifications or ability to string words together. Many are in it for their own name, comfort, or status.

Doctrine. Truth is not that important, or cannot be known. Therefore, the idea of pure doctrine has become almost irrelevant. There are no absolute truths. What is true for you is not necessarily true for me. Doctrine has, in fact, become a nasty word. Tolerance has become the measure of all things. We must be tolerant of all views, and God just has to fall in line.

Life. The lives of many church leaders and Christians leave much to be desired. Their lives belie the holiness of God, who should be their centre of worship. At Bible Schools or Seminaries, students and lecturers are often ungodly. Divorces and scandals of a sexual nature are common amongst church leaders.

Awe. There is no awe of God (Malachi 1:6-14). Showing contempt for God's Name is nothing new. It was the same in Malachi's day. Sacrifices were just a dead ritual. Priests accepted sacrifices as they came – blind, crippled and diseased.

They were more concerned with the people's feelings than with what God required. Their lifestyle belied any true faith in God.

What evidence is there that the minister or pastor is in Christ?

- Reverence and awe.
- Holding on to truth.
- Walking in peace and uprightness.
- Turning many from sin.

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Malachi 2:1-9

1. What was the current relationship between the LORD and the dishonouring priests? What was his admonition to them? 2:1-2
2. What threat did the LORD issue for the priests? Which strong word is used three times by the LORD? Why was this so? 2:2
3. What will be the outcome for the false priest? What was the grave warning for these faithless priests? 2:2-3, 9

Note: If the priests do not heed the warning and change their ways, the LORD will curse them. In fact, the curse was upon them already. The LORD would spread the offal of the sacrifices on their faces. Dung on your face was the highest possible insult. They would be carried away with it, and the indignity would be permanent. It would even affect their descendants.

4. What were the two purposes of the admonition? 2:4
5. What was the Covenant with Levi? 2:4; Numbers 25:10-13

6. What was God's covenant self-assumed responsibility to the nation via Levi? 2:5a
7. What was Levi's covenant responsibility towards God? In what manner did Levi of old worship God? 2:5b

Note: There are two parties in the Covenant. They were not equal partners, but had different covenant responsibilities.

Partner:	God	Priests
Responsibility:	Life & peace	Reverence & awe

8. What does God require in true worship? Hebrews 12:28-29
9. What was the main task of the priest? What kind of instruction was required from a priest, and was in Levi's mouth? 2:6
10. What was the effect of this true instruction? 2:6b
11. What did God require from a priest/minister? Who does a priest ultimately work for? 2:7

Note: There is no greater statement of the status of a priest or a minister today (2:7). Truth should be in the mouth of a priest/minister. He should lead people in true teaching and instruct them in God's Word. There should be nothing false on his lips, i.e. the absence of error. The lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge.

Not his own wisdom and instruction, but an understanding of the Word of God. This is a frightening responsibility, as he cannot sin or suffer alone.

He will drag others down with him if he teaches falsehood (2:8). The opposite is also true. A faithful ministry will usually be recognised by the conversion of sinners (2:6-7).

12. What was the grave accusation against the priests? 2:8a, c
13. Which two things did these faithless priests endanger? 2:4, 6, 8
14. What would God do to them before men? 2:9

Reflection & Application _____

1. How did the Levites become priests in the first place? Numbers 3:11-13
2. Can you think of any examples today where churches have lost the true teaching of the word of God and have led many into spiritual death?

Judah's Faithlessness**Malachi 2:10-16****Introduction**

The world is filled with pain because of marital unfaithfulness and divorce.

Marriage. The most intimate metaphor for God and his people in the Bible is that of a husband and his beloved wife. This beautiful picture of the husband-and-wife relationship, is based on the pattern of Christ and his bride, i.e. the church.

Ephesians 5:24 Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

Unfaithfulness. We often hear about successful businessmen or politicians ditching their faithful wives for a younger woman after many years of marriage. Many in pastoral ministry fail in this area and are asked to leave after extramarital relationships are exposed.

Divorce. Statistics show that many, if not most, marriages end in divorce. The remaining marriages are not necessarily happy either, even where unfaithfulness plays no part. In general, school principals and social workers, to name two professions, in general can speak a lot about children from broken homes. Many children in 'orphanages' today are not really orphans, but come from broken families.

In this passage, two areas of unfaithfulness are addressed:

- Breaking faith with one another.
- Breaking faith with our marriage partners.

What can believers do to not be found unfaithful? What is the solution offered?

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Malachi 2:10-16

1. In what way were the people of Judah breaking faith with one another? 2:10-11
2. Why is marrying the daughter of a foreign god so serious? 2:11

Note: YAHWEH is the Creator of Israel. The covenant community was connected by a common faith in YAHWEH. He wanted a royal priesthood and a holy nation. A people that feared him, loved him, and lived in awe of his name. They would represent God to the world. Their faith would be strengthened because of each other's faithfulness to the Covenant. They would attract people to the God of Israel. Therefore, they were not supposed to marry outside the Covenant community. Sadly, the opposite happened: they married pagan wives, who belonged to a different Kingdom, and a different 'father', and were led astray. They were the daughters of a foreign god! Not only did the people marry pagans, but even the Levites did so (Nehemiah 13)!

3. What will the LORD do with such a man who marries a pagan wife? 2:12

Note: They did not learn from history, as this was exactly what King Solomon did. cf. 1 Kings 11:1-11

4. Which other serious accusation did the LORD level against the people? 2:13
5. In which terms do God describe divorce? How does the LORD view such unfaithfulness? What will YAHWEH do? 2:14

Note: Breaking faith happens long before you have a sexual relationship or get divorced. It is much less than that. *If any other woman or man takes a place of prominence in any area of your life that rightfully belongs to your marriage partner, then you have already broken faith.*

6. What must be the relation with your wife?
7. How must men treat the other women they come into contact with?
1 Timothy 5:12
8. How dangerous and unacceptable is flirting? Ephesians 5:3
9. What must the believer do about the temptation of sexual immorality? 1 Corinthians 6:18 cf. Proverbs 5:1-23; 7:1-27
10. What is the purpose of marriage? 2:15
11. How does God feel about divorce? 2:16
12. Which two things does God call divorce? 2:16
13. Is divorce ever a good solution?
14. In which circumstances do the LORD allow divorce? Matthew 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:10-17

Note: One form of the marriage vows is:

I ----- take you ----- to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to care for, till death parts us, according to God's holy law, and this is my solemn pledge to you.

Reflection & Application _____

1. How does God feel about believers marrying unbelievers? What does he call this action? How does this affect the church today? 2 Corinthians 6:14
2. For which reason, according to this section, is this so serious?
3. How does God feel about marital unfaithfulness and divorce?

Note: Marriage covenant is not the failure that statistics and the world tell us. Marriage as God intended it is still the closest picture and foretaste of the relationship between Christ and his church. NB: This relationship will always involve some suffering, sometimes a lot!

4. What is the most glorious picture the LORD has for us believers? Isaiah 62:3-5; Revelation 19:7-9

The Justice of the LORD**Malachi 2:17-3:5****Introduction**

Have you ever considered all the evil in the world today? Things such as crime: robbery, assault, murder, rape and violence? Countries that are at war, suffering from famine, plague and natural disasters? Have you ever wondered why God is allowing this to continue?

The following questions are often asked:

- Can a God who is good approve of such evil? If God is good, then why is there so much evil in the world? Why do the perpetrators get away with it? If God were there, surely he would judge them.
- Does God care? Where is God in all of this?

It was the same in Malachi's day. Judah was back in the land. The temple had been rebuilt, sacrifices recommenced, and initially, there was hope for the messianic age to dawn.

However, crops failed, they were under Persian rule, and real sinners prospered; the messianic age had not dawned. The LORD had not delivered what they had hoped for.

Most of the people wanted God to look after their own interests. Like a benevolent cosmic force for Jews only. They were expecting the Day of the LORD. They expected independence and glory, and the Messiah for their own political freedom.

God seemed to be turning a blind eye to what they considered to be evil. In fact, it seemed that the more evil a person was, the better they fared in life.

However, only a minority were concerned about God's honour: the offering of blemished sacrifices, the false teaching, the mixed marriages, i.e. marriage of the Levites as well as the common people with pagan nations, and that God's Name was not honoured. Others did not care at all.

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Malachi 2:7-3:5

1. Who are the people addressed as 'you'? 2:17
2. In which two ways did they weary the LORD? 2:17
3. What was particularly blasphemous about this accusation? 2:17

Note: They were accusing, not appealing for help. They made two serious, even blasphemous accusations against God:

- That God approved of evil. They formulated this by saying that: "Those who do evil are good in the LORD's eyes."
- That God was absent and did not see what was going on. They challenged God by asking: "Where is the God of justice?" The Bible tells us we are wearying the Lord if we say, "Where is he?"

4. Is it ever a wise thing to call for God's justice? 2:17
5. How did the LORD respond to their insolent charge? 3:1
6. But is the 'adon', the Lord they were waiting for to come, God? 3:1
7. Who exactly will follow after the messenger he will send? 3:1; 5

Note: Lord or master is used for God more than 400 times. The covenant name of God, YAHWEH, was considered to be so holy that the Jews would never pronounce it. They would say 'my Lord', or Adonay. We have taken over this practice by placing the capital text *LORD* in our translations, whenever we encounter the name of YAHWEH.

8. Who is this 'Lord'? 3:1, 5
9. What will he come to do in response to their first reproach that he approves of evil? 3:2
10. Who will be the ones receiving his judgement? 2:17; 3:2
11. What message does a launderer's soap and a refiner's fire convey? 3:2
12. Who will be able to stand? 3:2
13. Will it only be the priesthood that will be judged? 3:3-4
14. Who will the LORD only accept? 3:3-4
15. How will the LORD deal with the unrighteous? How will they be identified? Name seven categories of wickedness. 3:5-6

Note the answer to both reproaches:

- 'Where is he' and
- 'He approves of evil'.

Is...

- He will come near, and
- he will come in judgement.

16. Can we live in unrighteousness and offer anything to God? Will it ever be acceptable to Him? 3:4

Reflection & Application _____

1. Who fulfilled this prophecy? Mark 1:1-4; Luke 1:76

Note: This must have been confusing to the average Jew. The messenger of the Covenant, the expected messiah, would be God Himself! And he would come suddenly and unexpectedly.

2. Is the gospel only good news? John 9:39

3. Do you think it is a clever thing to do to call on God's justice?

4. What attribute of God should we call on?

5. What will happen when God deals with us in this way?

6. What did John preach? Mark 1:4

7. What did Jesus preach? Mark 1:14-15
8. Are you fearing God? Do we bring offerings in righteousness?

True Repentance**Malachi 3:6-12****Introduction**

In the modern world, people think about money a lot. How to make it, save or invest it. How to provide for old age. Every war or conflict affects the world's money markets. What would a full-scale war mean to our offshore investments? What will the share markets do?

One question we as Christians might have is how much of our money we should give to God's work. If times are hard, may we give less?

In the days of Malachi, the currency of the day was not always cash. One could bring tithes and offerings to God in terms of animal or plant produce. You could bring wheat, grain, oil, sheep, etc.

Remember Cain and Abel? Abel gave God the firstborn of his flock, whereas Cain gave some of his produce. Malachi puts a very interesting spin on Judah's giving.

In the context of this section:

- A strong connection is drawn between the way one gives and repentance.
- Accordingly, it is also wedged between two prophecies with respect to judgment.

Note the structure:

- Prophecy: The LORD comes near for Judgement (3:5).
- Command: The command to repent (3:7).
- God's wrath: The Nation is under a curse (3:9).
- God's blessings: Test the LORD and see (3:10-12).

This suggests that true repentance and salvation are accompanied by faithful and proper giving.

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Malachi 3:6-12

1. What is the only reason that the descendants of Jacob had not been destroyed? 3:6
2. In response, how did the people of Israel respond to their side of the covenant? 3:7
3. What is the key to the whole section? 3:7b
4. What does “Return to me, and I will return you,” imply? 3:5, 3:7b
5. What was the promise? 3:7

Note: In NT terms, turning to God by us means repentance. The turning of God to us means the forgiveness of sins.

6. How did the LORD determine that they had turned away from him, in answer to the arrogant reply, ‘How are we to return?’ 3:8
7. What was the LORD’s response to their second arrogant reply, “How do we rob you?” 3:8
8. What did they demonstrate by their giving? 3:8
9. What was the present situation in the land and why? 3:9

Note: Malachi fits perfectly into the period of Nehemiah's absence from Jerusalem. Before he had left, the people promised to bring their tithes and offerings to the house of the LORD faithfully (Nehemiah 10:35-37).

The tithes and offerings in focus are those for the support of the temple staff. This was their chief source of livelihood. But during Nehemiah's absence, people neglected the compulsory contributions for the support of the temple staff. So, the nation did not fulfil its obligation. They persisted in robbing God, the whole nation of them. This, even though God's curse rested on them. For this reason, the Levites were obliged to abandon temple service in order to support themselves (Nehemiah 13:10).

Levites were not even supposed to own land and farm, as they were to be supported by the nation fully. The tithes and offerings were so meagre that they did not have enough to live on; they had to turn to other ways of making a living, such as farming. In fact, the storehouse in the temple was used to house Tobiah, an Ammonite and a friend of Eliashib the priest (Nehemiah 13:4-5).

Judah had to return to God by giving him what was due to him. By bringing the required tithes and offerings into the storehouse, so that the work of God would not be hindered. The priests and temple servants had to live off the tithes and offerings. It was used to meet their needs and maintain the building. The remainder was distributed according to need. This is confirmed by Malachi 3:10.

10. What was the LORD's answer to their wickedness? What would be the proof of their repentance? 3:10a

Note: Nehemiah, on his return from Susa, found that Tobiah had moved into the storehouse in the house of God. Nehemiah rectified the situation by throwing Tobiah out (Nehemiah 13:7-8) and rebuking the officials (Nehemiah 13:11). The bringing of the tithes to the storehouse of the temple was restored (Nehemiah 13:12-13).

11. In what way will they recognise the LORD's return to them? 3:10-11

12. What will all the surrounding nations recognise? 3:12
13. What resulted in the three curses being pronounced against them?
1:14; 2:2; 3:9
14. How can a curse be turned into a blessing? 3:10
15. What was the irony about all of this? 3:11
16. If the Jews would repent and return, what would happen? How
would they know that the LORD had returned to them? 3:11
17. Does the LORD invite them to test him in this?

Note: Jesus spoke a lot about money. Of Jesus's 38 parables, 16 dealt with money. Not external rules, but heart change. In the Discipleship Discourse (Sermon on the Mount), the disciples are told that they cannot serve God and money. The question is, must we give everything away as Jesus told the rich young ruler? Or as the poor widow? Or must we give half, as Zacchaeus did? We need to understand the principles of giving and what is beyond any doubt for the giver.

Reflection & Application _____

1. Have you truly repented and turned to God? Is your repentance marked by your giving? Are you giving from your firstfruits, the best of your produce?

2. What is your giving to the LORD an indication of?
3. What will the LORD do for us if we give sacrificially? Philippians 4:19
4. What will happen if you give out of reverence to God? 2 Corinthians 9:8-11
5. What have we already received as believers? 2 Corinthians 1:20; Ephesians 1:3

The Righteous and the Wicked**Malachi 3:13-18****Introduction**

The charges made against God in Malachi 3:13-15 are very similar to the preceding charges in Malachi 2:17-3:5. These blasphemous charges stated that:

- Evildoers are good in the eyes of the Lord.
- God is absent (Where is the God of Justice)

This sounds very similar to Psalm 73:11, where evildoers make similar claims against Heaven.

Note that, just as in 2:17-3:5, the charges are made against a background of judgement. In that context, it spoke of the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. 'Suddenly, the LORD you are seeking will come.' This *Day of the LORD* would come suddenly and would be a time of purification. But it would also be a time of grace.

Now, new charges are made against God. After these repeated accusations of God being unable or unwilling to act against evil, there is a new promise of another *Day of the LORD*. The final great Day of Judgement. So here in 3:13-15, these charges are followed by the promise of a Day of the LORD. But this would be the final day, and when it dawned, there would be no more grace. This day would be a dreadful day (4:5), and it is surely coming.

There are two groups of people involved, namely the righteous and the wicked. Both notice God's seeming unwillingness to act against injustice and sin, but their response and attitude of heart are totally different. What were the things the wicked were claiming? Interestingly, they are always the ones who ask the question, "Where is God?" Believers do not ask this question, as they know how sinful they are before a holy God. They also know that God will, in fact, judge the evildoers on the day of Judgement.

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Malachi 3:13-18

1. What did the wicked accuse the LORD of? What did they think regarding their own righteousness? 3:13-14
2. How did they feel about serving God? 3:14b
3. What did they say in their minds and with their actions? 3:15
4. Who were they really speaking of? 3:15
5. In what manner did they serve the LORD?
6. Does external religion ever bluff or please God?
7. In contrast, what was the attitude of the righteous? 3:16
8. Will the LORD notice the attitude of the righteous? 3:16
9. Are they considered righteous because of what they had done?
10. In what manner did they disagree with the wicked?
11. What does a scroll of remembrance sound like? 3:16 cf. Revelation 20:11-12

12. What attitude has to accompany the right kind of fear? 3:16b

13. What distinction will the LORD make? 3:17-18

14. How will the wicked be proved wrong? 3:18

Note: The LORD of Hosts, LORD of the Armies, LORD of Warfare, YAHWEH tsebaot **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת** Mal 1:6 WTT) from **צָבָא** (*tsaba*) meaning: *army, war, warfare*

15. What is *the day when I make up my treasured possession*? 3:17

16. On which two counts will the wicked be proved wrong? 3:15, 18

Reflection & Application _____

1. What is the most important decision every human being has to make?

2. Will God let evil pass unchecked?

3. What could be the case with evil? Romans 1:24, 26, 28

4. What can believers do together to encourage one another?

The Day of the LORD**Malachi 4:1-3****Introduction**

In this world, it may seem as if the wicked are doing well and the righteous generally suffer (Psalm 73:3-12). That it is indeed futile to serve the LORD (Psalm 73:13-14). If we consider only this present world, it may very well look like that at times; however, there is a great Day of Judgement coming. This great Day of Judgement is also called 'That Day', or the 'Day of the LORD'. The charges against the wicked will be answered on that last and final great day.

This is not a popular topic in many churches nowadays, as they do not like addressing things that may upset people and scare them away, which will have financial implications. However, if some people have been scared into the kingdom, then that is also good. A healthy conviction of sin and a fear of God's judgement is crucial for salvation.

No one except the LORD knows when this day will come. The prophets tell us that it will come suddenly and unexpectedly (Zechariah 14:5b-7). This tells us that it will be a unique day, a day known only to the LORD. It will be a terrible day. The wicked will hide in fear. In the gospels, Jesus tells us that people will cry out, "Mountains fall on us, hills cover us!" (Luke 23:28-30). The apostle Peter tells us that the present order of things will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10).

We will see forces unleashed unlike anything the world has ever seen. We will come face-to-face with the LORD of the armies of Heaven. There will be no place for hiding. External religion will not be able to save anyone! This time, God's visitation will not be to purify, but to consume!

The prophet Malachi echoes these thoughts.

Malachi 4:1 "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD of Hosts. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them."

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Malachi 4:1-3

1. On that day, how many outcomes will there be? 4:1-3
2. What will the outcome for the wicked be? Malachi 4:1, 3
3. What will be the outcome for the righteous? 4:2
4. What does the image of *the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings* mean? 1:2
5. Are the righteous saved and accepted because of their works?
6. How will the righteous feel about the wicked? 4:3

Reflection & Application

1. Who is the 'Sun of Righteousness'? Luke 1:76-79
2. What would Jesus come to do, considering the sun rising from the East would shine into the courtyard, into the holy place and fall on the curtain that separated it from the Holy of Holies?

3. What would Jesus do for us? Malachi 4:2; Isaiah 53:5

The Return of Elijah**Malachi 4:4-6****Introduction**

The people were to remember the covenant that God made with Israel through Moses, or the law of Moses.

In this context, the meaning of *the law of Moses* signifies not the Ten Commandments, but the full understanding of the Old Covenant.

This covenant was entered into at Horeb (Sinai). This covenant sets out God's standard for mankind. The warning is therefore, "To escape judgement, remember Moses and act!"

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Malachi 4:4-6

1. What were the people of Israel to remember? 4:4
2. In what manner would the LORD send his final warning? 4:5
3. What was the role of the first Elijah? 1 Kings 18:21, 40
4. For whom would the Elijah of old prepare the way? 2 Kings 2:9
5. What would the coming of a new Elijah indicate? 4:6

6. Who would follow after the new Elijah? Mark 1:1-9
7. Which event alone remains after the coming of Elijah and the revelation of the Messenger of the Covenant?

Reflection & Application _____

1. Who was this Elijah of the New Testament? Luke 1:17
2. What did he come to do?
3. What is the next great event after the coming of Jesus in God's eternal plan?

Conclusion to Malachi

Malachi 1:1-4:6

Where do you stand today with respect to the burden of the LORD had given to the prophet Malachi?

If we summarise the teaching of Malachi, we find the following:

- The unacceptable offer of crippled sacrifices.
- The blasphemy of the LORD's Name.
- Wrong theology.
- Unfaithful marriages.
- The provocation of the LORD.
- The robbing of the LORD.

The LORD would send the prophet 'Elijah', before the coming of the 'Sun of Righteousness'. However, he has come, and his name is Jesus. The final day of judgement will come unannounced. There will be no new prophet to warn, to turn you to the faith of your forefathers. Christ will not come again to give another chance. When Jesus comes again, it will be to make a final and eternal distinction and separation between the righteous and the wicked.

The righteous are not described as such because they are righteous in and of themselves, but because the 'Sun of Righteousness' had shone upon them. The Sun of Righteousness had changed them forever. He had come to heal us. Let us heed the call today to choose before it is too late!

- Malachi starts with God's irrevocable love, "I have loved you" (אָהַבְתִּי), *aheb*. 1:2
- Malachi ends with the very last word, curse: "Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse" (חֵרֶם), *cherem*. 4:6

It warns of God's utter destruction. Judgement cannot be separated from grace. Let us remember:

- God's Law.
- The day of the LORD.
- The judgement against the wicked.
- The salvation for the righteous.

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