



4 studies in Malachi  
for individuals, groups & 1:1



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## **Introduction:**

Before we begin our study series in the book of Malachi some background information will help us to understand its context and message.

It is my feeling that for most of us the book of Malachi remains a bit of a mystery or at least a 'road less travelled'! We know it is the last book of the Old Testament in the Christian Bible, and we may have heard sermons preached from the book when the issue of stewardship was to be addressed. As is the case with many of the prophetic books of the Bible, Malachi contains some very stark warnings and judgements, which need to be heard and heeded today. Its place in the Old Testament canon is appropriate as the book ends with prophetic reference to the coming of the Day of Yahweh, which we know to have begun with the coming of Jesus.

## **Where do we find Malachi in Biblical history?**

Noting our recent study series in the book of Daniel, we come to the period of biblical history in Malachi, after the return of the remnant of Jewish exiles from Babylon. The Persian King Cyrus I decreed in 538BC that displaced peoples in the empire could return to their home lands.

We recall that: Judah had been decimated by the Babylonians. Jerusalem and it's magnificent Temple laid waste. Now just a province or 'satrap' of Persia, Judah is a mere shadow of its former glory. One commentator (Hugenberger) suggesting a population of 150,000 (including returned exiles) inhabiting an

area of no more than 30x40kms. And significantly, no king of the Line of David!!

In stark contrast to a “land flowing with milk and honey”, ‘the harsh reality was one of economic privation, crop failure, prolonged drought and pestilence. (3:10-11)’ (Hugenberger, p883)

The religious climate of the time is described as “spiritual destitution” and religious practice as “dead orthodoxy” (Hugenberger p884). Exacerbated by neighbouring nations, (particularly Edom) taking advantage of Judah’s plight, brought demoralising harassment, pagan gods and foreign wives.

### **Who was Malachi and when was his book written?**

They are very good questions! For the text itself give us very few clues. Was there a prophet whose name was Malachi? Was Malachi Ezra’s last name? Is the book the work of an editor who brought together ancient thought and sentiment? All these ideas are suggested by commentators. However, for the purpose of our studies we will follow the majority who assert Malachi was a prophet who declared the Word of the Lord to the people of Judah. His name means “my messenger” or “my angel” or “by the hand of his messenger” as the LXX records.

Malachi was one of three post exilic prophets, with Haggai and Zechariah and a latter contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah. The text indicates that the Temple has been rebuilt (515BC Ezra 6:15)) and that religious practice there has resumed (1:7-10,3:8). Therefore, dates around early to mid-fifth century BC are likely. 500-475BC, 450-430BC and c460BC have all been suggested.

## **How is the book of Malachi structured and what is its literary form?**

The book of Malachi is somewhat unique in the Bible for its structure and form. The question and answer format is very different to the other prophetic writing of the Old Testament. Broadly it can be divided into two sections. The first (chaps 1,2) presents the case against Israel for its sin. The second section (chaps 3,4), the judgement that comes without repentance and the blessing that comes with it.

Malachi can be further outlined as follows:

### Introduction (1:1)

#### First Dispute (1:2-5) On Yahweh's Love

Yahweh: I have loved you.

People: How have you loved us?

Yahweh: By choosing Jacob (Israel) over Esau (Edom).

#### Second Dispute (1:6-2:9) On offering Unacceptable Sacrifices.

Yahweh: Why do you priests despise my name?

Priests: How have we despised your name?

Yahweh: By offering polluted sacrifices.

Priests: How have we done that?

Yahweh: By offering blemished, lame, or sick animals.

#### Third Dispute (2:10-16) On intermarriage and divorce.

Prophet: Yahweh will not accept your offerings.

People: Why?

Prophet: Because you have broken your marriage covenant.

Fourth Dispute (2:17-3:5) On Wearying Yahweh with Words.

Prophet: You have wearied Yahweh.

People: How?

Prophet: By questioning his justice.

Fifth Dispute (3:6-4:3) On returning to Yahweh

Prophet: Return to Yahweh.

People: How?

Prophet: You are robbing God.

People: How?

Prophet: By withholding tithes and offerings.

Sixth Dispute (3:13-4:3) On Speaking harshly about Yahweh

Yahweh: You have spoken against me.

People: How?

Yahweh: By saying it is vain to serve God. He will punish the wicked and reward the faithful.

Two Appendices (4:4-6) The Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah)

Keep the law of Moses.

Elijah will come before the Day of Yahweh.

*(Table adapted from Fee and Stuart pp 264, 265: Lasor, Hubbard and Bush pp 417)*

## **Why then was the book written and what are the themes communicated?**

We may have expected the people of Judah to be rather “upbeat” about their circumstances. The exiles have returned from Babylon, Jerusalem is again a walled city, and the Temple has been rebuilt. Yes, their political autonomy is somewhat limited, but they are largely free to practise their own religion. However, being ‘upbeat’ is not the case. Now perhaps 60-80 years beyond the optimism of the Ezra/Nehemiah period there is a widespread despondency and disillusionment amongst the people. As mentioned earlier, they face crop failure and economic hardship. When they look at the Temple, the ‘tangible’ presence of the Lord is no longer seen in the Holy of Holies! Their cry is ‘where is Yahweh’? He has abandoned us! We no longer feel loved by Yahweh! Consequently, the people have become careless and apathetic in fulfilling their obligations under their covenants established long ago with the Lord their God. So, through the prophet Malachi, the Lord responds to their cries and accusations. Malachi’s message is a call to return to the right observance of these Covenants, to right relationships with Yahweh and with each other. Hence, we find themes of Repentance (priests and people), Covenant (love/worship, sacrifice, marriage, divorce), Justice (tithing), Judgement, Eschatological hope and blessing (Day of Yahweh, Moses/Elijah), all prominent in the book of Malachi.

James Montgomery Boice best sums up our need to hear the message of Malachi when he titles his study of Malachi “Mirror of this Age”. (Boice p229)

1. Which of your friend or family members asks the most questions?

What do they ask about?

2. Have you ever been in a court room during a trial?

How did the lawyers establish their case?

3. Think about your friends who aren't Christian. What, if anything, do they imagine offends God?

4. How do people think that God shows love to people?

**Read Malachi 1**

*This chapter begins with Yahweh declaring that He has never stopped loving His people, as demonstrated in the plight of Edom fulfilling Obadiah's prophecy. The first charge brought is against the priests. The very group who should have been setting an example for the people, is accused of contempt. Their*

*sacrifices are unacceptable. Has the judgement of God in the exile taught them nothing!!*

5. What do we learn about this book from the introductory line?

6. How does God respond to the people who question his love for them?

### **Read Jeremiah 1**

*These words were spoken before God about 200 years before Malachi, before the exile of the people of Judah and Jerusalem to Babylon, and their subsequent return. Malachi is writing after the return from exile and rebuilding of Jerusalem (Malachi 1:7 – 10)*

7. What light does Jeremiah's prophecy shed on the demonstration of God's love in Malachi?

8. What does God's demonstration of love reveal about him?

9. Which phrase of verse 3 do you find harder to accept, “Esau I have hated” or “I have loved Jacob”?  
Why?

*The verb ‘hate’ is to be understood in the light of God’s electing love. The very fact that Jacob was chosen, ‘loved’, meant that Esau was rejected, ‘hated’, rejection being implicit in the exercise of choice. Personal animosity towards Esau is not implied.*  
*Baldwin, “Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi”*

10. Why does God remind Israel of their covenant relationship in this way before he rebukes them?

11. In what ways do you see God’s love demonstrated today?

12. What are the people of Israel doing in offering their sacrifices?

**13.** Why does God think the type and quality of the sacrifices matter?

**14.** In what aspect of life are you most likely to find yourself responding to God's love grudgingly?

**15.** Do you think God would assess any part of your response to his grace as "lukewarm"?

**16.** What might need to change about how you respond to God's love and kindness?

**17.** Christians today don't offer sacrifices, since Jesus offered a once for all sacrifice. But in what ways are we tempted to be unfaithful in our covenant relationship with God as Israel did?

**18.** How can we help each other respond to God's love with whole-hearted love and obedience?

## **Malachi 2:1 - 16**

## **A Warning and a Breaking**

1. If a person or group wanted to honour you, what means of showing honour would you choose?

2. What does it feel like to be ripped off, to not get what you deserve?

3. Why do you think relationship breakdowns are so painful?

### **Read Malachi 2:1 - 16**

*The actions of the priests have caused Yahweh's name to be ridiculed by other nations. Therefore, the priests would be 'cursed' and despised by the people. Furthermore, this absence of leadership/instruction is reflected in the breakdown of marriages and prevalence of divorce. Both of which the Lord hates.*

4. What is God's accusation against the priests?

5. Why is God promising to respond in the way he will?
  
6. Why do you think the priests are the focus of God's attention here?
  
7. What is the accusation God brings against the rest of the people in verses 10 – 16?
  
8. What do verses 11 and 12 tell us about repentance?
  
9. It was Israel's apostasy and worship of foreign gods that led to the exile. Why, having gone through that, are the people willing to tread the same path once more?
  
10. What does Malachi say about the relationship between knowledge of God and covenant faithfulness?

**11.** How does Israel's unfaithfulness with each other affect their covenant relationship with God?

**12.** Why is God concerned so concerned for faithfulness in marriage?

**13.** When is it hard to remain faithful to God?

**14.** What are some of the ways that you show honour to God?

**15.** Are there any areas of your life where you're withholding honour that is due to God?

**16.** What does it look like to "resolve to honour" God's name?

1. How do you prepare for the arrival of a special guest in your home?

2. In what moment of your life did you feel the most tired?

3. Today, what leads people to say that God is not just?

**Read Malachi 2:17 – 3:5**

“Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears”. You question the justice of the Lord!! Beware the ‘Refiner’ is coming!!!

4. Where do we hear people claiming that evil is good?

5. What is the day of God’s coming going to be like?

6. How is this promise of the day of the Lord God's response to the accusation of injustice?

7. What do you notice about the list of those who will face justice?

Are there any that surprise you?

**Read Mark 1:1 – 4**

8. How does Mark say the promise in Malachi of God's coming is fulfilled?

9. What do we learn about Jesus from Mark's statement (and Matthew, 3:3 and Luke, 7:27)?

**Read Malachi 3:6 – 18**

*The covenant keeping God has always remained faithful, even when from the very beginning you have been unfaithful.  
'Return to me'.*

*You say life is 'unfair' and accuse God of inequity! Yet you rob God in withholding from the Levites your covenant requirement to tithe for their provision. 'Return to me'*

**10.** Why does God begin this section with a statement about his unchanging nature?

**11.** What is the accusation God brings against the people in verses 6 – 12?

**12.** How had the people been robbing God?

**13.** Do you think it's possible for people to rob God today?

**14.** What is Israel struggling to believe about God?

15. Do you think we struggle with the same issues today?

16. What attitude is demonstrated by attempting to rob God?

17. Why is God so determined to maintain his covenant with Israel even though they are unfaithful to it in so many ways?

18. Why is it hard to trust God and be abundantly generous with our giving to God's purposes?

19. How could we use Malachi's words to urge each other to faithful giving and serving of God?

1. What does your name mean?

Have you ever wished you had a different name?

2. What makes you joyful?

**Read Malachi 4**

*The coming 'Day of Yahweh' is not to be taken lightly. "for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29) Return therefore to the covenant relationship established for you in the Law of Moses. And wait and watch for Elijah to herald the coming of that great Day.*

3. What is the difference between the two groups of people mentioned in verses 1 – 3?

4. What is going to happen on "the day"

5. What does it mean to revere God's name today?

6. These are the last words from God to the nation of Israel until the arrival of John the Baptist, some 400 years later. What expectation is held out in these verses?

7. What promises does God give here for his people to hold onto as the New Testament era dawns with the ministry of John?

8. Why is an instruction to remember the law given through Moses almost the very last word in the Old Testament?

9. What can Israel be confident of if they remember the law of Moses?

**10.** When do you feel most encouraged and equipped by remembering God's written Word?

**11.** What should the readers of Malachi expect to see when God arrives to be with his people.

**12.** In verse 2 Malachi uses quite an amusing simile to picture the joy of God's people. What are some of the ways in which Jesus brings you joy?

**13.** How can a day that brings judgement and destruction also bring joy?

**Read Matthew 11:1 - 15**

**14.** How does John fulfil the promise of Malachi 4?

**15.** Since Jesus identifies John as the fulfilment of God's promise through Malachi, what else do we learn about:

- John?
  
- The day of the Lord?
  
- Jesus?

**16.** We now look forward to the Day of the Lord in Christ's return. What might be different in your life and in the life of our church if the Day of the Lord was at the forefront of our minds?

**17.** What gets in the way of us being continually mindful of Christ's return?

**18.** What can we do in a similar way to John, in order to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17)?





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