



ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# Bible Study

JANUARY 2012

## MALACHI

Malachi's ministry began nearly 100 years after the end of the Babylonian captivity and the return of the Jews to their homeland. The temple was gradually being rebuilt and the expectant promise of God's blessings were being realised. Yet, Malachi saw something else happening. In contrast to glowing promises, the harsh reality of the times was the evidence of God's promises unfulfilled. What was wrong? Besides, in spite of promises of the coming Messiah and God's own glorious presence, the nation experienced spiritual destitution. The Holy Place of God had no visible evidence of God's presence; it was a time for reflection and self-examination.

### **Malachi - its historical context**

The book of Malachi dates from the period after groups of exiles, led by Ezra and Nehemiah, had returned from Babylon to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple. (5th century B.C.) This should have been a wonderful new beginning for God's people but human nature prevailed and they did not change their ways. The situation is spelt out in Ezra's prayer (Ezra 9:5-15). Read this passage aloud in your group to get a proper understanding of the situation.

Though it is not stated when Malachi carried out his ministry, he might have been a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah who reproved similar sins. In turn, all these godly leaders were basing their reproof on the Law of Moses, which the people were guilty of violating.

SERMON DATE **1 JAN 2012**

HONOUR GOD

MALACHI 1

SERMON DATE **8 JAN 2012**

THE CURSE OF PRIESTLY FAILURE

MALACHI 2:1-9

SERMON DATE **15 JAN 2012**

GUARD YOUR FAITH

MALACHI 2:10-16

SERMON DATE **22 JAN 2012**

GOD REFINES HIS PEOPLE

MALACHI 2:17 - 3:5

SERMON DATE **29 JAN 2012**

BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE

MALACHI 3:6-18

## HONOUR GOD

### MALACHI 1

#### GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

#### INTRODUCTION

If God is great, where is the honour? If God is to be worshipped, where are the sacrifices? Not just token offerings that are blemished and unacceptable but worthy sacrifices that come from sincere hearts. True worship begins with our hearts, our attitudes and our inner beings. What we are inside prompts what we give on the outside. Your gifts to God indicate your sincere genuine desire to honour Him. What do you give in your offering?

#### FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. The Love of God (1:1-5)
  - a. The style of Malachi is disputational ñ The LORD, speaking through Malachi, makes a statement and follows it with a rhetorical question to challenge the reader. Mal 1:2 is the first of six such statement/question pairs. How would you describe the relationship between God and his people from verse 2?
  
  - b. What point is being made through introducing the two ancestral figures of Esau and Jacob in this disputation? Who are the LORD's people descended from? What is the nature of the LORD's relationship with them?
  
  - c. What does this mean for God's influence in the world? (v5)
  
2. The Honour due to God (1:6)
  - a. What two metaphors are used to describe the ideal relationship between the priests and the LORD? (v6)
  
  - b. In this second disputation, what does the LORD expect from his priests but which, by implication, is sadly lacking? (v6)
  
  - c. In what way is your relationship with God like that of a son towards his father? In what way is your relationship with God like that of a servant towards his master? Discuss in your group and be specific.
  
3. The Contempt shown to the LORD (1:7-14)
  - a. What was wrong with the sacrifices that the priests were offering? (vv7,8)

- b. How does God respond to such sacrifices? (v10)  
Malachi was written several hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ. We, as followers of Jesus Christ, know that God no longer requires us to make sacrifices to atone for our sins - Jesus Christ has done that for us. See Hebrews 7:26-27.
- c. Whilst Hebrews 7:26 makes it very clear that animal blood sacrifices to pay the price of sin have been made redundant through the death of Jesus Christ, the word 'sacrific' is applied metaphorically in other ways. Read Romans 12:1 and Hebrews 13:15-16; what does this sort of sacrifice require?
- d. Even in the Old Testament the idea sometimes emerges that sacrifice is more to do with our attitudes, actions and how we live our lives than the token killing of an animal. What does David conclude is an appropriate sacrifice following his sin of adultery? (Ps 51:16-17). What do the prophets so often say about sacrifice? (Micah 6:6-8 is an example).

## DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

Christians who doubt God's love cannot honour him properly.

- People in Malachi's time were complaining that God did not love them. They expected too much or, to be more accurate, the wrong things. Are we sure that God loves us? Do we expect too much in a material sense from God? How often do you count your blessings? Name three things that show God's love for you?
- Because they doubted God's love, they did not honour God. Do you live your life as a 'son' of God, placing your trust in him and depending upon his protection? Do you live your life as a servant of God, obediently doing his will and following his instructions and guidance?
- Is your life a 'living sacrifice' to God (Rom 12:1)? How are you going to offer sacrifices to God which are acceptable to him, unlike the priests in Malachi's time? What will some of those sacrifices be?

## FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS

As a family or group tell each other:

1. of one way in which you have experienced God's love;
2. of one way in which you try to honour God in your life;
3. of one sacrifice you already make or, perhaps, plan to make as an offering to God.

## THE CURSE OF PRIESTLY FAILURE

MALACHI 2:1-9

### GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

### INTRODUCTION

When we fail to honour God, we will face the curse of insincere worship. This passage moves now to the priests in the temple. Even though the problem of worthless worship was all over Israel at that time, the priests were to be exemplary to the flock and ought to know better. Failure of the priests to fulfil their calling and godly roles led the people deeper into their woes. Will they become obsolete? Will they help God's people to understand the calling of a holy priesthood? Will they teach and guide? Will they extend their pastoral care to the people of God? Will they maintain their doctrinal purity? What does it mean to be successful spiritually?

### FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

In the Old Testament, the priests were messengers of God, serving as a conduit of God's message to his people, teaching the true knowledge of God and advising God's people who seek divine instructions. Similarly, believers in the New Testament are called to serve as a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). The Old Testament through the covenant of life and peace (Mal 2:5) was but a shadow of the New Testament's call to personal priesthood.

1. God's threat of reversing blessings to a curse (2:1-2)
  - a. Who is God's admonition specifically aimed at?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Read Exodus 19:5-6. Israel as God's people stood in a priestly and sacred relationship with God. What were the conditions attached to such a relationship?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. How would God treat the priests who refuse to honour him and listen to him? (vv2-3) What implications can we draw for the wider priestly community of believers (cf. 1 Peter 2:9)?
  
2. God's greater perspective on priesthood (2:3-7)
  - a. What is God's purpose in his admonitions in verse 3? Note: 'Rebuke your descendants', (KJV = 'Corrupt your seed'), i.e. render it unfruitful.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. What are the two blessings given in the covenant? (v5) These seem to be shadows of the things to come in the New Testament through Christ (cf. Rom 8:6).
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. Verse 6 demonstrates an alignment of words and deeds. What is the outcome and impact on others?

- d. Define the main priestly duties? (v7) As priests of God in this day and age, how might we discharge those duties?
3. God's pronouncement (2:8-9)
    - a. 'You' (v8) here is emphatic. What are the charges against those unfaithful priests?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
    - b. What are the attitudes people have against those priests? (v9) Discuss the relationship between (un)faithfulness to God and Christian witness to the world.

## **DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS**

Priests in the OT are to carry God's message in words and deeds, especially demonstrating God's messages in their lives. Similarly, we now are God's messengers in our time, bringing the gospel through our words and deeds. So consider how we:

- Called to be priests, are carrying his message? Or blunting his message?
- Called to be priests, are living lives that reflect our lips? Or turning others against God with our lifestyle?
- If someone has performed a priestly duty to you: a godly instruction, or a kind word that has blessed, you might want to think of returning a word of encouragement or pray and thank God for that person.

## **FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS**

- Reflect on your priestly role/duty in your family setting. What message are you sending with your lifestyle and behaviour?
- As parents: consider Ephesians 6:4, whose duty is it to bring children up in the Lord? How may you make adjustments so as to properly exercise your priestly roles within the family?

## GUARD YOUR FAITH

### MALACHI 2:10-16

#### GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

#### INTRODUCTION

If disobedience brings curses, obedience leads to blessings. Some may claim that disobedience is personal but from God's point of view, it is also communal. For by their false and insincere faith, they also lead others to stumble. Here, Malachi points to three areas that cause others to stumble: widespread dishonesty; marrying someone from another faith; and unfaithfulness to one's spouse. In order for us not to be stumbling blocks, we need to guard our faith by strengthening our relationship with God.

#### FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

After a severe indictment against the priests for failing to be faithful in their priestly calling, the Lord now confronts the sins of the people. Malachi points to two areas where they showed faithlessness towards God and towards one another by how they handled their relationships: marrying someone from another faith; and divorcing one's spouse.

1. 'The daughter of a foreign god': The sin of intermarriage (2:11-12)
  - a. Despite their offerings (v12), how did Malachi underscore the severity of their misdeed and its punishment? How did their intermarriage impact their relationship with God and the larger community?
  - b. Read Ezra 9:1-15; 10:1-4; Nehemiah 10:28-30; 13:23-27. What are the underlying concerns and dangers regarding intermarriage for God's people? What examples in the history of Israel were cited? Are these concerns and dangers still applicable today?
  - c. Though intermarriage was opposed by God's law (Ex 34:14-16; Deut 7:1-6; Jos 23:12-13), there were notable exceptions (e.g. Ruth; the foreign wives of Joseph and Moses). What does this suggest about the true underlying concern that allowed such exceptions without any hint of disapproval?
2. 'The wife of your youth' : The sin of divorce (2:13-16)

Verse 13 echoes verse 12 in presenting the people as coming to God only with religious externalities to seek his favour while ignoring the more important covenant obligations to one another. In Malachi's time, Jewish men might be divorcing their Jewish wives to marry pagan women, or it might be a more general case of divorce out of a casual attitude or for trivial reasons.

Verses 15 & 16 are rather difficult to translate into English. Bible versions may differ. The English Standard Version is followed here (NIV, NRSV differ from ESV somewhat in v16a): Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? - Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. For the man who does not love [lit. 'hates'] his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless." (ESV)

- a. According to verse 14, how does God view marriage? By being a witness to this relationship, what (divine) force does it bear on how men and women are to view and conduct their relationship?

- b. In verse 15a, b, what additional perspectives are given against divorce and which part of the OT revelation was it drawn from? (cf. Gen 2:24; Ez 9:2; Neh 13:23-24)?
  
- c. What is God's moral evaluation of those who 'hate and divorce' their wives? (cf. Deut 24:3; 22:13, 19 for the language of 'hate' and 'divorce' in the context of a marriage relationship).
  
- 3. 'One Father, one God': Covenant Infidelity (2:10)
  - a. The two sins in verses 11 to 16 are denounced under the summary charge of verse 10. Which repeated phrase binds verses 10 to 16 together, emphasizing the heart of Israel's problem with God and with one another?
  
  - b. To whom is God referred to as Father and Creator (e.g. Isaiah 43:1; 63:16; 64:8)? Consider Malachi 4:4, what does the 'covenant of our fathers' refer to? If these realities were taken seriously, how would it have impacted the conduct of God's people as individuals and as a community in the light of God's rebuke (v10b)?
  
  - c. 'So guard [or take heed to] yourselves in your spirits, and do not be faithless' (vv15-16). For singles and for couples, what forms would 'guarding' and 'watching' take today?

## DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

1. God redeemed and constituted Israel as a nation. He made a covenant with them by which he will be their one and only God and they will be his holy people. In this covenant is the explicit call to exclusive allegiance and faithfulness towards him. This is worked out daily not only in their love and obligations towards God but also towards one another in a community of spiritual kinship and unity.

Both intermarriage and divorce are not merely individual issues. They bring division among God's people and counter his calling for them. The offences are made doubly worse when the people continue to participate in the worship of God as though there was nothing wrong going on. In strong, emotive language, God through his prophet rebukes them and calls them to repent. The church, as God's people redeemed by Christ and looking forward to his glorious coming, needs also to hear these stirring words of love and rebuke.

2. In intermarriage, the problem is one of idolatry, not ethnicity. It opens the door for 'foreign' gods and their values to draw the hearts of individuals and community away from God - subtly if not openly. It is unfaithful to God and defiles his sacred covenant. It stumbles and endangers God's people. It has repercussions for the next generation.

Christians are to discern beyond the practical issues of looking for a relationship (e.g. affection, compatibility, character etc., important as they are) into the spiritual ramifications of being in a mixed marriage. The church and the family, as the community of faith, are also to do their part to nurture that spiritual consciousness in believers under their care.

3. The OT's last book obviously does not have the last word regarding marriage and divorce Jesus (Mat 5:32; 19:1-9) and Paul (1Co 7) have important things to add. Also, the disapproval of divorce in 2:14 is set in the context of a faithless attitude to marriage and an abuse of the permission of divorce granted in the Law (Deut 24:1-4; Matt 19:3). It is not intended to forbid divorce in all cases.

Having said that, Malachi does offer important first words on the subject:

a. Marriage is rooted in the order of creation. A husband and wife are joined by God to be one. What God has joined together in marriage presses for its permanence and indissolubility (Matt 19:6).

b. The creation order also establishes marriage as a covenant between husband and wife under God. They are held morally accountable by him. God's presence as witness presses upon the couple the serious call to life-long faithfulness, just as God is faithful to his people. To be unfaithful to 'the wife of your covenant' is to be unfaithful to God as well (2:10), and to do what is morally repugnant to him. It stains one's character ('garment') with moral filth. It invites God's displeasure and judgment.

Though divorce is permitted in the OT and NT in certain circumstances, and is often complex enough to need handling with great pastoral sensitivity, that permission does not supplant God's intended ideals of creation and covenant in marriage. This will mean that though divorce is permitted, the first goal is to seek to bring about reconciliation, repentance and forgiveness in the relationship, with the support of the larger community of family, friends and the church.

## **FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS**

In your observation, is Christian to non-Christian marriages and Christian divorce common today? When deciding to form or break such relationships, do they take into account biblical teaching as an important dimension in their decision-making?

After hearing the sharp reproof in Malachi, is there room left for God's grace in Christ for us, when we or others have fallen into sins like these? How should we respond to God's law and to God's grace?

## GOD REFINES HIS PEOPLE

MALACHI 2:17 - 3:5

### GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

### INTRODUCTION

When God's people continue to go against him by their adulterous behaviour and immorality, God is not going to sit by and watch. He loves his people too much to let them go away from him. God will cleanse and restore like a refiner of silver and with soap. The cleansing will be thorough and severe. This is so that we may return back to God and become pleasing sacrifices fitting to the Lord. God is the righteous judge who not only metes out judgement swiftly but also decisively.

### FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. God's weariness (2:17)

Accordingly to The Message Bible, the Israelites wearied the Lord by saying: 'God loves sinners and sin alike. God loves all'; and concerning, 'Judgment? God's too nice to judge'.

- a. Do you see God as the 'God of love' or 'God of judgment'? What does God of judgment and discipline mean (Hebrews 12:4-8; Revelation 3:19)?
  
- b. Why it is wrong to consider only that God is love and that 'all things are permissible' by him (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23)? What danger or warning can we learn from having a partial and inadequate knowledge of God and a wrong interpretation of his words?

2. God's messenger (3:1)

- a. Who is this 'messenger' referred to in Malachi 3:1a (cf. Matthew 11:10-15; Mark 1:2)? Why is this messenger important? How does this passage prophesy and authenticate the arrival of the Lord [messenger of the covenant (3:1b)]?
  
- b. What does the 'coming of the Lord' mean (Matthew 24:36-51; Revelation 22:6-7, 10-22)?

3. God's refinery (3:2-5)

- a. What happens in God's 'refinery' (Daniel 12:10; Isaiah 1:25; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15)? Who are those who can withstand God's refining fire (Psalm 24:3-4; Isaiah 33:14-15)?
  
- b. Who is the refiner and purifier whom God will ultimately send (1 John 1:7-9; 3:3; Titus 2:13, 14)?
  
- c. Who are the sons of Levi, and what will God do to them (v3)? How may this be relevant to you as well (1 Peter 2:5, 9)?

- d. Who will the Lord specifically judge beyond the sons of Levi (v5)? What warnings can we learn from here?
- e. What does it mean to have the 'fear of God' (Deuteronomy 10:12; Psalm 19:9, 111:10; Proverbs 8:13, 15:33, 16:6)? Does the fear of God live in you?

## DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

God refines his people that they might worship him with awesome fear.

What does it mean to fear God? Fear of God is motivated by His awesome power and justice. (Deuteronomy 10:12-22) In saying that the Lord is God of gods and Lord of lords, Moses was distinguishing the true God from all the local gods worshipped throughout the land. Then Moses went a step further, calling God 'mighty and awesome.' He has such awesome power and justice that people cannot stand before Him without His mercy. Fortunately, His mercy towards His people is unlimited. When we begin to grasp the extent of God's mercy towards us, we see what true love is and how deeply God loves us. Our fear of what He might do to us is transformed into a reverence and awe before His great mercy. Although our sins deserve severe judgment, God has chosen to show love and mercy to all who seek Him.

Where is the man who fears the Lord? God will teach him how to choose the best. (Psalm 25:1-22)

Knowing God increases reverent fear. To fear the Lord is to recognise God for who He is: holy, almighty, righteous, pure, all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-wise. When we regard God correctly, we gain a clearer picture of ourselves: sinful, weak, frail, and needy. When we recognise who God is and who we are, we will fall at His feet in humble respect. Only then will he show us how to choose His way.

Fearing God leads to knowing Him more fully . 'Friendship with God is reserved for those who reverence Him.' God offers intimate and lasting friendship to those who revere Him, who hold Him in highest honour. What relationship could ever compare with having the Lord of all creation for a friend? Your everlasting friendship with God will grow as you revere Him.

Fearing God does not mean being terrified of Him (Exodus 20:1-26).

Throughout the Bible we find this phrase, 'Do not be afraid.' God wasn't trying to scare the people. He was showing His mighty power so that the Israelites would know that He was the true God and would therefore obey Him. If they would do this, He would make His power available to them. God wants us to follow Him out of love rather than fear. To overcome fear, we must think more about His love. 1 John 4:18 says, 'Perfect love drives out fear.'

*Extracted from N. S. Wilson, et.al., The Handbook of Bible Application (Tyndale, 1992), pp. 220-221.*

## BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE

MALACHI 3:6-18

### GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

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### INTRODUCTION

Another area that evidenced the Israelites' disobedience at that time was their begrudging offering. It was likened to robbing God and it was a serious offence for the people. Yet, the promise that Malachi held out to them was that they should test God for his faithfulness. When people restore their faith and give sacrificially, God will multiply their offering and bless abundantly. This will be a sign of their close trusting relationship.

### FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Returning to God (3:6-12)
  - a. God says in verse 6 that he has not changed. How would this attribute of God have encouraged the Israelites?
  
  - b. In verse 7, 'return' is mentioned three times. What was that which the Israelites needed to return from?
  
  - c. In what ways have we been, or might be said to be, 'robbing' God? (v8)
  
  - d. Elsewhere, we are told not to 'put God to the test' (e.g. Deuteronomy 6:16, quoted by Jesus, c.f. Matt 4:7). Here, in verse 10, God says, 'Test me in this'. What is the difference? To what end is God asking the Israelites to test him?
  
  - e. What is the first blessing that God promises in verses 10-11 which comes from 'returning to him'? Does this mean that we will get whatever we ask for? Why and/or why not?
  
  - f. The second blessing from God which comes from 'returning to him' is by implication the blessing of influence (v12). Can other people see God's hand of blessing on us? What may be some of the reasons why it may not be obvious to others?
  
2. God is listening (3:13-18)
  - a. What are some of the 'harsh things' that we have ever said against God (whether aloud or in our hearts)?
  
  
  - b. Notice that the Israelites did not say 'God is bad' or in so many words. Instead, they said, 'It is futile to serve God' (v14a). What caused them to say that? Why was God displeased to hear that?

- c. The Israelites also said that they have carried out God's requirements and that they go about like mourners before the Lord Almighty (v14b). What are the Israelites really saying or trying to claim? What do their words say about their attitude towards God?
  
- d. The Israelites called the arrogant blessed. They observed that the evildoers prosper and even those who challenge God escape (v15a). Do we ever find ourselves envying those who are not 'burdened' with serving God, e.g. non-believers, nominal Christians, etc.? Discuss.
  
- e. The LORD also listened to the words of another group of people. Describe these people (v16). What does it mean to fear God and to honour his name? Use scripture to support your answers.
  
- f. We do not know, and Malachi did not say, what those people who fear the LORD and honour his name say to one another. Nevertheless, what do you think could have been said and shared among these people who fear the LORD and honour His name?
  
- g. One day ('in the day' v17; also 4:1), God promises to make those people who fear the LORD and honour his name part of his 'treasured possession'. On that day, there would be a clear distinction between the righteous and the wicked (v18). How can you use these promises to help a non-believer understand how God works out all things for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28)?

## DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

The righteous honour God in serving out of trust, not for calculative gain.

- The righteous serve God because they desire to honour his name; the wicked serve God out of selfish motives;
- When believers do not trust God's character enough to serve him whole-heartedly, the result is a 'short-changing' of God with our time, talents and treasures which he has given us. By half-hearted service, we have effectively 'robbed' God!
- The blessedness of a trusting relationship with God is ultimately the assurance of our place in God's house, rather than physical and temporal gain.

## FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS

- How would you feel when the waiters/waitresses at the restaurant offer you half-hearted service? How would God feel when you offer him half-hearted service?
- Evaluate your service attitude. How do you need to change? What understanding of God is needed to engender those changes?
- How can we encourage one another towards whole-hearted service in our small groups?