

Day Seven

If you knew that you wouldn't be able to communicate with someone for years, what would you say as your final words to that person? In today's passage, God gives His final words to the people of Israel before the coming of the Messiah.

Read: Malachi 4:1-6

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What will happen to the arrogant evildoers, and what will happen to those who revere God's name? (see verses 1-3)
- What does God want them to remember? (see verse 4)
- What will the prophet Elijah do? (see verses 5-6)

It is interesting that this message from God ends with references to Moses and Elijah, especially since these two were with God at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 3:1 and 1 Kings 19:8-18), and with Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matthew 17:1-5). In many ways, these two connect the history and story of God's people to the coming of a Savior. After the book of Malachi was written, some 400 years passed before Jesus came into the world (often called the Intertestamental Period). As generations of people waited for the coming Messiah, these final words from God would serve as comfort for those experiencing hardship and injustice.

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

In the days leading up to Christmas, take some time each day to thank God for fulfilling His promises to His people by sending Jesus – His messenger of the covenant – to us. All of us!

Well, that's the end of Malachi! I pray your time has filled you with fresh perspective as you reflected upon our collective need for a Savior. It has truly been a pleasure reading along with you. Merry Christmas, and I'll be back in February for Lent with our next book...the Gospel of Mark! – Pastor Chris

Questions? Comments? Contact Pastor Chris at chris.futch@oursaviorfl.org or (727) 344-2684.

Read through the Bible



Malachi



Day One

Welcome to our one-week journey through Malachi! This booklet is laid out to help you walk through a portion of this last book of the Old Testament. Whether you start off your day with this, find some time during your lunch, or sit down with it before you go to bed, the hope would be for you to engage with the Bible on a consistent basis as God engages you and calls you into His story. May your journey through this short book be filled with fresh perspective as you reflect upon our need for a Savior. – Pastor Chris

Read: Malachi 1:1-5

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- From whom, through whom, and to whom was this book written? (see verse 1)

In Hebrew, the name Malachi means “messenger.” Through Malachi, God had an important message for the people of Israel. The message was clear – God’s people had turned away from worshiping Him and obeying His laws. We will see many descriptors of their behavior throughout these four chapters, such as showing contempt for God (1:6), being unfaithful to Him (2:11), and even robbing Him (3:8). God clearly was not happy with His people!

- What characteristic of God did the people of Israel question? Why? (see verses 2-5)

Israel’s question – “How have you loved us?” – is the first of seven questions that are asked of God throughout the book of Malachi (1:2, 1:6, 1:7, 2:17, 3:7, 3:8, and 3:13). God answers it by reminding them that they are His chosen people. When compared to the perils of the Edomites (descendants of Esau), the Israelites (descendants of Jacob) have been blessed by God’s love for them.

Respond: Apply what you’ve learned in prayer and action

In what ways have you recently been reminded of God’s love for you? Take a moment to thank God for reminding you of His love for you through His Son, His Word, and His people.

Day Six

Manners. Cursive. Face-to-face interactions. Respect for authority. It seems like many of these practices have fallen by the wayside in recent decades. While the reasons are often varied, the underlying premise is that people no longer see good reason for doing these things. Why *should* I say, “Please” and “Thank you”? Why *should* I write in some loopy font? Why do I *need* to talk with my family at the dinner table? Why do I *need* to listen to what my teacher says? When people don’t see any benefit in doing certain things, those things often end up abandoned and forgotten. In today’s passage, the people of Israel don’t see any benefit in serving God.

Read: Malachi 3:13-18

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What harsh things did the people of Israel say against God? Why did they say these things? (see verses 13-15)

In verse 14, we get some insight as to why the people of Israel had turned away from serving God – they thought it was pointless. Why should they serve God and follow His laws when there seems to be no real benefit for doing so? Herein lies the question of the heart – do we serve God because we expect something in return (like blessings or favor), or do we serve God simply because He is God and He’s asked us to?

- What happened to the people who gathered together and talked with each other? (see verses 16-17)

There seemed to be a group of people who came together and talked through this concern. Ultimately, they determined that they would rather fear God and honor His name than refuse to serve Him (v. 16). The notion of their names being written in a book or “scroll of remembrance” can also be found elsewhere in Scripture (see Exodus 32:32-33, Psalm 69:28, Psalm 87:6, and Daniel 12:1).

Respond: Apply what you’ve learned in prayer and action

Take a moment to consider your motivations for serving God.

Day Five

Every now and then, you'll see a story on the news of a cat who ended up miles away from home, but eventually found its way back to its owners. Scientists aren't entirely sure how, but some research suggests that cats may have a homing ability similar to pigeons. In today's passage, the people of Israel are called to return back to God after wandering far away from Him.

Read: Malachi 3:6-12

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What problem does God identify with the people of Israel? What is His solution for them? (see verse 7)

"Return to me, and I will return to you." Ever since the beginning of time, God's people had wandered away from Him by neglecting (and sometimes outright refusing) to follow His laws and commandments. Each time they did this, God would call them back to Him. This call to return was one marked by repentance, and in this passage, God is calling His people to do so once again.

- How are the people of Israel robbing God? (see verses 8-9)
- What does He ask them to do? What will be the result of their obedience? (see verses 10-12)

Like the priests in chapter one who were cutting corners with their animal sacrifices, the people of Israel were also cutting corners when it came to giving. The problem for the people of Israel wasn't that they weren't giving tithes and offerings. The problem was that they weren't giving the *whole* tithe (v. 10). In response to their actions, God was calling His people to give Him their very best. As His children today, we are also called to give Him our very best.

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Spend some time meditating on God's reply in verse 7 – "Return to me, and I will return to you." Given your current life circumstances, what do these words mean to you? How do they give you hope?

Day Two

Have you ever seen the segment with Wendy Ryan on ABC Action News called "Dirty Dining"? In these investigative reports, Wendy will showcase a local restaurant who has been temporarily shut down for multiple health code violations (bugs, rodents, food improperly stored or stored at wrong temperatures, etc.). While the owners often give a variety of explanations, the reality is often that, at some point, these restaurants started cutting corners. Employees weren't properly trained. Food wasn't inspected. Bugs weren't routinely treated. And as a result, they failed their inspections and found themselves showcased on the 11 o'clock news! In today's passage, God calls out the priests for cutting corners in their preparation and execution of animal sacrifices.

Read: Malachi 1:6-2:9

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How had the priests shown contempt for God? (see 1:6-8 and 1:13-14)

Back then, the priests were tasked with making sure the animals sacrificed to God were unblemished and undefiled. However, it appears they had stopped doing this. No longer were they giving God their very best; they were keeping the finest animals for themselves (v. 14)!

- How did God say He would rebuke the priests for their disobedience? (see 2:3)

So, what exactly is "offal" (v. 3)? This vintage term refers to the entrails or "guts" of an animal. At that time, the priests were to take the offal of the animal they were about to sacrifice and burn it outside of the temple (see Exodus 29:14). By threatening to spread offal on the priests' faces, the implication was that they would also be thrown out of the sanctuary for their continued disobedience.

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Consider how you can avoid cutting corners in your time with God.

Day Three

A mother tells her daughter not to go down the slide face-first on her stomach. But the moment she turns around to talk with another mom, what does her daughter do? 😊 In today's passage, the people of Israel do exactly what God tells them not to do.

Read: Malachi 2:10-17

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How were the people of Israel breaking faith with one another? (see verses 10-11)

The people of Israel had been unfaithful to God and to one another by marrying people who worshiped other gods. The Bible speaks often about the troubles that come with marrying someone from a different religion (see Numbers 25, 1 Kings 11:1-10, 1 Kings 16:29-33, and 2 Corinthians 6:11-18).

- In addition to intermarriage with other faith backgrounds, what were the people of Israel doing? (see verses 13-15)

It appears as though many of the men (notably, the priests) had abandoned their wives in pursuit of other women. Here, God reminds the people of Israel that through marriage, He makes them 'one' in both flesh and spirit. Therefore, to divorce or "break faith" from one's wife went against God's desire for His people.

- How had they wearied the Lord? (see verse 17)

"Where is the God of justice?" For generations, the people of Israel had complained that God had let their enemies run amok without any consequences. This question is the one that leads to the great prophecy of the "messenger of the covenant" at the beginning of chapter 3...

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

In our postmodern culture today, 'truth' is often defined by each individual ("I determine what is true"). In light of the Israelites' unfaithfulness to God, take a moment to consider why it is important for us to be faithful to God's truth instead of our own.

Day Four

About 30 minutes before a parade at Disney World, park employees will begin roping off streets and sidewalks to prepare for the floats that will be making their way through the park. Their mission is twofold – 1) Alert visitors that the parade is about to start, and 2) Clear a path so the parade can happen safely and efficiently. When everything goes according to plan, the parade route runs smoothly, and visitors get to enjoy watching all of the different characters and floats. In today's passage, Malachi prophesies of a "messenger" who would prepare a path for someone important - a "messenger of the covenant."

Read: Malachi 3:1-5

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- Who is the "messenger" that God is sending? (see verse 1)

The New Testament confirms that the "messenger" in verse 1 is John the Baptist (see Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, and Luke 7:27). Back then, it was customary for a messenger to go ahead of a king to announce his arrival and clear a path for him. As we see from the accounts in the New Testament, John the Baptist did just that.

- Who is the "messenger of the covenant" that will come after? (see verse 1)

Verse 1 gives us an important clue as to who this "messenger of the covenant" is when it says, "Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come." As the messenger who would fulfill the covenant that God made with Abraham, Jesus (God Himself!) would finally bring ultimate justice once and for all.

- Why might God say that the messenger of the covenant will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap? (see verses 2-4)

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Take a moment to thank God for sending His "messenger of the covenant" to refine us and purify us from our unfaithful ways.