

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# **BIBLE FOR ALL (BFA) MATERIAL FOR SMALL GROUPS DISCUSSION**

## **Malachi**

**Bible Study Series – *Honour God***

**Study 1 – Malachi 1**

**Study 2 – Malachi 2:1-16**

**Study 3 – Malachi 2:17-3:12**

**Study 4 – Malachi 3:13-4:6**

## Introduction

The name “Malachi” means, “My Messenger” or simply “messenger.” This may be a title instead of his actual name. It is used 3 times (2:7 and in 3:1 twice). Malachi is the last of the Old Testament (OT) prophets, with the messages being given somewhere between 460 to 450 BC. The 400 years following Malachi’s messages and before the Gospels are often referred to as the *silent years*.

## Historical Time and Background

Malachi was written to those living in Jerusalem and what had been Israel after the 70 year Captivity. This captivity was a judgement upon Israel’s Southern Kingdom (tribes of Judah and Benjamin) for not giving the land its Sabbath rest. See the following Scriptures for some basic insight into the Captivity — Leviticus 25:1-7 / 2 Chronicles 36:20-23 / Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10-14; 30:3 / Daniel 9:1-3.

It was written after the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah, and after the completion of the Temple. He probably ministered and wrote during the time Nehemiah returned to Persia (432-425 BC), which would be almost 100 years after Haggai and Zechariah. The problems Malachi speaks of are similar to the ones Nehemiah faces upon his return in 425 BC (see Neh 13:1-28). Some familiarity with Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, Old Covenant Law and the history of Israel will be helpful in understanding Malachi.

## Old Testament Biblical Prophecy

The word prophecy simply means to speak forth. The one giving the prophecy is speaking out or towards someone, that is, giving a message that is intended for those hearing it. Biblical prophecy is speaking forth God’s counsel and mind, His will and purposes. Prophecies are found throughout the whole Bible.

There are two primary types of prophecy. They are *didactic* and *predictive*. Didactic prophecy where God is giving His people some moral, ethical or theological truth through the prophets. OT prophets were spokespeople for God to His people. The primary focus of didactic prophecy is the Law, the Old Covenant (Old Testament and Old Covenant are equivalent terms).

Didactic prophecy is spoken in the present tense about current situations or circumstances involving His people, the Jews. It is truth to live by then and now. As Jesus said in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them (NIV). Instruction given in didactic prophecy is based on the commands given in the Law. It can be described as forthtelling, or speaking out towards others with a specific purpose. Didactic prophecy is to be interpreted in the same way as any other Scripture text, and forms the bulk of prophecy in the Bible.

Predictive prophecy speaks of something before it takes place. It is for future fulfilment, truth that will be known in a later time. Often it is given as a promise of opportunity, or a blessing, or a warning of judgment to come. It can be described as fore-telling, speaking of things yet to come. OT prophecy includes many events which were predicted to come, and most of these prophecies were addressed to Judah, Israel and other nations. These predictions usually involved the immediate future of these nations, and have come to pass already, that is, they have been fulfilled.

Many prophecies have both didactic and predictive prophecy within the same segment of verses. Although many of the predictive prophecies have already been fulfilled, you would still need to see them as predictive. When they were given, they were predicting what was to come for Israel in that time. They are simply not future or unfulfilled for our present time.

## Time, History, Language and Style

Time is an important element to watch for when interpreting biblical prophecy — time sequence or chronology — the timing within the text and messages. It is often difficult to know what time period the prophecy is speaking about. One prophecy may involve the past, present and even the future. Within a segment or section, the time period may change several times without indication of change in time within the wording of the verse or segment. Verb tenses in the text may be misleading. For example, Malachi 1:2-5 begins with the present, then speaks of the past, then of the future.

Historical context is very important. This is the time within history when the prophecy was actually spoken. You need to know and understand the historical time of the prophet and his message. You need to know when the prophecy was actually spoken and to whom it was spoken. It is always important to know the historical background for understanding any prophecy, both OT and NT. This can usually be found in good reference books, especially those providing timelines.

Language is also very important since the prophetic message is given in words. Special attention and handling is needed for understanding figurative language, or what may be called picture language. Make a point to define all important words, especially those that seem like key words, within the context of the prophecy itself. You can use a concordance to see how words are used in another context or biblical reference. Look for words or phrases expressing ideas differently than their usual meaning. Again, this is called figurative or picture language.

For example, Malachi 1:3 says, “But Esau I have hated.” This is referring to more than just Jacob and Esau in Genesis (see Gen 25:29-30; 36:1). How can this be known? The context of the segment, verses 1-5, give this insight. Esau represents Edom, a neighbouring nation of people to Israel. There was a prophecy about Edom in Isaiah 34:5-15 that was fulfilled about a hundred years before Malachi’s time (also see— Jer 49:7-22; Ezek 25:12-14; 35:1- 15; and the book of Obadiah). The Lord was telling Israel (“Jacob”) of how His love for them is shown by the judgment He sent upon the nation of Edom (“Esau”). It shows the Lord being faithful to His promise (as in Isaiah 34).

Poetic styles and symbolic language are often used in biblical prophecy. You need to pay close attention to what kind of language is being used — the actual words and how they are used. Different words and phrases may express similar ideas, so careful reading and observation is very important. Parallelism is another element often used in prophecy. Parallelism is where a phrase or thought is repeated as a means of emphasis. Although it is repeated, it may be expressed in either similar, opposite, or progressive ways. Also, look for other patterns or forms of repetition of words and phrases. A recurring theme or idea may be observed based on repetition of words or phrases, serving as reinforcement or emphasis.

As you study through Malachi, look for what prophecies, or oracles, are speaking to Israel’s present situation. This would be didactic prophecy. Look also for messages that speak of something coming in the future, which would be predictive prophecy. Also, there are times when both types of prophecy are found in one segment of verses. When you look at a segment of verses, look for the primary focus of the message or oracle — an oracle is a divine announcement or revelation — a direct message from God. Look for who the message is spoken to and what it is speaking about.

Each author (prophet) has a particular style of speaking (writing) or presenting their messages. Notice how Malachi uses rhetorical questions as a dialogue between God and His people.

It will be helpful to read the text of Malachi in whatever Bible version you normally use and another reliable version or paraphrase such as — NIV, NLT, NASB, ESV. Avoid using Study Bible notes or commentaries until reading through the text yourself several times.

### **Guidelines for Interpreting Prophecy**

Assume the prophecy is literal, that what it actually says is what is intended by the author. Look for the simple, direct meaning.

Keep in mind that figurative language, the use of non-literal or symbolic words, may be used to give some type of picture to see. Understand things from the author’s point of view, not your own. The context is very important!

Note any references about time where there is any change in time, especially any dramatic changes in historical time periods, generations or centuries. There may be no clear or obvious expression of change from past to present or future tense. Observe verb tenses, but do not rely on them completely.

Know the historical setting of the prophecy itself. You will need to be a student of Bible history and familiar with world history that is connected to Biblical history. You will need to do some reading of Israel’s own history in the Bible, as well as look at simple, but good reference books. Above all, understand the original purpose of the prophecy for the original hearers.







6. (a) What do you think profaning the covenant has to do with being unfaithful with one another? What does this tell us about God's covenant and relationships? [How can this be known by what is written here?]
- (b) What specific thing has been done that is unfaithful? [Who has done this? Why is it detestable/abominable?]
- (c) What is another thing the Lord speaks to the people about in v13? [Why is this wrong and why would the Lord not accept their offerings?]
- (d) What terms are used to describe the wife?
- (e) What strong statement about divorce does the Lord make in v16? [What is meant by this statement about "violence"??]
- (f) What is the relationship between divorce and the covenant mentioned in v10?
- (g) How is the exhortation to "be on your guard" related to the command to "not be unfaithful"?

### **Application**

7. What covenant has God made with us? According to 1 Peter 2:1-10, how can all believers be considered priests of this new covenant? What teachings does this passage have for us?
8. How should we live out our faithfulness to the covenant that God has made with us?





**15 Dec 2019**

**Malachi 3:13-4:6**

---

**Observation and Interpretation** [Use the questions in parentheses as guides to answer the main question]

Read Malachi 3:13-18

1. (a) What does the Lord say His people are saying against Him? [How does the Lord further explain what their complaint is? How is this the same or different from what is said in 2:17?]

(b) Why are His people saying that serving the Lord and keeping God's Law are useless? [What do they think is happening?]

(c) How is this complaining against the Lord countered in the rest of Chap 3? [How is the scroll/book of remembrance God's answer to the complaint and accusation in verses 14-15? What new information is there compared to v1-6?]

2. (a) What does the Lord say about those who feared Him and honoured His name? How will He honour them? When does He say He will give them this honour?

(b) What will take place when those who fear God are honoured? [What will God's people be able to do?]

Read Malachi 4:1-6

3. (a) What "day" is said to be coming (v1)? How is it described? [Would it be the same one spoken of in Malachi 3:2? Why or why not?]

(b) Who (what people) do not need to fear this coming "day"? Why is this? [How are they described?]

(c) Who will come and help these people spoken of in v2?

4. What are the people of Israel instructed to remember? Why was this important? How is this related to what spoken about in all of Malachi?

5. (a) What promise is made in v5? Who would consider this to be a promise? [What “day” is spoken of here? Is it the same as the one in v1?]

(b) Who will be sent and what will he do? Consider Revelation 11:3-12 and 1 Kings 17:1. Do you think this has already taken place? Explain why?

6. How would you explain verse 6 in your own words? [How, or in what way, do you think this would take place? What specific benefits should be expected if this is done?]

7. How is Malachi 4:1-6 a summary of God’s message to Israel in this book?

8. Malachi closes the Old Testament. How has Christ’s coming fulfilled the message of Malachi?

### **Application**

9. Do you find yourself among the complainers or among those fearing and honouring God most of the time? What have you learnt that could change in your own life and attitude about serving the Lord?

10. Is there a need for your own heart to be “turned” to either your parents or your children in anyway?  
If so, how would you do take the first step to do so?

11. Of all the topics addressed in Malachi — what spoke most personally to you and why?