

WTF LIFE MAJOR LESSONS | from the MINOR PROPHETS



LESSON 14 - MALACHI

FACILITATOR'S

Note

In our final minor prophet lesson we study the preaching of Malachi. Malachi is addressing the Israelites some 100 years past the original return from the Babylonian exile. This new generation was losing their wholehearted zeal for God and they were offering up empty worship, careless offerings, indifferent hearts, and skepticism toward God. Their faithlessness was evidenced in their unfaithful marriages. The prophet is speaking a word from God ("the Lord of hosts says...") to return in faithfulness to God. Malachi is calling the Israelites to repentance as the "Day of the Lord" is approaching. God expresses His love for His people (1:2) and wants to encourage them to return to Him ("return to me, and I will return to you" – 3:7) so He can refine and purify them and their offerings of worship will be pleasing to Him (3:3-4). Focus your time on how Malachi points to some of our own deficiencies as followers of God today. Can our worship be empty; our hearts far from God; our offerings insignificant; and our marriages unfaithful? Are we returning to God and allowing Him to refine and purify our hearts through Jesus, so that we can approach Him in spirit and truth? Are we prepared for the "Day of the Lord"?

Through this lesson we hope to provide material that will provide knowledge (HEAD); then ask questions that will bring us understanding (HEART); and then motivate participants to go and live the Word in the world and demonstrate Godly wisdom (HANDS).

HEAD  **→ HEART**  **→ HANDS** 

We hope that by this study your class participants will not only hear, know, and understand the Word, but that they will also be driven to become the "Living Word" to the world around us. Your role in this process as a class facilitator is very important. Go beyond these lessons to demonstrate how what the Minor Prophets teach us can and should be lived daily. Use your life and the lives of others as examples of this "Living Word" concept.

*As always, we would encourage you to begin preparing for this lesson by digging into the Word and reading through the book of **Malachi**. We also encourage you to read/scan through **Ezra 7-10 and ALL of Nehemiah** as background to the book. As you move through **Malachi**, jot down any thoughts that come to you and particular passages that stand out and speak to you. We assure you that these will come into play as you facilitate this discussion. It is then that you should approach this lesson plan and use it (and others) only as a guide for the weeks to come. Your group is different than all the rest and so your lessons should be adapted accordingly.*

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PRAYER



Begin your time with a prayer asking God for the guidance of His Holy Spirit as you and your class seek to encounter Him through His Holy Word.

FOCUS

- Presentation of introductory material on the prophecy of Malachi.
- Understand that we can often find ourselves complacent and indifferent in our relationship with God. Yet, God desires our whole hearts in all things.
- Many offer only what is convenient to God. But God wants us to willingly give up all that we have in our love for Him rather than give Him our scraps.
- Outward formal worship is worthless unless it is accompanied with inward love and obedience.
- God loves us and wants us to return to Him so that He can refine and purify us.
- Our unfaithfulness in our covenant of marriage is often a sign of our unfaithfulness in our covenant with God.

DISCUSSION STARTERS



- Have you ever received a “re-gift”? You know, something that someone received that they didn’t want and they decide to re-gift on to you?
- How about a gift that you knew they person just found around the house or was even used?
- If you have received gifts like these, how did they make you feel? Did you feel like you received the attention that a gift should convey? Or, did you feel slighted, uncared for, and an indifference toward you? Why?
- Have you ever had a relationship with someone you knew outwardly was being nice and paying attention to you, but you knew inwardly they really didn’t want to be around you or take the time to be with you? How does a relationship like this make you feel? Discuss.
- How do you think God feels when we act like we want a relationship with Him on the outside, but inwardly we don’t give Him the time of day? Or how you think He likes our second-hand, re-gifted, scrap offerings?
- Let’s consider these questions as we address the prophecy of Malachi...

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KNOWLEDGE HEAD

From God's Word through Malachi

- OVERVIEW

- Author

- The author is identified as Malachi.
 - Malachi immediately acknowledges to his readers/listeners that his prophecy is a word of the Lord and not from himself (1:1).
- Malachi means "my messenger".
- There is nothing known about the background (hometown, family, occupation, etc.) of Malachi. In fact, the name Malachi is mentioned only once in all of Scripture in 1:1.
 - This fact has led many to believe that there was not a prophet named Malachi. The Targum (the Aramaic version of the Old Testament) actually says "my messenger whose name is Ezra." The Christian scholar and translator, Jerome, also attributed the prophecy to Ezra. Even the Septuagint (LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses Malachi as a common noun rather than a name "The oracle of the word of the Lord by my messenger." However, the LXX also titles the prophecy "Malachias" recognizing the name of the prophet.
 - In spite of these attempts of discretization, there is no real reason to attribute the book to any one other than whom the text attributes it to, Malachi.
 - The authenticity of his work is confirmed in multiple places in the New Testament (Matt. 11:10; 17:12; Mark 1:2; 9:11-12; Luke 1:17; Rom. 9:13).

- Date

- Internal evidence matched with other Biblical records is the only means of dating the text.
- With this in mind, due to the careless priests (1:6-2:9); skepticism (2:17; 3:14), divorce and intermarriage (2:16); the temple being complete and sacrifices being offered (1:7-10); Judah being under the oversight of a governor (1:8); Edom being destroyed (1:1-5); and tithes being neglected (3:8-10); **these conditions point to the time of Ezra chapters 7-10 and Nehemiah.**
 - For correlation see:
 - Priestly neglect (Neh. 13:4-9, 29-31; Mal. 1:6-2:9)
 - Intermarriage (Ezra 9-10; Neh. 10:30; 13:1-3, 23-27; Mal. 2:10-12)
 - Abusing the underprivileged (Neh. 5:1-13; Mal. 3:5)

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- Neglecting tithes (Neh. 10:32–39; 13:10–13; Mal. 3:8–10).
 - Therefore, it is commonly believe that Malachi wrote between 445-432 B.C.
- **Theme(s)**
 - The main theme and message of Malachi is renewed covenant faithfulness to God. The Israelites are to: (1) Remember the Law of Moses (1:2-2:16) and (2) Remember the Promise of Elijah and the coming “Day of the Lord” (2:17-4:6).
 - God wrestles with His children, battling **Contentment vs. Commitment** (see Malachi 3:18).
 - Several sub-themes emerge from this overarching theme:
 - God loves His people and demonstrates His love through various means. However, His people have not demonstrated their love for Him.
 - Defective, second-best sacrifices will never be acceptable to God.
 - Do not rob God by withholding tithes.
 - Empty formal worship is worthless to God.
 - Repent and return to the Lord.
 - “The Day of the Lord” is coming, prepared for by the prophet Elijah. For the unfaithful this day will bring destruction, but for the faithful the day will bring great joy!
 - **ASK:**
 - Do these themes still speak/apply to us today? How?
- **THE TEXT**
 - The text of Malachi is unique as it written in the form of a debate (or didactic-dialectic form) where: (1) God brings a charge against Israel, (2) Israel objects and questions God’s charge against them, and (3) God responds to the objection/question by presenting evidence of the charge’s validity.
 - The prophecy of Malachi can be outlined as follows:
 - **Condemnation of Faithless Priests** (1:2-2:9)
 - **Condemnation of Divorce and Intermarrying** (2:10-16)
 - **Condemnation of the Faithless and Reward of the Faithful** (2:17-4:6)
 - 1:2-2:9 (Condemnation of Faithless Priests)
 - In this section, God addresses the faithless worship of His people and His priests. He lays the blame primarily on the priests who knew better and were supposed to teach the Israelites His ways. The priests were allowing and condoning the blemished sacrifices offered by the people (1:13) that were in direct opposition to God’s instructions (Leviticus 1:3; Deuteronomy 15:21). He shares that even human rulers would not accept such blemished offerings (Malachi 1:8)!
 - God loves His people (1:2-5)
 - “I have loved you...” (v. 2)

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- God explains, “Here’s how I have loved you...” (vv. 3-5)
- Even though Israel has disrespected God and His love for them, He continues to love them and be patient with them.
- **ASK:**
 - God never stops loving us (no matter what we have done). How does this make you feel?
- **READ 1:6-14:** God addresses the faithlessness of the priests and the people (1:6-14)
 - God’s people offer worthless sacrifices (vv. 6-8)
 - It would be better to just close the doors of the temple (vv. 9-10)
 - God will be worshipped and praised among the nations (Gentiles) (vv. 11-13)
 - God curses those who offer Him blemished sacrifices (v. 14)
- **READ 2:1-9:** God blames and curses the priests for their lack of instruction to the people (2:1-9)
 - They must change their ways immediately in order to escape the curse (vv. 1-4)
 - God’s covenant with Levi and His description of the model priest (vv. 5-7)
 - The renegade priests and their disgrace before God (vv. 8-9)
- The message here speaks loudly to us today. We should give our best (not our seconds, thirds, fourths, etc.) to God. Although we no longer offer animal sacrifices, Paul tells us that each of us should be a “living sacrifice” and that our service must be “acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1). This is our “spiritual act of worship.” God is searching for those whose hearts are fully committed to Him (2 Chron. 16:9). Our worship is indicative of our heart for God. If we are offering Him our scraps or nothing at all, then we have demonstrated who our god is, and it ain’t Him.
 - **ASK:**
 - Do we approach our worship to God in a careless, casual manner?
 - Do we give God our scraps or our very best? Not only on Sunday, but everyday?
 - How important is the role of our ministers and elders? What are they accountable for? Can the elders and ministers lead the people correctly but the people still choose to honor self over God?
- **2:10-16 (Condemnation of Divorce and Intermarrying)**
 - In 2:10-13, Malachi addresses the involvement of idolatry and paganism in the Israelite’s worship. Although they had an outward showing of repentance, inside it was false and full of hypocrisy.

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- This hypocrisy is evident in the unfaithfulness demonstrated in their marriages. God speaks to the sanctity of marriage and that the Israelites had been unfaithful in their commitments to one another.
 - God detests/hate divorce! Why? If we cannot be faithful to our spouse whom we can touch, see, talk to, etc.; then we will be prone to leave our God whom we can't.
 - **ASK:**
 - God says in verse 14 that He is present and a witness to the covenant made between man and woman. Not only that, but that He (through His Spirit) makes them one. What does this tell us about marriage and how God views the covenant of marriage?
- **2:17-4:6 (Condemnation of the Faithless and Reward of the Faithful)**
 - How God Plans to Judge (2:17-3:5)
 - The people ask, "Where is the God of justice?" (2:17)
 - READ 3:1-5
 - God will send a messenger to prepare the way for His coming. Who is this messenger according to Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27? Who was he preparing the way for?
 - God explains His role (Jesus' role) as one who purifies and refines His people and priests and judges others. (3:3-5)
 - How did Jesus fulfill these roles?
 - When Jesus comes, he will perform two complementary works: He will purify and refine sinners (vv. 2-4) and judge others (v. 5). The images God uses for His purifying work are the *refiner's fire* and *fullers' soap*. Both of these images highlight the thoroughness and severity of God's purifying and refining work. The heat from a refiner's fire was extreme/intense so that the dross (impurities) could be separated from the pure metal (gold, silver, etc.). Also, lye soap (a very strong soap) was used to wash clothes and after the washing the clothes would be placed on rocks and beaten with sticks. There is a price to be paid should one desire God's purifying/refining work over His judgment (see Heb. 12:7-11).
 - **ASK:**
 - Do we embrace God's purifying/refining work in us, or do we try to escape it? Why?
 - Robbing God by Withholding Tithes and Offerings (3:6-12)
 - God does NOT change (3:6)
 - However, His people are fickle and therefore God will curse them (3:7-9)
 - Read v. 7 (see also Zech. 1:3): God's desire has always been that

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His people will return to Him (this is His will for our lives – Reconciliation). However, God’s people must also make movement toward Him.

- Read James 4:7-8. How does this relate?
- God will reward His people for their respect and faithfully fulfilling their responsibilities (3:10-12)
- God’s Form of Justice (3:13-4:6)
 - The People’s Complaint: the wicked flourish, the righteous suffer (3:13-15)
 - READ 3:16-18: God will separate righteous from the wicked (3:16-18)
 - God’s people are described as His treasured possession (3:17)
 - God will destroy the wicked (4:1)
 - God will exalt and glorify the righteous (4:2-3)
 - God encourages the faithful to remember and observe the law (4:4)
 - Elijah the messenger (John the Baptist) and his work of “preparing the way” (4:5-6)
 - **ASK:**
 - How is God’s justice in comparison to the justice of man?
- Malachi’s instructions are clear (both to his hearers and to us today): God implores His people to consider their ways, to respond to His love, and return to Him. He wants His children to accept His offer of life everlasting (John 3:16) and desires that everyone will repent of their ways in order to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

UNDERSTANDING ♥ HEART

- What do the times of Malachi have in common with our own times?
- What are some of the modern-day messages that we have heard through Malachi today?
- How might our modern-day worship become or reflect the worship of Malachi’s day? What is most important to God in regards to worship? How can we keep our hearts pure and focused before God in worship?
- What does God think about divorce? How should we minister to those who are contemplating divorce? In light of God’s grace and forgiveness, how should we minister to those who have gone through divorce?
- “Return to me and I’ll return to you!” “Draw near to me and I’ll draw near to you.” What does this mean and how should it be lived out each day?

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WISDOM HANDS

- What messages did you hear in this lesson that need to be shared with people you know?
- Who in your group of friends or family do you need to share the message with TODAY? Think specifically.
- Commit to each other that you will have the courage to share the message. Pray NOW and then pray for each other through the week to have the boldness to share.

PRAYER



End your time together with a prayer. Ask God to help you in sharing His Gospel message of HOPE to a lost world. Ask Him to open the eyes of our hearts through this study so that we may know Him more and develop an intimate relationship with Him.

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SEMESTER OUTLINE (SPRING 2016)

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS – Why Study This? (January 3)
2. HOSEA – PART 1 (January 10)
3. HOSEA – PART 2 (January 17)
4. JOEL (January 24)
5. AMOS (January 31)
6. OBADIAH & NAHUM (February 7)
7. JONAH (February 14)
8. MICAHA (February 21)
9. HABAKKUK (February 28)
10. ZEPHANIAH (March 6)
11. HAGGAI (March 13)
12. ZECHARIAH – PART 1 (April 3)
13. ZECHARIAH – PART 2 (April 10)
14. MALACHI (April 17)
15. CONCLUSION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS (April 24)