

Malachi calls Israel to repent—and there is plenty to repent of! A corrupt priesthood; meaningless worship rituals; crippling social injustices. The nation has been ‘robbing God’, Malachi says. In these studies, we consider why God sticks with his wayward people, and how the way is prepared for the coming Messiah who will change their hearts.

How to use these readings

- **With a penitent heart**, the true prerequisite for all Bible reading. Open with prayer (perhaps using the prayer suggested).
- **With 15-20 minutes** of peace and quiet. If you can take longer, and want to read and pray further—great! But we have designed the readings to be done in a fairly short space of time.
- **With an accurate modern translation**. We recommend the new ESV translation for personal and group Bible study. Bible Brief writers refer to this translation. Contact us for further details about the ESV or visit www.matthiasmedia.com.au/ESV.
- **With a notebook**. Even if you only jot down brief ideas, writing focuses the mind.

✓ NB: Tick in the box when you've completed each study.

Reading 1: Malachi 1:1-5 (i)

1. The Israelites challenge God's claim that he loves them and God responds. What does God point to as evidence of his love for them?
2. Why will Edom's future always be bleak?
3. How does God predict the Israelites will ultimately respond to his wrath upon Edom?

POINTER Malachi's prophecy is addressed to God's people after their return from exile, about 400 years before Jesus. He is chronologically the last prophet of the Old Testament period. The background to the distinction between Jacob and Esau is in Genesis 25:22-23. Jacob was the father of the nation of Israel—the people Malachi addresses. Edom was the nation of people who were descended from Esau.

- **As a guide and help, not a straitjacket**. Feel free to dig further into the passage, to notice and ponder things that the questions don't point to.
- **As a launch-pad for prayer**. Use the 'Prayer ideas' at the end of each reading as a starting point for your daily prayer. Many of the points that will arise from the readings will be things you can pray for yourself, and also for others (family, friends, neighbours, etc.). Why not compile a list of people you want to pray for, and use the prayer ideas from each reading to pray for the next person on your list?

Prayer for each day

Father in heaven,

Thank you that you speak through your word and that your Spirit helps me to hear you. Please speak to me as I read Malachi today. Remind me of your faithfulness and love that I might give you the praise you deserve. Help me to better understand the work of the Lord Jesus. Strengthen me to repent of half-heartedness and to fear you and live for you whole-heartedly.

*In Jesus name,
Amen.*



This month's Bible Brief was written by Simon Flinders, minister at St Martin's Georges Hall in Sydney.

PONDER Do you ever question or challenge God's love? Where should we look when we are tempted to doubt that God loves us?

PRAYER IDEAS Read 1 John 3:1 and thank God for that precious truth. Praise God that his greatness has been revealed even beyond the borders of Israel.

Notes

Reading 2: Malachi 1:1-5 (ii)

1. How is the fact that God chose Jacob evidence of his love for Israel?
2. Read Deuteronomy 7:6-9. Why does God say he chose Israel?
3. Read Romans 9:10-21. What does Paul say being one of God's people depends upon?

PONDER In Romans 9, Paul uses the Jacob and Esau story to illustrate a timeless truth

about the way God relates to people. What does your salvation depend upon? Does the fact that God chose you assure you that he loves you?

PRAYER IDEAS Praise God that he is a God of mercy. Thank him for choosing you. Thank him that you need never doubt his love.

Reading 3: Malachi 1:6-14 (i)

1. How have Israel's priests despised God's name?
2. What did God deserve and require (see Leviticus 1:10 for example)?
3. Read Mark 7:1-8. What are the similarities between Israel's priests in Malachi's day and the leaders of Israel in Jesus' day?

PONDER "Like Israel's leaders, sometimes our hearts are far from God and sometimes we treat our worship of him like it's a burden." Does that ever describe you? Does that describe you right now?

PRAYER IDEAS Using the language of v.11 and v.14, praise God for his greatness. Confess your halfheartedness to him. Pray that as your Father and your Lord, you would treat him as he deserves to be treated.

Reading 4: Malachi 1:6-14 (ii)

1. Read the passage again.
2. In what different ways does God describe their blemished sacrifices? (eg. vv.8,10)
3. Why does God say that their sacrifices are 'in vain' (v.10)? Remember that Jesus described the empty worship of the Jewish leaders in the same way in Mark 7:7.

PONDER While Israel's sacrifices and worship were blemished, they would always be unacceptable to God. Left to

ourselves, we can't offer God acceptable worship either.

PRAYER IDEAS Read 1 Peter 1:18-19 and thank God that he provided an unblemished, perfect sacrifice for us. Read Romans 12:1-2 and pray that in the light of God's mercy to us in Jesus, you'd offer the sacrifice of your self to him in the way Paul suggests. Thank God that because of Jesus, this sacrifice is acceptable to him.

Reading 5: Malachi 2:1-9

1. What does this passage tell us God expected of Israel's priests?
2. Why is he angry with them here?
3. How angry is he? Does that seem fair?

PONDER Being a messenger of God (v.7) is an awesome responsibility because God's truth affects people's lives. Perhaps God's anger at the failure of his messengers seems more reasonable when we realise that people's lives are at stake.

PRAYER IDEAS Read James 3:1. Pray for those who teach in Christ's body and especially for those who have a teaching ministry in your own church (including yourself if you do). Pray that they would take their responsibility as seriously as God does and that they would honour God by leading people to repentance rather than causing them to stumble.

POINTER 'Covenant' is a key word in the Old Testament and in Malachi. It refers to a binding agreement between two parties. Here Malachi speaks about the covenant between God and Levi. Levi was the tribe within Israel that God had set apart to be priests for the people. For some background on this covenant, read Numbers 25:10-13.

Reading 6: Malachi 2:10-12

1. What does it mean to 'marry the daughter of a foreign God'?
2. Why is this sort of marriage seen to be 'profaning the covenant' of Israel's fathers? See Deuteronomy 7:1-4.
3. Why does Malachi remind the people here that God loves his sanctuary?

PONDER Read 1 Kings 11:1-6. Notice the way that one of the wisest men in Israel's

POINTER Here the names 'Judah' and 'Jacob' are used as synonyms for 'Israel'.

Reading 7: Malachi 2:13-16

1. Why is God not accepting their offerings?
2. What did God originally intend for marriage?
3. In what context does the word 'covenant' occur in this passage?

PONDER Why does God take broken covenants so seriously? Consider the sharp contrast between Israel's faithlessness and the faithfulness of God.

Reading 8: Malachi 2:1-16

1. Read over 2:1-16 again.
2. List the three 'covenants' that Malachi rebukes Israel for breaking.
3. In what ways do each of these acts of faithlessness affect Israel's relationship with God (see v.8, v.11, v.13)?

PONDER Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. Israel's repeated failure to keep covenants meant that God promised to bring a new and better covenant, in which the failure of his

Reading 9: Malachi 2:17-3:5 (i)

1. Read 2:17 and try and express the Israelites' complaint in your own words.
2. According to 3:1 who are the two people who will come?
3. What will the messenger of the covenant do when he comes?

PONDER Israel's worship was not acceptable to God because of their impurity (cf. 1:10,

history became a fool by failing to obey God's word and by failing to trust that God knew what he was talking about when he warned the Israelites in Deuteronomy 7.

PRAYER IDEAS Read 2 Corinthians 6:14. Pray that you would never be divided in your loyalty to God through a foolish partnership with unbelievers/a particular unbeliever.

PRAYER IDEAS Read Matthew 19:3-6. Whether you are married or single at the moment, pray that you would never be responsible for separating what God has joined together. Pray that you would always be faithful as God is faithful. Pray in the same way for other married people you know.

people would be completely forgiven. The gracious promise of Jeremiah 31 casts its hopeful shadow even over the people of Malachi's day.

PRAYER IDEAS Read Hebrews 8. Praise God that his faithfulness meant that he did establish the new covenant in Jesus. Praise God for his mercy towards covenant-breakers like us. Thank him that, in Jesus, he remembers your sins no more.

2:13). Their offerings could only be pleasing to God again if they were purified (3:3-4). This is always God's way. He only accepts the worship of those who are pure.

PRAYER IDEAS Read Hebrews 9:11-14. Praise God that, through the blood of Jesus, he has purified you so that your worship/service is acceptable to him.

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Reading 10: Malachi 2:17-3:5 (ii)

1. Who are the sons of Levi (v.3)?
(See Reading 5 if you're stuck.)
2. Re-read 2:1-9. Why did they need purifying?

PONDER Re-read Hebrews 9:11-14. It is only because Jesus is the perfect high priest that he is able to offer the perfect sacrifice that makes our worship acceptable to God.

PRAYER IDEAS Praise God for the wonderful way in which Jesus is both our perfect priest and our perfect sacrifice. Read 1 Peter 2:9-12. Thank God for making you a part of his new royal priesthood in Jesus and pray that you'd live as he wants you to, pointing others to him.

Reading 11: Malachi 2:17-3:5 (iii)

1. Where does Malachi direct the Israelites to look if they want to see the God of justice?
2. When he speaks about the coming of the Lord, who is he ultimately referring to?
3. What is the answer to the question of 3:2?

PONDER Read John 5:22+27 and Acts 17:30-31. God has appointed Jesus judge. That is why when we look to him we see the God of justice. Consider how often our world

asks the question of 2:17 and how desperately they need to look to Jesus.

PRAYER IDEAS Read Romans 5:1-2 and see who Paul says can 'stand' even after the coming of the Lord. Praise God for his wonderful grace to you. Pray for our lost world that needs the justice and grace of Jesus so desperately.

Reading 12: Malachi 2:17-3:5 (iv)

1. When the Israelites appealed for God's justice (v.17) who did they want him to judge?
2. According to 3:2-5, who will he judge when he comes?
3. Do you think Malachi's words here may have made the Israelites reconsider their demands for God to come with justice?

PONDER Demanding justice from God is a very dangerous business. Since God's desire for justice is perfect, it does not

show favouritism (unlike ours), and may well involve judgement upon us! When you think about it, none of us really want God to be just—it'd be the end of us.

PRAYER IDEAS Read Romans 3:21-26. Praise God that he designed a way to be both just and merciful. Thank God that in Jesus he has justly spared you from the judgement you deserve.

Reading 13: Malachi 3:6-7

1. What does v.6 mean by 'consumed'?
2. Is Israel's rebellion against God a recent thing?
3. What is the connection between God's changelessness and Israel being spared from his wrath?
4. What does God call upon them to do?

PONDER Read Exodus 34:6-7 and notice how God reveals himself to Moses to be a God of justice as well as abounding in love and faithfulness. Consider the way in

which Israel could see both these things in what Malachi was saying to them.

PRAYER IDEAS Read John 1:1-14. The words 'grace and truth' (v.14) are connected with 'love and faithfulness' in Exodus 34. Praise God for the changelessness of God. Thank him for revealing his character to us so perfectly in Jesus. Thank him that in Jesus and because of his grace and truth, you are not consumed either.

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Reading 14: Malachi 3:8-12

1. How are the Israelites 'robbing' God?
2. What did God expect (see Leviticus 27:30 for example)?
3. What did God say would happen if they had the faith to offer him the 'full tithe'?
4. In what sense is the issue here (and in 1:6-8) a failure of Israel's *trust* in God?

PONDER Israel's unwillingness to trust God was not only stirring God's anger, it was also ensuring that they were missing out. They were not enjoying the blessings that God

said would come with obeying him. In their foolishness, they were 'robbing' themselves as much as they were robbing God!

PRAYER IDEAS Confess to God that you are often foolish enough to hold back from obedience and devotion to him because you don't really believe that his way is the best way. Read Matthew 5:2-12 and thank God that following Jesus and obeying his word really is the most 'blessed' way to live. Pray that his Spirit would strengthen you to trust and obey.

Reading 15: Malachi 3:13-15

1. What are Israel's complaints against God here?
2. How is their attitude similar to that expressed in 1:13 and 2:27?
3. In what ways do modern people make similar complaints? Re-write vv.14-15 in the words of the early 21st century.

PONDER Israel believed there was no benefit in pleasing God but that there was plenty of benefit in doing evil. They had forgotten both the blessings of obedience

(3:10-12) and the justice of God (2:17-3:5).

PRAYER IDEAS Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. Thank God for the resurrection of Jesus which ensures that serving the Lord is never in vain. Thank God for the day that is coming when he will bring perfect blessing to his people and perfect justice to those that oppose him. Pray that you wouldn't forget these truths (like Israel did) and that in remembering, you'd be 'steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord'.

Reading 16: Malachi 3:16-17

1. What is the purpose of the book of remembrance (v.16)?
2. What will these faithful Israelites be 'spared' (v.17) from?
3. What is it about these faithful Israelites that sets them apart?

PONDER By fearing God and esteeming his name, these Israelites treated God the way he deserves to be treated. They served him as a son, the very thing God had expected of all Israel (1:6).

PRAYER IDEAS Read Hebrews 6:10. Thank God that just as he 'remembered' these faithful Israelites, so too he 'remembers' (does not overlook) the service of Christian people in the New Covenant. Pray that you would treat God as he deserves to be treated and that you would be faithful in serving and loving the saints.

Reading 17: Malachi 3:16-18

1. What was the distinction between the 'righteous' and the 'wicked' in the way the Israelites were living in Malachi's day? Skim over the whole of Malachi and write a list in two columns (ie. the way the righteous should live, the way the wicked live).

PONDER The fundamental difference between the righteous and the wicked in Malachi's day was a difference in attitude to God. Some feared him and treated him as God. Others

did not fear God and went through the religious motions at best. Do you fear God?

PRAYER IDEAS Read Matthew 25:31-46 and notice that when the Son of Man comes in glory, he will reveal a distinction between all people, similar to the one Malachi was talking about. Pray that you would live as one who fears the Lord. Pray that in fearing him, you would overflow in genuine love for God's people.

Reading 18: Malachi 3:16-4:3 (i)

1. How is 3:18 connected with 4:1-3?
2. What will be the fate of the 'evildoers' on the day when God acts?
3. How do these verses answer the foolish accusations of the Israelites in 2:17 and 3:15?

PONDER In Malachi's day, the judgement of God was promised to those who failed to 'fear' God (eg. 3:16, 4:2). In the light of the more perfect revelation of God in Jesus, the judgement of God is promised to those who 'do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.

Reading 19: Malachi 3:16-4:3 (ii)

1. What does it mean to be 'treasured' by God (3:17)?
2. How does 4:2 picture the fate of those who 'fear' God on that day?

PONDER In this world the wicked often trample on the righteous. 4:3 reminds us of a day that is coming when the tables will be

PRAYER IDEAS Read Matthew 13:47-50. Jesus teaches that the day when the ultimate distinction will be made between the 'righteous' and the 'evildoers' is yet to come. Pray for those you know and love who are not yet in the Kingdom, who are not obeying the gospel of Jesus. Pray that God would be merciful and save them before that day comes.

turned. On that day, the sorrow of all God's people will be turned into exuberant and uninhibited joy (4:2).

PRAYER IDEAS Read Revelation 21:1-4 and 22:1-4. Praise God for the healing and joy we look forward to in the New Jerusalem.

Reading 20: Malachi 4:4-6

1. Why should the Israelites remember the law of Moses? What has it got to do with 'fearing' God?
2. Who will come before the Lord comes? What else has Malachi called him (see 3:1)?
3. Keep both 3:1 and 4:5-6 in mind. What will his role be?

PONDER The Israelites were looking forward to the coming of a prophet, like Elijah, who would prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. Read Matthew 11:7-14 and Luke 1:16-17 to see the way in which John the Baptist fulfils these prophecies.

PRAYER IDEAS Read Matthew 17:1-13. Jesus stands on the mountain with the two great Old Testament characters who Malachi's prophecy concludes with. It is a sign that the one who Moses, Elijah, and Malachi all looked forward to, had arrived. Praise God for bringing all human history together in Jesus. Praise him for his faithfulness in keeping his promises. Pray that you would live like one of the people who belong to the Lord.

Notes

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