

Lesson 2 Malachi 3:1 to end of book.

Some of our bibles may include a short chapter 4 in Malachi, while others do not. In texts that were taken from Hebrew translations rather than from the Septuagint or Greek translation, verses in 4:1-6 are numbered as 3:19-24. Keep in mind that chapter and verse numbers were not a part of the original texts, but were added later to make study and communal prayer easier. We are using Malachi to begin our study this year as a way to reflect on the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament. "Malachi" is Hebrew for "my messenger"; it is not believed to be a proper name. These prophecies are thought to have been written by an anonymous prophet in the 5th century B.C., after the Babylonian Exile, but before radical reforms of Judaism by Ezra. As the refugees from Babylon return to Judah, only a remnant remains. Judah is again under foreign control.

1. Welcome back to Bible Study! Let's begin today with a reflection on gratitude. Especially during difficult times, counting our blessings and giving thanks to God is a great help. Discuss briefly how you have been blessed during the past year.

2. Read Malachi 3:1-4, Malachi 3:23, Mark 1:4-8, and Matthew 17:1-3. These verses are a prophecy of a future messenger who will prepare the way for the LORD. Who do we believe this new messenger is? (Check footnotes in Malachi also.)

Malachi 3:1-4 Now I am sending my messenger— *he will prepare the way before me*;

And the lord whom you seek will come suddenly to his temple; The messenger of the covenant whom you desire—see, he is coming! *says the LORD of hosts.*² But who can endure the day of his coming?

Who can stand firm when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire, like fullers' lye.

³ He will sit refining and purifying silver, and he will purify the Levites, refining them like gold or silver, that they may bring offerings to the LORD in righteousness.⁴ Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will please the LORD, as in ancient days, as in years gone by.

Malachi 3:23 Now I am sending to you Elijah the prophet, Before the day of the LORD comes, the great and terrible day.

Mark 1:4-8 John [the] Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins. ⁶ John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this is what he proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the holy Spirit."

Matthew 17:1-3 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

3. Read again Malachi 3:1-4. What does the LORD say he will do for the Levites at the Temple?

4. Read Malachi 3:5-7. On what basis will the LORD judge the people in these verses? See also Luke 10:27 and Matthew 25:31-41.

Malachi 3:5-7 I will draw near to you for judgment, and I will be swift to bear witness against sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers, those who deprive a laborer of wages, oppress a widow or an orphan, or turn aside a resident alien, without fearing me, says the LORD of hosts. For I, the LORD, do not change, and you, sons of Jacob, do not cease to be.⁷ Since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, that I may return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

5. Read Malachi 3:7-12. In this dialogue between God and his people, what is the LORD asking his people to do? What does he promise them in return?

Malachi 3:7-12 Since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, that I may return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, “Why should we return?”⁸ Can anyone rob God? But you are robbing me! And you say, “How have we robbed you?” Of tithes and contributions!⁹ You are indeed accursed, for you, the whole nation, rob me.¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, and see if I do not open the floodgates of heaven for you, and pour down upon you blessing without measure!¹¹ I will rebuke the locust for you so that it will not destroy your crops, and the vine in the field will not be barren, says the LORD of hosts.¹² All the nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land, says the LORD of hosts.

6. Reflection: Why have the people lost faith in God or in prayer? Read Malachi 3:13-15 and consider the historical context of the 5th century B.C.

Malachi 3:13-15 Your words are too much for me, says the LORD. You ask, “What have we spoken against you?”¹⁴ You have said, “It is useless to serve God; what do we gain by observing God’s requirements, and by going about as mourners before the LORD of hosts?”¹⁵ But we call the arrogant blessed; for evildoers not only prosper but even test God and escape.”

7. Read Malachi 3:16-18. What do these verses say about the *nature of God*?

Malachi 3:16-18 Then those who fear the LORD spoke with one another, and *the LORD listened* attentively; A record book was written before him of those who fear the LORD and esteem his name.¹⁷ They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, my own special possession, on the day when I take action. And I will have compassion on them, as a man has compassion on his son who serves him.¹⁸ Then you will again distinguish between the just and the wicked, Between the person who serves God, and the one who does not.

8. Read Malachi 3:6 and 3:20-21. How do these verses reflect both justice and God’s commitment to the covenant relationship with those who obey and follow Him?

Malachi 3:20-21 But for you who fear my name, the sun of justice will arise with healing in its wings; and you will go out leaping like calves from the stall²¹ and tread down the wicked; they will become dust under the soles of your feet, on the day when I take action, says the LORD of hosts.