

BIBLE STUDY IV

Practical Bible Study IV: Syllabus

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CLASS #1:

- I. Course Introduction.
- II. Section #1: Mal 2:17-3:6.

CLASS #2:

- II. Section #1: (cont.)
- III. Section #2: Mal 3:7-4:3.

CLASS #3:

- III. Section #2: (cont.)

CLASS #4:

- III. Section #2: (cont.)

CLASS #5:

- IV. Section #3: Mal 4:4-6.
- V. Conclusions to the Book of Malachi.
Exam.

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Practical Bible Study IV: Exam

The “Inductive Bible Study” courses do not have exams like the other courses. The exam time is used to actually do inductive Bible study.

In this fourth “Practical Bible Study” course, the exam requires making observations, interpretations, and applications. The student is given a passage from the Bible and will use the exam time to study the passage and form observations, interpretive questions, interpretive answers, and applications. The student is required to submit their four most important observations and interpretive questions. Two of the observation/question combinations must include an interpretive answer, and one of those two must include an application. The observations, questions, and answers are graded according to importance, insight, clarity, etc.

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I. Course Introduction.

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Course Introduction:

Prerequisite Courses:

Introduction to Bible Study; Practical Bible Study I, II, and III.

This is the fourth practical Bible study course that follows the Introduction to Bible Study course. The series is based on the materials that were taught in that course.

We will use our more advanced understanding of Bible study to study the book of Malachi. In the courses on Phillipians we have already practiced what we learned in the “Introduction” course. Now we want to continue practicing and advance our ability to do inductive Bible study.

Format of this Course.

We will study Malachi 2:17-4:6. There will be three sections:

- 1) The purpose of His coming: to purify (2:17-3:6).
- 2) The proper response to His coming: to repent (3:7-4:3).
- 3) The official announcement (4:4-6).

Each section will contain three areas of study:

- 1) Structure study (this will include the process that leads us from observation to interpretation to application).

We will focus on interpretation in this course and allow more freedom (than in the first two Practical Bible Study courses) to go outside of the book of Malachi to answer our interpretive questions. We will also be less structured (than in the first two courses) in how we format this section.

We will do word studies (when necessary) within this section.

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- 2) An outline of the structure (we summarize the flow of the relationships between the parts of each section).
- 3) A conclusion (this will include: final points and thoughts; a one sentence summary description of the passage; and a three or four word title that captures the focus of the passage).

***Note: We will use the New American Standard Bible our study.

A. General Outline of Malachi:

The following general outline of the book of Malachi is used to organize the sections of this course and the sections of “Practical Bible Study III”:

1. Title and preparation (Mal 1:1-5).
2. Israel’s unfaithfulness and hypocrisy is rebuked (Mal 1:6-2:16).
 - a. The unfaithfulness and hypocrisy of the priests (Mal 1:6-2:9).
 - 1) The sin of the priests (Mal 1:6-14).
 - 2) The discipline and judgment of the priests (Mal 2:1-9).
 - b. The unfaithfulness and hypocrisy of the people (Mal 2:10-16).
3. The Lord’s coming is announced (Mal 2:17-4:6).
 - a. The purpose of His coming: to purify (Mal 2:17-3:6).
 - b. The proper response to His coming: to repent (Mal 3:7-4:3).
 - c. The official announcement (Mal 4:4-6).

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II. Section #1: The Purpose of His Coming: To Purify (Mal 2:17-3:6).

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A. Study of the Structure of Section #1.

1. Verse 17.

- a. Verse 17 prepares for Mal 3:1-6. It establishes the context in which God will initially announce the coming of the Lord. **What is that context?**
 - 1) Generally, the context is the unfaithfulness and hypocrisy of Israel that has been described throughout the first two chapters.
 - 2) Specifically, the context is the prideful hypocrisy of Israel's words that actually mock God.
- b. Again, we see the commonly used structure that includes God making a statement, the people questioning God as if they do not understand the statement, and God responding to clarify His point. **What does this structure imply?**
 - 1) As we have already seen in Mal 1:2, 6, 7 and Mal 2:14, the people of Israel seem blind to their hypocrisy and unfaithfulness. This is a tragic part of hypocrisy. The structure is used effectively to show that the only one that the hypocrite deceives is himself.
 - 2) This is the greatest danger of hypocrisy. It deceives the one who is practicing it.

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- c. The contents of this verse move from the general **“YOUR WORDS”** to the specific **“YOU SAY”**. The words that **“WEARY”** the Lord are specified in the second part of the verse.

1) **What does it mean that the Lord is wearied?**

- a) We know that it does not mean that the Lord became physically tired (see Is 40:28). Yet Isaiah does say that God is wearied with the sin of His people (see Is 43:24; 7:13).
- b) God is wearied by the sinful words of a hypocritical people. His patience is ending. He is impatient with His people who are not holy themselves, but still question the holiness of God.

2) **How does Israel question God’s holiness?**

- a) The people of Israel are not atheists. Thus, when they say, **“WHERE IS THE GOD OF JUSTICE,”** they are not questioning whether He exists or not. They are questioning the character of the God whom they know exists.
- b) This is even worse than atheism (just as hypocrisy is even worse than pure unbelief: see Mk 12:40). Israel’s questions do something worse than doubt God. They mock God. Israel actually mocks the holiness of God.

3) **How does this verse relate to that which has preceded it?**

- a) One way to answer this question is to observe that the idea of being wearied appears before this verse. In Mal 1:13 we see that the priests were also wearied. They were weary with the results of their hypocrisy. This, however, did not lead them to repentance. It only led them to more hypocrisy because the emptiness of their faith (without repentance) promoted more hypocrisy.

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- b) The priests were weary of their own religiosity because they felt its emptiness (not because they felt convicted).
- (1) God is also weary of their hypocrisy. However, He is weary because they do not see their sin. This is magnified by the manifestation of their hypocrisy.
- (a) The sinner (Israel) desires that God would punish the sinners.
- (b) The sinner wants justice, yet his own hypocrisy blinds him to the fact that he is the sinner.
- (2) This verse is ironic. The whole book of Malachi points to the people of Israel as sinners. Now these sinners are complaining that God will not judge sinners. They are actually asking for their own judgment (consider and discuss how the principles of Mt 7:1-5 make Mal 2:17 a very ironic verse).

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Author's Illustration:

It is like a child who disobeyed his father who told him not to play in the street. When the child runs to the father to complain that his older brother was doing something wrong, the father looks at him and says, Why are you so worried about your brother when you can not obey me yourself?

Insert Your Illustration:

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2. Verse 3:1.

- a. God answers the preceding question. Where is the God of justice? Behold, I am going to send Him. I will send the “LORD whom you seek.” The Lord means The God of justice (also see Zech 4:14; 6:15).
- b. We see a reference to two different people in this verse. The “**MESSENGER**” prepares the way for the “**MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT**” The first is described as “**MY MESSENGER**.” The second is described as “**THE LORD**” and “**THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT**.” God, or the Lord of hosts, sends both of them. Study the following diagram that shows this structure.

BEHOLD I (God the Father) AM GOING TO SEND . . . SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS

My Messenger		He will clear the way before me
The Lord The messenger of the covenant	whom you seek in whom you delight	will suddenly COME to the temple behold, He is COMING (the day of HIS COMING: v.2)

- c. Who are these two people?
 - 1) As we have already noted, the Lord (or the messenger of the covenant) is the God of justice. This is consistent with Mal 2:17 and with the fact that He will come to “**HIS TEMPLE**.” He is the owner of the temple. This can be none other than God Himself (which is also consistent with the fact that “Lord” with “the” in front of it always refers to God).
 - a) God the Father sends God the Son who is the Messiah or the messenger of the covenant.
 - b) Indeed, we see in Is 9:7 that the Messiah comes to fulfill the Davidic covenant (note the references in that verse to “justice” and “the Lord of hosts”).
 - 2) The other person “**MY MESSENGER**” seems to refer to John the Baptist (consider Is 40:3-5 and Mk 1:2, 3).

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3. Verse 2.

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- a. The word “**BUT**” introduces a contrast.
- b. What is the contrast?
 - 1) The contrast is established through the use of a repetition. In vs. 1 we see that “**HE IS COMING.**” In vs. 2 we see a reference to “**WHEN HE APPEARS?**” In vs. 1 the people “**SEEK**” the coming of the Lord. They delight in it. However, in vs. 2 His appearance is no delight at all. It is compared to a fire and there is a question of whether or not the people will be able to endure it.
 - 2) The contrast is between the people’s perception of the nature of the coming of the Lord and the reality of the nature of the coming of the Lord. Here again we can see the irony that was implied in vs. 17. The people want to see the God of justice. However, they do not understand the way in which the coming of the God of justice will affect them. God says, “Are you sure you want what you say that you want?”
 - a) The irony is based on the fact that Messianic expectations and Messianic realities were inconsistent. We are warned of this in vs. 1 with the use of the word “**SUDDENLY**” which is almost always used in the O.T. to refer to a disastrous event and/or the judgment of God.
 - b) The questions “**WHO CAN ENDURE?**” and “**WHO CAN STAND?**” remind the Israelites that they themselves are not ready for His appearing (consider Amos 5:20 with respect to the message of the contrast in this verse).
- c. Why does this contrast exist?
 - 1) The word “**FOR**” introduces the answer to this question.
 - 2) The reason why the people may not be as happy as they think they will be when the God of justice comes is that He will come like “**A REFINER’S FIRE AND LIKE FULLER’S SOAP.**”

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d. What is the meaning of a refiner's fire and fuller's soap?

- 1) A refiner does not destroy. He purifies. That is, he burns away everything that is not pure (with a very hot fire consider Mt 3:11, 12). The idea of purifying is seen in the repetition of that word in vs. 3.
- 2) A fuller's soap is the soap that can clean even the worst stain. It is what makes clothes white again.

4. Verse 3.

- a. In this verse we see the continuation of the reason the contrast exists. That is, we see the continuation of the description of what the Lord's coming will be like.
 - 1) We should observe that Malachi uses the word "**SIT.**" God is pictured as a "**SMELTER**" (one who works with intense concentration on the metal). He is also pictured as sitting (one who has great patience).
 - 2) Here we see the patience and concern that God has for His people.
- b. The word that stands out in this verse is "**LEVI.**" This reminds us of the words in Mal 2:4, "**THAT MY COVENANT MAY CONTINUE WITH LEVI.**" It is Levi who is going to be purified.

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c. Why is Levi going to be purified?

- 1) The reason is introduced by the words “**SO THAT.**” It is so that the worship of God’s people will be pure again.
- 2) We see later on in vs. 6 that it is because God does not change that the “**SONS OF JACOB**” are not consumed (completely destroyed). God is faithful to His covenant. He does not change. Thus, He will not allow the covenant to fail. He will purify Levi (discipline them) in order to maintain it.
 - a) Thus, in a certain sense the first part of this verse is a summary of Mal 2:1-9.
 - b) The second part of the verse is God’s solution to Mal 1:6-14.

5. Verse 4.

a. This verse explains the result of the purification.

b. What is the result?

- 1) The word “**THEN**” points to the result.
- 2) It is that the people of God will please the Lord (instead of disappointing Him as has been described throughout the book).
 - a) In vs. 3 we see that it is the priests who are being addressed directly. Indeed, we can see how the words “**AS IN THE DAYS OF OLD AND AS IN FORMER YEARS**” relate to Mal 2:5-7.
 - b) We could also say that the people are being addressed indirectly. Certainly it is the people who bring the correct or incorrect offerings to the priests so that they can sacrifice them. We should also note that Malachi makes this connection by repeating the phrase “**JUDAH AND JERUSALEM**” (see Mal 2:11).

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6. Verse 5.

- a. This verse provides the climax of the irony that began in Mal 2:17. Where is the God of justice? The irony is obvious in this verse when God says “**I WILL DRAW NEAR TO YOU FOR JUDGMENT.**” The people of Israel expressed their impatience in Mal 2:17. God now says that when the time is right, their desire for justice will come “**SWIFTLY and SUDDENLY**” (vs. 1). It is only the grace of God (seen in His desire to purify them) that will prevent all of them from being judged.
- b. It is important to observe that there are two types of sins that will be judged: sins of commission (personal sins) and sins of omission (social sins). Malachi, like the prophets before him, shows God’s concern for the social morality of His people as well as His concern for their worship of Him. These two are actually inseparable (for example, consider Jer 22:16 and Mt 22:37-39).
- c. At least three of these sins have already been identified by God as sins of His people:
 - 1) Adulterers (see Mal 2:14-16).
 - 2) Those who swear falsely (see Mal 1:14).
 - 3) Lack of a fear of God (see Mal 1:6).

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7. Verse 6.

- a. This verse serves as a conclusion to this section.
- b. **What is the conclusion?**
 - 1) The conclusion comes in the form of a reason. Specifically, it is the reason the people of God will not be destroyed completely. Indeed, they were doing at least some of the sins that were listed in the previous verse, yet God says that they will not be completely destroyed because of the fact that He never changes. Yes, there will be judgment (vs. 5), but first there will be discipline (vs. 2-4).
 - 2) God IS a God of covenant. As we learned earlier (Mal 1:1-5), God's justice is defined in terms of His faithfulness and loyalty to His promises. God does not change. He is faithful to His covenant. Thus, Israel is refined and purified instead of being consumed. This is the conclusion.
 - 3) The irony of this section is concluded in this verse also. Here we see a good definition of the pure justice of God (I DO NOT CHANGE). This is the ultimate in justice or "fairness." Indeed, it is the only thing that saves the people of Israel. Yet, it is these very people who are questioning and mocking the God of justice (Mal 2:17).

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B. An Outline of the Structure of Section #1 (using the outline, challenge the students to identify relationships between parts).

1. Preparation (Mal 2:17).
2. The ironic response of God (Mal 3:1-5).
 - a. God's general answer (vs. 1).
 - b. The ironic contrast (vs. 2-4).
 - 1) Statement of the contrast (vs. 2a).
 - 2) Explanation of the contrast (vs. 2b).
 - a) Continued explanation (vs. 3a).
 - b) Purpose of God's actions (vs. 3b).
 - c) Results of God's actions (vs. 4).
 - d) Climax of the contrast (vs. 5).
3. Conclusion (3:6).

C. Conclusion to Section #1.

1. Final points and thoughts.
 - a. If it were not for the grace and mercy of God all people would be judged and "consumed".
 - b. We sometimes question God's justice even though without it we would have no chance of salvation.
 - c. Sometimes the thing that we think we want (our human perspective of justice) is the thing that would lead to our own destruction. If God were to truly exercise judgment without His grace and faithfulness to His covenant, then all of us would perish. No one would be saved.
 - d. God is faithful even when we are faithless.

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- e. The passage begins with the question “**WHERE IS THE GOD OF JUSTICE?**” It ends with a definition of the justice of God (“**I, THE LORD, DO NOT CHANGE**”). God’s justice is based on His faithfulness to His covenant and promises.

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Discussion Point

Discuss ways in which we can apply this definition of justice to our own lives.

2. Summary sentence. The very aspect of God that the people of God questioned is the very aspect of God that keeps them from being destroyed.
3. Title. Justice is coming.

III. Section #2: The Proper Response to His Coming: To Repent (3:7-4:3).

A. Study of the Structure of Section #2.

1. Verse 7.
 - a. Here again we see the structure which includes statement, question, response. A new section begins as God makes a new statement about the unfaithfulness of Israel.
 - b. **How does the beginning of this section relate to the previous section?**
 - 1) The idea of faithfulness is the central part of the answer to this question.
 - 2) In Mal 3:6 we see that the conclusion to the previous section is that God is faithful. He does not change. The contrast between God and Israel is obvious as Malachi makes the transition to this new section. God has consistently proven His faithfulness. Israel has consistently proven her lack of faithfulness.

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c. The key word in the verse is “**RETURN.**” It is repeated three times.

1) **What does the word mean?**

- a) It means to change direction. The idea is that the Israelites were going away from God. God challenges them to “**RETURN**” or to change their direction. He wants them to turn and come back to Him.
- b) If (the condition is implied) they turn back to Him then He will turn back to them.

2) **How will God return to them?**

- a) We have a clue as to at least one way that He will return to them when we observe the continuity between the structure of this verse and vs. 10.
- b) Verse 7 promises that if they return to God then He will return to them. Verse 10 applies that promise to the financial area of life. It has the same structure. It says that if they give to God then He will give back to them.

2. Verse 8.

- a. There are many ways to return to God. As an example, God chooses what is perhaps the most indicative way. He challenges Israel to change in the financial area of their lives and to begin to give to the work of God again.

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Author's Illustration:

Someone once said that a man will follow his wallet (the storage place for his money). A change in the direction of the wallet is a good indicator of a true change in most other areas of life. Thus, God chooses to focus on this particular area of sin.

Insert Your Illustration:

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- b. The tithe was used to support the temple workers (see Lev 27:30; Num 18:21). It was also used to help the widows, orphans, and aliens (see Deut 14:28, 29). When the tithe was not given these groups of people were negatively affected (consider the implications of this with respect to 3:5c).
- 3. Verse 9.
 - a. Here we see the result of robbing God (it is important to note that “**Me**” is emphatic and that even though the tithe goes to the needy and the workers of the temple, it is actually God Himself who is being robbed). The result is that they are cursed with a curse (review 2:2, 3).

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b. What does God curse?

- 1) As we review Mal 2:2, 3 we remember that God curses their blessings. In vs. 10 God refers to His blessings. When we study the historical context of the book of Malachi, we realize that he wrote at a time when Israel was struggling with famine, drought, and crop failure. God curses the Israelites according to their sin. If they do not want to give God their crops and fruits (their blessings), then God will curse the production of those things. Malachi explains this more clearly in vs. 11.
- 2) This is a Biblical principle (see Prov 11:24) and explains why many people have financial problems. When we rob God we actually rob ourselves because we set into motion the tragic results of this Biblical principle.

4. Verse 10.

- a. Here we see a further indication of the fact that God was cursing their crops. In other passages of Scripture the phrase **“WINDOWS OF HEAVEN”** refers to abundant provision of food (see 2 Kings 7:2, 19; Ps 78:23, 24).
- b. The key idea of this verse is found in the challenge that God gives to His people. He actually challenges them to **“TEST”** Him.
- c. **Why does God challenge His people to test Him?**
 - 1) The root cause of hypocrisy is doubt. Doubt leads to ritual because doubt negates faith which is needed to produce results. Without results there is more doubt and more ritual (hypocrisy). It is an endless cycle. The people of God were caught in this cycle. Their hypocrisy insured that they would not see results. When they did not see results they fell into more hypocrisy which only led to less results. Israel needed to be revived. They needed to break the cycle that their hypocrisy had produced. Ahead in vs. 14 we see that this is the issue: **“IT IS VAIN TO SERVE GOD.”** In 1:6-14 we see that unbelief led to hypocrisy and that the priests were bored because of the lack of results (vs. 13).

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- 2) Thus, in an attempt to break the cycle that His people are caught in, God challenges them to test His reality. He challenges them to test the effectiveness of obedience. He challenges them to test His integrity.

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5. Verse 11.

- a. This verse serves as a continuation of vs. 10b. God will bless them instead of cursing their blessings.
- b. The word “**DEVOURER**” refers to locusts (see Joel 1; Deut 28:39, 40). God will rebuke them. That is, He will command the locusts (by His sovereignty) to stop destroying the land of Israel.
- c. It is not wise to “**ROB**” someone who has this type of sovereignty!

6. Verse 12.

- a. Here we see a very interesting result of all of this.
- b. **What is the result of God proving Himself to Israel?**
 - 1) It is relevant to Israel’s witness to the “**NATIONS**.” At this point we should remind ourselves of the missiological implications of the repeated use of the title “**LORD OF HOSTS**” (note that it has been repeated most recently in 3:1, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12). We should recognize that once again (review Mal 1:2, 5, 11, 14) the title “**LORD OF HOSTS**” is set in the context of Israel’s witness to the “**NATIONS**” and her blessings.

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- 2) Again, we are reminded of the flow of the Abrahamic covenant. Somehow the blessings of Israel had to result in blessing the nations. In the Old Testament this especially happened through the reputation of Israel. As Israel was obedient, God was able to bless her. This resulted in a testimony to the nations of the reality of God. In this way the nations were blessed.
- a) God's purposes for proving Himself are consistent with His purposes for choosing Israel (review Deut 7:8). He wants to show her His love. He also wants to keep His covenant that He made with Abraham and fulfill its missiological purposes.
 - b) Ultimately, the blessings showered upon Israel would reveal the one true God to the nations. This was a necessary part of God's redemptive plan that was not happening because of the unfaithfulness and hypocrisy of Israel.
 - c) Thus, God challenges them to "**TEST**" Him. He wants to break the cycle of death that Israel is caught in and begin the cycle of redemption that is built into the Abrahamic covenant.

7. Verse 13.

- a. The proper response to the coming of the Lord is to repent. However, the people of Israel have not repented. Their words are "**ARROGANT**" against the Lord. This verse serves to introduce a description of those who are in direct opposition to the promises of God in the previous verses. Indeed, vs. 13-15 present a contrast to the previous verses.
- b. Again we notice that it is "**YOUR WORDS**" that are the problem (review 2:17). The term "**SPOKEN**" is from a Hebrew word that actually means "spoken one to another." Thus, vs. 13 expands on the problem that was introduced in 2:17. The people are speaking and complaining one to another against the Lord. We might say that they are "gossiping" against God.

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8. Verse 14.

- a. Here the contrast or contradiction builds. God said that He would bless those who turned to Him (vs. 10-12). The words of the people of Israel contradict this promise. They say it is “**VAIN**” to serve God. They actually call God a liar.
- b. **Why does this contradiction exist?**
 - 1) First let us consider a verse in the New Testament. Read Jms 4:3. The principle is that the attitude with which a person asks for something is very important. The attitude of the people of Israel is wrong. They seem to be saying that unless they get something for themselves God is not worth their time. Thus, God promises benefits but they still do not receive because they ask with a wrong attitude.
 - 2) Second, we should remember the context of the book of Malachi. The people of Israel have fallen into empty religiosity. They practice the form without the contents. They practice ritual without obedience. As we saw earlier, there are no results that come from such a practice. Ironically, their words (“**IT IS VAIN**”) are true in their own context. The type of service and worship that they are offering to God IS done in vain (review Mk 7:6, 7). Indeed, we see in 2:13 that the people were “mourning.” However, there were no results. Why? Has God contradicted Himself? No! Mourning is simply a mold. If it is not filled with the proper contents (sincerity, repentance, etc.), then it is useless (review 1:10). God does not contradict Himself. They contradict God by thinking that hypocrisy will yield results.

Discussion Point

Consider Mt 23:23, 24. How can you apply these principles to your life?

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9. Verse 15.

- a. This verse serves as a conclusion of the contrast between vs. 13-15 and vs. 10-12.
- b. **What are the specific contrasts?**
 - 1) In vs. 10-12 God offers blessings to those “**WHO TURN TO HIM**” (the humble). Yet in vs. 15 the murmuring Israelites claim that it is the “**ARROGANT**” who get blessed.
 - 2) In vs. 10, 11 God promises to prosper those who turn to Him. Yet in vs. 15 the murmurers say that the evildoers prosper (review 2:17).
 - 3) In vs. 10 it is **GOD** who says to those who repent, “**TEST ME.**” Yet in vs. 15 it is **THE WICKED** who test God and escape.
- c. This contrast or contradiction is very serious. Ultimate futility is found in reversing what God says (which is what the murmurers are doing). In contradicting God, the people of God actually contradict themselves. They contradict what they already know. They call people blessed who they know are cursed (see Ps 119:21).

10. Verse 16.

- a. This verse begins another contrast. One group of people (those in vs. 13-15) are now contrasted with another group of people (those in vs. 16-18). This second group of people are those who are consistent with vs. 10-12.
 - 1) We should observe how this contrast is made obvious.
 - 2) In vs. 13 the people spoke to one another “**AGAINST**” God and God does not acknowledge them (see 2:13). In vs. 16 the people spoke to one another **IN FEAR OF GOD** and the Lord heard them.

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- b. Study the following diagram to see the contrast between the two groups of people.

Notes —

The people described in vv. 13-15	The people described in vv. 16-18
The speak with one another against God (1:13)	They speak with one another in the fear of God (3:16)
They did not fear God (1:6)	They feared God (3:16; 1:14)
They wearied God with their words (2:17; 3:13)	God gave attention to their words and heard them (3:16).
They despised, profaned, and did not give glory to God's name (1:6,12; 2:2)	They esteem His name (3:16)
They saw no value or profit in serving God (3:14)	They will be spared. They will be Mine, says God (3:17)
They are cut off (2:12)	They are remembered (3:16,17)
They must give attention to themselves (2:15,16)	God gives attention to them (3:16)

- c. It would seem (in the context of the previous chapters) that those who fear the Lord are those who have not fallen into the sin of doubt and cynicism.

- d. **How did they keep from falling?**

- 1) The text does not say much to help us answer this question. However, it does say that those who feared the Lord **“SPOKE TO ONE ANOTHER.”** This is very important. It shows the importance of fellowship between believers. Fellowship strengthened their faith and kept them from falling into doubt.
- 2) In the midst of this fellowship we see that God heard them. This reminds us of Mt 18:19, 20. Yes, fellowship is effective. It produces results (something that the people were desperate for).

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11. Verse 17.

- a. The word “**AND**” points to the nature of this verse. It is a continuation of the benefits that this group of people will receive. God promised that He would not destroy (3:6, 11). Here He emphasizes that promise. He says that they will be “**SPARED.**”
- b. **How will they be spared?**
 - 1) Observe the repetition of “**THE DAY**” (3:2, 17). They will be spared in the same sense as God will purify (discipline) in 3:2-4 instead of judge (3:5). This is consistent with the analogy of a father (who disciplines) sparing his son.
 - 2) The two groups are seen in that some will be purified and refined through discipline and some will be judged. Some will be consumed and some will be spared.

12. Verse 18.

- a. The result (observe the use of the term “**SO**”) is that there will be a distinction between good and evil and between sincere believers and hypocrites. The result is that the God of justice (2:17) will make a clear division between the righteous and the unrighteous.
- b. **Why is the distinguishing mentioned in the context of the “positive” group of people?**
 - 1) I believe God wants to make a point about the coming of the Messiah.
 - 2) His coming will focus on saving (positive) not on judging (negative). Read Jn 3:17.
 - a) The murmurers complained within a negative perspective of justice. Their focus was on the destruction and judgment of the wicked. They only looked at the negative side of justice and therefore were preparing themselves to miss the whole point of the coming of the Messiah (as most Jews did and continue to do today).

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- b) Yet, the coming of the Messiah had its focus on the “positive” aspect of God’s justice. The one who responds in humility and fear would be spared or saved.
- (1) This produces a correct perspective of the justice of God. It emphasizes the grace of God. Man is in need of God’s grace. He does not deserve anything. If he is “**SPARED**” (consider the implications of this word) it is only because of God’s grace.
 - (2) The perspective of the murmurers assumes that man is deserving and good. Thus, its focus is on the negative aspects of justice. Justice is simply that which punishes those who failed.
 - (3) The positive perspective of justice is that it is that which “**SPARES**” one who does not deserve anything.
- c. This perspective of justice is strengthened by the use of the term “**SERVE**” (note how the idea of service has become a focus in the previous verses: vs. 18, 17, 14). The Hebrew word might better be translated as “slave.” As is the case in Lk 17:7-10, the slave deserves nothing. Obedience does not earn him anything. Obedience is his obligation. He is a slave not an employee. His reward comes through the grace of his master. Justice is based on grace. Indeed, Malachi seems to be pointing to that truth here. Those who respond to God are “**SPARED**.” They do not earn a place in the book of remembrance. The focus of the God of justice is on His grace and not on His judgment.
13. Verse 4:1.
- a. The focus on the positive in no way excludes the reality of the negative. The Messiah will also come as the judge (in His second coming: see 2 Tim 4:1). And so the distinguishing between the good and the evil is also established (note the implications of the use of the word “**FOR**”) by the destruction of the wicked (the phrase, “**IT WILL LEAVE THEM NEITHER ROOT NOR BRANCH**” points to the fact that the wicked will be consumed in the sense that they will have nothing left: see Ezek 17:8, 9; Mt 3:12).

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- b. We are reminded here of 1 Cor 3:11-15. Anything that is not built on Jesus (fear of God, obedience, trust, relationship, etc.) is burned. Those who fear the Lord will be **“SPARED”** or **“SAVED,”** **“YET SO AS THROUGH FIRE”** (1 Cor 3:15). That is, they will be purified and refined instead of being consumed.

14. Verse 2.

- a. The word **“BUT”** introduces a contrast.
- b. **What is the contrast?**
 - 1) Again we see the contrast between the two groups of people.
 - 2) This time the contrast is made in terms of results. In vs. 1 we saw that the result for the wicked was complete destruction. Here in vs. 2 we see that the results for those who fear God are healing and freedom.
 - a) The wounds that have been produced by the sin nature will be healed. Their garments will be made white as snow (Is 1:18). They will leap for joy like calves do when they are freed from their confinement.
 - b) Again it is important to note the grace that is within justice. These people have not earned anything. They were sick (and healed) prisoners (and freed).

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15. Verse 3.

- a. The word “**AND**” reveals the nature of this verse. It is a continuation of the description of the results for those who fear God. They will “**TREAD DOWN THE WICKED.**”
- b. **In what sense will the righteous tread down the wicked?**
 - 1) The word “**FOR**” introduces the explanation of how the wicked will be treaded upon. They will be treaded upon not so much because of an aggressive attack by the righteous but because they will be “**ASHES.**” Fire produces ashes. Indeed, in vs. 1 we can observe that the wicked will be “**CHAFF**” as a result of the fire.
 - 2) Thus, the triumph of the righteous is seen in the fact that they still walk (are spared) while the wicked are ashes to be walked over (see Amos 9:12; Micah 4:13; 7:17; Josh 10:24). The “triumph” does not exist because they have conquered the wicked themselves.
- c. In vs. 18 we see the reference to the “**RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED.**” In 4:1 we see a description of the results of the wicked. In 4:2 we see a description of the results of the righteous. In 4:3 the results of the two groups are talked about in terms of how they will relate to each other.
- d. Two final observations should be made. The title “**THE LORD OF HOSTS**” is repeated many times in chapter three. The idea of “**THE DAY**” is repeated often (3:2, 17; 4:1, 3, 5).

Discussion Point

How do you understand the use of these phrases?

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B. An Outline of the Structure of Section #2 (using the outline, challenge the students to identify relationships between parts).

1. The challenge to repent (3:7-12).
 - a. The general challenge (vs. 7).
 - b. The specific challenge (vs. 8-11).
 - 1) What they must turn from (vs. 8).
 - a) The consequences of what they have not turned from (vs. 9).
 - 2) What they must turn to (vs. 10a).
 - a) The test within the repentance (vs. 10b).
 - b) The promises of repentance (vs. 10c,11).
 - c) The conclusion or result (vs. 12).
2. An example of those who do not repent (3:13-15).
 - a. Introduction (vs. 13).
 - b. The establishment of the contrast between these people and God's promises (vs. 14).
 - c. The specification of the contrast or contradiction (vs. 15).
3. An example of those who do repent (3:16-18).
 - a. Introduction to how they are in contrast to the other group (vs. 16).
 - b. A continuation of the benefits of those who repent (vs. 17).
 - c. The result of the manifestation of these benefits (vs. 18).

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4. The results that are associated with the two groups (4:1-3).

- a. The results associated with the wicked (vs. 1).
- b. The results associated with the righteous (vs. 2).
- c. How the results of both groups will relate to each other (vs. 3).

Notes —

C. Conclusion to Section #2.

1. Final points and thoughts.

- a. What a man does with his wallet (money) is a leading indicator of what he will do with other areas of his life. Where we put our money can reveal where we have put our heart (consider Mt 6:21).
- b. Give and it will be given to you (consider Lk 6:38; 2 Cor 9:6). So that you can give even more.
- c. When we do not give to others we can actually rob God Himself (consider Mt 25:34-46).
- d. God challenges His people to test His reality, integrity and effectiveness.
- e. The unrighteous may claim that their way is better. They may even be able to show temporary “proof” of the benefits of their way. However, in the end it will be seen that their way is the way of destruction.
- f. All men must rely on the grace of God. We are “spared.” We do not earn our way into heaven. We are spared through our response to God. We must turn to Him in fear (obedience, trust, relationship).

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- g. The righteous and the wicked can be distinguished. Good and evil are not simply relative concepts.
- h. Malachi points to the coming of the Messiah. In this Messiah we find a moral standard or absolute. The righteous are distinguished from the wicked in that they are filled with this Messiah. They are filled with this moral absolute (see Gal 2:20).

Author's Illustration:

Many people today work service jobs (policemen, social workers, nurses, etc.). Are they automatically righteous? No! Righteousness is not distinguished by the form but by the filling. They may serve. But are they filled with the Servant?

In the United States there is a church on every street corner. Are all those who go to church automatically righteous? No! Righteousness is not distinguished by the form but by the filling. They may be obedient to religious forms of godliness. But are they filled with the One who was perfectly obedient to God?

The American dollar bill says, **in God we trust**. Are all those who have dollar bills righteous? No! Righteousness is not distinguished by the form but by the filling. They may trust and fear God in a ceremonial way. But are they filled with the God whom they claim to trust?

Insert Your Illustration:

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- i. We might point to four ways in which God distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked. They are distinguished by their attributes, actions, attitudes, and results. Use the following diagram to show this in a general way.

Notes —

Distinguish	The Wicked (3:13-15)	The Righteous (3:16,17)
Attributes	They do not serve God (v.14)	They serve God(v.17)
Actions	They are disobedient (v.14)	They are Obedient (v.16)
Attitudes	They do not fear God (v.13)	They fear God (v.16)
Results	Futility/Emptiness (v.15)	Meaning/Fullness (v.17)

- 1) An attribute is that which characterizes someone and belongs to his personality. It is more than what someone does. It is what someone is. It is more than doing acts of service. It is being a servant.
 - a) The murmuring Israelites claimed that **“IT IS VAIN TO SERVE GOD”** (3:14). They placed conditions on their service. They did acts of service but they were not servants.
 - b) Servants say, **“WE HAVE DONE ONLY THAT WHICH WE OUGHT TO HAVE DONE”** (Lk 17:10). Because it is something they are and not simply something they do, they do not expect or demand a reward.
 - (1) Only servants can do actual service, because only servants have the inner motivation to serve. All other service is empty. It is only a mold.
 - (2) God looks at the offerer before He looks at the offering (review the progression of 1:6-8), and in so doing, He distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked.

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- 2) Although attributes include something more than actions, they do not negate actions. Attributes lead to actions.
- a) The murmurers claim that there is no profit in being obedient to God. But were they obedient in the first place? These are the same ones who despise God's name (1:6) by being blatantly disobedient in their offerings. These same ones profane God's name (1:12) and do not give honor to His name (2:2).
 - b) These murmurers are contrasted to those who fear God and who esteem or think on His name. What is the difference? Those who murmured were not pagans or secular humanists. They followed the law. The difference is that obedience comes from the heart.

Author's Illustration:

It is not just the mold. It is the Jell-O that fills the mold. It is not just the empanada. It is the cheese that fills the empanada. The murmuring Israelites were trying to give God a pie with no filling. They tried to give Him a form with no substance.

Insert Your Illustration:

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- c) Their “obedience” was empty. They did not take God’s commandment to heart (2:2), whereas those who feared God thought on His name. And so they are distinguished by their actions.
- 3) Attitudes can also distinguish between the wicked and the righteous. The righteous fear God. This signifies that they seek God, have a relationship with Him, and walk with Him. It also means that they hate evil (see Prov 8:13) and therefore turn away from it in humble repentance to God.
 - a) The murmuring Israelites claim that there is no profit in **“WALKING in MOURNING”** before the Lord.
 - b) But what type of walking and mourning did they do?
 - (1) As we saw in 2:13, a walk with God is negated in the midst of disobedience. Mourning before the Lord is a mere pretense.
 - (2) Again we see an empty form (a lack of fear) that can be distinguished from a filled form (an attitude of fear).

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- 4) The righteous and the wicked are also distinguished by the results of the lives they lead.
 - a) The result of the lives of the wicked is seen in 3:15. Their concluding statement is illogical. To say the arrogant are blessed is futile. They go beyond this futility, however, and say that the wicked are victorious over God. Here we have the ultimate in futile words. The level of futility is similar to the level that is reached in the words of Rom 1:32: **“They not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”** Ultimate futility is found in reversing what God says. This is exactly what the murmurers do in 3:15. The result of their lives is futility and emptiness.
 - b) This result can be distinguished from the result found in vs. 17; that is, meaning and fullness. This is the opposite of futility and emptiness.
 - (1) There is meaning and purpose in the lives of the righteous. God gives attention to them and hears their words. He remembers them and spares them.
 - (2) The words of the wicked only weary God. They are cut off (2:2).
 - (3) The wicked are empty. The righteous are full. They are placed in the book of remembrance and are prepared to be God’s own possession. God says of them, **“THEY WILL BE MINE.”**
 - (a) Fullness comes from being God’s own possession.
 - (b) This reminds us of Jesus words to His disciples in Lk 10:20. The fullness of the righteous is salvation. It is to spend eternal life with God. This distinguishes the righteous from the wicked.

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2) Summary sentence. God challenges His people to repent, but there will always be those who repent and those who do not repent, and the results associated with each group will distinguish them from each other.

3) Title. To repent or not to repent: that is the question.

Notes —

IV. Section #3: The Official Announcement (4:4-6).

A. Study of the Structure of Section #3.

1. Verse 4.

- a. The whole message of Malachi has led to the statement in 4:2, 3 that the righteous will triumph. Having arrived at that point, Malachi gives a final exhortation and instruction to those who are waiting for that reality. He does this by making an official announcement of the Lord's coming.
- b. The emphasis in vs. 4 is on obedience. God encourages His people to remember the "**LAW, STATUTES, and ORDINANCES.**" The emphasis in 3:16-4:3 was on the fear of God.
- c. This combination should remind us of the conclusion to the book of Ecclesiastes: "**FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS**" (Eccl 12:13).

2. Verse 5.

- a. Verses 5 and 6 remind us of 3:1, 2. The word "**BEHOLD**" is repeated. The phrase "**I AM SENDING**" is repeated. There is continuity between the ideas of preparing and restoring. There are references to "**THE DAY.**"

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Notes —

b. What conclusions could we make from this connection?

- 1) In 3:1 we read the words “**BEHOLD, I AM GOING TO SEND.**” In 4:5 we read “**BEHOLD I AM GOING TO SEND.**” In 3:1 it is “**My messenger**” who will be sent. In 4:5 it is “**ELIJAH**” who will be sent. We could conclude that My messenger means Elijah. We could also conclude that the job preparing the way before the Lord meant the job of restoring the hearts of God’s people.
- 2) We can defend these conclusions and expand on their meaning with references from the New Testament (for example, consider Mt 11:14; 17:10-12; Lk 1:17; Mk 1:1-4).

c. In this verse, Elijah (the prophet) is the biographical focus. In vs. 4 Moses (the lawgiver) was the biographical focus. Within the official announcement of the coming of the Messiah we see that God makes reference to the Law and the Prophets.

- 1) We know that the promised Messiah will stand with Moses and Elijah in the transfiguration (see Mt 17:3, 4).
- 2) The law and the prophets are commonly linked to Jesus in the New Testament (for example, consider Lk 24:44; Jn 1:45; 5:39).
- 3) Thus, we have a very appropriate connection between the Old and the New Testaments here at the close of the Old Testament writings.

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3. Verse 6.

- a. The word “**AND**” introduces a continuation of the explanation concerning the sending of Elijah. His work will be to turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.
- b. **What does this phrase mean?**
 - 1) Again we need to allow the New Testament to interpret the Old Testament. Read Lk 1:16, 17.
 - 2) The one who prepares the way of the Lord (review 3:1) will turn the people of God back to the Lord. Obedience, wisdom and justice are also associated with this phrase.

Discussion Point

Discuss what fathers and children have to do with turning back to God.

- c. The word “**LEST**” points to the possibility of an alternative.
- d. **What is the alternative?**
 - 1) The alternative to sending Elijah is to “**SMITE THE LAND WITH A CURSE.**” The Hebrew word for “curse” indicates a complete destruction of the thing that is cursed. However, God is faithful to His covenant even when His people are not faithful (see 2 Tim 2:13).
 - 2) It is like God is saying, “**I am sending Elijah because if I did not send him then I would have to do something that I am not able to do. I would have to deny the covenant that I have made with you.**”

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Notes —

B. An Outline of the Structure of Section #3 (using the outline, challenge the students to identify relationships between parts).

1. What the people should do: be obedient (4:4).
2. What God will do send Elijah (4:5, 6).
 - a. When? Before “the day” (vs. 5b).
 - b. What? He will restore (vs. 6a).
 - c. Why? So God can remain faithful to His covenant (vs. 6b).

C. Conclusion to Section #3.

1. Final points and thoughts.
 - a. Obedience and the fear of God are the keys to success.
 - b. God is sovereign. His purpose will not be thwarted (Job 42:2). His people will turn from Him, but He will act to turn them back to Himself.
 - c. God’s grace and mercy is beyond description and measurement. He is even willing to send back Elijah to deliver one more call to repentance.
2. Summary sentence.
 - a. Within the official announcement of the coming of the Messiah, God gives instructions concerning what His people must do and also declares what He will do.
3. Title.
 - a. Official announcement.

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V. Conclusions to the Book of Malachi.

Notes —

A. Reflect on Some of the Repeated Terms, Phrases and Concepts.

1. Terms and phrases.
 - a. My name.
 - b. Nations.
 - c. The Lord of hosts.
 - d. Despised.
 - e. Feared.
 - f. Covenant.
 - g. Turn.
 - h. Sending.
 - i. Coming.

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2. Concepts.

- a. The value of God.
- b. Profit, benefit, and blessing.
- c. Faithfulness and a lack of it.
- d. The missions heart of God for the nations.
- e. Hypocrisy and empty ritual.
- f. God's desire to keep His covenant.
- g. The coming of the Lord and the day of the Lord.
- h. The distinguishing between good and evil.
- i. The idea of being "chosen."

Discussion Point

Use the previous terms and concepts to review the message of Malachi.

B. Final Points and Review.

1. Malachi is the last book before the New Testament. Reforms were desperately needed to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. The message of Malachi needed to be proclaimed before the actual historical events of the life of John the Baptist could take place. We might say that Mal 4:5 had to be written before Mk 1:2 could be written. Malachi serves as a **bridge** between the Old and the New Testaments.
2. The principles of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3) are applied throughout the book of Malachi. Israel was a missionary nation that was not fulfilling God's plan. One of Malachi's central themes is to rebuke Israel for her lack of missionary zeal and effectiveness, and to show God's missionary heart for the nations.

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3. Malachi points to the vicious cycle of death that is created by unbelief and hypocrisy. Hypocrisy leads to doubt because it does not produce results. Doubt leads to more hypocrisy because it is satisfied with forms. More hypocrisy leads to more doubt which leads to more hypocrisy.

a) The hypocrisy of the people of Israel is the most consistent theme in Malachi. The people of Israel had the “human disease” that is described in 1 Sam 16:7. They were satisfied with the appearance of things.

b) The following list shows the contrasts that can be developed by this “disease.”

- 1) A form of godliness instead of godliness.
- 2) Religion instead of relationship.
- 3) Counterfeit instead of authentic.
- 4) Empty instead of filled.
- 5) Useless instead of effective.
- 6) Ritual instead of obedience.
- 7) False and superficial instead of real and profound.
- 8) Institutional instead of renewal/revival.
- 9) Death instead of life.

Discussion Point

As a conclusion to the class, promote a discussion of the reality of these contrasts in the life of the church and in the lives of the individuals in the class. Use it as a time to promote repentance. Challenge students to apply the message of the book of Malachi to their own lives by especially focusing on ways in which their worship of God can be more authentic and less hypocritical.

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