

Week 10 – Malachi

Connect: choose 1 *Connect* question and discuss for 5-7 minutes.

- How long have you had to wait for something promised to you? What was that like?
- Describe a time when you found someone was different than how you first perceived them.

Read these passages aloud:

Malachi 3:1-6 – The Coming Messenger of the LORD

Malachi 4:1-5 – The Great Day of the LORD

Engage the text as a group:

1. What do you **observe** in the text?
 - How is the messenger of the Lord described?
 - What was it that the people were longing for?
 - What will the LORD be judging when the LORD comes?
 - What will the day of restoration be like?
2. What **questions** arise for you from the text?
 - What were the things prompting Judah's listless faith?
 - What were the people looking for from God that they didn't feel they were getting?

Why does Malachi matter?

Malachi matters because he was a prophet calling Judah to remember again who God is. The people's expectation that God would make them who they once were—a significant and prominent nation in the midst of their neighbors, and that the LORD's presence would dwell in their midst in the temple—were not fulfilled. When the people's expectations were not fulfilled as they waited for God to show up in the ways they expected, they began to grow doubtful, distrust God's faithfulness and God's covenant love.

Malachi comes as a prophet to remind the people of Judah who God is and who they are as God's people, and to tell them that God would indeed come, but not on their terms or in the ways they demand or expect.

How do we tend to do that? In what ways do we expect God to conform to our expectations and show up in the ways we demand or want or think we need? Malachi's words are also for us today to remind us of the deep and immense covenant love of God, God's faithfulness, and the promise of God's restoration in Christ; and that God has made the church God's own, so God is faithful to God's people.

HOW DOES MALACHI POINT US TO JESUS?

Malachi points us to Jesus in his very words—he tells the people of Judah of a coming Great King. We get to turn the page in our Bibles after the book of Malachi ends and read about the coming of this great king, of Jesus in the book of Matthew. But for the people of Judah back

in the day, they had 400 years, *four centuries* they had to wait—before this word was fulfilled. That means people and generations lived and died and passed on this word of promise and hope that God would come to them to the next and the next generation, all the while waiting for God to meet them in this great King. Imagine the waiting, and not knowing when it's going to end. But the coming king is fulfilled in Jesus, and his words about the messenger of the Lord are fulfilled in John the Baptist. Turn the page. Read Matthew; hear of the great king.

3. What **applications** might this text have to your life today?

- Have you doubted God's goodness or covenant love? What circumstances have prompted it? What do Malachi's words have to say to you about God today?
- How can you draw near to God again, and remind yourself of who God is in spite of your circumstances or in the midst of your waiting?

6 tools for interpretation: read through the 6 Tools (if time allows) or take-home and read.

Literary: genre = prophetic book; prophecies to Judah (southern kingdom) following their return and establishment back in the land (c. 5th century B.C.) after their exile in Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem (586B.C.)¹

Historical: Malachi the prophet speaking a hundred years after Ezra and Nehemiah returned to Judah with the exiled people and rebuilt the temple and Jerusalem's walls.² Judah's expectation = God would restore Judah to former glory for neighbors to see; God would be in the temple. Faith in God started to dwindle when expectations were unmet. Belief in God's unfaithfulness began to infect their lives and religious practices. Malachi calls the people back to faithfulness in God, out their sinful practices.³ Proclaims a messenger of the LORD would come to prepare a way for the LORD⁴; messenger = John the Baptist.⁵ After Malachi follows 400 years of silence from God (no other prophet) until Jesus.⁶

Theological: theme = "the great King will come not only to judge his people, but also to bless and restore them."⁷ Malachi is announcing God's judgment that is coming, but also on the horizon, God's blessing and restoration of the people.

¹ "Malachi," *International Bible Society*.

² Michael Williams, *How to rEad the Bible through the Jesus Lens*, 2012 Zondervan, p. 157-160.

³ Malachi 3:5

⁴ Malachi 4:5

⁵ Matthew 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-9; Luke 1:67-80; John 1:19-28; "Malachi," *International Bible Society*, <https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-malachi/>.

⁶ "What Happened Between the Old and New Testaments? 4 Things You Need to Know to Read the New Testament Well." Zondervan Academic, <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/what-happened-between-testaments/>

⁷ "Malachi," *International Bible Society*.

Cultural: prophet Malachi = a contemporary of prophet Nehemiah (similarities in their messages against Judah's sin).⁸ Jerusalem has been rebuilt, the religious practices restored, but the people's hearts are not yet turned to God. Malachi brings a word to point the people back to God.

The bigger story: Malachi = final book of the Old Testament before the gospels telling of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Malachi's prophecy of a great king who will restore Israel to God is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. But this great King will look differently than the people expect—the king will not be bound only to Israel and will not reign over only an earthly kingdom, but will rule over every tongue, tribe and nation, and over a cosmic kingdom.

Holy Spirit: the Spirit's work in Malachi's prophetic ministry was to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah. Similarly for us today, we read Malachi anticipating the words of the gospels that reveal to us this great king long awaited for by Israel and received by us, the church—Jesus Christ.

Closing of Bible Study:

- What is something different or new that you learned or experienced about God through this study?
- What is something you learned or experienced about the Old Testament through this 10-week study?

Please note the responses, and send a quick summary to pastorjoella@calvin.edu. This feedback is helpful for our evaluation process.

Close in prayer:

Great king Jesus, thank you for your presence with and among your people 2000 years ago; thank you for your presence with us today through your Holy Spirit. Thank you, Father God, for speaking to your people through your servant Malachi. Your covenant love for us that persists is deep and wide and never-ending, and we are humbled and give you thanks. Thank you for making us your people. Send us out as the people of God to bear witness to our great King who is making all things new. Give us the courage and humility and community we need to do this. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

⁸ "Malachi," *International Bible Society*.