

At which point in Israel's history was the book of Malachi written?

What does God assert about Himself to Israel? What evidence does He point to in order to back up His claim?

What was Israel's response? Why did they respond in such a way? What does their response tell us about their attitude towards God?

Why did God choose Israel over Esau? (See also Gen 25:21-26, Rom 9:10-13.) What does this teach us about God?

Was God being unfair to Esau/Edom? (See also Gen 25:29-34, Num 20:14-21, Obad 10-12.) Give reasons for your answer.

What do we learn about God in this passage? (It may be helpful to refer also to Genesis 12:3 & 27:29).

Malachi reminds Israel of their status as God's covenant people as proof of His love for them.

Does God have a covenant people today? If so, who are those in this covenant relationship with God?

What does today's passage teach us about how we ought to respond to God?

Do we ever question God's love, and if so, are we justified in doing so?

study 2 - malachi 1:6-14

What accusation does the Lord bring against the priests (vv6-8)? Why was their action wrong? (See also Lev 22:17-25, Deut 15:21).

What was the reason underlying their offering of unacceptable sacrifices to God (vv6-7, 12-13)? How did they view their priestly ministry? What should have been their proper response as priests of Israel? What does this tell us about their attitude towards God?

While offering blemished sacrifices, they also entreated the favour of God. Why were their prayers not acceptable to God?

God gives us them a true picture of who He is (vv11, 14). What does God tell them about Himself?

To what does the term "the nations" refer? What will happen in the future in the nations? How does this contrast with the attitude of Israel's priests towards God?

What should be a proper response to God, the great King (vv6, 14, also 2:2,5)? What does it mean to fear God?

In verse 14, God turns to the individual Israelite who vows a proper sacrifice, yet offers a blemished one. What is the plight of such a person? Why? How do you reconcile this with Old Testament teaching that animal sacrifices in themselves do not actually make someone acceptable to God e.g. Psalm 51:16, Micah 6:6-7?

What sacrifices are Christians commanded to offer to God? In what way do we withhold our best from God?

The priests of Malachi's day tried to water down the requirements of God's law to make it easier for people to bring sacrifices. There are church leaders today who, in the name of inclusiveness and tolerance, modify the teachings of God's word in an attempt to make it more palatable to modern people. What does this tell us about their underlying attitudes to God? Can man ever be accepted by God when he comes on his own terms?

study 3 - malachi 2:1-9

Where in the Old Testament does God make a covenant with Levi? (You may wish to refer to Ex 28:1, 29:44, Num 18:7, 25:10-13). Was this privilege of priesthood given because of the tribe of Levi's merit?

In the covenant relationship that God initiated with the Levitical priesthood, what did God promise to give them? What was the response expected of them according to this covenant?

What were the duties of the priesthood with respect to Israel? How were they to fulfill these?

In what way did they break the terms of the covenant?

What would God do to the priests as a result? What were the blessings that God would curse in verse 2? What is the ultimate result of God's curse on the priests and their offspring?

The priests of Israel were central to the life of Israel as God's covenant people, and a curse on the priests would be a great disaster as Israel's acceptance by God depended on the mediatorial ministry of the priests. However, despite the curse on the priests, God promises that His covenant with Levi would stand (verse 4, see also Jer 33:17-22). How would this be possible? (See 3:3-4). Who does "sons of Levi" refer to? (You may wish to refer to 1 Pet 2:5,9, Rev 5:10, 20:6).

Given what we have discussed above, what have we learnt about God's gifts to us? What should our response be and how are we to live?

What does today's passage teach us about how we ought to respond to God? Do we ever question God's love, and if so, are we justified in doing so?

study 4 - malachi 2:10-16

What accusation does God bring against Israel? What two specific sins does Malachi address?

In what way are these sins an expression of faithlessness towards one another (v10) as well as to God?

Why was it wrong for an Israelite to marry a foreign woman? (See also Ex 34:15-16, Deut 7:3, Josh 23:12). What consequences did intermarriage have on the religious life of Israel in Israel's history? What would be the fate of the person who married the daughter of a foreign god, even if he outwardly obeyed the Law in bringing offerings to God?

Discuss whether the teaching against intermarriage has any relevance for Christians today.

What was the second sin which resulted in God not accepting the offerings of the Israelites? Why was it wrong?

What do we learn about marriage in this passage? Who are the parties to the marriage covenant?

What is one thing that God seeks in a faithful marriage?

Western society has rejected the concept of one marriage for life and embraced instead "serial monogamy" as the norm. If one no longer has feelings of "love" for one's spouse, it is acceptable to divorce him or her. How does this passage in Malachi respond to this view of marriage?

So far we have seen the failure of both the priests and the people in postexilic Israel to keep the covenant.

What are the implications to Israel of its failure to keep the Mosaic covenant? (Reference reading Lev 26, Deut chapters 28-30).

study 5 - malachi 2:17- 3:5

What accusation did Israel bring against God? What does this show about their underlying attitude towards God?

Who is the messenger God would send in 3:1a? What would he do? Is he the same messenger as the one mentioned in 3:1b?

What do we learn about the one who would suddenly come? Has this one come?

When he came, what would he do and to whom would he do it?

In study 3, we looked at who the "sons of Levi" referred to. (You may wish to refresh your memory).

What kind of offerings would the sons of Levi bring?

How does God answer the accusation stated in 2:17? What attitude sums up the sins listed in 3:5? Is Israel guilty of this attitude? Therefore how will they withstand the Lord's judgement (see 3:6)?

Like the Israelites of Malachi's day, we may be tempted to think God is unjust when we see evildoers flourish in our world instead of being punished. In asking for God's justice to be done, what implications did that have on Israel and what implications does it have on us today? How is God going to reconcile this with His love for Israel that He stated in 1:2?

No one can escape facing God's justice, beginning with Israel. What are the only two possible outcomes of facing His justice?

study 6 - malachi 3:6-18

What is Israel's response when God points out their covenant breaking? What new accusation does God bring against them? What was the purpose of the tithe (see Deut 14:28-29, 26:12)?

What was the logic underlying their failure to tithe? What was God's response?

What does this teach us about how we ought to view money and possessions? Do tithing laws apply to Christians today? Should we tithe in order that God may bless us? What attitudes to giving should a Christian have?

What accusation does Israel bring against God in 3:13-15? Do we ever have similar feelings about the state of our world today? What is God's response in 3:16-4:1?

In what way does God's unchanging nature mean that Israel is not consumed (3:6)? Does this mean that everyone in Israel would be spared?

Who are those that would be spared? How were they different to the rest of Israel? Were they saved by their works?

Read Ex 4:22-23, 7:16, 12:13, 19:5. In each of these passages, what similarities do we see between Israel in the Mosaic covenant, and God's chosen remnant in Malachi 3:17. What insight does this give us into the status of those whose names are written in the book of remembrance?

study 7 - malachi 4:1-6

Israel has accused God of inaction in the face of evil. There will be a day, however, when the Lord will act (4:3). What does this "day that is coming" (4:1) refer to? Is it equivalent to "the day of his coming" in 3:2?

What will happen on this day to the arrogant & the evildoers of 3:15 who appear blessed?

How does this contrast with what will happen to those who fear God's name? Discuss what this Day will bring to them (v2-3).

Has this Day come? Explain your answer.

What is the significance of the injunction to remember the law of Moses?

Whom will God send before the day of the Lord comes? What will this prophet do? Has this prophet come?

What would happen if God did not send this prophet Elijah? Why?

How ought we to live in view of the day of the Lord? (You may wish to refer also to 2 Pet 3:10-13).

study 8 - overview / summary

List down what you think are the main themes in the book of Malachi.

Summarize in 1 sentence what Malachi's message to Israel was.

Explain what you understand of the covenant the Lord had with Israel. Broadly speaking, what were the terms of this covenant? Why did the Lord choose Israel over other nations? Did keeping the covenant mean a form of salvation by works?

Were the remnant saved by God able to keep the covenant perfectly? What characteristics did they have which the Lord desires in His covenant people and which distinguished them from the rest of Israel? Could this be reduced to keeping a set of rules? Why was obeying the law important?

What does Malachi teach us about the characteristics of man-made religion?

"... The Mosaic covenant was by Malachi's time understood as a quaint, archaic document too restrictive to be taken seriously and inapplicable to a 'modern' age – virtually the same way that most people in modern Western societies view the Bible today." (Douglas Stuart, "Malachi", in *The Minor Prophets*, p. 1332). Discuss this statement and what our response should be.

The Mosaic covenant could not deal with the problem of sinful hearts. What is God's solution that we see in the teaching of Malachi? Do other nations apart from Israel have a share in this?

Christians are described in the New Testament as a priesthood (1 Pet 2:5,9, Rev 5:10, 20:6). What does the ideal picture of priesthood in Malachi teach us about what our priesthood means?

What key lessons does the book of Malachi have for Christians today? Wherever possible be specific.
