

Malachi
The Last Warning
Lesson 11

Key Verse

For thou *art* not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell
with thee.

—Psalm 5:4

Key Verse Thought: Read today's key verse. We are to remember that God does not like sin, and sin cannot stand in God's presence. For that reason, God continually sent prophets to warn His people when they disobeyed God's commands. In this lesson, will learn about the last prophet God sent to His people in the Old Testament – the final warning before a four hundred year silence of no new word from God to His people.

Emphasis: Christians are not to practice a religion as the priests in Malachi's day were doing, but to live obeying God's Word. Although going to church is very important (as we have learned), it is most important to live according to God's Word. We should also have Christian friends to encourage us, and we should encourage them

Lesson Summary: In our last lesson, we learned the condition of God's people when Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. God's people, including the priests, had fallen deeply into sin. Nehemiah once again corrected the sin and prayed.

God sent Malachi with a message for His people, beginning with the priests who were just practicing a religion and not serving God according to His Word. The priests, and then the people, had fallen into sin once again. As we will learn, Malachi dealt with many of the same sins that Nehemiah dealt with in the lives of God's people. Malachi was the last voice to God's people before about four hundred years of silence.

God had Malachi remind the Jews of the great love God had for His people. The memory of Jacob and Esau was recalled – the love of Jacob and the hatred for Esau. Jacob loved and sought after the things of God, and Esau hated and despised the people and things of God. Yet, God's people were not living as His people – for they sinned and did not even recognize how great their sin had become. God had a poignant question for them. “A son honoureth *his* father, and a servant his master: if then I *be* a father, where *is* mine honour? and if I *be* a master, where *is* my fear? ...” (Malachi 1:6). The people needed Malachi to show them how far from God they had fallen. Nevertheless, a few people still feared God. God saw that they encouraged each other often. God knew them and wrote them in a special book of remembrance. Remember, God knows the heart.

We will not only learn of the condition of God's people and the words of correction, but the promises of which God reminded His people – especially the promise of the Promised One, Jesus.

Malachi was not only the last prophet call to God's people before the four hundred years of silence, but also that call ended with a promise of a curse.

We will learn a few details of the four hundred years of silence that came after Malachi, discovering some of the changes that took place among God's people.

Suggested Bible Reading to Prepare for This Lesson:

- Monday: Malachi 1
- Tuesday: Malachi 2
- Wednesday: Malachi 3
- Thursday: Malachi 4
- Friday: Proverbs 14
- Saturday: Proverbs 15

Malachi
The Last Warning

1. The Sins of Israel (Malachi 1-2)
 - Their disregard to God
 - The sins of the priests
2. The Promise of God's Messenger (Malachi 3)
 - Preparing the way of Jesus
 - Encouragement to do right
3. A Final Warning (Malachi 4)
 - Remember the Law of Moses
 - The warning of a curse
4. The Four Hundred Years of Silence
 - Changes in the religious system
 - Other interesting facts

Note: As we finished the book of Nehemiah in our last lesson, we found that God's people were disobeying God's commands – once again. However, Nehemiah stood up, rebuked the people, and helped eliminate the sin.

In this lesson, we will learn the words from God that the last prophet in the Old Testament times had for God's people. He prophesied to God's people many, many years after Haggai and Zechariah – the two previous prophets. However long it actually was, we will find out just how far the people had fallen from living a life according to God's Word.

1. The Sins of Israel (Malachi 1-2)

Have you noticed a pattern in the nature of God's people? After a period of time, they seemed to fall into the same pitfalls. They forgot God and His commands. God would then send a prophet or another man of God (like Nehemiah that we learned about in our last lesson) to point out their sin and remind them to obey God's commands. Even though Nehemiah not only pointed out the people's sin but also corrected that sin, we find that the people had forgotten to obey God's commands – again. Therefore, God sent another messenger.

“The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi” (Malachi 1:1). Once again, we read that the prophet of the Lord had a burden of God's Word for Israel. **Malachi** means “my messenger or the messenger of the Lord.” **Burden** means “a load; a desire, longing, yearning.” Malachi had a longing to tell God's Word to His people.

What did God want His people to know? “2. I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, 3. And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness” (Malachi 1:2-3). Remember back to Jacob and Esau for a minute. They were twin brothers and Esau was born first. By all rights, he should have received the blessing from his father along with the inheritance. However, God knew his heart. Esau did not love God or the things of God (as we already learned). Instead, he lived to please himself. Jacob, on the other hand, sought God. Moreover, God blessed him. Although Esau received an inheritance, because of their hatred for God's people, God promised to “throw down” Esau's descendants (see Malachi 1:4) so that all would know that God hated this people for the hatred and rejection they showed toward God and His people. Not only would people recognize that God defeated and threw down Esau (the Edomites), but all would recognize that God blessed and magnified His people. God first wanted them to remember that He **had always** loved his people, and God **would always** love His people. However, God was greatly disappointed in the sin of His people.

See that even though God consistently provided for and blessed His people, read what they had done. “A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?” (Malachi 1:6). Notice that God directed His words first to the spiritual leaders of the day – the priests. God's people did not honor Him. They did not fear or obey Him. Worse than that, they did not even recognize they were doing wrong. Therefore, God sent His prophet, Malachi to tell them – so they would correct their ways.

Malachi 1:7-8:

“7. Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible.

8. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, *is it* not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, *is it* not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts.”

The people’s faith had been replaced by a religious practice – and a bad practice it was. For it was no longer what God required from His people, but what they felt like they wanted to offer. They were offering things to God that even the governor would not accept. They offered blind, lame, and sick offerings.

Malachi called for repentance. “And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 1:9). Read what else God had to say, “... I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand” (Malachi 1:10b).

Malachi continued to direct God’s Words to the priests. “1. And now, O ye priests, this commandment *is* for you. 2. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay *it* to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay *it* to heart” (Malachi 2:1-2). God was greatly disappointed with the condition of the priests. “7. For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he *is* the messenger of the LORD of hosts. 8. But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 2:7-8). Not only were the priests disobeying God’s commands, but the people were disobeying God’s commands as well. They had completely disregarded God’s Law.

More than that, the priests no longer had a voice among the people because of their great sin. For why should the people listen to the priests when they were not obeying God’s commands? “Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law” (Malachi 2:9).

Through the rest of the chapter, Malachi rebuked the people for once again intermarrying with the heathen nations, and for divorce, which seemed to have become common. The people then tried to justify their sin. “Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied *him*? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil *is* good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where *is* the God of judgment?” (Malachi 2:17). Although they thought they could get away with their sin, God sent Malachi to tell them that they could not.

A Deeper Path: One of the most important things Jesus did when He left this world and returned to heaven is found in the following verses. “7. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. 8. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9. Of sin, because they believe not on me; 10. Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; 11. Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:7-11). Today, instead of God sending a prophet amongst the people to tell them of their sin, Jesus left the Comforter – the Holy Spirit that each person receives when they ask Jesus into their heart. His job is to convict the Christian heart anytime they sin, so they will turn from that sin back to a life that pleases Jesus. It is then that a Christian is able to live a life so as to bring conviction to a lost and dying world so that they too, may desire to receive Jesus (and His Spirit).

2. The Promise of God's Messenger (Malachi 3)

After rebuking the priests for their lifestyle of disregarding God's Law, read what God promised.

1. Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. 2. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he *is* like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: 3. And he shall sit *as* a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. (Malachi 3:1-3)

My messenger was “*John the Baptist*,” and **the Lord, whom they sought**, was “*Jesus*.” God revealed that He would send a special messenger to prepare the way before God, Himself. (“13. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John ... 15. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord ... 16. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. 17. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” Luke 1:13-17.) Do you remember the Promised One they were to be watching and waiting for? That One that they sought, He would come into the temple suddenly. Would any of these priests be in the condition to stand before God, Himself? After what we just learned about the condition of God's priests, it did not sound like they were living as if the Promised One would appear suddenly. God compared the coming of Jesus with “*a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap*.” **A refiner's fire** means “*a precious metal that was heated until it became a liquid so that all of the impurities could rise to the top to be removed*.” **A fullers' soap** means “*used to rub and scrub clothing until the stains were washed away*.” Each of these can be compared to what Jesus' would do when he came – remove the impurities and sin from man.

God would judge His people for their sin. Some of the blatant sins of the day were listed in Malachi 3:5-8. Also, in the midst of that list, see what God said, “... **Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts** ...” (Malachi 3:7b). One of the sins listed was the neglect of bringing the tithes into the storehouse. If they would bring those tithes once again, read what Malachi declared to the people.

10. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it*. 11. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. 12. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:10-12)

If they would return to obeying God's commands, they would not be able to contain the blessings God had in store for His people. Not only that, but also all of the nations would call them blessed.

God recognized that there were still those few who rejected the sin and obeyed God's commands.

16. Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard *it*, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. 17. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. (Malachi 3:16-17)

Remember what we have learned – God knows the heart. “20. If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god; 21. Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart” (Psalm 44:20-21). As we just read in Malachi, God keeps a “book of remembrance” of those who trust in God.

A Deeper Path: Remember that Isaiah too, wrote of one who would prepare the way of the Lord. “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3). We know that one was John the Baptist (see Matthew 17:10-13 and/or Luke 1:13-17).

Jesus entered the Temple often: see Matthew 21:12-13; Luke 2:21-24, 43-50; John 2:13-22; etc.

We learned that although man may try to hide sin from God, they cannot because, “9. The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it? 10. I the LORD search the heart, *I* try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:9-10). God sees even the hidden things of the heart and rewards according to what is found therein.

Those that God saw that still feared Him, “spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard *it*” (Malachi 3:16a). Much encouragement comes from sharing with others who fear and serve God. “But exhort one another daily, while it is called *To day*; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13).

3. A Final Warning (Malachi 4)

God gave one final warning through Malachi. A day would come when everything that mankind has done will be judged by God. Man's works will be burned up and the wicked will be destroyed. More than that, they were to remember the following. “4. Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, *with* the statutes and judgments. 5. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD” (Malachi 4:4-5). They were to remember the Law of Moses (recognize that Moses represented God's Law) and Elijah (recognize that Elijah represented God's prophets). These two things culminated the Old Testament and all that was written therein – until Messiah came. Recognize the writings of the Old Testament and the obedience it demanded.

At the beginning of Malachi, we found that God's people did not honor Him, they did not fear or obey Him, and they did not even recognize they were doing wrong. They had not lived as God's children, and they had not continually acknowledged Him as their Father. Consequently, God sent His prophet, Malachi to tell them – so they would correct their ways. As we come to the end of Malachi, we find that God desired a right relationship with His people, not just an empty religious practice.

In Malachi 4:4-5, we found that God demanded obedience of the writings of the Old Testament. Why did God remind His people to adhere to the teachings of the Old Testament Law and Prophets again? “**And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse**” (Malachi 4:6). If God's people would not live according to His Word, God promised a curse. (Remember the blessings and curses followed with a covenant with God found in Deuteronomy as they prepared to enter into the Promised Land – see Deuteronomy 27:11 – 29:29.)

This was the last messenger God sent with words for His people recorded in the Old Testament. About four hundred years would pass before God would begin speaking to His people again.

We will find that the New Testament begins where the Old Testament ended. It completes the story that began in Genesis 3:15 – when God gave the promise of Jesus.

4. The Four Hundred Years of Silence

During this period of time, there was no new Word from God to His people. There were many changes in the religious system of the Jews:

- **Scribes:** These men were not the same scribes we were familiar with in the Old Testament. They were held as the interpreters and the teachers of God's Word. They were opposed to Jesus, and Jesus often rebuked them for adhering to their traditions instead of following God's Word.
- **Pharisees:** Originally, they had separated themselves from the political parties. They zealously guarded the law and were overall conservative. They believed in angels and the afterlife.
- **Sadducees:** They were considered more liberal than the Scribes or Pharisees. They denied the existence of angels or the afterlife. They did not believe in the resurrection or eternal life of man's soul. They were a much smaller group than the Pharisees were. They were mostly affiliated with the wealthy and influential. They too, opposed Jesus. Jesus condemned them as well.
- **The Sanhedrin:** They were a Jewish council, and they held the religious power among the Jewish people. The head of this group was the High Priest. They had the right given to them by the Romans to pass the sentence of death upon someone, but not to execute that right. The Sanhedrin tried Jesus, Stephen, and many others.
- **Synagogues:** They had become common places of Bible teaching and worship. It is believed they were started during the Babylonian captivity – because the people had no temple to worship God. Apparently, they began to meet in smaller groups for worship and religious instruction.

Other interesting facts:

- Hebrew, the language throughout the Old Testament, had been replaced with Greek and Aramaic.

- Persia was no longer the ruler in the land, for they were now replaced by Rome – who ruled the world as one vast empire.
- Idolatry had been completely eliminated in Israel.
- The reigning king over the Jewish people was an Idumean (and Edomite – a descendant of Esau) named Herod.
- The Temple had been rebuilt by Herod.

These things will help us as we begin our study of the New Testament next quarter.

Malachi 1-4 at a Glance:

Chapter 1: God loved Jacob, but hated Esau; a recognition of the sin of God’s people, by God – especially spiritual sins

Chapter 2: The priests had disregarded God’s Law and caused many others to stumble (not obey God’s Law); divorce prevalent; the people had wearied God with their words

Chapter 3: Promise of John the Baptist who would prepare the way for Jesus; a call to return to the Lord, and God would return to them; God knows those that are His

Chapter 4: The righteous will prevail over the wicked; Elijah will come before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; “**And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse**” (Malachi 4:6)

Reinforcement: Although the Old Testament ended with such a discouraging tone, we can understand the importance of obedience to God’s Word and the teachings found within. We are to make it a point to not only know what the Bible says, but to understand the teachings found within. That is one reason we are taking this time to go completely through the Bible. To not only hear the “stories,” but to understand the importance of knowing the Bible and living it out in our daily lives as Christians.

One of the most important things to remember about Malachi: the priests of that day had quit serving God and were just practicing a religion. They no longer adhered to the teachings of God’s Word. Also, remember that God saw those who still feared and obeyed Him. He made a special book of remembrance of those who trusted in God. God sent a messenger, Malachi, to warn the people of their sin and once again, to remind them that God would keep His promise to send the Messiah – the One who would take away the sin of the world. Not only that, but they received an extra “clue.” There would be a messenger who would come first; to prepare the way of the Lord. They were to be ready, for He would come suddenly.

Today, Christians are to live faithfully according to God’s Word, waiting for Jesus to return – suddenly. “36. **Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. 37. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch**” (Mark 13:36-37).

Closing: It would be good to close with a short prayer reinforcing today’s lesson. Always include any prayer requests you may have. *Today, pray that we will not forget the teachings of the Bible just to practice a religion. Pray that we will remember that God does not have pleasure in wickedness, but God will give us Christian friends to help encourage us.*