

Sterling Sermon Guide
Malachi: In the Courtroom with God
Moses Falco, October 1, 2017



MALACHI

How to use this guide

- The main purpose of this guide is to encourage groups and individuals to dig deeper into the topic of a sermon. This guide summarizes the sermon and provides discussion questions and suggestions of how to continue the conversation in order to apply the topic to real life.
- Listen to the sermon online (sterlingmennonite.ca) if you were not in church that Sunday or if you want to hear it again. If this sermon is not on the website, please contact our office.
- Re-read the scripture text and recommended reading.
- Select a leader in your group to guide your conversation and to lead you through this study.
- Use what is helpful for your group, but do not be bound by this guide. Let the Spirit lead you. You may be surprised where you end up.

Malachi: In the Courtroom with God
Part 1 of a 2-part series

Scripture Text: Malachi 1:6-14

Recommended Reading: Malachi (the whole book)

Prepare Your Heart: Malachi 1:2a

Sermon Nugget: The book of Malachi is set up like a court case. Israel against God. It is Israel who accuses God first, asking Him how He has loved them. They are tired of their faith. They think it is all futile. They have given up because they believe God is not fair. But God comes back at them and holds them to account. He has in fact lived into the covenant with Israel, but they have not. Israel is guilty, and by the end, most of them refuse to change. But God will never give up on His people, saving those who choose to follow Him. We live in a new covenant. But we need to realize as well that God calls us to live with Him and to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to Him. This book is a slap in the face for all of us who sometimes lose our passion because everything seems futile anyway. Are we offering our best to God, or just our leftovers?

Introduction to Malachi

The book of Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament and one of the 12 minor prophets. It was written around 430 BC and comes to the people of Israel after their exile in Babylon. Whether the author of this book was really a prophet named Malachi is unclear, as Malachi means “My Messenger” and could simply be a generic name for the person who brought this message to God’s people.

The sentiment and mood in Israel was low and sad. Unfortunately, even though Israel came out of exile and was allowed to return to their land, times were hard. They were poor and did not have enough to feed themselves. They looked around at other nations who seemed to be far better off than they were and became bitter and angry with God. They felt abandoned. It seemed like it was no use following God because others seemed to be better off without Him. It is in this context that Israel received this strong message of returning to God in covenant.

If you’ve ever had the chance to watch court room shows like Judge Judy, you may have a special appreciation for the setting of this book. Although not explicitly stated, it is helpful for us to imagine a court case between God and Israel. We are invited into a court room drama as active participants as God and Israel talk about their covenant together.

Condensed Biblical Timeline

2080 BC - God calls Abraham
1445 BC - God’s covenant with Israel
1010 BC - David becomes King
966 BC - Solomon builds the temple
931 BC - The kingdom is divided
730 BC - Time of Isaiah
586 BC - The fall of Jerusalem to Babylon
540 BC - Time of Daniel - Israel in exile
537 BC - Exiles allowed to return
440 BC - Rebuilding of Jerusalem
430 BC - Malachi

Discussion Questions

- 1) How do you understand the notion of a covenant? Where in the Bible do we hear language of covenant relationships? Which covenants are we a part of, either between us and God or in our lives with one another?

In the Court Room

The covenant between Israel and God can be found in passages like Exodus 19-24. This covenant was meant to be the means through which God would bring healing and hope to all people (Genesis 12:1-3). But things were broken in this relationship. The first to accuse in the court room is Israel. They accuse God twice, and God has a response each time. In turn, God has four accusations against Israel to which they have no response. Each end their case with a conclusion about how they want to move forward. In outline, the court case looks like this:

- Israel accuses God of not loving them. They don’t see God at work for them (1:2).
 - God reminds them that He has always loved them since He chose them as His people. He chose Jacob and not Esau (1:3-5).
- God accuses Israel of improper worship, bringing unworthy sacrifices and offerings (1:6-14).
- God calls out Israel’s priests for not caring by letting the people do whatever (2:1-9).
- God calls out men who divorce their wives for younger wives who follow other gods (2:10-16).
- Israel accuses God of being unjust. Everyone else seems to get away with sin (2:17).
 - God tells them that He will judge and that the time will come when all will be right (3:1-5).

- God accuses Israel of robbing from Him by withholding their tithes and offerings (3:6-12).
- Israel concludes that following God is futile. They do not want to continue in covenant with God and would rather go their own way (3:13-15).
- God concludes that He will not give up on His people, even just the small remnant of people who wish to follow Him. He calls them back to be His people (3:16-4:6).

Discussion Questions

- 2) Work your way through this court case, reading through the scripture passages. As an outsider looking in, do you think these accusations are fair? Does God explain Himself well? What do you make of the lack of response by Israel to God's accusations?
- 3) Do any of these accusations ring true to you? Maybe you have asked similar questions as Israel has. Or maybe you feel like God's accusations are something you need to listen to, to change something in your life. What impact does God's conclusion have for you?

So What?

It would be easy for us to simply watch the drama unfold and continue on with our lives, but that is not what this book is meant to do. It is not meant to simply tell us about Israel and God. It is meant to cause us to look inward at our own lives and relationship with God. It's almost as if the spectators become participants in this drama, and the question we have to ask is, "what does this mean for us?"

We live in the fulfillment of the promise that God will not abandon His people. We have freedom in Christ and have been given new life through Him. The Holy Spirit makes His dwelling in each believer and because of Jesus, we are able to be in direct relationship with God. But that does not simply happen. We are no longer under the Old Covenant, but our call as Christians is to give everything, our whole lives, over to God. The New Covenant in Jesus invites us into a new way of being and living, and this new kingdom puts a lot of our assumptions about life on its head. We often fall short in the ways God calls us to live and love. But God never changes. He never gave up on Israel and He won't give up on us.

Activity

Look up these passages about the New Covenant and what it means for followers of Jesus:

- Jeremiah 31:31-34
- Hebrews 8:10
- 2 Corinthians 3:6
- Romans 8:1-3
- Romans 12:1
- 1 Peter 2:9

Discussion Questions

- 4) Israel's heart was not in the right place. When God calls His people back to Him and accuses them of breaking the covenant, He is getting at the condition of their heart. Where is your heart at in your relationship with God? Are you holding back in your commitment or your worship? Have your questions and frustrations about God closed your heart to Him?
- 5) What is your response to God saying He won't give up on you? What if most people around you are ignoring God? What is your response to God's invitation to be in relationship with you?

Resources for Further Study (available for loan from Sterling)

Nahum - Malachi by Elizabeth Achtemeier (Interpretation Commentary, 1986).

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*"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid;
that foundation is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:11*