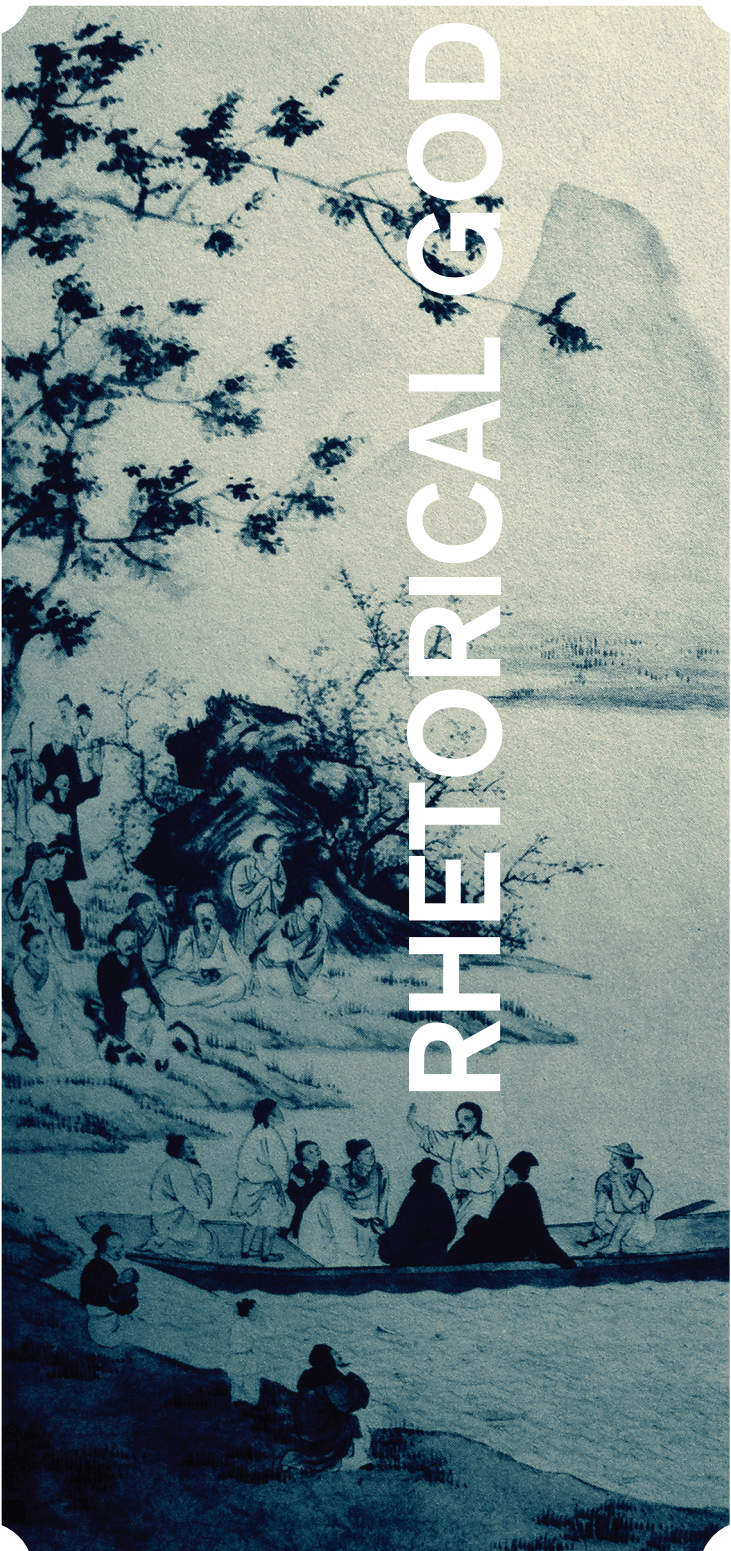


the book of malachi  hard answers to easy questions

RHETORICAL GOD



the book of malachi ∞ hard answers to easy questions
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RHETORICAL GOD

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the book of malachi ∞

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The Book of Malachi (יְמַלְאֵךְ.)

Malachi's place among the Minor Prophets may seem relatively obscure to most Christians except for the fact this little book is placed at the end of the Christian ordering of the Old Testament. And just because of its placement and designation of being a "minor" prophetic book, its explicit message to God's covenant people is literally as important today as it was over two millennia ago. Even so, you're probably wondering why we chose this book relative to any of the other Minor Prophets.

The title we chose for the Malachi series, Rhetorical God: hard answers to easy questions, is a partial explanation for our focus on Malachi's message. Often in life we want simplistic answers to simplistic questions, but as we'll see in Malachi, God often reveals that our questions are not so much in the way of our faith as our hearts. God is not interested in flippant, halfhearted religion, but in the hearts and minds of his people. Malachi, therefore, speaks into the lives of all Christians as a serious wake-up call regarding their covenant faithfulness to the God who first loved, loves, and will continue to love them.

Additionally, the content of Malachi is extremely relevant for the Christian church today. There are a host of topics within Malachi such as God's love and judgment, proper worship, Christian marriage & divorce, adultery and other moral issues, tithing/sacrificially giving, and for God's

mission. Virtually all of these topics are not only relevant but crucial for the health of the church.

Three Strand Churches believe that the entire Bible is inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16). While churches often preach through neatly packaged topical sermons with clever titles focused on Christian living, we don't. Instead, we have chosen to go verse by verse—exegetically—through books of the Bible that speak to larger and weightier theological concepts like the sovereignty of God, his redemptive work, and our response to his example and power working in our lives. We believe that if we focus primarily on knowing God as opposed to how to reform our behavior, we will end up living transformed lives that glorify him.

We believe Malachi is an excellent book to challenge us in our faith and relationship with God, as well as give us hard answers to easy questions. We love Malachi's satire, his rawness, and that he doesn't pull punches when revealing God's direction to the covenant people. Our prayer throughout this series is that we will be renewed again and again in our covenant fidelity toward God.

On behalf of the pastors of the
Three Strand Church Network



the format

Each study begins with a key attribute of God, revealing his character, along with a question designed to provoke our minds and hearts toward him. Each sermon will speak to the specific truth being proclaimed in each section of Malachi. Each section of this study will provide a basic summary along with references to other relevant texts for you to review or, if you miss a Sunday, will help you follow along with us wherever we are. There are also some questions for personal reflection as well as group discussion. Finally, each section concludes with space for sermon notes in case you want to write things down as you listen to the sermon on Sunday for reference or review as you reflect.

individuals

Pray: The first task of any sort of biblical study is prayer. Pray that God would illuminate your mind to understand and your heart to accept his Word. Pray that, as you see the truth, the Holy Spirit will give you strength to act in accordance with what you have learned.

Study: Work through the study and write out answers to the questions. Resist any temptation to skip over questions in the section. It is important to ponder how the truth applies to your life. Though these questions are sometimes penetrating and difficult, they are designed to help you think seriously about your understanding of God, yourself, and others.

Share: Take what opportunities you can to share with others about what you've learned and how you'd like your life to change as a result.

Review: It is recommended that you take some time to meditate on some or all of the passages preached. Review the sermon but, more importantly, the verses and their surrounding context. Try to spend more time dialoguing about God’s Word and truth therein, rather than focusing on the strength or weaknesses of the sermon itself.

Discuss: In your time together as a community, discuss what you have learned. Present new questions or verses that have come to mind as you have studied. Focus on the implications for your lives individually and as a group.

Reveal: Share with one another how you sense God calling you to change, pray for one another about these things, and invite one another to encourage you and hold you accountable to apply the truth.

Pray: in your time together as a community, use this guide as a launching point for discussion and genuine care for one another. Resist the urge to have to discuss every question or “get through the material.” Listen to one another’s hearts beyond the words of the answer so that you might minister to one another effectively.

If you have feedback or questions about the series or studies, please feel free to email them to life@damascusroadchurch.org or info@dyingtolive.org.



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who is Malachi?

the role of the prophet

The Old Testament and its 66 books are organized into different sections. The first five books are called the Books of the Law (i.e., Torah), also known as the Pentateuch. The next twelve books are considered the Books of History, ending with Esther. The following five books, from Job through Song of Songs are often called Books of Poetry and Wisdom. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel are considered the Major Prophets, while the final twelve books are called the Minor Prophets, identified by their size not necessarily their quality.

Malachi is the twelfth Minor Prophet and last book of the Old Testament. Its placement isn't

necessarily chronological because, historically, many of the prophets were contemporaries. The Hebrew word for prophet, *nabi*, comes from a root meaning “to bubble forth, as from a fountain,” or “to utter,” hence to pour forth words under divine inspiration. Even though a certain amount of uncertainty exists regarding the exact meaning of the word, it is the first and the most generally used for a prophet. The essential idea in the word is that a prophet is an “authorized spokesman” (see Deut. 18:18). The “prophet” proclaimed the message given to him by God; he spoke in God’s name and by his authority (Ex. 7:1). He is the mouth by which God speaks to men (Jer. 1:9; Isa. 51:16), and hence what the prophet says is not of man but of God (2 Pet. 1:20, 21; comp. Heb 3:7; Acts 4:25; 28:25).

Contrary to popular opinion, future-telling was only a small part of the prophet’s message. As God’s spokesman, the prophet’s message can be seen in the three-fold function they had among the people of God in the Old Testament.

FIRST, THEY WERE PREACHERS. Prophets expounded and interpreted the Mosaic Law to the nation of Israel. As they proclaimed the Word of God, their duty was to admonish, reprove, denounce sin, threaten with the terrors of judgment, call to repentance, or bring consolation and pardon. In this capacity, their role is that of a prosecuting attorney bringing charges against Mosaic Lawbreakers.

SECOND, THEY WERE PREDICTORS. In addition to preaching, prophets announced future judgments, deliverance, and events relating to the Messiah and his kingdom. Predicting the future was never intended merely to satisfy man's curiosity, but was designed to demonstrate that God knows and controls the future, and to give purposeful revelation. The failure of a prediction to be fulfilled would identify the speaker as a false prophet (Deut. 18:20-22).

THIRD, THEY WERE WATCHMEN. The Prophets served as watchmen over the people of Israel, both practically and symbolically. In practical terms, they warned against poor political decisions within the theocracy of Israel, the dangers of idolatry, false worship, and the worthlessness of religiosity. Figuratively, many of the lives of the prophets serve as symbolic images of God's relationship with his people. Not only were they watchmen, but they were watched.

the prophet Malachi

Unfortunately, very little is known about Malachi. In fact, there's debate whether the word "Malachi" is intended as a personal name or as the Hebrew possessive noun "my messenger." In any case, we have the prophetic message of Malachi in full, and the historical evidence leans heavily upon the position that Malachi is a proper name.

the history

All of the books of the Bible must be read in the context of the complete story of redemp-

tion. Malachi was not written in a vacuum but has its place in the history of God's people. Specifically, we must review a portion of Israel's history in order to understand the setting for this post-exilic prophetic book.

From the context of Malachi, we can see that the prophet wrote sometime after 515 B.C. because that was when the second temple was finished. Many scholars place Malachi anytime from then on through the administration of Nehemiah in Jerusalem. In 458 B.C. Ezra returned with another group of exiles from Babylon, and in 445 B.C. Nehemiah returned and led the people in rebuilding the walls of the city of Jerusalem. In the twelfth year of Nehemiah's governorship, he returned to Persia for an unknown period of time (see Neh 5:14; 13:6). It was during this interim, likely in 434 B.C., that Malachi took the helm of spiritual affairs in Jerusalem. All in all, many of the exiles had returned to Jerusalem, the temple had been rebuilt, and the sacrificial system had been reestablished. Indeed, as we see in Malachi, the temple had been functioning long enough to develop certain abuses against which Malachi contended at some length in his book. So even with a delivered people from exile, a rebuilt temple, and re-established priesthood and sacrificial system, God's covenant people fell into a spiritual lethargy, laxity, and religiosity. It was in this declining state of covenant fidelity that the last prophet in the Old Testament addressed God's people.

the theology

Malachi's theology stands in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets with their emphasis on the person and work of God himself. Malachi's theology stresses the fact that the God of Israel is also the sovereign God of the world. God is not only concerned with Israel, but with all nations. Additionally, the sovereign God is immutable in that he does not change. He is also a covenant keeping God who remembers his promises.

In reading Malachi it may seem that a large portion of his theology stresses the ceremonial aspects of the law, such as sacrifices, tithing and whatnot. This is partially true, but there's more to what he's saying than mere proper ritual, worship or blind obedience. Malachi was concerned with what Jesus called the "more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matt 23:23). To these words Jesus added, —and Malachi would certainly have agreed—"You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." Essentially, the problem Malachi points out is not just offering blemished animals or holding back tithes, but the heart behind such behavior.

Another theological characteristic (not new to the OT prophets) is that God is a God of justice. Injustice therefore is incompatible with godliness. Because of his justice, his covenant people should live by a certain ethic in their relationships with one another. To put it another

way, the faithfulness God had demonstrated to Israel, his love for his people in spite of their rebelliousness, should have inspired them in their view to treat one another with dignity and respect. Malachi also speaks about God's judgement being meted out against those who were acting unjustly. While the people actually charge God with injustice, Malachi reminds them that they were justifying their own lack of just behavior by pointing to the Lord's lack of justice. Malachi reveals that treachery was being committed against wives and others. In fact, as God had been a "witness" to the marriage covenants the people were breaking (2:14), he was also a witness of these crimes of injustice and would come "swiftly" to vindicate those who had been wronged. Judah's blindly hypocritical desire for justice would be satisfied when the Lord would come against those who practice treachery and oppression of the weak.

Much more could be said regarding the theology presented in Malachi. Overall, Malachi speaks to the hearts of a troubled people whose circumstances in life such as religious skepticism, financial insecurity, ethical problems, and personal disappointments are similar to those God's people often experience or encounter today. Present in his teaching, both negative and positive, is a strike to the heart of nominal, easygoing Christianity as it was Judaism in his day. The book contains a message that must not be overlooked by those who wish to encounter

the Lord and his kingdom and to lead others to a similar encounter. Its theological message concerns God's loving and holy character and his unchanging and glorious purposes for his covenant people. Our God calls his people to genuine worship, to renewed covenant fidelity both to himself and to one another, and to expectant faith in his mission of redemption.

the connection with the new testament & Jesus

Malachi is the last book of the Christian ordering of the Old Testament. In the Hebrew Bible the last book is Chronicles. In any case, after Malachi there was a period of divine silence in the prophetic office for roughly 400 years. God was literally remaining silent. The predicament with the Old Testament (henceforth OT) alone is that there's no clearly stated completion or resolution in its totality. Instead, and as referenced by Malachi, the OT ends in expectation and promise, awaiting a fuller revelation to usher in a new kingdom and its Messiah. The OT's many and varied prophecies about the coming Son of David and his new era point to a future time. Yet no one in the OT can be said to be that Messiah, and there was certainly no period in Israel's history that ushered in a messianic era. So the essential quandary of the OT is its prophetic claim that God revealed himself to Israel and that he will reveal himself further in the future, but again the 39 books of the OT remain incomplete in and of themselves in the history of redemption.

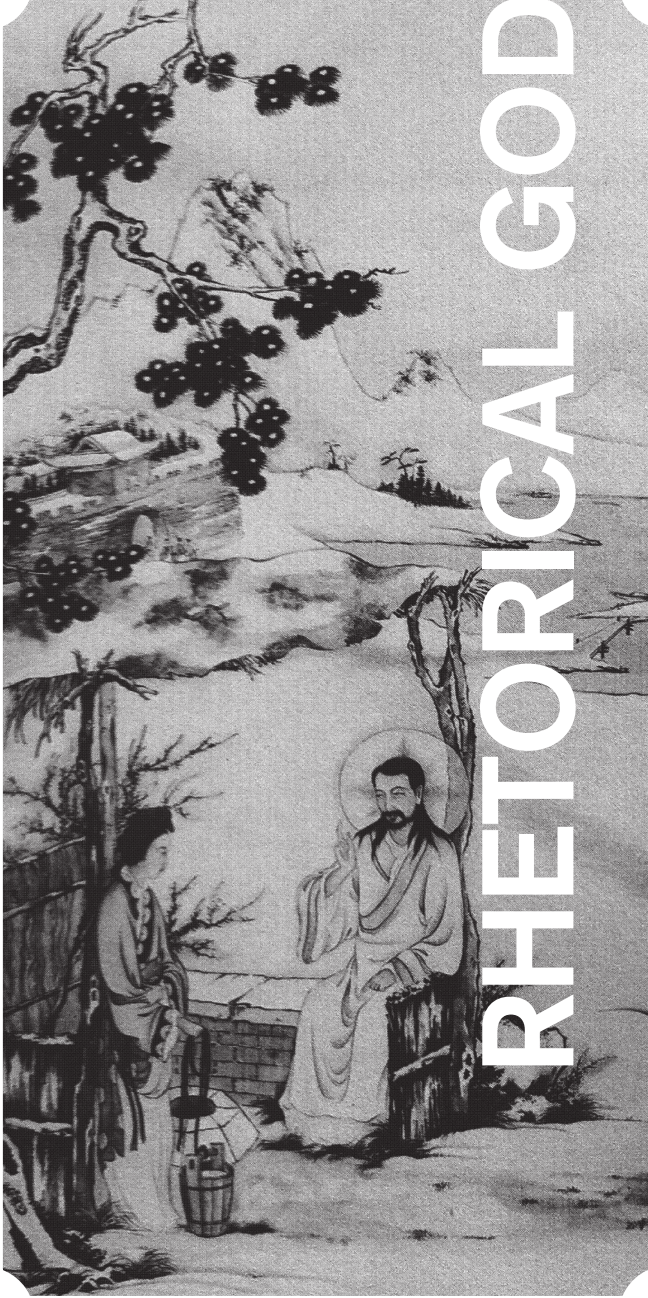


With the coming of John the Baptist (in all reality the last OT prophet), we have the beginning of a New Testament story which fulfills and complements the Old. The Gospel writers' genealogies of Jesus (Mt. 1:1-16; Lk. 3:23-28) explicitly affirmed that the Messiah has arrived, and that he is the culmination and fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Over and over again in the New Testament, the authors emphasize the intimate connections between the events of their day and the OT with quotes such

as “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet...” (Mt. 1:22 & Lk 24:44-47). Importantly, the Christian ordering of the canon intentionally ties Old and New together by concluding with the prophets and the final prediction by Malachi of that day when one greater than David will appear (Mal. 3:1). This brings us to the importance of Malachi for our understanding of Jesus as the Messiah. The link to that understanding begins with the person and ministry of John the Baptist.

As mentioned, Malachi’s most notable contribution to the Old Testament’s corpus of Messianic prophecy was his reference to the forerunner of the Messiah. The first allusion is in 3:1. The “my messenger” referenced cannot be Malachi himself but rather some Elijah figure who would announce for the last time in the Old Testament God’s terms of repentance (4:5). We have Jesus’ authoritative application of this office to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:14; 17:12-13 (see also Mark 9:11-13 & Luke 1:17). By the end of our series on Malachi, we will be ready to dive, headfirst, into the Gospel of Matthew to pick up where Malachi and the corpus of the OT ended.





RHETORICAL GOD

In the early 18th century, Bishop Nicolaus Zinzendorf pondered the concept of legacy. He concluded that the Christian legacy was to “preach the Gospel, die and be forgotten.” This phrase essentially captures what we know about the prophet Malachi. Unlike many other prophets and biblical personalities, nothing is known about Malachi the man, his upbringing, family, struggles with faith, etc. What we do have in his book, however, is an extremely relevant, well written, satirical, and divinely inspired prophecy that was, is, and will continue to be a wake-up call for God’s people.

Before we can ask what an ancient book written specifically to an ancient people means for us today, we much understand what it meant for its original audience. Our tendency is to first ask how the text applies to us now, usually without discovering how it applied in the context to the time and people “back then.” In part this is because we live in a self-absorbed culture which emphasizes personal experience and easy interpretation. Reading Scripture without context is dangerous as it can lead to a misunderstanding of God’s Word. Additionally, without context, asking questions of Scripture which it is not intended to answer is neither right nor safe, and has lead to bad theology; and bad theology is dangerous because it hurts people. Malachi serves as a smaller part of the larger story of redemption. We must begin our journey, therefore, learning about the historical setting and

circumstances surrounding Malachi's prophecy, and importantly the religious climate of the time.

We begin our story by looking back nearly 100 years before Malachi's ministry to the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. to end the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, and allow them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (2 Chron. 36:23). After the Jews returned from exile, they were commissioned to rebuild the temple, reengage in covenant worship through the mediation of the priesthood, and live as the people whom God declared them to be. After a period of normalcy for the people of God, a certain apathy toward the temple ritual and especially toward the laws of Moses had infected the people. Though in their own minds they were "orthodox" in their religious practices, their hearts were far from God. It was in this context that God raised up Malachi to both reprimand the people, and remind them of the covenant God and his love for them.



GOD IS MERCIFUL

Sometimes people make a distinction between God’s character in the Old Testament (i.e., wrathful) relative to the New Testament (i.e., loving). This is a false dichotomy because God indeed loves and is merciful toward his covenant people. That said, we need to remember that God’s love is held in tension relative to his justice. God is both loving and just, and therein lies the paradox of his mercy.

In these verses the charge that God has not loved his people is answered in two ways. First, an appeal is made to the story of Jacob and Esau in which Jacob, one of the covenant patriarchs of Israel, is blessed by God despite his trickery over his brother Esau. Jacob is chosen/elected and given the gift of mercy by God, while Esau clearly isn’t. Neither are Esau’s descendants, which is the second answer to the question. Interestingly, by birth Esau was as much a privileged child as Jacob; both were twin sons to Isaac and Rebekah. Yet God had loved Jacob with a gracious love. Jacob’s descendants, even in their rebellion and wickedness, received God’s patience, guidance, correction, and covenant love. God has been, is, and will be faithful to his covenant people, but that love does not come without a cost.

Out of all the examples God could have given to illustrate his love for his people, he chose the example of Jacob. The emphasis of this story reminds the self-righteous people of Malachi’s

day of the unmerited and therefore electing love of God. They have had the audacity to demand that God show how he has loved them, utterly disregarding their unique status as his elect people and forgetting their place in his redemptive story. Don't ever say, as those in Israel said, "How have you loved us?" Instead confess with faith the greatness of God's love as well as your love for him, and strive to be a mirror of his grace by looking to his ultimate act of love, the cross.



GOD IS WORTHY¹

There are some things that are difficult for preachers to speak about, and one in particular is the sin of their own profession, the clergy. As we see in this section, Malachi is concerned with the clergy's sins, and he's not pulling punches. The failure of the spiritual leadership of the people to honor God properly reveals their hearts, according to Malachi. The clergy engage in disrespectful service (vv. 6-7), offer disqualified sacrifices (vv. 8-9), and have disdainful attitudes (vv. 10-14). God is not interested in religious performance or ritual for its own sake by spiritual leaders, but the heart of the leader. This was the problem with the priesthood in Malachi's day. If leadership cannot properly honor God, how can they mediate between God and the people (v. 9)? Additionally, Malachi accuses the priests of saying that the altar may be despised; but presumably this 'saying' is not speech so much as it is action. Jesus expresses a similar sentiment in Matthew 15:8 when he says "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."

Clergy and the covenant people of God should honor God because he's worthy to be honored. This is not just a clergy problem, but a people of God problem. As the apostle Peter states it in 1 Peter 2:5b, all believers are "...a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Peter goes on in vv. 9-10: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special posses-

sion, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God, once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Peter’s words express the priesthood of all believers, and the motivation for why we should view God as worthy of our honor.

Our place as God’s people should be a place of honor, but only because of the grace that God bestows upon us through his Son. Therefore, the priesthood of all believers should engage in reverential and sacrificial service to God, and have attitudes of thanksgiving to the God that called, calls, and will continue to call us out of darkness into his wonderful light.



GOD IS WORTHY²

The Puritan theologian, Richard Baxter, once wrote in his book *The Reformed Pastor* that “The great and lamentable sin of ministers of the gospel is that they are not fully devoted to God. They do not give themselves up wholly to the blessed work they have undertaken to do. Is it not truth that flesh-pleasing and self-seeking interests—distinct from that of Christ—make us neglect our duty and lead us to walk unfaithfully in the great trust that God has given us? Is it not true that we serve God too cheaply? Do we not do so in the most applauded way? Does not all this show that we seek earthly rather than heavenly things? And that we mind the things which are below? While we preach for the realities which are above, do we not idolize the world? So what remains to be said, brethren, but to cry that we are all guilty of too many of the aforementioned sins. Do we not need to humble ourselves in lamentation for our miscarriages before the LORD?”

If the priests of Israel, whatever their sins, had been as humble and repentant as Richard Baxter, there would have been hope for spiritual renewal in Israel. But the priests in Malachi’s day were showing the opposite attitude, and instead of humbling themselves, they tried to justify their sin before God. Thus, God’s indictment of the clergy is that they’ve 1) turned aside from “the way,” and 2) caused many to stumble. Again, the problem with the priests was a heart problem, and God in a warning

and verdict on their dead orthodoxy, threatens to wipe the feces from the unfit sacrifices on their faces! To contrast their corrupt hearts, God recalls the ideal covenant with Levi of life, peace, reverence, honor, true teaching, both spoken and lived out. The ideal priest would walk-the-walk and be an example to the people; yet in contrast, the priests of Malachi's day were making the people stumble.

God is not interested in converts who make a onetime declaration of belief and then go on their way. Instead, God is interested in making disciples who embrace, embody and expose the gospel. Disciples embody not only Malachi's example of the covenant with Levi, but they are to emulate the example of Jesus himself. Whether we are leaders in the church or not, we are called to be disciples of the one who has called us out of darkness, to die to ourselves daily, and to be salt and light to the world.



GOD IS FAITHFUL

We have a crisis in our culture regarding marriage, and to be sure, it starts within the church, not outside of it. The people of God need to get their houses in order as it were when it comes to marriage because believers are watching as well as the non-Christian culture. How can we point at the world and proclaim Christian marriage to be authoritative and righteous when the world looks at us and perhaps sees something else in our practice of marriage? This is similar to the context in which Malachi is writing to the covenant people in ancient Israel.

Overall, Malachi lists many social problems which the other Minor Prophets addressed as well, such as the problem of intermarriage with unbelievers and the subsequent divorces (Ezra 9:2; Neh. 14:23-28). Hand in hand with this sin went a certain compromise of fidelity toward God. In the context of the passage, to not distinguish between Israelite women and pagan women was to deny the difference between the God of Israel and the pagan deities of the time, hence Malachi's comment in v. 11b about marrying the daughter of a foreign god. Interpreting this could literally mean the people were marrying foreigners or that they were adopting pagan religion into their own.

The basis of marriage according to Malachi is that God created it and is at its center as a faithful witness. It was God's idea to begin with, and again it comes from him. Pointing to the Gen-

esis account of one man and one woman being united in one permanent marriage, Malachi reminds his audience that marriage is a divine institution which is being abused. The context indicates the abuse consists of unfaithfulness in general, and in particular that the men have been too ready to divorce the wives of their youth (i.e., wives who are now old). This divorcing was a violation of the notion that man and wife are one flesh (v. 15, see Gen 2:24). It also undermines the loyalty to the covenant expected by God from his people, so much so that as the Talmud explains it, God hates the man who divorces his first wife because he covers his garment with violence. Divorce is not innocent in the eyes of God; it is to be seen as violence. Jesus supports this when he says when questioned about marriage: “What God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matt. 19:6).

Ultimately, the reason marriage is so sacred theologically and biblically is because it illustrates the most blessed of all spiritual relationships—the union of the believing man or woman with Christ, the divine bridegroom of the church. The seriousness of divorce must therefore illustrate apostasy at worst or the falling away of a man or woman from God. Whether unmarried, married, or remarried, God is calling you to guard yourselves in your spirit, and not to be faithless with regard to marriage.



GOD REFINES

The God of grace is also the God of justice, and in this section v. 17 opens up with a question and introduces chapter 3 of Malachi’s prophecy. The question of justice is likely set within the context of the abuses of worship and divorce among the people of God, as well as many other forms of injustice. The people of God who are committing injustice don’t truly fear the Lord and thus live in a state of unbelief in the justice of the almighty God and his moral governance of the world. So how does God respond to their question of “how have we wearied you?” He responds with v. 5: “So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice...” The answer of God to the pessimistic and cynical people of God is the justice of God. To be sure, God is not pleased by injustice, hypocrisy, inverted morals, and spiritual blindness. But there’s still a lingering question of where God’s justice is in times of actual injustice. Christians affirm God’s justice, but we all know that gross injustices occur every day. We believe that God will judge all evil one day, but in the meantime the evil do prosper, the righteous sometimes are afflicted, and evils go unchecked. This is as simple as watching the nightly news. One of the principle answers of why God is withholding the second coming and the final judgment (see Rev. 20:1-15) is because he is also a God

of grace. Simply put, he has not come in judgment because if he were to come none could possibly stand before him. At this point it's important to look at what God promises to do.

First, he promises to send his “messenger, who will prepare the way before him.” The New Testament identifies the “my messenger” of 3:1 as none other than John the Baptist (see Matt. 11:10, Mk. 1:2, Lk. 7:27). Malachi's messenger is the forerunner of the Messiah. The second promise is that God will come himself. This is an astonishing promise because it is one thing for God to send a messenger, but yet another entirely to come himself in the person of his Son. The Lord himself taught this when he eventually came—four hundred years after the age of Malachi. Jesus had returned to Nazareth after his baptism by John and his temptation by Satan, to begin his ministry, and he went into the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath. He was asked to take part in the service and was given the scroll of Isaiah from which he was to read the day's lesson. He unrolled it, found the sixty-first chapter and read:

.....
The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
.....

If you know the story, after this Jesus announced that this remarkable prophecy had been fulfilled in himself. He was the One who had come to do these things, as God had promised. But the remarkable thing about Jesus' handling of this passage is what he did not read. If you look at Isaiah 61, you find that the very next line of the prophecy, indeed the completion of the sentence with which Jesus stopped, says: "and the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa. 61:2). Vengeance or Judgment is part of Isaiah's great prophecy but it did not come with Jesus' first appearing. Indeed, by his very citation of this prophecy he indicated that a day of grace would precede the final judgment.



GOD IS GENEROUS

The beginning of this section starts out with the immutability of God. The theological doctrine of immutability essentially means that, being perfect, God cannot and does not change. In order to change, a moral being must change in either of two ways: either he must change for the better, or for the worse. God cannot get better because that would mean that he was less than perfect earlier, in which case he would not have been God. But God cannot get worse either because in that case he would become imperfect, which he cannot be. Why is this relevant? Because the people of God can and must change. It is the unchangeableness of God that gives us a chance to change. God always presents an invitation for people to return to him. The invitation to return (v. 7) which could also be called “to repent” was met with the question: “How are we to return?” Malachi doesn’t technically answer this question here, because his whole book and ministry was basically one of telling people how to get right with God. However, he does provide two key insights for changing: 1) giving to and for God’s mission and 2) serving in and for God’s mission.

The principle of tithing to and for the mission and kingdom of God is paramount for the people of God. For Israel, tithing was being fiscally responsible with what God has given, and not tithing was tantamount to “robbing from God.” However, truth be told, robbing from God is not only taking what’s not yours to take, but keep-

ing back for yourself what belongs to someone else. In the case of giving to the mission of God, holding back is typically just spiritual disobedience and apathy to God's mission, that is, the ongoing work of the Lord through the local church. Robbing from God was really an indictment on the hearts of the people, and God condemning the whole nation suggests that this "robbery" was a rather widespread abuse of his generosity. Most churches still fall under this indictment; their budgets are generally nowhere near 10% of the income of the members.

In vv. 10-12 there is a promise of blessing that's attached with God's challenge of giving. Note that there's no "magical formula" being taught in these verses, such as we "give to God to get from God." Rather, we are urged to give to the work of God not for ourselves, but because of what he is doing for others through his church. The apostle Paul, for example, instructs New Testament believers on the necessity of regularly and proportionately supporting the work of the Lord (see 1 Cor. 16:1-2). Moreover, the Old Testament tithe which Malachi's speaking to is not the upper limit. Christians are urged to "excel in this grace of giving" (2 Cor 8:7), remembering that they owe everything to the one who for their sake "made himself nothing" (Phil. 2:7; see 2 Cor. 8:9).

Lastly, vv. 13-14 reveal the essential problem with giving and serving: Unfaithfulness.

The sin of the people was essentially a lack of trust in God. Malachi's audience was viewing God as unfair and the keeping of the law as a useless exercise because there is clearly no benefit. Verse 15 is essentially restating the age-old dilemma: Why do the evil prosper and the righteous suffer? Even though Malachi doesn't give the exact answer, the people are acting out opposite to Job. Even in the midst of grief, frustration and anguish, like Job, we can ask questions of God while still being faithful. Our circumstances shouldn't shake our faith in the heart of God, however.



GOD IS PRESENT

In this section of text we have Malachi speaking about those covenant believers who properly reverence the Lord and love him. As God had heard the “harsh” words of the arrogant in v. 13, he also “listened and heard” the words of the faithful. The Lord refers to his remnant of followers as a treasured possession. To the believers, God promises to reveal the distinction between them and those who do not serve God. In the ancient Israelite covenant, the symbol of circumcision points to covenant affiliation, but it was never intended to replace personal faith. The people of God, whether they are circumcised in the Old Covenant or baptized in the New Covenant, are saved by grace alone through faith alone. Those who have merely a said faith rather than a true faith will be revealed, just as Jesus’ parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46.

In chapter 4 Malachi gets eschatological in the sense that he figuratively reveals what God will do at the final judgment. The image of a furnace, used earlier (in 3:2), reappears in this portrayal. Note that earlier the image was used to describe a future work of purging or purifying, as a result of which God would cleanse his people and establish a generation of those who would live righteously and worship him in truth. It is the kind of discipline Jesus spoke of through his use of the image of the vine and its branches. He spoke of trimming the branches (Jn. 15:2). It is a blessed thing for God’s people,

though painful. However, the second use of the image of a furnace (in 4:1) is quite different. Here the object of the burning is not purification but rather the destruction of the wicked. This to be sure is a judgment to be feared.

The church fathers from Justin Martyr (100-165A.D.) onward have almost universally understood the “sun of righteousness” to be Christ. Martin Luther in particular said, “Under the Law there is weakness and condemnation; under the wings of Christ, under the Gospel, there is strength and salvation.” This is proper theology and the earlier prophecy of God’s sending a messenger to prepare the way before him (Mal. 3:1) does and should encourage us to think forward to the coming of Jesus. The end of the section, for Christians, is meant to establish us and encourage our obedience to fall into the grace of God with faithful hearts.

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GOD IS ETERNAL

In closing the book of Malachi and furthermore, the Old Testament, God gives the Israelites the following instructions: First, to remember. Remember the law which contains the statues and rules for all of Israel, which God gave to Moses at Horeb. What is the significance of this? The Israelites needed to be reminded because unbeknownst to them, God would not speak to them through a prophet again for 400 years. They needed to be diligent in studying the law in the meantime, so as to guard themselves against temptation and to unite as a people of God.

The Israelites were also to look forward expectantly and with hope to another prophet, John the Baptist who would be as great as Elijah and who would pave the way for the arrival of Christ. John Calvin says, “The first thing is, that God reminds the Jews for what purpose he would send John, even to turn the hearts of men and to restore them to a holy unity of faith. It must therefore be noticed, that not only the Redeemer would come, but that after some intermission, as it has been said, had taken place, the doctrine of salvation would again have its own course, and would be commenced by John.”

We too as New Testament believers, need to remember and to behold. To remember what Christ did for all on the cross and to behold the day when he will return. Those who are in Christ will be with him forever in Heaven, while those who have turned their backs on him will be left to destruction.

John Piper states, “The great temptation for Israel in the Old Testament and for the church of Christ today is to forget that we are pilgrims not natives in this world. The temptation is to let the Lord’s delay make us settle into the world and become passive as we wait; to forget that we are aliens and exiles, sojourners, strangers on the earth, seeking another homeland, desiring and yearning for a better country (Heb. 11:13-16).” We would be wise to heed these words

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GOD IS COMPLEX: Introduction | Malachi 1.1

1. What has been your experience and/or opinion of the OT? Have you ever read or heard of Malachi?
2. What did you learn about the history of God’s people today? What surprised, impressed, or disturbed you?
3. According to scripture what is a Prophet? How does God speak to us now?
4. Why do you think God was silent for 400 years before speaking through John the Baptizer?
5. Read the table of contents. Of all God’s “rhetorical” questions, which one is most challenging or most intriguing? Why?

GOD IS MERCIFUL: How have you loved us? | Malachi 1.2-5

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged, intrigued, challenged?
2. How does the story of Jacob and Esau make you feel? See Gen 25.
3. In verse 2, what does God teach us about Himself and His relationship with us?
4. How does Deut 7:6-11 and Rom 9:9-18, help us understand the nature of God’s mercy and grace.

5. What experiences or circumstances have led you to doubt God's love? According to 2 Cor 5:14-15 how does the Gospel transform our response?

**GOD IS WORTHY ¹: How have we despised your name?
Malachi 1.6-14**

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged, intrigued, challenged?
2. How do the images of God as father and God as master make you feel? Which one do you struggle with most? Why?
3. From reading God's condemnations, what do we learn pastors and deacons should and should not do? How have you seen this played out in your church experiences?
4. How can religion serve to despise God's name according to Col 2:20-23 and 3 Tim 3:5?
5. Read 1 Peter 2:5-10. How do these verses change your perspective on who God is talking to in this section of Malachi? What is God asking you to change?

**GOD IS WORTHY ²: How have we despised your name?
Malachi 2.1-9**

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged, intrigued, challenged?

STUDY QUESTIONS

2. How do you respond to God smearing feces on the face of irreverent priests? How does Exodus 29:1-14 help you understand God's purposes in this action?
3. Read Numbers 25:6-13. What does the story of Phineas tell us about the nature of God's covenant with Levi - what does God want from His people?
4. Where has God called you to represent His truth and maintain purity of worship like a priest? How are you doing?
5. When and how have your actions or attitudes towards God and His holiness caused others to stumble? According to Titus 2:11-14 where is hope for change?

GOD IS FAITHFUL: How have we polluted you?

Malachi 2.10-16

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged, intrigued, challenged?
2. How does God say His people have profaned their covenant relationship with God? What does this communicate about the value and nature of the marriage covenant?
3. In verse 16 God uses violence to describe divorce. How does this make you feel ? What experience do you have with this?

4. Why are God's people crying at the altar?
Why is God unresponsive to their pleas?
What does this tell us about our relationship
with God and each other? See 1 Peter 3:7.
5. Discuss how we individually fulfill the com-
mand in verse 16 to "guard yourselves in your
spirit, and do not be faithless."?

**GOD IS REFINING: How have we wearied you?
Malachi 2.17-3.5**

1. What part of the text or sermon had the
greatest impact on you? Where were you
most encouraged, intrigued, challenged?
2. What has God grown tired of hearing from
His people? Why does God allow injustice?
3. Where have you experienced injustice? How
have you exercised injustice? How does
God's judgment of injustice make you feel?
4. What is the purpose of God sending a mes-
senger prior to his coming? What does this
tell us about God?
5. How do you know you are being refined? Ac-
cording to verse 5 what does it look like to be
refined? Read Matt 10:28.

GOD IS GENEROUS: How have we robbed you?

Malachi 3.6-15

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged, intrigued, challenged?
2. God’s call to repent is in fact a call to return to Him, how does this affect your view of repentance?
3. God equates a refusal to give with robbery. Robbing from God is not only taking what is not yours but withholding what belongs to Him. How does this make you feel?
4. This passage is often abused by many churches/preachers. Rather than ignoring passages like this discuss principles for giving found in the New Testament.
(Example 2 Cor 8-9).
5. How have you found your view of money changing at various points of your life? How has your view been changed or affirmed as a result of the sermon/text?

GOD IS PRESENT: How have we spoken against you?

Malachi 3.16-4-3

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged, intrigued, challenged?
2. Who is written in the “book of remembrance?” Why?

3. How does it make you feel to be called “my treasured possession” by God? What helps you believe this and what causes you to doubt this?
4. What does this text teach us about the eternal destiny of those who do not fear the Lord? Why is this difficult to believe? Why is this important to believe?
5. How does the truth of this passage affect your heart for the lost? What is God calling you to do next?

GOD IS ETERNAL: How shall we return? | Malachi 4.4-6

1. What part of the text or sermon had the greatest impact on you? Where were you most encouraged, intrigued, challenged?
2. What has God called His people to remember? Why does God ask us to look backward at what He has done?
3. These are the last words God speaks to His people for 400 years. How should we respond when God is silent?
4. What is the “great and awesome day of the Lord?” What does he intend to accomplish? How?
5. Which of God’s hard answers to easy questions impacted you most?



APPENDICES

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

APPENDIX 1

- I. Heading 1:1
- II. Oracle one: Yahweh's love for Israel 1:2-5
- III. Oracle two: The priests' illicit practices and indifferent attitudes 1:6—2:9
 - A. The priests' sins 1:6-14
 - 1. Disrespectful service 1:6-7
 - 2. Disqualified sacrifices 1:8-10
 - 3. Disdainful attitudes 1:11-14
 - B. The priests' warning 2:1-9
- IV. Oracle three: The people's mixed marriages and divorces 2:10-16
- V. Oracle four: The problem of God's justice 2:17—3:6
- VI. Oracle five: The people's sin of robbing God 3:7-12
- VII. Oracle six: The arrogant and the humble 3:13—4:3
 - A. The people's arrogance 3:13-15
 - B. The remnant's humility 3:16
 - C. The coming judgment of Israel 3:17—4:3
- VIII. Concluding promise and warning 4:4-6

Malachi is the thirtieth-ninth book of the Old Testament. Malachi's name means, *my messenger*, which is probably an abbreviated form of the messenger of the Lord. Malachi is best known as the last book of the Old Testament. This book contains promises of the coming of the Messiah, or Messenger of the Covenant. Malachi lived after the temple had been rebuilt and the worship restored, but he found the people sinning in various ways, and his ministry was addressed to their consciences to turn them back to God.

Listed below are questions on the book of Malachi. These questions can be used to help your children gain a greater understanding of this important book. 🌿

MALACHI CHAPTER 1

1. Who was the word of the Lord given to, according to verse one of this book? **VERSE 1:1**
2. What did God claim for Israel in verse two of this book? **VERSE 1:2**
3. What was the judgment of Edom, according to verses three through five? **VERSES 1:3-5**
4. What was God's complaint against Israel in these verses of this book? **VERSES 1:6-14**
5. How were the priests implicated in contemptible worship practices in verses eight through ten? **VERSES 1:8-10**

6. What worship would honor the Lord Almighty, according to verse eleven? **VERSE 1:11**
7. What was the attitude of the priests in Malachi's day in verses twelve and thirteen? **VERSES 1:12-13**
8. How were the people cheating the Lord in verse fourteen of this chapter? **VERSE 1:14**

MALACHI CHAPTER 2

1. What was the warning to the priests in the first four verses of this chapter? **VERSES 2:1-4**
2. What covenant were the priests expected to keep in verses five through nine? **VERSES 2:5-9**
3. How had the priests failed in keeping and applying the law, according to verses five through nine? **VERSES 2:5-9**
4. How had God's people broken faith with Him in verses ten through twelve? **VERSES 2:10-12**
5. What was the consequence of Israel's sin, according to verse twelve? **VERSE 2:12**
6. What was additional evidence of a broken covenant in verses thirteen through sixteen? **VERSES 2:13-16**
7. What was God's view of divorce in verse sixteen? **VERSE 2:16**
8. What charge did God give His people, according to verse sixteen? **VERSE 2:16**

9. How had Israel wearied God, according to verse seventeen of this chapter? **VERSE 2:17**
10. How were the people oblivious to their sin in verse seventeen? **VERSE 2:17**

MALACHI CHAPTER 3

1. What warning did God give in the first five verses of this chapter? **VERSES 3:1-5**
2. What was the basis for hope in God, according to verse six of this chapter? **VERSE 3:6**
3. What did God require of Israel in verses seven through twelve? **VERSES 3:7-12**
4. How had Israel sinned against God in the past, according to verse seven? **VERSE 3:7**
5. What was the nature of the curse on the nation in verse nine? **VERSE 3:9**
6. What did God promise in verses ten through twelve of this chapter? **VERSES 3:10-12**
7. How had Israel challenged God, according to verses thirteen through fifteen? **VERSES 3:13-15**
8. How did the Lord respond to those who feared Him in verse sixteen? **VERSE 3:16**
9. What assurance was given to those who were faithful to the Lord in verse sixteen? **VERSE 3:16**

10. Why did the people of Malachi's time need to repent, according to these verses and chapters?
VERSE 3:16, VERSE 4:6
11. What promise did God give to His people in verse seventeen of this chapter? VERSE 3:17
12. What distinction did God make, according to verse eighteen? VERSE 3:18

MALACHI CHAPTER 4

1. What will happen to the wicked in the day of the Lord in verse one of this chapter? VERSE 4:1
2. What would the day of the Lord hold for God's remnant in verse two? VERSE 4:2
3. What will the righteous do to the wicked, according to verse three? VERSE 4:3
4. Why did the prophet tell the people to recall the Law of Moses in verse four? VERSE 4:4
5. What did God promise through Malachi, according to verses five and six? VERSES 4:5-6
6. What major theme of the prophets did Malachi's last words reflect in verse six? VERSE 4:6

Pastoring Your Family

Deuteronomy 6 teaches that the parents of children, not the church, are primarily responsible for teaching their children about God. Many of us have failed in our God-given responsibility to pastor our homes, abdicating it to other people, institutions, or groups. As a result, worship has become something we do for 20 minutes on a Sunday and prayer something that we do at meals or bedtime. As part of this study, we're encouraging families to become more intentional in their worship of God together during the week.

Family Rhythm vs. Pharisaical Routine

An important part of leading your family is to develop a rhythm of worship for your family. Otherwise, it simply feels forced and unnatural every time. It is important to start implementing new practices slowly, especially if this is a new concept for your family. Without doubt, you can make a commitment each week to organize your schedule around a ONCE A WEEK family worship and Sabbath time. You might find it more effective, however, to weave some of the suggested practices throughout your already established routines (e.g. family meals, movie nights, etc.).

In other words, don't ignore God's command, but don't become a Pharisee about following them either (though legalism about such

things aren't necessarily our problem today). Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." In other words, an intentional time of Sabbath is a gift to be enjoyed. Jesus will not love you more if you practice the Sabbath...but be warned...you might start to enjoy and love Him more if you do!



Rhythm of Reading Together

Read the passage of Malachi that we are studying in church. This can be accomplished during the morning, before dinner, or even during the meal! Read the verse (s) and discuss 1) what it says, 2) what it means, and 3) how we can apply it to our lives. Obviously, the depth of these discussions will depend on the ages and personalities of the children. The point is not that you learn everything there is to know in a given passage. The point is that you demonstrate it is important to spend time discussing God's Word together.

Rhythm of Learning Together

Obviously, reading the same passage each day or night can quickly lose its allure. You can always read other Scripture, but consider going over the verses your children get from Sunday school, memorizing a verse as a family, OR even teaching some theology through a KID'S Catechism found online (www.reformed.org) Be sensitive to the ages of your children,.

It may be difficult for younger children to sit for long periods of time if they are not used to it. If you have older children, also be flexible.

Rhythm of Eating Together

It is important to eat together as a family as much as possible because you can use this natural gathering time to talk about God. Occasionally, it is fun to eat a special meal together. Set apart a Saturday every now and then, as a special “FEAST” day. The intent of this part of the day is to enjoy creation, specifically, the amazing foods that God has given us. This part of the day will require pre-planning but it should be something you look forward to all day—smelling the aromas, seeing the colors, feeling the textures, etc. It can be a special BBQ outdoors, a dinner the family makes together, your family’s favorite meal, a unique experience (Fondue), or something simmering in a crock-pot all day.

Rhythm of Singing Together

Worship through song together, even if you’re not musical. Encourage your children to worship God with their voice by singing one or two short songs. Choose a song familiar to everyone OR teach them one. Try to sing this same song every week for a month so they learn it. You do not need instruments as God has given us all a powerful one. If you cannot think of any songs, allow your children to make some up. Write them down and sing them next week.

Rhythm of Playing Together

It has been said that the families that “pray” together stay together. I believe it is equally important to PLAY as a family together. Like the feast, this will require some pre-planning. It should be something the family will look forward to, something you talk about all week even if cryptically (“Sabbath is coming this Saturday!”). Your play time together can happen in the morning, afternoon, or evening. It can take the form of going on a field trip to Deception Pass, flying kites at a local park, riding a ferry, building a fort in the woods, watching a family movie, dancing together, playing a board game...anything! It does not need to take up the entire day, though it may sometimes. The activities don’t have to be expensive adventures, but some special ones might. They don’t have to be elaborate, but they do need to be consistent.

Rhythm of Praying Together

There are many ways to have a prayer time beyond just bowing our heads and hoping for the Spirit to move us to say something. Children, old and young, like a little structure to give them direction. A simple way to pray is to follow the **A.C.T.S** acronym. Prayer begins with **ADORATION** to God. Then, you **CONFESS** whatever intentional or unintentional sins that might be on your heart. Then, you **THANK** God for all of his blessings, for provision, and especially for salvation in Christ. And finally, you make **SUPPLICATIONS**

to God, presenting your needs and requests. Other suggestions include:

PRAY PRAISES AND HOPES: Kids enjoy hearing how much you love them. One way to have a prayer time is to speak truth to your children. Tell them what you appreciate about them but also how you hope they grow in their obedience to Jesus. Lay hands on your kids and pray over them together. The kids may want to do this for each other and for you. Let them.

PRAY NEEDS AND DESIRES: Allow your children to share prayer requests. Write down the requests and revisit them every time you get together. Be sure the requests are not ALL self-focused but speak to the mission of God as well. Additionally, make sure they are expressing their gratefulness for answered prayer.

PRAY THE LORD'S PRAYER: If they are very young, lead them in the recitation of the Lord's Prayer found in Luke 11 or Matthew 6. This might feel repetitive but it is teaching them important truths.

PRAY THROUGH THE ASPECTS OF THE LORD'S PRAYER: If they are older, use the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6, Luke 11) as a model to pray. For example, take time to express praises for God's attributes, pray for God's Will to be done in a difficult situation, pray for provision, for protection from temptation, forgiveness, etc.

PRAY THROUGH THE 10 COMMANDMENTS: Pray through one, two, or all of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20. Each of the commandments represents a different aspect where we fail to love God. Praying through the commandments should not only reveal our sin, but lead us to the cross.

PRAY A PSALM: One of the best ways to pray, especially when you can't find words, is to pray God's OWN Words back to Him. Pray a Psalm back to Jesus.



Prophetic Validation

Unlike a king or a priest, there was no lineage to determine if someone had the right to hold the position of prophet. A prophet was someone called specifically by God to act as his herald for a specific covenant people. Validation was important because the prophet was acting as the perfect representative of God. The prophets' words were God's words, which is why he began with phrases such as, "This is what the Lord (Yahweh) says" (Isa. 18:4; 21:6, 16; 31:4; Jer. 2:5; 4:3). So, how could the people be sure that a prophet was truly speaking God's words?

A PROPHET VALIDATED HIMSELF BY SUPERNATURAL SIGNS. Although supernatural signs were a validation of the prophet, they weren't a guarantee that someone wasn't a false prophet. Also, it was very rare for a prophet to validate himself through supernatural signs (Deut. 13:1).

A PROPHET VALIDATED HIMSELF BY HIS TEACHING AND ACTIONS. If a prophet had loose morals, practiced magic, lied in God's name, or ever told people to do something contrary to God's law then he was false (Jer. 23:14; Isa. 8:19; Jer. 14:14). Prophets didn't come up with off-the-wall teachings, but would confirm the teachings and predictions of other prophets. This connection of universal teaching validated the prophet.

A PROPHET IS VALIDATED WHEN EVERY ONE OF HIS PREDICTIONS CAME TRUE. For those predictions that would definitely come true but wouldn't occur for a long time,

there was still a method of validation. Sometimes the prophet would make a prediction that occurred within a short period of time, to act as a sign confirming the ultimate prophecy he was making. An example of this is the Emmanuel passage. There was an initial prediction that acted as a sign for the ultimate prediction (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). If a sign wasn't given, then specific dates would be set so people could confirm the prophecy (Ez. 4:5; Isa. 23:15, 17; 38:15; Jer. 25:11-12; 28:3; Dan. 9:2). If a prophet broke any of these rules of validation, then he wasn't to be listened to.

Prophetic Interpretation

When you are reading the Bible and want to understand prophecy there are some basic questions that need to be asked in order to interpret properly.

WHAT IS THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION THE PROPHET IS ADDRESSING? If a prophet focuses on coming destruction, then it probably refers to destruction specific to that time period (either Assyrian destruction or Babylonian destruction). If the prophet talks of coming restoration, then it may refer to the re-gathering to the land just after the period of the exile. Don't automatically take the prophetic words and throw them into the far future.

WHAT GROUP OF PEOPLE IS THE PROPHET SPEAKING TO? Is the prophet talking to the people of Judah, Northern Israel, or foreign nations? This question will

greatly affect your understanding of the passage. If the prophet is telling Israel that if they don't repent, they will be judged, then you can look in the time period of the prophetic writing to determine if a judgment did occur directly after the prophetic account.

WHAT TIME MARKERS ARE INDICATED FOR THE EVENT? There are three major events that are prophesied about in the Old Testament:

- **CONTEMPORARY PREDICTIONS:** *These would be blessings and curses for the people of that day if they didn't obey.*
- **LAST DAY PREDICTIONS:** *When you read the terms "end of days", "latter days", "time of the end", or "last days", it is almost without exception referring to the period from the Jewish exile to the period of the final temple destruction in AD 70 (Gen. 49:1; Num. 24:14; Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Job 42:12; Jer. 30:24; 48:47; Ezek. 38:8; Dan. 2:28; 10:14; Isa. 2:2; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1; Matt. 24; Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; James 5:3; 2 Pet. 3:3). "Last Days" refers to the days leading up to the end of the Jewish economy, Jewish Blessing, and the Mosaic Covenant. The period after "last days" is the period of the church. Usually the prophet will begin a section using this terminology to tell you what he is referring to.*

- **DAY OF THE LORD PREDICTIONS:** *The “Day of the Lord” refers to any form of God’s judgment. If there are no time markers to indicate otherwise (such as “last days”) then the Day of the Lord is referring to a contemporary judgment on the people of that day.*

WHAT COVENANT PEOPLE DO THE PROPHETIC PREDICTIONS REFER TO? This is a bit trickier to discern, but not as hard as one would think. All prophets that came before Christ were pointing to him as the ultimate hope and restoration. He was the ultimate blessing and fulfillment of the big three covenants: Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic. The book of Daniel predicted that at the end of the “latter days” (AD 70) all prophecies and predictions referring to the nation of Israel would cease (Dan. 9:24; 12:4). All prophecies up to that point were fulfilled in Christ.

However, when Christ came he initiated a New Covenant (Jer. 31:31; Lk. 22:20; 1 Co. 11:25; 2 Co. 3:6; Heb. 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24), and prophetically taught new blessings concerning that covenant. He was the prophet of both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. He had to legally fulfill the Old to establish the New. As prophet of the New Covenant, Christ gave prophetic gifts to his apostles, and gave new covenant predictions concerning the coming resurrection. So, if we don’t establish what group of covenant people is being addressed, it will mess up our prophetic interpretations.

Prophetic Techniques

Since the primary purpose of prophecy is to teach and motivate not to make random predictions, there are various methods of prophetic teaching in the Bible. It is important to learn how to distinguish between the various types in order to interpret the meaning correctly.

SYMBOLS: A symbol is some type of object lesson used by a prophet to teach truth. A symbol can be a supernatural sign or just an action taken by the prophet to express in pictures what something means. The symbol is not the truth, but represents the truth. An example of a symbol is the prophet Jeremiah wearing, burying, and recovering a linen waistcloth as a symbol of the nation's sin and corruption that made them liable for judgment (Jer. 13). Jeremiah was not trying to teach the people how to best wear a linen waistcloth. Some people who come to the scriptures ignorantly use these types of symbolism to make a mockery of the Bible, because they interpret incorrectly.

TYPES/ANTITYPES: In his book *Beginning at Moses*, Michael Barrett calls types "picture prophecies". A type is a specialized symbol. It is a symbol that represents an actual future event or reality. The reality to which they are pointing is called an antitype.

A good picture to understand these terms would be that the type is the letter on the page and the antitype is the wooden stamp.

Types are sometimes called shadows (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1). In interpreting types it must be understood that a type has no existence apart from the antitype.

Here are some examples of type/antitype relationships. The Jewish Temple was a type of the true temple which exists in heaven (Heb. 8:5). The calling of God's servant Israel from Egypt was a picture of the reality which was God's calling of his Son Jesus from Egypt. (Matt. 2:15).

There are many type/antitype relationships in the Bible. The easiest way to recognize them is to see how the New Testament interprets Old Testament Events.

FULFILLMENTS: In the Bible, the word fulfill is used many times and can be very confusing to even seasoned Bible readers. Both the Hebrew word "kalah" and the Greek word "pleroo" mean "to complete, accomplish, fill to the top". The key is to understand what is being fulfilled. There are two major types of fulfillments in the Bible.

POINT TO POINT PREDICTIONS. There are some amazing predictions in the Bible. A point-to-point prediction is when a prophet says that something specific is supposed to happen in a specific way in the future. The intent of the prophet's words is to predict with accuracy a future event. It may surprise some that most of the prophecies in the Bible are not point-to-point predictions. Many misunderstandings involved

in prophecy stem from the belief that all prophecies fit this category, causing much confusion.

A great example of this type of prophecy is the prophecy of Ezekiel 26 concerning the destruction of Tyre. This chapter makes some specific predictions:

1. Nebuchadnezzar will raise a siege against Tyre, and destroy the mainland. (26:8)
2. Many nations will be against Tyre. (26:3)
3. Tyre will be made a bare rock, flattened completely. (26:4)
4. Fishermen will spread their nets over the site. (26:5)
5. Debris will be scraped off and thrown into the water. (26:12)
6. Tyre never will be rebuilt as before. (26:14)

Three years after this prediction King Nebuchadnezzar laid a siege to mainland Tyre lasting 13 years (585-573 BC). Eventually he broke through the walls and found the city practically empty. The people had moved miles off the coast of Tyre to an island and built a city there. It wasn't until hundreds of years later that Alexander the Great came up against Tyre. In order to get to the Island of Tyre, he destroyed mainland Tyre to the ground and used the debris to build a 200-foot wide causeway all the way out to the island. History records that they scraped

even the dust off the site to fill in the causeway. Today, Tyre exists but not on that same site. Fishermen use the flat rock to lay out their nets. This is an amazing prediction. However, this is not what most prophecies look like in the Bible.

PICTURE PROPHECIES. This second type of prophecy is most common, particularly for prophecies related to the Messiah. The prophets condemned Israel for their disobedience, but constantly pointed to a hope of restoration. That hope would come in someone who fulfilled everything necessary for salvation.

If you go to a bar and order a pint of Red Hook, the bar tender will fill your glass to the top. However, when the fizz dies down you realize it is only 80 percent full. You ask the bartender to “top it off”. This is how most of the prophecies worked out from Old Testament to New Testament. There were people, places, and events that happened to give us a picture of a potential ideal. However, they weren’t perfect. When Christ came he “topped off” each ideal and made them perfect. Christ was not just a good prophet, priest, king, servant, etc., he was the perfectly fulfilled prophet, priest, king, servant, etc. There is a great amount of rich material we can learn from picture prophecies.



A FINAL WORD

Remember that having a family Sabbath time does not make your family less sinful. In other words, don't build up unrealistic expectations for this evening. You will find that some nights will be incredible and others will be terrible. Some nights little Johnny will behave like an angel while during other times, he may act and sound like a Demon. The successful leading of your family is not always going to end in a perfectly planned and organized road to spiritual formation.

The value is in your commitment to lead your family because it honors God to do so. From your commitment, or lack thereof, your children will see what is valuable to you. Every family will plan, approach, and implement their rhythms differently. While everyone's experiences may not all work out the same way, everyone must work them out.



