

MINING THE BIBLE



Malachi

“The Bible is not a child’s storybook; rather it is great literature that requires thoughtful response. All its diamonds do not lie exposed on the surface. Its richness is mined only through hard intellectual and spiritual spadework.”

Haddon Robinson, Expository Preaching

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ABOUT 'MINING THE BIBLE'

Aim

The aim of these studies is twofold. Firstly, they're designed to help you get to grips with the main message and applications of Malachi as a book. There's a second aim though, which is to help equip you to learn to study the Bible for yourself.

How it works

Each study has two sections: Questions and Summary. The questions for each study are intended to get you thinking about the most important things that the author wants us to understand from each passage. After each of the studies there's a short summary which explains the main point of the passage - but try not to skip straight to this if you're finding one of the questions difficult. Studying the Bible takes thought and isn't always easy, but it's important that you have patience and work hard at understanding it for yourself. If you get really stuck and confused and feel you need the help of the explanation, then do make sure you refer back to the passage again as you read it so that you can see where the points come from in the text.

Some of the longer studies are split into two sets of questions and application. This gives you the option of breaking them into two separate studies if you prefer.

As you go through the studies, you'll occasionally come across these symbols:



#PRINCIPLE

This symbol accompanies a key principle to learn for studying the Bible.



#METHOD

This symbol accompanies a method which you might find helpful for studying the Bible.

You'll also occasionally come across blank pages with this faded symbol in the middle:



This is to keep the summaries at the end of each study separate from the questions, to help you avoid the temptation of looking across the page for the answers without first working hard at the passage yourself! You could use this space to make notes.

Note on translations

These studies were prepared from the ESV, and it's recommended that you use either that or a translation with a similar level of accuracy to the original wording of the Biblical languages. Without going into all the reasons for this, an important one is that such translations often help make connections between ideas in different passages easier to pick up on because a common word is translated consistently.

Introduction to Malachi

In the study guide to Micah, we began to think about some of the specific principles and methods that help us mine the riches of the prophetic genre. The idea of this booklet is to help reinforce some of those tools, while adding a few more to your repertoire (and, of course, getting to grips with the main message of Malachi). If you've not yet completed the Micah booklet, you should still be able to get a lot out of what's here; but get the most out of it, you might want to start there.

Enjoy!

More study guides can be found at www.miningthebible.co.uk.

OVERVIEW STUDY

Questions:

Read through the whole of Malachi (ideally a couple of times). Have the questions below in mind as you read through, then try to answer them.

- 1) Recall #METHOD – Figuring out the prophetic setting (Micah booklet). What can we deduce from the content of Malachi's messages about when he was prophesying?**
- 2) How would you summarise the mood of the people of Israel and their attitude towards God?**
- 3) What about how God feels about them?**
- 4) How would you break down the structure of this book into 4-7 sections? Try to ignore the divisions in this booklet and think about a few different ways you could split it up.**
- 5) Recall #METHOD – Repeated words/phrases. What are some of the repeated words/ideas that run through the book?**



BACKGROUND TO MALACHI

How do you cope with disappointment in the Christian life? That's an important question, because if we're honest, there are plenty of reasons why we might be tempted to become disillusioned with the Christian faith, aren't there? We read the Bible and we become passionate about the power of the gospel for salvation - and we go and we tell our friends - and find that lots of them are hardened, and don't want to hear. We read about how God care for us as His children and delights to give us good gives when we ask Him, and so we passionately bring our requests before God; and yet after months of praying He still doesn't seem to have given us what we think we need. We read how Jesus said that the gates of hell would never prevail against His church; and yet we see the liberalism of our culture devastatingly sweeping through so many Western denominations. We see mega-churches teaching the prosperity gospel, and we feel small and outnumbered. We read about God's compassion for us; and yet we suffer; maybe physically, maybe emotionally, maybe both. Life doesn't go the way we thought it would, and there seems to be no reason for it that we can see.

How do you respond when your experience of the Christian life doesn't seem to match up to what you expected it to be like? How do you deal with that disappointment?

The book of Malachi is a set of prophecies sent from God to His people, at a time when they were massively disappointed. Because they had not dealt with that disappointment well at all. Unlike some other prophets, we're not given any indication of the historical setting by the opening verses, but there are various hints of the context within the book; that there's a governor in Israel (not a king), problems with intermarriage (c.f. Ezra 9-10, Neh. 13:23-27) and an apparently functioning temple seem to place Malachi a short time after the return from exile.

If you've read any of Ezra, Nehemiah or Esther, you will know that life was not easy for those returned exiles. They were small. They were surrounded by opposition. And when the rebuilding of the temple was finished, those who had been alive to see the previous one (before it was destroyed) wept, because of how rubbish it was in comparison. Of course, God had provided for them in amazing ways through all of

that. But there were plenty of temptations to be discouraged; to think that what they were experiencing did not match up to the glorious return from exile that prophets (like Micah, if you've done the previous study guide) had foretold.

Here in Malachi's day, we find all that had taken its toll. Disappointment had led to disillusionment, which in turn had led to half-heartedness. 3:13-15 summarise the heart of the people's attitude; they didn't see any difference between how God was treating them and the wicked nations around them, and so they didn't see any point in worshipping whole-heartedly.

In short, we're looking back on Israel at a point when their relationship with God was really on the rocks; even though they actually didn't seem to realise it. In fact, reading the book of Malachi is a little bit like eavesdropping on a really awkward clear-the-air relationship chat; the kind of conversation that begins "we need to talk" (which we know immediately is probably not a good sign!). That's very much the tone of Malachi from the outset. God is the one initiating it; He's bringing the complaints. However, in classic soap opera fashion, the people of Israel are defensive and seem to be totally unaware that there is a problem...

STUDY 1: 1:1-5

Questions:



#METHOD – Using the footnotes.

Depending on what Bible version you're using, you may or may not find various words and sentences commented on in footnotes. Often these notes will tell you a more literal meaning of a word or phrase when an English version has helpfully attempted to convey the sense of, for example, an idiom in the original language that doesn't easily translate, or a word that would have had slightly different connotations for a Hebrew reader than it does for us. It can sometimes be helpful to look at these translation footnotes, as they can reveal wordplays in the original languages which might be obscured by a smoother translation.

1) Most translations will tell you in a footnote that Malachi's name means 'My messenger'. Could the meaning of Malachi's name have significance? As you read through the whole book in the Overview study, did you spot any other references to 'messengers'?



#PRINCIPLE – What's in a name?

You might be surprised how often the meaning of the names of characters in the Bible give us a clue about what is going on in the passages they're found in.

Let's just log that idea for now and make a note to come back to it later in the book...

2) Considering Israel's history, how reasonable is the people's question back to God in the second sentence of v2?

3) Why does God answer by referring to Jacob, Esau and Edom?

a) What kind of people were Jacob and Esau? (See Gen. 25:19-28:9)

Note: the contrasting language of 'love' and 'hate' in Hebrew is often used without the emotional connotations that those words have in English; they're more a matter-of-fact statement of whether or not someone is favoured.

b) On what basis did God choose to show favour to Jacob? (See Gen. 25:23; Rom. 9:10-13).

c) Edom was the nation that formed out of the descendants of Esau. According to Obadiah 10-15, what had Edom done and what had God promised to do?

d) In v3-5, what present evidence is there, and what future evidence will there be, to back up God's statement at the start of v2?

e) How do these opening verses relate to Israel's complaint that God treats His people no differently?

4) Have a go at coming up with a short summary sentence for 1:1-5.

Application:

1) When do you find yourself wondering if God really loves you? The next time that happens, how will remembering Malachi 1:1-5 affect the amount of sympathy you have with yourself?

2) How is God's patience evident in the way that He replies to the question of v2? How will that comfort you in those same situations?