

Most of life is not lived in crisis - which is a good thing. Not many of us would be able to sustain a life of perpetual pain or loss or ecstasy or challenge. But crisis has this to say for it: In time of crisis everything, absolutely everything, is important and significant. Life itself is on the line. No word is casual, no action marginal. And almost always, God and our relationship with God is on the front page.

But during the humdrum times, when things are, as we tend to say, "normal," our interest in God is crowded to the margins of our lives and we become preoccupied with ourselves. "Religion" during such times is trivialized into asking "God-questions" - calling God into question or complaining about him, treating the worship of God as a mere hobby or diversion, managing our personal affairs (such as marriage) for our own convenience and disregarding what God has to say about them, going about our usual activities as if God were not involved in such dailiness.

The prophecy of Malachi is made to order for just such conditions. Malachi creates a crisis at a time when we are unaware of crisis. He wakes us up to the crisis of God during the times when the only thing we are concerned with is us. He keeps us on our toes, listening for God, waiting in anticipation for God, ready to respond to God, who is always coming to us.

Malachi gets in the last word of Holy Scripture in the Old Testament. The final sentences in his message to us evoke the gigantic figures of Moses and Elijah - Moses to keep us rooted in what God has done and said in the past, Elijah to keep us alert to what God will do in the days ahead.

By leaving us in the company of mighty Moses and fiery Elijah, Malachi considerably reduces the danger of our trivializing matters of God and the soul.

(Eugene H. Peterson. *The Invitation: A Simple Guide to the Bible*)

One hundred years after exile, the Israelites who had returned to Jerusalem were as evil and corrupt as their ancestors. The book of Malachi addresses their corruption regarding issues like sacrifices, marriage and tithing. It also affirms that God does love His people and will fulfill prophecy.

The entire Scripture is one unified story that tells us the truth about the human condition and sin while announcing God's promise to one day send a messenger and then show up personally. He will defeat evil and purify a faithful remnant, establish a New Jerusalem and bring peace, healing and justice forever. It's that promise that prompts God's people to denounce sin, remain faithful to His covenant and hope for the future.

(The Bible Project: <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/malachi/>)

**READ MALACHI 3-4**

### *Opening*

- When told, “Eat whatever food you find in the house,” what do you look for? What is your reaction if its not there?
- When caught with your hand in the cookie jar, how do you react?
- From your appointment book, what are you eagerly anticipating three months from now? What are you dreading? How are you preparing for these due dates?

### *Digging in —Discovering the Word*

- How had Malachi’s peers robbed God? With what results?
- How does the Lord challenge the people to put him to the test (vv.10-12)?
- What was futile about worshipping God with a “whats-on-it-for-me” attitude?
- How will everyone get their just desserts in the end (vv.16-18)?
- What distinguishes the righteous from the wicked?
- Is the Day of the Lord inked, penciled or not even on their calendars? Why or why not?
- As Malachi is the last prophet until the New Testament, what is the importance of verses 4-5?

### *Connecting the Dots — Applying the Word*

- When have you struggled with bad things happening to good people?
- What does it feel like to be in a relationship with such a God who “does not change”?
- How does this statement about God fit with stories like we find in Genesis 6 (God regrets having made man), Genesis 18 (God seems willing to change his mind in talking with Abraham) and Jonah 3 (God changes his mind about punishing Nineveh).
- In what ways do you rob God every day? What tithe do you need to offer? Accordingly, rewrite v10-12 as personal promises to you from God.
- Reread the Q & A portions of Malachi. Rewrite them for your church. What images and issues would a modern Malachi hit home with?
- What might the phrase Day of the Lord mean to an average person walking down the street?
- What one things have you learned from Malachi? What one application are you making?

(adapted from the Serendipity Bible and The Invitation by Eugene Peterson)