



*Losing touch*  
with the *Living God*

Malachi



**Leaders' Notes**  
**Term 2 2023**

# Malachi - Losing Touch with the Living God

## LEADERS' NOTES

Prepare your study and answers before looking at the notes, which are only intended to provide assistance on particular questions. Not all avenues have been explored. Rather, the notes provide examples of how the question may be answered. You may find they lead into other questions that your group needs to come to grips with.

LEADERS don't have to know all the answers. It can be helpful to admit our deficiencies and allow others to minister to us!

### STUDY ONE HOW CAN I BE SURE GOD LOVES ME?

#### MALACHI 1:1-5 Section A    BIBLE SEARCH

1. ....Israelites, .....God .....Malachi
2. They doubt that he really loves them.
3. ....Abram, ....Moses at Mt Sinai, ....David
4. Great is the Lord. He is the ruler over all the nations

#### \*\*\*\*\* ACTIVITY \*\*\*\*\*

Divide the group into groups of three. One will be the narrator of Psalm 18. The other two will be the actors. Spend 5-10 minutes to discuss and practise what the two actors will do to mime the action of their section. vss 1-6, 7-15, 16-24, 25-32, 33-45, 46-50

Each group presents its mime and the narrator shares what they learnt from their section of the Psalm.

#### Section B    DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. a) No. It's what we do with our questioning that is important. We need to use it to draw closer to God, not withdraw from him. Often when we express our doubt or rage at God then we are emotionally released and able to put our trust in God again.

People from the Bible who questioned and doubted - Job, Thomas John 20:24-29 Abraham, Moses, Peter. They asked questions of God but each retained their relationship with God. The Psalms illustrate how, when we express our despair, we can still remember God's faithfulness in the past. Psalm 13, 22, 77, 88, 102, 130, 137.

b) \* Support them practically

Spend time with them, comfort them, be available for them, let them talk through their situation, make a meal/cake/biscuits, help them with some project they're doing around the house, invite them over, send or give a card/gift, ring them over an extended period of time just to check how they are going, be patient and loving etc.

\* Seek to encourage them spiritually

Pray for them, with them (if you are able to), if appropriate read verses assuring us of God's concern for us. (Hebrews 13:5b,6; 1 John 5:14; James 1:2-6,12)

Share with them a difficult situation you faced, when it was hard to trust God.

DO NOT SAY "I know how you feel." Rather, something like:

I imagine what you are facing is extremely difficult. When I was in the situation when this ..... happened I found it helpful.....

c) Don't force anyone to contribute. You may like to share an incident in your life and then ask if there is anyone else who would like to share with the group.

2. Get your members to think about the areas that society and the church impinge upon their relationship with God in a negative way. Ask for answers.

\*\*\* (Write people's responses on a chart, attach to a wall using Blu Tac) \*\*\*

\* Commitment to God ineffectual - Society's attitude "do your own thing", when the going gets tough, dump it!; morals of loyalty and faithfulness now obsolete - these all subtly affect us.

\* Things of the world clamour for our attention and allegiance... e.g. sport, money, family, prestige, power, job, clubs, clothing and obsession with how we look, business, possessions, craft, conforming to what the world expects of us. (None of these are necessarily wrong. Its when they take over God's place in our lives then we are in danger of "Losing Touch With The Living God.") Colossians 3:1-3

\* Disobedience, not obeying God or allowing his Spirit to work in our lives. James 1:22, 4:7,8. Titus 2:11,12,

\* Religion replaces relationship. Man made laws, rules, rituals distract us. Col 2:20-22

\* Lack of support and encouragement from fellow believers. Colossians 3:13,14. 2 Corinthians 1:4, Romans 15:5-7

3. You will need to explain why Jesus' death was necessary.

All have sinned, separated from God, do things our own way. All are guilty of rejecting him. Romans 3:23.

We can never earn our acceptance with God, we always fail. Being good doesn't mean that we deserve to be accepted by God. Romans 3:27

Jesus' death, as a substitute for us, was necessary to restore us to a relationship with God. Only because of what he has done does God now find us acceptable. Col 1:21,22; 1 John 5:12; John 3:16.

4. Our attitude to our families, church and society would be marked by a deep affection, concern and zeal for their spiritual welfare.

Our church would be mission minded. We would be eager to point people to Christ. Our churches and families would be loving and unified.

Our society would notice that we are "salt" Matthew 5:13 and we would have an influence for good upon it.

5. Record answers on a chart.

CONCLUDE the session using the points from Psalm 139 as a PRAYER

## STUDY 2 Malachi 1: 6-14

## Is My Worship Barren?

From earliest biblical times people gave offerings to God -  
Abel (Gen 4:3-4) presented the first fruits of his flock;  
Noah (Gen 8:20-22) gave a thank offering after the flood;  
Abraham (Gen 22:1-19) was willing to offer his only son.

In the nation of Israel, a range of sacrifices expressed various facets of the worship of the people and remained a characteristic of their worship, even when their hearts had strayed from a deep commitment to the covenant relationship which these sacrifices were meant to signify.

### A. BIBLE SEARCH

1. ....honours his father, ...his master
2. Priests were showing contempt to God by presenting offerings that, under their law, were unacceptable.
- 3.i) defiled food, sacrificed diseased animals (No good for anything else!)
  - \* Sacrifice is the giving up of something we genuinely value in order to express our devotion to God. The "sacrificing" of diseased animals was like offering someone as a birthday present the contents of our rubbish bin.\*
- ii) no respect for God yet expect him to be gracious to them.
  - \* They would have been too afraid to offer a governor what they were offering God. Too thoughtless to even see that their worship was unacceptable and irreverent.\*
- iii) burdensome (to come to worship God was just a chore)
  - \* They despised the work God gave them. Sacrifices polluted by their attitude.
- iv) Pretend to give proper sacrifice to keep up appearances.
  - \* The sacrifices came from people who did not really want to give God anything. The animals were blemished. They were offered by

priests who despised their work. The whole thing was a mindless ritual.

4. He is a great king, his name is to be feared among the nations. No one is like God, majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders.

\*\*\*\*\*ACTIVITY\*\*\*\*\*

Form two groups and make a collage (words, pictures, symbols etc) representing Isaiah 1:11-15 and 16-19

B. BIBLE DISCUSSION

1. The Old Testament sacrificial system was temporary. Via priests, sacrifices were continually offered to atone for sins. A barrier existed between mankind and God.

Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, once and for all. Our acceptance of his sacrifice is the only atonement that we need for sin. See Romans 3:25. Jesus opened up the way to access with God. See Ephesians 2:13 Through prayer we can come directly into his presence. See Hebrews 10:19-22.

2.

- \* By taking our focus off Christ and the authority of the Bible.
- \* Allowing non essentials to be elevated to gospel issues e.g wearing of Clerical robes.
- \* By imposing manmade ideas, rules, regulations and traditions that become ritual activity but don't involve our heart, mind or will.
- \* By not encouraging each other in our commitment to God.
- \* By not admonishing each other, when necessary, about our life style, priorities, behaviour and commitment.

3. Sacrifice = slaughter of an animal as an offering to God.

= giving up of a valued thing for another.

Sacrifices and offerings restored the broken relationship between God and man.

a) Choose 3 people to read the verses and comment upon them.

\* Our attitude to God is more important than what we offer him.

These verses remind us that the sacrifice component of worship is still valid in the Christian era. Our bodies are to be presented as living sacrifices, our praise is to be given and our minds are to be renewed and transformed.

b) Pressures and influences - other people, family, friends, spouse, the media, lives too busy, wanting to be accepted, not stand out and be different, materialism, self-centred values of the world, jobs, sinful nature etc

4.\* Society doubts God's love and goodness. e.g. If there is a God, why did he let this happen? God mustn't care. No honour given to God. Prefer the Big Bang Theory to acknowledging the creator.

\* Church gives God second best. Fit him in when I have satisfied my other commitments. Second rate effort and service. No depth of commitment. If something else crops up then I won't go to church. Don't want to serve God in something that will require my time on a regular basis.

\* Emphasis on tradition, rituals, regulations at expense of inner spiritual growth.

CONCLUDE by using Hebrews 4:14-16 as the basis of prayer

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sacrifices - Cain & Abel Genesis 4:1-4,

Noah Genesis 8:20, Abram Genesis 12:8

At Sinai instructions for worship by presenting sacrifices and offerings. Exodus 19, Numbers 10:10

Sacrifice and offering restored broken relationships between God and mankind and between men and women.

OT prelude of Christ's supreme sacrifice and offering of Himself.

Brought an end to the Levitical sacrificial institution of the OT because Christ's sacrifice rendered them unnecessary.

Now reconciliation of humankind to God and the true worship of God from the heart possible.

Jesus emphasised - Sacrifices without righteousness in the heart are meaningless.

Internal righteousness is more important than ritual conformity.

OT priests offered the slain beasts to God on an altar, NT describes the nature of the commitment that is demanded of believers. Romans 12:1. 1 Peter 2:5 Christians are "living stones", a "royal priesthood" v9. The sacrifices that are appropriate for believers are no longer bulls and goats, but praise, doing good and sharing. Heb.13:15ff



## STUDY 3 Malachi 2:1-12

## How Can I Lose Touch with God?

The prophets and priests were called by God to represent God and his will to the people. This often involved calling the people to repentance and obedience. That obedience was expressed not only by having a heart for true worship, but also by living a life that reflected their relationship to God. The message of Malachi to the post-Exilic nation was that only through the obedience of true worship would the nation have security and blessing.

### A. BIBLE SEARCH

1. ...Priests. They didn't obey or serve God with either reverence or love.
2. (You may like to write your members answers on a large sheet of paper)

#### Levis

Covenant life & peace

Revered God and stood in awe

True instruction

Walked uprightly

Kept the covenant

Turned many from sin

#### Priests

Cursed, descendants rebuked

No honour or awe for God

Perverted God's laws

Untruthful

Violated the covenant

Caused many to sin and turn from God

3. # Find real life and peace #  
# Learn about God's plan for your life #  
# Let us help you as we grow together in relationship with God #
- 4.\* Isn't God our Father?  
\* Wasn't it God who made us as his special people?  
\* Why don't we trust in the covenant of our fathers?

\*\*\*\*\*ACTIVITY\*\*\*\*\*

Partially cover a wall with paper. Print Prayer Wall as a heading. Read verses 1-3 of Psalm 138, 139 & 142 silently and have members write their own prayers on a piece of paper cut out in a brick shape. When they have finished they are to attach it to the prayer wall (blu tac or glue).

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B. BIBLE DISCUSSION

1. \* Honoured God and ordered their lives in accordance with His will.

Their lives were fruitful because of:

\* True Instruction - they took their responsibility to teach the law of Moses seriously. Not man's ideas or man's modifications of the Scripture.

\* Upright lifestyle - Through their example and teaching they were able to turn people away from sin to follow God's ways.

\* Peace - Enjoyed security and "fullness of life" by being loyal to the covenant.

\* These principles still apply today. We need to honour God and order our lives in accordance with his word. Our lives will be fruitful because of:

\* True Instruction - Teaching, learning, applying God's principles in our lives.

\* Upright lifestyle - Romans 12:1,2.

\* Peace - Enjoy "fullness of life" in our relationship with God. If we apply these principles, God will be glorified and we will turn people away from sin (rebellion against God) to follow God's ways.

2. Look for opportunities to encourage, pray, help, counsel, admonish and teach others.

We can only function practically and minister to each other in close relationships. To teach and practice love to each other is the most

significant key to unity. Col 3:14, 1 Peter 4:8, John 13:34,35.

We also need to exercise our spiritual gifts and maturity so we will be concerned, humble, patient, sensitive and compassionate to each other.

3. When God no longer appears to be listening to our prayers there is a reason.

In Old Testament times God refused to listen to Israel when the people sinned. Deuteronomy 1:45, Isaiah 8:18, Psalm 66:18-19, Isaiah 1:15, Micah 3:4

Other verses: Isaiah 59:2, Proverbs 21:13, Matthew 18:21-35 (Parable of the Unmerciful Servant) James 2:13, Matthew 5:7, Luke 6:37

God's answering our prayers does not depend on our being sinless.

Not the presence of sin, but our toleration or unwillingness to do anything about the sin in our lives, of which we become aware which hinders our prayers.

If Christians tolerate and cover up for their sins instead of coming out into the open with God, confessing and repenting then we become powerless in prayer and fruitless in service.

Sinful attitudes and actions against our brothers and sisters in Christ are a very common source of unconfessed, undealt with sin, which shuts down God's blessing.

b) Most people will answer no. Pose the question:

"How can we develop the same attitude as Jesus"?

Point out that we find it very hard to forgive those who have wronged us. It often will take us a long time as we pray and seek God's help to get to the position we can forgive. If we are sincere in our desire to forgive God will change our attitude towards the person.

c) It would be helpful if you wrote down the characteristics from these verses on a chart so people could refer to them during the discussion.

4. Peace - Hebrew word Shalom, more than absence of hostility, fullness of life enjoyed in complete security.

All of God's covenants aimed at peace.

The covenant from God's side means life and peace.

The covenant from Levi's side has an obligation, presupposes subjection in reverence and fear of the Lord.

Ezekiel 34:25 covenant of peace, Jeremiah 31:31-34 looks to the final peace initiated by Christ and still awaiting final fulfilment in heaven.

The message of peace reconciles man with God:

Rom 5:11, Phil 4:7, John 14:27.

Message of life John 10:10, John 5:24, 6:35, 8:12, 11:25,26, 15:5.

New life, new creation 2 Corinthians 5:17 extended to those who are in relationship with Christ Jesus.

\*\*\*CONCLUDE using Colossians 3:12-15 (Question 3c) as a prayer for each other.

## **STUDY 4 Malachi 2: 13 - 17 Life 'Aint What It Should Be!**

### **A. BIBLE SEARCH**

1. They weep and wail on the Lord's altar and wonder why God does not respond with blessing. Their conduct and attitudes showed they weren't prepared to keep their covenant obligations to live as God's people. They didn't trust in God even though they still sacrificed. They self-righteously felt they had done enough to earn God's blessing. As they looked at the evil nations around them they were envious and bitter against God.

2. Because:

- they had broken faith with their wives, their marriage partners;
- of their moral corruption and religious hypocrisy;
- they had given up their marriage covenant and their covenant relationship with God;
- sacrifices were still performed but their heart was not involved;

God withdrew his blessings from them because they were violating their marriages, they were relaxing the standards of purity which the Word of God gave them.

3. They had divorced their wives, their marriage partners. They weren't prepared to keep their marriage obligations and the suggestion is that they were not faithful to their wives. Their spiritual barrenness was caused by their violating their marriage.

4. Rather than change themselves or accept that God was seeking to bring them to repentance through their troubles, they charged God with being unjust. They put His patience to the test and it was now time for drastic action. (That included the fulfilment of the covenant through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's promised Messiah.) See also Isaiah 1: 14-16, 43:24.

\*\*\*\*\*ACTIVITY\*\*\*\*\*

Prepare for your members an 8 1/2" x 11" piece of paper, fold and cut out squares to make the shape of a cross. This cross can be folded into a box. On the inside of the box write a confession of their sins (list them). On the outside write a prayer of forgiveness. Fold the crosses into boxes. Use tape to keep them shut. Read aloud together Psalm 51. If possible pile the boxes together and have a bonfire with them, perhaps in a fireplace.

B. BIBLE DISCUSSION

*Note: The study focused on a Biblical perspective of marriage. Perhaps LGBTI issues, although important, might be left for another time!*

1. a) Marriage - God's institution between a man and a woman where they live together as partners for the rest of their lives. This union is to take precedence over every other relationship, even the tie existing between parents and children. A man and wife become one flesh (Gen 2:22-24). They are to give the partner an exclusive loving place in their lives. Marriage involves love (Gen 24:67, 29:30) companionship and devotion. God specifically designed man and woman for each other. He stated that in marriage God himself actually joins two people together. Matthew 19:4-6

Marriage is to be monogamous (a one-man, one-woman relationship)

Marriage is only for this life. Mark 12:25, Luke 20:35

(Variations will exist between different cultures and non-Christian couples)

b) The purposes may vary according to the society and the culture. Some suggestions:

- Procreation: godly offspring v.15, 1 Cor7:14, Gen1:28, Ps127:3-5
- Pleasure: Heb 13:4; 1 Cor 7:4; Prov 5:18-19; Song of Solomon
- Provision of needs: 1 Peter 3:7; Eph 5:25-33;
- Partnership Gen 2

- A symbol of Christ's relationship to His church
- c) A Christian's perspective - (some examples)
  - a binding covenant before God,
  - needs of the other are to be met (contrast with self-centredness),
  - exclusivity;
  - care, nurture of children especially example of Godly living:
  - equal but different.

2. a) Covenant made in God's presence v14, Proverbs 2:17  
 permanent v16, Matthew 19:4-6,8,9.

The start of a new family unit v14, Mark 10:6-8

A consequence - godly offspring v 15, 1 Cor 7:14

Need to be faithful to their marriage commitment v11,14,  
 Hebrews 13:4

b) God hates divorce because of what it does to his people. Marriage is a symbol of the permanent commitment Christ has to the church. Like all sin there are consequences. See: Matt 5:27-32, 19:3-9, Mark 10:11-12. Divorce is a concession to our sinfulness, but God prefers it never happens.

- Being a Christian does not overcome all difficulties! We need to work at our marriages and call each other to account where necessary. As representatives of God in the community the way we are relating in our marriages should reflect this.
- While God hates divorce, he still loves us unconditionally. The church should exhibit God's grace, compassion, care and acceptance.

To think about: "Why is it that Christians tend to shoot their wounded?" Anonymous

Other passages: 1 Peter 3:1-2, 1 Cor 7:12-15;

Singleness: 1 Corinthians 7:7

2. a) This question serves as a revision exercise. List answers on a large sheet of paper
  - b. Pinpoint 2 or 3 sins or attitudes that you/the group consider are the major problems our church faces.
  - c. Challenge your group to be supportive spiritually and practically to those who are married, single adults and single parents in our church.
- CONCLUDE with a time of prayer for the group and other church members.



## STUDY 5 MALACHI 3:1-5

## What's God Going To Do?

### A. BIBLE SEARCH

1. He will reign forever; he is likened to a King; he is the Holy One, the Creator; he will be King over all the earth and the only Lord.
2. He will send a son from the line of David who will rule in righteousness forever. He will be called Wonderful Counsellor and will carry out a royal program that will cause people to marvel. A Mighty God; a compassionate provider and protector; the Prince of Peace. His rule will be forever and he will bring wholeness and well-being to individuals
3. The Lord .....will come to deliver and to judge. They had given up on God and had grown cynical and morally corrupt. God's coming will mean judgement and purification as well as redemption.
4. Preach the Word and be ready to speak whether it is to correct, rebuke or to encourage others with patience and empathy.

### FILM REVIEW CHECKSHEET

The aim is to get people interacting with the passage in a creative way to help them visualise the events. Some may find this difficult.

Reassure them to have a go and not to worry too much about their answers. At the end, discuss some of the issues that are crucial for Christians. e.g. assurance of salvation, evangelism, God's grace and mercy, judgement. Alternatively, you could give a short talk to the group based on this passage OR get your group to act out the film.

**STORYLINE:** God will prepare his people by sending a prophet before he sends his promised one. The Messiah will complete God's work and he will judge people and accept those who are righteous.

**ACTORS:** Malachi, John the Baptist, Jesus, Christians and unbelievers.

### SCRIPT

**SCENE 1.** Malachi stands before the people warning of the consequences of their actions and prophesying as to future events.

SCENE 2. 460 years in the future, at a river. John the Baptist performing baptism for purification of sins when Jesus enters and people are told who he is.

SCENE 3. Unknown date sometime in the future in heaven. A courtroom scene based on Judgement. A number of people are asked the question by Jesus "Why should I let you into my heaven?"

POINTS TO HIGHLIGHT:

God has remained faithful to his covenant. Jesus ushers in the Day of the Lord which will result in life in all its fullness for some and eternal separation from God for others.

MOOD: Scene 1 Solemn. Scene 2 Excitement. Scene 3 Joy and Despair.

CAMERA DETAILS

Scene 1 Focus on Malachi when he is warning the people and then show reactions to his words by focussing on some faces in the crowd.

Scene 2 Capture the excitement and miraculous nature of the baptism of Jesus. The dove alighting on him and the voice from heaven presented as the crucial part of this scene. Gradually focus in on the people and capture their reaction.

Scene 3 Splendour of surroundings. Dramatic nature of this scene highlighted. Focus on despair of those rejected and joy for those whom Jesus accepts.

## Study 6

## Malachi 3: 6-18.

## Do I Rob God?

This passage follows from the promise that judgment is coming, by which God will purify the nation, making them fit for his service (2:17 - 3:5). Even now, God gives them a further chance to repent. He still longs to bless, if only they will return to him.

### A. Bible Search

1. v.6 unchanging, patient, v.7 forgiving, v.10,17 faithful, rewarder, v.11 all powerful, v.16 listens to us, v.18 just

2. Return to God and follow his ways.

\* The "descendants of Jacob". Jacob is mentioned in 1:2 as the recipient of God's electing love. Jacob had no merit in himself, but was a liar and a cheat Gen 27:36. God is constant in his love for his covenant people. Therefore, he has not abandoned them. Israel is consistent too - by their failure. No matter how many times we fail, if we repent, God is faithful 1 Jn 1:9\*

3. v.7 "How shall we return?". Israel is so proud and spiritually blind that they don't see they need to repent. God charges them with:

\* v.7 failed to keep God's law

\* v.10 Robbing Him of Tithes (one tenth of their income) and offerings (voluntary gifts in excess of the tithe).

\* v.14 They appeared to serve him, but slander God. They suggest God cannot be trusted, is unfaithful to them, v. 15 He is unjust, even powerless.

\* v.10 "put me to the test". Continual droughts and famine.

To tithe meant Israel was taking a risk. Could they trust God?

\* v.12 Israel tried to build a reputation for themselves (eg Solomon) but God is the one who can make them the envy of the nations (Gen 12:2,3).

\* v.10,16,17 The best way to have a living faith is to "put God to the test". Then they would have a personal faith, not relying on the

experience of others. V.17 "They shall be mine"

4. a) Supply all their needs abundantly, heavens thrown open, bumper harvest out of all proportion to what their repentance deserved.

b) A blessing which cannot be snatched away. A blessing which is secure and which they can enjoy to the full.

c) As they repent and return to God, He will bring a vast reputation to them among the other nations. (In the past they had often tried to establish a reputation for themselves. God tells them to concentrate on serving Him and He will build their reputation in the eyes of others.)

d) If they exercise practical faith in God then He will respond miraculously, and open the gates of heaven for them.

\*\*\*\*\* ACTIVITY Read Psalm 34 together. Write on "Goodness Clouds" (cloud shapes cut out) how God's goodness helps us and the difference this makes to our lives. \*\*\*\*\*

## B. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How we use our gifts and abilities, our home and relationships with others, our time, our possessions and our money will reflect the importance we give to God and his work. 2 Samuel 24:24b

We often fall into the danger of robbing God by not giving him the priority and allegiance that he deserves.

2. Does my giving reflect that my "Treasure" belongs to the Lord?" James 1:17, Does my level of giving reflect how much God has done? Abraham and Jacob tithed before the Law was given. Under the Law, the tenth was intended for the Levites, who in turn tithed to support the priests (Nu. 18:28) i.e. tithes and offerings supported God's work.

Giving is to be: Regular, proportionate, generous, universal, personal, cheerful, according to need, sacrificial, secret & humble. See 1 Cor 16:2, 2 Cor 9:6-7, Acts 11:27-29, Mark 12:41-44, Hebrews 13:16, Philippians 4:18,19; Matt 6:1-4

(Give members of your group one of these verses to look up and to

tell the others what principle of giving is discussed in the verse/s.)

3. To answer this question have a Think Tank where on a large sheet of paper you get people to list the ways God promises to bless his people OR...

...in groups of 2 or 3 look up verses and write down the promise God gives to Christians.

Psalm 23:1, John 3:16, 7:37-39, 10:10, 11:25, 14:2,3. 15:5 Matthew 28:20. Romans 8:18, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, 15:51-57. Hebrews 4:14-16, 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, 3:5,6,18. 9:8, 13:14. Ephesians 1:3,17-19. 3:16-20

3. People who serve the Lord faithfully are not exempt from calamities. At times of crises God expects us to be honest with him and pour out our agonies and disappointments to him.

The persistence with which people pursue wicked deeds suggests that they believe they can escape justice. Often this is not the case and they have to pay for their evil. The principle of justice still operates in our world even though there is plenty of injustice about. Our sins make their marks upon us, both physically and spiritually and it is impossible to escape from our sins as we will either have to face the consequences of them on earth or in eternity. Because the effects of sin abound in our world suffering and injustice will only be totally remedied with the end times.

Living in our materialistic society and often being confronted with the apparent happiness and comfort of the ungodly we can fall into this temptation. Psalm 73. The attitude that says "It is futile to serve God." reveals that people are serving God for what he can do for them and what they can get out of him rather than because they want to bring glory to his name.

\* The Bible's emphasis is that this life is transitory. There will be a time of reckoning.

Rom 8:18, 1 Cor 15:19, Mal 4:1.

CONCLUDE with a time of praise and thanksgiving, using the promises that God gives to Christians as discussed in Question 3.

## Study 7      Malachi 4:1-6      Am I Prepared?

COMMENCE with a brainstorming session about the end times. Jot down answers on paper without making any comments. Then compare the group's responses with the following comments/references:

Malachi warns his people that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is coming and that it will "will burn like a furnace". Nevertheless in that day the righteous will rejoice.

In the Old Testament the "Day Of The Lord" is a time when God will intervene with judgement and/or blessing. Zeph 1:14-2:4, Isaiah 13:6. He will triumph over and punish his enemies and grant rest (security) and blessing to his people.

In the New Testament it is also referred to as the Day of God's wrath Romans 2:5, the Day of God 2 Peter 3:12, the Day of Christ 1 Cor 1:8. The coming will be as unexpected as that of a thief in the night, Matt 24:43-44, Luke 12:39-40, 2 Peter 3:10.

### BIBLE SEARCH

1. sun = Jesus,  
stubble = non believers,  
calves = those who trust in God.

2. <u>Righteous</u>	<u>Wicked</u>
saved	lost
healed	destroyed
delighted	despairing
experiencing God's salvation	experiencing God's judgement

- Directed them to the law (their covenant responsibilities) to alert them that they are sinners.

- God was going to use John the Baptist (Matthew 11: 10-14, the Elijah who was to come) to prepare people for Jesus, the Saviour and thus they would be ready for Judgement Day (The Day of the Lord).

- Those who repented of their sins would be ready. Those who went on in the hypocrisy of being good enough for God, by their religious practices, would reject Jesus.

4. God of wrath see also Matthew 25:31-33, John 3:36.

God of righteousness - Isaiah 9:2, 60:1,19 Luke 1:78-79

God of healing - Isaiah 53:5, 61:1

God of redemption - Isaiah 48:17,18, 55:6,7

## B. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Judgement awaits people whose religious duty is devoid of true affection for God.

For those who give God insincere worship with blemished, cheap "sacrifices", God wants them to repent and turn to him in faith.

God will send the Lord to judge and redeem.

In this world there is much sin, unfairness and inequality but this will be rectified with the Day of the Lord.

2. The righteous have a covenant of life and peace Mal 2:5. Their attitudes, values, behaviour, relationships and actions should reflect this. Rom 12:1,2; Heb 13:15,16; Col 3:1-3, 12-17; 2 Cor 5:17

As righteous people we are to be the "salt of the earth and the "light of the world" Mth 5:13-15 Therefore our lives **should** shine out in contrast to the wicked. Jn 13:34,35.

Discuss: Does the theory always work out in practice? i.e is it easy to distinguish the righteous from the wicked?

The wicked follow false, worldly religious teachings. We follow the truth. Jn 14:6,10:10 Col 2:8

\* By being conscious of the awesome finality of judgement and taking our responsibility as children of the light seriously.

- We have the responsibility to warn people so they might repent and be saved. Acts 18:6; Acts 20:24-27; Ezek 3:17-19

- We need to love them enough to desire to save them (even if they may not respond to us positively as we tell them). Hebrews 13:6

### 3. Truths about God in Malachi:

- Love 1:2
- Great ruler over all the nations 1:5,11,14
- Given us a covenant of life and peace 2:5
- sends his message through his messengers 1:1, 2:6,7. 3:1. 4:4,5
- Faithfulness and commitment in spite of our sins 3:6
- delight and blessings to those who follow his ways 3:6-12,16-17
- in his mercy and grace provides a way for salvation 3:7 4:2,  
Luke 1:78-79
- unchanging 3:6
- judges and punishes those who reject Him 2:9, 3:5, 4:1

Some areas which, although not unique to Malachi, are sometimes less familiar to us:

- \* The problem of spiritual degeneration - faith can deteriorate into formalism.
- \* How we can pervert the teaching of the word to suit our own ends.
- \* How easy we stray from our marriage obligations.
- \* Painless worship, giving God second best of our time, talents, money and devotion.