

## SESSION 1

Unit 1

# The Prophets Point to Jesus

### Session Outcome

To understand how God prepares the way for a relationship with Him.

### Customize:

is the password to access expanded teaching helps at [FoundryLeader.com](http://FoundryLeader.com).

### Discover:

See *Illustrated Bible Life* for an insightful look at Malachi's reference to the "sun of righteousness," and verse-by-verse commentary on the Scripture passage.

December

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## THE PROCESS OF PREPARATION

*God promises to come to His people to restore justice, to purify hearts, and to bring healing.*

### THE WORD

**MALACHI  
2:17**

**Y**ou have wearied the Lord with your words. "How have we wearied him?" you ask.

By saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them" or "Where is the God of justice?"

**MALACHI  
3:1-5**

<sup>1</sup>"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the LORD you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

<sup>2</sup>But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. <sup>3</sup>He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, <sup>4</sup>and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

<sup>5</sup>"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, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty.

**3:16-18**

<sup>16</sup>Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name.

**Last Week:**

We discovered that all faith comes from Christ alone and all else must be aligned to Him.

**This Week:**

We will discover that God desires a relationship with us and the ways God prepares us for a relationship with Him.

**Notes:**

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<sup>17</sup>“On the day when I act,” says the LORD Almighty, “they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. <sup>18</sup>And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

**MALACHI  
4:1-5**

**KEY VERSE**

<sup>1</sup>“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. <sup>2</sup>**But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.** <sup>3</sup>Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act,” says the LORD Almighty.

<sup>4</sup>“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

<sup>5</sup>“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.

**ENGAGE THE WORD**

**T**he place of the book of Malachi as the last prophetic book in the Old Testament has led many people to conclude that Malachi was the last among the prophets of Israel. Most scholars place his ministry in the mid-fifth century BC, between 464-424 BC. The book contains references to priests, sacrifices, and tithing in the temple. Life had become normal for the Jews in Palestine after they had returned home from their captivity in Babylon. Malachi’s message to his audience suggests that they became complacent in their worship and relationship to God. The prophet sought to challenge them to return to true worship and faithful relationship with God.

Malachi organized his message in the form of seven disputes between God and His people. These disputes focus on God’s love (1:2-5), blemished sacrifices (1:6-14), lack of reverence to God (2:1-9), divorce (2:10-16), God’s justice (2:17-3:5), tithing (3:6-12), and serving God (3:13-15).

 **Watch:**

Dr. Jim Edlin introduces this quarter’s focus on the prophets.

**Listen:**



The importance of the sun in ancient Near Eastern religions is the focus of this week’s *Illustrated Bible Life* podcast on FoundryLeader.com.

**Notes:**

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**Did You Know?**  
Malachi uses two images from his world to describe God’s refining work. One is that of metal workers extracting pure metals by placing ore in a crucible and heating it over a fire and skimming off impurities. The other is that of people washing clothes using an alkali powder derived from certain plants to remove stains and brighten clothing.

**THE DISPUTE**

We begin today’s session with God’s fifth dispute with His covenant people.

**Malachi 2:17—3:5**

God’s accusation that His people’s words have become a burden to Him prompted them to ask for an explanation of His charge against them. God answered that their untruthful words about His partiality to the wicked and failure to do justice were the cause of His weariness. God’s people made a serious false accusation against Him. When others make false accusations against us, we tend to react with anger. However, God responded to His people in a different way. He said they would soon see His work of restoring justice in the land. Using the imagery of a royal visit, God announced His plan to come in person to restore justice in the land. The people looked for the God of justice. They would not be disappointed; their wish would come true. Not only that, they would gain a new and right perspective about God. God’s response demonstrates God’s patience with us when we misunderstand Him or mischaracterize the intent of His actions. We are also reminded here that often we gain a proper perspective of God by carefully reflecting on His actions.

Malachi said that God’s corrective actions would begin with the corrupt priesthood. Earlier, the prophet accused them of showing contempt for God by sacrificing animals prohibited by the Law (see 1:6-14). God would purify them so that there would be proper worship in the temple. Proper worship by the people of God is a sign of proper relationship with God. God’s visit would also result in the trial of all who are wicked in the land.

God’s commitment to do justice gives us hope as we live in a world of injustice. Restoration of justice is an outcome of God’s work of salvation; work He accomplished through His coming into our world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. We hope for the day

**Discover:**

Though their science was limited, the ancients knew the sun's importance for life. This made the sun an object of worship for most of the ancient Near East. So why would Malachi use a metaphor like the sun to talk about the one true God? Let's find out in this week's *Illustrated Bible Life* article, "With Healing in Its Wings."

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Session 1

**Think About It**

Believers in ancient Israel often complained about God's justice (see Job 21:7-15; Jeremiah 12:1-2; Habakkuk 1:2-4). God did not chastise them, but gave them the assurance of His commitment to do justice in the world.

of Jesus' second coming when God will bring His work to its completion (see Revelation 21:3-5).

**Malachi 3:16—4:5**

The prophet reminded those who honored God that when they spoke, God heard them. He also assured them of their place in God's book of remembrance, and God's special relationship to them. Malachi predicted that the wicked and the righteous would have different experiences on the day of God's judgment. The faithful would need to continue the life of faithfulness to God to experience healing and renewal in their life on that day. Faithful believers of God through the ages have believed that on the day of judgment their names would be found in "the book of life" (Revelation 20:11-15).

The prophet said that Elijah would be the messenger whom God would send to prepare the way for His coming (see 3:1). In the New Testament, John the Baptist is portrayed as the messenger who came before the coming of Jesus. He, like Elijah, was fiercely loyal to God and tried to restore people to God (Luke 1:17; Matthew 11:14; 17:10-12). Elijah and John the Baptist challenge us to be messengers of the Lord as we wait for His second coming.

**HOPE FOR THE FAITHFUL**

**REFLECT**

What are your questions and concerns about injustice in our world? How is God involved in making things right for the victims of injustice?

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# Discussion Guide



## Connect to My Experience

Begin your time together by discussing that most people typically prepare for the Christmas holiday.

- What are some ways your family prepares for Christmas?
- How does our church prepare for Christmas?
- How do you personally prepare spiritually for Christmas?

Advent is a time of preparation for our celebration of Christ's coming. It reminds us of the importance of preparation.

- What are some of the ways that God prepared the world for Christ's coming? (Prophets, John the Baptist, and so on.)

## Transition:

Over 400 years before Jesus came, God spoke to a man named Malachi. His message was about preparing for God to come to our world. Today, we will see that God is still in charge and at work in the world preparing the way for a relationship with us.



## Connect to the Word

*Invite someone to read Malachi 2:17—3:5, then discuss the following,*

Malachi lived more than 400 years before Christ (ca. 432 BC) at a time of great moral decline. He condemned sin and called people to return to God. This passage opens with a challenge from Malachi concerning the Israelites' complaint that God has not done justice.

- Based on what we know about the nation of Israel at this point in their history, why might God be "weary" of hearing this complaint? (God had continually been faithful and just, but the people kept complaining.)
- Are there circumstances where a person might be tempted to ask, "Where is the God of justice?" If so, when? Why?

Malachi moves to the promise of a messenger (3:1), whom the New Testament later associates with John the Baptist as the forerunner of Jesus.

- In what ways does God use people to be His messengers today? Share a time when God recently used you as His messenger.
- John the Baptist pointed people to the good news of Jesus' first coming. In what ways do believers point people to the good news of Jesus' first coming?

Malachi also speaks of the "messenger of the covenant," who is Jesus Christ.

- Do you think this answered the people's question of "Where is the God of justice?" If so, how? (He promised His coming.)
- In what ways does Jesus fulfill the role of "messenger of the covenant"? (God promised to send a redeemer. This was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.)

The exposition writer notes the priesthood was practicing corrupt forms of worship, and the people demonstrating complacency around their relationship with God.

- Why is it important that God must first wash (literally scrub) and purify (literally refine like metal) the very people asking for justice?
- Why do you think God started first with the nation of Israel before turning to those who were committing wrongs against them?
- Why is it important for us to realize that God is just as concerned with the pu-

## Insight

God's justice is always a two-way street. Our appeal to God to bring justice may always require our attention to God's expectations for those who love God. We do not have to "earn" God's justice, but we do have to recognize God is not interested in serving our personal needs. Still, God's justice is always anchored in God's loving grace, with the promise of healing, wholeness and a kind of "disciplined freedom" that God does deliver, as Malachi and John the Baptist announce, in and through Jesus Christ.

*Invite someone to read Malachi 3:16—4:5, then discuss the following,*

rity of those within the body of Christ (the church) as He is with those outside the body of Christ (the world)?

Malachi's words not only include accusation (testimony) of misdeeds and judgment on the arrogant, but also a promise of compassion for those that "fear" and honor God. Loving reverence may well describe those whom God the Father receives as children. Arrogance (as a kind of reverence for oneself) then clearly defines the wicked who reject God and receive due punishment.

- Do you think the Israelites were able to distinguish the difference between reverence and arrogance? Why?
- How might the words of these verses help them understand the difference between justice and revenge?

Malachi's closing contrast in 4:1-5 is a contrast of living with reverence and healing. Yet the vision also includes a covenantal understanding to this new-found freedom based on God's covenant with Moses, a kind of "disciplined" freedom of returning to a committed relationship with God.

- How is a Christian's relationship with Jesus a covenant relationship with God?
- In what ways is our relationship with Christ a kind of "disciplined freedom"?



## Connect to My Life and the World

The people of Malachi's day spoke of "the God of justice" sarcastically to suggest they had not been treated fairly. But Malachi knew that justice was at the heart of God's character.

- Give examples of ways that our world is different from what God intended. What is the reason for the difference?
- Why do people ignore God's leadership? (Greed, selfishness, fear, etc. Obedience to God is grounded in trust.)
- In what ways do you see God's justice working in the world today?
- In what ways can our lives be examples of God's justice in our world?

Invite your group to get silent before God.

- In what ways am I keeping my heart in constant preparation for God's presence in my life?
- In what ways am I God's messenger in my world? In what ways am I helping others prepare their hearts for God's presence?
- In what ways am I living in preparation for Christ's second coming?

Close in prayer, thanking God for His love and patience.

*Sessions 1-5 are written by Dean Blevins*

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