

# **Return to Me**



## **7 Bible Studies on Malachi for Chinese Returnees**

**Prepared for the Return**

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# Introduction

There are hundreds of Bible study guides out there, so you might well be wondering *'Why have a special set of Bible studies for returnees?'*

Returnees to China (those going home after a period of studying or working abroad) face a huge variety of challenges to their Christian faith. Some of these challenges are common to all Christians, while others will be unique to returnees. These Bible studies aim to help returnees to think through a number of these challenges in light of God's word, in order to equip them to stand firm in Christ when they return home. The studies will be most useful for those preparing to return soon, or those who have recently returned.

They are written out of a conviction that it is God's word which best equips Christians to stand firm, rather than any special programme, which is why these studies go through a book of the Bible rather than a series of topics. However, there are certain areas which are common challenges for many returnees, and so these notes suggest one issue that could be discussed following each study, along with some possible questions or areas to think through. You can adapt these questions to suit the individuals you are studying with, and help them think through how God's word in Malachi should impact our attitude to each of these issues.

The studies have been designed for a group to work through; they can also be adapted for use in one-to-one Bible studies. This study pack is intended to help equip anyone leading such a study - hopefully a group members' version will be available soon! We have also produced audio interviews to tie in with some of the 'returnee issues' raised in the studies, where those who have already returned share their experiences in these areas. The interviews can be found at <http://www.seaturtles.org.uk/interviews/>.

# **Explanation of some of the features of this resource:**

## **◆ Purpose of the Passage**

Each study begins with a sentence entitled 'Purpose of the passage'. This is a summary of the main point of the passage and the effect it is intended to have on the reader, both in Malachi's day and today. This should help the study to remain focussed on the main point, and perhaps explain what some of the questions are getting at.

## **◆ Answers**

Some of the questions have answers; others don't! Where answers are provided they are just a guide, not a full answer. To help your understanding and personal study of Malachi you may find it useful to consult other resources, such as Bible study notes on Malachi by Lee Gatiss, available for free download from <http://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/bible-study-resources>

## **◆ Bible Reading 'Tools'**

A number of 'tools' are mentioned throughout the studies: these are different ways of discovering the meaning of a Bible passage. The aim is to help returnees learn to read God's word for themselves by equipping them with some general principles about how to understand the Bible. Perhaps you could make a little toolkit as a visual aid! Here is a brief explanation of the different tools used in this study guide:

### **The top two:**

These can be used with any and every passage!

Author's Purpose tool: *Why did the author write this passage of the Bible? How does this passage help me understand why the author wrote the whole book?*

'So What?' tool: *How should this passage change my life - the way I think and the way I act?*

### **Other useful tools:**

Tone tool: (study 3, 7) *How does the author make his point? How does the passage make us feel?*

Context tool: (study 4) *How is my understanding of this passage/verse helped by seeing how it fits within the rest of the book?*

Structure tool: (study 5) *How does the book/ passage break down into sections? What is each section saying and how do they fit together?*

(read 'Dig Deeper' by Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach (IVP 2005) and 'Dig Even Deeper' by Andrew Sach and Richard Alldritt (IVP 2011) for a fuller explanation and for more tools)

## One Unfolding Story; One Unchanging God

These are two useful principles to help us apply the Old Testament to our lives.

1. The Bible is **'One Unfolding Story'**: it gradually reveals God's amazing plan to save a people from their sin through Jesus' death, and bring them to be with him forever in his new creation. Malachi's original hearers lived at a different stage in the unfolding of God's plan. Therefore some of the responses they were called to make will look quite different for us who live after Christ's death and resurrection. For example, Malachi talks a lot about priests and the sacrificial system, but now Christ has fulfilled this system by becoming our perfect priest and dying as the perfect, once-and-for-all sacrifice - so we are no longer to make animal sacrifices as the Israelites in Malachi's day were! Instead we can praise God for how Jesus has fulfilled this role.

2. However, we worship **'One Unchanging God'**: as Malachi 3:6 tells us, "I the Lord do not change", so whatever was true of God in Malachi's day is also true of him today - and we must respond to him appropriately. Although we do not offer animal sacrifices, he is still "a great King" (Malachi 1:14) who requires his people's worship.

Questions based on these two principles appear in most of the studies.

### ◆ Before the Study...

At the start of each study is a box with questions for group members to think through in advance. This will help the whole group to get more out of the study and encourage them to read the Bible on their own.

### ◆ 'Big Questions'

Some studies have a 'Big Question' (usually quite difficult) followed by several easier questions which help the group answer the big question. It can be helpful to write out the big question, enabling the group to see which direction the smaller questions are going in.

### ◆ Visual Aids

Visual aids can be particularly useful if the group is studying in their second language. Suggestions for visual aids are given throughout, such as tables and speech bubbles.

It is particularly helpful to have a large Bible timeline as a visual aid, since Malachi often makes reference to other events in Bible history, both past and future. You can point out where these events take place on the timeline, and also use it to help illustrate the principle of 'One Unfolding Story'. A sample timeline is included on page 27, and these notes suggest some places where you could use it.

# Malachi 1:1-5

**Purpose of the Passage:** Be assured God loves you - shown through his defeat of your enemies.

## Before the study...

Read Genesis 25:19-34 and Obadiah v10-11. What was the history of the relationship between Edom and Israel?

It might be a good idea to read the whole book through together in your group at the start of the study - it's not very long! Having two readers playing the parts of God and the people can help to bring out the debate style of Malachi.

**Starter Question:** What would you say if someone asked you "How do you know that God loves you?"

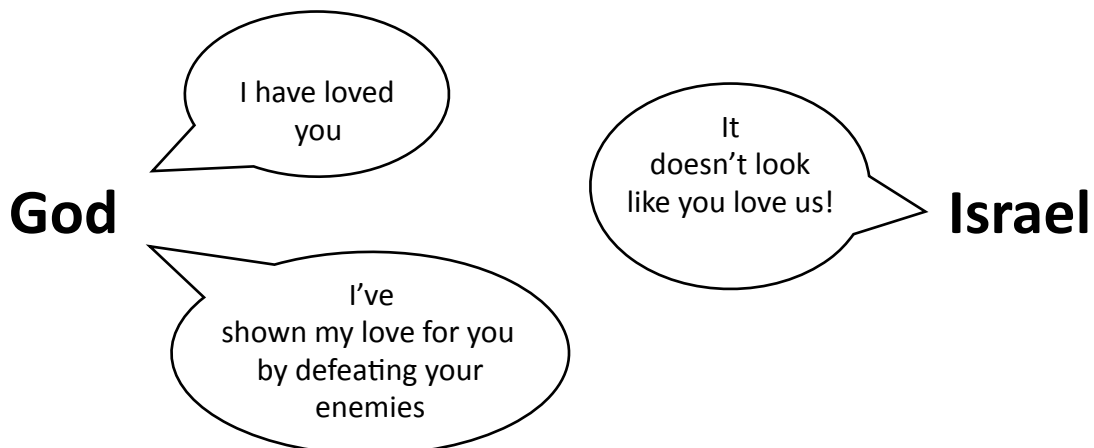
## 1. Whose words are recorded in the book of Malachi? (v1)

*God's words, spoken through his prophet Malachi, to Israel.*

(you might want to show this on the Bible timeline)

## 2. Who are the speakers in v2? What do they say?

(You could get the group to fill in speech bubbles, putting the content in their own words where possible.)



### 3. Why might the Israelites doubt that God loved them?

- From reading through Malachi:
  - *their nation is full of injustice (2:17), and is not prospering (3:11).*
- From historical background (refer to the Bible timeline):
  - **Read Ezra 3:11-13: How do the people feel when they return from exile?**  
*A mixture of joy and disappointment - joy at returning and rebuilding the temple, but disappointment that it's not as glorious as the previous temple.*

Malachi's hearers would have been disappointed that, despite God's promises to Abraham and to the prophets, the Israelites were few in number, without a king, unprosperous and politically weak.... Has God forgotten his promises?

### 4. Big Question: How has God shown his love to Israel?

#### - Who were Jacob and Esau?

*Briefly recap Genesis 25:19-34: they were brothers, and Jacob's descendants inherited God's promise to Abraham after Esau sold Jacob his birthright.*

*Jacob's descendants = Israel; Esau's descendants = Edom*

#### - Read Obadiah v10-11 (addressed to Edom). **What was the relationship like between Edom and Israel?**

*They were enemies: when Israel was destroyed by Babylon, Edom rejoiced in their misfortune and took part in plundering them.*

#### - **What is the future of Edom?**

*Eternal destruction, never to be rebuilt as a nation again.*

#### - **How would this prediction of Edom's destruction have made the Israelites feel? (v5) Why?**

*They would have praised God's greatness, because he shows himself faithful to his promise to love Jacob and not Esau.*

*They will be confident of God's love for them, shown through his defeat of their enemies.*

#### - Return to the Big Question: **How has God shown his love to Israel?**

*By permanently destroying her enemies, according to his promise.*

### 5. ONE UNFOLDING STORY: For Christians today, our enemies aren't Edom!

#### a) **Who are the enemies of Christians today?**

*(Look at Ephesians 6:12 and Colossians 2:15, perhaps in two groups)*

*Spiritual forces of evil (such as Satan)*

#### b) **How has God defeated these enemies?**

*Disarmed them at the cross*

6. What situations sometimes make us doubt God's love for us?

What situations might cause those who've recently returned home to doubt God's love?

7. How does this passage reassure us in such situations?

8. How might you use this passage to encourage a friend who's returned home?

### **Returnee Issue: "It all seems so far away"**

In the midst of so many big life changes, many returnees will doubt God's love when they go home; Christianity may even start to feel irrelevant, western, and far away. *Following Jesus was good for my life overseas, but it just doesn't work back in China.* This is just like Malachi's readers, for whom God's promises to bless them felt so long ago, and their circumstances caused them to doubt that he loved them. But we can point our friends to an even greater demonstration of God's love than Malachi could: God's victory over all our enemies at the cross!

In addition to the Bible study questions above, you could discuss the following:

- What practical steps will you take to remind yourself of God's love when you go home?
- How can you continue to remember God's love in some of these situations:
  - Feeling helpless in the battle against sin?
  - Struggling to find a job?
  - Missing Christian friends from overseas?



# Malachi 1:6-14

**Purpose of the passage: Repent of bringing God substandard sacrifices which dishonour him.**

**Before the study...**

1. What was the role of priests and sacrifices in the Old Testament? (see Leviticus 9:2,7)
2. How does God feel about the priests in this passage? Why?

**Starter Question: Who do you highly respect? How does this respect make you act towards them?**

**1. What is the priests' attitude to God in this passage? How is this attitude revealed in their actions? (v6-9, 12-13)**

*They were failing to offer unblemished sacrifices. This reveals a halfhearted attitude to God and lack of reverence for his holiness.*

**2. Why might the priests have had this halfhearted attitude towards God?**

*Remember Israel's situation. They doubted that God would keep his promise, so didn't think it was worth offering unblemished sacrifices.*

**3. How does God respond to the priests? (Why does he emphasise that his name will be great among the nations? v9-11,14)**

*He tells them he does not want or need their halfhearted offerings, as he will receive pure offerings from all nations.*

**4. How should the priests respond to this message - in attitude and action? (v14)**

**5. ONE UNCHANGING GOD: What do we learn about God in this passage?**

**6. ONE UNFOLDING STORY: What has changed for God's people today?  
(Do we still need to make sacrifices?)**

- No! Jesus is our perfect priest and sacrifice! (Hebrews 10:11-14)
- Yes! We are called to worship our great God wholeheartedly (Romans 12:1).

**7. How is our worship of God halfhearted in these areas (see below)?  
Why are we halfhearted in these areas?**

Prayer life

Love for other Christians

(The group could split in half and tackle one topic each)

**8. What temptations to halfheartedness might be particularly strong for those who've recently returned home?**

**9. What can we do practically to tackle our halfheartedness?**

*Refer back to the starter question, and show that the key is having an attitude of respect for God.*

### **Returnee Issue: Relationship with God**

A living personal relationship with God will be particularly important in the months before and after returning home, so we want to help our friends to think through how they will prioritise setting aside time to hear from God in the Bible and respond in prayer. Talk to them about how they will continue to read the Bible - for example, do they use a reading plan or Bible reading notes? Perhaps you could enact an example 'quiet time' together (modeling how to understand a passage, apply it, and pray it through). Of course, our relationship with God is much more than just having a daily 'quiet time', so you could also discuss how a personal relationship with God will impact different areas of our lives throughout the day.

Possible questions for discussion:

- Why is it important to spend regular time with God?
- Why might it be difficult to set aside time to spend with God after going home?

Areas to discuss may include:

- Disruption of regular routine
- Time pressure from new job, or job hunting
- It's hard to understand the Bible
- It's hard to pray

- How can you get into good habits now?

# Malachi 2:1-9

**Purpose of the passage: Long for faithful teachers who fear God.**

## Before the study...

1. How does God say a priest should act?
2. What is God's covenant with Levi?

**Starter Question: If you moved to a new city and had to choose a new church, which factors are important to consider?**

## 1. Last week, what did we learn about the priests' job?

*They offer sacrifices to make atonement*

## What extra things do we learn about their job in this passage?

*They teach God's word*

## 2. How does God feel about the priests in this passage? Why do you think that?

(v2,3,8,9)

*Use the TONE tool - dung (or offal) on your face is not very nice!*

## 3. What are the priests doing wrong?

## 4. What is the covenant of Levi?

(Who is Levi? What is a covenant? What are the terms of this covenant?)

## Suggested visual aid

You could display the contrast between how a priest *should* act and how these priests were acting (questions 3 and 5) by drawing a table, or by sticking post-it notes on a picture of a priest:

What priests are doing:

Don't honour God's name (2)

Not living God's way (8,9)

Cause others to stumble by wrong teaching (8)

Break the covenant of Levi (8)



What priests should do:

Fear God (5)

Live uprightly (6)

Turn others from sin by teaching God's word truly (6,7)

Keep the covenant of Levi (5,6)

**5. What are we told here about how a priest should act?**

→ We see clearly that the priests utterly fail in their job.

**6. Why is their failure such a serious problem?**

*It leads to curse, not just on themselves, but on all people (2).*

*People are caused to stumble, as they're not hearing God's word taught truly (8).*

*The priests dishonour God's holy name (2).*

→ Having a faithful priest is really important.

**7. If you were one of the people of Malachi's day, how would you feel about having priests like this?**

**8. ONE UNFOLDING STORY: For us who live after Jesus, who does the priest's role today?**

*Primarily Jesus, who has fulfilled the priest's role in offering sacrifices, and who perfectly keeps the covenant with Levi, walking God's way and teaching truly.*

*The priests' teaching role is also done by all who teach the Bible.*

**How does this passage make you feel about our priest Jesus?**

**9. ONE UNCHANGING GOD: What does God want Christian teachers to be like?**

**10. God obviously thinks the character of a Bible teacher is very important. How should this influence:**

**a) Our future choice of church?**

*Does the leader fear God, teach the Bible truly, help others grow in godliness, and live a godly life themselves?*

**b) Our prayers for those who teach us? How can this help us pray for church leaders in China?**

*Think practically!*

## Returnee Issue: Church

Especially if they have become Christians abroad, many returnees will struggle to settle into a church in China. This can be for a number of reasons, such as language (they are not used to reading the Bible and praying in Chinese), unfamiliarity of style (a small house church that meets in an office building and sings unaccompanied may be hard to adjust to if you are used to lively music or a beautiful old church building), disappointment with the standard of teaching, busy-ness at work, or simply not knowing where the local church is.

Because of this, we want to do all we can to get our friends thinking in advance about what it will be like to be involved in a church back home, and to encourage them to have a servant-hearted attitude to the church, so that they persevere in going even when the church does not seem to meet all their needs. Encouraging prayerfulness for the church in China is a great way to do this - especially if someone in the group knows of particular churches or leaders whom the group can support regularly in prayer. Those who became Christians overseas may not know much about the church situation in China; for example they may be surprised to learn that the government places restrictions on Christian meetings. Try to inform them about the church back home as much as you can, perhaps introducing the question of whether to attend an official 'Three Self Church', or an unregistered 'house church' (often there is no clear right/wrong answer to this question!)

Possible questions for discussion:

- Why is it important for Christians to belong to a church?
- What do you think church will be like when you return home? What are you looking forward to? What are you nervous about?
- In what ways might you be able to serve your church in China after you return?

# Malachi 2:10-16

**Purpose of the passage: Be warned against faithlessness to the faithful Lord.**

## Before the study...

1. What are the people doing wrong in this passage?
2. Why is it so serious?

## 1. Big Question: What attitude lies behind the people's action in this passage?

What two things are they doing wrong?

i) Why is marrying a foreign wife so bad?

*See Deuteronomy 7:3-4: they were told that marrying foreign wives would turn the people to serve other gods. So marrying a foreign wife was equivalent to abandoning an exclusive faith in the Lord. Also v15: it is impossible to have godly children with a woman who worships other gods.*

ii) Why is divorcing the wife of their youth so bad?

*They divorced their wives to marry foreign gods - so this is the same problem as above. Also, they are breaking the covenant they made with their wives (v14).*

What attitude to God does this reveal? (v10-11)

What does it mean to 'break faith' (NIV)/ 'be faithless' (ESV)? (Repeated word in v10,11,14, 15, 16)

Return to Big Question: the people have a **faithless** attitude to God.

## 2. What have we already seen about the theme of faithfulness in Malachi?

*Use the CONTEXT tool*

- God shows faithful love to Israel (1:2-5)
- God requires faithfulness from the priests, but they are **faithless** (1:6-2:9)
- God is faithful to the covenant with Levi (2:4-7)

**3. How does this make you feel about the people's faithlessness in this passage?**

*Shocked! God is so faithful to them, yet they break faith with both God and each other.*

**4. How will God respond to the people's faithlessness?**

*He will cut those who are faithless off from his people (12)*

*He will not accept their offerings (13)*

**5. How should the people respond to hearing this?**

*Not by making an empty religious display (13)*

*They should guard themselves against faithlessness in both attitude and action (15-16)*

**6. ONE UNFOLDING STORY: How is our situation different to that of Judah?**

*- Jesus has died for a faithless people so that we can have hope, despite our faithlessness.*

*- God's people are now defined by faith in Jesus, not by race, so we can marry foreigners!*

**7. How should faithfulness to God affect who Christians choose to marry? Why?**

*Christians should only marry other Christians, to prevent our faith in Jesus from being influenced by those who don't trust in him.*

**8. Case study:**

Xiao Li lives in China, and has recently become a Christian. She is under pressure from both her family and from society to get married, but there are no single men at her church. It is easier to get to know guys at work, but none of them are Christians.

**What would you say to Xiao Li?**

(What should she do, **and** what should she think?)

**8. ONE UNCHANGING GOD: God is still faithful to his people. How does knowing this help you to be faithful to him?**

## Returnee Issue: Marriage

When they go home many returnees will face great pressure to get married: their parents may well have a series of eligible men or women lined up for them to go on dates with! This pressure is very complicated, as the parents are likely to have spent a great deal of money on their child's education, and expect them to marry "well". Also, children in China are expected to provide for their parents in old age, and one single salary may be insufficient for this, hence getting married can be seen as part of one's duty to look after one's parents. However, there are far more Christian women than men in China, which poses a terrible dilemma for many female returnees: marry a non-Christian, or risk disappointing your parents, jeopardising their future and being looked down on by society. This area requires great sensitivity as we encourage our friends to stay faithful to God's call to only marry a believer, while taking seriously the many painful potential repercussions of such a choice. Working through the case study above will raise some relevant issues, but you will probably need to talk to each group member individually to discover where the particular challenges lie for them.

Possible questions for discussion:

- What is God's will for us in relationships? Why is this good for us?
- What might make it difficult for you to obey God in the area of marriage? (e.g. loneliness/ pressure from parents/ not being convinced that God knows best)
- How might we comfort ourselves and each other when we struggle to trust God in this area?



# Malachi 2:17-3:5

**Purpose of the passage: Fear God; he is faithful and WILL come in judgement.**

## Before the study...

1. Why are the people complaining in this passage?
2. Why will God send a messenger?

### 1. Why are the people complaining? (v17)

*Evildoers are not being punished, and other nations seem to prosper more than them.*

It looks like  
God's abandoned  
his promises

### 2. When do we feel like making similar complaints?

*E.g. There is so much suffering and injustice in the world; the church looks weak*

### 3. Big Question: HOW DOES GOD ANSWER THEIR COMPLAINT?

**a) In pairs, break the passage into sections with titles. (STRUCTURE tool)**

#### **b) Look at v1-4: How do these verses answer the people's complaint?**

(Who will come? What will they do? What effect will this have on the nation?)

*Two messengers will come: the first will prepare the way for the second, who is the Lord, the messenger of the covenant, who will refine and purify the Levites so that they make acceptable offerings.*

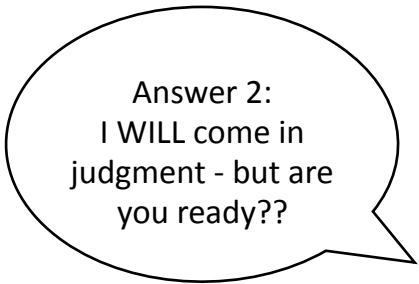
*This will restore blessing to the nation, as the Levites are representative of the whole people.*

Answer 1:  
I WILL keep my promise  
to bless the nation, by  
purifying it

**c) Look at v5: How does this verse answer the people's complaint?**

(How would this verse make them feel? Why?)

*They are doing some of the things that God denounces - so they would feel sobered and afraid.*



**4. ONE UNCHANGING GOD: What have we learnt about God?**

- *he keeps his promises to bless his people.*
- *he's just: he will judge unrighteousness.*

**5. ONE UNFOLDING STORY: This passage talks about things that God will do in the future. Which things have already happened?**

- *the two messengers have come: Jesus and John the Baptist*
- *Jesus has purified a people who're acceptable for God, and announced judgment.*

**Which things are still to happen in the future?**

- *full judgment and justice to come.*
- *fully enjoying the blessings that come from being purified (sinlessness, no more death, seeing God face to face etc)*

**6. How should the people have responded to this answer to their complaint?**

*Trust that God's promised future judgment will happen, and therefore fear him.*

**7. a) How do the two different parts of God's answer tackle the complaints we raised in question 2?**

**b) In the next few months, when might we doubt that God will come to judge? When might we doubt that God has purified us in Jesus?**

*Think of particular situations that your group members will face, such as exams, visits home, fighting sin etc.*

**c) How can we make sure we remember this passage at these times?**

## Returnee Issue: Sharing the Gospel

As this passage talks about Jesus' return and judgment, it is likely to raise the question of what will happen on that day to our friends and family who do not know Jesus. Most of those who become Christians abroad will be returning to non-Christian families, so it is important that we help them to think through how they can make best use of opportunities to explain the gospel to them when they return. In particular, we can help our friends to think about:

- **Sharing their testimony in a Christ-centered way**

What questions might family and friends ask about life overseas?

- *think about how to turn these general questions into gospel opportunities.*

How will you explain to friends and family what it means that you became a Christian, and why you became a Christian? How can you do this in a way that helps them start to understand the gospel?

- *perhaps you could practice explaining to each other how you became a Christian, and think about how to explain it in a way that honours Christ.*

- **Memorising a simple gospel outline**

Our friends may use the outline to explain the gospel to someone, or it may just help them to be clear themselves about what they are trying to tell others when they share the gospel.

A good example of a gospel outline is Two Ways to Live

(<http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/2wtl/> - also available in Chinese).

While the truth of the gospel is unchanging, the way we explain it varies depending on who we are speaking to. You and your friend could discuss how you might adapt this gospel outline so that it resonates with someone from a Chinese worldview.

# Malachi 3:6-12

**Purpose of the passage: Trust God's faithfulness to bless, and so obey him.**

## Before the study...

1. What do we learn about God's character?
2. What does the Israelites' behaviour reveal about their attitude to God?

**Starter Question: What different reasons do Christians have for giving money to church/Christian charities?**

### 1. What aspect of God's character has not changed?

*His grace to Israel - he does not destroy Israel, though this is what she deserves for turning from him. He will faithfully bless Israel, as he promised.*

### 2. What were the Israelites doing wrong?

*Refusing to give God the full tithe (= 10% of all their crops, e.g. Leviticus 27:32)*

### 3. What does this reveal about their attitude to God?

*They did not trust him to keep his promise to bless them.*

### 4. Sum this up by filling in the table:

Attitude to God	Behaviour	Result
<b>Doubting his faithfulness to his promise to bless</b>	<i>Disobedient - e.g. not giving God the full tithe</i>	<i>They are cursed, with pestilence and bad harvest</i>
<b>Trusting his faithfulness to his promise to bless</b>	<i>Obedient - e.g. giving God the full tithe</i>	<i>They will be blessed, with abundant crops and fruit. All nations will marvel at God's blessing to Israel.</i>

**5. Do they earn God's blessing by their obedience? If not, then what role does obedience play?**

*No, as we know God's promise to bless is unchanging, despite Israel's disobedience (v6). But obedience is an **indicator** of whether or not they are trusting and turning to God, which is essential.*

**6. Why might it have been difficult for them to trust God's command to tithe?**

*Their nation was not prospering, and God's promises were not yet fulfilled. At a time of famine and poverty, offering 10% of your crops to God is not easy!*

**7. How would this passage motivate them to give wholeheartedly?**

**8. ONE UNCHANGING GOD:**

**How does this passage motivate us to give wholeheartedly?**

**How does it motivate us to obey God wholeheartedly?**

**9. ONE UNFOLDING STORY: Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-11. How has Jesus' coming changed the way in which we should give?**

*We're no longer under the Mosaic covenant, so don't need to tithe; instead each should give 'as he has decided in his heart' (v7).*

*The blessing we receive through giving is not material, but spiritual (v8, 10). There are also rewards in heaven.*

**10. What reasons make it difficult for us to give money away?**

**11. How would trusting God's faithfulness affect our use of money in practice?**

## Returnee Issue: Parents and Family

In traditional Chinese culture, love for parents is considered to be the most important virtue. Chinese parents usually look to their child - often an only child as a result of the one child policy - to bring them status and material security in old age. It can be very hard for parents to accept that Christ is now their child's top priority.

After being away from family for a long time while overseas, returnees may need to think through how to relate to their parents in a Christ-like way when they return home - particularly to consider how to honour non-Christian parents (who probably funded their studies abroad), while not compromising on the gospel. The questions below use the framework of Malachi 3:6-12 (trusting God's faithfulness leads to obedience) to help us think through what it will mean to obey God in the area of family relationships.

- When might it be a challenge to obey God in your relationships with your parents after returning home?

Areas to discuss may include:

- Dealing with parents' high hopes for your career/marriage
  - Pressure to participate in idol worship/ ancestor worship
  - Pressure to stop going to church
  - Loving your parents practically and not being selfish
- How would trusting God's faithfulness affect your behaviour in these areas?
  - How can you wholeheartedly worship God through your relationship with your family?

# Malachi 3:13-4:6


**Purpose of the passage: Fear God; the day of distinction will make it worth it.**

## Before the study...

1. What do we learn about the future 'day'?
2. How should God's people live in view of that day?

## 1. What is the people's complaint? Why do they think this?

*It looks like serving God is pointless, as the wicked prosper.*



Serving  
God is  
pointless

## 2. In what situations do we think that serving God is pointless?

## 3. What one verse from the passage would you choose to sum up God's answer?

*Something that shows God will make a distinction between two groups of people...*

## 4. How are the two groups of people described in this passage? What will happen to them both on the future day?

Answer using the table below:

<b>People</b>	<i>Those who don't serve God The arrogant Etc...</i>	<i>Those who fear the Lord The righteous Etc...</i>
<b>Future</b>	<i>They will be burnt up - utterly destroyed Etc...</i>	<i>God will remember them They will be God's own treasured possession Etc...</i>

## 5. How does the imagery used in the passage help us to understand God's answer?

*Use the TONE tool: the vivid, emotive images help us to realise that this future day is real, although we cannot see it yet.*

## 6. Why does the book end with v4-6?

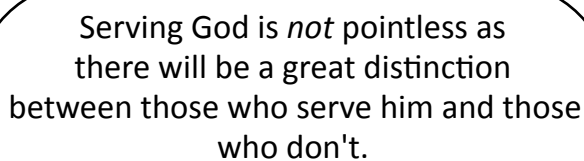
v4 What should the people do? How does this passage encourage them to do it?

v5-6 Who was Elijah? What will he do? Who does this remind us of in Malachi? So what should the people do?

*He prepares for the day of the Lord, like the messenger of 3:1; so wait for him*

--> v4-6 show them what to do between now and the day of the Lord: they should keep their side of the covenant, and wait for that day.

## 7. How does the passage answer the people's complaint?



Serving God is *not* pointless as there will be a great distinction between those who serve him and those who don't.

## 8. How is God's timescale different to the people's timescale?

*They expected God's promises to be fulfilled now (i.e. the people of Israel being blessed in the land of Israel), but God's answer talks of a new people (those who fear God) and a future blessing.*

## 9. ONE UNCHANGING GOD: What unchanging promises does God make in this passage?

*He will save those who fear him*

*He will punish the wicked*

## 10. ONE UNFOLDING STORY: How is the response we should make different to their's? (4:4-6)

*We express our fear of God differently, as we are not under the Mosaic covenant. Elijah (John the Baptist) has already come and we are now waiting for Jesus' return!*

**11. Case Study:** Wei returned to Beijing 2 months ago, and is desperately looking for a job. Eventually he gets an offer from a company where he would like to work, but the boss says that he must produce some fake documents in order to get the job.

**How would you use this passage to advise Wei?**

**12. Choose an area where you're tempted to think it is pointless to serve God - perhaps something you have been challenged about through studying Malachi.**

- How does this passage remind you that it is not pointless?
- Which aspect of that future day is the biggest encouragement to you?



## Returnee Issue: Work

Work is one of the areas where it can be most tempting for returnees to think that serving God is 'pointless'. With their overseas study experience they are expected to get a top job when they return, but with a top job usually comes high pressure, compulsory overtime, and frequent business trips. It is very difficult to say 'no' to one's boss, particularly in China where there is a stronger sense of respect for authority. Such a working environment can pose many difficult questions:

- Should I accept this brilliant job offer even though I know the hours are long and I'll struggle to make it to church... or turn it down, disappointing my parents, without any guarantee that I'll get another offer?
- What should I do when I have to go on business trips every weekend, making it impossible to have regular fellowship with other Christians?
- Should I ask my boss to excuse me from attending meetings on Sundays when they clash with my church service... even though this is unheard of in my company, and may put my job at risk?
- How should I react when my boss expects me to do business in a way that I know is not entirely honest and fair?

There is no easy answer to these questions, but it is worth thinking through some of them as case studies. The following questions might be helpful as you do so:

- Why might you be tempted to put your work above your relationship with God?
- How does the future perspective of Jesus' return encourages you to make decisions that seem 'pointless' now?

# Finally...

If you have time, you could do a final study summarising, applying and praying through some of the big lessons from Malachi. A Returnee Issue for this study is suggested below.

You could also pass on a link to the Sea Turtles Website, which has various articles, interviews and links for those preparing to return home, or who have recently returned: <http://www.seaturtles.org.uk/>

## **Returnee Issue: Keeping Going**

The Christian life will always be full of struggles and pressures - no matter which country we live in. However, Malachi gives us an amazing incentive to keep going as Christians even when it's really hard, because the struggles won't last forever! One day our Lord will return, and we will 'go out and leap like calves released from the stall'. A summary study is a good chance to remind our friends of this perspective; to show them that there is nothing more important than continuing as a Christian to the end of our lives.

You could revisit any particular issues that came up during the course of the study, perhaps using the questions below.

- How has studying Malachi increased your confidence in God's faithfulness to you?
- How has it increased your fear of the Lord?
- What practical steps can you take so that you continue to grow in these two areas after returning home?

Spend plenty of time praying together for any challenges, and praising God for his unchanging faithfulness.

## Bible Timeline 圣经总览

