

MITCHELTON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

WEIGHING
the Heart

3 WEEK SERIES IN MALACHI



WEEK 1

A LITTLE RESPECT

PAGE 3

WEEK 2

UNFAITHFUL PRIESTS & HUSBANDS

PAGE 7

WEEK 3

THE VERDICT

PAGE 11

A Courtroom Drama

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament, and therefore comes at a critical point. Israel has returned from exile in Babylon. Their sin of worshipping idols has been paid for. But have their hearts returned to their true God? God is unhappy with how he's being treated. Like a non-apology apology, Israel's worship and lifestyle is leaving a bad taste in God's mouth.

God has been sending messenger after messenger, begging his people to return to him with their whole hearts. This message is their final warning. Return to your God with your whole heart or he will come—with a curse.

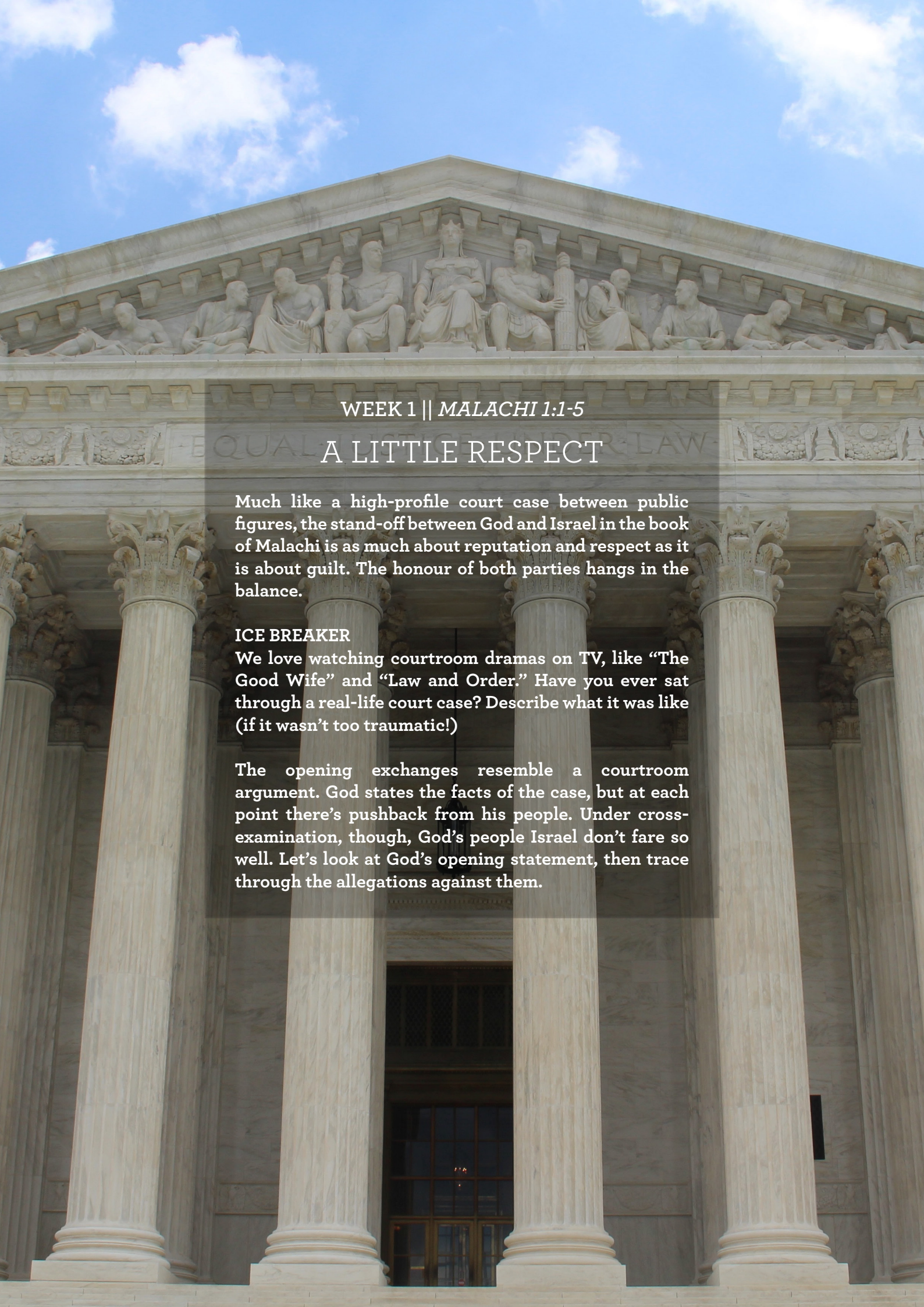
Malachi presents God's argument as a court case, with a series of allegations and then cross-examination by the opposing party. With the judge's concluding remarks we find that this is actually a pre-trial hearing, with a much bigger day of future judgement still to come. Malachi points Israel forward to the day when God himself will come in the person of Jesus.

What will Jesus find when he comes to the temple? Will Israel's hearts have returned to their father? Or will he sentence the temple to destruction? And where do we fit into the story?

We pray that this guide will help you turn to God with your whole heart, as it points to Jesus as not only the judge, but the one who takes God's judgment on himself.

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WEEK 1 || *MALACHI 1:1-5*

A LITTLE RESPECT

Much like a high-profile court case between public figures, the stand-off between God and Israel in the book of Malachi is as much about reputation and respect as it is about guilt. The honour of both parties hangs in the balance.

ICE BREAKER

We love watching courtroom dramas on TV, like “The Good Wife” and “Law and Order.” Have you ever sat through a real-life court case? Describe what it was like (if it wasn’t too traumatic!)

The opening exchanges resemble a courtroom argument. God states the facts of the case, but at each point there’s pushback from his people. Under cross-examination, though, God’s people Israel don’t fare so well. Let’s look at God’s opening statement, then trace through the allegations against them.

OPENING STATEMENT OF THE PROSECUTION

Read Malachi 1:1-5

1. What attitude does God have towards Israel in his opening statement?
2. From the tone of their response, what does Israel think of God's profession of love?
3. What evidence does God cite in response?
4. What statement was God making to the world by judging Edom as he did?

God's response—"Look how things would be if I didn't love you!"—is an intense way to open the case. Why would they have been destroyed like Edom if God didn't love them? Keep reading. There's more of the case against Israel in God's first allegation.

ALLEGATION 1: "YOU DISHONOUR ME"

Read Malachi 1:6-14

5. What role does God play in the relationship?
6. What is Israel's heart towards God?
7. Does Israel feel that their actions deserve this evaluation?
8. What does the quality of the animals that the Israelites bring for sacrifice reveal about their heart attitude towards their God? (v8)
9. How far has Israel pushed God with their treatment of him? (v10)
10. What effect is Israel's treatment of God having as the surrounding nations watch on? (v11-13)
11. What is the relationship between Israel's conduct and God's international reputation?

God chose Israel to be a special people, so that through them he would bless the nations. As the nations watched the way Israel loved their God and each other they were supposed to be awed at how good Israel's God is. The way Israel sacrificed their worst and least to God didn't exactly make the nations around them think that Israel or their God was worth following.

Read Deuteronomy 4:6-8 below

Observe [these laws] carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Deuteronomy 4:6-8

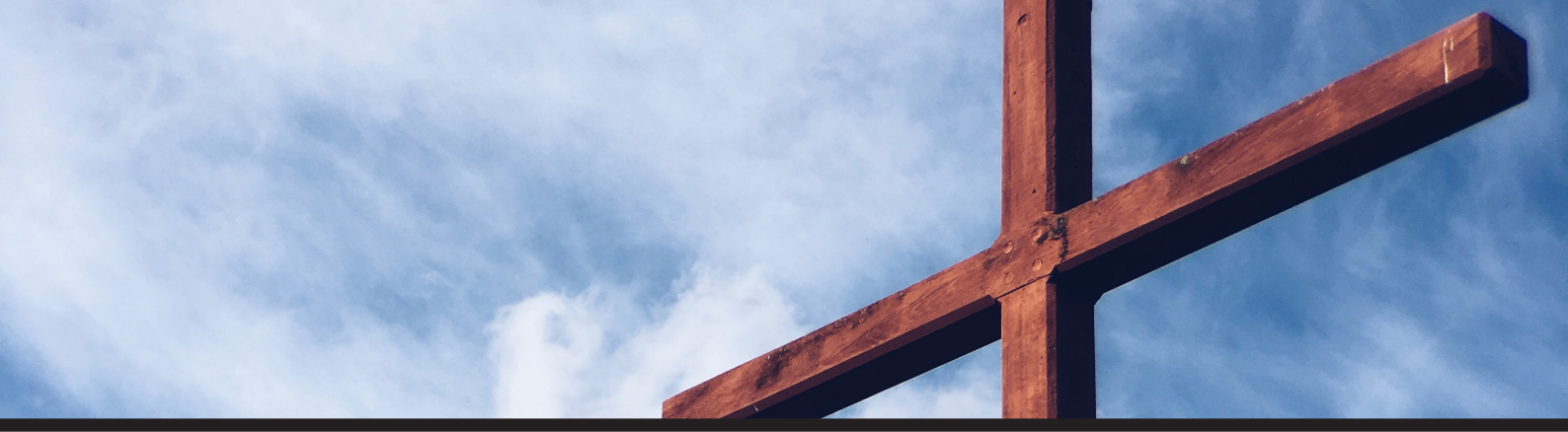
FOLLOW THE STORY

Read Hebrews 9:23-26 below

It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Hebrews 9:23-26

Jesus' whole life was spent serving God and God's people, even to the point of giving up his life. It was a better sacrifice than those of Israel in every possible way. It is Jesus' sacrifice on the cross that honours God as father, master and great king.



LOOKING FORWARD

The sacrifice of Jesus satisfies God's requirements for all people who follow him. As God's new people, saved by Jesus, we're all the more called to live in a way that honours God as both great king and merciful saviour.

Read 1 Peter 2:9-12

12. For people who follow Jesus now, what's our collective task?

13. How are we demonstrating to people watching our lives that our God is a great king worthy of honour and respect?

14. Israel made God angry by not honouring Him; instead they gave Him their least and worst. Would someone watching your life think that God deserves your best? Or just your leftovers?

15. What can we do to show people that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is good evidence that our God is worth honouring? How does this complement our attempts to live such good lives that people think God is worth honouring?

Pray together that we would live such good lives among our friends that they will praise God and want to get to know him. Thank Jesus for being the perfect sacrifice that makes us acceptable to God.