



WEEK 3 || *MALACHI 2:17-4:6*

THE VERDICT

God's court case against Israel continues. And the charges are mounting. This week we'll see things build up to a climax.

Are there people who seem to have the opposite definitions of 'good' and 'evil' to you?

How does our culture seem to define 'good' today?

ALLEGATION 4: "YOUR ACCUSATIONS WEARY ME"

Read Malachi 2:17-3:5

1. God's relentless list of allegations against Israel continues. Why does God find them so tiresome?
2. Trace through the sequence of God's promised actions in 3:1.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
3. What consequences will there be for Israel, and why will this be surprising? (Remember, this is the one they say they seeking!)
4. What will the outcome be after God finishes 'refining' Israel?
5. On the day God visits his temple to finally 'put Israel on trial' (3:5), list the specific sins he'll be looking for...
6. Can you categorise them?

These issues will be very relevant on the day Jesus comes to visit his temple!

ALLEGATION 5: "YOU KEEP TURNING AWAY"

Read Malachi 3:6-12

7. What's the only reason the descendants of Jacob (Israel) are still standing?
8. What's their crime this time, and what do they need to do? (v7)
9. What will Israel's return to God look like? (v8-10)

ALLEGATION 6: "YOU ROB ME"

10. What allegation is God adding to the rap-sheet, and why? (v8-10)

The people of Israel were living under a long standing covenant with God that promised all kinds of physical blessings in the promised land -- if -- they served the Lord with all their hearts. As we saw in chapter 1, their honouring of God was shown for what it was by the quality of animals they brought for sacrifice. Here in chapter 3, it's reflected in the fact that they don't bring their required tithes and offerings to the temple storehouse. In effect, says Malachi, they're robbing God...

11. Look back over Malachi so far, and summarise in your own words Israel's approach to their 'religious duties':

They would:

They would not:

12. What 'covenant blessings' is God offering?

What should result from this in v12?

13. As usual, Israel seems bemused by God's allegations against them. What's their final crime?

What do their words reveal?

Do you ever feel this way?

THE VERDICT: TURN OR BURN

Read the final words of the Old Testament in Malachi 4.

14. What two kinds of Israelites does Malachi describe, and what outcomes does he foresee for each group? (v1-3)

Remember, Malachi has already accused Israel's men of violating the covenant with God by breaking faith with their wives and deserting their families (2:14-15). Israel's families, which were

meant to produce godly offspring, were a mess. But that's just a sign of the deeper mess: because they've abandoned their God!

According to verse 5, what are the two next steps?

I will send _____

before the _____.

15. Noticing the family-breakdown issues in chapter 2, what evidence will show that Israel has had a change of heart? (v6)

16. All the allegations have been laid. What will the consequence be when God comes to visit if Israel doesn't change course and truly repent? (4v6b)

A CLIFFHANGER ENDING

The ending of Malachi, and the whole of the Old Testament, is a cliff-hanger. What will Israel do? When the time comes for God to visit them, will Israel turn, or be totally destroyed?

We only have to turn the page to find the answers in the New Testament, almost 400 years later. All four of the gospel writers introduce us to John the Baptist, the promised fore-runner of the Lord's visit.

Read Luke 3:3-20

17. How does Luke summarise the theme of John's message for Israel? How does this fit with Malachi's warning?

18. What warning does John give to the Israelite leaders in v9? How does this compare with Malachi's ultimatum?

19. When people ask John if he is the Messiah, what's his answer?

20. What will John do, and what will the coming one do?



THE HOLY SPIRIT AND FIRE

The word 'baptise' (Luke 3:16) simply means 'wash.' But what does John actually mean that Jesus will do? Some think he's talking about the 'tongues of fire' that were seen when the disciples first received the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. But when you read the very next verse (Luke 3:17), it seems that Israel will face a choice of two options, just as Malachi said. One option will be baptism with the Holy Spirit. The other option will be that Israel will be 'washed' by being burned away like the chaff at harvest time.

Which way will they choose when they meet Jesus? That's the big question!

MARRIAGE RENEWAL

21. In Malachi's time, unfaithfulness in marriage was one of Israel's defining sins (see last week's study). What does John's conflict with Herod (Luke 3:19) reveal about the state of Israel's leadership?

REPENTANCE, THE SPIRIT, AND YOU

Jesus brings a real turning point in the history of national Israel—or more accurately, an 'end point.' But as repentance and the need to turn back to God for forgiveness was preached in Jesus name, it was a message that resonated not just with faithful Israelites, but with thousands of 'gentiles' as well. And as Peter says in his powerful speech in Acts 15, and Paul points out in Galatians, Gentile believers receive the promised Holy Spirit as well! The end for the unrepentant nation of Israel then came with their destruction by the Romans in 70AD.

22. Think back to God's allegations against Israel. How does the Holy Spirit motivate better things from Christians today?

23. In what areas is the Holy Spirit convicting you to honour God more faithfully?

24. Share with the group some ways you could encourage one another in these things.