

## Malachi Chapters 3-4- John Karmelich

1. I'd like you to imagine the following scenario. God asked you to write down the last things He is going to say to people before He goes "silent" for 400 years. Even if you are a religious Jew, it'd be the last thing God's going to say to close out the Old Testament. Assuming you're a Christian, it'd be the last thing for about 400 years until John the Baptist comes on the scene. Would you write a line like, "Hey everybody, be kind to others, live as God desires and hang tough until Jesus shows up?" Assuming you've got some knowledge of Israel's history since then, what message would you'd like to leave not only as a witness to the world, but as the one who'll be forever known as the last Old Testament speaker? Since Israel was part of another empire at that time and will be parts of other empires for thousands of years, what message of hope or of God's judgment would you write? It had to be a scary thing to do for a task that taunting. Realize that's what we have here in Malachi. It's God's final message before He goes silent for hundreds of years.
  - a) The good news is you don't have to complete this assignment. Malachi's completed it for us a few thousand years ago. What God wants us to get from this text is to realize "what's coming down the road" for them and yes, for us. Malachi's going to include references to events of Jesus First and Second Coming mixed together. He's going to tell us about John the Baptist since he's "next on the list of who's coming". Malachi's going to tell us of signs to watch for before Jesus First and Second Comings so we'd recognize those events if they happen to occur when we're around. More importantly, he gives us some practical advice on what God expects of us until He shows up on the scene. If you've ever wanted a good summary of what God expects of us until we die? You've come to the right place!
  - b) The point is God's going to go silent for a long time, and here's what we're to do until all of that occurs. In the past few lessons, I've hinted at the idea of God going silent on us as a common occurrence in the life of a Christian. What I mean by that is we may go through a time where we fell like our prayers are bouncing off a ceiling with no response. We may feel like nothing's going right and God's not there helping us. I've come to accept times as those as times where God's saying to me, "Yes I'm still here, but I'm testing your faith as to see how you're going to react." When such times come, keep praying, keep studying the bible as it's still God's word and then make the best decisions we can, with the situation at hand. That's how God wants us to live whether we feel His presence or not.
  - c) Again, I'm giving that little speech here because God's about to "go silent" in terms of any new revelation from Him for hundreds of years. So let me ask the obvious question: Why was there no new writing after Revelation? Why has God "gone silent" effectively for the last 2,000 years? Obviously I don't believe He has. Since the printing press came around in the 12th or 13th century, copying God's word has become a lot easier. In the 4th century when the Christian church officially organized the bible, a "standard" was set for us to see His word written for us. Today in the era where vast sums of information are available at our fingertips, there's no excuse for most people to not find His Word available to us. All I am saying is God's still communicating to us today and leading people to Him as we have His word at our fingertips in a completed form.
2. Speaking of communicating God's word before things go silent, let's get back to Malachi. As I say a lot there were no chapter breaks in the original text. They were added roughly around the same time as the printing press came on the scene. The official Jewish version of the bible has these two final chapters as one, with the Christian bible separating this text into two chapters. Either way, we have a final message to God's people before a long period of time of God going silent. OK John, you can now stop beating that fact over our heads. What is it that Malachi has to say at that time? Thought you would never ask. Here we go:
  - a) Malachi begins by saying a messenger is coming right before the Messiah shows up on the scene. Kings in those days would come after a messenger says, the king's on his way."

- b) All I'm saying is Malachi used a style that people of his day could relate to. Since he got a vision from God (I'd argue all of Malachi's a single vision), he wants to communicate to us how God expects us to live until the Messiah (Jesus) shows up, and what He'll do when He's here. I'd say that's a pretty daunting task, but that's what God called Malachi to do.
  - c) With that said, let me try to summarize the last two chapters so we understand what is his final words before "going silent" and more importantly how they apply to our lives today as we Christians wait for the literal return of Jesus to rule over the world.
3. Chapter 3 opens effectively with a promise that a messenger will come right before the Messiah is going to show up on the scene. OK, that requires some explanations:
- a) It's an ancient Middle East custom that before a king comes on the scene, a messenger first shows up to effectively say, "Get everything ready the big shot's coming!" We get some of that today, as when a president or a key figure speaks, a crowd's there to listen. My point is simply that before Jesus comes on the scene, a powerful messenger will effectively say it is about to happen. Let's be honest, John the Baptist fit that role before Jesus First Coming. The First Century historian Josephus records the popularity of "The Baptist". It just wasn't the bible saying John was popular, as an outside source verified that point.
  - b) The end of Chapter 4 says that the prophet Elijah who lived a few hundreds years prior to Malachi would literally be that messenger. Elijah was taken directly to heaven so in that sense he didn't die. (2nd Kings 2:11.) Malachi tells us near the end his book that Elijah will make an "encore appearance" soon before the Messiah shows up.
  - c) Here's the tricky part: John the Baptist literally denied that he was Elijah. Jesus also made the comment that "If Israel accepted Jesus' coming, John "would have been" Elijah. Since it didn't happen, in effect it's a non-issue. Bottom line, John the Baptist fulfilled that role prior to Jesus First Coming and Christian theology argues that Elijah himself will literally return prior to Jesus Second Coming. More details about that in the lesson.
  - d) Malachi doesn't just say, "watch out for that guy" but warns that judgment's coming when he does show up. I'll argue that one reason the Romans destroyed Israel was because they rejected Jesus. That's why three of the four gospels discuss Jerusalem's destruction. The point is God's going to come down hard on those who reject His rule when it does occur.
  - e) Anyway, that's not all that Malachi warns about in these last two chapters. Between those warnings of the messenger (Chapter 3 effectively opens with it and Chapter 4 effectively closes with it), Malachi gives a few more warnings on the topic of "what should be doing until all of this happens"?
    - i) He starts by naming some specific sins, as examples of things people are willing to do more than honoring God as God. We'll get to that.
    - ii) Then Malachi gives a rant about "tithing". I listened to a good number of pastors go "on and on" about this as if they're effectively saying, "fill up our pocketbooks". As a clue to my view on this, I believe in having a healthy balance between being saved by grace alone versus putting our money where our mouth is in our lives. I don't read of tithing in the New Testament but there's a lot of text on the topic of Christians giving. Ok, no more "on and on" on that topic.
    - iii) Malachi closes his examples of how we should act until Jesus shows up lecture by warning of the dangers of speaking arrogantly against God. It's the idea of people saying, "I see wicked people prospering, so why should I believe God exists?" We are getting the reminder that "Judgment is coming" (accept it) and nobody will get away with it forever. The point is living for God now is worth it and that's how He expects us to live until Jesus returns on the scene.
    - iv) Finally we get a positive statement that says God's well aware of all we do for Him and how we Christians spend our days focusing on Him. It's a reminder that there will be saved people in the end.
    - v) Then Malachi ends where he began saying "Judgment's coming, deal with it"!

- f) OK that's the last two chapters in two pages. That's God's effective message to Christians until Jesus returns as well. My lesson title is "God's final words before going silent". That fits well with this final message of the Old Testament. With that said, time for details:
4. Chapter 3, Verse 1: "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.
- a) Whenever starting a new chapter, it's always a good idea to read it in context of where we left off. The entire four-chapter book of Malachi is in effect a single speech. His main topic is naming ways that the Israelites are not pleasing to God. In effect, Verses 1-8 are one big interruption of that topic to say in effect, "God's coming and right before He does, He will send a messenger the same way a king or important dignitary sends a messenger to say in effect, "The big guy is coming, everybody get ready!"
- b) So why the warning? Why not just have Jesus show up on the scene to start the judging process? Why the big "Revelation show?" For starters, God wants to make it obvious to everyone when it begins. The reason John the Baptist's ministry was successful was God wanted to be successful so people will know God Himself is about to pop on the scene.
- c) Let me focus on the "First Coming Events" and then I'll discuss the "Second Coming as it also relates to this verse.
- i) The New Testament makes it clear that when John the Baptist started preaching, it was in the middle of "nowhere". I don't think he made flyers or had messengers to say, "Come see this wild man in the middle of nowhere preach about Jesus!" What I suspect is some shepherds saw what he was doing, they told those in towns what John was doing and it led to a great revival of people coming to see him preach.
- ii) Let's also make it clear than when the religious leaders sent rep's to find out what's the big fuss, John stated very clearly he is not Elijah. (See Gospel of John 1:21).
- a) That reminds me, I always get some newer Christians who think the writer of the Gospel of John is also John the Baptist. They are separate people. All you have to realize is John the Baptist dies in the "middle" of the Gospels so it can't be the same guy who wrote the Gospel of John.
- b) In Matthew's Gospel Chapter 11, Jesus states that if (the big if) the Israelites would accept Him as the Messiah, then "the Baptist" would be how Verse 1 of Malachi gets literally fulfilled. Since that didn't happen, we have to "fast forward" to Jesus Second Coming to fulfill this verse whenever that occurs.
- iii) Before I get to that, let me address the idea of Jesus "returning at any moment" vs. the "Revelation Show" happening first! Most Roman Catholics hold the view that all that "show" takes place over the 2,000-year and counting time span since Jesus came on the scene. Therefore, all that's left is the "final act" of Revelation when we see Jesus starting the judging process.
- a) Most Evangelical Protestants hold the literal view that the "show" is future and a single 7-year event. However, the rapture of the Christian church is a separate event that occurs prior to the "show" starting.
- b) Some Christians hold the view that the rapture happens right at the end of the 7-year "show". I disagree for the simple reason that I hold the view that Jesus can return at any time. If the "post-trib." view is correct, Jesus cannot be coming back at any moment, but only after the "show" occurs.
- iv) Enough of that debate. Time to discuss Jesus Second Coming and Elijah:
- a) As I said in the introduction, Elijah technically didn't die, but he was taken directly to heaven. (2nd Kings 2:11). There's only one other character (Post Abraham, pre Jesus,) where a burial could be questioned was for Moses. In Deuteronomy 34:6, it says Moses was buried in the land of Moab (that's the land of Jordan today), but no one knows the spot where he was buried.

- b) In the New Testament one-chapter book of Jude, there's a strange little line (Verse 9) about a dispute over Moses body and who gets to have it.
  - c) OK John, you're getting weird on us. What's the point?
  - d) When Jesus got "transfigured" before His disciples (became all white), with Him appeared Moses and Elijah. (Matthew 17, Mark 9 and Luke 9).
  - e) What I'm getting at is I'm positive God's not through with either Elijah or Moses. Revelation Chapter 11 speaks of two unnamed witnesses who show up just before Jesus comes on the scene. One of those two witnesses has the power to turn water into blood, which one must admit is very "Moses like". The other has the power to make it stop raining, which is arguably Elijah's most famous miracle. (See 1st Kings Chapter 18.)
  - f) My point of all this, is simply that Elijah is part of the "Revelation Show" as well as the fact that John the Baptist was "Elijah-like" in what He did.
- d) Bringing all of this back to Verse 1 of Malachi, the point is an important messenger is part of both Jesus First Coming and Jesus Second Coming whenever it happens. If over a page on this isn't enough, I'm going to discuss it a little more at the end of Chapter 4. Since I've now spent all this time on Verse 1, I better speed it up and move on to Verse 2.
5. Verse 2: 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.
- a) The next logical question is, "OK John the Baptist shows up before Jesus and Elijah will be showing up before Jesus Second Coming, so what?" What'll they be doing? The answer's in these three verses. The message is much more than "Jesus is coming deal with it". It's a message to "clean up our act" as THE King of the world's on His way to judge us!
  - b) Time for another quick discussion on the question of does the Christian behavior matter if we're saved by grace alone. If Christians are saved strictly by believing Jesus died for our sins, He is God and He's in charge of our lives, why are we judged based on behavior? It comes down to the important question of, if we believe all that, what have we done about it? That question is the underlying message of Malachi as well as much of the bible. We will get examples of acceptable and unacceptable behavior coming up, but until then, the issue here is what does John the Baptist do and what will Elijah do to encourage that? The picture being painted here is that both of these guys will work on "cleaning up our act" in preparation for Jesus coming. John baptized people as if to say, "you're now clean of your sins, now go act better than you've been doing, because Jesus is about to appear on the scene. Elijah effectively gives the same warning that judgment's coming and will do the "no rain trick" (among others) to prove he was sent by God.
  - c) The references in Verse 2 to "refiner's fire or launderer's soap" are both about cleaning up our act because Jesus will be "in our face" about it.
  - d) Consider the following: If Malachi is predicting this messenger will show up right before the Messiah shows up, wouldn't that imply that Israelites have to be back in the Israel for all of this to happen? Wouldn't they have to be saved or at least care about the Messiah in order for this to occur? These verses are subtle reminders that Israelites being home again when all this occurs has to happen just as it did in 1948. Further, there must be a massive "Evangelical wave" that sweeps over Israel for Jesus if all of this turns like Revelation says it will. My point is underlying Malachi's predictions of Judah (a nickname for the Israel in that day) and Jerusalem must be standing and "Devout Jewish" for all of this occur.
    - i) Also notice the Levites will exist then. Another strange underlying prediction will be that Israelites will once again know what tribe they're from when Jesus returns on the scene. Realize Ezekiel 48 speaks of dividing Israel by tribe again one day!

- ii) Anyway, the underlying point of all of this is that Malachi is predicting that before Jesus returns, a great "Evangelical movement" will occur so that the Israelites there will desire to seek God and "clean up their act" in preparation for all of this.
  - e) Gee John, that's all well and good for a "some day in the future", but how does any of this affect us non-Jewish people living today? Even if we accept this as biblical truth, why do we have to care about this now? (So glad you asked!) Because just as John the Baptist did prepare people for Jesus First Coming and Elijah prepares people for His Second, so we've been called to lead others to Jesus, which is what the Great Commission is all about. What God desires we each use the gifts He's given us, and combine that effort with what we do enjoy doing as to use those gifts to make a difference for Him and the kingdom!
  - f) While you're sitting there contemplating what specifically you should be doing, all of that leads me back to the topic of "Faith versus Works". God expects us to live as He desires as a witness for Him. I've joked for years that I'm free to sin all I want. The big question each of us must ask is "how much do we want to?" If God expects us to be witnesses for Him, it does mean we're to modify our behavior. No we can't be perfect. On the other hand we're not to give up trying either. The secret to living as God desires is relying upon His power to live as He desires. The great advantage the New Testament believer has over Israelites living in the Old Testament, is God gave us His spirit to help us live as He desires.
    - i) But John, we still sin. Agreed. God's word tells us how we should live. The Spirit guides us as to what to do at any moment. But God also gives us the free will as to choose what to do at any moment. The point is the power and the ability to live as God desires is there, but we must choose to live as He desires.
  - g) Wow, nice sermon. What does any of that have to do with Malachi? He's predicting that when Elijah shows up on the scene, the Holy Spirit will work in the lives of Israelites then just as He does with Christians today. We won't become robots, but just as Christians do have the power to do His will, so the Israelites one day will have also have the Holy Spirit when all of this occurs. In effect, Malachi's predicting a big "evangelical sweep" of Israel to occur just as Jesus called us to be a witness to Him today. So does that mean we shouldn't witness to a Jewish person today because this "sweep" is coming? Of course not. We don't know when that sweep will occur, so God desires we be witnesses to all people until then! There's no greater gift a person can have (outside of salvation itself) than to have the Holy Spirit work within us as to make a difference for Jesus until He shows up!
  - h) On that positive note, Verse 5:
6. Verse 5: "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.
- a) OK, now that we got the good news explained it's time for the bad news: Jesus will come not to pat everyone on the head and say that He loves us just as you are. That'll be a time of judgment for all people and all nations. Of course nobody's perfect. That's why we can only be saved by trusting in God's payment for our sins. However people would naturally ask, well, what did I do wrong? We get a list of some of those things here in Verse 5.
  - b) Notice murder and theft aren't on the list. Sorcery (trying to get demons to act) made that list as well as adultery and people who defraud the less fortunate. My point is God has a standard He expects us to live by and there are consequences from turning from it. What about saved by grace versus this list? First if we claim the blood of Jesus as our sole reason for salvation, what we did before that doesn't matter. The next issue is how we lived as a witness for Him. What if we just claim Jesus on our deathbed? The question is if we can't live for Jesus now, what makes us think we get that opportunity right before we die? All I am saying is God has standards. People will be judged by what they knew or could have known about those standards and are given the reasons why they're sent to hell.

- c) Remember why we're to live by God's standards: To be a witness for Him, not to earn His love. We will be graded as a witness for Him when He returns. Yes there will be rewards in heaven and that's what His standards are all about for believers. If you desire to ignore those standards, let's just say, eternity away from God's presence isn't worth it. If you are not sure if you're saved, just accept Jesus is God, He's now in charge of all aspects of your life and believe He paid the complete price for all your sins. Then you don't have to worry about the bad stuff on this list. Again even once one is saved, He still has standards for us to live by. He does desire we make the effort to seek His will through prayer and regular study of His word. Then we make the best decisions we can based on those guidelines.
  - d) With that said, failure to live by His standards upon accepting Jesus will get you on God's "naughty list", which is infinitely worse than Santa's bad list! The sins listed in Verse 5 are examples of why we can be rejected by God for failing to trust Him to guide our life.
  - e) OK, enough condemnation for one verse. Let's try the next one.
7. Verse 6: "I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. <sup>7</sup>Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty.
- a) I have to admit, Verse 6 is precious to me. Occasionally I will get people who say that the God of the Old Testament is not the God of the New. My answer is Verse 6. His standard to be with Him hasn't changed from the Old to the New. God still demands obedience for us to be a witness for Him. I'm convinced people will be judged fairly based on what they do know or could have known about Him. Then we're judged based on what we did with that information. That's how "grace and works" mix. We've strictly saved by His grace. I love to say, "Then what?" That's when our works come in, not to prove our worth to Him, but to use our lives as a living witness for Him.
  - b) Anyway, now that I've got my "God doesn't change" speech out of my system. The rest of Verse 6 and Verse 7 is the reminder to the Israelites, "Hey, you're still around aren't you? I don't see any Philistines or Amorites around today, but there are still Israelites all over the world." My point is God's reaching out to them as a nation as well as reaching out to each of us individually to draw close to Him. Verse 7 is a promise: If we make an effort to seek Him, He will draw close to us. So how does that work? Ask any believer! We know that the Holy Spirit is working in our lives simply by the fact God's guiding our life and giving us desires to live certain ways and do things that we'd never desire to do before we were saved.
8. Verse 7b: "But you ask, 'How are we to return?'
- a) Here Malachi asks the question, many of his audience must be wondering: What are we doing wrong? We're back in the land aren't we? We built the temple didn't we? What is it you require of us now that we're here? That's like us Christians asking God, we believe Jesus died for our sins and He's God, so "now what"? Malachi gives a couple of examples through the rest of his book.
9. Verse 8: "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings. <sup>9</sup>You are under a curse – your whole nation – because you are robbing me. <sup>10</sup>Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. <sup>11</sup>I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the LORD Almighty. <sup>12</sup>"Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.
- a) Boy do preachers love these verses. These verses are a chance to go off on a congregation for not giving enough money to one's church. I'll just say that the sermons I heard on this chapter spent a lot of time on these verses. The big question of course, is do they apply to us Christians? What about the fact the word "tithe" doesn't appear in the New Testament?

- b) Let me begin by saying, I'm not passing the plate. I'm only discussing the scriptures, as it's what I believe God called me to do. For those who don't know the word "tithe" refers to a 10% donation of one's net income (say after taxes) to God. I'll also say the word tithe does appear in one New Testament reference. It's used in describing how the devout Israelites went out of their way to tithe every little thing they have to prove they're giving to God.
- c) You will not find any references in the New Testament that requires Christians to tithe.
- d) Coming back to the pastors who lecture on this, they love to point out that Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20), a non-Jewish king, before the Jewish nation started as proof that tithing isn't just a Jewish requirement.
- e) Also realize that the Israelites weren't just required to give 10%. Technically they were to give 23.33% of their income, as there were two and one-thirds tithes per year!
- f) With that said, let me discuss Christians and giving. Let's start with how much? The New Testament makes it clear that God loves a cheerful giver. (2nd Corinthians 9:6-7). The key is our attitude about giving more than the amount. When I get paid, I actually pray about how much to give and God makes it clear.
  - i) The next big question is where. First I'd argue that Christians should mainly give to Christian causes and let nonbelievers support non-Christian causes.
  - ii) With that said, my view is consider the stock market: We want to pick stocks that give us a good return on investment. The same applies to our giving. Of course I'd argue that our church should be first on our giving list. The other issue to be made is where do we see the Holy Spirit working? I've seen some great givers who only give when they see ministries bearing fruit for God. That's like finding a stock that has good potential and it's "bearing fruit". Obviously, if there is a cause that's near to your heart, I'm not denying supporting that effort.
- g) Keep in mind the underlying point: God wants us to use our lives as a witness for Him. If we trust Him with our finances, we're "putting our money where our mouth is".
- h) With that said, let me get back to Malachi. One of the things promised in these verses is if we give to God, He'll bless us tremendously. Boy, do the "health, wealth and prosperity" preacher's love that one! There are false teachers who'll wrongly argue that if you do give them one dollar, now God owes you ten!
  - i) My response is Revelation 2:9. There was a church in Smyrna (it's in Turkey) that Jesus said, "I know you're poor, but you're rich". I get the impression that this church was generous with what resources they had. Individuals in that church are going to get rewards in heaven based on what that verse says. My simple point is I didn't see those church members getting "back 10 for giving one". I could state a few more biblical examples of the poor being blessed after they trusted God in the giving of what they had.
  - ii) My point is, it's not the amount we give, it is our trust in God to provide for us, if we're willing to trust Him with our resources.
  - iii) Realize that people wrongly think that God's blessing the financially successful of this world. God's not promising that. He is promising that if we trust Him in the area of giving, we can't lose! So does that mean we should give God everything in our savings and trust Him to pay the rent? No. It means we trust Him with what we have and ask how we can be a blessing to others with the resources and yes the time He's given us. That's the lifestyle God's looking for in our giving.
- i) Let me wrap this up by returning to Malachi's time. Apparently it wasn't a "bumper" year for crops. Therefore, the tithes were down. God was saying to them, "Hey you want to be blessed? Trust Me with what you do have, and I promise to bless you more than you can ever realize. Again, I don't want you to send to me or anyone your life savings thinking that God must now pay you much more than that based on Malachi Chapter 3. What we are to do is give generously knowing that giving is trusting God with our resources!

10. Verse 13: "You have spoken arrogantly against me," says the LORD. "Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?'"
- a) Well, since most of us are uncomfortable talking about money and giving, Malachi comes to the rescue by changing the topic in Verse 13. Here Malachi is quoting God (that's what prophets did) by saying the people have spoken against God's desire. That is followed by the logical question of, "What did we say?" (Personally if God was ticked off at me, I'd be asking the same question.)
  - b) Before I move on, remember that God doesn't have "moods". A perfect God would know all things. An expanded way to translate this idea is to say, "At this particular moment in your history, I'd like all of you to be aware of what you've said about Me." OK then, onto God's response as to the specific charges He's making against them (and us!):
11. Verse 14: "You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty?'<sup>15</sup> But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it."
- a) Let me paraphrase by saying what we can easily think in the same situation: Why should I do all this stuff for God and complain about all the sin that's going on around me when I see people who could care less about God be financially successful (or fame, or whatever) in life. In other words, why put in all the effort to serve God when we see others who just focus on making money or getting fame, succeeding in life? To put it simply, why should I care about all this "God stuff" when we see non-God fearing people become successful?
    - i) Even before Malachi gets into the answer, remember God knows all things, which includes what we're thinking. I assume most of us know that, but we'd rather not think about. Does that mean every bad thought I have will get me in trouble? No. Jesus died for every sin, so we can't lose our salvation. I will say that God desires we take "Every thought captive" to Him. (2nd Corinthians 10:5). It's another form of confession to give bad thoughts to Him. Speaking of bad thoughts:
12. Verse 16: 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.
- a) What's implied between Verses 15 and 16 is the thought that God knows all things and is going to hold all people accountable for their thoughts as well as their actions. If we have committed our lives to serving Jesus and we see other people "succeed" in this life, we can have assurance that if they don't care about serving God, the rewards of this life is all that they'll ever get. Let's be honest, if there is no next life, we like the religious Israelites back in this text are wasting their lives as non-God fearing people are prospering. Paul in effect said the same thing. That "we're (Christians) wasting our lives if Jesus didn't rise from the dead." (This is the key point of 1st Corinthians Chapter 15, by the way).
  - b) Anyway, instead of focusing on the fate of those who don't care about God, Malachi gives us a positive point: He effectively says that those who think about God is kept for Him to realize how much He cares about is. Personally I hope God has an encyclopedia of all the positive thoughts I've had about Him! But John, you just lectured us that God's perfect as He doesn't need a book to know our thoughts about Him. If heaven does have books that discuss such things as when we remember (think about) God, I'm willing to bet they're for us to realize how much God's aware of all the time we spent praying to Him and thinking about Him and not for His personal "let me look that up" reference!
  - c) Consider this the "positive intermission" among all the text here focusing on how we are supposed to be living as a witness for Jesus until He shows up. The other good news is we get one more positive thought in Verse 17:

13. Verse 17: "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.
- a) I'd admit, that if I was sitting there live, listening to Malachi I'd be scared to death at this point that I'm going to hell. Essentially Malachi's been lecturing us that the Messiah will soon show up on the scene, judge us and tell us we're not good enough for God! It must be scary to hear this lecture on the topic of "we're not good enough as we are". That's why Malachi gets all compassionate here at the end of Chapter 3. God's effectively telling them as well as us that as long as we're trusting in Him for the complete payment of our sins as we use our lives as a witness for Him, "we can't blow it". If we do make the effort to use a portion of our time to honor him (e.g., daily prayer and study) as well as make an effort to be a living witness for Him (e.g., put our money where our mouth is), we can't blow it!
    - i) That's why Malachi tells us that God will spare those who seek Him when He will return just as a father has compassion for a son who serves him!
    - ii) Even people who didn't grow up with a loving father can picture having one who is like that. Realize that God the Father wants to love us as much as He loves His only Son and spend eternity with us! God loves us, just because He does. Still He has a standard of perfection. That's why God Himself had to pay the full price for our sins. The "then what", is God expects us to use the time He's given us for His glory, by giving back some of that time to Him.
    - iii) Therefore, Chapter 3 ends on a note of both a promise and a curse. The promise is that if we accept that fact about God that He loves us, wants to spend eternity with us, and He did pay the complete price for our sins, we can be assured that we'll be saved. The reason the Old Testament effectively ends with a now-what statement is to remind us that God wants us to be "Busy for Him" until He returns. He wants us to "put our money where our mouth is". He wants us to put our time where we claim our heart is. That's what waiting for Jesus is all about and the main point of Malachi. These last two chapters in effect open and close with the reminder that a great messenger will show up right before the Messiah (Jesus) Himself will show up on the scene. The point isn't to stand there and think, "Jesus will come one day so I'll worry about it when it happens". The point is to live with the possibility of Jesus returning at any moment, so I better be busy "doing what the boss wants me to do until He gets here!" That's not only Malachi's message, but that's what Jesus wants us to do until does return.
    - iv) Gee, that'd be a wonderful way to end both the Old Testament and Malachi. There is still five more verses to go to not only wrap up this book, not only wrap up all of the Minor Prophets, but the underlying message of the entire Old Testament: That a Messiah (Great King) is coming who will rule over the world. God desires we be using our lives as a witness to that fact until that moment occurs!
    - v) Well then, while we're all just sitting here contemplating what we should be doing until that occurs, let me sneak over to "Chapter 4" of Malachi.
14. Chapter 4, Verse 1: "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.
- a) This next verse is the bad news. Let's be honest, there's a large percentage of people in the world who not only don't believe in Jesus, but resent the idea of having someone lecturing them on how to live! Let's be honest, when people stand before God, they'll realize they've blown it big time, but there is a too late! We're reading about the "too late" here in Verse 1 of Chapter 4. This reminds me of the classic line of, "What makes you think you'll be able to live for God "then", when you can't live for Him now?" That's why judgment's coming.

- b) These verses discuss the idea of all people who reject God being "burnt up" to a point that there will be no remembrance of them at all. Which reminds me, I should quickly discuss the idea of "annihilation" here. Many false religions as well as atheists argue that at death we simply no longer exist in terms of conscious thought. That's what annihilation means. I bring it up here as one can see that based on what Verse 1 teaches. The reason there is a next life for all people is God can't un-create what He created in the first place! Remember that Jesus spent more time talking about hell than He did heaven. That's a reminder to us that hell is as real and as literal as heaven is! It's a place God had to create to send people who don't want to be with Him forever!
- i) How much punishment is "fair" for say murder or stealing? Wouldn't a 1,000-years or 100,000 years in hell be more than sufficient for most crimes? The issue isn't for us to ponder a fair length of a sentence for a crime. The real issue is God's perfect! Therefore, we have to be perfect to be with Him forever, or we'll be perfectly taken away from His presence forever! What about the naïve toward God? I figure that if God is God He'll judge people perfectly. So why can't He just annihilate people who don't want to be with Him? Why hell? The answer is we were created with a purpose: To glorify God! When we reject that purpose, we're turning from Him! Eternity away from His presence isn't about eternally suffering for whatever sins we commit, it's about God "giving us what we want", eternity without Him! That is why most people will spend eternity in hell because they reject why He created us in the first place!
  - ii) OK, enough of that. My main point here is that God's judgment is coming to all people one day. The idea of many being "burnt up" as in wiped out doesn't mean annihilation, but it refers to sending people where they want to go for eternity, to a place where they can be without God's presence. It's like the classic line that goes: "Hell will be locked from the inside" (C.S. Lewis, I believe) as that's a place where people go who don't want to live by God's rules for eternity.
  - iii) Now for the positive news, Verse 2:
15. Verse 2: But for 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.
- a) The day of God's judgment should not be a day of fear for believers. Yes I suppose that we should be nervous about our eternal rewards for heaven and exactly what will we be doing there for eternity. The main point here is simply that we don't have to fear God's judgment if we're trusting in Him as the complete payment of our sins. Malachi is trying to use a picture of "simple and complete joy" like a child playing outdoors with no fear of any consequences or worries about what'll happen to us.
  - b) Again remember that Malachi "bookends" these two chapters by describing a messenger coming right before "The" king comes! The point here is simply to remind us that if we're trusting in God for the complete payment for that judgment, we don't have to fear this in the day it occurs.
  - c) OK, I admit, I don't think of heaven as being outdoors enjoying the sunshine playing like a well-fed calf? Couldn't Malachi use a different picture to describe eternal joy? Malachi lived in a day and a location where farming was the main "staple" of the economy. He is using a word picture people of his time and place could relate to! I don't see eternity as a place where we just "go out and play like little children". Just as we serve God now in our lifetime, so we'll be full of joy for eternity as we continue to serve Him forever. However it won't be a burden, but a joy. If we're full of joy now by using our lives for His glory, so that joy will continue forever. That's the underlying point behind that word picture!
  - d) However, Malachi doesn't end the Old Testament on that happy note. Instead we get one final warning about what's coming. Malachi comes down hard in the end to remind us of what we're called to do until He shows up: Be a witness for Jesus or "else"!

16. Verse 3: 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.
- a) My first question here is who is the "you"? God won't turn us into mass-murderers as we wipe out everyone who refuses to live as He desires. I see the "you" as God Himself who is doing not only the judging, but the sentencing as well. Another clue as to who the "you" is, is the reference to "your feet". Does it mean the saved "dance on the graves" of all those who are not saved? No. If anything it's a reminder of the eternity of one's decision of us either accepting God's rule over our lives or rejecting it. This is God saying in effect, here is what's going to happen to all people who reject Me, they'll end up as "ashes under My feet" in that day. Again, I don't believe in annihilation so the reference if literal refers to dead bodies and not people's eternal souls.
  - b) So whether this refers to devout believers in God winning in the end or in Jesus winning as He does the judging, either way, the results are the same. We're not God so we do not have the power to judge people or enforce that judgment. That's why I see this verse as a reference to what Jesus will do in actually judging people in that day.
  - c) OK, now that I've scared everyone half to death, let's sneak over to Verse 4.
17. Verse 4: "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.
- a) If I'm an Israelite and I'm hearing all these verses about condemnation, the first thing that I might be wondering at this point is, "OK, what do I have to do to avoid all of that?" That is why "out of the blue" we get this reference to Moses receiving "the law". Horeb refers to the literal place where Moses received God's laws. I remember years ago, my father had a lunch meeting with myself and a friend who's Orthodox Jewish. My father asked both of us, who wrote the law? We both responded in unison God. Then my friend and I looked at each other in shock that both us said "God" instead of Moses. While Moses was the one who wrote it down, God is the one who gave us the law in the first place. OK, so what?
    - i) Consider that it's now been well over a millennium between the time God first did give those laws to Moses and the time of Malachi. It's been over two millennia since then. The big question is are those laws still binding on us? It's complicated in the sense that Jesus was the fulfillment of the law's requirements for sins. Some of the laws were meant for the Israelites only as a sign that they've separated their lives for Him, such as the Leviticus "food laws". However, I'm sure that ideas like murder and theft are "still on the books".
    - ii) Let me put it this way: Malachi is closing out the Old Testament. The big question is what do we do until the Messiah shows up? The answer is to be a living witness for Him until then. The next question is how? That's why Malachi reminds us that God gave us a set of laws to follow until He shows up! Like I said, it doesn't mean we Christians have to eat "kosher" or offer animals up at a temple! However, what it does mean is we're to live as a witness for Jesus until He shows up! That's a key point to this book, to the Old Testament in general, and to life in general. We were created with a purpose: To glorify God based on how we live! That's why we get this reference to the law right before the book ends.
    - iii) Well if that isn't a strange enough ending, let's take a look at the last two verses:
18. Verse 5: "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. <sup>6</sup>He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."
- a) Remember that Chapter 3 opened with the point that God's going to send a messenger in preparation for the Messiah coming. Malachi is closing his book by saying in effect that the messenger is Elijah who to make it simple lived hundreds of years prior to Malachi.
  - b) So why "reincarnate" Elijah to be this messenger. It's not like any of us know what he did look like all those millenniums ago.

- c) For starters, "God chooses who God chooses" so we have to accept that. As I stated earlier in the lesson Elijah didn't die, but was just taken up into heaven. I pointed out the fact that Jesus had a "staff meeting" with Elijah and Moses as recorded in three of the four gospels. All I'm saying is if God wants Elijah to make an encore appearance before Jesus returns, it is God's right to pick him for that role.
  - d) If you have any friends who are religious Israelites, among the preparation for celebrating the Passover holiday is to have a dinner place setting for Elijah in case he shows up on our doorstep. No they don't literally expect him, it is a reminder that Elijah is to return before the Messiah shows up. It's a way of saying we're waiting on the Messiah and we'll expect Elijah to show up before that happens. If nothing else, it shows that religious Israelites do believe Malachi is a prophet of God as he's the only one who says this.
  - e) However, as these two verses indicate, Elijah's return isn't to go have dinner with a lucky family. Malachi describes that visit as a "great and dreadful day". He will turn the hearts of children to their parents and vice versa. OK, what does that mean? It means like John the Baptist, Malachi's going to preach, "Get ready the Messiah's coming! Start living as He requires (living by biblical standards) and turn from sin. Elijah is the "final call" to change one's way of living to live as God desires we live. Like Revelation 11 says, when these two witnesses come on the scene, they'll have the power to make it stop raining and turn our water sources into blood. Bottom line, these guys will be bad news to mess with them! I am just saying Elijah's return won't be a leisurely Passover dinner, but a public witness on the issue of how we're supposed to live (for God) and the consequences of failing to do so.
  - f) So what's the reference mean about turning the children to their parents and vice-versa? I think it's simpler than we think. Let's say we are strong Christians and are parents aren't. Or if our children are nonbelievers, Elijah's going to come down hard with the "Just who do you think you're messing with anyway"? Time to live like those religious members of your family. That's all this is.
  - g) In effect, Malachi ends the Old Testament with an equivalent of the "Great Commission". To put it simply that order given by Jesus is to make disciples and teach them to change their way of living by believing in the Trinity. Malachi's warning is in effect, the Messiah is coming, change your way of living and believe in His coming. In effect, they're similar messages about living as God desires before it's too late.
  - h) OK, it's been 2,000 years since Jesus. How do we know Elijah and Jesus are coming? The best answer is the bible has a 100% track record about being right so far about history, I'd argue that it's trustworthy whenever the wrap-up show begins. Given the fact Israel is an independent country again after thousands of years, that's the big clue we're getting close to that event occurring. That's one reason why I trust it to be true.
  - i) Speaking of major changes coming, Malachi's final line is a warning. It's essentially, "We need to repent or the land will be struck with total destruction." Now if that doesn't scare you, I don't know what will. I'd argue a reason that the nation of Israel was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD was for that rejection. The key is not to repeat that mistake! That's why God calls us to make a difference for Him until then. Which reminds me, we should pray for His power to make that difference as that's the only way it's possible.
  - j) Before I close in prayer, my thank you for reading through some or all of this series on the Minor Prophets. It's been a fun adventure and God has blessed me tremendously on what I've learned myself through this series. My sources are on the next page if interested. OK, then, onto the closing prayer.
19. Heavenly Father, We accept the fact that You've separated us to be a witness for You. Help us to use the most valuable thing you've given us, our time and our resources to make a difference for You in this world. More importantly fill us with Your Spirit as to have the power to do what it is You desire of us. Make it obvious to us, what You specifically desire of us as we use that time to make that difference before Jesus and Elijah do show up! We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

## Supplement: Bibliography

"If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted me to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to them further via the places listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the bible is the bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in preparation of my lessons. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV), Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King James Version (KJV) (no copyright on that version); the English Standard Version. (ESV). The copyright information for the ESV is in point #7 below. The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189; "The Message" copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text used in these lessons (except the ESV) is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over these lessons. The specific commentaries just on The Minor Prophets are listed first, and then bible-wide commentaries. They're listed in alphabetical order by author. References to audio commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on The Minor Prophets by Jon Courson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format at <http://www.joncourson.com/>.
2. Commentary on The Minor Prophets by Bob Davis. They are available for free in MP3® format at <http://northcountrychapel.com/studies/>.
3. Commentary on The Minor Prophets by David Guzik. It is available for free in audio and text format. The web address is [http://www.enduringword.com/library\\_commentaries.htm](http://www.enduringword.com/library_commentaries.htm) Mr. Davis quotes a lot of famous authors from the 19th and 20th Century on these books and I've used some of those quotes.
4. Commentary on The Minor Prophets by Chuck Missler, available at K-House Ministries 1-800-KHOUSE1. The web address is <http://www.khouse.org>.
5. The Minor Prophets by Charles Feinberg. Originally published in five volumes. Combined into one book in 1990 by Moody Press. ISBN 0-8024-5305-8. (My favorite on this series, by the way.)
6. The English Standard Version Study Bible; Copyright (2005-2009) The Standard Bible Society. The version itself is copyrighted 2008 by Crossway Bibles, a publication of "Good News Publishers".
7. The Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia, Zondervan Publications, (via CD-ROM 1998 release). This is a multi-volume encyclopedia with notes on every bible verse. It is available through Zondervan. Paperback books are published on individual Bible books from this same source.
8. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing: [www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm](http://www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm).
9. The MacArthur Study Bible with commentary by John MacArthur Nelson Bibles (1997); ISBN: 0849912229.
10. I also refer sometimes to J.P. Moreland apologetic ministry which is at [www.jpmoreland.com](http://www.jpmoreland.com) and Greg Koukl's apologetic ministry, which is Stand to Reason at [www.str.org](http://www.str.org) I also quote from Dennis Prager on many Jewish issues. He is a nationally syndicated radio broadcaster. See [dennisprager.com](http://dennisprager.com).
11. My apology if I have quoted someone else and I have forgotten to include them in this list.