



AN ADVENT STUDY IN MALACHI

**HOPE THROUGH  
DARKNESS**

/

A GUIDE FOR YOUR TIMES WITH THE LORD

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## **Introduction**

The Christmas season is a time of anticipation and hope. Traditions, presents, and loved ones all bring hope into our lives. In the midst of dark winter days, the joy of Christmas draws our heart to joy-filled hope. But, Christmas is also a time of anticipation. We wait through dark winter days and the difficult emotions of a holiday season, trusting that God will walk with us through the darkness and the difficulty.

Waiting is not a new concept to God's people. Israel (God's people) throughout the Bible had gone through hundreds of years of hearing God speak and watching him move then waiting for him to speak and to move again. Slowly over time Israel lost faith in waiting for God. They turned away from him and began to find hope in everything else but him. But God did not leave his people in darkness.

Hope is also not a new concept to God's people. God specifically chose Malachi, a prophet, God's messenger, to speak to Israel on God's behalf. God spoke in a dark time in order to remind his beloved people who he is: God is loving, perfectly just and unendingly faithful. He is Israel's one true salvation. God is Israel's true hope in darkness. We are reminded of that same hope as we celebrate Advent. We are reminded that God does not leave his people in darkness. We have an unending hope that is a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul in Jesus (Heb 6:19).

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### **Hope's Foundation: God's Love**

The Bible mentions the love of God nearly 260 times. Clearly the love of God must be an important attribute of who God is. It shouldn't come as a surprise to us that the first thing in the book of Malachi that God wants to remind his people of is his love for them (Mal 1:2). God is trying to make a point that he longs for his people to hear his voice, obey his commands, and most of all be reminded of His unending, powerful love for them.

God first declared his love for Israel through Moses centuries before Malachi. In Deuteronomy 7:7-8 God says, "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers". God did not choose Israel for what they could do for him.

God lovingly commits himself to an imperfect people. That people would neglect to love him by continuously turning away from him, disobeying his laws, and disgracing his presence by offering second best sacrifices. God solely chose Israel because of who he is, not because of who they were. When Israel loved everything else but God, God still chose to love His people. Israel was a people chosen by God for no other reason than the fact that he loved them and he chose them

Our hope does not lie in our own ability to present ourselves perfectly in front of a holy God. Our hope is in God's love for us. God has drawn near to us with an everlasting love (Jer 31:3). In response to God's everlasting love for us, God invites us today to find joy in loving him rightly by coming to him and offering him our very best sacrifice: ourselves. We can offer God our very best today by entrusting him to be Lord over the entirety of our lives forever.

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Read: Malachi 1

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Read: Malachi 1

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Read: Deuteronomy 7:6-16

Record:

Read: Deuteronomy 7:6-16

Record:

Reflect:

Reflect:

Respond:

Respond:

Read: Isaijah 54:4-17

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Read: Isaijah 54:4-17

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Read: 1 John 4:7-21

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Read: 1 John 4:7-21

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

### **Hope's Trust: God's Faithfulness and Justice**

God is perfectly faithful and perfectly just, and God is unchanging in His character. God is one God (Mal 3:10 & 15). Centuries before the time of Malachi God said to his people, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God the Lord is one," (Deut 6:4). This unchanging God for all of history has established and kept covenants with His people (Gen 12, Ex 19, 2 Sam 7).

A covenant is a binding agreement between two parties that involves a relationship and an oath of faithfulness to one another. The perfect picture of a covenant is the picture of marriage. During a wedding ceremony two people make a promise to be faithful and to love one another. Marriage requires both parties to keep that promise for the rest of their lives, regardless of how hard it might be at times to love and be faithful to the other person.

Throughout the Bible covenants are marks of God's faithfulness. Yet, God's people had been marked by faithlessness in their relationship with God. The best picture of this faithlessness is the way that the people of God were approaching the covenant of marriage. In both the marriage covenant and in their covenant with God, Israel was guilty of not fearing God which means that they did not believe that He was all powerful, perfectly just and unendingly faithful.

In the face of their faithlessness, God reminded Israel of one simple yet profound truth about His character: He is unchanging (Mal 3:6). God does not leave His people in their sin. Though Israel was faithless, God remained faithful. God invited His people to return to Him on the condition that they would turn from sin, and instead turn to Him, fear Him and love Him for a lifetime (Mal 3:7). God still longs to invite His people today to return to Him and be reminded of His unchanging character. We serve a God who is perfectly just and faithful, and whose character has not and will never change.

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Malachi 2:10-3:12

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Malachi 2:10-3:12

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Isaiah 40

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Isaiah 40

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Judges 2:11-23

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Judges 2:11-23

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Romans 3:9-26

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Romans 3:9-26

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

### **Hope's Expectation: God's Salvation**

God is called the Lord of Hosts 24 times in the book of Malachi. Clearly, this is an important name for God. "Lord of Hosts" is one of the many names of God that specifically means that God reigns and governs over everything in heaven and earth. We serve a God who is mighty and commands with cosmic power over the entirety of the universe.

Through Malachi God reminds His people that He is the heavenly commander in chief, and He is all powerful; therefore, He is more than able to overcome the power of sin. Malachi speaks of a day when all sin will cease to be and when God's people, His treasured possession (Mal 3:17), those who fear Him and trust Him, will be saved from His perfect wrath against all sin. God is making it clear to His people that He is Israel's one, true salvation.

God promised His people that a day is coming soon, "burning like an oven" (Mal 4:1) when all sin and evil will be destroyed and burned away like stubble. One day soon "the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings" and will overcome every dark and wicked thing. God also promised that He would speak to His people again soon by sending another prophet like Malachi or Elijah. This prophet would declare the "great and awesome day" when the Lord comes (Mal 3:1 & 4:5).

Four hundred years later God would send John the Baptist to be the second Elijah. John was sent by God to be a prophet of the Most High King (Luke 1:76). John would prepare the way for Israel's one true light and true salvation: Jesus. During a dark time in Israel's history God promised to send a bright sun over the horizon in Jesus.

God promised Israel that darkness would not have the last word. God was faithful to keep His promise to His people then, and God is faithful to keep His promise to His people now. God sent his Son, with righteousness and healing in His wings, to save and reconcile His beloved people back to himself. Jesus is the sun that will shine on into eternity forever as an eternal balm for humanity's broken sinful nature. Jesus, the true light and salvation for all the world, has brought light into a dark, depraved world.

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Malachi 3:13-4:5

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Malachi 3:13-4:5

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Isaiah 9:1-7

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Isaiah 9:1-7

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Zechariah 9:9-17

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Zechariah 9:9-17

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:



Luke 1:39-80

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Luke 1:39-80

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

### **Hope Has Come**

Since the beginning of time hope has always shone brightly through darkness. In the very beginning, before there was anything else there was God living in perfect unity and relationship with himself, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Gen 1:1). Before anything was, God was. Then, God created the heavens and the earth. That creation was formless and void but God spoke light into the darkness (Gen 1:3) and God filled what was once empty (Gen 1:11,28).

Emptiness and darkness have not, and will never be a problem for God because when God spoke, light shone through darkness and life itself was born. In the same way, all throughout the Bible, God has met His people when they have felt empty and times have felt dark. God speaks to His people in the darkness and the emptiness. This happened at Christmas.

After 400 years of silence from the last prophet, Malachi, God spoke once again to his people. Yet again God spoke into a dark, empty world in need of light and life. But this time God spoke by sending the Word, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the true light (John 1:4) into the world so that the glory and grace of God might be uniquely and perfectly revealed.

In John 8:12 Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life". Jesus, arms filled with grace and truth, came into a dark, empty world offering light and life abundantly to all who believe in him (John 10:10). Through Jesus, and Jesus alone, we are able to experience the fullness of God's grace for all who trust and believe in him as their Savior and Lord (John 14:6).

Each year we anticipate and celebrate Jesus's birth again and again because we are reminding ourselves of the truth: Jesus, the true light, has already come into the world and has overcome sin and darkness eternally. And, we look forward to the day when Jesus will come again in victorious life whose reign is full of goodness and grace and will shine on forever and ever and have no end (Rev 22:5). Praise God, because the true light has come into the world and darkness has not overcome it!

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John 1:1-18

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

John 1:1-18

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Luke 2:1-21

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Luke 2:1-21

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Hebrews 6:13-20

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Hebrews 6:13-20

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Revelation 22:1-20

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Revelation 22:1-20

Record:

Reflect:

Respond:

Christmas Eve/Christmas Day

### **Hope Lives**

Merry Christmas! Today we celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus, who came into the world as the long awaited Messiah and true light. Take some time today to read God's word together with loved ones and pray for one another. Be reminded of the true hope we have in Jesus as Immanuel, God with us.

What about Christmas were you most excited for this year (a specific gift, traditions, etc.)? Why do you think that was something you were excited for?

### **Read Matthew 1:17-25 out loud together.**

What is significant about Jesus' family line? Why is it important that He came from such ordinary people?

What is strange to you about the birth of Jesus?

What does "Immanuel" mean? What is significant about having a Savior who is "Immanuel"?

What about Jesus as Immanuel brings you hope today on Christmas?

### **Prayer**

Take some time to pray for one another. A great way to do this would be to pray for the person on your right. Pray for them in 2 ways: Thanking God for something special about them. Praying for something that you hope for them.

Have one person pray this prayer out loud for your family:

*Father, thank you for sending your son, Jesus. Thank you for not leaving us in darkness without hope. Thank you that our hope in you is eternal and unending. Thank you for sending us a Savior who knows what it is like to live in this world and who is always with us. Help us to remember and celebrate this truth today on Christmas. Amen.*

Christmas Eve/Christmas Day

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