

LIVING THE LIVING WORD
Bible-Based Bible Study and Application

Grace Chapel
Orange, CA

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MALACHI

1. INTRODUCTION

This week, we are going to learn nothing new. We are going to watch as Malachi does something very similar to things that Moses, David, and Solomon did before him. After seeing another instance of this pattern, we are going to focus on how to replicate it in our own work with Psalm 139, both in interpretation and in application.

2. MALACHI AND THE PERILS OF PARTIAL COMPLIANCE

Let's take a quick look at a couple of sample sacrificial passages in Leviticus 4. Notice that in vv. 3, 23, 28, and 32, the sacrifices are supposed to be "without blemish." We could multiply references on this, but these four will do for a representative sample.

Now notice what Israel is actually doing, as recorded in Malachi 1:6-14. They are bringing God sheep so bad off that they wouldn't serve them to their governor. How insulting! Predictably, God is insulted. He would rather they just nail the temple doors shut than keep offering diseased sheep on His altar.

Some people might say "Hey, at least they didn't stop altogether; you've got to give them credit for putting forth *some* effort." But that isn't how God sees it; He wants their best, and nothing else will do. He made that clear in the Law, and even though it is now centuries later, He still holds them to that same standard.

3. THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGES

Your Daily Walk

We will discuss application in the next section, below, but before we do, let me encourage you to think about Malachi as you struggle this week to do the right thing. Think about the crooked priest putting a diseased, lame sheep on the altar as a sacrifice, and how insulting that is to God. As you set out to apply Scripture to your life this week, put forth the necessary effort to really think it through, and then follow through on it. Don't give God any diseased sheep.

Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

This week we begin working on application. As you've seen, application is integral to Scripture—right from the Garden of Eden the Word of God requires us to

do something. How should your life change because of what you've learned in Psalm 139? Be specific, and think through it in some detail. By way of example, as I seek to apply v. 14, I might think to myself, "The body really is a marvelous invention. I enjoy having one, and I should praise the Lord more for that." That's fine, as far as it goes. But it doesn't go far enough. That's the forgettable sort of thought that I'll, well, *forget* by the time I've left the building.

Remember last week, when we looked at how Solomon made vivid applications of the Law? Let's do as he did; let's make it more specific. When and where should I praise the Lord more for the marvels of the body? I work out at various times in the week; perhaps I should begin and end my workouts with a prayer of praise. What other bodily experiences do I enjoy? What about eating? After all, God could have made the sense of taste to just tell me, in objective, detached fashion, what the chemical constituents of the food are. But He didn't; instead, he so wired my nervous system that I experience pleasure at the taste of certain foods. Fearfully and wonderfully made—I should praise God for the ability to enjoy food. And so on.

So instead of a generic 'I should praise God more,' I now have a set of experiential hooks, places in my life that are praise-deficient. When I feel that spreading warmth in my muscles and connective tissue, the pleasurable tingle that tells me my body is beginning to wake up, I should praise God. When I feel the relaxed-but-energetic glow that follows a workout, I should praise God. When I revel in the taste of homemade chicken soup, the peppery finish of a good Shiraz, or the tang of an orange, I should praise God.

Now, what form should my praise take? Well, what form does David's praise take in v. 14? He acknowledges the quality of the workmanship and the identity of the craftsman: "Marvelous are Your works..." The praise could be as simple as a mental note, a "popcorn" prayer: "Wow, God. Good going!"

You see the difference? Instead of "I should praise God more," I have now come to "When I experience physical pleasure (e.g., limbering up, after working out, when enjoying food), I should tell God what a great job He did." This is important because a specific application becomes something I can track. I can ask myself at the end of the day: (1) What happened that I enjoyed? and (2) Did I remember to praise God when it happened? In this way I can track my progress and begin to see real changes in my patterns of living and thinking.

Like Solomon did, we might also think through the consequences of failure. What do I look like if I fail to make this application? Well, then I go though my life enjoying God's good gifts, but thinking that they're "just there," taking them for granted, rather like an ungrateful teenager who takes his parent's provision for granted. That's not a flattering picture—spending my whole spiritual life stuck in "clueless teenager" mode. Let's take it further: if I stay in "clueless teenager" mode, what happens? Then I cultivate a habit of ingratitude; I become incapable of seeing the grace that is given to me for what it is. I don't honor these pleasurable moments as gifts from God; I don't attend to them at all. So in fact, I enjoy them *less* than I would if I really took the time to notice them. Of course, eventually God will break

through, even if it's at the Bema. And then, suddenly, the light dawns, and I realize that God gave me a rich life packed to the brim with little graces, and *I never even noticed*.¹

Two cautions in closing: First, the specific application is *only one of many*. There are other ways to apply v. 14 as well; I shouldn't think that I've got v. 14 down just because this one application becomes part of my life. Second, real spiritual development comes from God. There's nothing you can do to please Him apart from His strength, so an integral part of this process is calling on the Lord to help you *actually* change. His promise is that as you meditate on His Word, He will work the necessary miracle to allow you to live a life that pleases Him.²

Reading (1-2 hrs.)

We're going to skip ahead in Hendricks a little this week. Because of the time constraints of this series, we needed to start working on application in Psalm 139 at this point. You'll find it helpful to read chapters 39-41 of Hendricks this week (don't worry; we'll come back for the chapters we skipped).

Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

The era of the prophets was punctuated by many judgments, returns to the Lord, and apostasies away from the Lord. To many people, that period of Israel's history seems like a historical spaghetti bowl, with very little overall coherence. But God always has a plan in history, and sometimes, He shows us what it is. In order to have a look at the history of the prophetic period, build a horizontal chart of 2 Chronicles. Is there an underlying pattern to the book? If so, what is it? You'll find an example attached to this handout.³

4. LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGES

Your Daily Walk

Did anybody follow through on the suggestion to think through a pet sin in the way that Solomon thinks in Proverbs? Is it helping?

Honing Your Skills (30-60 min.)

This is the point in the series where group study begins to get really uncomfortable. I am going to ask you to tell us what you think the psalm means. Probably you won't be entirely right, and that's okay. That's what the rest of us are here for. The goal here is to fellowship, to pool our observations and come closer to the text together than we could on our own.

A quick note about what we're *not* doing: we are not sharing "what the text means to me," as though it can mean many different things to many different people.

¹ If you've ever seen or read Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, the ending presents a very vivid—albeit totally secularized—picture of what this is going to be like.

² Romans 6-8

³ Similar examples available at <http://www.dankatie.com/hermeneutics/bookchart.php>.

As we've seen throughout our study thus far, God's Word means something definite, and we're here to submit to that meaning—together.

Reading (1-2 hrs.)

How did your reading in Hendricks help you grasp the meaning of Psalm 139?

Heavy-Duty Homework (2-3 hrs.)

How did the poetry of Exodus 15 match up with the history of Exodus 14? Did you notice that the poetry essentially said the same things? That it makes reference to the same literal events *as* literal events? This gives us a way of gauging our interpretation of predictive poetry. When Proverbs says “The companion of fools will be destroyed,” it is not poetic hyperbole; he really means that such a person will get destroyed.