

## Lesson 5—March 29, 2020

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 50:1-15  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Malachi 2-3  
PRINT PASSAGE: Malachi 2:1-9; 3:5-6

**Key Verse**—If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart. (Malachi 2:2, KJV)

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“If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honor my name,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not resolved to honor me.” (Malachi 2:2, NIV)

# Justice for All

### Teacher's Resource Kit

- Townsend Press Commentary: Teacher's Edition
- Townsend Press Flashlight Commentary
- Bible Studies for Adults
- Bible Studies for Young Adults
- (Optional: Adults/Young Adults Leadership Resource Kit [materials for this lesson])

### Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Understand the significance of justice for spiritual leadership.
- Affirm the value of covenanted reverence of God for leadership.
- Practice just spiritual leadership.



### \*Key Terms

**Covenant (2:4)**—Hebrew: *bēriyth* (ber-ēth'): league; treaty; alliance; agreement; pledge.

**Oppress (3:5)**—Hebrew: *ashaq* (aw-shak'): to wrong or extort; defraud; get deceitfully.

**Priests (2:1)**—Hebrew: *kohen* (ko-hane'): chief ministers; principal officers.

\*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 4)

### Preparing the Lesson

- Refer to the *Townsend Press SS Commentary Teacher's Edition* for an additional lesson plan—with word studies, insights on teaching adults, learner matrices, etc.
- Review last week's student assignments (“Your Life” and Your World!”).
- This guide offers two options for leading your class.

- Thoroughly review your student book for your adult or young adult class.
- See page 7 for how to plan each week's lesson.
- See page 6 for a student *Personal Growth Plan*.
- See page 113 for the *Faith in 3-D* as it explains how to live out their faith in the world.

## WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

Just leaders act honorably toward constituents. How do just leaders act toward others? Malachi admonishes the priests to turn from their wickedness, revere God, and reap a rich harvest for promoting godly justice.

## THE LESSON IN FOCUS

The daily recitation of the United States oath of allegiance was a routine occurrence every morning in our school, as well as Scripture and prayer. Of course, this dates me as a baby boomer. Of relevant interest is the last phrase of the pledge: “with liberty and justice for all.” Its composer, Francis Bellamy, originally considered using the words *equality* and *fraternity*, but decided against it because of some educational leaders' opposition to equality for women and African Americans. Yet, as it stands today, political leadership in this nation has not been able to make liberty and justice for all a reality. Some leaders became corrupt and failed to remember promises made or they catered to the desires of influential people at the expense of showing justice toward the disenfranchised. This is tragic and also against the principles of God's Word. It is even more tragic when spiritual leaders fail to act honorably, fair, and just toward God's people as His representatives. This was the case in post-exilic Judah during Malachi's time. Social injustice was rampant and the priests had become increasingly complacent, corrupt, and insensitive to God's law and the people. Then as now, justice for all was only a catch phrase.

## THE LESSON IN CONTEXT

The title of the book of Malachi is derived from its author. Uniquely, his prophecy is the last work in the Minor Prophets and marks the close of the Old Testament canon. Four hundred years would

pass before God spoke through another prophet in the person of John the Baptist, in the New Testament. Very little is known about Malachi's personal background. Internal evidence dates his prophecy sometime in the late fifth century BC, during Nehemiah's return to his position in Persia. Judah (Jerusalem) in Malachi's time had been re-occupied for a century. Religious and moral conditions were worse and had regressed to where they were before the Exile. The spiritual leadership was corrupt and complacent. The enthusiasm that had marked their return was gone. None of the glorious promises of the covenant had come to pass. The people were discouraged and had begun to question God's justice and His concern for them. They erroneously believed they could maintain a love relationship with God by robotically observing formal rituals. Malachi rebuked both priests and people for their spiritual hypocrisy, spiritual infidelity, corruption, compromise, false worship, divorce, and insolence. He warned that God was indeed coming, but as judge, refiner, and purifier of the nation.

## OPENING INQUIRY (Choose from the questions below)

1. Why did God promise to curse the priests? (verse 2)
2. Why was there no chance of a reprieve for these corrupt priests? (verse 2b)
3. How were the priests to be humiliated and cast aside? (verse 3)
4. What were the results of God's covenant with Levi, the tribe of priests? (verse 5)
5. How had the Levitical priests honored God? (verse 6)

## INSIGHTS

Twenty-first-century social and religious conditions are a mirror image of those during Malachi's time. Scandal, corruption, and social injustice are present in both secular and religious communities. Truly just leadership is not nonexistent but is not the norm in some of these arenas. God allowed the establishment of secular and religious leadership

authority for the purpose of ensuring justice and equity for all. When leaders fail to promote and model them, they are in direct violation of His Word and they dishonor Him and disrespect His name. Spiritual leaders have the greater responsibility and accountability before God because they have the welfare of His people under their authority. This God-given authority is to be used to ensure justice for all without partiality. The appropriate execution of this awesome responsibility is only possible when spiritual leaders intentionally seek an intimate obedient relationship with Him and submit to His guidance as they strive to practice just spiritual leadership.

### EXPLORATION

Use this lesson to explore (1) the consequence of failing to model just spiritual leadership (verses 1-4); (2) practices that are examples of just and unjust spiritual leadership (verses 5-9); and (3) the foundation for faith and hope for spiritual leaders who remain faithful to God (3:5-6). Examine current examples of corrupt secular and corrupt non-secular and religious leaders and their effects on those they lead. Encourage your students to commit to pray for the pastoral and lay leadership in their congregation and to use biblical procedures for choosing godly leaders.

### ADDITIONAL EXPOSITORY INSIGHTS FOR THE TEACHER

#### Commentary on Malachi 2:1-4

#### KJV

**AND NOW, O ye *priests*, this commandment is for you.**

**2 If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.**

**3 Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your**

**solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.**

**4 And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my *covenant* might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.**

#### NIV

**“AND NOW, you *priests*, this warning is for you.**

**2 “If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honor my name,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not resolved to honor me.**

**3 “Because of you I will rebuke your descendants; I will smear on your faces the dung from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it.**

**4 “And you will know that I have sent you this warning so that my *covenant* with Levi may continue,” says the LORD Almighty.**

Malachi 1:6–2:9 is a rebuke of the priests. Malachi exposed their specific sins (1:6-14) and then graphically described how they would be disciplined (2:1-4). His opening address directly identified them and suggests that there will be no lessening of the severity of the announced punishment (verse 1). Their just judgment was sealed and there was no hope of escape. The two conditional clauses in verse 2—“If you do not listen” and “if you do not resolve to honor my name” (NIV)—further revealed that the possibility of their avoiding their punishment was fast approaching. Because they refused to do either of these two things, an irrevocable curse had already been pronounced on them. This curse on their blessings has been interpreted as referring to either a loss of material livelihood received from the sacrificial offerings brought to the Temple or a loss of the prerogative to pronounce spiritual blessings. Either way, Malachi announced that God has already carried out this judgment. The curse is further expanded in verse 3. Again, there are dual interpretations. The Lord’s judgment to rebuke

their offspring (seed) could refer to a reduction in the tithes and offerings brought to the Temple they were allowed to receive. A second interpretation is the negative effect their sinful behavior as priests would have on their children. The most graphic illustration of how God viewed these unfaithful priests was His intention to disgrace and humiliate them by spreading the dung (offal) from the sacrificial animals on their faces! Usually, dung was carried outside the camp and burned for its uncleanness. Like the dung, these priests would be carried off and deposited with it. God's purpose was to shake them out of their complacency and bring them back to their original purpose (verse 4). Leaders today would do well to heed God's divine purpose for their positions in His church and seek to use them as He intended. The millennials and Generation X among us need godly examples if they are going to develop into disciples that look and act like Christ. The failure of our spiritual leaders adversely affects the health of the church and will bring judgment upon them as in Malachi's day.



### DISCUSSION STARTERS

*(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)*

- **Adult Question:**

*What are some examples of God's name's being profaned today?*

- **Young Adult Question:**

*We honor God just by staying in close communion with Him. What are some additional ways in which we can honor God in our daily walk with Him?*

### Commentary on Malachi 2:5-9

#### KJV

**5 My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.**

**6 The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in**

**peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.**

**7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.**

**8 But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.**

**9 Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.**

#### NIV

**5 "My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name.**

**6 "True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin.**

**7 "For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth.**

**8 "But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi," says the LORD Almighty.**

**9 "So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law."**

Following the announcement of judgment on the priests, Malachi reviewed the purpose of God's covenant with Levi, the priestly tribe, how the priests initially performed under it, and how these priests had profaned it. God's original intent in choosing the Levites as priests was to give them access to joy and lives of peace if they obeyed Him (verse 5). The result of enjoying these divine benefits would



be their reverence of His Person and submission to His authority. Clearly, the priests in Malachi's audience had failed miserably and were not enjoying these benefits. The original priests maintained a relationship with God which empowered them to instruct truth, refuse to speak evil, live godly before Him and the people, influence others to turn from sin, teach the Law, and serve as God's messengers to the people (verses 7-8). By contrast, the priests in Malachi's day had strayed from the purpose and practice of their covenant with the Law. Tragically, they were the cause of others' disobeying the Law because of their erroneous teaching. Even their lifestyles encouraged wrong living in others. They were also guilty of adulterating the Law to satisfy and gain the favor of the influential among them (verse 9b). The consequence was a loss of standing and respect among the people (9a). Malachi's scathing rebuke of the priests is reminiscent of Christ's rebuke centuries later of the spiritual leaders during His earthly ministry (see Matthew 23). God's standards for spiritual leaders has not changed. By application, spiritual leaders are challenged and reminded to speak truth, teach sound doctrine, and strive to positively influence others by their example of godly living. By doing so, they would ensure joy and peace for themselves and those they lead. Failure would bring discipline and disgrace.



### DISCUSSION STARTERS

*(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)*

- **Adult Question:**  
*How can spiritual leaders avoid losing their credibility without compromising to please others?*
- **Young Adult Question:**  
*We are to live a lifestyle continuously that is pleasing to God. When people see your life, can they recognize that you are in awe of God?*

### Commentary on Malachi 3:5-6

#### KJV

**5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and**

**I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.**

**6 For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.**

#### NIV

**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.**

**6 “I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.”**

Malachi answers the skepticism and callousness of the people about God's justice (see Malachi 2:17) in chapter 3. They were insensitive to their own sins and accused God of blessing unrighteousness and disregarding the righteous. They wanted to know when He was coming. Malachi informed them that He was coming but not like they expected. Because of their continuous wickedness and refusal to repent, He was coming to deal with their sins as a refiner and a purifier. Malachi's generation had the idea that the Lord's expected coming was to straighten out everyone else but them—because they were His chosen people. They failed to realize that they would be the first to be disciplined (verse 5). In the capacity of a “swift witness,” the Lord would waste no time in judging sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers, oppressors of the disenfranchised, and those refusing to reflect His person—sins that are strictly prohibited by the Law. Only the unchanging character of God and His covenant promises would prevent the total destruction of the nation (verse 6). They were unchanging in their persistent rebelliousness against His love, but He would faithfully keep His promise to them as His chosen people. The immutable character and faithfulness of God to His

promises is also the basis of our hope, now and in the future. We all fail as spiritual leaders and as followers, but the invitation to repent and return is always available. When we do, we have the assurance that He will forgive and cleanse us, and restore our fellowship with Him (see 1 John 1:9).



## DISCUSSION STARTERS

*(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)*

- **Adult Question:**

*Identify some of the social conditions that may lead to questioning God's justice. How should the community of faith respond?*

- **Young Adult Question:**

*As a church, we are to follow our leader, who is the head of the congregation. However, there will be times when our pastor needs encouragement. List some encouraging ideas to uplift your pastor during times when the pastor is down.*

## LIFE APPLICATION

- **Refer to Adult Book**

*(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)*

— As a part of the community of faith, if you are blessed with spiritual leaders who are godly examples, make an opportunity to personally encourage and thank them for honoring God through their ministry. Commit to continually pray for them as they continue to serve.

*(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)*

— Corrupt leadership is evident in all areas of society. The community of faith must accept the responsibility to use the right to vote as a means of placing leaders of integrity in governmental positions and seek to follow God's standard for placing spiritual leaders over His people. It must be kept in mind that all leaders will ultimately have to answer to God if they fail to honor Him and use their authority to promote justice for all.

- **Refer to Young Adult Book**

*(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)*

— As believers, we should be examples of what God requires of His people. We should always try to walk upright and help others who are in need. This kind of behavior is pleasing to God, and He will judge and reward us accordingly.

*(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)*

— There are so many unjust leaders in the world today. We have to stay mindful that God has given believers discernment to keep us from being victims in our society. Listen and obey!

## NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

The lesson topic for Sunday, April 5, 2020, is "Seeking a Champion of Justice." The Devotional Reading is Psalm 98, the Background Scripture is Isaiah 42, and the Printed Text is Isaiah 42:1-9.



## Closing Prayer

Father, help us to respect and appreciate the privilege of serving as leaders and following effective spiritual leaders. Help us be godly examples of justice and fairness and to influence others to turn from sin to You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

<b>MONDAY</b> , March 30	"Faith Heroes Acted Justly"	(Hebrews 11:29-35)
<b>TUESDAY</b> , March 31	"Your King Comes Humbly"	(Matthew 21:1-11)
<b>WEDNESDAY</b> , April 1	"A House of Prayer for All Nations"	(Mark 11:15-19)
<b>THURSDAY</b> , April 2	"Neglect Justice at Your Peril"	(Luke 11:42-44)
<b>FRIDAY</b> , April 3	"Jesus, God's Servant Messiah"	(Matthew 12:15-21)
<b>SATURDAY</b> , April 4	"God Will Not Forsake the People"	(Isaiah 42:10-17)
<b>SUNDAY</b> , April 5	"God's Servant to Establish Justice Everywhere"	(Isaiah 42:1-9)

## INTERACTIVE LEARNING APPROACH

### YOUNG ADULT FOCUS

This lesson plan is designed to provide a more interactive approach to the teaching of today's lesson. The focus is on student-teacher involvement. It can be formulated to use with the *Bible Studies for Young Adults* quarterly.

#### Materials needed:

- The movie *Munich*
- Computers/Speakers
- Wi-Fi

#### **Interaction—Introducing the Lesson** (10-15 minutes)

- Introduce today's topic: "Justice for All."
- Have someone read the "Life Happens" section on page **26** aloud and then, as a class, discuss the corresponding questions.
- Share the Unifying Principle: "Just leaders act honorably toward constituents. How do just leaders act toward others? Malachi admonishes the priests to turn from their wickedness, revere God, and reap a rich harvest for promoting godly justice."

#### **Exploring the Word** (25-30 minutes)

- Show the clip "Pursuit of Righteousness" from the movie *Munich*, directed by Steven Spielberg. This can be found at [www.wingclips.com](http://www.wingclips.com). Share this: "Robert questions the ethics of their mission of violence and what it means to their Jewish faith." Discuss the challenge of

some Christian leaders to promote godly justice and why some don't.

- Give a brief overview of the book of Malachi.
- Have someone read Malachi 2:1-4.
- Discuss the role of priests and why God was angry with them.
- Research God's covenant with Levi and its importance.
- Have someone read Malachi 2:5-9.
- Contrast God's experience with Levi versus what God is experiencing with the leaders in the text.
- Discuss contemporary scandals of religious leaders and how they profaned God's holy name.
- Have someone read Malachi 3:5-6.
- God threatens to bring swift judgment upon those who ignore His covenant and oppress vulnerable people (see Malachi 3:5). Discuss how verse 5 is played out today and how verse 6 is a word of encouragement.

#### **Life Application** (10 minutes)

- Read aloud the "Your Life" section on page **31**.

#### **Life Response** (5 minutes)

- Read aloud the "Your World!" section on page **31**.
- Close in prayer and remind the students to prepare for next week's lesson.