



# 12

## A Message of Hope

### Key Theme

- God's plans are perfect.

### Key Passages

- Malachi 3:1–7, 4:1–6; Luke 1:13–17; Matthew 11:7–15, 17:10–13

### Objective

Students will be able to:

- Explain how the Old Testament ends by pointing forward to Jesus.



## Lesson Overview



### Come On In

Students will practice the memory verse by working on a crossword puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend.

- Print one Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.

- Write on the board, "Who is Malachi's messenger?"



### Studying God's Word

The Lord gave the people a message of hope as the writing of the Old Testament came to its conclusion. In the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi spoke of a messenger to come who would prepare the way for the Messiah. The messenger did come 400 years later. He was John the Baptist.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.

- Read through the lesson key passages.



### Activity: Zacharias's Prayer

The students will examine the prophecy of Zacharias in Luke 1, looking for allusions to what God had done and promised in the past.

- Student Guides

- Pencils



# Prepare to Share

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along with this background.

As we come to the end of our study of the Old Testament, we can begin looking forward to the events of the New Testament. In one sense, we have been looking forward through the whole study of the Old Testament as we considered the coming of the Messiah—Jesus Christ. The Scarlet Thread poster has been one of the tools we have used to try to understand how God has been orchestrating the events of history so that the Messiah would come into the world at the perfect time. In his first epistle, Peter makes it clear that the prophets of old were studying and prophesying about the coming of Christ.

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. (1 Peter 1:10–12)

One of these prophets was Malachi. In our last lesson, we looked at how Malachi called the people to worship God rightly. God desires the right attitude in worship, rather than merely going through the motions of the religious ceremonies. In this lesson, we will be looking at how the close of the Old Testament, the book of Malachi, points forward to John the Baptist and his announcement of Jesus.

As is the pattern with many prophecies in the Old Testament, Malachi's message contains both statements about the present and the future. In Malachi 3:1 we read, "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me." Who is this messenger Malachi proclaims?

Later, God spoke of sending Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers and children toward one another (Mala-

chi 4:5–6). But Elijah lived 500 years before Malachi, so how can this be? These were some of the mysteries that Peter was talking about in the passage above, and the answer to these questions was revealed a little over 400 years after Malachi recorded them. In fact, we learn about the identity of the Elijah-messenger from the mouths of an angel and Jesus.

About 400 years after Malachi was prophesying, the angel Gabriel visited the priest Zacharias while he was offering incense to God in the Temple. Gabriel told Zacharias that he would have a son whom he was to name John. John would have the spirit and power of Elijah and "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" to prepare a people for the Lord (Luke 1:13–17)—a direct connection to the prophecy of Malachi 4:5–6. We know this child as John the Baptist.

Malachi's role was to remind the Israelites that they were still waiting for the Seed of Abraham who would come to take away their sin. John's role was to announce the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah—the Lamb who would take away the sin of the world.

If there were any doubts about John the Baptist being an Elijah-like messenger spoken of in the prophecies of Malachi, Jesus made the connection clear in Matthew 11:7–15. Explaining the role of John, Jesus quoted Malachi 3:1 and explained the work of John in fulfilling the prophecy. Jesus said, "And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matthew 11:14).

We must note that later, Jesus told His disciples that Elijah was still to come and would restore all things (Matthew 17:10–13). And even John himself denied being Elijah (John 1:19–23). It seems that John came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17), but did not completely fulfill Malachi's prophecy. Thus, it appears that this prophecy of Malachi is a near/far prophecy, speaking of John the Baptist as the messenger who would prepare the way of the Lord, but also of a yet future coming of Elijah "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Malachi 4:5).

After Malachi, there was silence—over 400 years of silence. No prophet was on the earth, speaking on behalf of God, until John the Baptist's ministry began. This period of time is often referred to as the 400 silent

years because of the lack of any word from God. God was only speaking through what had already been recorded by the previous writers of the Old Testament Scriptures, but those writings contained plenty for the Israelites to consider until the coming of Messiah.

Some have described the Old Testament as a sign with an arrow pointing forward to Jesus. Whether we use Messiah, Christ, or Savior to refer to Jesus, all of these titles point to the deliverance of His people from their sins. The sacrifices offered under the Law of Moses were a shadow of the perfect and complete work of Jesus. The offering of Isaac and the ram that replaced him was a shadow of the sacrifice on the Cross. God brought about this plan according to His perfect timing. All of these things were a part of God's plan throughout the history of the world He had created. All of history was marching forward to the day when Jesus Christ would come to live a perfect life, die as a sacrifice for sin upon the Cross, and then rise again to life to signify the conquering of sin and death. We can now partake of this perfect plan of redemption through our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

## HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

The 400 silent years are also referred to as the Intertestamental Period. Although God was not speaking through prophets at this time, there was much going on in the world according to God's sovereign direction. Daniel had seen visions of kingdoms that would rise and fall after the Babylonian Empire began to crumble. Many of these kingdoms and empires rose and fell during these 400 years. From the Persians to the Greeks to the Romans, control over the Middle East changed hands several times during this era.

During this time, Alexander the Great ruled the Greeks (circa 336 BC) followed by four of his generals. After Alexander, the Jews were free to practice their religion under the supervision of the Ptolemaic rulers of Greece. This all changed under the persecution of the Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanies, who sacked

Jerusalem in 167 BC, setting up a statue of Zeus in the Temple and offering pigs as a sacrifice on the altar. In response, a group of zealous Jews rebelled against the Greeks. This revolt came to be known as the Maccabean revolt under the leadership of Judas Maccabaeus. This group retook Jerusalem, though greatly outnumbered, and purified the Temple. The Jewish feast of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, was celebrated and is commemorated to this day.

Though there was no inspired writing during this period, there are historical records. In the Apocrypha, the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees record the events of the revolt, but this is not Scripture. In fact, at several points in 1 Maccabees, the writer makes it clear that there were no prophets in Israel at the time. While these books can shed some light on select historical events, they are not infallible and offer no light to guide our path as do the true and sure words of Scripture.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



## BEFORE THE THRONE

Lord, Jesus, I am in awe of you. How you love your people. Such a contrast! The people were sacrificing defiled animals. All the while you were fully committed to laying down your life for them—for me! You generously left them with hope before the 400 years of silence. You promised to come and bring redemption even while they were living in darkness. Messiah, my Savior, my Lord, when I was a sinner, you still loved me. You redeemed my life from the pit. Lord I pray you will open the eyes of my students to see this wonderful plan of redemption. Show them, Lord that your ways are better than the ways of the world. Draw them through your Spirit and Word to the truth and abounding hope the Gospel brings.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





## COME ON IN

- Write on the board, “Who is Malachi’s messenger?”
- Students will practice the memory verse by working on a crossword puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend.



## Review

Our lesson today brings us to the close of our study of the Old Testament and points us forward to our study of the New Testament. Last week we looked at the way God desires to be worshipped.

- ? How have you been able to apply what we learned in last week’s lesson? *Discuss various answers, reminding the students that there is grace in Jesus even when we fail to offer pure worship.*

God’s plans have been playing out in history for over 6,000 years. We have covered roughly 4,000 years of that history. As we have moved through this history, we have been making connections to events in world history to help us have some context. We have gone from Creation, to the Corruption that entered as a result of sin, to the Catastrophe God brought to judge

the sinfulness of mankind, to the Confusion applied as a judgment at the rebellion at Babel. *Refer to the 7 C’s of History poster for the full scope of history.*

We have also studied through the specifics of Israel, tracing their history from the Exodus, through the wanderings in the Wilderness of Sinai, entering into the Promised Land, through the cycle of rebellion and repentance during the period of the judges, and on to the period of the united and divided kingdoms. *Refer to the History of Israel poster to cover these events.*

Our final lesson on the Old Testament will come from Malachi’s prophecies and the coming of a messenger.



- Write on the board, “Who is Malachi’s messenger?”



## Studying God’s Word

### READ THE WORD

Let’s read Malachi 3:1–7 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

### EXAMINE THE WORD

#### Observe the Text

Before we dig into this passage, I want to point out that this is quite a complex passage. We are going to try to understand each of the parts, but it will require a bit of work. As we have mentioned with prophetic

passages in the past, there are both near and future references within these few verses.

- ? **Who does the Lord say he will send?** *A messenger will come. Interestingly, Malachi's name means messenger, so this may be a play on words to validate Malachi's message.*
- ? **Are the two instances of "messenger" in verse 1 talking about the same person?** *It seems that they are different people since the first messenger prepares the way for the Lord and the second messenger is identified with the Lord Himself. In some translations, the second instance, Messenger, is capitalized as a reference to a name of the Lord. Also, the ideas in verses 2–3 connect to the judgment that is to come when the Messenger appears.*
- ? **In verse 1, the phrase "prepare the way" before the Lord is mentioned in two other places in Scripture. Can anyone think of a past reference to this idea?** *Isaiah 40:3–5 uses this same language. In the context of this passage, the Jews are told to prepare for the coming of the Messiah.*
- ? **What yet-future reference is made to this passage?** *Jesus used this passage in Matthew 11:10. Have someone read Matthew 11:7–10.*
- ? **Who did Jesus identify as the first messenger in Malachi 3:1?** *John the Baptist.*
- ? **Knowing that the first instance surely refers to John the Baptist, can we insert his name into the second instance of "messenger" in verse 1?** *Read verse 1 inserting John the Baptist in both instances of "messenger" to show that it doesn't make sense.*

The second instance of "messenger" seems to make the most sense when we see it as the Messiah since John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of Jesus. We can understand how the Jews misunderstood many of these things as they were unfolding since they are difficult for us to unravel even with the full revelation of Scripture we now have. This explains the near-future fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy.

- ? **What time period does verse 2 refer to?** *The day of His coming looks far forward to the day of future judgment. Different views on eschatology would place this at the millennial reign of Jesus or at the final judgment. In either case, this portion of the prophecy has not yet been fulfilled.*
- ? **What do all of the images in verses 3–5 describe?** *All of these are images of future judgment and cleansing from sin. Again, different eschatological positions will understand the exact applications of the verses differently. You may wish to explain your church's position here.*
- ? **Looking to verses 6 and 7, what hope did God offer the Israelites?** *He encouraged them to repent and receive His unchanging mercy, though He pointed out that they would continue to argue against the Lord. If God wiped out the Jews at this point, He would break His promise to send the Messiah.*

## Discover the Truth

God had warned the Israelites repeatedly, and they had repeatedly returned to their own ways, failing to worship God as He desired. Even the priests had forsaken their role to teach the people; and God was finished. He sent Malachi to announce judgment. The coming judgment was going

Isaiah 40:3–5

Matthew 11:7–10

FAITHFUL

to be thorough. God would purify them with fire and wash them clean that they might offer to the Lord in righteousness.

But God also offered hope to the people. The Messiah was coming! This was a promise God had made thousands of years ago and was sure to keep. God is faithful to fulfill the promises He has made, including the promise of a Savior.

MERCIFUL

? What attribute of God do we see demonstrated in His patience with the Jews? *God was merciful in not giving the Jews what they deserved. Their sin deserved punishment, but God chose not to consume them in order to fulfill His earlier promise.*

God had a plan in place to bring salvation to Israel—and to the Gentiles. Malachi was a messenger who was announcing a messenger who would prepare the way for the Messiah to come. Even in the face of rebuke and judgment, there was hope. And that hope was a person.



## READ THE WORD

Malachi 4:1–6

Last week we looked at 3:8–18 and the further indictment including the failure to give willingly and cheerfully and complaining against the Lord's goodness and help. Let's look at verses 4:1–6 and learn more about this messenger. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

## EXAMINE THE WORD

### Observe the Text

- ? What is the coming day referring to? *The day of judgment.*
- ? What contrast is set in verses 1 and 2? *Verses 1 and 2 talk about the harsh judgment that God will bring to sinful people, and verse 2 speaks of the healing that will come to the righteous. There is also a play on the idea of heat: a burning oven is contrasted with the sun where one burns up the wicked and one provides healing.*
- ? On whom will God's judgment fall? *Those who are proud and do wicked things.*
- ? Who will find healing? *Those who fear God's name.*
- ? To whom is the Sun of Righteousness referring? *This is a reference to the Messiah.*
- ? Who is introduced in verse 5? *Elijah.*
- ? When will Elijah come? *Before the great and dreadful day of the Lord—the day of judgment.*
- ? What will Elijah do when he comes? *He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the children's hearts to their fathers.*

? Does anyone recognize that language from somewhere else in Scripture?

*This language is quoted by Gabriel in the birth announcement to Zacharias. Have someone read Luke 1:13–17 aloud.*

Luke 1:13–17

? How did Gabriel describe John’s fulfillment of the words of Malachi?

*Gabriel said that John would come in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the people. These were the first words recorded as coming from God since the time of Malachi. God chose to break the silence with the birth announcement to Zacharias.*

Let’s take a moment to deal with a difficulty in the text. Turn to John 1 and listen as I read verses 19–28. Read the passage after the students turn there. Here John seems to be denying that he is Elijah.

John 1:19–28

Let’s look at one more passage where Jesus speaks of John’s ministry. Turn to Matthew 17 and listen as I read 10–13. Read the passage after the students turn there.

Matthew 17:10–13

? Here Jesus said that “Elijah has come already” referring to John the Baptist.

**So, who was right then—John or Jesus?** *Actually, this is a false dichotomy, and it isn’t necessary that either is wrong. John was clearly the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy made by Malachi—or at least part of it. But he was not a reincarnated Elijah. He came in the spirit and power of Elijah. All those who were willing to accept that fulfillment would also see that Jesus was indeed the Messiah since John had prepared the way for His entry to minister in Israel.*

But notice in Matthew 17:11 that Jesus said, “Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.” So, it appears that while John the Baptist was a “type” of Elijah, and came in the spirit and power of Elijah, there is yet a future coming of Elijah where he will restore all things. At least that’s what Jesus appears to be saying.

## Discover the Truth

Malachi, the last prophet in our Old Testament, pointed forward to the Messiah and a messenger who would announce His coming. Some 400 years after these words were delivered to the Jews and recorded for us to read, the prophecy was fulfilled. John was born to Elizabeth and Zacharias after the announcement by Gabriel. Shortly after that, Mary gave birth to Jesus as Gabriel had revealed to her. John began his ministry of baptizing and preparing the way for the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

God’s plans are perfect and they unfold in history just as He directs them. We have the privilege of being able to look back on all of those events and we have the benefit of the careful study and cross-examination of many fine teachers who have come before us. We need to take advantage of all of the resources and knowledge that are available to us and seek to worship God more deeply as a result.





# Zacharias's Prayer

## MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

## INSTRUCTIONS

As I mentioned earlier, Zacharias was the first person recorded in Scripture to receive a message from God since Malachi spoke 400 years earlier. His message pointed forward, but it used allusions from the past to do so. This is a very interesting way to look at this passage—it looks forward by referring to the past. The prophecies of Malachi and Zacharias intersect with one another in a very clear way.

I would like you to examine Zacharias's prophecy and look for any allusions from the Old Testament. For instance, Psalm 78:13 says, "He divided the sea and caused them to pass through; and He made the waters stand up like a heap."

? **What event is alluded to in this verse?** *The crossing of the Red Sea is in mind even though it is not mentioned by that name.*

You will find the Zacharias's Prayer activity in your Student Guide. Examine the passage and we will talk about what you find in a

few minutes. Have the students work in small groups to complete the activity.

## CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

? **What allusions did you find?** *Verse 69 talks about the continuing line of David's throne in the Messiah as described in 2 Samuel 7 and Jeremiah 23:5–6. Verse 70 mentions all of the prophets that have spoken for God. Verses 72–75 refer back to the covenant made with Abraham to bring salvation through his Seed and to make Israel a great nation. Verse 76 looks back to Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 and the preparing ministry of John. Verses 77–78 are connected to the work of the Messiah in removing the sins of the people and the New Covenant God would institute as described in Jeremiah 31:34. Verse 79 speaks of the light that would shine into a dark world just as Isaiah 9:2–6 and 60:2–3 prophesied.*

The richness of the truths of a passage like this is quite overwhelming when we make the connections to the things that had already been revealed.

? **In what ways do the prophecies of Malachi and Zacharias intersect with one another?** *Both of these prophecies are given through the Holy Spirit. While Malachi looks forward and Zachariah looks backward, both reveal the wisdom in the perfect plans of God. Both speak of the preparing ministry of John. Both speak of the forgiveness that will be found in the Messiah. Both interact with other prophecies that had been delivered before.*



## Applying God's Word

### WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

4,000 years! God had promised to send the remedy for sin 4,000 years before He fulfilled His promise. We might question why He waited so long, but then we are reminded of Job's encounter when he demanded an explanation from God. We must trust that God's timing is perfect and

that He brought the Messiah when He determined the timing was best—“in the fullness of time” as Paul says in Galatians 4:4.

From the days of Malachi to the arrival of John announcing the Lamb, 400 years passed. These are often called the 400 Years of Silence as God had sent no prophets to the people during that time. During those 400 years there was much going on in Israel—all of which was part of God’s plan, as well. The visions Daniel had seen and interpreted played out through the Greek and Roman Empires. The Temple was ransacked and defiled by Antiochus Epiphanes. Then a band of Jews under the leadership of the Maccabees drove out the invaders and restored the Temple worship.

Some of the historical events are recorded in what is called the Apocrypha. While these books are not considered part of the biblical canon, they do offer some significant insights into the history and theology of that period. Unfortunately, many false ideas about God, the nature of salvation, and the true nature of the afterlife have been added to people’s views of God as the Apocrypha has been added to God’s Word by millions around the world.

We must hold fast to the wisdom and mercy of God in directing history to the point that Jesus would be born to live a perfect life and die on our behalf, trusting in the Bible as the only authoritative source revealing those ideas to us. After His death, He was buried in a tomb only to rise from the dead on the third day. All of those things playing out in the wisdom of God were worth the wait for all who trust in Him, repent of their sins, and look forward to the day when He returns to fully restore His creation and reverse the Curse that our sin brought into the world.

## GOD’S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? **What have you learned about the importance of examining a text like Malachi 3:1 in light of the past and future connections to the text?** *Rather than glossing over passages, taking time to think carefully about what led to certain prophecies and what they point to gives a fullness to them that can only help us see how truly wise and awesome God is to be able to weave all of these things together throughout all of history.*
- ? **We have mentioned the idea of the scarlet thread of the Messiah weaving its way through history. How do you see that thread in light of today’s study?** *Refer to The Scarlet Thread Poster, discussing various connections seen by the students.*
- ? **Was God really silent in the 400 years from Malachi to Zacharias?** *No, because He had revealed so much in the writings of the Old Testament. He could be heard and known from what was revealed there. In fact, Malachi 4:4 calls the Jews to remember God by what He had revealed in the written words of Scripture.*

Turn to 1 Peter 1:10–12 and listen as I read. *Read the passage.*

1 Peter 1:10–12

? **How does Peter’s idea relate to what we have been studying today?** *We can understand how the Jews of Jesus’s day, not having the fullness of the revelation of the Bible that we have today, could have misunderstood passages. We know they were expecting Elijah, but they weren’t exactly sure how the prophecies were to be fulfilled in John and Jesus. Likewise, there are many future prophecies that people within the church disagree about exactly how they will be fulfilled. Will Elijah be one of the two witnesses in the book of Revelation, or should we seek another? We need to take care not to judge the people in Jesus’s day too harshly, knowing that we may err in the future apart from the grace of God revealing and teaching us those truths by His Spirit.*

? **When questions arise about books like those in the Apocrypha, why is it important to be able to respond to those who wonder why they are not accepted as part of the Bible?** *God’s Word cannot be added to. We should have at least a basic idea of why we look to only the 66 books as the canon of Scripture, or at least an idea of how to find those answers to help us to make a reasonable defense for the hope that we have in Christ (1 Peter 3:14–17).*



### MEMORY VERSE

**Nehemiah 9:6** You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.



### GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for being faithful to His promise to send the Messiah.
- Praise God for His wisdom in directing history.
- Ask God for guidance by the Holy Spirit to understand His Word.