

1. In the Days of Malachi (fitting that on the last Sunday of the year that we focus on the last book in the OT. Fitting also because of the contemporary nature of that book. Malachi was God's preacher to Judah during the days after the return of the Jews from their 70-year exile in Babylon. It is likely by the time of his writing seventy more years had passed since the rebuilding of the temple. During this time Judah had increasingly lost its passion to follow Jehovah. A sort of national depression has set in among the Jews. Things were not going as they had imagined. They were still little more than a backwater outpost in the Persian Empire—controlled by them and paying heavy taxes. They had lost hope in the postexilic promise and felt God had abandoned them resulting in a great disconnect between their religion and daily life. Malachi whose names means "my messenger" was called to speak a word from the Lord into this situation, He addressed—along with Nehemiah)
2. Five Major Failures (which all put together reveal how far they had drifted from God. And as we consider each of them—let's read ourselves into this story. These are warning signs of any people anywhere who lose passion. On the verge of a new year—a traditional time of serious self-reflection—do we see ourselves in any of these failures?)
 - a. Mixed marriages—Malachi 2:11-15; Nehemiah 13:23-27 (they married daughters of foreign Gods—major problem since flirting with other gods was one huge reason their forefathers failed. It equals what we would call moral compromise)
 - b. Failure to tithe—Malachi 3:3-10; Nehemiah 13:10-14 (and in so doing stop supporting the temple and stop providing for the poor. Money always goes where the passion is)
 - c. No Sabbath-Keeping—Malachi 2:8-9; Nehemiah 13:7-9 (Keeping God's day holy no longer was a priority for them; how we spend our time also follows our passions; assembling with God's people becomes less significant. Other things take precedent)
 - d. Corrupt officials—Malachi 1:6-2:9; Nehemiah 13:7-9 (no surprise here—all of what anchored them to God had been neglected, so they become morally/ethically compromised. When God's will is ignored, removed, made insignificant that always opens the door for questionable behavior to become rationalized and accepted)
 - e. Social problems—Malachi 3:5; Nehemiah 5:1-13 (again no surprise that Judah as a nation was neglecting the poor and practicing injustice, which itself resulted in social unrest. Natural progression when God is put on the back burner. We can see it in our culture. As we can readily see all of these major failures around us now—not just nationally, but even in our churches.)
3. Malachi Speaks
 - a. Trust God—3:6-18 (May sound like a cliché but it is an absolute—for them and us. They may have felt like an insignificant outpost in Persia and may have concluded that God had forgotten them, but neither were true—God was still working. They were a part of a much larger narrative. God needed them in their time and place to be his people so that narrative would continue to unfold—same is true for us)
 - b. The Day of the Lord is Coming—4:1-6 (He foretold of a great and dreadful day—of an Elijah (John the Baptist) coming—and how that would change everything. And it did in Christ. They needed to realize they were a significant part of that story, rekindle their passion and live for that day. That message remains unchanged for us)
4. Malachi 4:2