

MALACHI

MINOR PROPHETS SERIES

A Dispute About God's Justice 2:17-3:6

Thus far in Malachi God has brought three disputes against the people: 1) their doubt of his love; 2) their dishonourable actions; and 3) their lack of faithfulness in their marital relationships. All along the people refuse to believe and accept God's accusations. Judah thinks all is well because they are not neglecting to give offerings and make sacrifices.

Disputation # 4

Assertion: The people had "*wearied the Lord*" with their words

Objection by Israel: "*How have we wearied him?*"

God's Response: They had questioned his execution of justice claiming that he allowed evil to go on unpunished. This accusation is not against the priests alone, but the entire nation.

We know that the unlimited God does not grow weary in the same way we do (fatigue from exertion or exhaustion from the pressures of life). The word "*weary*" as used of God expresses his displeasure with the people because of their sin. The word also shows that God's patience has nearly been exhausted. Yet the oblivious people continue to ask, "*How have we wearied him?*"

The people expressed scepticism in God and doubted his he would ever bring judgment. Even though a large part of the people acted faithless themselves, they still expected God to take action against injustice. Perhaps it was the few faithful among them that voiced these complaints, but unrighteous people also complain about God; claiming that he is distant and aloof. The Lord grew weary of their constant complaining and lack of understanding.

1. Why does complaining so anger God?

2. Why are people quick to accuse God of being distant and uninvolved?

In chapter 3 God begins to describe what the future holds and to inform Judah that judgment and justice is coming soon. The word "*behold*" is a word that expresses something that is shocking, imminent, and certain to happen.¹

God will send one he calls "*my messenger*." We recall that the name "Malachi" means "*my messenger*" and the word could also be translated as "angel." This promise however is of a future messenger who will serve in a preparatory role for still another yet to come.



¹ Smith, James E. Postexilic Prophets. Lulu, 2007, p. 318.

3. In Matthew 11:10 whom does Jesus identify as the “messenger” of Malachi 3:10?

Malachi 3:10 is a clear prophecy of the coming of John the Baptist who preceded the coming of Jesus into the world. God speaks in the first person when he says “my messenger” will prepare the way before “me.” God was coming to earth in flesh. (See also Mark 1:2,3 where Mark combines Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 as prophecies of John the Baptist.)

Though the Jews had anticipated the coming of the Messiah for centuries, he still came in an unexpected time and manner as indicated by the word “suddenly” in verse 1. The prophecy was that the Messiah will come into his temple and Scripture tells us that he did; first as an infant, then when he was twelve, at various times during his ministry, and finally on Palm Sunday a week before his resurrection. Today the temple of the Holy Spirit is in the lives of Christians.

4. Why are people surprised when God does what he promises to do? Can you think of any future promises that will catch people unprepared?

The Lord is coming, but his coming will not be what the Jews expect. They believed the Messiah would arrive to judge their enemies. While this is true, Judah will also face judgment. Two rhetorical questions are asked in verse 2: “Who can endure the day of his coming? “Who can stand when he appears?” The correct answer is that only the righteous can stand. The wicked will be removed as indicated by the two illustrations of the work of the Messiah: “he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.”



The refiner's fire and the fuller's soap are used to purify, refine, and cleanse. The refiner's fire separates worthless impurities from valuable metal and the lye in the soap separates dirt from the clean garment. When the Messiah comes he will separate the righteous from the unrighteous. Only those who love and obey him will stand at his appearance.



In verse 3 the illustration pictures the Messiah sitting as a refiner and purifier of silver. The sons of Levi represent the priests of Malachi's day who had become unconcerned about godly living and offering untainted sacrifices. The refining will produce a cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. We should take this as figuratively pointing to the church which is God's holy people and nation. Today all Christians are priests of God.

5. How does Matthew 3:11-12 describe the purifying and separating work of Christ?

The church is made up of men and women who are purified and separated from the world and to the Lord. 1 Peter 2:9 describes Christians in this manner: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (See also 1 Peter 2:5; Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6).

Christians are metaphorically depicted as Judah and Jerusalem, in verse 5, who will make pleasing offerings to the Lord as in the days of old. The days of old looks back to the best days of the Jews from Abraham onward. The word translated as “*pleasing*” indicates a sweet smell which brings pleasure to God.

6. What is called “a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” in Philippians 4:18?

Verse 5 pictures a courtroom scene where the Messiah acts as both witness and judge. He names six categories of sinners against whom he will take judgment:

1. Sorcerers -- These are people who try to learn or manipulate the future. This sin brought the penalty of death in the Old Testament. Likewise those involved in sorcery will not see heaven (Rev. 21:8).
2. Adulterers -- This is another sin punishable by death under the Old Testament Law and was forbidden in the 10 Commandments (Ex. 20:14). Adultery is heterosexual relations with someone other than one's spouse.
3. Perjurers -- Oath taking was serious and the breaking of a vow was an offence against God and the community.
4. Oppressors -- God speaks against those who oppress the worker, the widow, and the orphan. God views with disdain those who use their power or authority to take advantage of the powerless.
5. Abusers -- Here those who were resident in Israel, but not citizens are in view. Sojourners were to be treated fairly.
6. Irreligious -- Those who did not fear Yahweh were to be judged. This is a general accusation against all who did not act in ways that were righteous and in keeping with God's commands.



7. Is God's role as judge popular today? Why or why not?

God gives proof of his coming and of judgment through expressing this truth about himself: “*I the LORD do not change.*” Not only does God not change, he cannot change. He is totally perfect and complete in power, knowledge, and presence. To add anything would mean that he had been lacking and to remove anything would cause him to be lacking. He is perfect and complete and will remain perfect and complete making it impossible for him to change. We call this the “immutability” of God.

The Jews are called the “children of Jacob” in 3:6 because “they were so much like their ancestor. Like Jacob, the Jews of Malachi's day were guilty of deceit in respect to God and man. God had kept his word to Jacob (Israel) thus far. Therefore, his promises/warnings for the future may be trusted.”²

² Smith, *ibid.* p. 327.

God is patient, but he is wearied by sin and complaining and we can be sure that one day he will bring judgment. Israel in the days of Malachi believed God to be neglectful by his seemingly slow execution of justice. At the same time they remained oblivious to their own sinfulness which is pictured in the six categories of sin above. They did not trust in our truly believe the promises of the unchanging God.

In similar fashion the apostle Peter says that scoffers will come in the last days scoffing about the Lord's Second Coming. They will engage in sin while disbelieving what God has promised. Even as the Jews were caught off-guard by the first coming of the Messiah many will be surprised when Jesus returns. Peter says that the day of the Lord will come as unexpected as *"thief"* and when the day of the Lord comes the heavens, the earth, and all the works done on earth will be destroyed. He then asks this probing question: *"Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God ...?"* (2 Peter 3:11-12).