

Oracle 4: God's Justice Delivered (Part 2)

Malachi 2:17-3:5

January 24th, 2021

1. Claim: You have **wearied** the Lord with your words (2:17a)
2. Question: How have we **wearied** Him? (2:17b)
3. Explanation: Distorting evil, good, and **justice** (2:17-3:5)
 - a. An accusation of **delayed** judgement (2:17c)
 - i. "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord"
 1. Could be a distortion of good and evil or another way of wording "where is the God of justice?"
 2. **Why do we have tend to invert good and evil? How do we see that today?**
 - a. Isa. 5:20²⁰ Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!
 - ii. **What is behind an accusatory question like "where is the God of justice?" What assumptions are being made?**
 - iii. Many Biblical authors struggled with the apparent prosperity of the wicked
 1. **Job 21:7**⁷ "Why do the wicked *still* live, Continue on, also become very powerful?"
 2. **Eccl. 8:14**¹⁴ There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility.
 3. **Jer. 12:1** Righteous are You, O LORD, that I would plead *my* case with You; Indeed I would discuss matters of justice with You: Why has the way of the wicked prospered? *Why* are all those who deal in treachery at ease?
 - iv. **How can we avoid making the same assumptions when we see justice delayed?**
 1. Psalm 73
 2. 2 Pet. 3:8-9⁸ But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.⁹ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.
 - b. God will send His **messenger** (3:1)
 - i. The phrase "Behold, I send" recalls other royal pronouncements of sending messengers, human or otherwise, to execute justice (**Ex. 8:21**; **Isa. 6:8**; **Jer. 43:10**; **Joel 2:19**).
 1. Exod. 8:21²¹ "For if you do not let My people go, behold, I will send swarms of insects on you and on your servants and on your people and into your houses;
 2. Isa. 6:8⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"
 3. Jer. 43:10¹⁰ and say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Behold, I am going to send and get Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and I am going to set his throne *right* over these stones that I have hidden; and he will spread his canopy over them.

4. Mac - It was a custom of the Near Eastern kings to send messengers before them to remove obstacles to their visit. Employing a wordplay on the name of Malachi, ("the Lord's messenger"), the Lord himself announced he was sending one who would "prepare the way before me."
- ii. Jesus identifies this messenger as John the Baptist.
 1. **Matthew 11:7-10**⁷ As these men were going *away*, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"⁸ "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft *clothing*? Those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings' palaces!"⁹ "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet."¹⁰ "This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.'
 2. **Isa. 40:3** A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.
 3. **John 1:23** He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said."
 4. **Mal. 4:5-6**⁵ "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD."⁶ "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

iii. Look at the words in this passage. How does John fulfill this promise?

1. The gospels identify the messenger of the covenant with John the Baptist, and the Lord (Mal. 3:1) with Jesus (Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27). It is in Jesus Christ that God works out ultimate justice for his discouraged people and judgment on those who do not fear him (Matt. 3:12). Reflection on the partial fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy in the Gospels, while looking forward to its full and complete fulfillment in the second coming, will guard us from any blasphemous resentment of God as we walk the hard road of his service.
2. Bkc – Jesus explicitly identified this person as John the Baptist (Matt 1:7-10). The fact that this messenger will prepare His way harmonizes with Isaiah 40:3 (John 1:23). The coming of this messenger was to be the first of a twofold eschatological event. The second step would be the coming of the Lord in His day.

iv. Who are "the Lord" and "the messenger of the covenant" in the second part of v. 1? The same as "My messenger" or different?

1. parallelism in the lines indicates the Lord IS the messenger of the covenant
 - a. And the Lord, whom you seek,
 - b. and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight,
2. Bkc – the title the messenger of the covenant occurs only here in the Bible. This individual is not the same as "My messenger" in v. 1 for the messenger of the covenant comes after the earlier messenger. Most likely this is the Lord Himself.
3. Whom you seek...in whom you delight reflects the general expectation of the Lord's coming as predicted by many other prophets. Also carries a note of sarcasm.
4. Mac - messenger of the covenant. Probably not the messenger just mentioned. Rather, because this Messenger will "come to his temple," it is most likely a reference to the Lord himself, the One who has the authority to reward or judge his people on the basis of their faithfulness to his covenant with them.

c. He will come to **cleanse** and **purify** (3:2-4)

i. What do these verses tell us about the intent of this messenger's coming?

1. It's not a destructive fire but a refining and cleansing fire

2. The second sentence of the verse provides a note of hope amid coming judgment, for without this refining, God's people could not stand in his judgment (cf. Mal. 3:5). Part of the messenger's work is to cleanse God's people spiritually.
- ii. The messenger "sits" as the refining continues for some time before it is complete. (v. 3)
- iii. **Who is the object of this cleansing? How does that fit with what we have already seen in Malachi?**
 1. the priests were a big part of the problem and they were the surprising object of the purification.
 2. **Mal. 1:6** "'A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?' says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, 'How have we despised Your name?'"
- d. Then God will draw near for **judgment** (v. 5)
 - i. Judgment was delayed but not permanently
 1. Remember, that was the accusation that started this section – why aren't you bringing judgment?
 - ii. Once his own people have been refined, the Lord executes justice on those rebelling against him (2:17)—not from a distance but by personally drawing near. The Lord's acting as a witness represents the whole process of justice; his "swift" witness resolves the complaint beginning the passage. No longer will the people ask where the God of justice is, as he judges crimes ranging from false worship to sexual sin to oppression of the poor.
 - iii. **What do you notice about the list of people that judgment will come against?**
 1. Fairly broad
 - a. False worship, sexual sin, lying, injustice against workers and vulnerable
 2. Who were the sorcerers?
 - a. **Mic. 5:12** "I will cut off sorceries from your hand, And you will have fortune-tellers no more.