
[IN THE HEBREW, CHAP. 3:1-3, 19-24.]

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Many commentaries, in other respects good, are marred by the fact that they apply these passages directly to the Messianic times, and fail to distinguish between the meaning of the prophetic announcement and the application of the words made in Matthew and Mark. The first step toward understanding what the evangelists mean is to get a clear idea of what the prophet meant. The reverse of this is not a good principle in Old Testament exegesis.

Premising that the book of Malachi was produced in Jerusalem, in the Persian period, not long before the adoption of the law in 444 B.C., a careful reading of the passages and of the associated verses will reveal a few facts that are needed for a proper elucidation of the meaning.

1. A great and terrible day of Jehovah is to come, in which the God of judgment will appear to annihilate the wicked, and to give joy to the righteous. The God of judgment is called the Lord, Jehovah, Jehovah of hosts. The "Day of Jehovah" had often been referred to by the prophets. It is a term by which they appear to suggest the special interposition of Jehovah in the affairs of men at important epochs. It is particularly to be noted that, according to the prediction, Jehovah himself was to come.

2. The judgment here spoken of is to take place within the chosen people itself. The other nations are referred to in this book, but only that their pure service may be contrasted with the pollutions and profanations in Israel. Mal. 2:17 indicates three classes of offenders: (a) the evil-doers, in respect to whom men complain that Jehovah regards them as good, thus wearying God with their false conclusions. The evil-doers will be punished by Jehovah; God does not call evil good, and there is a God of judgment, who will do his

\[\text{1 See W. R. Smith, Prophets, pp. 131 f., 396 f.; Driver, Isaiah, pp. 27 f.; Literature, p. 197.}\]

\[\text{2 Mal. 1:11.}\]

\[\text{3 Mal. 3:5, 6, 18; 4:1, 3, 5.}\]

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work. (b) A class of complainers themselves, who appear to maintain an outward regard for the worship of God, but rob him of his dues. These blinded people desire the judgment and expect to be held in honor by the Judge, but the prophet declares that the Judge will appear first in the temple itself, and will distinguish carefully between the self-righteous formalists and the true priests of God, and will consume the former like dross. (c) The skeptical spirit, whether embodied in the priests or in other arrogant persons, receives its condemnation, and it is declared that only those who really fear Jehovah shall be spared when Jehovah comes to judgment.

3. The terms "my messenger," "the messenger of the covenant," would ordinarily indicate the angelic manifestation of Jehovah about which we have statements elsewhere. It is not clear that the author of our prophecy had, at the time of writing Mal. 3:1-3, any other idea in mind. Jehovah's messenger is the channel of his message, the medium of his presence, the expression of himself, sometimes identified with himself. It may be assumed that "my messenger" and "the messenger of the covenant" would refer to the same manifestation, and Mal. 3:2-5 would seem to favor this, for the work of the messenger of the covenant is probably there distinguished from that of Jehovah as in a measure preparatory. The only difficulty about this view is the apparently sharp distinction drawn between the two in Mal. 3:1. The passage Zech. 1:9, 10 will teach us, however, that such distinctions often may be more apparent than real, and the blending of functions introduced into the present passage points to the identity of the two messengers.

Good usage, however, would permit our prophet to apply the term "messenger" to others than angels. In Mal. 2:7 the prophet presents one of the highest and most spiritual conceptions of the priesthood, by declaring that the priest is the messenger of Jehovah of hosts. In Hag. 1:13 the prophet is said to be the messenger of Jehovah.

It is not strange, therefore, that in Mal. 4:5 the messenger to come should be declared to be a prophet with the spirit and power of Elijah,

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4 Mal. 3:8-10. 6 Mal. 3:3. 7 Mal. 3:13-15; cf. 2:17.
9 Judg. 5:23; Exod. 23:20 ff.; Isa. 63:9; Zech. 1:8-11; 3:1, 2, and often.
10 As in Mal. 3:1; Zech. 3:1, 2.
11 This is the evident meaning of the coming of Elijah. For the similar prediction of the coming of David, see Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23; 37:24.
for the messenger of the covenant must be conceived of as urgent for the maintenance of the covenant, and Elijah mourns that the children of Israel had forsaken the covenant of Jehovah;\textsuperscript{12} the work of the messenger was to be strenuous for the conversion of the people and uncompromising in the judgment on evil-doers, and for such aims Elijah stands conspicuous among the prophets.

4. The work of the forerunner of Jehovah will be to turn the hearts of fathers to sons and of sons to fathers, and to establish obedience to the law of Moses;\textsuperscript{13} also to purge the priests,\textsuperscript{14} so that pure offerings may be presented in the temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem. It is not quite certain in what consisted the particular variance between fathers and sons, but all of us know the peculiar liability to misunderstanding among members of the same family, where human relationships are not subordinated to a supreme regard for the will of God; and we can understand the general sense of the passage, Mal. 4 : 6, whether or not, as Steiner suggests, the difficulties arise especially from the separations of husbands from wives mentioned in Mal. 2 : 10–16. The intention of the writer is to indicate a work of reconciliation among the people, and of restoration in them of respect for the law and the service of God.

5. Those who fear Jehovah are associated in a goodly fellowship which is simply religious. The political idea of the restored community and of national greatness is here exchanged for the moral idea of a company of God-fearing men.

With these ideas in mind we are prepared for the exposition of the passages. The prophet declares that those doubtful of God, or of his regard for truth, and who wish for his coming,\textsuperscript{15} will be surprised by his speedy appearance in the temple for judgment.\textsuperscript{16} A way will be prepared before him\textsuperscript{17} by a prophet like Elijah,\textsuperscript{18} who will transform many human relationships with thoughts of love,\textsuperscript{19} and restore the broken covenant by bringing the people that receive him into obedience to the law,\textsuperscript{20} and into respect for the services of the temple.\textsuperscript{21} In the process the wicked priests will be eliminated,\textsuperscript{22} the work being as thorough as that of the refiner who sits before the heated furnace and leaves therein the precious metal till it is entirely free from its alloy,\textsuperscript{23} When he shall have separated the evil from the priesthood, they will present offerings that are right to Jehovah in the temple.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{12}1 Kings 19:10, 14.
\textsuperscript{13}Mal. 4:4–6.
\textsuperscript{14}Mal. 3:3.
\textsuperscript{15}Mal. 2:17; 3:1.
\textsuperscript{16}Mal. 3:1.
\textsuperscript{17}Mal. 3:1; cf. Isa. 40:3.
\textsuperscript{18}Mal. 4:5.
\textsuperscript{19}Mal. 4:6.
\textsuperscript{20}Mal. 4:4.
preparatory work in mercy has been allowed, lest at the coming of Jehovah the whole people be annihilated. The coming of Jehovah, however, cannot be averted; the day of judgment is about to dawn, which shall prove a devouring fire to the arrogant evil-doers, here compared to chaff devoured in the fire without a remainder. For good people, however, the same day shall have a beautiful sunrise, and shall provide glad freedom from restraint, so that in their joy at the bright day of Jehovah "they shall be like calves which are forced to stand through the winter in narrow stalls, but in early spring, when the sun comes forth from the wintry cloud-veil, are again driven into the open, and therefore leap and skip with unrestrained joy." Upon the ashes of the wicked the feet of the righteous shall tread. The people are expected to remember the law of Moses, for in the obedience and fear of God is the hope for the brightness of that day. It is the purpose of the coming of Elijah to enforce this, and thus to produce the fear of God. Listen to him, for in what he enjoins lies security in that great and terrible day, and membership in the goodly fellowship of godly souls.

If we may venture to detach from the terms which are purely those of the prophet's time their underlying principle, it will run somewhat like this: Those who doubt the presence of God in this world and his interpositions for judgment are mistaken. He may be expected to sift the righteous from the wicked, and to punish the latter. Since he delights not in punishment, he will give fair warning of his coming, and will graciously provide messengers to accomplish godly fear among the people. To the two questions, Does God delight in evil? Is there a God of judgment? the prophetic response is: He does not delight in evil, and he will speedily show that he does not. Jehovah is the God of judgment.

There is a temptation always to ask these same questions in some form or other, for evil is not yet removed out of the way, and wicked people to our imperfect vision seem to prosper; and therefore we need constantly to come back to the words of the ancient Hebrew seer.

In Matt. 17:10-13 our Lord applies the prophecy of Elijah to the coming of John the Baptist, and both in this Matthew passage and in Mark 9:10-13 Jesus seems to imply that in his own ministry the Lord of judgment appeared, and no one can doubt that the principle just stated finds a conspicuous illustration in the work of John and in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

21 Mal. 4:6. 22 Mal. 4:1. 23 So Köhler. 24 Mal. 4:2, 3. 25 Mal. 4:1. 26 Mal. 4:5. 27 Mal. 4:6. 28 Mal. 2:17.