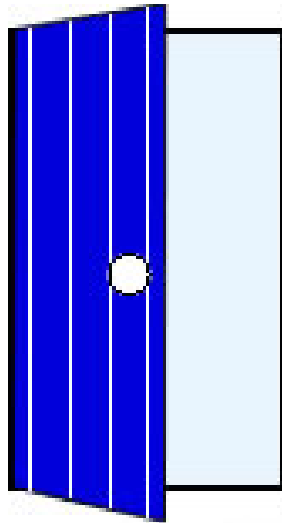


# **BIBLE STUDIES**



**Mill Lane Chapel**

**Malachi**

## **(6) "He is like a refiner's fire"**

### **Read Chapter 2: 17 - 3: 6**

Malachi 2: 17 - 3: 18 can be divided into three sections. **(1)** The coming of the Refiner, 2: 17 - 3: 6. "But who may abide the day of his coming.....for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap", V2. **(2)** The call to return, 3: 7-12. "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?", V7. **(3)** The conduct of the remnant, V13-18. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another", V16.

### **1) THE COMING OF THE REFINER, 2: 17 - 3: 6**

This section comprises a question and an answer. **(A) The question:** "Where is the God of judgement?", 2: 17. An answer is **not** expected. God just **doesn't** seem to intervene! **(B) The answer:** "Behold, I **will** send my messenger before my face.....and the Lord whom ye seek, **shall** suddenly come to his temple.....behold, he **shall** come, saith the Lord of hosts", 3: 1. An answer **is** forthcoming. God **does** intervene! In fact, He answers the question Himself! We must now examine both question and answer more closely.

#### **A) THE QUESTION, 2: 17**

"Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgement?" So it is possible to weary God, even though other passages tell us that He is unwearied! "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is **weary?** He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength", Isaiah 40: 28-29. He is unwearied in helping His people. God never tires: "He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep", Psalm 121: 3-4. But He finds no pleasure in sin: "Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast **wearied** me with thine iniquities", Isaiah 43: 24.

Let's remember that Israel's God is **our** God. He delights to strengthen us. See, for example 2 Cor.12: 9, Phil. 4: 13. But He deplores our sin. Do **we** bring Him pleasure, or displeasure?

Israel had wearied God in two ways. **(i)** They cast doubt on His righteousness. "Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them." **(ii)** They cast doubt on His intervention. "Where is the God of judgement?" The two are linked by the little word "or", which probably means, 'to put it another way.' In which case, the meaning is something like this: 'God must condone evil, otherwise He would intervene.'

### **i) They cast doubt on His righteousness**

The charge is blasphemous! "Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them." The question that follows, "Where is the God of judgement?", makes it clear that they had expected Him to intervene, not, obviously, against **them**, but on their behalf, against the surrounding pagan nations. Because God had not done so, they concluded that He condoned their evil ways, and accused Him of failing to take right and wrong seriously. The Old Testament writers were sometimes perplexed by the prosperity of the wicked, and asked, for example, "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?", Job 12: 1. But here it is the voice of cynicism and unbelief.

Sometimes we too are perplexed at the way in which wicked people appear to escape unpunished, but we can be sure that God cannot compromise His own righteousness. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?". Genesis 18: 25. The Psalmist had the same problem until he "went into the sanctuary of God" and "understood.....their end", Psalm 73: 1-20.

### **ii) They cast doubt on His intervention**

"Where is the God of judgement?" They were saying in effect: 'people can get away with whatever they please.....God won't do anything about it anyway.....it just doesn't seem to matter.' This is exactly the argument of the "scoffers" in 2 Peter 3: 4, "Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." They do not believe in divine intervention! We must not adopt the same attitude. Whilst God, in mercy, does not consume us with fire from heaven when we sin, that does not mean to say that we escape unscathed. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap", Galatians 6: 7. See also 1 Cor. 11: 30

## **B) THE ANSWER, 3: 1-6**

God answers their charges with a resounding, "Behold." It is permeated with authority, strength, and certainty. The word first occurs in Genesis 1: 29 in connection with the provision of food for man and beast, and prefaces a wide range of divine statements throughout the Bible, including intervention, as here, against sin. See, for example Genesis 6: 13, Revelation 1: 7, 5: 5. We must notice that these verses answer the two questions above in full.

**a)** They had said "Where is the God of judgement?" God answers, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, **whom ye seek**, shall suddenly come to his temple.....And I will come near to you in **judgement**", V1 & V5. The words, "the Lord whom **ye seek**", are used ironically. Peter meets the arguments of the "scoffers" in exactly the same way: in spite of their scorn, "the day of the Lord **will** come", 2 Peter 3: 10.

**b)** They had said, "Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them." God answers: "I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against the false swearers.....and that fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts", V5. He has no delight in evildoers.

We must now look at the details in these verses. Chapter 3: 1-6 can be divided as follows: **(i)** The coming of the Lord, V1. Notice the Lord's messenger ("my messenger"), and the Lord Himself ("the messenger of the covenant"); **(ii)** The cleansing of Israel, V2-6. It is important to notice that the "God of judgement" begins with **them!** He would come, not initially to judge the Gentile nations, but to purge the temple and its worship. This was not what they expected, and illustrates the divine principle that "judgement must begin at the house of God", 1 Peter 4: 17.

### **i) The coming of the Lord, V1**

**a) The Lord's messenger.** "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me." There is no doubt about his identity. Speaking of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus said, "For this is he, of whom it is written, behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee", Matthew 11: 10. See also Luke 7: 27. Mark begins by quoting the same words: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee", Mark 1: 1-2. (Do notice the change from "before **me**" to "before **thee**." It is most significant). Zacharias was thoroughly aware that Malachi referred to John: "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways", Luke 1: 76. John himself was thoroughly aware of his role as predicted by Malachi: "I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him", John 3: 28.

**b) The Lord Himself.** The first thing to notice is that this verse clearly emphasises the deity of the Lord Jesus. It is the "God of judgement" who says, "Behold, **I** will send **my** messenger, and shall prepare the way before **me**." John the Baptist, "my messenger", prepared the way for the Lord Jesus, Who must therefore be none other than God himself. This is confirmed by the second statement: "And the **Lord (Adon)**, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple." This remarkable verse therefore emphasises both the deity of the Lord Jesus, and His separate identity.

It is significant that whilst the former part of this verse is quoted in the New Testament, the latter part is not: "And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." The reason is clear. Whilst the Lord Jesus did "come to his temple", He has **not** yet come in the manner described **here**. John 2 describes His visit to the temple two thousand years'

ago. "And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple.....and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise", V13-16. He was obliged to do exactly the same again when He visited the temple in Matthew 21: 12-13. It would therefore be quite correct to say that He came without warning ("suddenly"), and purified the temple. We also know, however, that he was subsequently rejected: "He came unto his own (things), and His own (people) received him not." He came **then** in grace and mercy, but Malachi describes His coming in **judgement**. He will then resemble "a refiner's fire", and will "sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."

This verse therefore crosses the centuries, and is comparable with Isaiah 61: 1-3, which draws together the first and second advents of Christ, without reference to the intervening period. We must notice that when the Lord Jesus read from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue at Nazareth, He terminated the reading with the words, "To preach the acceptable year of the Lord", and then said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." Luke 4: 16-19. He did not read the words which immediately follow in the sentence, "And the day of vengeance of our God." There are two thousand years between "the acceptable year of the Lord" and "the day of vengeance of our God" (Isaiah 61: 2), just as there are two thousand years between the near future and distant future events described in Malachi 3.

The details given in this verse are full of interest, and remind us that there are no wasted words in Scripture. The Bible amply rewards detailed study!

**a) The significance of His titles.** He is called "**the Lord** whom ye seek." This divine title (*Adon*) was used by Abraham in the plural: "Lord God (*Adonahy Jehovah*) what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless", Genesis 15: 2. It occurs in Zechariah 4: 14 ("The Lord, of the whole earth") and 6: 5 ("The Lord of all the earth"). In both cases, the title "Lord" translates '*Adon*.' See also Psalm 8 : 1, "O Lord (*Jehovah*) our Lord (*Adonahy*), how excellent is thy name in all the earth", and Psalm 110: 1, "The Lord (*Jehovah*) said unto my Lord (*Adon*).". Thomas Newberry explains that '*Adon*' means 'Sovereign Lord, Master, Possessor, or Proprietor.' The title therefore emphasises His divine **rule**.

He is also called "**the messenger of the covenant**." This can be translated 'the angel of the covenant', and immediately reminds us of His appearances in the Old Testament. This passage states that "the messenger of the covenant" is "the Lord" Himself, and therefore confirms the deity of "the angel of the Lord" in such passages as Exodus 3: 2 ("The angel of the Lord appeared unto him [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.....**God** called to him out of the midst of the bush"), Exodus 14: 19-24 ("And the angel of the Lord, which went before the camp of Israel removed and went behind them.....In the morning watch the **Lord**

looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud), Hosea 2: 24 "Yea, he [Jacob] had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto him, he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with **us**"). The 'key' passage in this connection is Isaiah 63: 9-10, "In all their affliction he (the Lord") was afflicted, and the **angel of his presence** saved them.....but they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit." Notice the Godhead here! Three divine Persons. Additional reading on this subject will take us to Joshua 5: 13-15, Judges 6: 11, 20-23, 13: 3, 17-22. Compare Revelation 10: 1.

He is called "the messenger of the covenant" because it is through Him that God speaks to His covenant people, and through Him that the covenant will be fulfilled. The words, "the messenger of the covenant, **whom ye delight in**", are probably ironical, and refer to 2: 17. They didn't really "delight" in him at all!

**b) The certainty of His coming.** All we need to do is to emphasise the appropriate words. "The Lord whom ye seek, **shall** suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he **shall** come, saith the Lord of hosts." His coming is never in doubt.

**c) The manner of His coming.** "The Lord whom ye seek, shall **suddenly** come to his temple." It has been pointed out that the word "suddenly" is ominous. It is usually associated with a calamitous event. See, for example, Isaiah 47: 11 ("desolation shall come upon thee suddenly"), Jeremiah 4: 20, ("Suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment"), 1 Thessalonians 5: 3 ("For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them"). See also Matthew 24: 37-44. The flood was unexpected. It happened suddenly. "They knew not, until the flood came, and took them all away." We should add, that His coming will **not** be unexpected by the godly remnant at the end-time. They will say, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us", Isaiah 25: 9.

**d) The place to which he comes.** "The Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to **his temple**." Whilst this could refer to the millennial temple described in Ezekiel 40-46, to which the "glory of the Lord" will return (43: 2-4), it is far more likely that Malachi refers to the temple which will exist at the actual time of Christ's return. See Revelation 11: 1, "Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein." It will be in this temple that Antichrist will sit, proclaiming himself to be God. See 1 Thessalonians 2: 3-4. But the "temple of God" will be occupied by its **rightful** owner. He will come to **"his** temple." This leads to the purpose for which He will come:

### **(ii) The cleansing of Israel, V2-6**

As we have noticed, this passage refers to the first and second advents of Christ, without reference to the intervening period. John the Baptist, the "messenger" who preceded the Lord Jesus, did exactly the same. He referred to His first



advent: "I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God", John 1: 34. He referred to His second advent in saying, "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner: but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable", Luke 3: 17. This clearly refers to the future, and describes the same events anticipated here by Malachi. John uses the agricultural language (winnowing), whereas Malachi uses industrial language (refining). "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap." Judgement will be executed **(a)** on "the sons of Levi" particularly, V3-4, and **(b)** on "the sons of Jacob" generally, V5-6. There is a difference of emphasis: in the first case, it is purifying judgement, and in the second, it is punitive judgement. See Jeremiah 30: 11, "Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished." There can be no doubt that the refining process through which the nation will pass must include the unparalleled sufferings of the "great tribulation" (Matthew 24: 21), elsewhere called "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30: 7).

#### **a) The priesthood particularly, V3-4**

"And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years." (Read this in conjunction with Ezekiel 44: 10-16). This reverses the sad situation described in 1: 8, 13; 2: 13 etc. Compare Zechariah 13: 8-9, "And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call upon my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God." Malachi refers specifically to the priesthood, "the sons of Levi", whilst Zechariah refers to the people generally. But in both cases, the object is the same. God is intent on the purification of His people so that their offerings and prayers can be acceptable to Him. So there will be a 'purified' priesthood, and "pleasant" offerings. God looks, not only for correct words and procedures, but even more in importance, for genuine holiness and purity in His people. He requires "an offering in righteousness." This is something **we** must never forget. There can be no presentation with purification. See Hebrews 10: 22. Peter alludes to the work of a refiner when speaking about the "trial of.....faith." See 1 Peter 1: 7.

#### **b) The nation generally, V5-6**

"And I will come near to you to judgement; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the

fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts." Compare Ezekiel 43: 7-9. They will no longer say, "Where is the God of judgement?!" The **"sorcerers"** will be judged. That is 'the occultists of all descriptions', M.C.Unger. See Matthew 24: 11, 24; 2 Thessalonians 2: 8-12; Revelation 9: 20-21. The Greek word for sorcery is '*pharmakia*', from which comes the English word, pharmacy. W.E.Vine notes that 'in sorcery, the use of drugs, whether simple or potent, was generally accompanied by incantations and appeals to occult powers.' **"Adulterers"** will be judged. See Hebrews 13: 4. **"False swearers"** will be judged. See Psalm 24: 4, Jeremiah 5: 2, 7: 9 etc. **Oppression** in every form will be judged. Whether by defrauding labourers of their pay (Leviticus 19: 13; James 5: 4), penalising the weak and helpless (Exodus 22: 22-24; Matthew 23: 14; note James 1: 27), or refusing kindness to the visitor (see Deuteronomy 27: 19 etc). **Irreverence** will be judged. God will punish those who "fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts." In the language of Isaiah, God will cleanse His people "by the spirit of judgement, and by the spirit of burning" (4: 4). See also Isaiah 2: 25. In the words of the Lord Jesus, "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." With this result: "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father", Matthew 13: 41-43.

The reason for divine judgement is to ensure the fulfilment of God's covenant with His people. If He left them in their sin, He could never bless them. But God's purpose for Israel will be accomplished, not because **they** had been faithful to the covenant, but because **He** will be faithful. "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." If He totally consumed them, the covenant would never be fulfilled. He will therefore create conditions in and amongst His people which bring Him pleasure, and this involves their purifying. Notice that they are called "sons of Jacob", emphasising their unworthiness. Let's remember that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance", Romans 11: 29. His covenant with Israel cannot fail. Divine attributes are beautifully balanced here. "For I am the Lord, I change not ('God is light'); therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed (God is love')." The same statement emphasises truth and grace, in that order.

We cannot leave these verses without noting some important lessons for ourselves. Israel had failed to realise that their Messiah would come as a refiner. But do **we** appreciate that we will meet the Lord Jesus as a refiner? Notice the three expressions, "he shall **come**.....he shall **sit**.....he shall **purify**." Now read 1 Corinthians 3: 12-15, "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is (either "gold, silver, precious stones" or "wood, hay, stubble") . If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." See also 2 Corinthians 5: 10.



If we genuinely seek Him (3: 1. Israel did not) and genuinely delight in Him (3: 1. Israel did not), we will be well pleasing to Him (3: 4). We must therefore "labour (make it our aim), that, whether present or absent, we may be acceptable (well-pleasing) to Him", 2 Cor. 5: 9.

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