

The Holy Savior

3:1-5

“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts. ‘But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of old and as in former years. Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner and his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien, and do not fear Me,’ says the Lord of hosts” (3:1-5).

Malachi 3:1-5 introduces us to the intriguing study of predictive prophecy. It is predictive prophecy that stands as a bastion of scriptural inspiration. In our text, we find Malachi, with pinpoint accuracy, looking forward four hundred years, making specific predictions about the Messiah. In Malachi’s words, as well as in other predictive prophecies, an amazing precision of historical detail is seen. There is not the slightest hint of hesitation or uncertainty. The remarkable degree of specific detail eliminates

the skeptic’s weak rebuttal of “good guess.”

In these verses we find a Hebrew prophet predicting, with detail, events which could have only been revealed through inspiration. This process is described by Peter as God’s Holy Spirit superintending the prophets (2 Peter 1:19-21). When people admit inspiration, the following facts are logical consequences: God’s existence; Christ’s rule and reign; and the necessity of all people to obey God’s will in the New Testament. Thus, the issue of inspiration is vital to us today. The critic of the Bible who chooses to deny inspiration is left without an adequate explanation of how Malachi could look ahead and describe the Savior. The only reasonable explanation is to accept the inspiration of the text and obey God’s gospel plan!

The present passage was spoken in response to the murmurers of 2:17. Some had returned from Babylon with expectations of the Messiah’s immediate appearance. They earnestly sought God’s ways. But their zeal in spiritual matters waned. Many assumed that God had forgotten them. The resettlement had been accomplished years ago; crops were in bad shape; and the political scene had not improved. Cynical doubt slowly invaded. God was accused of reneging on His promises; of callous indifference to His people; and of practicing injustice and approving evil (2:17).

Malachi answered these murmurers by pointing out that Israel’s God was not some capricious

being whose word was in doubt. God's promises stood on solid ground! The Messiah would most certainly come, but it would be when God was ready for Him to appear. The text reveals specific facts about the Lord. These facts would assure Israel of God's promises. To the skeptics, these specifics revealed that God's plans were not whimsical promises. Malachi began with a resounding "Behold!" By that term the prophet immediately captured Israel's attention.

The passage draws attention to the Holy Savior. Just as predictive prophecy underscores the validity of Scripture's inspiration, it also presents a great argument for the deity of Jesus Christ. Over three hundred times the prophets predicted specific facts regarding the coming Lord. So intimate was Jesus with prophecy that He often spoke of it: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me" (John 5:39); "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). The Apostle John spoke of the intimacy between Christ and prophecy: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10b). It is more clear—Jesus Christ was the subject of more prophecy than anyone else in the course of human history (cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12; Matthew 5:17; 26:24).

As Malachi turned to answer the cynics, he presented a prophetic portrait of the Savior who would come to fulfill God's promise to Abraham. Notice the details of Malachi's prophecy. These details provide comfort and assurance to the faithful. This description also speaks to the erring sinner. Friend, how could Malachi look four hundred years into the future and foretell such specific details? Surely his prophecy will convince you to obey God's gracious invitation while there is yet time.

THE HOLY SAVIOR: HIS PERSON AND WORK

Malachi's words are specific regarding the promised Messiah and what His work would include. Consider these five facts revealed in the passage.

First, the Savior would be preceded by a "forerunner" (3:1a). Malachi observed that before the

Messiah could appear, the way had to be prepared. This preparation would be accomplished by a "messenger" who would go before Him. This messenger would not be an angel but a man. He is later identified as "Elijah" (4:5). Of course, Malachi was not suggesting that Elijah would be resurrected but that the forerunner would be "as" the Old Testament personality (cf. Luke 1:17). The task of this messenger would be to clear away the barriers which would impede the Messiah (cf. Isaiah 40:3-5).

The Scriptures tell us that it was John who fulfilled this prophecy (cf. Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:2, 3). As John preached, there was a call for repentance and religious reformation (Matthew 3:7-12). This reformation would remove the callous attitude that surrounded the heart of Israel.

This forerunner had to appear before the Messiah could appear. Those who murmured in 2:17 needed to understand this so they would know why God's promise had not yet been fulfilled.

Second, the "identity" of the Savior is given by Malachi (3:1 b). The coming Savior was to be the "messenger of the covenant." This description connects the Messiah with other divine appearances in the Old Testament (i.e., the "angel of Jehovah" who guided Israel into the promised land). This connection reveals the deity of the coming Messiah.

The Scriptures tell us that this "messenger of the covenant" was Jesus Christ. In Christ we find the fulfillment. Through Christ, as the messenger of the covenant, Christians find encouragement to persevere (cf. Hebrews 1:1—2:4; 9:15; etc.). In Christ we see the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to Abraham (cf. Galatians 3:6-29).

Malachi's words were comforting to Israel. God had not forgotten the nation of His special love. The heavenly Father was working even then to establish the "new covenant of peace" with Abraham's children.

Third, the "impact" of the Savior's work is foretold (3:2, 3). Malachi used two images to illustrate the work of the coming Messiah. The coming Savior would work like "fire." This illustration described a smelter burning the corrupt ingredients away and leaving only pure metal. This was a figure often used by the Hebrew

prophets. Isaiah used this metaphor to signify the discipline of righteous anger, "I will also turn My hand against you, and will smelt away your dross as with lye, and will remove all your alloy" (Isaiah 1:25; cf. Psalms 12:6). The second figure describing the Messiah's impact was "soap." This describes one washing away filth and rendering the washed object spotless. Once again, this was a common metaphor of the prophets (cf. Isaiah 1:18; 4:4; Jeremiah 2:22).

These two figures stress that the Savior's work is purification. When the messenger of the covenant would come, all sin stains could be removed. The objective of His coming was to purify the people so they could be members of a holy covenant with Jehovah God.

Scripture reveals that the New Testament of Christ accomplishes these objectives (Luke 24:46, 47; Hebrews 9:14, 15). The forerunner, John the Baptist, spoke of this purifying process indicating that it was through Christ that sin's dark stains could be forever removed (Matthew 3:10-12). Those who are cleansed by the impact of this Savior will be blessed (Luke 7:23).

Fourth, the "objective" of the Savior's work is foretold (3:4). The promised Savior would come to cleanse people so their sacrifices would be "pleasing." This new covenant would so change man's heart that he would not dare offer the blemished sacrifices of Malachi 1. After the impact of the Savior's "soap" and "fire," the members of the new covenant would not dare oppress one another as in Malachi 2. Those who follow the Savior will offer sacrifice and service that is "holy and acceptable" (Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 2:5). The word "pleasing" literally means "sweet." It presents a delightful picture of the worshiper offering the sweetest sacrifice possible to God.

This is the objective that all should strive to accomplish. Israel was not pleasing to God which was tragic. This tragedy is too common even today. Let all strive to obey the Savior so we can achieve this blessed objective!

Fifth, the "final role" of the Savior is described (3:5). The coming, work, covenant, the objective of the Messiah is summarized with one word—"judgment" (Matthew 3:12; Isaiah 42:4). Those who fail to enter into the covenant with Christ will face His harsh wrath. This judgment will be "swift" because it is sped with haste to those

who fail to become holy. Those who reject the new covenant will find no escape from this judgment. There will be no adequate concealment, excuses, or subterfuge to prevent this judgment.

While on earth, Jesus displayed the intensity of this judgment. The cleansing of the temple (Luke 19:45, 46; John 2:13-16) is a portrait of the divine wrath toward those who corrupt God's holy covenant. With only a whip, the Lord cleansed the temple. The sight of His anger was awesome. Can you imagine how it will appear when He returns with angelic legions to judge the ungodly? (cf. Revelation 19:11-21).

Here then are five distinct facts about the Messiah. They were spoken four centuries before either John or Christ appeared on earth. Their details can be explained only by inspiration. The message was to hearten Israel's confidence in God's promises. God has not forgotten the returned exiles. The Messiah was coming. The murmurers had no justification in their scoffing!

THE HOLY SAVIOR: LESSONS TO TAKE TO HEART

From this predictive prophecy we are able to discover three lessons of abiding value. Consider each and make a personal application.

Never question God's Word! God had promised the Messiah and He fulfilled that promise. Some Christians are like ancient Israel. They forget the faithfulness of God's Word. They fail to remember the promises of God's abiding presence and love (Matthew 28:20b; Romans 8:28). Many unbelievers scoff and question God's Word. They ridicule the second coming. Like those in 2 Peter 3, their scoffing is an effort to justify a profane lifestyle. But their scoffing will bring swift punishment.

Never underestimate the impact of the Savior upon your life. Jesus Christ brings "fire" and "soap" that can remove all impurities and will make "all things new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). A grand holiness is possible only by following the Savior's will. No one is beyond the scope of this cleansing. "All the world" has been invited to partake of the sin-purging power of the gospel. All have the prophetic promise of Isaiah 1:18 ("white as snow"). The only barrier to this cleansing is man's submission. "Whosoever will" may be cleansed. Many today remain in a sin-stained

condition because they are unwilling to submit and obey God's gospel commands (Acts 22:16).

Remember that Christ's proper place is in the "temple." All who seek fellowship and cleansing must provide a "holy temple" in which He can abide (John 15:6, 7, 10; 1 Corinthians 16, 17; 6:13b-20), that is, our lives. All who fail to provide this holy abode for the Lord will face divine anger (3:5).

CONCLUSION

In ancient times a celebrated artist made a wonderful shield. He worked his name into the shield so it could not be removed without destroying the shield. This is exactly the same with the Scriptures of Christ. You cannot eliminate the Holy Savior from the Holy Scriptures unless you want to destroy the Bible! In a similar way, you cannot eliminate the Holy Savior from daily life or else you will destroy all that prompts the

desire to be holy. Those in Malachi's day lost all that would prompt the desire to be holy. We must be careful to prevent such occurring in our day!

Notice 3:1: "The messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight." It is ironic that Israel was seeking the Holy Savior. His arrival would not have been for their good, but for their destruction! (cf. Amos 5:18; Nahum 1:6; Joel 2:11). Israel had no genuine "delight" in the Holy Savior. They expected Him to come and judge the heathen and bring them national honor. But they failed to consider that His coming would result in harsh judgment for them.

Let us ask, "Is it possible that you are like Israel? Do you really delight in the thoughts of Christ's second coming?" May we all have the attitude of Paul in regard to His return (Titus 2:13).

—John Kachelman

Messengers From God (Malachi 3:1)

God said He would send "My messenger." As we think of other messengers of God we can apply the following traits:

1. They come with God's authority—"send."
2. They submit to God's will—"I am going to send."
3. They remove obstacles that keep some from faith—"clear."
4. They cause others to focus on Christ, not self.

The Covenant of God (Malachi 3:1)

1. It brings delight (3:1).
2. It causes purification (3:2, 3).
3. It accomplishes our being pleasing to God (3:3, 4).

The Lord's Coming (Malachi 3:1-4)

1. He would come in response to God's promise (3:1).
2. He would come as the messenger of the covenant (3:1).
3. He would come with a purifying result (3:2, 3).
4. He would enable God's worshipers to be pleasing (3:4).

Consequences Considered (Malachi 3:1-5)

When the Messiah came, what consequences would occur?

1. God's covenant would be brought (3:1).
2. God's judgment would be shown (3:2).
3. True worshipers would arise (3:3, 4).
4. The ungodly would be punished (3:5).

“I Will Draw Near for Judgment”
(Malachi 3:5)

1. This is an absolute promise from God (2:17; 2 Peter 3:4).
2. This focuses upon the security of judgment. Nothing will escape God’s eyes (2 Corinthians 5:9, 10).
3. This informs us that it is a time of reckoning.
4. This is a somber promise from God which should motivate obedience to Him (2 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Peter 3:11).

God, A Swift Witness
(Malachi 3:5)

The all-knowing God will be a swift witness to the way we have lived when the Judgment Day comes. In particular, Malachi says God as a swift witness will focus on these points:

1. How we allowed His Word to purify us (3:1-3).
2. How we presented offerings to Him (3:3, 4).
3. How we practiced His commands (3:5a).
4. How we treated others (3:5b).

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