

MALACHI: CALL TO OVERCOME SPIRITUAL APATHY

V: Overcoming Doubts About God's Righteousness

(Malachi 2:17-3:6)

I. Introduction

- A. About 100 years after the Hebrew exiles had returned from Babylon and rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple, their "initial enthusiasm had worn off," with life and worship becoming mere routines. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the Book of Malachi: The Times," p. 1325)
- B. God raised up Malachi to call the people to repentance from spiritual apathy, and Malachi 2:17-3:6 addressed the issue of doubts that the people had about God's righteousness, so we view the passage for our application:

II. Overcoming Doubts About God's Righteousness, Malachi 2:17-3:6.

- A. Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary defines a "theodicy" as a "defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil," and Israel in Malachi's day needed a theodicy, Malachi 2:17:
 - 1. God voiced His complaint about being wearied by the words of His people in Israel, Malachi 2:17a.
 - 2. When the people asked how they had wearied God by their words, the Lord voiced their claim, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them," or their asking, "Where is the God of justice?" (Malachi 2:17b ESV)
 - 3. Thus, the wicked prospered and the upright suffered, but God was not immediately passing judgment in these cases, so the people asked where was the God of justice. (Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 1582-1583)
- B. The Lord then supplied His own "theodicy," revealing His great grace behind His current inaction, Mal. 3:1-6:
 - 1. The Lord announced that He would send His messenger to prepare the way before His arrival, that messenger being the Messiah's forerunner, John the Baptist, Malachi 3:1a; Ibid., p. 1583.
 - 2. Then, the Lord Whom the people of Israel sought to administer justice would suddenly come to His temple, the Messiah and Messenger of the Covenant in Whom the people of Israel delighted, Mal. 3:1b.
 - 3. However, the prophet Malachi rhetorically asked who could endure the day of His arrival, who could stand when He appeared, for He would be like a refiner's fire and fullers' soap, sitting as a refiner and purifier of silver, and He would purify the sons of Levi and refine them as gold and silver so that they would bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord, Malachi 3:2-3. Then the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem would be acceptable to the Lord as in times past, Malachi 3:4.
 - 4. This purification of the temple anticipated Christ's judgment at His Second Advent when He purifies Israel of her sins along with His purging of the sins of the nations of the world, Ibid., p. 1583-1584.
 - 5. At Christ's Second Advent, He will purify not only the tribe of Levi in Israel, but the entire nation (Ezekiel 20:34-38), purging Israel "of those involved in sorcery (cf. Micah 5:12), adultery, perjury, depriving workers of their wages, oppressing widows and orphans, and mistreating aliens – all those who do not fear Him," Malachi 3:5; Ibid., p. 1584. "God's removing these sinners from Israel will be His answer to the nation's question about His justice (Mal. 2:17)," Ibid.
 - 6. Such severe, comprehensive divine punishment might seem to devastate the whole nation of Israel, so God added that He Himself did not change, that He was faithful [to His Abrahamic Covenant regarding His promise of Israel's future national blessings], and for that reason, the children of (sinful) Jacob, their forefather, were not utterly consumed in God's punishment, Malachi 3:6!

Lesson: *God wearied over Israel's words that He seemed to favor the wicked and not the upright in not quickly punishing the wicked or vindicating the upright, so He explained that it was only by His longsuffering and grace that the whole nation was not quickly consumed in His punishment. God would come and render His justice, and it would be thorough and complete, so His people were to revere Him and wait upon Him to render His judgment.*

Application: *(1) If we are tempted to ask why God does not quickly punish evil people and vindicate the innocent, we must recall that only due to His great longsuffering and grace are not ALL sinners immediately and severely punished by Him! (2) Thus, if we struggle to handle the ongoing injustices that we or others face, may we humbly submit to God's rule and wait upon Him in hope of His intervention that will be both timely and complete. (3) If we learn that we have wronged someone else, may we immediately repent of it before God severely punishes us for that sin. (4) In understanding how gracious and longsuffering the Lord has been with us in not immediately, fully punishing us for our past sins, may we then exercise longsuffering with other people who sin that they might have opportunity to repent and overcome sin by God's grace. (cf. 1 Timothy 1:12-16)*