

THE CHARGE AGAINST ISRAEL: QUESTIONING GOD'S JUSTICE MALACHI 02:17–03:06

Introduction

The LORD's indictment against His people continues. The LORD has already charged the people with doubting His love and dishonouring His Name. Now He turns His attention to sins related primarily to their treatment of one another — predominantly, the problems of divorce and intermarriage (marriage to unbelievers). The root of divorce was the sin of unfaithfulness. The root of intermarriage was the sin of compromise with the world. To these sins the people added the sin of hypocrisy — they were crying to the LORD for mercy with no intention of changing their ways. They went through the motions of repentance, attended worship and prayed, but had no desire to obey God's Word. They also began to question God's justice. Therefore, the LORD presented a strong indictment against the people. This is, *Charges Three and Four: Compromise, Hypocrisy, Unfaithfulness and Questioning God's Justice*, Malachi 2:10-3:6.

I. Charge 3: compromise, hypocrisy and unfaithfulness (vv. 2:10-16).

II. Charge 4: questioning God's justice (vv. 2:17-3:6).

Malachi 02:17–03:06 Charges Against Israel: Questioning God's Justice

The people in Malachi's day were questioning God's justice. People were doing whatever they wanted and no one ever seemed to get punished or suffer the consequences. They ignored God's law and mistakenly thought God was ignoring them, too. But nothing could have been further from the truth. Note the Scripture and outline:

1. The prophet laid a strong charge against the people: they had wearied the LORD with their words and accusations (v. 17a). The LORD had grown tired of the people's unceasing sin, their total disregard for His Word and commandments. Yet, they still dared to pray and ask for His blessings (2:13). This was arrogance and ignorance to be sure; on top of that, it was pure folly.
 2. When confronted by Malachi, the people again questioned the LORD's charge against them (v. 17b). They persisted in their hostility and their disrespect, asking *how* they had wearied the LORD. As before, they were either so hardened that they were blind to their sins or they really believed the LORD did not care. Either case was tragic.
 3. The people offended God with what they had been saying and thinking (V. 17c). Still, the LORD indulged the people's question and explained why He was weary. He was weary because of the people's many words and their false accusations. The people were accepting two completely irrational theories that were also totally false.
 - a. They accused God of endorsing evil and failing to punish evildoers, of saying evil (divorce, sin) is good. What the people were insinuating was a serious flaw in some
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people's thinking: they were saying that since no judgment had yet fallen on those who were breaking God's laws, God must be satisfied with what they were doing; He must not really care. Given that the people did not see any immediate ill consequences to sin — sins such as divorce, intermarriage and the offering of imperfect sacrifices — they had been lulled into thinking that judgment would never come.

- b. They denied God and His justice. Basically, what the people were asking was, "Where is the God of justice?" or "Where is the justice of God?" They erroneously thought He did not care about what the wicked were doing and that He would do nothing about their sins.

Behind these questions was also the thought that God's promised blessings would never come. Over the centuries, God had promised the people prosperity, but to date the people still struggled to survive. The people were probably comparing themselves to more prosperous nations around them and to the prior generations of Israel. They were wondering why the wicked prospered. Deeming themselves more righteous and godly than the nations surrounding them, they undoubtedly wondered why the LORD allowed them to suffer, and when God's justice would prevail. However in all this, the Israelites failed to consider a significant fact: their own sins were the reason God's promised blessings had been withheld. In addition, they failed to consider that God's justice — His coming judgment — would include them. God could not bless them while they were living in sin. If He did, it would be equivalent to endorsing their sin.

Thought 1. It is a grave mistake to think that God does not see or care about our sins or to question His concern for justice. It is also a mistake to think that God rewards the wicked. When the wicked appear to prosper, it is important to keep in mind that God sees and knows all and that He is a God of justice. God's Word makes it perfectly clear that judgment is coming. It is only a matter of time before the wicked meet their fate.

Ezek 5:7-17 Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "You have been more unruly than the nations around you and have not followed my decrees or kept my laws. You have not even conformed to the standards of the nations around you." Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "I myself am against you, Jerusalem, and I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations. Because of all your detestable idols, I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again. Therefore in your midst parents will eat their children, and children will eat their parents. I will inflict punishment on you and will scatter all your survivors to the winds. Therefore as surely as I live," declares the Sovereign LORD, "because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your vile images and detestable practices, I myself will shave you; I will not look on you with pity or spare you. A third of your people will die of the plague or perish by famine inside you; a third will fall by the sword outside your walls; and a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with

drawn sword. Then my anger will cease and my wrath against them will subside, and I will be avenged. And when I have spent my wrath on them, they will know that I the LORD have spoken in my zeal. I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations around you, in the sight of all who pass by. You will be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and an object of horror to the nations around you when I inflict punishment on you in anger and in wrath and with stinging rebuke. I the LORD have spoken. When I shoot at you with my deadly and destructive arrows of famine, I will shoot to destroy you. I will bring more and more famine upon you and cut off your supply of food. I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will leave you childless. Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you, and I will bring the sword against you. I the LORD have spoken.”

Rom 1:32 *Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

2 Cor 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

4. The LORD issued a strong warning to the people: He would come to execute justice (vv. 3:1-5). In fact, two special messengers were coming. It was the second of these messengers who would execute justice. Several prophets before Malachi had foretold of the coming of this messenger — Christ the Messiah. But, obviously, the people needed to be reminded again.

- a. Note that the first messenger would prepare the way for the second messenger (v. 3:1a). Jesus Himself identified this first messenger as John the Baptist:

Mat 11:7, 10 *As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'"*

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus Christ. Some 800 years earlier, the prophet Isaiah had also predicted the coming of John the Baptist, and the Apostle John substantiated the fact:

Isa 40:3 *A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God."*

John 1:23 *John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"*

- b. The LORD said that He Himself — the promised Messiah — would also come (v. 1b). He was the second special messenger. The LORD had promised the Messiah through several other prophets. Here in Malachi, He comes straight to the point.

⇒ He will come to His temple and His arrival will be sudden, unexpected. Keep in mind that Malachi had been dealing with perversions of temple worship: blemished

sacrifices, cheating God out of what was His due, and the sins and corruption of the priests. Therefore, this announcement must have been troublesome to the LORD's accusers because the LORD was coming to the temple to set things right. The careless priests would certainly be judged. In fact, they had already been warned of being cut off. Thereafter, the Messiah, God's Messenger, would restore proper and pure worship in the temple.

=> He will come as the Messenger of the covenant. Other prophets had foretold the Messiah's coming; hence Malachi's words "whom you delight in." The words are somewhat ironic in light of the people's half-hearted belief in God's promises, if the people believed at all (see 2:17). Now they probably feared His coming as much as they desired it. This sense of foreboding would have been heightened by the very next verse (v. 2).

- c. The Messiah will come to humble and cleanse His people — like a refiner's fire or strong soap (v. 2). The opening words of this verse are powerful and sobering. Speaking of the Messiah when He comes to judge the world, Malachi asks, "Who can endure His coming?" and "Who will be able to stand?" The implied answer is clear: only the righteous will endure and be able to stand, for the wicked will surely be judged.

The Messiah was coming to cleanse and purify His people. The prophet Zechariah had made two things clear: Israel would be purged of the wicked — those who rejected the coming Messiah; and only the righteous would remain — those who trusted the Messiah for their deliverance and salvation. Therefore, the LORD's judgment would not consume all of Israel; rather, Israel would be cleansed through the process of judgment. Of course, the believing remnant of Israel will also be cleansed by the blood of Christ. In this way, God's Messenger will be like a refiner's fire that purges silver and gold of their dross, their impurities, and God's people will be cleansed from their sin as if by a launderer's strong soap. Bear in mind that there is nothing the people can do to cleanse themselves. The LORD through His Messiah will do the cleansing. Only He can purify us from our sins.

- d. The Messiah will come to purify the priests (vv. 3-4). The people were not the only ones needing to be cleansed. So were the priests. Malachi spent a great deal of time confronting and warning the priests. Therefore, the Messiah was coming to purify them as well. This was essential for at least two reasons:

=> so they could present righteous and acceptable offerings to the LORD

=> so the people's offerings would be acceptable to the LORD — as in former years

- e. The Messiah will come to execute justice (v. 5). He will be God's ultimate answer to the people's question, "Where is God's justice?" When Christ comes to judge the world, He will set all wrongs right. He will execute true justice, and every sin and sinner will be held to account. The LORD Himself declares that He will enact judgment against several kinds of wickedness and those who practice such

wickedness. We know from the New Testament that such judgment will apply to those who are unrepentant, who refuse to accept Christ as their Saviour, unrepentant people such as...

=> sorcerers

=> adulterers

=> liars and perjurers

=> cheaters and thieves — those who steal from workers, withhold due wages

=> oppressors and abusers — those who mistreat the widows, orphans and foreigners

=> all who do not fear God

5. The LORD gave His people a wonderful promise: He is the LORD and does not change. Therefore, He would always save His people. They would never be totally consumed (v. 6). In closing this section, the LORD reminded His people of two very significant facts: first, He is the LORD Almighty and does not change. As Scripture declares, He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8). He is immutable, unchangeable. His will is firmly established and so is His Word. What He declares is so — just as He declares it. Therefore, when He established His covenant with Israel, when He made them His own nation and people, it was forever. Even if they broke the covenant, *He* would keep it. Even though they sinned, *He* would find a way to atone for their sin, to forgive and cleanse them. This way was through Jesus Christ the Messiah.

Second, the LORD reminded the people that they had not been destroyed. This phrase is dependent on the first fact, which was that God is unchangeable. That is to say, it was because God is unchangeable that they had not been destroyed. This is the only reason they had not been judged and completely cut off from the LORD. Though they had sinned and violated every term of God's covenant, He would not change. He would uphold His covenant and abide by it. He would still judge the wicked and purge the nation of unrepentant sinners, but the nation as a whole would not be consumed. God would always protect and preserve a righteous remnant, those who would trust and obey Him. The LORD would also not change in His mercy. He would remain merciful and find a way to bring His rebellious people back to Himself. This was the LORD's great promise to His people — He would not change. For this reason and this reason alone, they had not been destroyed. These words may have been filled with promise and mercy, but they were also sharp and biting. We who read them today need to heed their sobering effect, for we, too, have not been destroyed — *only* because of the unchangeable nature and love of God.

Thought 1. This passage is a powerful confirmation that the Messenger — Jesus Christ — is truly God's answer to sin and every injustice and wrong committed by the human race.

=> Christ is the answer to our need for forgiveness and salvation.

Luke 5:24 *“But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”*

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

John 3:17 *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

Gal 1:4 *Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*

1 Pet 2:24 *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

=> Christ is the answer to our need for strength within marriage.

Eph 5:25 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*

Eph 5:22 *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.*

=> Christ is the answer to our need for personal, spiritual peace.

John 14:27 *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

John 16:33 *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

Phil 4:7 *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

=> Christ is the answer to the world's need for lasting peace, established by Christ's eternal kingdom.

Psa 46:9 *He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.*

Isa 2:4 *He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.*

Hos 2:18 *In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.*

Zec 9:10 *I will take away the chariots from Ephraim, and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

Micah 4:4 *Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken.*

=> Christ is the answer to the world's need for righteousness.

Jer 23:6 *In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUS SAVIOUR.*

Rom 8:4 *In order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*

2 Cor 9:9 *As it is written: "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever."*

Heb 1:8 *But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the sceptre of your kingdom."*

Rev 19:11 *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war.*

=> Christ's the answer to the world's need for justice and judgment of the wicked.

Mat 13:41 *"The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil."*

John 5:22 *"Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son."*

John 5:27 *"And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man."*

Rom 2:16 *This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

1 Cor 4:5 *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts.*

Jude 1:15 *To judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him. g*