

***Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas***  
***Fredericksburg Bible Church***

*107 East Austin*

*Fredericksburg, Texas 78624*

*830-997-8834    [jthomas@fbgbible.org](mailto:jthomas@fbgbible.org)*

**C1403 – January 22, 2014 – Malachi 2:17-3:5**  
**God's Justice Unveiled**

Last week we analyzed the third disputation where Malachi denounced the priests in particular and the people in general for their sins of divorce and remarriage. This was inconsistent with the question he posed in Malachi 2:10, “Do we not all have one Father?” If they all had one Father then they were all brothers and sisters. Why then did they deal treacherously with one another? The specific treachery was Jewish husbands and the priests in particular, divorcing their Jewish wives. This was profaning the Mosaic Covenant which spelled out how the one Father wanted his children to live in His household. Verse 11 explains that not only had they dealt treacherously with their wives by divorcing them but in turn they committed an abomination by marrying pagan girls. Of course it wasn’t just the girls they married but the pagan baggage carried by these girls. And through their influence they introduced pagan worship practices into the Temple worship. This ruined the Temple as the location where God met with His sons and daughters. In verse 12 Malachi invokes a curse against any and every man who had committed this treachery and abomination, including the priests. The priests were the primary problem because they were the spiritual leaders of the people. If they disregarded God’s plan for marriage then the people would follow suit. In verse 13 after the priests divorced their wives and remarried pagans then they went to the Lord in prayer and with offerings but the LORD did not accept their offerings. Verse 14 explains that they were so spiritually ignorant that they did not know why God was not accepting their prayers and offerings. Malachi spells out for them that the cause was the treacherous divorcing of their wives and that these were their wives even by covenant, a contractual agreement that God had witnessed. Legally they were bound to be faithful to their wives in the sight of God. To divorce them was inconsistent with God’s faithfulness to His one covenant nation Israel. Verse 15 explains that the LORD had one covenanted nation and within that

a spiritual remnant of priests who were supposed to be serving Him faithfully. The LORD was looking for a spiritual priesthood to serve in His Temple and yet this generation of priests was far from that standard as evidenced by their treachery against their wives. The imperative is clear; they should modify their attitude by adopting the LORD's faithful attitude toward covenants and stop divorcing the wives of their youth. Verse 16 is the clearest statement on God's attitude toward divorce in the Bible. "For I hate divorce," God says. God hates divorce because it is the violation of a covenant. God takes covenants very seriously. When we vow to do something by the formal promises of a covenant, such as marriage, we are duty bound to keep our word before God. He also turns a cultural custom on its head by declaring that I also hate "him who turns marriage into divorce by violence." The bottom line is that the priests were not covenant keepers but covenant breakers. Their example of covenant breaking led the people to follow their example by breaking their covenants with their wives as well. This was profaning the covenant and bringing God's curse upon them. They should stop divorcing their wives and remain faithful to their covenants.

Tonight in 2:17 Malachi turns to the fourth disputation of the six before God goes silent for 400 years. Here he returns to the common three-fold formula we have seen in the other disputations; first, a statement of a truth, second, a questioning of the truth and third, the proof of the truth. So this week we are back on familiar ground as far as the structure is concerned. But we have a very interesting verse in 3:1 concerning the identity of the first messenger. "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me." What we want to do is follow the sound hermeneutical procedure of studying the passage in its immediate historical context and then deal with the quotation of this verse as applied to John the Baptist in the NT. To start let's get the context starting in 2:17. First we have the statement of truth. **You have wearied the LORD with your words.** The priests are in view and it was they who had **wearied the LORD with their words.** God was, in a sense, yawning as they spoke endless nonsense. We've already seen two ways in which they wearied him by their **words.** First, in 2:7, "the priest's lips were to preserve knowledge. They were to teach the Torah with purity so that the people knew what God expected of them and how to learn loyalty to Him. However, in verse 8, the priests had distorted the teaching of the Torah and thereby caused many to stumble, corrupting the covenant of Levi. This distorted teaching was wearying the LORD. Second, in 2:13 the priest's

prayers and offerings were wearying the LORD. They went into a bunch of commotion but the LORD did not accept their prayers and offerings because of the treachery they were committing against their wives. Therefore the prayers and offerings only wearied the LORD.

In essence talk is cheap. The LORD was exhausted by their ongoing talk while their actions were contrary to His word. And here they are in verse 17 still wondering how they have wearied the LORD. So second, they question the truth that they had wearied the LORD by saying, **“How have we wearied Him?”** On one hand they are playing ignorant, as if they didn’t know how they had wearied Him; on the other hand they are challenging the statement that they had wearied Him. Perhaps they were invoking Isa 40:28 where it is said that “the LORD...does not become weary or tired.” If the LORD does not become weary or tired then how could our words be wearying Him? But if they were to appeal to that verse they would be distorting its intended meaning. The verse simply means that God does not get tired in the sense that man gets tired. He is not a man such that He runs out of energy and needs to refuel by sleeping and eating. So the statement of truth that they had wearied the LORD with their words is an anthropomorphism designed to communicate that the LORD doesn’t want them to continue speaking to Him until they have considered what they are saying and adjusted what they are saying to His word. As it was they were pronouncing false doctrine.

To prove that they were speaking false doctrine and wearying the LORD Malachi begins to prove the truth in verse 17c. How had they wearied the LORD? **In that** they said, **“Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,”** or, **“Where is the God of justice?”** Both statements are relatively equal. The point is that they were claiming that God was not just. They said that because from their point of view it seemed like the wicked were prospering. The Psalmist asked the same question, “Who do the wicked prosper?” Why is it that those who do evil appear to be blessed? It seems that the scales of justice are tipped in favor of those who do evil? Does this mean that the LORD delights in wickedness and has judged in their favor? We all sense this problem even in our own time but this was particularly a problem in OT Israel because God said in the Law that if they blessed Him they would be blessed and if they cursed Him they would be cursed. But they saw people doing evil and being blessed. So they

leveled the accusation against God that He was not just. As they put it, **Where is the God of justice?** This ongoing accusation wearied the LORD.

Now the proof that God is just begins in chapter 3:1. **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. **2But 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. 3He 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. 4Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. 5Then 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 in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,”** says the LORD of hosts. Again, note the closing expression we saw eleven times a couple of weeks ago, **the LORD of hosts. Hosts** is the Hebrew for “armies.” He is the LORD of armies and His armies consist of all aspects of creation from angels to men to aspects of nature like wind and fire. This is very clearly a judgment passage. It is describing a very specific time when God will enter into judgment with Israel. When He does it will prove that He is just. In short then, while it may appear that God is not just because the wicked are prospering, the Scriptural answer is that God is storing up wrath for the day of judgment.

Can anyone detect when this day of judgment is from the first five verses we just read? On the biblical timeline when is the day of judgment? The Tribulation, or more properly, the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel. Recall that Daniel prophesied a calendar for Israel and Jerusalem consisting of seventy sevens of years or 490 years. That calendar began with Artaxerxes decree in 444BC to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The first 483 years expired precisely at the Triumphal Entry of Christ. Then there is a gap prophesied during which Christ would be crucified and Jerusalem destroyed. The last seven years will begin with the signing of a peace treaty between the anti-Christ and the leadership of Israel. In the middle of that seven years the treaty will be

broken and the anti-Christ will commit the abomination of desolation and attempt to destroy Israel. It's that final seven years of Daniel's seventy sevens that are in view here. It's that time when God is going to enter into judgment with Israel and Jerusalem.

And verse 1 is saying that three things are going to happen in this period of judgment. First, **Behold, I am going to send My messenger, My *malak*.** This is the same word used in 1:1 of Malachi. There it is debated whether it is the author's proper name or not. Here we are simply told that God is going to send His *malak*; a messenger. A *malak* can be an angelic or human messenger. We're not told at this time whether the messenger is angelic or human but we are told what he will do. What will the messenger do? **He will clear the way before Me.** The Hebrew for **clear** is a *piel* stem which is an intensive verb. To **clear the way** means to clear a highway of traffic so that a great king can proceed down the highway without any hindrances. Who is this one who is coming to clear the way? I want to deal with this in some detail at the end but observe now that whoever this messenger is he will remove any hindrances to the coming of the King. This means the one who fulfills this passage will be successful in turning the nation back to the King. And since a prophet always preceded and announced the king then we can say that this messenger must be a prophet. If you skip ahead to 4:5 I think you find the name of this prophet.

Second, **And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple.** The **Lord** is *Adonai*, a Messianic title distinct from YHWH used earlier of the Father. The Messiah is the great King who the nation Israel will be seeking at that time. When He comes He will come suddenly **to His temple.** The emphasis is on the suddenness of His arrival at the Temple. In a sense it is a surprise visit. This would be fearful for the priests since they are the ones ministering in His temple. If they are not serving properly then they would be judged. So when the Messiah suddenly arrives at His temple they should be serving Him properly. Third, **and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming.** The Hebrew **and** should be translated "even," *even the messenger of the covenant.* The Hebrew conjunction is identifying the Lord whom they seek with **the messenger of the covenant.** They are not two distinct people but one and the same person. The Lord who they seek and will suddenly come to His temple is the messenger of the covenant. The covenant is the new covenant described in

Jer 31:31-34. This is the covenant God will make with Israel and Judah to forgive their sins, give them a new heart and inscribe His law upon their heart so that they will not sin against Him. This can, of course, be no other than the Messiah. He is the one who will herald the new covenant. So verse 1 is teaching that God is going to send two messengers in the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel. The first one is a prophet who will clear the highway so that the great King Messiah can proceed unhindered. The second is the great King Messiah Himself who will suddenly come to His temple heralding the new covenant. He is the one Israel will be looking for and delighting in that time.

Verse 2 characterizes this coming to His temple. **But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?** It is evident that when He comes He will come in judgment. This answers the question posed at the end of 2:17, “Where is the God of justice?” The answer: He is coming to His Temple suddenly and when He does who can endure it? Who will be able to stand? The reason is because **He is like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s or laundrymen’s soap.** A **fire** is used by a refiner of fine metals to separate the impurities from the pure ore. Soap is used by a laundryman to cleanse fabrics from impurities. The teaching is that when the great King Messiah comes He will purify the priests. This way He will have a priesthood that will serve Him properly. Clearly in the Messianic kingdom there will be a Levitical priesthood that will serve in the Messianic Temple.

Verse 3, **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.** It will be the great King Messiah’s work of purifying the **sons of Levi** that will make them suitable to **present...offerings to the LORD** that are characterized as **righteousness** in the Messianic Temple. There will most definitely be a purified remnant of the **sons of Levi** serving in a Messianic Temple.

Verse 4, **Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.** The **days of old and former years** refer to the days when the priesthood was not corrupt, namely in David’s day and the early years of Solomon’s reign. During those days the priests served with great care and dedication to the LORD. After their time the priesthood became corrupt. On the basis of the eternal covenant of Levi the Messiah will sit as a smelter and purify the Levites so

that they will gleam like gold and silver and present offerings that are pleasing to the LORD.

Verse 5, **Then** or at that time, **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 in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,”** says **the LORD of hosts**. All these sins were condemned in the Mosaic Law. In the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel the LORD will **draw near** to those who are characterized by these sins **for judgment**. He will swiftly testify **against** them. This involves more than just the priests, it involves the whole nation Israel (Ezek 20:34-38). He will, in short separate the remnant from the non-remnant and make a people for Himself. This is the word of **the LORD of “armies.”**

In summary, verses 1-5 are God’s answer to their challenging claim in 2:17 that He was not just because the wicked prospered. In verse 1 God would one day send His prophetic messenger who would clear the highway for the Lord. Then the King Messiah would come swiftly to His temple heralding the new covenant. In verse 2 this coming would be in judgment. In verse 3 He would be like a refiner who separates the dross from the pure ore and like a laundryman’s soap which separates impurities from the pure cloth. This judgment would purify for Himself the sons of Levi so that they could serve in His Messianic Temple. In verse 4, at long last their offerings would be pleasing as they had been in the days of David and Solomon. But in verse 5, the way to those pleasing days in the Messianic kingdom require that the LORD judge swiftly and severely those Jews characterized by the list of sins in verse 5. The underlying problem with all of them is the last, those who do not fear Me. This judgment would separate out the non-remnant of Jews from the remnant and the new covenant would be fulfilled to the remnant so they could be His people and He could be their God. God was most certainly just. It is simply that His justice had not yet been applied to the priests and people in Malachi’s day. Instead they were enjoying a day of grace before that judgment comes. In the end that day of grace will come to an end and judgment will fall.

Now that's the exegesis of the passage. I want to go back now to 3:1 and deal briefly with the identification of the first messenger who is said to be one who **will clear the way before the Lord**. Almost all commentators conclude that this is a prophecy of John the Baptist but if this is John then there are really only two routes you can go; neither of which is contextual. I'll show you those two views in a moment but I want you to see that this is the prevailing view. I only found two commentaries that don't agree this is John. Generally speaking though they all go straight to John. For example, the very excellent Bible Knowledge Commentary says, "There is no question about who this was because Jesus identified him as John the Baptist (Matt. 11:10; cf. Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27)."<sup>i</sup> The commentator implies this is a closed issue. Tom Constable, also a very excellent commentator follows suit when he says, "Jesus explicitly identified this person as John the Baptist (Matt. 11:7–10)."<sup>ii</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum makes the same certain identification, "John the Baptist was clearly the fulfillment of these passages."<sup>iii</sup> The Expositors Bible Commentary goes so far as to say it is a settled issue, "This verse is quoted in the NT. Matthew (11:10), Mark (1:2), and Luke (7:27) include its first half. They all refer it to John the Baptist. Thus the NT settles the identity of the one called "my messenger." He is the forerunner of Christ, John the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth."<sup>iv</sup> So as you can see these commentators are absolutely certain that Malachi 3:1 is a prophecy of John. The reason is also very clear. Jesus in three passages quoted Malachi 3:1 of John. That's the reasoning that is being employed and that appears like sound reasoning but let's take a closer look.

There are two views that come out of the approach that this is John. First, amillennialism. Amillennialism means they don't hold to any kind of earthly millennium in their scheme. When Christ came He was rejected by Israel, they crucified Him and so He cast off Israel forever. In Israel's place He adopted the Church, the true Israel and Kingdom of God. At the end of the Church/Kingdom there will be a general resurrection of the dead, a general judgment and then eternity will begin. That's amillennialism. In their interpretation of this passage the messenger is interpreted as John who they identify as Elijah. So there is no future Elijah. John paved the way for the King by preaching a message of repentance. When Jesus came His sudden coming to His temple is interpreted as fulfilled in His presentation at the temple as a baby and His other temple visits. The judgment is interpreted as accomplished by Christ through the Roman armies in AD70. The resulting

cleansed temple and priesthood are interpreted as the Church in heaven. That's amillennialism and the best thing I can say about it is that at least its consistent but it's not textual. Second, the inconsistent view of premillennialism. Premillennialism means Christ comes before the earthly millennium. When Christ came He offered the kingdom to Israel, they rejected it, they crucified Him, He temporarily set Israel aside. In the meantime He began to build His Church. When the Church is completed Christ will return and establish His kingdom on earth. In the premillennial interpretation of this passage the messenger is John who came in the spirit and power of Elijah. John is not Elijah. John paved the way for the King by preaching a message of repentance. Jesus' sudden coming to His temple, however, they interpret as relating to His second coming so that there is a gap of time in verse 1. When he comes a second time He will judge and purify the priesthood in preparation for worship in the earthly Messianic Temple. I consider this view inconsistent because it requires a gap of time between John as the first messenger in verse 1 and Jesus at His second coming. And while gaps of time are not unheard of in OT prophetic revelation, the context here does not support a gap of time. Nevertheless, that's a premillennial approach, it's better than the amillennial approach but its contextual. It's reading the NT back into the OT just like amillennialists do. My view is that the messenger is Elijah and can only be fulfilled by Elijah. Jesus makes application to John because one aspect of John's ministry was similar to Elijah's; namely, he was sent to prepare the way for the Lord. However, John did not prepare the way for the Lord in the way the text demands. The clearing the way for the Lord requires a removal of all hindrances so that the king can come unhindered. The fact is that Jesus was hindered greatly at His first coming, particularly among the leadership of Israel who constantly tried to trap and murder Jesus. John in no way cleared the highway although that was the goal of his ministry. Elijah, however, will clear the highway. He will remove all hindrances by turning the father's hearts toward their children and the children's hearts toward their father. Elijah will be successful and the king will return unhindered. So everything in Mal 3:1-5 relates to the future coming of Elijah and the Messiah. This interpretation does not read the NT data back into the OT but allows the OT to stand in its original context. It also allows the situation in the NT to stand in its context. This is sound hermeneutics. A NT passage cannot change the original intended meaning of an OT passage.

For example, in Matt 2 Jesus' parents take him to Egypt to remain safely out of Herod's grasp. When Herod died an angel appeared to Joseph and told him they could leave Egypt because Herod was dead. When they left Matthew quotes the OT passage of Hos 11:1 and says, thus it was fulfilled, "out of Egypt I called My Son." However, Hos 11:1 in the original context is not a prophecy at all but simply a historical reference to the Exodus of Israel out of Egypt centuries before. It should be quite clear that Hos 11:1 was therefore not being fulfilled by Jesus in the literal sense of the term. Instead, the Exodus was a type and Jesus' exodus from Egypt was the anti-type. The point is that Jesus was following the same pattern of the nation; they both went down to Egypt and they both came out of Egypt. This is one example showing that there are a variety of ways the NT authors quote the OT. So just because you have Jesus quoting Mal 3:1 and applying it to John does not mean that Mal 3:1 is a prophecy of John. Instead, an application is being made to John because of one point of similarity in their ministries. Both will be sent to prepare the way for the Lord by turning the nation Israel back. John was not successful. Elijah will be. Malachi 4:5-6 says that Elijah will come and turn the people back.

Alva McClain agrees when he says on Mal 3. "Again, referring to the ministry of John the Baptist as His forerunner, Christ connects it with the prophecy of Malachi (Luke 7:24-27 with Mal 3:1). But Malachi 3:1 cannot be disconnected from the context in which it appears, where the regal "messenger of the covenant" comes to His temple to sit in judgment upon the nation of Israel, purifying the "sons of Levi," making the "offering of Judah and Jerusalem [to] be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years"; and adjudicating the social wrongs common to a sinful race (Mal. 3:1-6)." His point is that contextually John didn't do this. And just because Jesus applied it to John does not mean we are at liberty to read John back into Malachi. All Jesus is doing is making an application because of one point of similarity in their purpose of ministry; to prepare the way for the Lord. McClain says, "as to the identity of this messenger of Jehovah there should be little question. The coming "voice" will be that of a man, and he is named "Elijah the prophet" (Mal. 4:5). Whether or not there may be some secondary reference in the Old Testament passages to John the Baptist is a matter reserved for discussion in connection with the New Testament material. But certainly some attention should be given to the testimony of John himself who, when asked by the Pharisees, "Art thou Elijah?", replied, "I am not" (John 1:21,

ASV). And our Lord, after the death of John, said to the disciples, “Elijah indeed cometh, and shall restore all things” (Matt. 17:11, ASV).” That is, he was still to come and therefore John was not Elijah.

What then of John? Who was he? Luke 1:76 says of John that he “will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” His ministry was as I have characterized, “in the spirit and power of Elijah.” He conceivably could have been Elijah if the nation had turned in response to his ministry. As Jesus says in Matt 11:14 “If you are willing to accept [the kingdom], John himself is Elijah who was to come.” This introduces the problem of *contingency*. When we speak of contingency it should be understood that we are speaking from the standpoint of the human factor in history and not from the standpoint of the divine factor in history. God has declared the end from the beginning, there is no contingency from His point of view, but from the human standpoint there are genuine human choices involved in history. Jesus captures the truth of contingency by this offer of the kingdom. “If you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.” Implicitly Jesus claims that Elijah was prophesied to come in the OT. Implicitly He also implies that John was not prophesied to come in the OT. But if they accept John’s message then John would fulfill the function of Elijah and the kingdom would come. The point is a very sensitive one. Was the kingdom offer to Israel a genuine offer? The answer is absolutely. It was so much a genuine offer of the kingdom that had they accepted it John would have been Elijah. However, the historical situation changed once the nation rejected the kingdom offer in Matt 12. At that point the kingdom offer was gradually withdrawn and it became clear that John was not Elijah. Jesus said to them in Matt 17:11 “Elijah is coming and will restore all things; 12but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished.” In light of the genuine offer and rejection of the kingdom it was no longer possible that John was Elijah. Thus, as Jesus said, Elijah is still to come and when he comes he will restore all things.

One of the keys to the puzzling NT passages concerning John and Elijah; the kingdom offer and rejection, election and faith, sovereignty and human responsibility is the Scriptural teaching of “contingency.” McClain says,

“When the nation Israel was offered the kingdom the nation had a genuine decision to make; tragically they made it the wrong way. “The fact that all this was “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23) does not in the least detract from its moral and historical reality. Those who fail to see this can make nothing out of certain portions of our Lord’s prophetic teaching. There still remains the philosophical problem of course, but this is nothing new; it being only an aspect of the wider problem of Divine Sovereignty and Moral Responsibility. And for this there is no completely rational solution which does not end by affirming one and denying the other. But the Word of God teaches the reality of both. And if perhaps we shall never wish to give up the search for an answer to the problem, a Christian attitude of intellectual humility will help in some degree to alleviate our uneasiness as we continue the quest.” Very wise words indeed. The same problems attend to the offer of salvation to one who is not elect in the mind of God. The offer of salvation is genuine; tragically they reject it. Both are true.

#### Extra Information:

There are three reasons from the context of Malachi that make it impossible that this is a prophecy of John fulfilled in John. The First, the context in 2:17 is a challenge that God is just. John’s coming did not relate to a revelation of God’s justice; message is unrelated to the question the people in Malachi’s day asked. To say this is when John came, the closest connection John has to judgment is his announcement that a day was coming where the Messiah would judge Israel. However, his prophecy also relates to the future 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel in which a purified remnant of Israel would enter the kingdom. The offer was on the table but the offer was rejected. The consequent destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD70 could not relate to this prophecy because this prophecy does not result in the destruction of the Temple but in a purified priesthood to serve in the Temple. Thus John is not in view because John’s ministry does not answer the question of whether God is just in dealing with sin. Second, this could not be John because the context relates to the future judgment in the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel and John did not come in the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel nor will he. It is out of place on the biblical timeline to refer this to John. Third, the text says that the messenger will clear the way for the Lord’s coming. John did not clear the way for the Lord’s coming. John preached a message of repentance so the people might be ready for the one coming after him. Very few people proportionate to the nation repented.

Certainly the leadership did not. When the King came the leadership were great hindrances to His establishment of the kingdom. Therefore John did not clear the way. The one who fulfills this prophecy will clear the way. Fourth, when this messenger comes the Messiah will suddenly come to His temple. Jesus did not suddenly come to His temple at His first coming. Some commentators say this refers to His presentation and other visits to the temple. However, contextually the adverb “suddenly” refers to a surprise visit. In context this visit will involve a judgment that purifies the priesthood for service in the temple. This simply did not happen in connection with John and Jesus’ first coming. Therefore, for those four reasons Malachi 3:1 cannot possibly be a prophecy of John.

Considering the greater context of Malachi, in 4:5 a messenger is named who will come in the future 70th week of Daniel and clear the way before Him so that the LORD is unhindered by Israel’s response. In Mal 4:5 we are told, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 6He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.” The OT seems to end with the name of the prophet who is God’s messenger that will lead the nation back to God. Therefore every orthodox Jew holds a special place for Elijah, in the circumcision rite there is a place left vacant for Elijah, in the Passover there is a place left vacant for Elijah. Every Jew is waiting for Elijah to come. The Jewish Soncino commentary on 3:1 says “the allusion is to Elijah.” So although almost every evangelical commentary says that 3:1 is a prophecy of John it seems much better contextually to say it is a prophecy of Elijah. He is the one who will successfully pave the way for the LORD to come by removing any hindrances to the LORD’s coming by restoring the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

Why then did Jesus quote Malachi 3:1 of John? He is making an application of the kind of ministry John had as similar to the kind of ministry. Malachi 3:1 predicts that will immediately precede the Messiah’s coming to His temple suddenly in judgment. John had a similar ministry in that he did call the nation to repentance in preparation for the coming Messiah. However, his ministry was not successful as predicted in Malachi 3:1. He did not clear the way before the LORD. Relatively few Jews responded to John’s ministry and the leadership certainly rejected John’s ministry. John therefore, in no way

fulfilled Malachi 3:1. But the similarities of John's ministry to this passage are clear.

---

<sup>i</sup> Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Mal 3:1). Galaxie Software.

<sup>ii</sup> Blaising, C. A. (1985). Malachi. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 1583). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>iii</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, p 130-131.

<sup>iv</sup> Alden, R. L. (1986). Malachi. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets* (Vol. 7, p. 719). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2014