

# Explore: A pure people

May 15, 2015

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for May 31 focuses on Malachi 3:1-7; 3:16-4:2.*

God invites sinners to salvation because he is a just and holy God. Accordingly, we pick up on the conversation from last week's lesson regarding our faithfulness and obedience to the Lord. Malachi's instructions thus far have called for a complacent and apathetic people to repent. He especially prodded the priesthood to consider their corrupted system of worship. Malachi also pointed to idolatrous marriages as a prime illustration of the waywardness of many once-faithful people.

In this lesson, we will examine Malachi's prophetic vision concerning the Day of the Lord. In so doing, we find the judgment of God refines God's people. Further, we notice God's judgment is consistent with God's character. Malachi consequently offers hope to those who, despite the temptation towards idolatry and waywardness, stay the course of obedience. Indeed, God does chasten his own (Proverbs 3:12; Hebrews 12:6).

## **God's messenger (3:1-5)**

God will right the wrongs. Subsequently, Malachi noted God's promised messenger. We only can surmise the identity of this messenger. Perhaps the messenger is John the Baptist or Elijah, as some scholars have offered over the years. Perhaps, however, God spoke in more figurative terms. Consider the Ancient Near East tradition among royal rulers. They would send forth messengers or heralds to pronounce their anticipated arrival in a nearby town. In other words, the Day of the Lord is imminent, and the news will get out.

Notice, too, the Lord's arrival will be sudden and swift. Another "messenger of the covenant" appears at this point. Malachi could have been speaking directly about Jesus. Malachi then asked a pointed question as to the ability of the hearers to endure the day of God's arrival. Malachi envisioned the Day of the Lord as a significantly serious and overwhelming moment when the whole judgment of God comes to full fruition. It will be like nothing anyone has ever seen. Indeed, no one would be able to stand in the presence of the Almighty Yahweh.

Consequently, Malachi envisioned judgment beginning in God's house. The priesthood, or Levites, would be cleansed first with a "refiner's fire" and "launderer's soap." That is, God would remove their impurities and make their lives and minds clean. God would begin with these people in order to ensure right offerings once again would rise up to him. The Levites could lead the people in right worship. God then concerns himself with the people and used what is considered common courtroom language. We will go on trial with God rightly presiding as both judge and jury. Notice the trial is quick and fair. All sinners are held accountable for missing the mark of God.

### **God's unchangeable character (3:6-7)**

With unwavering and straightforward candor, God declared, "I the Lord do not change." In other words, God always will be true to God's nature. Justice will be done, and evil will not be allowed to survive. Consider, however, God's judgment actually is an act of great grace. God promised to save his people from complete destruction. God's purpose for every person is that he or she be saved. We are the ones who condemn ourselves (John 3:17). Therefore, God is our only source of life and hope. We must turn in faith to him if we have any hope of eternal life both in the now and in the not yet. Accordingly, God's people can expect to go through times of refining and purifying. Our works of faith will be shown for what they are (1 Corinthians 3:1-16).

### **God's record (3:16-18)**

Malachi switched gears slightly in this section. Specifically, he noted God keeps a record of those who faithfully have trusted in him. Consider that the faithful ones “talked with each other.” This phrase indicates believers discussed Malachi’s prophecy concerning the Day of the Lord at length. Their faith apparently was strengthened, even though they did not understand the entire prophecy in detail. They embraced the truth of refining and purification without fear but in reverence and faith. Accordingly, Malachi informed us the Lord observed their discussion, and a “scroll of remembrance” was written in God’s presence. On this scroll are written the names of the remnant—those who remained faithful and true. They serve as examples and forerunners to those who, by faith in Christ, will be finally vindicated on the Day of the Lord because of his grace. Those who are declared righteous will survive for all eternity.

### **Hope for the faithful (4:1-2)**

The Lord offered one final promise through Malachi at this point. The Day of the Lord will be a universal event filled with dread, but God offers hope to all who will have faith in the Messiah. Notice the Lord spoke with metaphorical and encouraging terms as a way of illustrating just how great eternal life will be for the believer. The “sun of righteousness” will provide illumination and spiritual health, as well as energy for believers. They will be able to “frolic like well-fed calves.” In other words, there will come a day when the righteous, through Christ, will be free from the hindrances of sin and of the flesh. God will win!