

When the LORD Comes to His Temple

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Malachi 3:1–5 (NKJV) “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts. 2 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 launderers’ soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the LORD, as in the days of old, as in former years. 5 And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts.”

This prophecy was written by Malachi, the last Old Testament prophet, to the remnant Jews who had returned from their exile in Babylon. Malachi most likely wrote his words during Nehemiah’s return to Persia between 433-424 B.C., almost a century after the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The temple had been rebuilt and sacrificial system renewed under the leadership of Zerubbabel in 516 B.C. Ezra the scribe had returned in 458 B.C. and restored the knowledge of God’s law followed by Nehemiah in 445 B.C. who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem.

Less than a century had passed since the exiles had returned to the land. Sadly, the religious routine quickly led to hard-heartedness toward God and widespread departure from His law. The priests had become more complacent and corrupt (Malachi 1:6-2:9). Many had divorced their Jewish wives in order to marry foreign wives (Malachi 2:11-15; Ezra 9, 10; Nehemiah 13:23-27). In pursuit of their own desires, many were robbing God of the tithe causing the ministry in God’s house to be neglected (Malachi 3:8-10; Nehemiah 13:10-14). Their failure to tithe was seen as a direct reflection of an apathetic spiritual attitude that was bringing a curse upon the entire nation. Injustice against widows, orphans, and strangers went unaddressed (Malachi 3:5; Nehemiah 5:1-13). The sins of lying, adultery and dabbling in pagan religious practices were becoming common place (Malachi 3:5). Malachi’s words were a stinging rebuke, a call for repentance, and a warning of coming judgment.

Malachi says, “*The LORD, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple.*” (Malachi 3:1) Many claim to seekers of God. The reality is that few are followers of God. Malachi warned that the LORD would come to His temple to purge His house from corruption and restore true worship.

Before the LORD comes to His temple, He sends forth a message of rebuke and call for repentance. This message is an extension of His mercy to prepare those who are willing to repent and return. His coming is often referred to as “the Day of the LORD”. For God’s faithful servants, it will be a day of great blessing, salvation, and deliverance (Isaiah 2), but for His enemies it will be a day of darkness (Amos 5:18).

The temple refers to the place God has chosen to dwell—fill with His presence or glory. In the Old Testament a literal temple was built in Jerusalem. Although Israel had a magnificent temple, they had departed from the true worship of God. It was time for the LORD to come to His house. In preparation of His coming, God sent John the Baptist as a forerunner to prepare the people of Israel for Christ's first coming through a baptism of repentance (see Luke 3:1–17). Then on two different occasions—at the beginning and at the close of His earthly ministry—Jesus literally came into the Jewish temple and purged it of corruption (John 2:13–17; Matthew 21:12–17). Ultimately the people rejected Him and His correction. As a result, the temple in Jerusalem was left to them desolate—forsaken by God (Matthew 23:37–39).

In the New Testament, God's temple is the church (Ephesians 2:19–22) and the physical bodies of believers (1 Corinthians 6:19). Because the temple is the dwelling place of God, the temple must be holy (1 Peter 1:15). Sin defiles the God's temple and will not be allowed. In His mercy God rebukes us, calls for repentance, and warns of His coming correction and judgment if we do not. Yes, the LORD will come to judge and cleanse His house. As the Scripture says, *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"* (1 Peter 4:17 NKJV)

If we want God's glory in our church and in our lives, we must prepare ourselves for His presence. Many seek God's presence while failing to pursue holiness. Many seek after glory apart from the cross. We make a terrible mistake when we treat God like a genie in a bottle that comes to give us what we want. Seeking what we want—even the things of God—apart from the cross is actually seeking our own shame, making us enemies of the cross. Philippians 3:17–20 (NKJV) declares, *"Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. ¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame— who set their mind on earthly things. ²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,"* If we seek God's glory by running to the cross of Christ in true repentance, then He will come to us in salvation, deliverance, revival, and restoration.

When the LORD comes to His temple, He will come suddenly. "Suddenly" does not mean immediately. It means instantaneously, unannounced and at an unsuspected time. The LORD will come as a thief in the night. Those who are prepared will not be caught unprepared (1 Thessalonians 5:2–6).

The LORD's coming will be both an awesome and fearful event. Who can endure the day of His appearing? He will sit as a Judge over His people. He will come to us as a refiner's fire and launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. Psalm 12:6 (NKJV) says, *"The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times."* This means that He will come to separate false from the real, error from the truth, the unclean from the clean, the chaff from the wheat, the unfruitful from the fruitful, the spots and blemishes from His bride, the unrighteous from the righteous, the goats from the sheep, the profane from the holy, the rebel from the submitted, and the dead from the living. He will restore a pure faith in His people.

When He comes He will restore true worship in His house. He will restore to Himself a purified people who will offer an offering in righteousness that will be pleasant to Him. Once the LORD has cleansed His house and purified His people, He will be a swift witness against sinners. Yes, the LORD is coming to His temple. It is time to be prepared. Even so, Lord, come!

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