

DEEP DIVE

THE BOOK OF MALACHI

May 2026 - June 2026

REV. AARIF G. BRADLEY, M. DIV

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LESSON 5

SUNDAY MAY 31, 2026

WHERE IS THE GOD OF JUSTICE?

Malachi 2:17–3:5

KEY VERSE

| KJV

But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap. Malachi 3:2

| NIV

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. Malachi 3:2

LESSON AIMS

As a result of this lesson, you should be able to:

1. Understand the difference between human expectations of justice and God's justice
2. Recognize how misplaced assumptions about God can lead to spiritual error
3. Respond rightly to God's refining and righteous judgment

KEY TERMS

- Justice – God's righteous judgment and moral order
- Weary – Irritating (used here to describe God's response to their words)

- Messenger – One sent to prepare the way
- Refiner’s fire – A process that purifies by removing impurities
- Fuller’s soap – A strong cleansing agent used to wash cloth
- Sorcery – Seeking power apart from God
- Oppression – Exploiting or mistreating others unjustly

INTRODUCTION

People often want justice but only a version of justice that works in their favor. In this passage, the people accuse God of being unjust. They look at the world around them and come to a conclusion that either God approves of wrongdoing, or He is not paying attention. But their perspective is flawed because they are evaluating God based on what they see, while ignoring the condition of their own heart and lives. Malachi reveals a powerful truth that when people question God’s justice, they often assume they would stand on the right side of it. God’s response is both corrective and sobering. He does not deny justice in fact, He promises it. But He makes it clear that when it comes, it will not look the way they expect.

| Analysis of the Biblical Text

QUESTIONING GOD’S JUSTICE (MALACHI 2:17)

| KJV

Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?

| NIV

You have wearied the LORD with your words. ‘How have we wearied him?’ you ask. By saying, ‘All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them’ or ‘Where is the God of justice?’

The people are essentially putting God on trial with their words. On one hand, they suggest that God is indifferent to evil and that He looks on wrongdoing and treats it as acceptable. On the other hand, they swing in the opposite direction and question whether He is even just at all: “Where is the God of justice?” It is a double accusation that reveals confusion about both God’s character and their own condition.

God says their words have “wearied” Him. This is not describing exhaustion as if God is limited or otherwise infected with human limitations, but rather the repetitive, distorted pattern of their speech is what He’s talking about. They are not asking honest questions that lead to faith instead they are making persistent claims that misrepresent who God is. The issue is not that they are struggling to understand justice; it is that they are redefining God in a way that fits their frustration. What makes this more serious is where their focus is placed. They are looking outward at visible injustice and concluding that God must be either absent or approving of evil. But they never turn the same level of scrutiny inward. Instead of asking, how have we contributed to this brokenness? they ask, “What is wrong with God?” Their perception of injustice becomes a lens through which they judge God, rather than a mirror that exposes their own need for correction.

This is why God’s response is so poignant. The problem is not their awareness of injustice the problem is their interpretation of it. When God’s justice is misunderstood, it often leads people to assume God is wrong while they themselves remain unexamined. In reality, the question is not whether God is just, but whether we are willing to let His justice examine us as well.



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

When life feels unfair, are you more likely to question God or examine your own perspective?

THE PROMISE OF A COMING MESSENGER (MALACHI 3:1)

| KJV

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple...

| NIV

I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple...

God's response to their question is not a debate or an explanation, it is a declaration that He is coming. When they ask, "Where is the God of justice?" they are assuming absence. God answers by pointing to His future arrival, which means justice is not missing, it is on schedule. But God also adds something important, before He comes, He will send a messenger to prepare the way. This messenger is later understood in Scripture as the one who prepares the way for Christ. The point is that God's coming will not be sudden chaos without warning it will be preceded by preparation, invitation, and opportunity to respond.

However, the real shift in the passage is this, the people are asking for justice as if it is something external God needs to fix around them. God responds by saying His coming is not just about correcting the world, they are also being brought into that moment of accountability. In other words, they are not only waiting for justice to happen, they are preparing to stand before it. This is why the text immediately asks, "Who can endure the day of His coming?" The implication is clear that the same justice they are demanding outwardly will also examine them inwardly. God's arrival is not only comforting to the righteous, but it is revealing to everyone.

The key idea is this, God's justice is not absent or delayed in the sense they think; it is determined and will arrive exactly when He has appointed it. But when it comes, it will not function only as a response to evil in the world, but it will also function as a moment of exposure, purification, and accountability for His people. Their question assumes God is not acting but God's answer shows He is not only acting, but He is also preparing to arrive personally, and nothing will remain hidden when He comes.

THE SHOCK OF HIS COMING (MALACHI 3:2)

| KJV

But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?...

| NIV

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?...

This question challenges their assumption. They are asking for justice as if they are ready for it and it is as if God responds by asking them “are you sure?” His coming is described as a refiner’s fire (burning away impurity) and fuller’s soap (deep cleansing). This is intense, transformative, and unavoidable. God’s justice does more than confront evil; it exposes what is hidden and purifies what is corrupted.



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

If God fully examined your life, what would need to be refined or cleansed?

PURIFICATION BEFORE ACCEPTANCE (MALACHI 3:3–4)

| KJV

- 3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.
- 4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

| NIV

- 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness,
- 4 and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

God begins with the priests again, the leaders who are responsible for worship. Before judgment spreads outward, purification starts with those with spiritual responsibility. The goal is not destruction, but restoration: to remove corruption, to restore proper worship, and to make offerings acceptable again. God’s refining is not meant to destroy; it is meant to restore what has been corrupted. The imagery is deliberate: a refiner does not discard metal immediately; he applies heat to remove impurities so that what remains is pure and usable. Likewise, the fuller’s soap does

not destroy the cloth, it cleans it thoroughly so it can be fit for use again. The process is severe, but the purpose is restorative.

The issue is not that God is finished with His people, but that what He has called holy has become contaminated. His response is to restore what has been distorted, not abandon it.

Worship is meant to be pleasant to God again and not rejected forever. The aim is not removal of the offering itself, but removal of what has made the offering unacceptable. This reveals a deeper truth about God's justice in this passage that it is not merely punitive, it is corrective. It targets corruption with the intention of recovery. God is not erasing His people; He is reclaiming what belongs to Him by restoring it to its proper form and purpose.

JUDGMENT AGAINST REAL INJUSTICE (MALACHI 3:5)

| KJV

And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts.

| NIV

So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the Lord Almighty.

Now God answers their concern about injustice directly. He lists real offenses: sorcery (seeking power apart from God), adultery (moral unfaithfulness), dishonesty (lying under oath) and exploitation (oppressing workers, widows, and the vulnerable). Taken together, these sins show a society where every sphere has been affected: worship, relationships, speech, and justice.

Nothing remains untouched because reverence for God has been removed from the center. The root issue is clear at the end: they do not fear God. Injustice among people flows from a lack of reverence for God. The text does not speak of fear in the sense of panic, but reverence. It is the loss of awareness that God sees, evaluates, and will respond. When that awareness is gone,

moral boundaries become negotiable. People begin to justify what God calls corruption because there is no longer a governing sense of His presence or authority. The deeper point is this, God is not unaware of injustice, nor is He indifferent to it. The problem is that injustice among people is often sustained by the absence of reverence for Him. When reverence for God is lost, human behavior inevitably becomes morally distorted.

| A Closing Thought

The people wanted justice, but they wanted it directed outward, not inward. God's response reveals something deeper that justice is not selective. It does not only address what is wrong around us alone, it also addresses what is wrong within us. The same God who judges injustice is also the One who refines His people. God is just in that He will confront wrongdoing, but God is also purifying, He works to restore His people. The question is not whether God will act, but whether we are prepared for how He will act *even in us*.

| Your Life

Consider how you view justice. Do you expect God to correct others more than yourself? Are you open to being refined, or only interested in being affirmed? Allow God to examine your heart honestly and then respond to conviction instead of resisting it and accept that growth often comes through God's refinement. Let God correct what is within you, not just what is around you.

| Your World!

We live in a world deeply concerned with justice yet often divided on what justice actually means. God's justice is different, it is not selective, or biased and does not overlook truth. As believers, we are called to live with integrity, treat others justly, and reflect God's character in how we respond to wrongdoing. Real change begins when people who desire justice are also willing to be shaped by it.



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Help us to understand Your justice correctly. Where we have misunderstood You or questioned Your ways, correct our thinking. Search our hearts and refine what does not reflect You. Give us the humility to receive correction and the strength to live with integrity. Teach us to trust Your timing and to walk in reverence before You.

In Jesus' name, Amen.



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