

The Theme of Fire in Malachi

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Last modified: December 21, 2016

Fire as a Literary Theme: Starting Point	
<p>^{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. 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 fullers’ soap. 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.</p>	
Fire as Purifying	Fire as Destroying
<p>^{3:4} Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. ⁵ Then 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. ⁶ ‘For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷ From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ ⁸ Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! ¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. ¹¹ Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes,’ says the LORD of hosts. ¹² All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land,’ says the LORD of hosts.</p>	<p>^{4:1} ‘For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. ³ You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,’ says the LORD of hosts.</p>

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Malachi*: A preacher who lived around 420 BC, after Israel started returning from exile under the Persian Empire. The name Malachi is the word *mal’akhi*, meaning ‘my messenger.’ It occurs in Mal.3:1. Malachi is one of the twelve ‘minor prophets’ in the collection of the Hebrew prophets, part of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament.
- *Malachi’s References to Israel’s Priesthood*: The second temple had been rededicated in 516 BC. God operated like a dialysis machine through the temple sacrificial system. The Israelites passed on their impurity into God by laying hands on animals, and God gave them back His purified life in the form of the animals’ blood, which was not corrupted by sin. God could therefore live among His people in the temple, and He made the land fruitful for Israel (e.g. Dt.11). That is why Malachi points out that Israel’s land is not fruitful.