

Malachi 3:2

Authorized King James Version (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' sope:

Analysis

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' sope. This verse follows Malachi 3:1's promise that the Lord will suddenly come to His temple. But the question "who may abide" (mi-mekhalkel) and "who shall stand" (mi-ha'omed) reveals the coming will bring judgment, not mere blessing. The Hebrew suggests trembling, inability to endure. The answer: only those purified by grace can stand before the holy God.

Two images describe the purifying judgment: "refiner's fire" (esh metzoref) and "fullers' soap" (borit mekabbes). Refiners used intense fire to melt precious metals, removing impurities (dross) and leaving pure gold or silver. Fullers used caustic lye soap to bleach and clean cloth, a harsh but necessary process. Both images emphasize painful but redemptive purification. The coming Lord won't overlook sin but will burn away impurity and cleanse defilement.

This prophecy has dual application. Christ's first coming brought refining judgment through His teaching (dividing sheep from goats), His cross (judging sin), and subsequent destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70). His second coming will bring final refinement and judgment. Peter uses similar imagery: believers are tested by fire that their faith may be found genuine (1 Peter 1:6-7). The refining process is painful but produces purity, holiness, and Christ-likeness. Those who trust Christ's purifying work will stand; those who reject it will be consumed.

Historical Context

This oracle addressed post-exilic Jews who questioned God's justice and complained that evildoers prospered (Malachi 2:17). They demanded to know where the God of judgment was. God's answer: He will come—but as refiner and purifier, starting with His own house (the priesthood, v. 3). The imagery would resonate with an agrarian society familiar with metalworking and textile cleaning. Both processes required skill, patience, and harsh treatment to achieve desired results. The prophecy warned that Messiah's coming wouldn't simply vindicate Israel against enemies but would purify Israel itself. Jesus fulfilled this by confronting religious hypocrisy, cleansing the temple, and establishing new covenant through His blood. The refining continues in sanctification and will be completed at His return.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does God's refining work in your life—what impurities is He burning away?
2. Why is purification often painful, and how should we respond to God's sanctifying work?
3. How does Christ's sacrifice enable us to stand in the day of His appearing?
4. What does it mean that judgment begins with God's house (1 Peter 4:17)?

Interlinear Text

וְמִ	מִכְלָכָל	וְמִ	בָּוֹא	וְמִ	בְּעֵמָה
H4310	But who may abide	H853	the day	H4310	and who shall stand
	H3557		H3117		H5975
בְּהַבָּאֹת	וְ	וְ	מִצְבֵּחַ	וְ	מִכְבָּרִים
when he appeareth	H3588	H1931	fire	for he is like a refiner's	' soap
	H7200		H784		H1287
מִכְבָּרִים:					
and like fullers					
	H3526				

Additional Cross-References

Zechariah 13:9 (Parallel theme): And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

Isaiah 4:4 (Parallel theme): When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.

Revelation 6:17 (Parallel theme): For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Hebrews 12:25 (Parallel theme): See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:

Isaiah 1:18 (Parallel theme): Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Psalms 2:7 (Parallel theme): I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

Luke 21:36 (Parallel theme): Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

Luke 3:9 (Parallel theme): And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Luke 3:17 (Parallel theme): Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.

Malachi 4:1 (Parallel theme): For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.