

Malachi 3:5

Authorized King James Version (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.

Analysis

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.

After promising purified worship (v. 4), God announces judgment on specific sins. The phrase **I will come near to you** (וְקָרַבְתִּי אֵלֵיכֶם, veqaravti aleikhem) uses courtroom language—God approaches as judge and prosecutor. **A swift witness** (עֵד מְהֵרָה, ed mehaber) emphasizes both God's role as eyewitness to all sin and the speed of His judgment—unlike human courts where justice delays, God's judgment comes swiftly and surely.

The catalog of sins reveals both vertical offenses (against God) and horizontal offenses (against people). **Sorcerers** (מְכַשְׁפִּים, mekhashefim) practiced occult arts forbidden by Torah (Exodus 22:18, Deuteronomy 18:10-12). **Adulterers** (מְנַאֲפִים, mena'afim) violated marriage covenant, reflecting Israel's spiritual adultery against God. **False swearers** (נִשְׁבָּעִים לַשֶּׁקֶר, nishba'im la-sheqer) broke oaths,

taking God's name in vain.

The social sins follow: oppressing hired workers by withholding wages (עֲשֵׂקֵי שֶׁכָּרִי, oshqei sekhar-sakhir) violates Leviticus 19:13 and Deuteronomy 24:14-15. Mistreating **the widow and the fatherless** (אַלְמָנָה וַיָּתוֹם, almanah ve-yatom)—society's most vulnerable—contradicts God's repeated commands to protect them (Exodus 22:22, Deuteronomy 10:18, James 1:27). Turning aside **the stranger** (גֵּר, ger, resident alien) from justice violates the law's provision for foreigners (Exodus 23:9). The root of all these sins: **fear not me** (וְאַתָּה לֹא יִרְאוּ, ve'oti lo yare'u)—absence of reverent fear of God produces both idolatry and injustice.

Historical Context

This indictment reflects actual conditions in post-exilic Judah. Despite returning from exile and rebuilding the temple, the people quickly lapsed into the same sins that brought judgment. Occult practices persisted despite clear Torah prohibitions. Marital unfaithfulness was rampant (Malachi 2:14-16). Economic exploitation of workers, widows, orphans, and foreigners characterized the society. Nehemiah encountered similar problems—nobles and officials charging excessive interest and enslaving their fellow Jews (Nehemiah 5:1-13). The prophets consistently linked social justice with true religion; God condemns religious ritual divorced from righteous living (Isaiah 1:10-17, Amos 5:21-24, Micah 6:8). This verse anticipates Christ's judgment on religious hypocrisy—those who appear righteous outwardly but inwardly are full of wickedness (Matthew 23:27-28). The catalog of sins also reflects violations of both tables of the Ten Commandments—idolatry (sorcery), covenant faithfulness (adultery, false oaths), and neighbor love (oppression, injustice).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does the fear of God serve as the foundation for both proper worship and just treatment of others?
2. What does this verse teach about God's concern for social justice alongside doctrinal purity?
3. In what ways might we be guilty of religious observance while tolerating injustice or oppression in our society?

Interlinear Text

וְקָרַבְתִּי י	אֵלֵיכֶם	לִמְשָׁפֵט	וְהִי יִתִּי	עֵד
And I will come near	H413	to you to judgment	H1961	witness
H7126		H4941		H5707
וְהָיִיתִי כַּרְמֵל	בְּמִכְשָׁפִים	וּבִמְנַ אֶפֶי ים	וּבִנְשָׁבָע ים	
and I will be a swift	against the sorcerers	and against the adulterers	swearers	
H4116	H3784	H5003	H7650	
לִשְׁ קָר	וּבְעֹשֵׂק י	שְׂכָר	שֶׁ כִּיר	
and against false	and against those that oppress	in his wages	the hireling	
H8267	H6231	H7939	H7916	
אֶלְמָנָה	וְיָתוֹם	וּמֵטִי	גֵר	וְלֹא אֶל
the widow	and the fatherless	and that turn aside	the stranger	H3808
H490	H3490	H5186	H1616	
וּמִיָּמִינוּ	אֲמַר	יְהוָה	צְבָאוֹת:	
from his right and fear	not me saith	the LORD	of hosts	
H3372	H559	H3068	H6635	

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 13:4 (Judgment): Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

Deuteronomy 5:11 (References Lord): Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

James 5:4 (References Lord): Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

Malachi 2:14 (Witness): Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.

Deuteronomy 27:19 (Judgment): Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Revelation 22:15 (Parallel theme): For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

Revelation 21:8 (Parallel theme): But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Leviticus 20:27 (Parallel theme): A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them.

Leviticus 19:13 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

Leviticus 20:6 (Parallel theme): And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people.

