

# The Case for Jesus the Messiah— Incredible Prophecies that Prove God Exists

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## 16. Malachi 3:1—When Did God Suddenly Come to His Temple? Who Was the Messenger He Sent before Him to Prepare the Way?

### The Biblical Text

*“Behold, I am sending My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Angel of the Covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He comes,” says Jehovah of hosts. (Malachi 3:1)*

### The Context of the Passage

In Malachi 2:17, the people of Israel, immersed in their own miseries, complained and asked, “Where is the God of justice?” Malachi’s response was simple: “The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple” (3:1).

However, before He would come, God would send a “forerunner” to prepare the way ahead of Him. The text does not say *a* messenger, but *His* messenger.

The people of Israel were already familiar with this “forerunner” from Isaiah’s prophecy in Isaiah 40:3 where the Hebrew words, “To prepare the way,” are identical with those used here in Malachi 3:1.

It was necessary that mankind be morally prepared for the coming of the Lord. The messenger of the Covenant who would come to His temple would be none other than the Lord God Himself. The word “Lord” here (*ha adon*) always refers to God (cf. Isaiah 1:24; 3:1; 10:16, 33).

### The Explanation of the Text

Malachi’s prophecy is quoted in the New Testament in Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2 and Luke 7:27 where the messenger preparing the way before God is John the Baptist. Jesus Christ Himself said about John the Baptist in Matthew 11:10, “This is the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’”

But who is “the Lord... the Angel of the Covenant” that suddenly comes to His temple? Who else could this be referring to but Jesus Christ? Concerning the term “the Angel of the Covenant” Lange writes:

From a very early period we find mention of an extraordinary Messenger, or Angel, who is sometimes called the “Angel of God,” at others, the “Angel of Jehovah.” He is represented as the Mediator between the invisible God and men in all God’s communications and dealings with men. To this Angel divine names, attributes, purposes, and acts are ascribed. He occasionally assumed a human form, as in his interviews with Hagar, Abraham, Jacob, Joshua, Gideon, Manoah, and his wife. He went before the camp of Israel on the night of the exodus. In Exodus 23:20, Jehovah said,

“Behold, I send an angel before thee to bring thee into the place, which I have prepared. My name is in him.” In Isaiah 63:9 he is called “the angel of his Presence, or face,” where there is a reference to Exodus 33:14, 15, where Jehovah said to Moses, “My Presence (or Hebrew, My face) shall go with thee,” and Moses said, “if thy face go not with us, carry us not up hence.” He is called the “face of God,” because though no man can see his face and live, yet the Angel of his face is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person. In him Jehovah’s presence is manifested, and his glory reflected, for the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ. There is thus a gradual development in the Old Testament of the doctrine of the incarnation, of the distinction of persons in the Godhead, not brought to light fully, lest it should interfere with the doctrine of the unity of God.<sup>113</sup>

The questions that this text raises are: When did the Lord suddenly come to His temple? Who is the Angel of the Covenant? Who else could it have been but Jesus Christ?

### **Was Malachi 3:1 Recognized by the Jews as Messianic?**

“The Messianic character of this verse is generally allowed by Jewish and Christian writers, however they may attempt to explain it.”<sup>114</sup> Edersheim observes, “this passage is applied to Elijah as forerunner of the Messiah in Pirque de R. Eliz. C.29.”<sup>115</sup>

### **Clues to Identify the Messiah**

Whoever the Messiah is, He *must* fit the following descriptions:

*Clue #1*—He, a male child (the Hebrew text specifically uses a 3rd person, singular, masculine pronoun—“he”), will be born of the seed of the woman.

*Clue #2*—He will come from the race of the Jews, and specifically from the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

*Clue #3*—He will be a great prophet, with the authority to teach like Moses.

*Clue #4*—He will be mocked, and people will cast lots for His garments while He suffers.

*Clue #5*—He will be David’s Lord.

*Clue #6*—He will be the child born who is God, and will have an everlasting kingdom.

*Clue #7*—He will be wounded and bruised, smitten and spit upon, mocked, killed with thieves, bear the sins of many, be rejected by His own people, pierced for our transgressions, be buried in a rich man’s tomb, and come back to life after His death.

*Clue #8*—He will be Jehovah our Righteousness.

*Clue #9*—He will be the Messiah who comes to Jerusalem 483 years after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem is given. At that time He will be killed.

*Clue #10*—He will be born in Bethlehem but has existed eternally.

*Clue #11*—He will be the King, who has salvation and comes riding on a donkey.

*Clue #12*—He will be Jehovah, the One pierced by the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

*Clue #13*—The Lord Himself will actually come to the temple in Jerusalem, but be preceded by a messenger.

### *Summary*

We may summarize what we have learned so far. So far, we have seen that a male seed of the woman will defeat Satan but be wounded in the process. This seed will be a descendant of Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob. In this coming One, all of the world will be blessed. He will be unique in all of Israel’s history, because He will be a “prophet like Moses.” But He will be mocked, insulted and crucified by men. Surprisingly, His bones will not be broken, but His garments will be gambled for. Although He will be a descendant of King David, He will also be David’s “Lord” and be second only to God Himself. He will be a child given to Israel who will also be God, who will have an everlasting kingdom, and who will live in Galilee. In addition, this coming One will be perfectly innocent and yet He will die for the world’s sins. But He will come back to life from the dead in resurrection. He is given a specific name, “Jehovah our Righteousness.” He will arrive exactly 483 years after the

444 B.C. decree of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem. He will be the ruler of Israel who is “the eternal One Himself,” and yet He will be *born* in Bethlehem! He will be the very King of Israel who will bring salvation, but surprisingly—He will come riding on a donkey. In addition, He will be Jehovah Himself who will be “pierced,” and all Israel will mourn for Him.

Finally, we see that this coming One, the Messiah of Israel, will suddenly come to His temple but that a special messenger will be sent before Him to prepare His way.

If we look at all these prophecies we see that Jesus Christ has fulfilled all of them:

- √ Genesis 3:15—Jesus defeated Satan but was wounded during the crucifixion.
- √ Genesis 12, 17, 22—He was the literal descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in whom all the world was blessed.
- √ Deuteronomy 18—He was the “prophet like Moses.”
- √ Psalm 22—He was mocked, insulted and crucified. His garments were gambled for and His bones were not broken.
- √ Psalm 110—He was David’s “lord.”
- √ Isaiah 9—He was God Himself and He lived in Galilee.
- √ Isaiah 53—He was perfectly innocent and without sin, yet He atoned for the sin of the world. He was resurrected from the dead.
- √ Jeremiah 23—Because He was God and “justified many,” His proper name is “Jehovah our Righteousness.”
- √ Daniel 9—He arrived at the specific time given by the prophecy, 483 years after Artaxerxes’ decree to rebuild Jerusalem.
- √ Micah 5—He was eternal and He was born in Bethlehem.
- √ Zechariah 9—He was the King of Israel who brought salvation and He entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey.
- √ Zechariah 12—He was Jehovah; He was pierced.
- √ Malachi 3—John the Baptist prepared the way for Him as He suddenly came to His temple.

We have examined just a few of the prophecies concerning the Messiah found in the Hebrew Scriptures. There are dozens of others which we could have discussed that are just as specific as these.

- (1) He will be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; see Mt. 1:23).
- (2) He would live in Nazareth of Galilee (Isa. 9:1-2; see Mt. 2:23; 4:15).
- (3) He would occasion the massacre of Bethlehem’s children (Jer. 31:15; see Mt. 2:18).
- (4) His mission would include the Gentiles (Isa. 42:1-3, 6; see Mt. 12:18-21).
- (5) His ministry would include physical relief (Isa. 61:1-2; see Lk. 4:16-21).
- (6) He would be the Shepherd struck with the sword, resulting in the sheep being scattered (Zech. 13:7; see Mt. 26:31, 56; Mk. 14:27, 49-50).
- (7) He would be betrayed by a friend for 30 pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12-13; see Mt. 27:9-10).
- (8) He would be given vinegar and gall to drink (Ps. 69:21; see Mt. 27:34).
- (9) He would be presented with all dominion over all peoples, nations and men of every language (Dan. 7:13-14; see Rev. 11:15).
- (10) He would be hated without a cause (Ps. 69:4; Isa. 49:7; Jn. 7:48; Jn. 15:25).
- (11) He would be rejected by the rulers (Ps. 118:22; Mt. 21:42; Jn. 7:48).

But the point should be obvious. Who is the only Person who has fulfilled all of these prophecies and more? Only Jesus Christ. There is no way to avoid this fact.

Scholars Delitzsch and Gloag have rightly stated:

So far as we can determine, these prophecies refer to the Messiah only, and cannot be predicated of another. The ancient Jews admit the Messianic character of most of them; although the modern Jews, in consequence of their controversy with the Christians, have attempted to explain them away by applications which must appear to every candid reader to be unnatural... these and other predictions have received their accomplishment in Jesus of Nazareth,... the combination of prophecies is sufficient to prove that Jesus is the Messiah;...<sup>116</sup>