



JUSTICE

Nobody likes a bad call. It's infuriating when officials get it wrong and it turns the tide of a game. Something wells up within us at the injustice.

Twice, Israel challenged the Lord for bad calls. They said, ***"Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them."*** Or by asking, ***"Where is the God of justice?"*** And later in chapter 3 they said, ***"It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge...before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape."***

We've seen these same themes throughout our study of the Minor Prophets. Everyone craves justice. It's a desire so hard wired into our souls that nearly every story written shows heroes winning and bad guys losing. Why? Because these stories resonate with our design, and the ultimate outcome to the Greatest Story Ever Told.

MALACHI 2-4 (SELECTED)

¹⁷ You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"

^{3:1} "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare 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.

¹³ "Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' ¹⁴ You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts? ¹⁵ And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.'"

^{4:1} "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall 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 shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³ And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We learn so much about God's Messiah, Jesus Christ, through studying the Minor Prophets. God revealed more and more as time went on, as his people encountered trials of various kinds. As God's people struggled, God shared new ways Christ would meet that struggle eternally. It's the Greatest Story Ever Told. Scan the QR code for a dramatized visual of what that final battle might look like as the Snake Crusher wins.



DISCUSSION

What is one key theme that has stood out to you over the course of this study?

1. What did Israel state regarding God's relationship toward evildoers? (2:17, 3:15)

2. To what is the coming Lord compared? (3:2)

3. What will happen to...?
...evildoers? (4:1)

...those who fear God's name? (2-3)

4. How does God's ultimate victory satisfy humanity's deep longing for justice?

5. What fate awaits those who never "fear the name of the Lord" and place saving faith in Christ?

6. What is God challenging you to do as a result of this study?

Leave it all on the field. If there's anything left unsaid or unasked, now is the time. Don't wait! Talk to your coach today.

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION



STUDY NOTES

THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD

God created the world. It was perfect. However, for humanity to truly show allegiance and affection to God, they had to have the opportunity for rebellion. God didn't create humanity as mindless robots. So, all the way back in Genesis 1 & 2, when Adam and Eve were in the garden, they could do *anything* and literally *everything* was inside the rules of what God allowed them to do—except for one thing. God said don't eat from one tree. In Genesis 3, they did. That single act of rebellion so corrupted the world, that we cannot fathom a reality with sin's corrupting devastation.

Satan, in the form of a snake, had tricked Eve while Adam stood passively by. Instead of destroying humanity (which God had every right to do), God promised a child, a Snake-Crusher that would stomp Satan's head—though Satan would strike his heel.

As the story of Genesis continues, we're looking for the Snake-Crusher. Clearly it wasn't Adam and Eve's first children as one killed the other out of spite. Instead, the story goes on and we wait. We learn more about what the Snake-Crusher will be like—the blessing of Abraham, a prophet like Moses, a king like David, Isaiah said he would suffer, Ezekiel said he would make dry bones come alive.

We learn that what Israel experienced in Egypt and in the Babylonian Exile is a picture of the reality in which humanity lives. Humanity has been enslaved to sin since it entered the world. Not only that, this world is not the ultimate destination for God's people. God's people are strangers and aliens in a foreign land. However, God's people are a Kingdom of Priests that the whole world would know God and make his name great.

As we open our passage today and close out our study, we will see some of the final words recorded before the Snake Crusher explodes into history. These words help identify the Snake-Crusher, and inspire hope deep in our hearts that God's justice will ultimately be victorious.

HOPE LIVES

When Habakkuk asked, "*Where is justice,*" God said, "*The Babylonians are on the way.*" As Israel asked the same question in *Malachi*, God said, "***Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.***"

In the ancient world, before nobles traveled, people would be sent ahead to "prepare the

way." Not only did removing fallen tree limbs and fixing potholes make for a more enjoyable ride, but very practically, it also removed opportunities for bandits to set traps. God used this time-honored idea to validate and identify the Snake-Crusher.

After the messenger, God said, "***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. 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.***"

The appearance of the Snake Crusher will not be as pleasant as one might imagine. A refiner's fire melted metal so that impurities could be scraped from the top. Fullers' soap, likely lye, is almost caustic and can cause great harm to skin if used improperly. Both images represent purification, but both are intense, dangerous, and great caution is warranted. So too with the Snake Crusher—as C.S. Lewis described Aslan, the Christ-figure in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, "He's not safe. But he is good. He's the King."

About 400 year after these words were written, these prophesied men appeared on the scene. The "Messenger" was John the Baptist. And, "the Lord" the Snake-Crusher, is none other than Jesus Christ. He brought purification, but not in the way most expected. Because many passages speak of the Messiah (the Snake Crusher) in terms of power and victory, they assumed he arrived to rule and reign. They misunderstood the thing we now understand. Jesus came first to give his life for the sins of humanity. We are hopeless and helpless without that sacrifice.

And yet, he will come again (which is the thing that they missed) in power and glory. "***For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze,***" says the ***LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."*** Though they may prosper for the moment, it will not last. Instead, ***for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.***

WHAT'S NEXT?

So, after all this, what are you going to do about it? Will you share the message like *Jonah*, will you humble yourself like *Obadiah*, will you live repentantly like *Joel*, will you faithfully endure like *Habakkuk*, and will you offer pure, faithful, and persistent worship like *Malachi*. His name will be great among the nations—that's a promise! The only question is will his name be great in *YOU*?

