

# Exegetical Notes on Malachi 3:1-4

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The reading from the Old Testament which is assigned to the Second Sunday in Advent in Series C of *Lutheran Worship* consists in the first four verses of the third chapter of the Book of Malachi. (The exegesis of these verses below is, in answer to several enquiries, in no way designed to promote the use in the main service of the week of the three-year series provided in *Lutheran Worship* nor of any other modern selections from the gospels and epistles in such a context. This exegete, on the contrary, would continue to urge, on various grounds, fidelity to the pericopal tradition inherited from the ancient church by the church of the reformation and modified only slightly by the Blessed Reformer of the Church, if one is speaking specifically of the gospels and epistles to be read in the main (eucharistic) service of the week. No comparable series of readings, on the other hand, from the Old Testament was either handed down from the ancient church or bestowed on us by the Blessed Reformer; nor, indeed, is there such a program of readings from the New Testament to be used in all the possible additional offices of any given week. In such cases, therefore, even such a traditionalist as this exegete is able, with consistency, to make use of any pericope drawn from the region of Holy Scripture desired.)

## THE HISTORICAL AND LITERARY SETTING

The superscription to the last of the prophetic books of the Old Testament identifies the author quite simply as "Malachi" (1:1). Malachi presumably has at least two reasons to forbear any note of his paternity. His descent, firstly, was evidently of no particular distinction. He would, secondly, have been well-known to everyone in a post-exilic community which was still quite small.

The name "Malachi" clearly signifies "my messenger" (BDB, 522a), by virtue of adding the first singular pronominal suffix to the noun mal'akh (BDB, 521b). In 3:1, however, mal'aki is a title rather than a name. Here it refers, not to the author of the Book of Malachi, but rather to a clearly future figure, who was to be the special precursor of the mal'akh-berith.

Most modern scholars, to be sure, taking mal'aki as a common rather than as a proper noun, see the Book of Malachi as in some way an anonymous composition. Some, to be specific, view the appellative as the pen-name of an author desiring to remain anonymous, while others regard the superscription as an addition to the book. Brown, Driver and Briggs, for instance, reject construing the last word in the superscription either as the "historical name" of the author or as a "pseudonym for Ezra" in favor of taking it instead as "a conjecture based on 3:1," presumably by editors of Malachi in particular or of the Minor Prophets in general (BDB, 522a). The theory of the anonymous authorship of the Book of Malachi in one form or another is now commonly accepted even in conservative circles. The interpretation, however, of mal'aki as an appellative in verse one of his book is to be rejected as totally fallacious on all the various ground enunciated in *The Prophetic Books of the Babylonian Exile and the Persian Empire*.

Despite the lack of any chronological notation, the time-frame is clearly Persian, since the chief executive in Judah is a governor (1:8). The word pecah, restricted almost wholly to the post-

exilic era, is applied elsewhere to Zerubbabel (Haggai 1:1) and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 5:14). Malachi's ministry is, however, considerably subsequent to the time of Haggai and Zechariah, who prophesied in the late sixth century B.C., and, indeed, can scarcely precede the first governorship of Nehemiah (444-433 B.C.) in view of the various considerations stated in *The Prophetic Books of the Babylonian Exile and the Persian Empire* [ibid.].

Malachi's preaching, to be sure, does not fit well within the strictly regulated regime of Nehemiah himself. At the same time, however, the Book of Malachi must antedate the final edition of the Old Testament composed by Ezra and Nehemiah during Nehemiah's second term as governor of Judah, around 420 B.C. (as asserted in the exegete's canonicity of the Old Testament). Thus, the Book of Malachi emanates from the hiatus between the first and second gubernatorial terms of Nehemiah. His first term lasted twelve years, ending in 433 or 432 (Nehemiah 5:14; 13:6). His second term began "after some time," but still in the reign of Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 13:6). Since the king named died in 425 or 424 B.C., Nehemiah apparently took up his second governorship in the year 425 or shortly theretofore. Thus, the Book of Malachi, in the final form passed down to all ensuing generations, came into existence, in all probability, *circa* 430 B.C.

This conclusion corresponds to Malachi's implicit self-consciousness of being the last of the prophets of the Old Testament. He indicates as much in the verses which are the object of this study when he speaks of a sudden coming of the Messiah preceded only by His special herald (3:1-4). The same indication recurs in the conclusion to the book (3: 23-24 MT; 4:5-6 EV).

The logical locale of Malachi's ministry was Jerusalem, the recently repopulated capital of Judah. The post-exilic capital was still in the process of reconstruction (Nehemiah 11). Malachi means by "Israel" (1:1) the small population of post-exilic Judah (2:11), composed of the descendants of the participants in the First Return from Babylonia in 586, only slightly augmented by the so-called Second Return of 457 and Third Return of 444 B.C. The Prophet Malachi addresses, in particular, the priests of Judah, who were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the community (1:6-10, 12-13; 2:1-9).

A quick relapse of Judah into spiritual laxity following the recall of Nehemiah to Babylon around 433 B.C. was the occasion of the Book of Malachi. Although absent from Judah no more than several years between his two gubernatorial terms (as mentioned above in discussing the date of Malachi), Nehemiah nevertheless found pervasive corruption and spiritual negligence upon his return around 425 (Nehemiah 13). The prevailing sins of Malachi's society correspond closely, then, to those confronting Ezra and Nehemiah both preceding and following his preaching and writing. Corruption was widespread in the priesthood (1:6-10, 12-13; 2:1-9). Mixed marriage was uniting believers in the One True God with the adherents of other gods (2:10-12). Negligence in ceremonial matters (1:6-10, 12-14) was manifesting itself, above all, in faithless tithing (3:8-10). Oppression of the impoverished was common (3:5).

The following historical circumstances are worth bearing in mind as one studies and expounds any passage from the Book of Malachi:

465 B.C. On the assassination of Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I Longimanus ascended the throne of the Persian Empire.

457 B.C. Ezra the Scribe, vested with full authority in spiritual affairs in Judah, led the so-called Second Return (Ezra 7-8). Finding priestly corruption and mixed marriage rampant there, he imposed reforms which were sealed with a national covenant.

444 B.C. In the so-called Third Return Nehemiah, cupbearer to Artaxerxes and newly appointed to the governorship of Judah, arrived in Jerusalem with a special commission to rebuild its walls. He found the rich oppressing the moneyless and took an oath from the leaders of Judah to end this injustice (Nehemiah 5).

444 B.C. Probably yet in this same year the people of Judah, under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, pledged themselves in a solemn covenant to keep the law with care, including the rules about marriage, tithing, and providing the needs of the temple (Nehemiah 8-10).

444-433. During his first governorship Nehemiah initiated the reconstruction and repopulation of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:11-7:4; 11:1-24).

433 (or 432). Nehemiah returned to Babylon for "some time" and the people of Judah quickly relapsed into their old ways. This spiritual recession clearly implies the additional absence in this period of Ezra, who had, of course, responsibilities elsewhere -- in the rest of Abarnahara (Ezra 7:25), in Babylonia (Ezra 7:16), and perhaps, as chief rabbi and minister of Jewish affairs, in the whole Persian Empire.

433-425 or shortly theretofore. The recidivism of Judah provoked divine displeasure in the form of drought, locusts, and dearth (Malachi 3:10-11).

425 or shortly theretofore. Nehemiah returned to Judah to reassume the governorship, taking drastic steps against backsliders of all kinds (Nehemiah 13).

The purpose of Malachi in writing the book bearing his name was to prepare the people of Judah for the coming of the Messiah (so as to receive, not His condemnation through impenitence, but rather His salvation through faith) (3: 1-6, 16-24 MT; 4: 1-6, 16-24 EV). The theme, correspondingly, of the Book of Malachi may be stated thus: True faith in the grace of God heeds the law of God. (The central verse is 3:22 [MT; 4:4 EV], which, however, is correctly understood only in conjunction with a true appreciation of 1:2 and the messianic prophecies of the book).

A unique feature of Malachi is his systematic use of the dialectic method of teaching. He quotes the question posed by his addressees (whether with their lips or in their minds) and then delivers the divine answer. Thus, no fewer than twenty-three interrogative sentences occur in a book of but fifty-five verses. Thus, although the style may be more prosaic than in the earlier prophetic books, the running debate produces a lively effect.

The book is basically a divine disputation with Judah in which God demonstrates His own faithfulness to His word (both law and gospel) and, on the other hand, Judah's faithlessness to Him.

This body of the book consists in all the verses intervening between the simple superscription of 1:1 and the general conclusion embracing the final three verses (3:22-24 MT; 4:4-6 EV). The following outline emerges, therefore, of the divine disputation with Judah (1:1-3:21 MT; 1:1-4:3 EV), with special emphasis on the section containing the verses currently before us:

A. Concerning God's Department (1:2-5)

B. Concerning Judah's Department (1:6-2:17)

1. Profanation of the Temple (1: 6-14)

2. False Teaching (2: 1-9)

3. Marriage with Unbelievers (2: 10-12)

4. Widespread Divorce (2: 13-16)

5. Impious Impatience (2: 17)

C. Concerning God's Department (3: 1-6): His Fidelity to His Word (Both Law and Gospel)

6. Its Central Realization: His Coming as Man (verse (verses 1-5)

a. Its Introduction by His Special Herald (verse 1a)

b. Its Occurrence (verse 1b)

(1.) Its Circumstances in Time and Place (verse 1b1)

(2.) Its Purpose and Certainty (verse 1b2)

(a.) Its Purpose (1b2a)

(b.) Its Certainty (1b2b)

c. Its Results (verses 2-5)

(1.) The Separation of Believers and Unbelievers (verse 2)

(2.) The Purification of Believers (verses 3-4)

(a.) The Ministry of the New Testament (verse 3)

- (b.) The Church of the New Testament (verse 4)
- (3.) The Condemnation of Unbelievers (verse 5)
- 7. Its Eternal Basis: His Changelessness as God (verse 6)

D. Concerning Judah's Deportment (3:7-12)

E. Concerning God's Deportment (3:13-21 MT; 3:13-4:3 EV)

The four verses before us, then, in this exegetical study comprise the majority of those in the middle section of the Book of Malachi. The final verse of the preceding chapter (2:17) is of special importance in setting the stage for this whole section which follows. For verses 1-6 of Malachi 3 serve, in fact, to rebuke to the expression of impious impatience with which Malachi 2 concludes: "Where is the God of the judgment?"

### **A LITERAL TRANSLATION AND COMMENTS**

1. Behold, I am sending My messenger,

And he shall clear a way before Me,

For suddenly will come unto His temple the Lord

whom ye are seeking,

Yea, the Messenger of the Testament

in whom ye are delighting --

Behold, He shall come, the LORD of Hosts has said.

The Second Person of the Trinity is clearly the speaker here in accordance with His general role, from the time of creation, as the spokesman of the Holy Trinity to His creatures. For He clearly refers to Himself in the first person by means of the pronominal suffixes of *mal'akhi* and *lphanai* which are rendered "My" before "messenger" and as "Me" following "before" in the translation above. He then refers to Himself in the third person as "the Lord" and "the Messenger of the Testament" and with all the pronouns and verbal forms which are rendered as "He" and "His" in the lines which follow. Such references to Himself in the third person by God the Son are as common as the same usage by the Hebrew historians and prophets.

The "LORD" printed in all capitals in the translation above represents the Divine Name, YHWH, which is ordinarily pointed with the vowels of *'adonai* in the Massoretic Text since, from time immemorial in the reading of the TaNaK, a form of *'adon* has been substituted for the tetragrammeton by virtue of a pious aversion to pronouncing the most exclusive name of the One True God. The Divine Name was, indeed, invented and assumed by God specifically to

emphasize His exclusive nature as the only Self-Existing One from eternity to eternity, from whom all things else receive being and preservation in time. The tetragrammeton, then, occurs as the penultimate word of verse 1 and in the final clause of verse 3 and the initial clause of verse 4.

It is, however, the actual noun *'adhon* which serves as the subject of the third clause of verse 1 and so is printed as "Lord" with only the initial capital in the translation above. The definite article would be used, of course, even without the ensuing clause, in referring to *the* Lord who Lord beyond compare as the Lord of Lords. Here, however, the definite article serves syntactically to tie *'adhon* to *the relative clause which ensues and thereby defines the specific Lord to whom reference is being made: "the Lord whom ye are seeking."*

The definite *ha'adhon*, therefore, is harking back to the Lord whose coming the murmurers in Judah were demanding in the preceding verse (2:17): "Where is the God of the judgment?" The reference is thereby, however, specifically to the Second Person of the Trinity, who was to come as the Messiah both to judge and, more importantly, to save. It was, indeed, by virtue of his saving work, rather than His judging, that the people of Judah should have been "seeking" His coming while recognizing the sin in themselves which made His salvation an absolute necessity if they were to escape temporal and eternal damnation.

The same relation to chapter 2:17 obtains also in the relative clause which follows the parallel "Messenger of the Testament": "in whom ye are delighting." The masculine plural participle of *chphtz* in 3:1 reflects back, with irony, on the third masculine singular perfect of *chphtz* employed by the critics of God in the preceding verse:

Everyone doing evil is good in the eyes of the LORD,

Yea, in them He Himself has delighted.

The contrite believers, of course, are continually delighting in the Messiah for the very reason that they realize themselves to be, in fact, evildoers in whom He has nevertheless graciously delighted Himself and to whom, therefore, He has imputed His own goodness in the eyes of the Lord.

The one whom the Second Person of the Godhead calls "My messenger" whom "I am sending to clear a way before Me" is the special herald of the Messiah who was to announce that He was already in the world and about to reveal Himself in a public way. Isaiah had already spoken of him in similar terms as the culmination of the prophets of the Old Testament (Isaiah 40: 3):

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness:

Prepare ye the way of the LORD;

Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Malachi, indeed, is clearly building here upon the foundation which the Prophet Isaiah had previously laid in the memorable prediction of the Messiah's special precursor with which he begins the third main unit of his book (40: 3-8). Malachi then returns to the predicted forerunner's function in the conclusion to his book, namely, in his final two verses (3: 23-24 MT; 4: 5-6 EV).

The reference of "My messenger" is directly and exclusively to the man whom we know as John the Baptist. Mark explicitly asserts the fulfilling of this specific prophecy already in the third verse of his gospel (Mark 1:3), and our Lord Himself confirms the assertion (Matthew 11: 7-11). All the evangelists, moreover, and, indeed, John himself speak of him and none other as the one predicted by Isaiah in the verse (40:3) on which Malachi builds here (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; and John 1:23). Both the Angel Gabriel, furthermore, and our Lord Himself identify John as the prophet like Elijah fulfilling the verse in which Malachi himself, in his conclusion (Malachi 3:23 MT, 4:5 EV), reflects back on the verse before us now (Luke 1: 16-17 and Matthew 11: 12-15).

The words which are rendered "clear" and "before Me" in the original text are members of the same lexical family, the relationship being, unfortunately, incapable of reproduction in the English language. The basic meaning of the verb *pnh* is "turn" and is so used with an intransitive sense in the qal [BDB, 815a-b]. The hiphil, with its causative significance, means "turn" in the transitive sense and "make a turn" (especially in Jeremiah), while the passive "be turned back" and "is faced" express the two instances of the hophal [BDB, 815b].

The piel of *pnh* has the distinctive significance of "turn away" in the sense of "put out of the way" (as in Zephaniah 3:15) and hence "make clear" or even "empty" (as in Leviticus 14:36). Brown-Driver-Briggs explains the usage in Genesis 24:31 as "clear away things scattered about, make orderly" and compares it to the German *aufraeumen* [BDB, 815b]. In Psalm 80 the verb piel, with no stated object, means "clear away" the "ground" -- or, really, other plants from the land selected -- in preparing the ground for the planting of a vine (verse 10). In half, however, of the instances of the piel, which is to say four out of eight, *the object of the verb* is derekh ("way") [BDB, 815b]. Besides the verse of Malachi before us (3:1) and the verse of Isaiah on which Malachi is building (40:3), the same combination occurs in Isaiah 57:14 and 62:10. The idea is to "free" the road involved "from obstacles" which would otherwise hinder progress along it [BDB, 815b].

The plural noun *panim* means "face" -- presumably as those points "turned toward" others which are most widely associated with the specific person by others [BDB, 815a, in 815a-819a]. The use of the plural in this case is the variety known as the plural of local extension (as is noted in *Classical Hebrew and Modern English*). Of the eight or so combinations of the construct *pnei* with prepositions, *liphnei* is, apparently, the most common [BDB, 816b-817b, in 816b-819a]. Although the word used most generally in the Hebrew Bible to mean "before" in the sense of being "in the presence of" someone or something, it is properly "at the face or front of" a person or thing [BDB, 816b]. Thus, *pnei* is used, with reference to position, to mean "before" in the sense of "in front of" someone or something [BDB, 817b]. Such is especially the case with verbs "of motion (with which *negedh* is hardly used)" [BDB, 817b].

Here in Malachi, in contextual terms, the main obstacles which would have to be cleared away from before the Lord to make His coming a blessing to people are the self-satisfaction which prevents them from feeling the need of salvation and the impenitence which keeps them from acknowledging this need. The "way" concerned here, then, can only be cleared by producing repentance in the hearts of sinners. The special herald of the Messiah was to be dispatched, in consequence, with remarkable powers to proclaim the law and gospel of God to this end. His relentless fulminations against sin were invested with the ferocity of Elijah, so as to bring contrition to Judah. He was empowered, on the other hand, with the new sacrament of holy baptism, so as to immerse the contrite in the salvation which was now already in the course of being won by the God who had now become man in Jesus Christ. All the gospels testify to the forcefulness of his ministry (Matthew 3:2, 7-12; Mark 1: 4-8; Luke 3: 7-18; John 1: 6-8, 19-36; 3: 22-36; etcetera).

The "Messenger of the Testament" is the Messiah Himself. The combination, to be sure, of *mal'akh* with *berith* in the construct chain *mal'akh-berith* is unique to this verse. It draws together, however, two aspects of the Messiah which were already well-known to the church of the Old Testament by the time of Malachi. All the way back to Genesis, for one thing, the Second Person of the Godhead is often called the Messenger of the LORD or, to say the same thing, the Angel of the Lord. He receives, indeed, many similar names in the Old Testament by virtue of His customary role as the spokesman of the Holy Trinity to the creatures of God. The prophets, secondly, had already predicted the execution of a new testament of God on the basis of the vicarious suffering unto death of the God-Man, most directly in Isaiah 42:6. By the terms of His will the Messiah was to bequeath to us sinners forgiveness of sins and so eternal life with Him (Jeremiah 31: 31-34).

In prophecies of the Messiah the word "temple" can certainly denominate the church of the New Testament. Here, however, nothing is predicated of this temple, such as eternity, which would lead us to abandon the ordinary significance of the term, which is also more in line with the references to the temple and its use in the preceding and succeeding contexts. The prime glory, indeed, of the Second Temple would be the sudden appearance therein of the God-Man Himself in the course of His accomplishing the redemption of the world. There He would be presented already as a infant of but forty days (Luke 2:22-38), and there He would often preach the message of His own coming (Matthew 26:55 and *passim* in all the gospels). In the tabernacle, to be sure, and the Temple of Solomon the people saw the theophany of the Messiah in the form of a cloud; in the Second Temple the people saw the Messiah in actual flesh. His incarnate revelation in this place which had long been the central site of His self-revelation before His incarnation was one of the many signs by which the Messiah was to be recognized by His people and distinguished from any counterfeits. The destruction of the Second Temple was certain proof of the His coming having already occurred in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who both proclaimed there the message of His testament and also announced there the impending destruction of the place to be rendered obsolete by His testate death.

2. But who will be enduring the day of His coming?

Yea, who will be the one standing at His appearing?



For He is as a fire of a refiner,

Yea, as soap of fullers.

The "coming" of verse 2 is still the first coming of the Messiah, as in the preceding verse. There is no contextual need to jump suddenly to the parousia, nor would the analogy of faith require such an alteration in the chronological frame of reference. The claims of the chiliasts notwithstanding, the prophets of the Old Testament were always fully aware of the era of the New Testament intervening between the first and second advents of the Messiah and carefully distinguished between them. The first coming of our Lord was not merely a coming in grace, nor will grace be lacking in His coming again.

There will be both grace and condemnation when He appears again; there was condemnation as well as grace when He came long ago. His own message embraced both the law of God and His gospel, as did the ministry of His messenger John. The destruction of the temple to which He came teaching both law and gospel occurred in the course of the terrible refining of Judah in which the unbelieving dross was clearly separated from the precious metal of those believing in Him. St. Simeon foresaw the results of His coming to Judah when first our Lord came within the courts of His temple as a man-child (Luke 2: 34-35, RSV):

Behold, this child is set for the fall

and rising of many in Israel,

and for a sign that is spoken against ...,

that the thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.

Verse 2 of Malachi 3 provides a good example of the prophet's unique dialectic method of preaching and writing, which includes his common use of rhetorical questions. Here, indeed, he is responding in kind to the carping question which concludes the preceding chapter (2:17): "Where is the God of the judgment?" There the murmurers in Judah are complaining of the delay of the Messiah in coming to judge and destroy all the enemies of the people of God. The Messiah was, of course, to come to judge men, but also and, more importantly, to save men. It was, indeed, as stated above, by virtue of his saving work, rather than His judging, that the people of Judah should have been "seeking" His coming while recognizing the sin in themselves which made His salvation an absolute necessity if they were to escape temporal and eternal damnation.

3. For He shall sit as a refiner,

Yea, as a purifier of silver,

And He shall purify the sons of Levi,

Yea, He will prove them as the gold and as the silver,

And they will be ones bringing nigh to the LORD

An offering by means of righteousness.

Malachi 3:3 is quoted in Article XXIV of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession (section 34) immediately following a more lengthy discussion of Malachi 1:1 [section 31-33]. Both citations find an appropriate place in the portion of the article on the mass entitled "What a Sacrifice Is, and What Are the Species of Sacrifice" (sections 16-65) [CT, 389-407]. The occasion is the use of the verse in the Roman Confutation to defend the papal doctrine of the profitability of the sacrament of the altar *ex opere operato*. The Apology, however, sufficiently refutes this misuse of Malachi from the words themselves and the parallel language of verse 16 of Romans 15 [CT, 395a-397a]:

This passage clearly requires the sacrifices of the righteous, and hence does not favor the opinion concerning the *opus operatum*. But the sacrifices of the sons of Levi, i.e., of those teaching in the New Testament, are the preaching of the Gospel, and the good fruits of preaching, as Paul says ...: "Ministering the Gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost," i.e., that the Gentiles might be offerings acceptable to God by faith, etc. For in the Law the slaying of victims signified both the death of Christ and the preaching of the Gospel, by which this oldness of flesh should be mortified, and the new and eternal life be begun in us.

In the original Latin of the Apology the quotation of Romans 15 begins with "sacrificio evangelium Dei" [BELK, 359a; CT, 394a] where the New American Standard Bible speaks of "ministering as a priest the gospel of God" and the Revised Standard Version of "the priestly service of the gospel of God" (verse 16) [as also in BC, 256].

The Messiah who has promised His precursor's coming and then His own coming in verse 1, now promises in verse 3 His companions and successors in the ministry of the New Testament. Within the contextual contours, clearly, of the preceding chapters, the "sons of Levi" are the public priests of the people of God. The public priesthood of the New Testament stands, on the one hand, in continuity with the public priesthood of the Old Testament, even as the priesthood of the new church as a whole stands in continuity with the priesthood of Israel as a whole.

The coming of the Messiah, nevertheless, would change the public priesthood in many ways. He Himself would assume the high priesthood and prime pastorate of His church, and He would then make His apostles the first ministers with Him of the New Testament. In the transition the majority of the public priests of the Second Temple would reject the True High Priest and would so be purged as dross from the new ministry of the church of God.

4. And the offering of Judah and Jerusalem  
shall be pleasing to the LORD,

According to days of eternity,  
even as according to early years.

In accordance with the usual usage of the messianic prophecies, the phrase "Judah and Jerusalem" is a pleonastic reference to the church, here to the church of all history. For the "offering" of the church in the era of the new testament is compared with her offering in her early years. The "early years" of the church would carry us back to the life of repentance led by the patriarchs and, indeed, to the life of repentance led by Adam and Eve following the calamitous fall into sin and the contrition and saving faith then worked by a gracious God.

The phrase, however, "days of eternity" traces the history of the church back even further into a boundless past, even as it thereby assumes a boundless future. For here the Lord smites again the self-satisfaction of the flesh and strengthens the hope of His penitents by reminding us that the righteousness of the church in His eyes harks back ultimately to His election of people in eternity to faith in the saving work of the Messiah and so to eternal glory with Him.