

# Malachi 4 - The "Day of the Lord"; Return of Elijah; The Two Witnesses

VI. God corrects Judah for questioning the benefits of practicing righteousness (Mal 3:13—4:6)

- (4) God defends the benefits of righteousness (3:16—4:6)
  - (B) God will destroy the wicked (4:1,3)
  - (C) God will bless the righteous (4:2)
  - (D) God's instruments for bringing blessing to the righteous (4:4-6)
    - (a) Obedience to the Mosaic Law (4:4)
    - (b) Elijah (4:5-6)
      - (i) Time of his coming (4:5)
      - (ii) Purpose of his coming (4:6)

## Malachi 4

(B) God will destroy the wicked (4:1,3)

**1** "For behold, **theday** is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of armies, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branches.

**1** "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."

**1** "The coming day is certainly going to burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and all who practice evil will be stubble—the coming day will set them on fire," says the LORD of the Heavenly Armies, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."

**1** 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.

— "...the day" - the Day of the Lord

— Unlike Mal 3:2-3, which emphasized the purification of Israel (in particular, the Levites), this passage emphasizes the destruction of the wicked (Cf. Is 66:15; Zeph 1:18; 3:8)

— So complete will be the judgment that the wicked (the arrogant and every evildoer; Cf. Mal 3:15), compared to stubble, will not have a root or a branch remaining.

— This does not mean annihilation in the sense of cessation of existence (the wicked will be resurrected, Dan 12:2), but rather the complete exclusion of the wicked from God's

Kingdom (Cf. Matt 25:46)

(C) God will bless the righteous (4:2)

2 But for you who fear My name, **the sun of righteousness** will rise with healing in its **wings**; and you will go forth and frolic like **calves** from the stall.

2 "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.

2 But the Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in its light for those who fear my name. You will go out and leap like calves released from their stalls

2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

- "...the sun of righteousness" - appears only here in Scripture

— "sun" - in Hebrew can be translated "servant"

- "...wings" - also, a fold in garment used for storing precious things; in the Hebrew, can be translated "corners"

- "...calves" - enjoying open pasture after being cooped up in a pen (stall) expresses the future satisfaction and joy of the righteous (Cf. Is 65:17-25; Hosea 14:4-7; Amos 9:13-15; Zeph 3:19-20)

(B) God will destroy the wicked (4:1,3)

3 And you will crush the wicked underfoot, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I am preparing," says the LORD of armies.

3 You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts.

3 and trample down the wicked. Indeed, they will become ashes under the soles of your feet on the day I do this," says the LORD of the Heavenly Armies.

3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do [this], saith the LORD of hosts.

- This not only indicates the finality of the judgment on the wicked, but it also brings to a sharp conclusion the answer to the cynical question asked by the unfaithful Israelites, "What do we gain by carrying out His requirements?" (Mal 3:14)

(D) God's instruments for bringing blessing to the righteous (4:4-6)

(a) Obedience to the Mosaic Law (4:4)

4 "Remember the Law of Moses My servant, the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

4 "Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

4 "Remember the Law of Moses my servant that I gave him at Horeb for all Israel—both the decrees and laws.

4 Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, *with* the statutes and judgments.

- "Remember" - used 14x in Deuteronomy as an exhortation to Israel concerning this covenant Law

- This command can refer to:

- (1) Mental acts of remembering or paying attention to something
- (2) Mental acts combined with appropriate external actions (in other words, recalling and obeying)
- (3) Acts of reciting or repeating something verbally

- In light of Malachi's insistence on obedience, meaning (2) seems to be the force of this command: "Recall it to mind and do it!"

- "...Moses My servant" - not only speaks of Moses' faithfulness (Heb 3:5) but also reminds the reader that the Lord Almighty (Mal 4:3) is the same God who powerfully displayed His judgments and His salvation at the time of the Exodus. And He is the Living God who gave the Ten Commandments to the people...

— At Horeb, the ancient name for Mount Sinai (Ex 3:1; Deut 5:2; Ps 106:19), He graciously accepted Moses' role as prophetic mediator in the giving of the entire Law (Deut 5:23-31).

- The people in Malachi's time needed a renewed fear of God; they needed to repent and be faithful to God's covenant

— Such repentance would cause them to benefit from rather than suffer in the coming day of the Lord

(b) Elijah (4:5-6)

(i) Time of his coming (4:5)

5 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet **before** the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

5 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

5 "Pay attention! I'm sending Elijah the prophet to you before the great and dreadful Day of the LORD comes,

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

- "...before" - this pinpoints the timing of the return of Elijah as before the Tribulation

(ii) Purpose of his coming (4:6)

6 He will turn the hearts of the fathers back to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and strike the land with complete destruction."

6 He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

6 and he will turn the hearts of fathers to children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I'll come, strike the land, and utterly destroy it."

6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

- The nature of Elijah's ministry when he returns will be that of a Jewish family reunion program.

— The Jewish family unit, so strong for centuries, has begun to break down. Elijah's ministry will be to restore this family unity in preparation for the Second Coming.

- Elijah's ministry may be as one of the Two Witnesses during the first half of the Tribulation

### **The Enigma of Elijah**

There is a great deal of confusion concerning the relationship of Elijah to John the Baptist. It should be kept in mind that Elijah was never promised before the First Coming of the Messiah. Elijah was only promised to come before the Second Coming of the Messiah and before the Tribulation itself. However, a forerunner was predicted before the First Coming of the Messiah in Mal 3:1 and Is 40:3-5. This was fulfilled by John the Baptist in Matt 3:1-6; 11:7-10; John 1:23.

But while John the Baptist fulfilled those prophecies concerning the forerunner before the First Coming of the Messiah, he was not Elijah who was promised before the Second Coming. This becomes clear when all of the relevant passages are taken into account. One important passage bearing on this question is found in John 1:19-23. In this passage, John the Baptist makes it clear that he is not Elijah. He never claimed to be Elijah, and when asked, he denied it. He only claimed to be the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy.

The next passage is found in Matt 17:9-13. In answer to the disciples' question regarding the coming of Elijah, the Messiah first states, using the future tense, that Elijah will indeed come to *restore all things*, which is a strong allusion to his ministry mentioned in Mal 4:6. But this was a promise in relation to the Second Coming, not the First Coming. Hence, Elijah is yet to come to do the ministry of restoration. The disciples' confusion at this stage was due to the fact that they did not yet understand the twofold coming of the Messiah and were still expecting the Kingdom to be set up at that time. The parallel passage in Mark 9:9-13 adds the point that if Elijah had come before the First Coming and restored all things, then all the prophecies of the sufferings of the First Coming would remain unfulfilled. Elijah will indeed come first but first before the Second Coming, not before the First Coming. John the Baptist did not accomplish the Elijah's ministry of restoration.

The Messiah then adds that in one sense John the Baptist was Elijah. But in what sense? Two other passages answer that. The first is in Matt 11:11-14. To understand what is being said, it should be noted that the Messiah is preaching the good news of the Kingdom in v11-12. If Israel had received the Kingdom, then John the Baptist would have fulfilled the function of Elijah and would have accomplished the ministry of restoration. But the Kingdom was rejected and hence, John the Baptist did not fulfill the function of Elijah; thus Elijah is yet to come to accomplish the work of restoration.

The second passage answering the question as to what way John the Baptist was Elijah is in Luke 1:13-17. In announcing the coming birth of John the Baptist, the angel declares that he will come "in the spirit and power of Elijah."

Consolidating what these verses are saying, some time before the Tribulation Elijah the Prophet will return to do his work of restoration. Thus, Elijah will serve as a forerunner of the Messiah's Second Coming in the same way as John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Messiah's First Coming. John was a type of Elijah in that he came *in the spirit and power of Elijah*. If Israel had accepted the message, then John the Baptist would have accomplished the function of Elijah, which was the work of restoration. However, John the Baptist and the Messiah were both rejected, and so Elijah is yet to come to perform the work of restoration before the Tribulation.

### **In Conclusion**

The last words of the OT are Malachi's ominous anticipation of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. This event of judgment, a climactic event in history, is a major theme of the prophets. The force of the warnings and appeals in Malachi's book hinges as much on the *certainty* of this coming judgment as on the covenant-based offer of grace.

The Book of Revelation renders the same expectation of judgment and repentance at the end of the NT (Rev 22:12-17) but with greater details about the One who will return.