



## Malachi - Chapter Four

### Summary of Chapter Four

The prophecy concludes with the promise of eternal judgement with all the evildoers being burned in the lake of fire but those who have remained faithful to God receiving healing for what they have endured in life.

There is a final call for the people of God to remember the teaching they have received through the law and to expect the return of the prophet Elijah before the Messiah finally appears. He will prevent the wrath of God from falling upon all the people.

#### h. Malachi 4:1-6 - The Great Day of the Lord

Malachi, like many other prophets before him, now reminds his readers that a day of judgement approaches. It will be a time of blessing for the righteous, for those who have sought God and have tried to follow his ways, but it will be a terrible time for those who have opposed God and who will face eternal damnation.

<sup>1</sup> See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. <sup>2</sup> But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. <sup>3</sup> 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.

#### Malachi 4:1-3

Although for all the arrogant and all evildoers it will be a day when they are burned up like stubble, for those who revere God's name, it will also be a day

when the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings: <<Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn>> (Isaiah 60:1-3), and: <<By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us>> (Luke 1:78), and they will subdue the wicked.

Just as the sun drives away darkness and clouds, bringing light and joy, so the sun of righteousness will appear to dispel gloom, oppression, and injustice. For the image of the rising sun applied to a great visitation from God, as just confirmed in Isaiah 60:1-2; for the recognition that the birth of John the Baptist had ushered in this expected era, as noted in Luke 1:78. The righteousness brought by this sun includes both judgement on evildoers and reward for those who are righteous in their deeds. Its wings are a poetic image for the rays of this sun, bringing healing to all who come under its influence. Some suggest that ancient Near Eastern depictions of a winged sun disk are reflected in the image. Malachi's readers probably would have thought this image predicted the sudden appearance of God himself, who is elsewhere compared to the sun: <<For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favour and honour. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly>> (Psalm 84:11), <<The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended>> (Isaiah 60:19-20), <<And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb>> (Revelation 21:23). But Christian interpreters throughout the history of the church have understood this prophecy to be fulfilled in Christ, who is <<the light of the world>> (John 8:12), and further confirmed in John 1:4-6, 9:5 and 11:9.

<sup>4</sup> Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. <sup>5</sup> Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. <sup>6</sup> He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.

#### Malachi 4:4-6

These closing appeals summarise the main points of Malachi's prophecy: Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, which is the primary focus of the first three disputations, and the promised sending of the prophet Elijah before

the great and terrible day of the Lord comes, the focus of the last three disputations.

Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai as confirmed in Exodus Chapters 19-20 and Deuteronomy 5:2. Malachi's own thoroughgoing dependence on the Law of Moses and many allusions to Pentateuchal texts prepare the reader for the first climactic charge. In the second charge, the reason for the identification of the coming prophet as Elijah is less obvious. Perhaps the need for an Elijah-like ministry was suggested by a long-standing drought: <<*Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word'*>> (1 Kings 17:1), <<*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing*>> (Malachi 3:10), and: <<*Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth*>> (James 5:17). Alternatively, Malachi's concern with the corrosive effects of marriage to an idolater (2:10-12) may have brought to mind Ahab's notorious interfaith marriage to Jezebel, which proved so troublesome to Elijah and so disastrous to Israel (1 Kings 16:31, 18:4, 18:19 and 19:2). No doubt Malachi would have welcomed an Elijah-like challenge to religious compromise and complacency as recorded in 1 Kings Chapter 18. It seems most likely, however, that Malachi recognised that of all the OT prophets, Elijah best fit the portrait of the messianic prophet like Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15 and 34:10-12. As such, Elijah stands alongside Moses in vv.4-6 as the representative of the entire OT line of prophets, much as he functions on the Mount of Transfiguration: <<*And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus*>> (Mark 9:4).

The promise to send the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes confirms the interpretation given here of Malachi 3:1-5, that the promised messenger is not Malachi himself but some future prophet. It is likely that this future prophet is identified with Elijah not because Elijah was spared from death, as if this might permit a literal return to life, but because the future messenger would have a prophetic ministry similar to that of the historical Elijah. Compare the many OT predictions of a future Davidic king that do not suggest David's literal return to life, such as: <<*But they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them*>> (Jeremiah 30:9), and: <<*I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken*>> (Ezekiel 34:23-24). The NT identifies John the Baptist as the fulfilment of Malachi's prophesied Elijah, for example Matthew 11:10-14 and 17:10-13. When John the Baptist denied that he was Elijah: <<*And they asked him, 'What then? Are you*

*Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the prophet?’ He answered, ‘No’>> (John 1:21), it is possible either that he was denying that he was Elijah in person, or that he rejected not the ministry predicted in Malachi but misguided popular elaborations of this promise based on other notable features in the original Elijah’s ministry, especially his many miracles, which pointed more to Christ than to John: <<**Many came to him, and they were saying, ‘John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true’>> (John 10:41); refer also to the comment made on Matthew 11:14 on the website.***

Amos 5:18-20 is the earliest known use of the prophets’ expression, the day of the Lord. It also occurs in Isaiah 13:6 and 13:9, Jeremiah 46:10, Ezekiel 13:5 and 30:3, Joel 1:15, 2:1, 2:11, 2:31 and 3:14, Obadiah 15, and Zephaniah 1:7 and 1:14. Perhaps in Amos’ day the term was in popular use for the time when the Lord would intervene and put Israel at the head of the nations, possibly based on Deuteronomy 32:35-37; but Amos, and all prophets after him, clarify what it would mean for the Lord to visit his people: it means judgement upon them if they are unfaithful. In Amos, the term points forward to the coming judgement on the Northern Kingdom at the hands of the Assyrians: <<**therefore I will take you into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts>> (Amos 5:27); in Zephaniah, it points to the coming judgement on Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. Other prophets use the term to signal God’s forthcoming punishment of other nations for their brutalities, e.g. Babylon in Isaiah, Egypt in Jeremiah, Edom in Obadiah and many nations both Joel and Obadiah. Malachi and probably Joel use the term to denote something farther off in the future. All of this indicates that the day is not unique, but may be repeated as circumstances call for it. The NT authors apply the term as well to the return of Christ: <<**He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ>> (1 Corinthians 1:8), <<But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed>> (2 Peter 3:10).****