

The Final Words Malachi 4

Introduction

The last section of Malachi contains the last inspired words of the Old Testament. There was no further special revelation for about four hundred years until the events of the gospels. God's final word in the Old Testament is the warning of a curse. But in the center of this passage, God also gives the promise of gospel victory and the vindication of His people.

Overview of the Text

A day is coming burning like an oven that will completely consume the wicked (v. 1). In that day, for those who fear the Lord's name, the Sun of Righteousness, speaking of Jesus, will also arise with healing in His wings. Then, His people will go out with joy, strong and secure (v. 2). They will trample the wicked like ashes under their feet (v. 3). The Lord then exhorts the people to remember the Law of Moses (v. 4). The book concludes with a promise that Elijah the prophet will come before this day (v. 5), bringing reconciliation between children and fathers. Apart from that kind of restoration, the Lord will come to strike the earth with utter destruction (v. 6). This passage is also chiastic, providing a contrast to this curse:

A – A day is coming that will consume the proud and wicked, root and branch (4:1).

B – The Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings to God-fearers (4:2).

C – The God-fearers will advance and trample over the wicked (4:3).

B¹ – Remember the Law of Moses (4:4).

A¹ – Before that day, Elijah will come and reconcile fathers and children; or a curse (4:5-6).

The Coming Day

Malachi has already mentioned the coming day (3:1-2, 17-18), speaking primarily of the time and results of Jesus' coming. Because the leaders of Jerusalem reject Jesus, a fiery judgment falls upon them in AD 70. The believing Jews are spared then, not only by their new life in Christ, but also because they obey Christ and flee Jerusalem (Matt. 24:16). However, the proud, whose hearts were not turned, are met with the burning oven of God's wrath as the Temple and the whole structure of the sacrificial system was committed to destruction. This is of course culminated in the final judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

Root and Branch, Fathers and Children (A, A¹)

Both v. 1 and vs. 5-6 speak of the coming day and the complete destruction it will bring ("root and branch", *cherem*, cf. Deut. 13:12ff). "Root and branch" is also contrasted with the fathers and children. When the wicked are consumed, they are totally cut off. The generations of the wicked do not last. On the other hand, Elijah, coming before that day, turns the hearts of the people so that generations are reconciled. We are told that this is speaking of John the Baptist (Matt. 11:10-14, Luke 1:17). John preached a message of repentance pointing ahead to the Messiah who was about to come. (Matt. 3:1-6). How does this message of repentance turn the hearts of fathers to children and children to fathers? The theme of God's Fatherhood runs through Malachi (e.g., 1:6; 2:10; 3:17). The Jews' covenant unfaithfulness meant they were not acting like sons of Abraham (cf. Gal. 3:7, John 8:39). The implication is that this brings conflict also between immediate fathers and children. John's message of turning back to the Father prepared the people (e.g., John 1:35-

42) for the gospel message that Jesus was the only way to truly be reconciled to the Father (John 14:6). Elijah/John will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers not directly, but they will be turned to one another as they both turn to the Lord. There is great joy that comes from being reconciled to the Father, but that joy is in God's kindness multiplied when generations are reconciled to Him and worship Him together (cf., Deut. 6:1-2). This is God's design, and it gives hope to Christians in all ages who desire to see their fathers and their children worshipping the Lord with them.

Law and Gospel (B, B¹)

The Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings points ahead to the coming Messiah. Jesus is the light of the world (Matt. 4:16, John 8:12). When He rises, the saints will go out rejoicing, secure and strong in their Lord. The metaphor for Christ here is rich. The light of the gospel gives life like the healing rays of the sun to those who had been in the dark. The rays are like wings, with which Christ would gather in His own to protect and comfort (Matt. 23:37, Ps. 91:4). The Hebrew word for wings (*kanaph*) is also the word for the hem or edge of a garment. The Jews were commanded to put tassels on the *kanaph* of their garments to remind them of God's Law (Num. 15:37-41). The woman with the flow of blood showed faith in Jesus as this Sun when she reached to touch the edge of His garment (Matt. 9:20-22). It is fitting, then, that the Lord's parting exhortation in the OT is, "Remember the Law of Moses." The tassels would now remind them also of the One the Law pointed to, who would bring healing that the law could not give (Rom. 3:20-26, John 5:46).

Gospel Advance (C)

At the center of the passage, then, the Lord declares that the faithful will trample over the wicked. Taking this with the previous verse, we see a picture of the beginning of the Church and the gospel takeover of the world. In His life before the cross, Christ healed much, but it was just a taste of the healing He would bring when He was raised from the dead and raised to the right hand of the Father. When the Sun of Righteousness rose on Easter morning, He brought healing to the world. He had conquered sin and death, and then, rising to the Father, He sent His church out ("Go, therefore...") to trample out the wicked and darkness (cf. Rom. 16:20). His saints continue this work of advancing His kingdom until death meets its final end and all of Christ's enemies have been placed under His feet (1 Cor. 15:24-26, Ps. 110:1). And they advance, rejoicing and secure in His care for them ("I am with you always"). Jesus wins, and because of this our labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:57-58).

Conclusion

Malachi's oracle is full of sharp rebukes and accusations. God strikes at the heart of those who put on a face of worshipping the Lord but do not fear God in their hearts. The message we get from Malachi is particularly for professing believers, for God's church. Malachi concludes with a dire warning of utter destruction to those whose hearts are not turned back to the Lord. But to those who fear the Lord, who cry out to Him, who confess their sins before Him, there is great gospel hope. Jesus wins in the end, and His victory means peace, rest, joy, courage, and security for you—in short, the hope and eventually the reality of eternal life. Remember the Law of Moses. Remember the Sun of Righteousness who died for your sins so that you might live as His forgiven and victorious people.