

# MALACHI

## MINOR PROPHETS SERIES

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

In Malachi 3:16 the last section of the book began with God promising to record the names of the righteous in a book of remembrance. These ones are God's possession and will be spared from the wrath that is coming upon the unrighteous.

In chapter 4 God expands his description of the coming day of judgment. For the wicked it will be the most terrible of days. God uses the word “*behold*” to introduce something that needs to be heard and which is very important. Yahweh announces that “*the day is coming*.” The timing of the coming of this day is unknown, but could be expected at any moment.

God addresses the wicked first who will see that day “*burning like an oven*.” The day of the Lord often is spoken of as a day of burning or fire. The word used for burning “*depicts the hottest fire, that of the refiner's furnace ... a large beehive-shaped metal structure vented in the roof. Wood was piled up in the furnace, ignited and fanned into a fire so intense that the flames shot through the roof vents (cf. Dan 3; Hos 7:7).*”<sup>1</sup>



The agricultural word “*stubble*” indicates a highly flammable leftover from the grain harvest. The picture is that of the hottest fire consuming the most combustible of materials.

- 1. What kind of people does Malachi 4:1 say will experience this great fire?**
- 2. How does Malachi 4:1 impress upon the reader the completeness of the destruction by fire of the wicked? (See also Matt. 3:10)**

In contrast to the fire which the wicked will face, in verse 2 God stresses the hope that is available to the righteous. The judgment upon the wicked will be terrible, **but** for those who fear the name of Yahweh the day of the Lord will be glorious.

The phrase “*the sun of righteousness*” shall rise seems to be a metaphoric description of the coming of the Messiah. As the sun is dependable on its rising we can be assured that the Son of God will also one day come. He is described as the sun of “*righteousness*” because all he says and does is right and he leads man to be right with God.

- 3. What does Zechariah the father of John the Baptist call Jesus in Luke 1:78?**

<sup>1</sup> Smith, James E. Postexilic Prophets. Lulu, 2007, p. 343.

#### 4. Name two or three effects we feel or experience from the sun that we also receive from the Son of God?

On the day of the Lord, when the Messiah comes, those who fear the Lord's name will find *"healing in its wings."* This ancient and picturesque language may seem hard for us to understand, but the lesson seems to be that the coming day of the Lord will bring healing and salvation from the trials and troubles of this life.



The joy of that day and the healing brought by it is described as being like the leaping of young calves released from the stall. The exhilarating freedom seen in the frolicking of a young calf describes the intense joy of the righteous on the day of the Lord. (See also Jeremiah 50:11)

#### 5. What word pictures might you use to illustrate the intense joy that the day of the Lord and salvation brings to the righteous?

The treading down of the wicked in verse 3 is a metaphorical picture from the treading of grapes in the winepress (see Rev. 14:19-20). Verse 3 is not calling on the faithful to take action against the wicked since it is God who will take vengeance on the wicked. The wicked are viewed as ashes which have been burned as stubble in a fiery oven. This verse pictures God as a God of action in the phrase, *"on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts."* The God of the Bible is dependable and will do what he says when the time is right. The wicked will not escape punishment.

This verse has been used by some in an attempt to prove that the wicked will be annihilated therefore there is no eternal punishment. We must realise: 1) This passage is metaphorical so we must not press the word imagery beyond what was intended. *"Besides, ashes do not always indicate annihilation because people who were very much alive could refer to themselves as dust and ashes (Gn 18:27; Job 30:19)."*<sup>2</sup> 2) No Scripture can contradict another Scripture. 3) We should interpret the difficult in light of what is more easily understood.

The Bible seems to clearly say that there will be eternal punishment for the unrighteous. Mark 9:48 speaks of hell *"where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."* Jesus speaks of the final judgment in Matthew 25:41 speaks of hell as an *"eternal fire"* and adds in 25:46 that it is a place of *"eternal punishment."* Paul refers to hell as a place of *"eternal destruction"* in 2 Thess. 1:9. The word *"destruction"* is appropriate because hell is a place completely removed from the presence and blessing of the Lord.

#### 6. Why might some Bible teachers be more comfortable with annihilation instead of eternal punishment?



Malachi brings this short book to a close beginning in 4:4 with a call to obedience to the covenant. These are God's last words recorded until the New Testament some four hundred years later. If the Jews were to be his people they must obey the Law as given to them by God through Moses.

God stresses that Moses was his *"servant"* to impress upon the people that the Law was God given and every statute and every rule within the law was to be obeyed.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 346.

Horeb and Sinai are both used to identify the place where the Law was given. Either these refer to the same mountain or Horeb may refer to the range of mountains with Sinai the particular peak where the Law was given to Moses.

In every generation and every age the way to repentance and restoration is through obedience to what God says. In the days of Malachi the people were to obey the words of the Law given through Moses. Today men and women can repent and find restoration to God through obedience to the teachings of the New Testament. God has communicated to man through his true and abiding word. We cannot please him apart from doing what he says in the ways he says.

### **7. If what God says is so important why is Bible knowledge so weak in many who call themselves Christians today?**

In Malachi 4:5 we have another prophecy of the coming of the John the Baptist who will prepare the way for the Messiah. Zechariah and Elizabeth were told before the birth of John the Baptist that would minister *“in the spirit and power of Elijah”* John is identified as the Elijah is to come in Matt. 11:14.



This Elijah (John the Baptist) would work to turn Israel back to God in preparation for the coming of the Messiah and the *“great and awesome day of the Lord.”* This great day may have a two-fold meaning. Many believe that the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70 is the primary focus. If the Jews would repent and accept the teaching of John the Baptist concerning the Messiah this destruction could be avoided.

The ministry of John was to lead Israel to repentance. As we saw in Malachi 3, God had called the people to *“turn”* and *“return”* and here again the word *“turn”* is a call to repentance and restoration. John urged everyone to repent including parents and children. His goal is to see a unity within Israel from father to son across generations as God’s people repent and return to God in obedience.

John was only partially successful and utter and terrible destruction did come upon the nation of Israel as Jerusalem is invaded and destroyed by the Romans. Those who did listen to John and accepted the Messiah were spared. In Matthew 24:15 Jesus urged the people to be ready for the *“abomination of desolation”* (destruction of Jerusalem and the temple) as prophesied in Daniel 9:27 and to flee Judea to the mountains. The Christians listened to the warning from Jesus and fled the slaughter.

Though God is a God of wrath he continuously offers salvation to his people if they will only repent and turn back to him. The ministry of the prophets included passionate calls to Israel to obey the commands of God. In Malachi God speaks to the people pointing out six specific ways in which they were disobedient as he calls for repentance.

The people of Israel in Malachi denied that they had disobeyed God in any of the six ways he specifies, yet their weak faith, unholy lifestyles, and lukewarm worship was unacceptable to God. They were unrighteous though they viewed themselves as righteous. God appeals for repentance yet the majority of the people are unmoved.

### **8. How is it that a people who claim to be God’s people can be unmoved by his impassioned calls for repentance?**

Four hundred years after Malachi, God sent John the Baptist to call the people to repentance in preparation for the coming of Christ. Typically, only a relative few of the people who heard God's message through John listened and obeyed.

God still calls for repentance and reminds us through the apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:9, *"The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."*