

Exegesis of Malachi 4:1-6

OT lesson for Pentecost 25, Series C, Nov. 14, 2010

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I. **Background** for the pericope of Malachi's prophecy of the Coming of the Messiah:

- A. Malachi's name in Hebrew means: "My Messenger."
- B. Malachi prophesied against the people of Israel around 433 B.C. after the exiles returned to Jerusalem under Nehemiah's governorship.
- C. Malachi's prophecy has many similarities to the things Nehemiah condemned when he had returned to Jerusalem the second time:

Sins condemned by Nehemiah and Malachi:

- Sacrifices defiled
- Tithes ignored
- Sabbaths broken
- Intermarriage with foreigners

II. **Interpretation** (translation from the Hebrew which has these verses as chapter 3:19 - 24):

- A. v.1a—"*For behold, the day is coming! Burning like an oven!*"
 1. This opening phrase is abrupt adding to the impact of the two Qal participles.
 2. What is meant is the coming judgment on Jerusalem, though it is inclusive of God's judgment on all who reject Him.
- B. v.1b— "*All the proud and everyone doing evil will be like stubble and that coming day will set them ablaze, ' says Yahweh of Hosts. 'Not a root or branch will be left on them. ' "*
 1. Malachi had earlier said that the evil prosper (3:15), but now he answers that paradox by proclaiming they will be punished.
 2. *Stubble*--(see Obadiah 1:18, Matthew 3:12). As the Promised Land was prepared for Israel's possession by purging out the Canaanites, so judgment on unbelievers will bring the saints into the Lord's inheritance of heaven (Matt 3:14).
 3. *Yahweh of Hosts*—found 265x in the Hebrew Bible with 21x in Malachi. This refers to Yahweh's position as the Lord over the armies of angels on heaven and is a term of judgment.
 4. *Not a root or branch*--proverbial for utter destruction (Amos 2:9).
- C. v.2a "*But for you who fear my Name will rise a sun of righteousness with healing in its wings*"
 1. In contrast to the wicked whose judgment will be like an oven that consumes the stubble (Matthew 6:30), the righteous will see God as a Sun [good play on words here for "Son"], not of condemnation, but "of righteousness"; not destroying, but "healing" (Jeremiah 23:6).
 2. *Fear my Name*—these are those in Malachi 3:16 who confessed God amid horrible blasphemy (Isaiah 66:5 , Matthew 10:32).
 3. *Sun of righteousness*--Compare how the NT authors show this is Christ: Luke 1:78 , John 1:9, 8:12 , Ephesians 5:14; and in His second coming, 2 Peter 1:19. (Also there are OT references to this: 2 Samuel 23:4, Psalms 84:11).
- D. v.2b— "*and you will go out and spring about as calves [released] from the stall. ' "*
 1. *You will go out*—like captives set free (reminder of the previous exile), pointing to the Messiah's setting us free from sin.
 2. *Calves from the stall*--when set free from the stall they go out with joy, as God's people should after absolution (Acts 8:8 , 13:52 , 20:24 , Romans 14:17 , Galatians 5:22 , Philippians 1:4 , 1 Peter 1:8).

- E. v.3— *“You will tread down wicked ones for they will ashes under the soles of your feet on the day I am doing these things,” says Yahweh of Hosts!*”
1. Refers to the great reversal of the evil who seem to prosper (Mal. 3:15) and the righteous who suffer.
 2. Now the faithful take part in the benefits of the judgment with the wicked under their feet!
- F. v.4— *“Remember the law of my servant Moses which I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.”*
1. *Remember the law*—“The law and all the prophets” were to be in force until John the Baptist (Matthew 11:13), since there were no prophets after Malachi; therefore God’s people are told, “Remember the law,” for in the absence of living prophets, they would forget it.
- G. v.5— *“Behold I am sending to you Elijah before the great and dreadful Day of Yahweh comes.”*
1. Just as “Moses” and “Elijah” are here connected with the Lord’s coming, so at the transfiguration they talked with Jesus, implying that the law and prophets which had prepared His way were now fulfilled in Him (Matt 17)!
 2. John the Baptist was *an* Elijah in spirit (Luke 1:16 Luke 1:17), but not the literal Elijah; since when he was asked, “Are you Elijah?” (John 1:21), He answered, “I am not.”
 3. So at the transfiguration, Elijah’s appearance with Jesus fulfilled this prophecy (Matt 17)!
- H. v.6— *“He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers; lest I will come and strike the earth [literally, land] with a curse.”*
1. The threat here is that, if this restoration were not effected, the Messiah’s coming would prove “a curse” to the “earth,” not a blessing. So it is for all who reject Jesus.
 2. *Curse*--Hebrew, *Cherem*, “a ban”; the fearful term applied by the Jews to the extermination of the guilty Canaanites. Under this ban Judea has long lain.
 3. Similar is the awful curse on all of Gentile churches who love not the Lord Jesus now (1 Corinthians 16:22). For if God spare not the natural branches, the Jews, much less will He spare unbelieving among the Gentiles (Romans 11:20-21).
 4. The last word of the OT is “curse” while the first word Jesus speaks as the Messiah in the NT is “Blessed” (Matt 5:3).

III. Preaching ideas

- A. Connect the Coming of Jesus with the fulfillment of this prophecy.
1. Jesus came to take the wrath of God’s judgment from us at the cross.
 2. He comes again for final judgment which will be a “curse” for all who reject Jesus, but a “blessing for all who have faith!
- B. The Sun of Righteousness
1. Jesus brings us the Light of God’s love and many other benefits we receive from the sun.
 2. Good metaphor of life (John 18:12), learning (Psalm 119:105), guidance (Psalm 23).
- C. The Joy of salvation, forgiveness and reconciliation
1. There are many illustration in Scripture of this, but here Malachi uses farming metaphors.
 2. Seeing a calf released from its stall is a sight to behold. So it is for the new believer! How do we keep the joy of our first love for those who have been long time believers though?
 3. Give a personal story of reconciliation perhaps and the joy it brings.