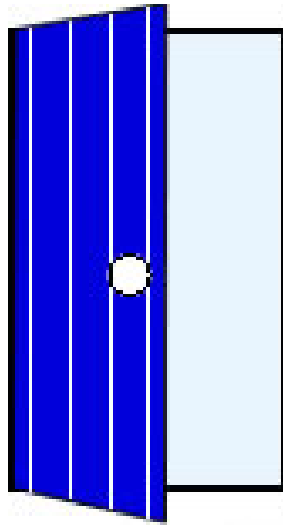


BIBLE STUDIES



Mill Lane Chapel

Malachi

(9) "The Sun of righteousness"

Read Chapter 4: 1-6

Malachi Chapters 3 & 4 are linked by the words, "**For**, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven." The conclusion of Chapter 3 and the commencement of Chapter 4, describe a "**day**." "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that **day** when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not. For, behold, the **day** cometh, that shall burn as an oven", 3: 17-4: 1.

The "day" described in 3: 17, 4: 1, 4: 3 and 4: 5, is the "**day of the Lord**", described by Jeremiah as follows: "Alas! for that **day** is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it", 30: 7. We must carefully distinguish between "the day of Christ" and "the day of the Lord."
(a) "The day of Christ." See, for example, Philippians 2: 16, and kindred expressions in 1 Corinthians 1: 8, 5: 5 etc. The location is always heaven, and the subject is always reward. It refers to the rapture of the saints, and to the judgement seat of Christ. **(b) "The day of the Lord."** This term is used frequently in the Old Testament, and refers to divine intervention on earth. It commences in Revelation 6, where the Lord Jesus opens the book to introduce the "day of vengeance of our God", extends to the end of the millennial age: see 2 Peter 3: 10. The "day of the Lord" will mean consuming judgement for the wicked (V1), and, ultimately, great blessing for the godly (V2). The problem in 3: 15 will then be fully and finally resolved: "And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."

Malachi 4 explains **how** God will judge the wicked, and **how** He will bless the godly remnant. He will intervene directly in human affairs. The chapter can be divided as follows: **(1)** The removal of the wicked, V1; **(2)** The rising of the Sun, V2-3; **(3)** The remembrance of the covenant, V4; **(4)** The restoration by Elijah, V4-6.

1) THE REMOVAL OF THE WICKED, V1

"For, behold, the **day** cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, 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." Compare Psalm 50: 3. The judgement that will be executed in "the day of the Lord", or "the great and terrible day of the Lord" (V5), is described in two ways **(a)** A heath fire kindled by the sun. Parched fields become a vast oven. Compare Isaiah 4: 4, "When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof, by the spirit of judgement, and by **the spirit of burning**." It is a picture of

irresistible judgement. (b) A farmer burning stubble preparatory for a new crop. The comprehensive character of the judgement is conveyed by the words, "that it shall leave them neither **root** nor **branch**." It will be complete: there will be no possibility of **regrowth** (no "root"), and no trace of **past growth** (no "branch").

We must not overlook the lesson for ourselves. The God of coming judgement is our God, and He is "a consuming fire." We must therefore heed the words of Peter, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness", 2 Peter 3: 11.

2) THE RISING OF THE SUN, V2-3

"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. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I do this (JND, 'the day that I prepare'; See also 3: 17), saith the Lord of hosts." The expression "Sun of righteousness" recalls the Lord's glory on the mount of transfiguration when "his face did shine as the **sun**", Matthew 17: 2. J.B.Hewitt comments: 'As the sun is the grandest object in nature, so we have in Christ the noblest exhibition of the righteousness of the old covenant that human history has ever known.' It also recalls the history of Jacob, where the history of the man reflects the history of the nation. After his experience at Peniel, prefiguring the coming tribulation, Jacob crossed the brook, "and as he passed over Peniel **the sun rose upon him**", Genesis 32: 31. One day the nation will cry: "Hail Thou Sun of righteousness." Unlike the natural sun (Psalm 50: 1, Malachi 1: 11), "the Sun of righteousness" will rise and never set. We should notice:

A) The effect of the rising Sun

i) He will dispel the darkness. What darkness! At the time of Christ's coming, the world will be in the grip of unparalleled spiritual darkness. It will be governed by a trinity of evil: the Dragon (counterfeiting the Father), the Beast (counterfeiting the Son), and the False Prophet (counterfeiting the Holy Spirit). Apart from the elect remnant, the whole world will be deceived. See 2 Thessalonians 2: 9-12. The dark world at the end-time will experience the darkness of divine judgement. See, for example, Zephaniah 1: 14-15: "The great day of the Lord is near.....that day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness."

ii) He will mark the beginning of a new day. He will mark the beginning of the seventh day of divine purpose for the earth: the millennial day. To this Psalm 118: 24 refers: "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."

B) The position of the rising Sun

He will rise in connection with the earth. The sun rises in relation to the circumference of the earth. To see the sun rise, we are obliged to look at the earth. But to see the morning star ("the bright and morning star", Revelation 22: 16), we are obliged to look heavenwards! The Old Testament ends with the "Sun of righteousness": the New Testament ends with the "Bright and Morning Star." The "Sun of righteousness" therefore draws our attention to the Lord Jesus as the Hope of Israel, and the Hope of the world.

C) The beneficiaries of the rising Sun

"But unto **you that fear my name** shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." So the godly remnant in Malachi's day will have their successors at the end-time. When Malachi preached, there were some that "feared the Lord", and when the Lord Jesus returns to reign, there will be some that "fear my name." Throughout the centuries, there has been a remnant amongst God's earthly people who have brought Him pleasure. See Romans 11: 5. At the moment, they are part of the church, but after the church has been taken to heaven, God will have a believing remnant amongst the Jewish people. The Lord Jesus referred to them in Matthew 24: 22, "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the **elect's** sake those days shall be shortened." The 'elect' are the 144,000 of Revelation 7. They are preserved by God from the attack of the demon locusts described in Revelation 9, and are found intact on "the mount Sion" in Revelation 14. Zephaniah 3: 12 refers to them: "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord."

The "days" to which the Lord Jesus referred, is the period of the "Great Tribulation", which will last for 1,260 days (see Revelation 12: 6 etc) or three and a half years. It is therefore most interesting to read that Elijah prayed "earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months", James 5: 17. There was a godly remnant in Israel during this period (1 Kings 19: 18), just as there will be a godly remnant throughout the duration of the "Great Tribulation" In fact, there is a remarkable correspondence between the two periods. Check it out!

D) The purity of the rising Sun

"But unto you that fear My Name, shall the **Sun of righteousness** arise." The Old Testament continually emphasises the righteousness of His reign. See the following passages in Isaiah: "He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears: but with **righteousness** shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth", 11: 3-4. "Behold, a king shall reign in **righteousness**, and princes shall rule in judgement", 32: 1. "Then judgement shall dwell in the wilderness, and

righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of **righteousness** shall be peace (see Romans 5: 1); and the effect of **righteousness**, quietness and assurance for ever", 32: 16-17.

E) The healing of the rising Sun

"The Sun of righteousness" will "arise with **healing in His wings**." This refers to the rays or beams of the sun. They are called "wings" because of the speed with which the rays of the sun spread over the earth. He will heal the nation of its backslidden condition. See Hosea 11: 4, "I will **heal** their backsliding." Compare Jeremiah 14: 19. What a healing that will be! Israel will prove in that day that "the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly", Psalm 84: 11. Compare Isaiah 42: 1-4. As the final Ruler, He will fulfil the requirements expressed by David, "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God: And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even as a morning without clouds", 2 Sam. 23: 3-4.

In consequence, we read: "And ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." The words "grow up" mean 'leap' or 'frisk.' See JND, 'And ye shall go forth and leap like fatted calves.' That is, like calves coming out into the sunlight. The remnant will rejoice that righteousness has at last triumphed. It will indeed be a "morning without clouds" for them! The nation will be rejuvenated. The prophetic scriptures give Jerusalem complete dominance in every sphere. Jerusalem will be **(a)** The centre of divine and universal **education**. See Isaiah 2: 3; **(b)** The centre of divine and universal **administration**. See, again, Isaiah 2: 3; **(c)** The centre of divine and universal **worship**. See Zechariah 14: 16.

If V2 describes the enjoyment of blessing when "the Sun of righteousness" arises, then V3 describes the execution of judgement at that time. "The upright shall have dominion over them **in the morning**", Psalm 49: 14.

3) THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE COVENANT, V4

"**Remember** ye the law of Moses My servant which I commanded unto him in Horeb for **all** Israel, with the statutes and judgements." They are therefore reminded of the covenant. God has told them what **He** will do for them that feared His Name. Now He reminds them what **they** were to do. His promises in connection with their **future** were to impact their lives **now!** It has been observed that the business of the prophet was to address the present in the light of the future.

We should notice the following: **(a)** They were to "**Remember**.....the law of Moses my servant." The subject of remembrance occurs thirteen times in Deuteronomy. Compare 2 Peter 3: 1-2, "This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:

that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour." **(b)** They were to recognise that God's word was **mandatory**: "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I **commanded** unto him in Horeb." **(c)** They were to recognise that this involved going back to the **beginning**. "Which I commanded to him in **Horeb**." Compare Galatians 1: 8-9, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which **we have preached unto you**, let him be accursed." The original stands. **(d)** They were to recognise that the word of God was binding on them **all**. "The law of Moses.....which I commanded unto him in Horeb for **all** Israel." **(e)** They were to recognise **every part** of the "law of Moses.....with the **statutes and judgements**." That is, the categorical law, and the case law.

4) THE RESTORATION BY ELIJAH, V5-6

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: 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." We should notice the connection between Moses (V4) and Elijah (V5). Both were on the mount of transfiguration. It was through **Moses** that the covenant was **made**: it was through **Elijah** that the covenant was **restored** (1 Kings 18: 30-31 etc). Elijah called the people back to God.

The coming of "Elijah the prophet" raises some interesting questions. For example, was this prophecy actually fulfilled through the preaching of John the Baptist, or does it still await fulfilment? If the prophecy has been partially fulfilled in John, but awaits complete fulfilment, are we to expect Elijah himself, and does the Bible tell us anything more about his coming? We will endeavour to address these questions.

A) Was this prophecy fulfilled by John the Baptist?

We should note the following in this connection. **(a)** Whilst, obviously, John was not literally Elijah (see John 1: 19-21), there was a correspondence between John and Elijah. The angel made this clear to Zacharias: "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before Him in the **spirit and power of Elias**", Luke 1: 16-17. See also Matthew 11: 4. "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John, and if ye will receive it, **this is Elias, which was for to come**." John was "Elias, which was for to come", because of the similarity of his ministry. Like Elijah, he called people back to God. Through his ministry, men and women were convicted of sin, brought to repentance, and prepared for Messiah's coming. **(b)** The Lord Jesus certainly referred to John in this way. See Mark 9: 11-13, "And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that **Elias must first come**? And he answered and told them, **Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things**; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things and be set at nought. But I

say unto you, that ***Elias is indeed come***, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him." See also Matthew 17: 10. John certainly ***did*** "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." See Acts 19: 4, "Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they ***should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.***"

B) Was this prophecy COMPLETELY fulfilled by John the Baptist?

In this connection, we must carefully consider Matthew 17: 11-13 (and Mark 9: 11-13): "Elijah truly ***shall*** first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come ***already***.....Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist." This *could* suggest that whilst the prophecy has been partially fulfilled, it has not yet been completely fulfilled. In favour of this, we could argue that it is not realistic to suggest that the prophecy was completely fulfilled in John the Baptist, since this would imply a period of 2,000 years between his mission and "the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord." We could also argue that the ministry of John preceeded 'the day of grace', rather than "the day of the Lord", and therefore the prophecy must await future fulfilment.

Against this, however, it could be argued that there is a precedent in this very prophecy for a gap of two thousand years between the sending of "Elias" and the "great and terrible day of the Lord." See 3: 1-4, where, clearly, there is a two thousand year period between the preaching of John the Baptist, and the coming of the Lord Jesus Who will appear "like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap"

C) Does the passage refer to John the Baptist AND Elijah?

In support of this suggestion, we could argue that events prior to the "great and terrible day of the Lord", have cast their shadow before them in the preaching and call to repentance by John the Baptist, and on that basis, we can expect another preacher in the mould of Elijah, like John the Baptist, if not Elijah himself. M.C.Unger, who espouses this view, suggests that he will be 'a great prophetic witness in Elijah's *official, not his personal capacity*, in the sense that John the Baptist was an Elijah in spirit. (Luke 1: 16-17).' Unger also notes that it cannot possibly be Elijah himself, since that would involve 'a glorified person with a ministry amongst men *before* Christ's advent in glory.'

We should notice, however, that the other prophetic scriptures are silent on the subject, unless, as is often suggested, he is one of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. But the fact that the whole world will rejoice at their death, strongly suggests that they will not "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers!"

Bearing in mind then that the prophetic scriptures give no further information, the suggestion that Elijah, or another preacher of the same stature, will literally exercise a ministry on earth immediately prior to "the great and terrible day of the

Lord", raises more questions than it answers! To the contrary, there is certainly a similarity between Malachi 3: 1-4 and 4: 5-6, and we can justifiably conclude **(a)** that in both cases, no reference is made to the interval between the first and second advents of Christ, and **(b)** that in both cases, the preacher is John the Baptist. It is significant that John himself made **no reference to the interval**: see Luke 3: 16-17, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I cometh.....He will thoroughly purge His floor, and will gather the wheat into His garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable." There seems, therefore, good reason to conclude (without taking an entrenched view!) that Malachi 4: 5-6 was fulfilled by John the Baptist. To quote, again, the Lord Jesus, "Elias is come **already**.....Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of **John the Baptist**", Matthew 17: 11-13. One further question remains:

D) How does the passage apply to John the Baptist?

i) "He shall turn the heart of the **fathers to the children**, and the heart of the **children to their fathers**." The way in which this verse is quoted in the New Testament suggests that this reconciliation will take place because people will turn from sin and disobedience. "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. and he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord", Luke 1: 16-17. As a result of John's preaching, there would be people **united** in their readiness to receive Christ. See, again, Acts 19: 4. (Note that one effect of the Lord's ministry was to **separate** families. "And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child.....for I am come to set a man at variance against his father.....", Matthew 10: 21, 35-36).

ii) "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** (JND, 'land', with particular reference to Israel) **with a curse**." This is true **now**. This world would have been judged long ago, were it not for the presence of believers. This will be true in the future. See Matthew 24: 21-22, "For then shall be great tribulation.....And except those days should be shortened, there shall no flesh be saved: but for **the elect's sake** those days shall be shortened", Matthew 24: 21-22. Compare Genesis 18: 23-25, "And Abraham drew near and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?"

The Old Testament concludes with reference to **"a curse"**. The New Testament concludes with reference to **"no more curse"**, Revelation 22: 3. In fact, the New Testament concludes with reference to divine grace. "The **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen", 22: 21. The reason for the change from "curse" to "grace" lies in Galatians 3: 13, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being **made a curse for us** for it is written, **Cursed** is every one that hangeth on a tree." The Old Testament ends with "Lest **I come** and smite the earth with a curse." The New Testament ends with, "Surely **I come** quickly", with the response, "Even so, **come**, Lord Jesus", Revelation 22: 20.

09.03.2001