

**HOW WOULD YOU FINISH THE OLD TESTAMENT? - Malachi 4:1-6** - "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. [2] But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. [3] 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. [4] "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. [5] "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. [6] And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

Since man's first disobedience in the garden of Eden the prophecies about a coming Redeemer had been given. One would come who would finally be of the seed of a woman and who would crush the serpents head (**Genesis 3:15**). Quite simply, that is what the Bible is all about. Malachi announces the days of prophecy and preparation are about to come to an end. God would be silent for the next four hundred years. How does God sign off? What are the people to heed and remember?

- 1) **TO HELP PEOPLE PREPARE FOR THE REDEEMER, THE IMMEDIATE FORERUNNER IS PINPOINTED AND ANNOUNCED - Malachi 4:5** - "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes."

This prophecy finds very specific fulfillment in the New Testament. In fact, we're told exactly how the angel **Gabriel** saw the fulfillment of those words: **Luke 1:11-17** - "And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. [12] And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. [13] But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. [14] And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, [15] for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. [16] And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, [17] and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

Or look at **Matthew 11:13-15** - "For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, [14] and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. [15] He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Jesus addressed a group of people who couldn't believe that God would use a scruffy messenger like John the Baptist to prepare the way for the Messiah. John, like Elijah, had much to say **then** and **now** to people who looked for involvement in **institutional religion** rather than the promised **Redeemer** for their standing before God.

You can sense the urgency in these words in the book of Malachi. The people had a history of ignoring all that God said - **Malachi 3:7** - "From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them...." See the patience of God when He says, "There will be no more messengers except one. He will come on the scene like Elijah. Make sure you don't miss what he's pointing to! Everything rides on your response to his message!"

- 2) **NEXT, YOU HAVE THE KIND OF WORK THE REDEEMER WILL DO IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE - Malachi 4:6** - "And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

Look at those words, "**turn the hearts**." We know that men's hearts aren't right. Even atheists see the division - the hatred - the twisted love of what's selfish and perverse. We know our hearts are turned in the wrong direction. These verses also relate to the work of God in the **homes** of His people. One of the first signs of a deep work of the Spirit of God in a man is the way it lights a passionate fire for **effective fatherhood**. And one of the surest signs of a genuine work of the Spirit of God in youth is a renewed devotion to the authority and training of parents.

People can only learn so much from human experts. We really aren't short on the **techniques of parenting**. There's surely a place for a book on how to raise your kids or how to live peacefully with your strong-willed teenager. All of these books and conferences and seminars have their place. But deep inside we all know only the Spirit of God can turn human hearts. What the prophet Malachi prepared the people for, the apostle Paul repeats with greater detail. Take the time to read his words on parents and children and marriage. And then notice that all his words on the family in **Ephesians 5:15-20** are set in the context of the **inner work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's people** (**Ephesians 5:17-6:20**). There is a profound reason for that. This isn't just a passage on "How to Be a Better Parent." It's about **life in the Spirit** and how that will be manifested in **marriage** (**5:22-33**), **home** (**6:1-4**), and **work** (**6:5-9**).

- 3) **THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL COME WITH BOTH HEALING AND CONSUMING FIRE - Malachi 4:1-2** - "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. [2] But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall."

There is always a trick to understanding the **timing** of many passages in the writings of the prophets. Exactly **what coming of Jesus** is being described? Many of the ideas in these verses seem to describe His **first** coming. Certainly that's the coming for which John the Baptist was the forerunner.

But what about these verses that talk about a day when "all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble" (**4:1**)? That doesn't seem to be a reality yet. Even John himself found this all a little confusing:

**Matthew 11:1-6** - "When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. [2] Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples [3] and said to him, "**Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?**" [4] And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: [5] the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. [6] And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

John had just recently prophesied about Jesus' coming - with His winnowing fork handy in His hand, **burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire** (**Matthew 3:10-12**). But now Jesus was here. And John was in prison. And the chaff were all partying upstairs, getting ready to execute John. What was going on? No wonder John began to ask, "Should we maybe be looking for someone else?" After all, Jesus was eating and drinking with the chaff. He didn't burn them up.

So how are we to understand these closing words of Malachi? I think it's best to gain our understanding from the lips of Jesus Himself. In a very significant passage of Scripture He announced His mission to the people of His day:

**Luke 4:16-21** - "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. [17] And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, [18] "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, [19] to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." [20] And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. [21] And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

The passage Jesus quoted was **Isaiah 61:1-2**. The words Jesus quoted don't complete the words Isaiah penned concerning the Messiah's mission. In fact, the very next phrase after the place where Jesus stopped quoting says this - "**to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor** [that's where Jesus stopped] ....**and the day of vengeance of our God**"

So the question is why did Jesus stop reading where He stopped reading? What about John's winnowing fork and unquenchable fire? Didn't Jesus come to do that too? Yes. But not yet.

The day of judgement would follow a marvellous window of grace and mercy and pardon. First He would come with "healing in His wings." First, He would work in softening and turning the hearts of those who would hear and acknowledge Him.

Do you see it? If you are away from God, this is your day! This is the way God wraps up the Old Testament. Through His prophet Malachi the world is told, "There is one more big event to watch out for. Make sure you don't miss your golden opportunity. God will speak again after a long time of silence. There will be the dawning of a brand new day!"

That day is still with us. Notice that everything hinges on responding to God's last word. There's either healing or curse. That's the final warning - the final word of the Old Testament. There will come no more offers. There is coming marvelous **mercy and pardon** for the repentant. But also nothing but a **curse** for those who ignore God's Son.

So the answer to John's question - "where's the fire? - where's the judgement?" - is found here. Jesus came to offer healing to those who would listen. He will come again to judge with burning fire those who refuse. This is not the day of final judgement. But is **is** the day of sentencing. It **is** the day of recording.

What about people who reject the Son? The New Testament says they're doomed. Listen to what Jesus Himself said:

**John 3:18** - "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

**John 3:36** - "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son *shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*"

Those who choose not to believe are not judged yet. But they are already sentenced. Their fate is sealed by their response to the Son who would long to come to them with healing in His wings.

So we too live in those shadowy days looking forward to another coming of Jesus. And just as the people of God had to be awakened to His first coming, we need to be alert to His second coming. Receive His unbelievable grace and mercy. Live as His holy bride. And make sure we know Him as our Savior and Lord.