

December 7

Scriptures: Read Malachi 3 & 4

Key Verse: “But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings...” (Malachi 4:2)

Overview

As Malachi was exposing the people’s sinfulness, it came to light that some were questioning the justice and character of God. They saw that the wicked were prospering and felt that it was not worth living a constrained life serving a God who seemed indifferent about whether a person is good or evil — a God who would allow the wicked to have success and high positions instead of punishment (2:17; 3:13-15). The importance and seriousness of Malachi’s answer is indicated in the word “behold” (3:1). The people were to know that God had a plan, and that plan included the judgment of the wicked; they certainly would not escape punishment. Malachi wanted the people to learn that faithfulness and righteousness would indeed bring great rewards and that the Lord took careful note of all the righteous.

God’s plan for the purification and redemption of His people would be preceded by His messenger, who would prepare the way for the Lord. This was fulfilled by John the Baptist, who prepared the spiritual ground for Jesus’ ministry (Luke 1:76; 3:4-6; Isa. 40:3-5). The Jews had longed for the coming of the Messiah, but many had the wrong idea. They believed that His coming would bring blessing to all the Jews and did not expect that they themselves would be judged or put through the fire. Malachi prophesied, however, that indeed He was coming, but because of the nature of His coming, who could endure it? — only the righteous and pure. Malachi, like John the Baptist, foretold that the Messiah would be One who refines and purifies, but inherent with such a process is the removal of all impurities through the fire. In this way, the end result would be a holy and acceptable priesthood (3:2-3; Matt. 3:9-12; 1 Pet. 2:9).

As in other prophecies there is often a blending of events, such as those in the near future with those in the last days. Malachi appears to blend some factors that would relate Jesus Christ’s first coming with that of His second coming. It will be at His second coming that He will come swiftly to bring judgment upon all those who practise wickedness, including sorcery (witchcraft/occultism), adultery (immorality), false swearing (hypocrisy/deceit), and oppression of the helpless and needy (3:5). The only hope will be for the pure and undefiled — those whose sins have been washed away by the blood of Jesus.

Malachi gives hope for the people of Israel which is based upon God’s unchanging character. God still loved them and still extended His grace. Although, as a nation, they had strayed away from God and disobeyed Him, there was yet hope through repentance and returning to Him. A remnant of Jacob would survive God’s purification process, for God would be faithful to His covenant with their forefathers (3:6-7).

After the Lord called for their repentance and return to Him, they still obstinately questioned, “In what way shall we return?” (3:7). In an attempt to bring light to their spiritual blindness, Malachi makes a specific charge, and yet there were many areas in which they had fallen short. His

charge, however, was in the most sensitive area — that of their wallets. The Lord, through Malachi, accused them of robbing Him by withholding their obligatory tithes and offerings (cf. Lev. 27:30-33; Num. 18:20-32; Neh. 10:37-39). For this reason, the temple worship could not continue as it should, since the priests and Levites did not have the support that God had planned for them (cf. Neh. 13:10-12). Malachi explained that this neglect had resulted in their lack of blessings. The New Testament teaches that we are to be stewards of God's money and that giving is more than mere duty, but it springs from our joy, love, and gratitude to Him (e.g. Lk. 19:8; Mark 12:42-44). It is giving back to Him what is already His (1 Chron. 29:14). By the example of the early church, we see that some gave according to their ability, but many gave above that in support of those who ministered to them, as well as for the needy (2 Cor. 8:2-5; 1 Cor. 9:11-14; Mt. 25:35-40; Acts 4:32-35). Malachi challenged the people to give and put God to the test. The abundant blessings to follow would be both spiritual and physical, and it would serve as a witness to the heathen that God was with them and that He was the true Source of blessings (3:8-12; Luke 6:38).

Malachi's message reached the hearts of some of the Jews who still feared the Lord. They likely discussed among themselves the necessity of returning to God with their whole hearts, and they would have made a public confession of their faith and resolve to obey God. The Lord was pleased with them, and that day their names were recorded in the Book of Life (Luke 10:20; Isa. 4:3; Ex. 32:32; Rev. 20:12; 21:27). They would become a part of that remnant the Lord would spare. They would be honoured with rewards in heaven and would stand with the saints of God in judgment over the wicked (3:16-18). At that time (the day of the Lord), Malachi declares that the wicked will be utterly consumed by God's fiery wrath (4:1), but the righteous who fear God will be gathered together by "The Sun of Righteousness", the Light of the World, the Messiah Jesus, who will heal and bring comfort, joy, and victory over their enemies (4:2-3; cf. Luke 1:78; John 8:12).

The last few verses of the Old Testament exhort the people of Israel to "remember [keep] the Law of Moses" (4:4), for in so doing it would prepare them with expectant and open hearts for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. Once again, Malachi makes mention of the prophet in whom dwelt the spirit of Elijah (John the Baptist, Matt. 11:14; 17:10-13), who would prepare the way and open the people's hearts that they might recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah. How fitting that God would foretell of John's coming through Malachi, the last prophetic voice before that of John the Baptist some 400 years later. John's preparation was crucial, for if his message had been rejected and no one was ready to believe in Jesus, God might have stricken the earth "with a curse" at that very time (4:6b). Malachi's prophetic warning comes from the loving heart of God who desires that all men come to repentance and a knowledge of His Son (1 Tim. 2:4).

Prayer

Lord Almighty, we thank You for the way in which You provide for all of our needs. Help us to be faithful in returning freely and willingly to You a portion of that with which You have blessed us.