

MALACHI 4:1-6
God's Answer to Belief and Unbelief

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. These six verses were the last words of inspired scripture in the Old Testament canon. For the next 400 years, until John the Baptist, God gave no more written revelation to His people. NOTE: What God says in these verses must be very important.
- B. These Jews had thought it unprofitable to serve God because the wicked were prospering and the righteous were suffering (Mal. 3:14-15). There will be a final judgment at which time God will, without respect of persons, judge men (3:18), and at that time true believers will be blessed and the wicked shall be judged. NOTE: The true believer receives the great majority of his blessings in eternity, not time.

II. JUDGMENT FOR UNBELIEVERS (4:1)

- A. **“For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven”** God speaks about a future day of judgment for unbelievers. There most certainly is a day of reckoning coming for all men. NOTE: This day of judgment will be at the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15) where God will judge all unbelievers. Because God's judgment is often likened to fire, the day is said to burn as a furnace. Unbelievers will be judged according to their works and their works will be shown to be inadequate to save. Only the grace of God through faith in Christ can save which results in works pleasing to God.
- B. **“And all the proud, yea, and 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.”** The wicked have their just dessert of judgment and it is certain. This judgment will be total for the words "root and branch" speak of totality. The wicked will be utterly destroyed. NOTE: Annihilationists try to make this verse prove that the wicked will be blotted out of conscious existence completely and hell is only nothingness without consciousness. However, the Bible speaks of a final resurrection of the wicked (John 5:29-30) and "resurrection" always refers to the body. The wicked will have a body, soul and spirit judged at the Great White Throne. It may be that their bodies will be burned in the Lake of Fire if hell is literal burning fire. The Bible knows nothing of souls that go out of existence through the judgment of God. The godly are in conscious bliss eternally, while the wicked are in conscious woe throughout eternity. There must be conscious existence or the thought of eternal judgment and punishment would be meaningless (Matt. 24:46; II Thess. 1:9).

III. BLESSING FOR BELIEVERS (4:2-3)

- A. **“But unto you who fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.”**
1. For those who "fear" God (true believers) there is a special portion assigned to them. They shall be blessed by the Sun of righteousness.
 2. The "Sun of righteousness" may be an eternal period of blessing for the godly in the future. However, this may be a figurative reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah (Psa. 84:11; Isa. 9:2; 49:6). NOTE: Eternal bliss is the portion of the true believer because he believes in Messiah who gives spiritual healing.
- B. **“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 shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts.”** This is figurative language but the righteous will be set free and have the vitality of a frisky, gamboling calf in a stall. The righteous (true believers) will tread down the wicked. The ungodly are compared to ashes as a result of the fire of God's judgment. NOTE: God reverses in eternity what is usually true in time - the righteous shall be blessed of God and the wicked judged.

IV. EXHORTATION TO BELIEVERS IN ISRAEL (4:4) - "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him at Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.” The true believers in Israel are

exhorted to keep the Mosaic Law as a rule of life. NOTE: These Jews were not saved by keeping the Law but were saved by grace through faith in God and the promised Messiah. As true believers they desired to keep the Law to evidence the reality of their salvation but they never kept it perfectly.

V. THE PROMISE TO BELIEVE IN ISRAEL (4:5-6)

A. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."

1. Some Bible scholars believe that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of this prophecy (Matt. 11:14; Luke 1:17) and that Elijah came in John (Matt. 17:10-13). The "dreadful day of the Lord" would be the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D.
2. The more traditional Jewish and Christian view is that the real person Elijah will return to do a ministry before the second advent of Jesus Christ. John said he was not Elijah (John 1:21). John the Baptist came in the "power and the spirit" of Elijah (Luke 1:17); that is, his ministry was somewhat similar in that both were calling an apostate nation back to God. Elijah will "restore all things" when he comes and John did not do this in his ministry (Matt. 17:11). Elijah is also said to precede the "great and terrible day of the Lord" which refers to the second advent (Mal. 4:5). Because of the above arguments, it would seem quite possible that one of the two witnesses who will evangelize the world in the Tribulation will be Elijah (Rev. 11:3-12). NOTE: As John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah before the first coming, so Elijah will come in person before the second coming.

B. "And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of... the children to their fathers."

Elijah's ministry will be to reconcile the unbelieving Jews in the Tribulation to the Messiah, and thus reconcile them with their believing ancestors and forefathers (Abraham, Jacob, Moses, etc.). The effect of the preaching of Elijah will be to bring back the Jews then in being to the faith of the believing Patriarchs, preparing them for the second advent.

C. "Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

1. The idea behind a "curse" is destruction and extermination (Lev. 27:28-29; Deut. 13:16-17). Elijah's ministry will be one of the main means that God will use to convert that last generation of Jews before the second advent, and this restoration will avoid God bringing a curse on this earth. E.B. Pusey says,

The prayer and zeal of Elijah will gain a reprieve, in which God will spare the world for the gathering of His own elect, the full conversion of the Jews, which shall fulfill the Apostle's words, "So shall all Israel be saved." (Minor Prophets).

2. The Jews read 4:5 after 4:6 because they do not want to end up the Old Testament canon with the word "curse." NOTE: Men need not be afraid of the word "curse" if they realize that none but Christ saves (Acts 4:12; 10: 43) and Christ has born the curse for all who believe in him (Gal. 3:13). NOTE: It is interesting to note that the last chapter of the Old Testament ends up with the message of eternal judgment and a final appeal for men to repent and turn to God.