Malachi 3-4 • A Word for the End Times

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Open your Bible please. Take it out. Open it up to the last book of the Old Testament, which is Malachi. If you open it up and you're in the New Testament, you've gone too far; take a left. And we are in the last two chapters of Malachi, chapters 3 and 4. Let's begin with prayer; just ask the Lord's guidance.

Father, every single time we dig into the Word, we've got to come to You. We've got to remember to come to You and say, "Lord, speak to me through the scripture. Speak to me Lord." This is Your Word. This is the spiritual dynamic of truth that You have preserved for us all these many centuries, and You have done it so powerfully and You continue, Lord, to bring forth that transforming work of Your spirit whenever we consume the Word. And we just trust that tonight will be no different.

So, Lord, as we go through these last two chapters of Malachi, and as we study the prophecies that You laid upon the heart of Malachi to record for us concerning the last days, in the events they're in, we ask You to speak to us and prepare our hearts, prepare our minds, minister to us spiritually, give us grace and insight into the things that will be taking place in the coming days. So, we ask Your guidance; we ask for Your spirit to open us up, to hear Your voice, and we ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Malachi chapter 3 begins with a prophecy that covers both the first coming of Jesus and the second coming of our Lord, and it begins this way. Verse 1, it says:

[1] "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts."

So once again, in just a single verse of scripture, we are presented with a prophecy that covers two separate time periods. This is referred to - we've talked about this many times in the past, you've heard me talk about it - it's

called the Law of Double Reference. It's where a prophecy has a short term from the standpoint of the prophet, and then a long-term fulfillment. And this is seen many times throughout the Old Testament. It is even occasionally seen in the New Testament. And the first reference that we get from this is obviously to the ministry of John the Baptist.

Because if you read those words here in Malachi, you thought, "Ooh, that sounds familiar," well, there's good reason for that because it is actually prophesied or I should say, quoted by Jesus as He was speaking about John the Baptist. Let me show you on the screen. It's from Matthew 11, and it goes like this:

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Matthew 11:7-10 (ESV)
*"As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John (*and that's John the Baptist*): 'What did you go out in the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet*?' *Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written,* (and then Jesus goes on to quote Malachi 3:1) '*Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'"*

So, it's pretty obvious Jesus is giving us a fulfillment right there. But this is a short-term fulfillment because if you really read through that passage, you're going to see that there are hints that this prophecy in Malachi 3:1 extends beyond just the first coming of Jesus, specifically where we read *"and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple."*

That is a statement that is more reflective of the second coming; the sudden return of our Lord Jesus in His second coming. But if that isn't enough, we go on to verse 2, where we're going to see the second coming outlined a little bit more clearly. Look what it says in verse 2 in your Bible, it says:

2 "But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?"

Now those words speak of judgment. Those words speak of the difficulty of His second coming where it says, "*who can stand*." Those are not words that are indicative of His first coming. His first coming was a gentle coming.

Anybody could stand in His first coming. In fact, we just looked at this last Sunday in our study of the Gospel of John. Remember what the Apostle John told us about the first coming of Jesus. Let's put it up on the screen to remind you.

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<u>John 3:17 (ESV)</u>
"For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

That is the characterization of the first coming of Jesus Christ; not condemnation, but saving. He came to save us. He came to rescue us. He came to ransom us from the grave, from our sin and the death that it produces. So, the words that are reflective of the first coming of Jesus are very comforting.

But notice here again that in verse 2, Malachi, or the Lord through Malachi, says:

2 "*…who can endure his coming? Who can endure that day, the day of his coming?*"

He goes on to predict more about that in verse 2, where he says:

"For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap."

Now those are two interesting sort of illustrations that speak of the purifying work of the Lord that is going to take place at His second coming. And you'll notice he uses examples that are kind of harsh. When he talks about a refiner's fire, that speaks of purification through intense heat. That's the way the refiner would take care of or get rid of the unwanted elements from the metals like gold and silver. He'd put them in a crucible and refine those metals by burning away the parts that would burn so that just the pure metal was left, but it involved intense heat.

Now that's a picture of judgment you guys. That's not talking about His first coming, that's talking about His second coming. And then this whole idea of the fullers' soap; we use detergent today that talks about being gentle on your clothes, you know? Well, fullers' soap was not gentle on your clothes. It washed them and cleansed them, but it used a strong alkaline base to draw out and clean.

And of course, then after they were done using the fullers' soap, they'd take them down and beat them on a rock. And that's really not a sign of gentleness either, but that's really not in view here. But these pictures of the refiner's fire and the fullers' soap, these are tough, harsh means of refining and cleansing. And again, that's more indicative of His second coming than His first.

So, you can see in these first two verses, we have the first coming of Jesus, and we have the second coming of Jesus; first speaking of John the Baptist and his preparation, and then this work of purification that Jesus brings on His second coming.

It goes on even further to speak of a second coming in verse 3 to say:

3 "He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years."

And again, these are words that apply not to the first coming, but to the second coming of Jesus, very much reflect the change of the way Israel will worship the Lord following the second coming of Jesus.

It gets even clearer in verse 5 that we're talking about his second coming when it says:

*5 "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. (*Again, that's not what He came to do in the first coming.) *I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts."*

Well, here you go. I mean, we know that the second coming of the Lord is going to be a time of judgment and purification for the House of Israel.

It's also going to be a time of salvation for the House of Israel. And that is precisely what these words reflect. And the Lord goes on here speaking through the prophet in verse 6 saying:

6 "For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed."

This is making a very interesting, but a very theological statement about the Lord. We live in a world where everything changes, everything. But the Lord here speaks of Himself saying, *"I the Lord do not change."* Now in theological terms - don't worry, we're not going to have a test - but in theological terms, this is called the immutability of God. So, when somebody says God is immutable, it means He doesn't change. He never changes.

Now, that might sound tremendously boring to you and me, but it is a reason to praise His name because what it means in a practical sense is that whatever promises, whatever words he spoke, He's going to be true to those. He will never go back on His word. He can't go back on His word because He doesn't change. So, His expressions of love and mercy and tenderness will never change.

I might say something to someone that expresses tenderness and mercy, and then changed my mind later on because maybe they did something to hurt me or to offend me or something like that. And suddenly I'm no longer feeling that same sense of compassion or even like for the person. And you say, "well, what happened? What changed?" "Well, they did this, they did that." It doesn't matter. We do things against the Lord, His feelings toward you don't change. They don't change, because He does not change.

Now this doesn't mean that God doesn't minister differently in the lives of His children; doesn't mean His methods don't take on a different form. We see this between the old covenant and the new covenant. The old covenant was a covenant that God made with Israel and it was a physical covenant. If you look at the promises in the old covenant, you see that they're all physical.

Obey me and I'll give you the land. I'll bless you in the land. I'll bless you against your enemies. Your kids will be strong and healthy. Your crops will be good. They'll be abundant, and I'll keep sicknesses that the Egyptians had to deal with, I'll keep those off you. They were all physical. Now, is that what we deal with in the new covenant? Do we have a physical covenant with God?

There's a lot of Christians that would like to say yes, but we don't. When you begin to read and study the book of Ephesians in the New Testament, Paul begins in the very first chapter of Ephesians praising the Lord because of the spiritual blessings that are ours in Jesus. And he begins to recount them and he starts talking about all these spiritual blessings that are ours.

Now, it doesn't mean God doesn't bless us physically. What it means is those aren't part of the covenant. Are you with me? When I say not part of the covenant, I mean, they're not covenant promises.

Here's the point I'm making in this little illustration. Physical promises are not guaranteed in the new covenant, spiritual promises are. In the old covenant it was physical promises that were guaranteed; promised if they would obey. The whole point is here, God changed the way he dealt with people but He Himself does not change. Very important.

So, God keeps His word and what He says here in verse 6 is because I don't change, you're not consumed, you're not destroyed. And I, because I don't change, and that means I keep my word. You're still alive today as a nation.

But He reminds them of their history, and their history has given God plenty of opportunity to wipe them away. He says in verse 7:

7 *"From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?"*

In other words, Lord, give us a practical way that we can return to You. So, God says, "alright, I'll give you an answer on that one" - verse 8:

8 *"Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?'"* (And here's God's answer,) *in your tithes and contributions.*

Alright, let's stop there for a minute. Let's remind ourselves that under the Mosaic Covenant, the Israelites were commanded by God to give a 10th to the Lord. And that's where we get our word "tithe", that literally means a 10th. And they were to give this primarily as support for the priests. And this would go into the storehouses, and the priests would draw from that the grain, animals, things like that. And it would be used to support the priests in their ministry because that's the way God intended it to work.

The nation of Israel and all the tribes that made up the nation of Israel would support that one tribe of the Levites who were called to that ministry in the priesthood. And if they reneged on that, if they did not walk in obedience to the Lord's command related to the tithe, the Levites would be forced to abandon their duties.

And this happened during the history of Israel. They would abandon their duties and they would go to farming, start farming on their own, and they would neglect the work of the ministry of the temple because the people weren't being obedient to give their tithes and offerings to the house of the Lord.

And so, here's what God says in verse 9. He goes on and He says here's the result –

9 "You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you."

You're involved in this. So, here's the answer. Verse 10:

*10 "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, (*this is basically His way of challenging them*) if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."*

Notice God even challenges them. He says "I promised that if you would do this, that you would have an abundant overflow." So, He says "Test me to see if what I'm saying is true. Start tithing out of obedience and see if I don't bless you." That's what He's saying to the people. In fact, He says "not only am I going to bless you," but he goes on in verse 11 to say:

11 "I will rebuke the devourer for you,"

And the devourer could be many things; could be an enemy who comes and steals their grain, could be anything that would eat away at their resources. He says, "I will rebuke those things…"

"…so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts."

And then the result is going to be that all the nations, verse 12:

12 "… will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts."

Here's God, the God who does not change, reminding them of a promise He made saying, "you guys have let go of this and you're under a curse because of your lack of obedience. And if you would just begin to walk in obedience to

this, you would see blessings abundantly overflowing, and your resources would be taken care of."

Now I need to stop here for a moment because whenever we get into a teaching from the scripture, particularly from the Old Testament related to this issue of giving, I often get asked whether or not God commands us to tithe in the New Testament and how these verses apply to us today.

Well, as I've already mentioned, this was certainly a command that God gave under the Mosaic covenant, and when people ask me questions about the Mosaic covenant, I always ask them a question: "are you under the Mosaic covenant?" And then I kind of wait for an answer. And so, it's like, well are you a Jew under the Mosaic covenant still? Is that where you see yourself? And they go "well, no."

See, this is a covenant God made with Israel. It was a command in the covenant. We're not under the Mosaic covenant; that's clear in the New Testament. We are under the new covenant of grace that is outlined in the New Testament, was laid down, prophesied, and inaugurated through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and our faith in Him.

Well, when I begin to share those things, a common response that I get is, "well, Pastor Paul, you know that tithing predates the law." Because when we read through the Book of Genesis, we see Abraham tithing, and this was before the law was given. Moses wouldn't be born for a long time, and yet we see it happening there.

And so they'll say to me, "you know that, don't you Pastor Paul tithing predates the Mosaic covenant?" And that is absolutely true, but that is still not an argument to prove that God commands it today. I happen to know that there are churches, Christian churches today that tell their people "God commands you to tithe." That is not true. That is simply not true. There is no statement in the New Testament where God commands 10% from his people.

Now, what does he command? Well, here's the deal. In the New Testament, you've been purchased, okay? You're told in the New Testament that He bought you. "Do you not know that you are not your own" Paul writes, you've been bought with a price. Now what do you suppose He bought? He purchased all of you, body, soul and spirit. Everything you own, it's all His. It's all His.

So, what do you owe Him? Well, you owe Him 100%. But here's what he tells you to do. 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 up on the screen. He begins by reminding you of a spiritual principle:

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2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (ESV)
"...whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

Now, keeping that in mind, here is the New Testament idea for giving:

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Here's the point. God would rather you give 1% cheerfully than 10% with a grumble or an angry heart. He would rather you give 1% cheerfully than 100% with a grumbling heart. That ruins the offering to the Lord. That ruins the sacrifice when we grumble, when we complain.

I'll tell you to this day, I hate it when people use the phrase "I have to pay my tithes." I really dislike that because that's not what we're doing in the New Testament. You are giving because it's a privilege and a joy.

That's not the kind of language you use when you're paying your power bill or your mortgage or your property taxes. Those you have to pay. I'm not saying you're free to grumble, even there, I'm just saying that language is more indicative of that, "I have to pay my property taxes." Sue and I just did that, and that's something we have to do.

But when it comes to giving to the Lord, God says, "this is something I want you to do." So, here's the rule of thumb I want you to use. First of all, remember I purchased 100% of you. Second of all, I want you to remember there is a spiritual principle that I put into place, and it's as solid as gravity. If you so sparingly, you're going to reap sparingly. If you so generously, you're going to reap generously. That principle is in place and is immovable. And thirdly, I want you to give what's in your heart to give.

Now here's why people don't like to hear that, because it puts the pressure on me to kind of figure it out and to come before the Lord, and wait on God and listen to His voice.

We would rather just be told what to do and then grumble about it. “Just give 10%.” “Alright, fine. There you go. Well, I did what I was supposed to do.” No, that's not what God's word tells you to do.

And you say, “well, Pastor Paul, are you saying 10% is a bad amount?” No. If that's what the Lord has laid upon your heart to give then great do it, but do it cheerfully. Again, God loves a cheerful giver. He wants you to be a giver, but He wants you to do it cheerfully because there's a blessing that goes along with that, an attitude that says “This is a privilege. This is a privilege to give to the Lord.” However that gift is given, however you choose to give that gift to the Lord.

So, there you go. Now you know what the New Testament says about giving. Let each man give as he is decided in his heart. And if you don't know what the Lord would have you give, then wait on the Lord. Ask Him for direction. Ask Him for insight.

Now, in verse 13, God levels another charge against the people saying:

13 “Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you say, ‘How have we spoken against you?’ 14 You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? 15 And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.’”

This is what the people were saying, and they were looking upon the proud - we've talked about this before - the people were looking upon others who are proud and godless, and they're looking at their lives and they're coming to the conclusion, “I don't think it's worth it. All this devotion that we show to the Lord and this giving up of certain worldly pleasures, because these guys aren't giving up worldly pleasures and it seems like they're walking in abundance and we're giving up worldly pleasures to serve the Lord. And we're going without and life is hard for us.”

And what they were doing is they were allowing their circumstances to define their understanding of God's care and love for them as a people. And we call this being today being a circumstantial Christian; I base everything on circumstances. If I start a new ministry and it doesn't go very well, I say “well, obviously God doesn't want me to do that because it's not going well.”

See, that's taking circumstances and making it the end all say all of God's will in my life. It's the barometer. It's not going very well, so it obviously isn't God's

will. Aren't you glad Apostle Paul didn't take on that attitude? Because things didn't go very well a lot of the time, but he knew he was in the center of God's will.

So here they are looking circumstantially, and then the people felt that the problem was on God's end. And that's very common today. People go through circumstantial difficulties and they're like, "what is the deal? I've been praying about this thing, and God just doesn't respond. He isn't coming to the party on this thing with me. What's the deal?" And they're like "I just think God's just not answering. He's just not answering. I pray and I pray," and they just assume it's God's fault because He didn't answer, He didn't respond when I prayed, He didn't do this, He didn't meet my expectations.

And what people don't do - it's exactly what the people here that he's talking about in Malachi are doing - they didn't stop to think and say, "Lord, search me and know me and see if there'd be any wicked way in me, and then lead me in the way everlasting" - like David did. They didn't look inward and say, "Lord, speak to us about our lives. If things aren't going great, maybe there's another element to this that I need to look into and stop accusing you."

Because I've got news for you: when you compare your life with other people - it doesn't matter whether those people frankly are Christians or non-Christians – if you compare your lives to other people, you're always going to find somebody who appears to have it better than you, always.

Comparing yourself with others is about the dumbest thing you can do. It really isn't smart at all, and so I would really strongly encourage you not to do it. But I want to remind you of something: you're a believer in Jesus. What comes after this life for you is the never removed presence of the Lord.

You know what that means? That means this is the only hell you're ever going to experience. Now, think about the unbeliever who never comes to Christ. This is the only heaven they will ever know.

So, when you're looking at the unbeliever and you see that God is being merciful to that person and allowing the sun to shine and the rain to fall, and blessings to abound, God is being gracious. He wants them to turn from their ways. He wants them to recognize at last, the Lord is the source of my blessing. So, keep that in mind when you're comparing your life.

And that's exactly what Psalm 73 is all about. Don't turn there now, but take time to make a note about Psalm 73 and go back and read it. And the psalmist is

doing exactly what we're reading about here. He's looking at the unbeliever, seeing how apparently easy this person's life is, seeing how difficult his own life is, and he's saying to the Lord, “what in the world am I doing devoting my life to you, and is this really the way you treat your children?”

But the Psalm ends with the psalmist saying, “This almost made me stumble.” He says, “I almost stumbled. And this idea literally became oppressive to me. But then I did something that I hadn't done before. I came into the presence of God, and then I understood.

I understood that when this life is over, you take me by the hand and I'm with you. But his life, it might appear to be going good now, one wrong step and it's all over. His hope is dashed. My hope, regardless of what happens in this life, is in you, Lord, and so I will never be without hope ever no matter what happens.

But him, his hope is in riches. We all know how fragile those things are. His hope is in health. We know how fragile that is. His hope is in this world. This world is passing away. But my hope will never pass away because Lord, it's in you.” So, hang out in Psalm 73 this week and just see if the Lord doesn't minister to your heart.

Now as we get into verse 16 and following, we're kind of introduced to another group of people. These aren't complainers. These aren't people who are moaning and groaning about how unbelievers are getting along fine. These are people who feared the Lord. And it says here in verse 16:

16 “Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another.”

In other words, they came together to talk about what the Lord was saying through Malachi.

“The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name.”

Here's what God says about those people: “they're mine.” Isn't that great? God says:

7 “They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.”

In other words, as a man spares his child who is obedient to Him. So, isn't this interesting? It's really a wonderful passage here in Malachi in response of the Lord's confrontation of the people and their moaning and groaning and complaining and bitterness and all these other things. It says that some of the people heard this and took it to heart, and these are people who feared God. They responded to His word and they got together and they said, "guys, this is not good. We fear the word of the Lord and we want to do right by God."

And they got together and I don't know if they had a prayer service or a worship, I don't know what they did. Maybe they got together and just determined we are going to walk in obedience no matter what. Whatever they did, the Lord heard. And it says a book of remembrance was made.

Isn't that something? A book of remembrance. Now, God doesn't write a book of remembrance because he's forgetful. You and I have to make notes sometimes because we would forget otherwise. This is a way of the scripture just speaking of the fact that God will not forget those who fear His name, who esteem His word, and who make a determination in their hearts "I will serve the Lord."

He's not going to forget and He will not forget you either. And this is even echoed in the New Testament. God will not forget the service that you have rendered to Him, your faithful service. He will not forget a book of remembrance. There is a book of remembrance in heaven, and that's a lovely idea is it not?

Now the chapter ends in verse 18 by simply saying:

18 "Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him."

And I believe this last verse is a prophetic statement related to the last days when Jesus returns. Because you see, that's the situation that was going on during the time of Malachi is going to be very similar to the situation in Israel during the great tribulation. There's going to be people, there's going to be Jews who fear the Lord, and there are going to be Jews who very wickedly continue on in the ways of the world.

And the great tribulation is going to be a time of great judgment for those who have turned away from God. But God is going to protect and spare those who have come to the Lord and feared His word and esteemed His name. And we

see this happening. And God says at that time, you're going to see a very stark distinction.

Here's the point, people, we don't see a stark distinction now. Do you get that? The Bible says that now the rain falls on the just and the unjust, the sun shines on the just and the unjust, right? There's really, you don't see a big, huge distinction. But he says in that day, once more, you will see a distinction.

And I believe what he's talking about here, because we're really kind of in this theme of the end days, this period of time of the great tribulation. And I want to remind you as we get into these last few verses of chapter 4, there are no chapter divisions in the original writings. So, notice the theme or the context of the verse we just read as we into chapter 3, the context continues into chapter 4 where God says:

[1] "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble."

And what they would do with stubble back in those days is they'd pick it up and pull it from the ground and burn it. He says:

"*The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."*

All right. See, again, this is the theme. This is the context of what we're looking at, and that is why I believe the previous verse where God says there's going to be a distinction is that while judgment is coming to some, there's going to be protection coming to others, for those who are true to the Lord.

And then he goes on in verse 2 to talk about the promises given to those who fear his name. Look at verse 2:

[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."

Have you guys ever seen a calf leaping around in the pasture? It's just a hoot. I mean, they just, they look like they're just gone crazy. It looked like they've just gone wacko, but they're just leaping around just because they're just full of energy, and it's a picture for you and me of just uncontainable joy. And he says "for those who fear my name, when I return on that day that you guys, it is just going to be uncontainable joy. You're going to be leaping around and skipping around like a calf."

And it's just kind of an interesting picture, isn't it? Furthermore, he goes on in verse 3 to say:

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."

Again, this is talking about the battle of Armageddon when the Lord returns and begins to fight for Israel, those who are true to the Lord and have not fallen under the judgment during the great tribulation period are then going to rise up in great strength and put down their enemies.

And we've read elsewhere in the Old Testament that one man is going to have the strength of a hundred and it's just going to be amazing. So, it's just going to be crazy. And so, here's the word of the Lord to His people. He says:

4 "Remember the law of my servant Moses" (because keep in mind they're still under the Mosaic law at this time and he's talking to the people now)

"...and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel" (He's encouraging them to walk into obedience.)

And today, now he says, under the word of the Lord. And then this final prophecy that finishes out the book of Malachi and frankly, the Old Testament. And I find this fascinating that this is the last prophecy before 400 years of silence. Because you have 400 years of silence between the Old Testament and the New. Here's the last thing God says to them:

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."

Now, we have discussed these last couple of verses in Malachi many times, but what we see here in these verses is a promise from the Lord that He is going to have Elijah return. And you'll recall that the prophet Elijah lived during the Times of the Kings. You can read about Elijah and then his servant who took over in his place, Elisha; kind of interesting they had such similar names. But the prophet Elijah was known for being especially powerful as a prophet, and frankly holds a very unique position as one of the two Biblical characters that never experienced physical death. He was simply taken up to be with the Lord without experiencing physical death.

But the Bible tells us here in a promise through Malachi, that Elijah will return. Now the big question we always want to know is when. Well look at again in verse 5. Here's the when: *"before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes."*

Now, we've mentioned previously that this word "awesome" is translated differently in different Bibles. We think of awesome as amazing, but the New American standard Bible translates this as terrible. The New King James version translates this word as "dreadful." So, Elijah is going to return before the great and terrible or dreadful day of the Lord. So, when is the great and terrible/dreadful day of the Lord?

Well, that almost certainly refers to the second coming of Jesus, or at least the events prior to the second coming of Jesus, which we know His second coming come takes place at the end of the great tribulation. I believe He comes for the church at the beginning of the great tribulation in what we call the rapture. But that is not the second coming.

The second coming is when He comes to earth. For the church, He meets us in the clouds. Paul tells us in First Thessalonians, we will meet the Lord in the air, and there we will be with the Lord. So, I believe that the rapture ushers in the great tribulation period, Jesus returns at the end of the great tribulation period and fights on behalf of Israel.

But sometime prior to what the Bible calls this great and dreadful day of the Lord, the prophet Elijah returns to turn the hearts of the people back to the Lord. Now this is interesting. I mean, the language is all very, I think fairly conclusive when it talks about the great and dreadful or great and terrible day of the Lord. That language doesn't apply to the first coming of Jesus.

It wasn't a dreadful day. It wasn't a terrible day. It was a wonderful day. It was a day that Angels sang about and heralded the good news. I bring you good news, good tidings of great joy. That's the first coming of Jesus. That's not great and dreadful. So obviously you look at the language here and you go, "this is very clearly the second coming of Jesus," but we've got a problem.

The problem is Jesus made some statements about the return of Elijah, let me put it on the screen. It's from Mark 9:

(Slide)

Mark 9:11-13 (ESV)
"And they asked him, 'Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?' And he said to them, 'Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt. But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased as it is written of him."

And he's talking there about John the Baptist. Well, that's interesting. That just kind of threw a wrench in our understanding. So, what are we supposed to think about this? Well, there's some other things to take into consideration.

You'll remember that John the Baptist's father was a priest; he was in the Levitical line. And he was in the temple burning incense, and an angel appeared to him and foretold the birth of his son. He didn't believe it because his wife was well past childbearing years. So, when he told him that his wife was going to have a son, Zachariah didn't believe it. He's like, "yeah, right."

So, the Lord basically struck him dumb. He was unable to speak until the baby was born. And what the angel said to Zechariah about John was he began to talk to him about the characteristic of John's ministry, and he said he will go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah. Now, the angel did not say he would be Elijah. He said he would go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah.

The other thing you have to keep in mind about this whole equation is that when the religious leaders came to John while he was baptizing and asked him, "are you Elijah," John said, "I am not." So, you've got to take all that into consideration. John says, "no, I'm not Elijah." The angel said he will minister in the spirit and power of Elijah. And Jesus said, if you're willing to accept it, he is the Elijah.

So, what are we talking about here? What's our conclusion? Well, once again, we're talking about another example of this Law of Double Reference where we have John the Baptist being a short-term fulfillment of what Malachi is prophesying here in these final verses of the chapter. And then you have the long-term fulfillment that is yet future; I believe, Elijah, the person will return just as the Lord said, "I will send Elijah. He will come."

And when exactly before the great and terrible day of the Lord, we don't know the definite timing there. We just know that he's going to come and he's going to be involved in turning the hearts of the people, and particularly Jews, back to the Lord.

He's really going to carry on a very similar ministry as the 144,000 that we read about in the Book of Revelation. They are also involved in evangelizing the Jews during that time. So, this is yet another example of this law of double reference. So, when exactly this is going to happen, don't even ask me. I don't know. We're just going to have to stay tuned and find out together.

So, with that, we finished the book of Malachi and the Old Testament; our third time through. Let's pray.

Father, how gracious You are. How gracious You are to attend our study of Your Word and how glorious it is. The wonderful clues and puzzle pieces that are laid out for us to lay hold of that speak so powerfully and poignantly of this plan that You have to redeem Your people.

And we're thankful for Israel, and we're thankful for the church, and we're thankful for the new covenant of grace that whosoever believes in the finished work of Jesus on the cross will not perish but have everlasting life. What a glorious, wonderful plan.

And Lord, You have seen fit to reveal that plan to us in Your word, and You have given us insights, and we thank You for that. And as we continue to study Your Word, we pray that you would fill us with a greater thirst for more. Lord, give us a longing in our hearts to be filled to the brim, and overflowing with the wisdom and understanding of Your Word; not just Lord, that we would know what it says, but that we would go on to be doers of the Word as well.

We thank You, Father, for your goodness and grace, and pray all of these things in the name of Your glorious son, Jesus Christ our Lord, and all God's people said together. Amen.

God bless you. Have a good rest of your Wednesday.