

Sifting the Congregation (3:16-18)

3:16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name. 3:17 “They will be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.” 3:18 So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

- On one side you have “those who feared the LORD,” “who esteem His name,” “the righteous,” and the “one who serves God.” These are described as God’s “own possession” and “his own son.”
- On the other side you have “the wicked,” “who does not serve Him.”
 - A list summarizing their sins occurs in 3:5.
- There is a challenging the LORD throughout this prophecy from the wicked in the congregation (1:2,6,7; 2:14,17; 3:7,8,13).

The Day Is Coming (4:1-3)

Those Who Reject the LORD (4:1)

4:1 “For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the LORD of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”

- This is an echo of 3:1.
- “The day” (3:2,17; 4:1,3).

Those Who Fear the LORD (4:2-3)

4:2 “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. 4:3 You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,” says the LORD of hosts.

- “Fear” (1:14; 2:5; 3:5,16; 4:2,5).
- For comparison of the LORD to “the sun,” see Psalm 84:11; Isaiah 60:19-20 (specifically the Son, see Acts 26:13; Revelation 1:16).
- “...of righteousness,” in connection to “the sun,” speaks of God’s absolute standard of right and wrong being made clear in His judgment. The moral/spiritual/intellectual confusion of the darkness of this world will be banished.
 - When we read Malachi, we see a tendency among those confessing to be God’s people to reject (or resent) the Word of God in favor of what is convenient, what fits the people’s desires, or matches a way of serving God they prefer.
- The result among God’s people will be joy.
- “The wicked” had oppressed the people of God both directly (persecution) and indirectly (“suppressing the truth in unrighteousness,” Romans 1:18).
 - Romans 16:20.

Remember the Ways of the LORD (4:4)

4:4 “Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.”

- תּוֹרָה was also the theme of 2:6-9.
- “Righteousness,” mentioned in 4:2, has been made clear by God in the revelation of His character and truth in the Law.
- The first writer of the O.T., Moses, is mentioned by the LORD through Malachi, the last writer of the O.T.
- 1,200 years separate the men, over a millennium of God telling the story of creation, the fall of humanity into sin, and the long plan to save from out of sinful humanity through the coming Messiah.
- The Prophets of the O.T. did not surpass the Law, but instead taught and applied the Law. “The prophetic office was not separated from the law” (John Calvin).

- We never outgrow or graduate past the basics of biblical faith.

The Last Prophet (4:5-6)

Preparing the Way (4:5)

4:5 “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.”

- Like Elijah, John the Baptist was sent to restore true worship, true religion (Matthew 11:14; 17:12; Mark 9:13; Luke 1:17).
- This is also a lesson about O.T. fulfillment; Elijah was not literally reincarnated, but John the Baptist came in the same function and attitude as Elijah (it is against this literalist expectation that John denies being Elijah in John 1:19-21).

He Will Move Hearts (4:6a)

4:6a “He will restore [וְהָשִׁיב] from שִׁיב] the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers...”

- This is a unity between fathers and children in the true faith delivered in the Law and Prophets, which looked forward by faith to the fulfillment found in the coming Messiah.
 - “God of our fathers” points us to the fact that the connection between generations must be God Himself, His covenant with His people, and His commands to His people.¹
- In Isaiah, we read the rebellious people saying, “Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us” (63:16).
- The plural “fathers” in Malachi has also pointed back to the faith heritage of the past (2:10; 3:7).
- See also Zechariah 1:2-6.

¹ Exodus 3:13,15,16; Deuteronomy 1:11,21; 4:1; 6:3; 12:1; 27:3; Joshua 18:3; 2 Chronicles 13:12; 28:9; 29:5; Ezra 8:28; 10:11; Acts 7:32.

Judgment Comes Where There Is No Repentance (4:6b)

4:6b “...so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

- On this “curse” (תָּרָם), see Joshua 6:18; Isaiah 43:28.
- In the synagogue reading of Malachi it is customary to read the next-to-last verse after this verse because the ending is so harsh (we see the same thing in the Greek translation of the O.T.).
- The delay of the return of the Master is meant to bring us to repentance in light of His extended mercy (Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:3-9). Instead, some regard His delay as a sign He will not come and judge (Luke 12:45-46).