

# CHAPTER 4

We have here proper instructions given us (very proper to close the canon of the Old Testament with),

**I.** Concerning the state of recompence and retribution that is before us, the misery of the wicked and the happiness of the righteous in that state (v. 1-3). And this is represented to us under a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unbelieving Jews with it, and of the comforts and triumphs of those among them that received the gospel.

**II.** Concerning the state of trial and preparation we are now in, in which we are directed to have an eye to divine revelation, and to follow that; they then must keep to the law of Moses (v. 4) and expect a further discovery of God's will by Elijah the prophet, that is, by John Baptist, the harbinger of the Messiah (v. 5, 6). The last chapter of the New Testament is much to the same purport, setting before us heaven and hell in the other world, and obliging us to adhere to the word of God in this world.

## ~~301~~ MALACHI 4:1-3

### EVANGELICAL PREDICTIONS

The great and terrible day of the Lord is here prophesied of. This, like the pillar of cloud and fire, shall have a dark side turned towards the Egyptians that fight against God, and a bright side towards the faithful Israelites that follow him: *The day cometh*, that is, the Lord cometh, the day of the Lord; and it has reference both to the first and to the second coming of Jesus Christ; the day of both was fixed, and should answer the character here given of it.

**I.** In both Christ is a consuming fire to those that rebel against him. The day of his coming *shall burn as an oven*; it shall be a day of wrath, of *fiery indignation*. This was foretold concerning the Messiah, ~~320~~ Psalm 21:9, *Thy hand shall find out all thy enemies, and shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of thy anger*. It will be a day of terror and destruction like

the burning of a city, or rather of a wood, the trees whereof are withered and dried, for to that the allusion seems to be, as <sup><317></sup>Isaiah 10:17, 18, *The light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame, and it shall consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field.* Now observe here,

**1.** Who shall be fuel to this fire — all *the proud* in heart, whose words have been stout against God, and their necks stiff and unapt to yield to the yoke of his commandments (all those that *in the pride of their countenances will not seek after God*, nor submit to the grace and government of Jesus Christ — all that proudly say they *will not have Christ to reign over them*), and all those that *do wickedly* in their affections and conversations, that wilfully persist in sin, in contempt of and contradiction to the law of God; they are such as *do wickedly against the covenant*, as another prophet had lately expressed it, <sup><318></sup>Daniel 11:32. God, that has perfect knowledge of every one's character, knows who are *the proud*, and of every one's actions, knows who they are that *do wickedly*; and they shall be as *stubble* to this fire; they shall be consumed by it, easily consumed, utterly consumed, and it is wholly owing to themselves that they shall be so, for they make themselves stubble, that is, combustible matter, to this fire. If they were not stubble, it would not burn them; for the fire will be to every man according as he and his works are found; if they be *wood, hay, and stubble*, they will be *consumed*; but if they be *gold, silver, and precious stones*, they will *abide the fire* and be purified by it, <sup><319></sup>1 Corinthians 3:13-15. Those that by their unbelief oppose Christ thereby set themselves as *briers and thorns* before a *devouring fire*, <sup><320></sup>Isaiah 27:4, 5.

**2.** What shall be the force and what the fruit of this fire: *The day that cometh shall burn them up*, shall both terrify and ruin them, and shall *leave them neither root nor branch*, neither *son nor nephew* (so the Chaldee paraphrase): neither they nor their posterity shall be spared; they shall be wholly extirpated and cut off. *Who knows the power of God's anger? The proud and those that do wickedly* will not fear it, but they shall be made to feel it. Where are those now that *called the proud happy*, when thus they are made completely miserable, when there remains no branch of their happiness to be enjoyed for the present, nor any root of it out of which it might again spring up? Now this was fulfilled,

**(1.)** When Christ, in his doctrine, spoke terror and condemnation to the proud Pharisees and the other Jews that did wickedly, when he sent that

fire on the earth which burnt up the chaff of the traditions of the elders and the corrupt glosses they had put upon the law of God.

(2.) When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, and the nation of the Jews, as a nation, quite blotted out from under heaven, and neither root nor branch left them. This seems to be principally intended here; our Saviour says that those should be the *days of vengeance*, when all the things that were written to that purport should be fulfilled, <sup><272></sup>Luke 21:22. Then the unbelieving Jews were as stubble to the devouring fire of God's judgments, which gathered together to them as the eagles to the carcass.

(3.) It is certainly applicable, and is to be applied, to the day of judgment, to the particular judgment at death (some of the Jewish doctors refer it the *punishment that seizes on the souls of the wicked immediately after they go out of the body*), but especially to the general judgment, at the end of time, when Christ shall be *revealed in flaming fire*, to execute judgment on the proud, and all that do wickedly. The whole world shall then *burn as an oven*, and all the children of this world, that set their hearts upon it and choose their portion in it, shall take their ruin with it, and the fire then kindled shall never be quenched.

II. In both Christ is a rejoicing light to those who serve him faithfully, to those who fear his name and give him the glory due to it (v. 2), who stand in awe of that name of his which the wicked profane and trample upon. Here are mercy and comfort kept in store for all those who fear the Lord and think on his name. Observe,

1. Whence this mercy and comfort shall flow to them: *To you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise, with healing in his wings*. The day that comes, as it will be a stormy day to the wicked, a day in which God will rain upon them *fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest*, as he did on Sodom (<sup><3916></sup>Psalm 11:6), *a day of clouds and thick darkness* (<sup><3158></sup>Amos 5:18, 20), so it will be a fair and bright day to those who fear God, and reviving as the rising sun is to the earth; and particular notice is taken of the rising of the sun upon Zoar when that was mercifully distinguished from the cities of the plain, which the fire *consumed*; see <sup><1123></sup>Genesis 19:23. So to those that fear God is comfort spoken. When the hearts of others *fail for fear* let them *lift up their heads for joy, for their redemption draws nigh*, <sup><2728></sup>Luke 21:28. But by the *Sun of righteousness* here we are certainly to understand Jesus Christ, who would undertake to

secure the believing remnant, in the day of the general destruction of the Jews, from falling with the rest, and to comfort them in that day of distress and perplexity with his consolations; he directed those that were in Judea to *flee to the mountains* (~~4045~~ Matthew 24:16), and they did so, and were all safe and easy in Pella. But it is to be applied more generally,

(1.) To the coming of Christ in the flesh to seek and save those that were lost; then the *Sun of righteousness* arose upon this dark world. Christ is the *light of the world*, the true light, the great light that makes day and rules the day (~~4045~~ John 8:12), as the sun. He is the *light of men* (~~4004~~ John 1:4), is to men's souls as the sun is to the visible world, which without the sun would be a dungeon; so would mankind be darkness itself without the *light of the glory of God shining in the face of Christ*. Christ is the Sun that has light in himself, and is the fountain of light (~~4004~~ Psalm 19:4-6); he is the *Sun of righteousness*, for he is himself a righteous Saviour. Righteousness is both the light and the heat of this Sun; the word of his righteousness is so; it guides, instructs, and quickens; so is the *everlasting righteousness* he has brought in. He is *made of God to us righteousness*; he is the *Lord our righteousness*, and therefore is fitly called *the Sun of righteousness*. Through him we are justified and sanctified, and so are brought to see light. This Sun of righteousness, in the fulness of time, arose upon the world, and with him *light came into the world* (~~4045~~ John 3:19), a *great light*, ~~4045~~ Matthew 4:16. In him *the day-spring from on high visited us, to give light to those that sit in darkness*, ~~4045~~ Luke 1:78, 79. Righteousness sometimes signifies mercy or benignity, and it was in Christ that the *tender mercy of our God* visited us.

(2.) It is applicable to the graces and comforts of the Holy Spirit, brought into the souls of men. Grotius understands it of Christ's giving the Spirit to those that are his, to shine in their hearts, and to be a *comforter* to them, a *sun and a shield*. Those that are possessed and governed by a holy fear of God and a dread of his majesty shall have his *love* also *shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost*; and then the sun may be said to arise there, and to bring both a delightful day and a fruitful spring along with it.

(3.) Christ's second coming will be a glorious and welcome sun-rising to all that *fear his name*; it will be that morning of the resurrection in which *the upright shall have dominion*, ~~4045~~ Psalm 49:14. That day which to the wicked will *burn as an oven* will to the righteous be bright as the morning; and it is what they wait for, *more than those that wait for the morning*.

2. What this mercy and comfort shall bring to them: He *shall arise with healing under his wings*, or in his *rays* or *beams*, which are as the wings of the sun. Christ came, as *the sun*, to bring not only light to a dark world, but health to a diseased distempered world. The Jews (says Dr. Pocock) have a proverbial saying, *As the sun riseth, infirmities decrease*; the flowers which drooped and languished all night revive in the morning. Christ came into the world to be the great physician, yea, and the great medicine too, both the balm in Gilead and the physician there. When he was upon earth, he went about as the sun in his circuit, doing this good; he *healed all manner of sicknesses and diseases among the people*; he healed by wholesale, as the sun does. He shall arise *with healing in his skirts*; so some read it, and they apply it to the story of the woman's touching *the hem of his garment*, and being thereby *made whole*, and his finding that *virtue went out of him*, <sup>4158</sup>Mark 5:28-30. But his healing bodily diseases was a specimen of his great design in coming into the world to heal the diseases of men's souls, and to put them into a good state of health, that they may serve and enjoy both God and themselves.

3. What good effect it shall have upon them.

(1.) It shall make them vigorous in themselves: "*You shall go forth*, as those that are healed go abroad and return to their business." The souls shall go forth out of their bodies at death, and the bodies out of their graves at the resurrection, as prisoners out of their dungeons, and both to see the light and be set at liberty. "*You shall go forth* as plants out of the earth, when in the spring the sun returns." Some make it to mean the going forth of the Christians from Jerusalem, and the escape they thereby made from its destruction. And thus the souls on whom the Sun of righteousness arises go forth out of the world, go forth out of Babylon, as those that are made *free indeed*. "*You shall likewise grow up*; being restored to health and liberty, you shall increase in knowledge, and grace, and spiritual strength." The souls on which the Sun of righteousness arises are growing up towards *the perfect man*; those that by the grace of God are made wise and good are by the same grace made wiser and better; and their path, like that of the rising sun, *shines more and more to the perfect day*, <sup>4159</sup>Proverbs 4:18. Their growth is compared to that of *the calves of the stall*, which is a quick, strong, and useful growth. "*You shall grow up*, not as the *flower of the field*, which is slender, and weak, and of little use, and withers soon after it has grown up, but as the *calves of the stall*," that, as one of the rabbin expounds it, *grow great in flesh and fatness*, with which

both God's altars and men's tables are replenished; so the growth of the saints, on whom the Sun of righteousness arises, honours both God and man. Some read it, instead of *You shall grow up*, *You shall move yourselves*, or *leap for joy*, shall be as frolicsome as calves of the stall, when they are let loose in the open field; it denotes the joy of the saints, who rejoice in Christ Jesus; they shall even leap for joy; they are *always caused to triumph*.

(2.) It shall make them victorious over their enemies (v. 3): *You shall tread down the wicked*. Time was when the wicked trod them down, said to their souls, *Bow down, that we may go over*; but the day will come when they shall *tread down the wicked*. The wicked, being made Christ's footstool, are made theirs also (<sup><431></sup>Psalm 110:1), and come and *worship before the feet* of the church, <sup><432></sup>Revelation 3:9. *The elder shall serve the younger*. When believers by faith *overcome the world*, when they suppress their own corrupt appetites and passions, when the God of peace bruises Satan under their feet, then they *tread down the wicked*. When it came to the turn of the Christians to triumph over the Jews that had insulted over them, then this promise was fulfilled: *They shall be ashes under the soles of your feet*; they shall not only be *trodden down*, but *trodden to dirt*. When the day that comes shall have *burnt them up*, they shall trample upon them as ashes. When the righteous shall rise to *everlasting life*, the wicked shall rise to *everlasting contempt*; and, though they shall not triumph over them, they shall triumph in that God whose justice is glorified in their destruction. The saints in glory are said to have power given them over the nations, to *rule them with a rod of iron*, <sup><425></sup>Revelation 2:26, 27. *This you shall do, in the day that I shall do this*. Note, The saints' triumphs are all owing to God's victories; it is not they that do this, but God that does it for them, that says, *Come set your feet on the necks of these kings*. Some read it, "*In the day that I make, or shall make, the great day that I shall make remarkable, of which you will say with joy, This is the day which the Lord has made.*" The day of the destruction of Jerusalem is called the *great and notable day of the Lord* (<sup><422></sup>Acts 2:20), and our Saviour in foretelling that destruction made use of such expressions as, like these, might be applied likewise to the *end of the world* and the *last judgment*; for it was such a terrible revelation of the wrath of God from heaven, and caused such a scene of horror upon this earth, that it might fitly serve for a type of that glorious transaction which will be an outlet to the days of time and an inlet to the days of eternity. By

the accomplishment of these prophecies in the ruin of the Jewish nation, we should have our faith confirmed in the assurances Christ has given us concerning the dissolution of all things. *Surely I come quickly*; so says Christ, *the Lord of hosts*, to whom all power in heaven and earth is committed.

## ~~300~~ MALACHI 4:4-6

### EVANGELICAL PREDICTIONS

This is doubtless intended for a solemn conclusion, not only of this prophecy, but of the canon of the Old Testament, and is a plain information that they were not to expect any more sayings nor writing by divine inspiration, any more of the dictates of the Spirit of prophecy, till the beginning of the gospel of the Messiah, which sets aside the Apocrypha as no part of holy writ, and which therefore the Jews never received.

Now that prophecy ceases, and is about to be sealed up, there are two things required of the people of God, that lived then: —

**I.** They must keep up an obedient veneration for the law of Moses (v. 4): *Remember the law of Moses my servant*, and observe to do according to it, even that law which *I commanded unto him in Horeb*, that fiery law which was intended *for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments*, not only the law of the ten commandments, but all the other appointments, ceremonial and judicial, then and there given. Observe here,

**1.** The honourable mention that is made of *Moses*, the first writer of the Old Testament, in *Malachi*, the last writer. God by him calls him *Moses my servant*; for the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance. See how the penmen of scripture, though they lived in several ages at a great distance from each other (it was above 1200 years from Moses to Malachi), all concurred in the same thing, and supported one another, being all actuated and guided by one and the same Spirit.

**2.** The honourable mention that is made of the *law of Moses*; it was what God himself *commanded*; he owns it for his law, and he commanded it *for all Israel*, as the municipal law of their kingdom. Thus will God *magnify*

*his law and make it honourable.* Note, We are concerned to keep the law because God has commanded it and commanded it for us, for we are the spiritual Israel; and, if we expect the benefit of the covenant with Israel (<sup>368</sup>Hebrews 8:10), we must observe the commands given to Israel, those of them that were intended to be of perpetual obligation.

**3.** The summary of our duty, with reference to the law. We must remember it. Forgetfulness of the law is at the bottom of all our transgressions of it; if we would rightly remember it, we could not but conform to it. We should remember it when we have occasion to use it, remember both the commands themselves and the sanctions wherewith they are enforced. The office of conscience is to bid us *remember the law*. But how does this charge to remember the law of Moses come in here?

**(1.)** This prophet had reproved them for many gross corruptions and irregularities both in worship and conversation, and now, for the reforming and amending of what was amiss, he only charges them to *remember the law of Moses*: “Keep to that rule, and you will do all you should do.” He will *lay upon them no other burden* than what they *have received; hold that fast*, <sup>4124</sup>Revelation 2:24, 25. Note, Corrupt churches are to be reformed by the written word, and reduced into order by being reduced to the standard of *the law and the testimony*, see <sup>4123</sup>1 Corinthians 11:23.

**(2.)** The church had long enjoyed the benefit of prophets, extraordinary messengers from God, and now they had a whole book of their prophecies put together, and it was a finished piece; but they must not think that hereby the *law of Moses* was superseded, and had become as an almanac out of date, as if now they were advanced to a higher form and might forget that. No; the prophets do but confirm and apply the law, and press the observance of that; and therefore still *Remember the law*. Note, Even when we have made considerable advances in knowledge we must still retain the first principles of practical religion and resolve to abide by them. Those that study the writings of the prophets, and the apocalypse, must still remember the law of Moses and the four gospels.

**(3.)** Prophecy was now to cease in the church for some ages, and the Spirit of prophecy not to return till the *beginning of the gospel*, and now they are told to *remember the law of Moses*; let them live by the rules of that, and live upon the promises of that. Note, We need not complain for want of visions and revelations as long as we have the written word, and the canon of scripture complete, to be our guide; for that is the most *sure word of*

*prophecy*, and the touchstone by which we are to *try the spirits*. Though we have not prophets, yet, as long as we have Bibles, we may keep our communion with God, and keep ourselves in his way.

(4.) They were to expect the coming of the Messiah, the preaching of his gospel, and the setting up of his kingdom, and in that expectation they must *remember the law of Moses*, and live in obedience to that, and then they might expect the comforts that the Messiah would bring to *the willing and obedient*. Let them observe the law of Moses, and live up to the light which that gave them, and then they might expect the benefit of the gospel of Christ, for *to him that has*, and uses what he has well, *more shall be given, and he shall have abundance*.

II. They must keep up a believing expectation of the gospel of Christ, and must look for the beginning of it in the appearing of Elijah the prophet (v. 5, 6): “*Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet*. Though the Spirit of prophecy cease for a time, and you will have only the law to consult, yet it shall revive again in one that shall be sent *in the spirit and power of Elias*,” <sup><417></sup>Luke 1:17. The *law and the prophets were until John* (<sup><266></sup>Luke 16:16); they continued to be the only lights of the church till that morning-star appeared. Note, As God never *left himself without witness* in the world, so neither in the church, but, as there was occasion, carried the light of divine revelation further and further to the perfect day. They had now Moses and the prophets, and might hear them; but God will go further: he will send them Elijah. Observe,

1. Who this prophet is that shall be sent; it is *Elijah*. The Jewish doctors will have it to be the same Elijah that prophesied in Israel in the days of Ahab — that he shall come again to be the forerunner of the Messiah; yet others of them say not the same person, but another of the same spirit. It should seem, those different sentiments they had when they asked John, “*Art thou Elias, or that prophet that should bear his name?*” <sup><418></sup>John 1:19-21. But we Christians know very well that John Baptist was the Elias that was to come, <sup><470></sup>Matthew 17:10-13; and very expressly, <sup><414></sup>Matthew 11:14, *This is Elias that was to come*; and v. 10, the same of whom it is written, *Behold, I send my messenger*, <sup><300></sup>Malachi 3:1. Elijah was a man of great austerity and mortification, zealous for God, bold in reproofing sin, and active to reduce an apostate people to God and their duty; John Baptist was animated by the same spirit and power, and preached repentance and reformation, as Elias had done; and all held him for a prophet, as they did

Elijah in his day, and that his baptism was *from heaven*, and not *of men*. Note, When God has such work to do as was formerly to be done he can raise up such men to do it as he formerly raised up, and can put into a John Baptist the spirit of an Elias.

2. When he shall be sent — before the appearing of the Messiah, which, because it was the judgment of this world, and introduced the ruin of the Jewish church and nation, is here called the *coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord*. John Baptist gave them fair warning of this when he told them of the *wrath to come* (that *wrath to the uttermost* which was hastening upon them) and put them into a way of escape from it, and when he told them of the *fan in Christ's hand*, with which Christ would thoroughly purge his floor; see ~~408~~ Matthew 3:7, 10, 12. That day of Christ, when he came first, was as that day will be when he comes again — though a great and joyful day to those that embrace him, yet a *great and dreadful day* to those that oppose him. John Baptist was sent before the coming of this day, to give people notice of it, that they might get ready for it, and go forth to meet it.

3. On what errand he shall be sent: *He shall turn the heart of the fathers to their children, and the heart of the children to their fathers*; that is, “he shall be employed in this work; he shall attempt it; his doctrine and baptism shall have a direct tendency to it, and with many shall be successful: he shall be an instrument in God's hand of *turning many to righteousness, to the Lord their God, and so making ready a people prepared for him,*” ~~416~~ Luke 1:16, 17. Note, The turning of souls to God and their duty is the best preparation of them for the great and dreadful day of the Lord. It is promised concerning John,

(1.) That he shall give a turn to things, shall make a bold stand against the strong torrent of sin and impiety which he found in full force among the children of his people, and beating down all before it. This is called his *coming to restore all things* (~~417~~ Matthew 17:11), to set them to rights, that they may again go in the right channel.

(2.) That he shall preach a doctrine that shall reach men's hearts, and have an influence upon them, and work a change in them. God's word, in his mouth, shall be *quickness and powerful*, and a *discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*. Many had their consciences awakened by his ministry who yet were not thoroughly wrought upon, such a spirit and power was there in it.

(3.) That he shall turn the hearts of the fathers with the children, and of the children with the fathers (for so some read it), to God and to their duty. He shall call upon young and old to repent, and shall not labour in vain, for many of the fathers that are going off, and many of the children that are growing up, shall be wrought upon by his ministry.

(4.) That thus he shall be an instrument to revive and confirm love and unity among relations, and shall bring them closer and bind them faster to each other, by bringing and binding them all to their God. He shall prepare the way for that kingdom of heaven which will make all its faithful subjects of *one heart* and *one soul* (<sup><40B></sup>Acts 4:32), which will be a kingdom of love, and will slay all enmities.

4. With what view he shall be sent on this errand: *Lest I come and smite the earth*, that is, the land of Israel, the body of the Jewish nation (that were of the earth earthy), *with a curse*. They by their impiety and impenitence in it had laid themselves open to the curse of God, which is a separation to all evil. God was ready to smite them with that curse, to bring utter ruin upon them, to strike home, to strike dead, with the curse; but he will yet once more try them, whether they will repent and return, and so prevent it; and therefore he sends John Baptist to preach repentance to them, that their conversion might prevent their confusion; so unwilling is God that any should perish, so willing to have his anger turned away. Had they universally repented and reformed, their repentance would have had this desired effect; but, they generally rejecting the counsel of God in John's baptism, it proved against themselves (<sup><40B></sup>Luke 7:30) and their land was smitten with the curse which both it and they lie under to this day. Note, Those must expect to be smitten with a sword, with a curse, who *turn not to him that smites them* with a rod, with a cross, <sup><29B></sup>Isaiah 9:13. Now the *axe is laid to the root of the tree*, says John Baptist, and it is ready to be smitten, to be cut down, *with a curse*; therefore *bring forth fruit meet for repentance*. Some observe that the last word of the Old Testament is a curse, which threatens the earth (<sup><38B></sup>Zechariah 5:3), our desert of which we must be made sensible of, that we may bid Christ welcome, who comes with a blessing; and it is with a blessing, with the choicest of blessings, that the New Testament ends, and with it let us arm ourselves, or rather let God arm us, against this curse. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. Amen.*