

Malachi 3. 13-4.6. Bethesda. 27 November 2006.

'Your words have been strong against me', says the Lord. 'But you say, "What have we spoken together against you?"

'You have said, "It is futile to serve God. What profit is it that we have kept His requirement, and that we have walked as mourners before the Lord of hosts?"

"And now we call the arrogant blessed. Not only are the evildoers built up; they also tempt God and escape".

Then those who feared the Lord spoke together, each to his neighbour. And the Lord paid attention and heard them. And a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name.

'And they shall be mine', says the Lord of hosts, 'in the day which I am preparing – my personal possession. And I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.

'And you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

'For, behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace. And all the arrogant and every evil-doer will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up', says the Lord of hosts, 'leaving them neither root nor branch.

'But to you who fear my name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings. And you shall go out and frisk like calves from the stall.

'You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day which I am preparing', says the Lord of hosts.

'Remember the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, the statutes and the legal judgements.

'Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and fearful day of the Lord.

'And he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest I come and strike the land with utter destruction.'

'Your words have been strong – probably in the sense of harsh, loud, insolent – against me', says the Lord.¹

Earlier, He had said that He had no pleasure in them, 1. 10, and that their words had wearied Him – had 'exhausted Him, 2. 17. And now, in this, the last of the seven charges He levels against them, He makes it clear that He has found their words highly offensive.

'But you say, "What have we spoken together against you?"

They use the same word of themselves as is used a little further down of those who feared the Lord – that is, these men have been speaking among themselves. 'What have we said against you in our conversations with one another that has upset you?' they want to know.²

'You have said, "It is futile – it is useless – ineffective – to serve God. What profit is it that we have kept His requirement'. And I note that the Hebrew word for 'profit' here is not the usual word for profit or reward. This word is used largely in the old Testament to describe greed for personal and dishonest gain – for unjust profit. And so the very word which Malachi puts into the mouths of the people exposes that they were really asking for *unearned* and *undeserved* favours. And you can say that again!

Just think of the quality of the service they had been rendering the Lord – as revealed in the previous sections of the book.

The priests :

- offered blind, lame, sick and blemished sacrifices, 1. 8, 13, 14;
- caused many to stumble at the law, 2. 8; and
- showed partiality in their judgements, 2. 9.

The people :

- married the worshippers of idols, 2. 11;
- dealt unfaithfully with their wives, 2. 15;
- were violent and cruel, 2. 16;
- practised witchcraft and adultery, 3. 5;
- gave false testimony and defrauded hired labourers, 3. 5;
- oppressed widows and orphans, 3. 5;
- turned away from God's statutes, 3. 7; and
- robbed God of His tithes and offerings, 3. 8.

And this was how the priests and people had 'served God'! Served God indeed! And now they have the audacity to criticize God for failing to keep His side of the covenant – of failing to deliver the goods by way of material prosperity and blessing!³ Their reaction to their present unfavourable circumstances was not to question what was wrong with themselves – not to pray with the psalmist in Psalm 119, 'Turn my heart to your statutes and not to covetousness (to selfish and dishonest gain – the same word as here)', Psa. 119. 36 – but to complain against Him and His righteousness. What a profound cheek!

Long before, Job had quoted the wicked as saying, 'Who is the Almighty, that we should *serve* Him? And what *profit* do we have if we pray to Him?', Job 21. 14-15. Alas, that here it is God's own nation – who deluded themselves into believing that mere outward observance of certain legal requirements was all He required – who here take the very same stand.

'And that we have walked as mourners before the Lord of hosts?' – have donned black apparel – and – quite likely – had fasted and left our faces unwashed – as a sign and symbol of mourning for sin. Clearly this people had gone through the motions of appearing to grieve and sorrow over the sin of their nation. But it was all bogus. They *acted* as those who were penitent. And '*acted*' is the right word – for that was all it was – acting. Because, if the truth were told, they consistently refused to accept that they had done anything wrong and that there was any need for *real* repentance on their part. But having gone through the *outward* form, they fully expected adequate payment and reward from God, just as if they had been professional mourners - and were appalled that there had been no pay off.

'As we see it', they were saying, 'the proud and arrogant are the ones who are happy. Evil people not only prosper, but they try your patience with their evil deeds – and get away scot-free'.

God had earlier said that, if they, His people, were willing to obey Him, He would so enrich them that 'all nations' should 'call them blessed', 3. 12. And this is their reply! Referring back to God's own words – 'We (and they emphasise the word 'we') – we pronounce blessed those you pronounce cursed' – I have in mind the words of Psalm 119. 21, 'You have rebuked the *arrogant* (the word in our passage) – those who are *cursed*'.

In chapter 2 (v. 17), the priests had asserted 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them' – and this attitude had clearly infected the people in general. 'Not only are the evildoers built up (are successful)', they say, 'but they also tempt God (they challenge God) and they escape'.

'You call on us', they are saying, 'to "prove" you – to "test" you (the word translated "tempt" here) – with regard to your professed willingness to pour out your blessings on us, 3. 8 – well let us tell you that we see no point in wasting our time with any of this. The wicked have *already* "proved" you – they have "put you to the test" – have defied your patience – with their sins – and what have you done? Nothing – absolutely nothing! They have gone unpunished'. The evidence is unambiguous – you favour the wicked'.

What gross impertinence! And I guess the assertion that the God of heaven favoured workers of evil was probably the greatest insult they could have directed against Him.

And the remainder of Malachi's prophecy down to 4. 3 – immediately before God's demand that they remember the law which He had commanded Moses – is concerned with rebutting this monstrous claim – with answering the people's last and most serious accusation against the Lord. Oh yes, make no mistake, God is saying, the day is coming when He will make the difference between the righteous and the wicked abundantly plain!

'*Then* those who feared the Lord'. When? When the ungodliness of the majority was rampant. For good men will still be good men in bad times. And God always has a remnant.⁴

And Malachi draws our attention to *the character, the conversation and the contemplation* of this godly remnant.

- (a) Their **character** – 'those who feared the Lord'.
- (b) Their **conversation** – they 'spoke together, each to his neighbour'.
- (c) Their **contemplation** – 'who meditate on His name'.

The first distinguishing mark of this remnant is that '*they feared the Lord*'.

And such reverential fear lies at the very heart of *our* relationship with God. Israel had been taught *from the beginning* of their history, Deuteronomy 10. 12, 'What does the Lord your God require of you, but to *fear the Lord your God*, to walk in all His ways and to love Him'. And one of God's chief complaints with His people here *at the end* of their Old Testament history is 'They do *not* fear me', Mal. 3. 5. 'If then I be a father, where is my honour? and if I be a master, where is *my fear*?'", He wanted to know, Mal. 1. 6.

And, according to scripture, to fear the Lord – to stand in awe of Him - is both to hate evil and to delight in obeying God's commands.

Second, we note *the conversation of the remnant*. For, just as the godless in Judah conversed together – speaking together *against* God and His ways – so the godly conversed and communed together – speaking together *of* Him and *for* Him.⁵

And third we note *their contemplation* – ‘who meditate on His name’.

We have seen in previous weeks how the priests of the day despised the name of the Lord, 1. 6, and gave no glory to His name, 2. 2. But these godly men and women sought to maintain the honour of that name so deeply dishonoured by others.

The Greek Old Testament renders this, ‘who *reverenced* His name’. And the word here could convey the idea that they not only pondered His name but that they highly esteemed and prized it.⁶

His ‘name’, of course, stands for His Person – for all that He has revealed about Himself and His character. As one greatly respected Jewish commentator of the eleventh century says, ‘Those are meant who always meditate on the ways of the Lord and the knowledge of His Godhead, for *His name is Himself, and He is His Name*’.⁷ These good people were made then of the same stuff as the New Testament Anna, who ‘spoke (who was continually speaking) of Him (the Lord Jesus) to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem’, Luke 2. 38. That is, the Lord Himself was both the topic of their conversation and the centre of their thoughts.

Unnoticed by the majority around, or, if noticed, only despised, the godly remnant were not too insignificant to attract the notice of the Lord. For ‘the Lord paid attention and heard them’. Their very words rose up to heaven itself, and God deigned to listen attentively (as the word is) to all they said. He ‘pricked up His ears’ and paid close attention – not one word – not the faintest whisper – spoken in the ear of another saint – escaping Him.

‘And a book of remembrance was written before Him’. According to 1 Kings 4, in Solomon’s day, a man named Jehoshaphat was appointed as the king’s ‘recorder’ or, more literally, ‘remembrancer’ (the same Hebrew word as here), 1 Kings 4. 3. The ‘remembrancer’s’ job was to record events of particular significance and to note the names of any who rendered special service to the king. We know that the Persian kings of Malachi’s day also kept a written record of specific deeds of service performed for them. You can think, for instance, of the exploits of Mordecai the Jew some 50 years before, recorded in the book of Esther.

This good man had delivered the then King, Ahasuerus (Xerxes), from an assassination attempt, by exposing the plot of two conspirators. Yet even though the two guilty men were tried and executed, Mordecai received no reward at the time.

But one sleepless night, the King ordered his officials to read to him from the royal archives, Esther 6. 1. And, in the providence of God, having read the relevant memorandum, the king promptly rewarded Mordecai for his loyalty. And I note that the expression ‘book of the records’ in Esther 6. 1 is exactly the same in Hebrew as that translated ‘book of remembrance’ here.

The book of Malachi speaks of God as the ‘great King’, 1. 14. And here ‘the great King’ orders an administrative document – a memorandum in effect – be written and filed in His royal archives that it might lie constantly ‘before Him’ – not simply in His presence but constantly before His eyes to remind Him of the deeds of the godly remnant. And this that, on the great and terrible day of His visitation in judgement on His enemies, the memorandum safely lodged in the royal archives, would serve to protect His faithful people from that very judgement.

Not, of course, that God needs to maintain written records literally – or that he has any difficulty in remembering the devotion and service of His people. This is figurative language – but it is no less important for that.

He treasured the memory of His loyal servants, and saw to it, as it were, that, in His heavenly throne room, the angelic secretarial staff took minutes of the meeting and inscribed the names of this faithful remnant in His book of remembrance. They had thought upon *His* name, and He will not forget *their* names. He was, in the words of Hebrews 6, ‘not unrighteous to forget their work and the love they had showed toward His name’, Heb. 6. 10.

But I do wonder whether, if my talk was taken down verbatim, very much – if any – of it could be entered into God’s book of remembrance as that which is ‘good for building up, as fits the occasion’ as Paul expressed it in Ephesians 4. 29.⁸

‘And they shall be mine’, says the Lord of hosts – where the word ‘mine’ is emphatic. And you could write this wonderful word ‘mine’ over the whole of Israel’s history as portrayed by the prophets.

Speaking of their past – of the unpromising and unattractive background from which both Jerusalem and the nation came, the Lord said in Ezekiel 16, ‘When I passed by you ... and looked upon you ... I spread my skirt (my long

flowing tunic) over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you *became mine*", says the Lord God', Ezek. 16. 8.

Speaking of their present, the Lord assured His people in Isaiah 43, 'Thus says the Lord, who ... formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you *are mine*', Isa. 43. 1.

And here, speaking of their future, He says, 'They *shall be mine*', says the Lord of hosts, 'in the day which I am preparing', Mal. 3. 16.

And how we can rejoice that the Lord Jesus speaks of *us too* as 'mine' – as 'my sheep, 'my friends', 'my brethren' – and we know that no-one – not even the ultimate thief and robber – his satanic majesty himself – can pluck us out of the hands of our Lord or His Father, John 10. 27, 28.

But this godly remnant was not only 'His' – they were 'His personal possession'.

The word we translate 'personal possession' – rendered 'jewels' in the KJV – is used in scripture to describe the personal property of a king as distinct from that which was his as a monarch. For example, when David donated vast sums of money towards the costs of building the Temple of God in 1 Chronicles 29, he told his people, 'because I have set my affection on the house of my God, I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, my *own special treasure* of gold and silver', 1 Chron. 29. 3.⁹ The word, that is, speaks of one's own precious and valued possession – one's own special treasure. And the Lord speaks here of this remnant as a people uniquely belonging to Him – as those exceedingly precious to Him.

God uses the word several times in the Old Testament to describe His people¹⁰, but It was to the new-born nation following the Exodus from Egypt that the promise was first given, 'you shall be a *special treasure* to me above all people; for all the earth is mine', Exod. 19. 5. In other words, although the whole earth belonged to Him, Israel was to be His very own people in a special sense – to be His 'crown jewel' among all the nations.¹¹

Nor do we come behind Israel in any way. Paul spoke to Titus concerning, 'our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ ... who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for Himself a people – His own special possession', Tit. 2. 14 – this being the same word used in the Greek Old Testament to translate the word here in Malachi 3. 16 and elsewhere. And every believer *today* can therefore be regarded as a jewel in God's personal treasury – possessed, preserved and precious!¹²

I enjoy the story told by a Roman historian who wrote during the reign of Tiberius Caesar – at the time our Lord was here. This historian wrote of one Cornelia, the daughter of the great Roman general who had defeated Hannibal and the army of Carthage. Cornelia was, we are told, a noble woman and an excellent mother. The writer claims that a lady from Campania, on a visit to Cornelia's home, showed Cornelia her jewels, the finest in existence at that period – and then asked Cornelia if she might see Cornelia's jewels.

Cornelia kept the lady talking until her sons came home from school, and then declared, '*These are my jewels*'.¹³ And if some angelic principality or power should venture to ask the Almighty to show off His jewels, He – the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth – wouldn't point to any precious metals or rare gems of earth – for what are these to Him? He would point to you and me – and declare, '*These are my jewels*'!

And the Lord gives the godly remnant His assurance that, in the coming day of judgement for the wicked – described here as 'the day which I am preparing' – they will be 'spared' ... spared indeed with the affection of a father for a submissive and obedient son. 'I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him' is truly a lovely expression – but it recalls for me God's affection for His own submissive and obedient Son – who did always and only those things which pleased Him – but of whom it is written that 'He did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all', Rom. 8. 32. Enjoy it again, my bother, my sister – His measureless love for sinful man constrained Him not to spare His sinless Son!

'And you', God says to the insolent men who had defied God back at the beginning of our section, 'shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him' – the 'again' referring to the many occasions in the past when God had made an unmistakable distinction between those who were His and those who weren't – stretching right back to the time at the Exodus when He – the Lord – 'made a difference between the Egyptians and Israel', as reported in Exod. 11. 7. And He now warns the ungodly men of Malachi's day – who asserted that it was altogether futile and profitless to serve God, v. 14 – that they would be compelled, in the day of judgement to recognise that He did indeed draw a very clear distinction 'between the righteous and the wicked' – and that it was therefore *far from futile* to serve Him! But it would then be too late for them to change sides!

Make no mistake, God will have the last word. Back in one Coffee Morning in February I told the story of an ungodly farmer who once wrote to a Christian: 'I stole the seed, I stole the fertiliser. I ploughed, sowed and reaped on Sundays when you were all in church', he wrote, 'and I've had *more* bushels to the acre than any of the Christians around here in my October harvest'. Apparently, the Christian wrote back, briefly and courteously, 'God does not

always settle His accounts in October'. No, He doesn't – but He wanted the men of Malachi's day to know that settle them He would!

Let *us* take heart then – no service for our Master is ever wasted. And I have no doubt that, when *our* day of judgement – our day of review – comes, one of my greatest regrets will be that I hadn't served Him better – that, in the words of the song, 'I'll wish I had given Him more'.

By and by when I kneel at His feet,
Beautiful feet, nail-riven feet;
By and by when I kneel at His feet,
I'll wish I had given Him more.
More, so much more,
More of my heart than I e're gave before,
By and by when I kneel at His feet,
I'll wish I had given Him more.¹⁴

Note the connecting word 'for' at the beginning of chapter 4 – for there is no break at all in the thought-flow between the end of chapter 3 and the opening of chapter 4. Indeed, in the Hebrew text there isn't even a chapter division, and the six verses of chapter 4 are scored there as 3. 19-24.

In other words, the opening section of chapter 4 expands on the separation between wicked and righteous which will be made in that great and dreadful day when God intervenes in judgement.

In chapter 2, the people had asked, 'Where is the God of judgement (the God of justice)?', v. 17. And here the Lord assures them that, no matter how they felt or what they said, the day of judgement would most certainly come – when all seeming anomalies would be rectified.

In a nutshell, to the wicked that day will be a time of consuming fire, but to the righteous – to them who fear God's name – it will herald a time of healing and of exuberant joy.

As the prophet ponders the coming day – what other scriptures call 'the day of the Lord' – he bursts out, in breathless emotion, 'It comes! Burning like a furnace! The proud wicked are chaff! The day burns them up!'

The word 'furnace' conveys something of the burning intensity of the heat – familiar to us, of course, from the account of Nebuchadnezzar's 'burning fiery furnace', flames from which consumed the men who cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into its midst, Dan. 3. 19-23.

Malachi's reference to 'all the *arrogant* and every *evildoer*' clearly points back to the description of those who do not fear the Lord in 3. 15: 'now we call the *arrogant* blessed. Not only are the *evildoers* built up; they also tempt God and escape'. But the arrogant will not be blessed, nor the evildoer escape in that day! 'All the arrogant and every evil-doer will be stubble'.

Malachi has spoken earlier of the fire of God's judgement – and made it clear that, for some, the purpose of the fire will be to refine; 'He (the Angel of the Covenant – the Messiah) is like a refiner's fire ... He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver', 3. 2-3. But here we learn that, for others, the purpose of His fire is to consume – not the dross but the wicked themselves – when that coming day will set them ablaze and they will be wholly destroyed, like some shrub thrown into a furnace or oven.¹⁵

But things will be very different for those who, in the words of Nehemiah's prayer in chapter 1 of his book 'delight to fear' God's name', v. 11.¹⁶ Eugene Peterson in the Message captures the contrast well : the arrogant wicked, he renders 'will be ... burned to a crisp, nothing left but scorched earth and ash--a black day! But *for you*, sunrise! The sun of righteousness will dawn on those who honor my name, with healing radiating from its wings', vv. 1-2.

It is clear that the Lord contrasts the health-giving sun with the consuming fire. But both translators and expositors differ in their understanding of the expression 'sun of righteousness'. Some take it to mean that 'righteousness' itself is pictured as the sun – that 'righteousness' will be revealed – will be demonstrated – on that coming day as clearly as the sun shines at the dawn. And certainly this interpretation would fit well into the context here – where, as we have seen, the people at large doubted God's justice and righteousness. And this interpretation also has in its favour other biblical expressions, such as David's 'He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday', Psa. 37. 6.¹⁷

On the other hand, the majority of commentators through the ages have interpreted the picture as one of Messiah Himself. And I suspect that they are right – and note that Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, referred to the Messiah as the 'dayspring from on high' – as 'the rising sun' who will come to us from heaven – to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death', Luke 1. 78-79.¹⁸

For my part then, I have no problem understanding ‘the Sun of Righteousness’ as a title of our Lord Jesus – or in believing that the day will come when Israel will yet bask in His light.

And just as the wings (the beams or rays, that is) of the rising sun bring light and healing to those who have been sick and sleepless through a long, dark night – so the advent of the Sun of Righteousness will dispel all darkness and sin and radiate healing. And Israel will be brought to confess, in the well-known language of Isaiah 53, ‘He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and *by his wounds we are healed!*’

The freedom, the joy and exhilaration which the righteous will enjoy in that day is likened graphically to the frisking and frolicking of calves in the open pasture when let loose from the stall in which they had been cooped up. ‘You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day which I am preparing’ - the image of ashes referring us back to the consuming furnace-fire of judgment of verse 1. In the day which God is preparing, there will be a reversal of roles – and the righteous – who on many occasions have been ‘trampled down’ by their foes – will be given the final victory over them.

And now that all the dialogues and disputes between God and His people are over, Malachi brings his message to a conclusion with three short points : (i) an **exhortation** to remember the Law of Moses, (ii) a **promise** to send Elijah to Israel before the great and fearful day of the Lord, and (iii) a **warning** – that, repentance apart, He – the Lord – will come Himself and smite the land with utter destruction.

Interestingly these backward and forward looks centre around the persons of Moses and Elijah – who, as you will recall, appeared in glory on the so-called Mount of the Transfiguration – when they, Moses the mediator of the old law-covenant and Elijah the champion of the law in Israel, spoke with our Lord Jesus of His departure which He was to accomplish in Jerusalem ... by means of which departure He would redeem us from the curse of the law we had broken.

‘I remember your words’, God had said in effect in 3. 16, ‘now you remember mine – the law I gave to Moses!’ And the Lord stresses that He – and not Moses – was the real author of the law.¹⁹ Moses was simply God’s ‘servant’ to whom God issued His commandments – and that, ‘for *all* Israel’. In other words the law was given, not merely for Moses himself – or only for the people of Israel of his own day – but for the entire nation through all time. Although, therefore, it was now a day of *weakness and humiliation*, this was no excuse for making it a day of *negligence*. His people weren’t at liberty to lower the standard which *God* had commanded in His word.²⁰

The words ‘the statutes and the legal judgements’ form a common expression for the law of God as a whole.

OH - statutes

And Moses himself used it many times when exhorting the people to observe the law God had given him – for instance in Deuteronomy 4: ‘Now, O Israel, listen to *the statutes and the legal judgments* which I teach you to observe, that you may live ... surely I have taught you *statutes and legal judgments*, just as the Lord my God commanded me ... what great nation is there that has such *statutes and righteous legal judgments* as are in all this law which I set before you this day? ... the Lord commanded me ... to teach you *statutes and legal judgments*, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess’, Deut. 4. 1-14.

OH – 4. 1-6

‘Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and fearful day of the Lord.’²¹

Now man has *his* day – the period marked by human rebellion against God. But many inspired writers – in both Testaments – are at pains to assure us that God will have *His* day in the end.

And there can be no question but that this particular prophecy found fulfilment in John the Baptist. The only issue is whether John is the *sole* fulfilment of this prophecy. In other words, will ‘Elijah the prophet’ – either an Elijah-like figure or Elijah personally – and we remember that Elijah never died – will an Elijah-like figure or Elijah be sent immediately before the coming of that great and dreadful day of God’s wrath?

Speaking personally I can see arguments both ways. Though I do lean towards the opinion that, just as the Old Testament expectation of Messiah’s coming was to be fulfilled in two stages—the first and second coming of our Lord, the one past and the other yet future—so the old Testament expectation of Elijah will be fulfilled in two stages also. That is, that John the Baptist came as the real – but *partial* – fulfilment of this prophecy.²²

OH – Elijah and John

But for our purpose this evening, we need note only the words of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, in Luke 1, ‘You shall call his name John ... he shall turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to *turn the hearts of the fathers to the children*’,

Luke 1. 13-17 ... and the words of our Lord to His disciples at the foot of the Mount of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17, 'Elijah indeed is coming and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands'. 'Then the disciples understood', Matthew adds, 'that He spoke to them of John the Baptist', Matthew 17. 11-13.

But a whole lot of water would go under the bridge before John would put in an appearance. Indeed, John wouldn't come on the scene for over 400 years.

OH – 4. 1-6

'Lest I come and strike the land with utter destruction'.²³ The word translated 'a curse' in both the KJV and the NIV is a rather technical word – meaning properly to be accursed – to be doomed – to be appointed to utter destruction. This is the word used to describe the fate of the Canaanites; for example, as is said in Deuteronomy 20, 'of the cities of these peoples which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall *utterly destroy* them', Deut. 20. 16-17. That is, Malachi is saying, if God's people refuse to repent and continue to resemble the Canaanites in character, far from their land being 'a delightful land', 3. 12, their land will necessarily share the fate of the land of the Canaanites in being wholly destroyed.²⁴

And so we come to the end of our current studies on the book of Malachi. But we have also reached, of course, the end of the Old Testament – both in terms of its canon – Malachi being the last book – and of its history.

And, if the Old Testament was all we had in our Bibles, it would be a most disappointing book.

OH – OT

For, in itself, it is a book :

- of unsatisfied longings, expectations and hopes
- of unexplained rituals and shadows – and
- of unfulfilled prophecies.

And all of this shouts at us that it is at best an unfinished story – that it points forward to something more.

But Israel would have to wait some time for the rest of the story. For heaven was now going off the air for over 400 years – until the moment came for the angel Gabriel to materialise unannounced in the temple at Jerusalem – paralysing the officiating old priest Zachariah with fear. There would be no further broadcasts until then.²⁵

OH – Testaments close

As we have seen, within a few verses of the close of the Old Testament, the Lord Jesus is spoken of as *the Sun of Righteousness* ('the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings') – followed by a conditional threat ('*lest I come* and strike the land with utter destruction').

I like to contrast this with the New Testament, where, within a few verses of its close, the Lord Jesus is spoken of as *the Bright and Morning Star* ('I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star' ... which, as you probably know, appears *before* the rising of the sun) – followed by an unconditional promise ('*Surely I come* quickly').

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

End-notes

¹ 'Been strong against me' could also mean to be strong over any one, to oppress and do violence to a person. 'Your words put a constraint on me' – to prove Myself a God of judgement.

² The form of the verb 'said' pictures them as speaking to one another. 'The Niphal form of the verb has the reciprocal sense of the conjunction', T. V. Moore.

³ It is not possible to serve God acceptably in the spirit of the hireling. Men who expect recompense and payment in this world for serving God have mistaken God for mammon! Truly, if the righteous had not hope of another and better life, in vain would they suffer and serve - 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied', 1 Cor. 15. 19.

⁴ **Compare the seven thousand in Elijah's day who had not bowed the knee to Baal.**

⁵ Communing together as Jonathan and David (1 Sam. 23.16-18); as Jeremiah and Baruch (Jer. 45.1-5); and as Paul and his friends in prison (Col. 4. 11).

⁶ TWOT, number 767; NIDOTTE, number 3108. especially page 303.

⁷ Ibn Ezra. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/biography/IbnEzra.html>

⁸ Or would it rather fill a sports page or gossip column?

⁹ Compare, 'I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces', Eccles. 2. 8.

¹⁰ See Exod. 19. 5; Deut. 7. 6; 14. 2; 26. 18; Psa. 135. 4.

¹¹ Israel already was God's possession, but Malachi envisages is a coming time when God will gather his remnant together and openly vindicate them. This clearly refers to the day of the Lord (cf. v. 2; 4:1, 3) when He will resurrect Old Testament saints.

An earlier prophet had written, 'For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, And for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, Until her righteousness goes forth as brightness ... You shall also be a crown of glory In the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem In the hand of your God ... you shall be called Hephzibah, {Literally My Delight (the word of Mal. 3. 12) Is in her}', Isa. 62. 1-4.

¹² One American Bible teacher said, 'My cousin Vanessa has a stuffed bunny that she's had for years. This bunny goes everywhere she goes. And it looks like it. At one time, bunny was pink. Now bunny is unwashably grey. It looks like a dog might have attacked it at one point and ripped the stuffing out and attacked again after bunny was repaired. Nevertheless if bunny gets left at my house her mom has to come back and pick him up.

This is what it means to be a treasured possession. In my eyes, bunny should have been put out of misery a long time ago. Bunny disgusts me. He won't come clean anymore. Viewed in ourselves, we're the same way. We should have been put out of our misery. We're filthy and disgusting. And yet we are treasured possessions that God isn't going home without'. Mike Stine. <http://www.spreadinglight.com/sermons/m-r/malachi4.html>

¹³ Source : A legend preserved by Valerius Maximus, IV, 4. 'Maxima ornamenta esse matronis liberos, apud Pomponium Rufum collectorum libro * sic invenimus: Cornelia Gracchorum mater, cum Campana matrona apud illam hospita ornamenta sua pulcherrima illius saeculi ostenderet, traxit eam sermone, donec e schola redirent liberi, et 'haec' inquit 'ornamenta sunt mea'. omnia nimirum habet qui nihil concupiscit, eo quidem certius ~ quam cuncta possidet, quia dominium rerum conlabi solet, bonae mentis usurpatio nullum tristioris fortunae recipit incursum. itaque quorsum attinet aut divitias in prima felicitatis parte aut paupertatem in ultimo miseriarum statu ponere, cum et illarum frons hilaris multis intus amaritudinibus sit referta et huius horridior aspectus solidis et certis bonis abundet? quod melius personis quam verbis repraesentabitur.'

Valerius Maximus, to whom the *praenomen* Marcus is assigned in one of the best manuscripts, and that of Publius in another, is known to us as the compiler of a large collection of historical anecdotes, entitled *D Factis Dictisque Memorabilibus Libri IX*, arranged under different heads, the sayings and doings of Roman worthies being, moreover, kept distinct in each division from those of foreigners. No reasonable doubt can be entertained with regard to the period when he flourished. The dedication is indeed couched in such general terms, that the adulation might apply to almost any Caesar ; but when we find the writer speaking of himself as removed by two generations only from Marcus Antonius the orator (VI 8 § 1.), when we remark the studied abhorrence everywhere expressed towards Brutus and Cassius (VI 4 § 5, I 8 § 8.), and the eager flattery so lavishly heaped upon the Julian line, we at once conclude that he lived under the first emperors. The description of the reigning prince as one descended from both of the two illustrious censors, Claudius Nero and Livius Salinator (IX 2 § 6.), distinctly marks out Tiberius; and, this point being fixed, we can determine that the parricide, whose-treason and destruction form the theme of a glowing invective (IX 11 § 4.), must be the notorious Sejanus. The opinion hazarded by some of the earlier scholars, that we ought to regard this Valerius Maximus as the same person with the consul of that name who held office for the first time under Volusianus in A.D. 253, and for a second time under Gallienus III A.D. 256, seems to be totally devoid of any foundation, and is directly contradicted not only by the evidence recited above, but also by the fact that the Valerius Maximus whom we are now considering is referred to by the elder Pliny (*H. N.* I and VII.), by Plutarch (*Marcell.* sub fin.), and by Aulus Gellius (XII 7.), the testimony of the last especially being quite impregnable. Of his personal history we know nothing, except the solitary circumstance, recorded by himself, that he accompanied, but in what capacity we are not told, Sex. Pompeius into Asia (II 6 § 8), the Sextus Pompeius apparently who was consul A.D. 14, at the time when Augustus died, and who was the first to render homage to his successor.

¹⁴ Grace Reese Adkins, 1948.

¹⁵ In the book of Job, Bildad gives a graphic sketch of the meaning of the words 'leaving them neither root nor branch', when he says of the ungodly man – 'His roots dry up below and his branches wither above. The memory of him perishes from the earth; he has no name in the land ... such is the place of one who knows not God', Job 18. 16-21.¹⁵ But the image employed by Malachi hardly needs Bildad to explain it. It is obvious enough – all proud workers of iniquity will then be utterly wiped out.

¹⁶ Psalms 61:6 [5E] For thou, O God, hast heard my vows, thou hast given me the heritage of those who fear thy name.

Deut 28:58 "If you are not careful to do all the words of this law which are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awful name, the LORD your God,

Isaiah 59:19 So they shall fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the LORD drives.

Mal 2:5 My covenant with him was a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him, that he might fear; and he feared me, he stood in awe of my name.

Psalms 86:11 Teach me thy way, O LORD, that I may walk in thy truth; unite my heart to fear thy name.

Psalms 102:16 [15E] The nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory.

Psalms 111:9 He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant for ever. Holy and terrible is his name!

¹⁷ Also 'sun' is feminine and 'His wings' is literally 'her wings'.

¹⁸ And I would also compare the words of Jeremiah in chapter 33 of his prophecy, where he foretold the restoration of both Judah and Israel in the latter days and where the Lord spoke of Jerusalem, saying, 'Behold, I will bring it health and *healing*; I will *heal* them ... I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned ... at that time I will cause to grow up to David a *Branch of righteousness*; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth', Jer. 33. 5-15.

¹⁹ Cf. John 8. 1-11.

²⁰ The Lord's requirement here should be set against His earlier rebuke back in chapter 3 verse 7, 'From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my *statutes* and have *not* kept them'.

²¹ Some take this verse to refer to the fathers Abraham Isaac and Jacob, so that the meaning is simply this—the people will return to the faith of the fathers. But the problem with this is that it says that Elijah will also turn the fathers hearts toward the children. It would be unlikely that God would speak of Elijah changing the hearts of Abraham Isaac and Jacob. So I take it in its simpler sense: ordinary living fathers and ordinary living children will have their hearts changed toward each other.

²² As I read it, neither John nor Jesus – nor any of the writers of the New Testament – spoke of him as the only and final fulfilment. See following quotations ...

(a) 'Gabriel interprets this for us, to include the sending of John the Immerser. For he not only says (Luke 1:17.) that he shall "go before" the Lord "in the spirit and power of Elias," but describes his mission in the characteristic words of Malachi, "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children;" and those other words also, "and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just," perhaps represent the sequel in Malachi, "and the hearts of the children to the fathers;" for their hearts could only be so turned by conversion to God, whom the fathers, patriarchs and prophets, knew, loved and served; and whom they served in name only. 'you shall call his name John ... he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord', Luke 1. 15-17. Be same as 3. 1 – where can be no doubt. Note similar language. John the Immerser, in denying that he was Elias, (John 1:21) denied only, that he was that great prophet himself. Our Lord, in saying (Matthew 11:14), "This is Elias, which was for to come (Matthew 17:12) that Elias is come already and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed, met the error of the scribes, that He could not be the Christ, because Elias was not yet come. The play on 'Behold' *sending* "my messenger" with Malachi's name in 3:1 is matched in 4:5 by 'behold' *sending* "Elijah." the messenger's preparation was for the first advent of our Lord, and since the events included in that day in Mal 3:2ff and Mal 4:1ff involve the purification of the Levites, the judgment on the wicked and the return of the Yahweh to his temple, it is fair to conclude that that day embraces both advents. This is precisely the situation which Joel 2:28–32 presents. The fulfillment of Joel's words at Pentecost, Acts 2. 16, is as much a part of that day as the seismographic and cosmological convolutions connected with the second advent. One fulfillment not exhaust prediction. Yes, are gaps, Isa. 61. The foreshortened perspective that the Old Testament prophets frequently had of the future. They were not always permitted to distinguish clearly between the first and second coming of Christ. Malachi saw two widely separated events – John fulfil first portion at first advent and remainder await Lord's second. (b) Most natural reading of 'before'. John said that was not Elijah, John 1. When He says (Matthew 17:11), "Elias truly shall first come and restore all things," He implies a coming of Elijah, other than that of John the Immerser, since he was already martyred, and all things were not yet restored. This must also be the fullest fulfillment. Christ is here alluding to his own second coming, which shall be preceded by the appearance of Elijah in person. This seems to be the plain meaning of the prophecy in Malachi, and of Christ's announcement, and is confirmed by St. John's statement concerning the two witnesses (Revelation 11:3, 6). That the paragraph cannot refer to John the Baptist is plain from the tenses used in this verse contrasted with those in the following. To regard ver. 12 as simply a correction of ver. 10 is to do violence to language, and to leave one half of Malachi's prediction unexplained. Restore all things. The event is still future, and was not fulfilled in the Baptist's preaching, however deep and extensive may have been its influence. Christ is here speaking of the past, as in the preceding verse he spake of the future. The common Jewish interpretation confused the two events and the two personages, reducing them to one. And this mistake has been committed by many modern expositors.

John Piper = From my most recent study of this I would say that just as the expectation of the Messiah's coming will be fulfilled in two stages—the first and second coming of our Lord—so the expectation of Elijah will be fulfilled in two stages also. John the Baptist came as the first fulfillment of this prophecy. But there are good arguments that neither he nor Jesus nor the writers of the New Testament thought of John as the final Elijah. (Luke 1:17 - he comes in "the spirit and the power of Elijah;" Matthew 11:14 - "If you are able to receive it;" John 1:21 - John says he is not Elijah; Matthew 17:11 - "Elijah comes and will restore all things;") In stead Revelation 11:3-12 pictures two witnesses at the end of the age making one last extraordinary call to Israel to Israel to repent and prepare for the impending judgment. One of these is almost certainly the final Elijah, because he has "the power to shut up the sky, that no rain may fall" just as the first Elijah did. But if other is Moses, he had once died! So what kind of body have in Rev. 11 – because is killed? I.e. a mortal body. So must be man like Moses – so one like Elijah. I.e. not literally and personally – one in spirit and power as John. The task of this coming prophet had this same two-pronged focus. Mark 9:12 answers the inquiry of Peter, James, and John ("Why do the scribes say the first Elijah must come?") as they were returning from the Mount of Transfiguration and hearing about the Son of Man suffering and being raised again by saying: "Elijah has come [ejlqwVn, past] first and is restoring [ajpokaqistavnei, present] all things." Matt 17:11, referring to the identical event, combined the present with the future tense: "Elijah is coming (e[r]cetai, present) and he will restore [ajpokatasthvsei] all things." Since this present is coupled with a future tense, the present must be interpreted as a futuristic present—"Elijah is coming."

Now the term "restoration" is used in the OT both as a technical term for the restoration of Israel to their own land and as a moral restoration of the inner man. We believe that Matthean and Markan uses of this verb are parallel, in part, to the noun form (ajpokatasthvseou) used in Acts 3:21. In Acts, Peter states that Jesus now remains in heaven "until the time of the restoration (or 'establishing') of all things that God has spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets." That too is a future work associated with the *parousia*. C.f. Acts 1. 7. [Luke presented the kingdom (basileiva) as having present and future aspects. The concept of a kingdom is first recorded in Luke as part of the announcement of the birth of Jesus. The angel announced, "The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:32–33). This everlasting kingdom is identified with national Israel by the phrase "over the house of Jacob."

Jesus preached "the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43; 8:1 ; 9:11), and He commissioned the disciples to preach this same message (9:2, 60). He told the disciples that they should inform the people that the kingdom of God was near (10:9–11), and He told the Pharisees that the kingdom of God was in their midst (17:21).

When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come" (11:2), this pointed to the future. This future kingdom will include the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles (13:28–29 ; 22:30 ; Matt 8:11). Before the Triumphal Entry, as the disciples approached Jerusalem, they anticipated the immediate appearance of the kingdom of God (Luke 19:11). Jesus gave the disciples a number of signs (21:25–28) by which they could recognize that the kingdom of God was near (21:31). At the last Passover Jesus referred to the future aspect of the kingdom of God when He stated He would not eat the Passover meal again "until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (22:16–18).

This future aspect of the kingdom is further defined in Jesus' response to the disciples' arguing over which of them was the greatest. "And you are those who have stood by Me in My trials; and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28–30). Jesus clearly led the disciples to believe in a future kingdom for Israel in which they would reign with Him over the 12 tribes.

Acts 3. 19 - These times of refreshing will take place in the personal presence of Christ when God the Father sends Him to earth again. These times of refreshing will occur at the period of the restoration (ajpokatastasi) of all things (v. 21). Interestingly Josephus used ajpokatastasi" to refer to the restoration of the Jews to the land of Palestine.] This Elijah of the future is to "restore all things." This did not John. He restored some things. He preached repentance, and his doctrine is still restoring. But the "time of the restoration of all things" is that of the second advent of Christ (see Acts 3:19-21).

How land not under ban – post 1948 – if John not save nation?

At the Transfiguration (see Mark 9:2; Matthew 17:11), Jesus announced that Elijah does come, and restores all things. But then he added that Elijah already came. So here we have another example of the already--not yet theme of prophecy. John came in the spirit of Elijah, and people killed him. But Elijah must yet come.

Most commentators identify one of the two witnesses in Revelation 12 as Elijah--either the real Elijah (otherwise, why did he not die?) or one like John who came in the spirit of Elijah.

Is Jesus saying John completely fulfills the expectation of Elijah? Or is Jesus saying that Elijah is a type which appears now in John and will reappear again before the Day of the Lord? This "already/not yet" tension is common in the NT and may very well lie behind this saying of Jesus.

Our Lord's words, "Elias truly shall first come and restore all things," seem to me to leave no question, that, as John the Immerser came, in the spirit and power of Elias, before His first coming, so, before the second coming, Elijah should come in person, as Jews and Christians have alike expected. This has been the Christian expectation from the first – as witness the understanding of the Church Fathers. Justin Martyr asked his opponent (Dial. c. 49. p. 131. Oxford translation.)

"Shall we not conceive that the Word of God has proclaimed Elias to be the forerunner of the great and terrible day of His second Coming?" "Certainly," was Trypho's reply. Justin continues, "Our Lord Himself taught us in His own teaching that this very thing shall be, when He said that 'Elias also shall come;' and we know that this shall be fulfilled, when He is about to come from heaven in glory." Tertullian says (De anima c.35. p. 539. Rig.) "Elias is to

come again, not after a departure from life, but after a translation; not to be restored to the body, from which he was never taken; but to be restored to the world, from which he was translated'.

"John is spoken of as to come in the spirit and power of Elias, because, as Elias shall precede the second Coming of the Lord, so John preceded His first ... John then was Elias in spirit; he was not Elias in person. What then the Lord owned as to spirit, that John denies as to the person", Gregory the Great.

His very ascension perhaps was for the purpose of his later eschatological appearance as forerunner of the coming of YHWH. Jewish tradition from earliest times viewed it in this way.

Elijah still plays a significant role in Jewish liturgy and ritual. He is mentioned when grace is said after meals: "May God in his mercy send us the prophet Elijah." And in the benedictions after the weekly Sabbath reading of a chapter from the books of the prophets, the prayerbook says, "Let us rejoice, O Lord, through your servant, the prophet Elijah, and through the kingdom of David, your Messiah. May he come soon and rejoice our hearts." Elijah is mentioned in the circumcision ceremony and in the Passover seder. At the beginning of the celebration of the Passover a special cup of wine, called "Elijah's cup" is placed on the table. When grace is said after the meal, a child opens the door in expectation of Elijah's appearance and biblical passages are recited which express the hope of Jewish people for deliverance from oppression (Wiener, *The Prophet Elijah* 132–35).

Jesus asserted that if Israel had accepted His messiahship, then Elijah had come (Matt. 17:10–13; Mark 9:11–13). That the prophecy was fulfilled in some sense by John the Baptist is undeniable, but that he did not completely fulfill the prophecy is also evident. Even subsequent to the transfiguration, Jesus still spoke of Elijah's coming as a future event (Matt. 17:11).

When John was asked who he was, he stated very clearly, "I am not Elijah" (John 1:21, 23). That is, the prophecy didn't find an exhaustive fulfillment in John. Now in Matthew 11:13 Jesus said, "If you receive it"--this was Elijah who was to come. There is a contingency here. [or is it that this interpretation of the Baptist is new.] John may have come in the spirit and power of Elijah--but he was not Elijah, and he did not do what Malachi 4 said, turn the people right just before the great and terrible day of judgment. "If you receive it" may very well refer to receiving the message of the kingdom, that is, receiving Christ. But we know that Jesus came to his own, but his own received him not, but to as many as received him he gave the authority to be the sons of God (John 1:11, 12). Jesus may have meant that had the people received the Messiah, John's ministry would have been the whole fulfillment of Malachi 4. But of course they did not, and the Scripture was clear that they would not; but Jesus' offer of himself to his people was still a legitimate offer, even if he knew they would reject him. Just as the Lord would not be accepted as the Messiah, neither would John be accepted as Elijah. Both would have to come again.

The Lord promised to send His people Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord arrived. An angel later told John the Baptist's parents that their son would minister in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). Yet John denied that he was Elijah (John 1:21-23). Jesus said that John would have been the Elijah who was to come if the people of his day had accepted Jesus as their Messiah (Matt. 11:14). Since they did not, John did not fulfill this prophecy about Elijah coming, though he did fulfill the prophecy about Messiah's forerunner (3:1). This interpretation has in its favor Jesus' words following the Transfiguration (and John the Baptist's death). Jesus said that Elijah would come and restore all things (Matt. 17:11). Whether the original Elijah will appear before the day of the Lord or whether an Elijah-like figure, similar to John the Baptist, will appear remains to be seen. If Moses is Moses personally not a Moses-like servant, why should Elijah be an Elijah-like prophet not Elijah personally

The context of the two prophecies in Malachi indicate that Elijah was going to come back to turn the hearts of Israel to the Lord before the Messiah came to set up His earthly kingdom, so that the Lord's fury would not rest upon them when He came Himself (Malachi 3:1-3; 4:1-6).

This will be fulfilled when Elijah comes back as one of the two witnesses during the tribulation period right before Jesus returns during the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 11:2-12). We know that their ministry is to bring judgment upon the wicked, and give some sort of a testimony to the people (11:5-6).

alluding to Malachi 4: 5 (not to Malachi 3), Jesus adds, "And if ye will receive it" (that which I say), "this is Elias, which was for to come." If they received the Lord Jesus, the kingdom might be established, the curse still hanging over the people set aside, and relationships according to God re-established in Israel; in such a case, the future mission of Elias would not be necessary, and John the Baptist, come in the spirit and power of Elias, would occupy the place, so to speak, of the future prophet.

What John did for Jesus at His first coming, preparing the hearts of people to receive Him, this latter-day Elijah will do for Him at His second coming.

the question of our Lord's disciples in Matthew 17:10, "Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come." Christ himself confirms this opinion by answering, "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things." He cannot be referring here to John the Baptist, because he uses the future tense; and when he goes on to say that "Elias is come already," he is referring to what was past, and he himself explains that he means John, who was announced to come in the spirit and power of Elias (Luke 1:17), but of whom it could not be said that he "restored all things."

It is argued by Keil, Reinke, and others, that, as the promise of King David in such passages as Jeremiah 30:9;<263423>Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24; Hosea 3:5, etc., cannot imply the resurrection of David and his return to earth, so we cannot think of an actual reappearance of Elijah himself, but only of the coming of some prophet with his spirit and power. But, as Knabenbauer points out, for the attribution of the name David to Messiah, long and careful preparation had been made; e.g. by his being called "the rod of Jesse," the occupant of David's throne, etc.; and all who heard the expression would at once understand the symbolical application, especially as David was known to have died and been buried. But when they found Malachi speaking of the reappearance of "Elijah *the prophet*," who, as they were well aware, had never died, of whose connection with the coming Messenger they had never heard,

they could not avoid the conclusion to which they came, viz. that before the great day of judgment Elias should again visit the earth in person.

²³ I understand that, when the Jews read the book of Malachi in the synagogue, they repeat verse 5 after verse 6 to avoid concluding the prophecy with such a dismal and solemn threat. And no doubt for the same reason, when they translated the Old Testament into Greek, they moved verse 4 from between verses 3 and 5 and put it at the end of the book – after verse 6. But alas for them, such attempts to blunt the message do nothing to alter its grim reality.

²⁴ This is a stark contrast with the book of Zechariah where one section of the last chapter ends by saying, “and there shall be no more utter destruction” (Zech 14:11). Suggesting that, in the event, the threat of destruction will be lifted by the repentance of the people.

²⁵ In the long interval between Malachi and John the Baptist there were times when Israel looked and longed for a new prophet to arise (1 Macc. 9:27; 14:41).