**Hope**

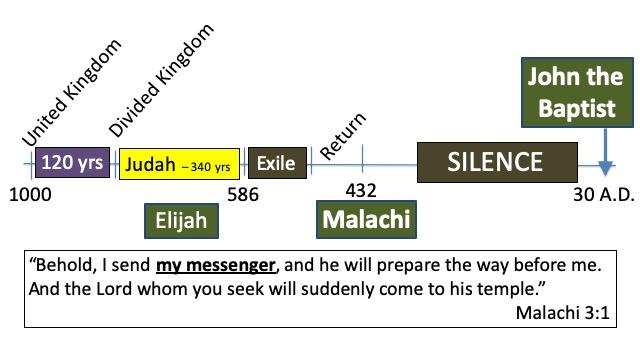
Malachi 4

***Open the Bible Review of the Old Testament***

1. **Life** – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”
2. **Curse** – “To Adam God said… Cursed is the ground; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life.”
3. **Salvation** - The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth… So the Lord said, “I will blot out man… from the face of the land…” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.
4. **Judgment** - Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city… and let us make a name for ourselves… So the Lord confusedthe language of all the earth. And… dispersed them over the face of all the earth.
5. **Promise** - I will surely bless you…and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed
6. **Blood** - When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you,
7. **Law** – You shall have no other gods before me
8. **Atonement** - Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.
9. **Priest** - Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.
10. **Courage** - Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go
11. **Deliverer** - Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them.
12. **King** - And the Lord said to Samuel, “Obey the voice of the people… for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.”
13. **Throne** – Go and tell my servant David… I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.
14. **Prophet** - Nathan said to David, “You are the one! Thus says the Lord… Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight?
15. **Temple** - the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud… for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.
16. **Worship** - And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.”
17. **Sin** - The king of Assyria… carried the Israelites away to Assyria… And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God
18. **Righteousness** - Great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book
19. **Joy** - They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.
20. **Holiness** - In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up
21. **Servant** - Behold my servant, whom I uphold… I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.
22. **Calling** - Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters
23. **Heart** - For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel… I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.
24. **Tears** - The Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
25. **Glory** - Then the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house
26. **Shepherd** - Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep… As a shepherd seeks out his flock… so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them
27. **Alien** - But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank.
28. **Hope** - Behold, the day is coming… when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble… But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings

Congratulations everyone! Today we have completed our journey through the Old Testament! ***Malachi is the hinge*** from the Old to the New – it is the final Word from the Lord before John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness.

Here is an overview of **Israel’s history** from the united kingdom under David to the time of Malachi’s ministry 600 years later, all the way to the coming of John the Baptist 400 years after that. We see 1,000 years in a single snapshot.



The name ***Malachi means “Messenger.”*** As a prophet of the Lord, Malachi was, of course, a messenger of the Lord. He had the extra honor of being the LAST prophet of the Lord before John the Baptist – who is clearly the one referenced in Malachi 3:1, since Malachi explicitly states this in 4:5 – *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”* [Timeline 2]

Though the Old Testament ends on a note of judgment, there is also a profound promise here **to give God’s people HOPE**. God was not done with His people. Though they had rebelled over and over, God forgave and restored them over and over. And though the prophetic word would go silent for over 400 years, one final Messenger would come as the forerunner to the Messiah. Jesus made it clear, that Messenger was John the Baptist: *“For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.”* Matthew 11:13-14 [Timeline 3]

As we’ve seen throughout the Old Testament, ***the whole Bible is one story and all of it points to Jesus.*** God has been announcing and working His great plan of salvation since the dawn of creation – to reconcile to Himself ALL THINGS IN CHRIST.

Here at the end of the Old Testament, we hear the final six verses of God’s verbal revelation. Malachi four begins and ends with the threat of judgment, but in between those warnings is a wonderful promise of HOPE. Here is our summary:

**Malachi 4**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Warning for Evildoers:** | **Promise for God-Fearers:** |
| Judgment & Wrath | Peace and Joy |
| “All the arrogant and evildoers will be stubble.” Mal. 4:1 | “You shall go out leaping like calves.” Mal. 4:2 |

Let’s look first at **the warning** and then focus in on the promise of peace and joy.

**For Evildoers there will be Judgment and Wrath**

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze.” Malachi 4:1

***Fire is the great symbol of God’s presence and justice.***

* He led the nation of Israel as a pillar of fire by day.
* When the sons of Aaron offered unauthorized fire in the temple they were consumed with fire from the temple.
* When Elijah faced the prophets of Baal the Lord proved His supremacy by sending fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and water around the altar.
* When Sodom and Gomorrah became so wicked God could stand it no longer, He rained down fire and sulfur from heaven to consume them.

The consistent symbol for God’s coming judgment at the end of days is FIRE. He promised to never again destroy the earth with water, but God has promised that **HE WILL destroy the whole world when Jesus returns** pouring out the seven bowls of God’s righteous fury**.** And then, when the fighting and drama are over, the devil and all his demons will be thrown alive into ***the lake of fire*** – the misery they will suffer forever without ever actually dying.

When God makes all things new, those who belong to Jesus will drink from the springs of living water that flow from His throne. But Revelation 21 says:

**For Evildoers there will be Judgment and Wrath**

“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” Revelation 21:8

**This is the consistent message of the whole Bible.** Anyone who denies the final judgment and eternal separation of the righteous from the unrighteous has not actually read the Bible. Why is the Old Testament so harsh at times? Why did Israel wipe out whole nations without mercy? Because ***God has a zero-tolerance policy for sin and idolatry***. The nations around Israel heard about Israel’s God and the mighty acts He had done – and once in a while someone like Ruth the Moabitess or Uriah the Hittite would convert from the worship of their ancestral gods to devote themselves to the Lord, the God of Israel. But most people ignored or rejected what they heard about the Lord and fixed their trust in their own gods or their own strength – and suffered the consequences for their choice.

**God’s justice is perfect**. He knows everyone’s heart and gives each person exactly what he or she deserves. Romans 2 says:

**For Evildoers there will be Judgment and Wrath**

“He will render to each one according to his works… for those who are self-seekingand do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil.” Romans 2:6,8,10

This is a serious warning, not to be ignored or downplayed. The stakes could not be higher. Look back in Malachi 4, the very last sentence of the Old Testament:

**For Evildoers there will be Judgment and Wrath**

“And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children… lest I come and strike the land with ***a decree of utter destruction***.” Malachi 4:6

The dads in the room are like, “Hold on!” Don’t panic. This isn’t saying, “Pay attention to your kids or it’s Doom’s Day for you.” (You should pay attention to your kids!) We’ll see what it means in a few minutes. But for now just notice the **dramatic contrast** in this final verse of divine revelation before 400 years of silence.

* You can EITHER live in harmonious, loving family relationships
* OR ELSE be among those who are stricken with utter destruction.

**Which side of the line are you on?** Are you a sheep belonging to Jesus, the Good Shepherd? Or are you a goat, belonging to satan, the prince of this world? Have you been declared righteous by your faith in Christ or are you still defined and controlled by your sin? When God looks at you does He see the righteousness of Jesus or the wickedness of your selfish, sinful heart? Are you living in harmonious, loving relationships or are you in danger of God’s curse of utter destruction? Listen to Romans 2 as we pivot from the warning to the promise:

“***He will render to each one according to his works***: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;but for those who are self-seekingand do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.” Romans 2:6-8

“There will be **tribulation and distress** for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but **glory and honor and peace** for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.” Romans 2:9-11

***God has promised JUSTICE in the end***. The day is coming – burning like an oven. And friends, that day is not far off. **Books will be opened** on that day as everyone stands before the throne of Jesus Christ for their final evaluation. You do not want to be evaluated by what is recorded in those books – for all it will do is prove, for the world to see, the wickedness of your thoughts, attitudes and actions.

But praise be to God there is another book – called **the Lamb’s Book of Life**. And if your name is found there then the other books will be closed and ***your judgment will be replaced by celebration***. Jesus the Judge will look at you and say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant, come and enter your Master’s happiness.” There will be GLORY, HONOR and PEACE for you. But there will be judgment and wrath for those whose names are not in Jesus’ book.

That is the warning: for evildoers there will be judgment and wrath. But ***here is the promise***: for God-fearers there will be peace and joy. Let’s see the HOPE-filled future God has in store for those who belong to Jesus by faith! There are ***four promises to give us hope***, here is the first.

**For God-Fearers there will be Peace and Joy**

“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.” Malachi 4:2

* Promise 1 - Healing

Verse one – with its imagery of blazing heat – flows right into verse 2 with reference to the Sun. But this time the heat is not burning things up but somehow is bringing them healing. ***The same sun that nourishes one plant destroys another!*** We have been amazed by the plants that grow here in Florida. Up north the only thing I could consistently grow was weeds. But here there are hardy plants that can grow with minimal water and a LOT of sunshine. God obviously designed certain plants to flourish under the same sun that would destroy other plants.

A couple of weeks ago we envisioned ***the presence of God as an ocean***. Believers in Jesus are like cats who have been transformed into ocean creatures so that we will be able to enjoy the presence of God for eternity. But for those who do not know Jesus eternity will be misery – they will be like cats in the ocean of God’s righteous judgment.

This passage gives us a different picture with ***the presence of God like the SUN***. In verse one the Day of the Lord is pictured as a day of blazing heat and destroying flames. In verse two we see **“the sun of righteousness”** rising with healing in its wings. When Jesus comes back it will be in power and glory, with the full revelation of His divine nature and supreme authority. The Day of His return will be a Day of terrifying judgment as His righteous fury is unleashed on a world filled with wickedness. But for those who belong to Him it will be our moment of full and final healing!

Think of **what the return of Christ will mean for you** – if you belong to Jesus by faith. It will mean complete wholeness - shalom in the fullest sense.

* Jesus will lift you up in His arms and you will know an acceptance and love that you have so far only glimpsed.
* He will wipe every tear from your eyes – in an instant all sadness and pain will become a distant memory.
* And in the blink of an eye your mortal body will be clothed with immortality. In other words, you will be ***given your UPGRADE*** – your new body that will not break down but will last FOREVER.

**For God-Fearers there will be Peace and Joy**

“In the twinkling of an eye... the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and ***we shall be changed***... and this mortal body must put on immortality.” 1 Cor. 15:52-53

* Promise 1 - Healing

This is ***not just the relief of a few symptoms*** - this is our complete and eternal transformation into GLORY. The theological term is GLORIFICATION. Brother, sister - the day is coming when we who have been justified in Christ will be GLORIFIED IN HIM: changed to become immortal, imperishable. C.S. Lewis said, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked with a mere mortal,” and “the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship” (the Weight of Glory).

Do you remember ***when the woman touched Jesus’ robe and was healed?*** She was an outcast among the Jewish people – contaminated and unclean because of a longstanding, untreatable flow of blood. She had heard about Jesus and had such faith in him that all she wanted was to touch his robe and she believed she would be healed. In the bustle of the crowd she got to him and did touch his robe – and her faith proved well placed. Just touching his robe did heal her.

The robes a rabbi wore had **“wings” – hems or fringes**. Based on this prophecy in Malachi 4 many people, like this woman, came to Jesus just to touch the hem of his garment. And, like her, they were healed – because just the act of seeking healing in this way was a demonstration of faith in Jesus as the One prophesied as “the sun of righteousness.”

Just as the woman was healed instantly when she touched Jesus’ robe, ***so we will be healed instantly when Jesus comes back***. We will no longer be broken, sick and struggling but in a single moment we will become whole, healthy and well. Jesus will bring HEALING! This is a great comfort and hope for all of us who struggle.

If your body is breaking down, make it ***a regular practice to meditate on HEAVEN***. Think about what awaits you in eternity. This life is a tiny flicker on the eternal film reel – one little flash of time. **Richard Baxter** was a great preacher and pastor in 17th century England. He suffered from kidney stones, headaches, bleeding, toothaches, swollen feet and many other ailments – meaning he lived with chronic pain every minute of every day. To cope with this he developed the ***practice of meditating on HEAVEN for 30 minutes each day***. Check out the church blog for more on this.

Our first promise is of healing. Second, Malachi four promises happiness!

**For God-Fearers there will be Peace and Joy**

“But for you who fear my name… You shall go out out leaping like calves from the stall.” Malachi 4:2

* Promise 2 - Happiness

I’ve been told that animals don’t feel happiness and sadness like humans do – but they sure seem to. Think of **your dog** when you come home at the end of the day – that sure looks like more than, “I have need to go outside for like 2 hours now!” The picture here is of calves released from their pens – young cows eager to run free in the meadow.

It’s a picture of ***being released into a place made just for you*** – into a freedom you were designed to enjoy. That is what heaven will be for us. We will be set free from the stall of this world – all of its confining challenges and besetting struggles. We will be released from these bodies in bondage to decay into the freedom and joy of life directly in the presence of God.

And THAT will be joy beyond all joy we have known in this world. ***To truly and fully see the Lord, high and lifted up…*** To be with Him without any sin or guilt or shame holding us back. To finally experience the fullness of His love without any fear or unbelief or confusion.

The closest we can get to understanding what this freedom and joy will be like is in ***our best relationships now***. What you feel when you haven’t seen your parents for a long time and then you step into their house – that’s what heaven will feel like – COMING HOME. What you feel when you’ve been away from your family for a week – and they throw a party for you when you get back. The joy of a huge wedding that brings all the aunts, uncles and cousins together – or better yet, the Disney family reunion where Grampa rents a huge house for everyone to enjoy together. Or better yet, the Disney CRUISE that Grampa buys for everyone. Those are little teasers of the joys of heaven.

The New Testament image is of a great wedding celebration. Rev. 19:

**For God-Fearers there will be Peace and Joy**

“***Let us rejoice*** and exult and give him the glory, ***for the marriage of the Lamb has come***, and his Bride has made herself ready.” Rev. 19:7

* Promise 2 - Happiness

***Our bridegroom is coming!*** Brothers and sisters - this is our blessed hope! May we be faithful in making ourselves ready! May we not compromise our purity but may we maintain our first love and wait in holy readiness and faithful service to our coming King! His return will be the fulfillment of all of our hopes and dreams - the culmination of all of our joys!

Healing. Happiness. The third promise is of holiness:

**For God-Fearers there will be Peace and Joy**

“***Remember the law*** of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.” Malachi 4:4

* Promise 3 - Holiness

Here was the struggle for Israel throughout their history: hearing, believing and obeying the Law. Over and over the Law of Moses ***commands the nation to REMEMBER***. Their whole calendar was designed to help them remember: from the Passover to the Day of Atonement to the Feast of Tabernacles; to say nothing of the daily, monthly and annual sacrifices they were supposed to offer.

This great promise of God’s Word is that what is commanded and difficult now will be our everlasting delight. ***We will be holy and righteous forever*** in heaven without even trying. This is probably the hardest thing for us to imagine because our experience now is so clouded by our selfishness and pride. But listen to the Word of the Lord in 1 John 3:

**Promise 3 - Holiness**

“Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears***we shall be like him***, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.” 1 John 3:2-3

***Just to see the Lord will be to become like Him.*** We are already the children of God, but we have not yet been fully transformed – our mortal bodies have not yet been clothed with immortality. We have been justified but we have not yet been glorified. Oh what a day that will be when we see our glorious Lord and all of our remaining sin is finally purged away and the butterfly emerges from its earthly chrysalis! Our destiny, brothers and sisters, is eternal holiness in the presence of our infinitely holy God!

May we obey Malachi 4 and **REMEMBER** the Law of God that we might live in increasing holiness NOW! May we **TREASURE** the Law of God. May we **BELIEVE** the Law of God that we might be holy as the Lord our God is holy!

One more – the fourth promise: harmony.

**For God-Fearers there will be Peace and Joy**

“And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.” Malachi 4:6

* Promise 4 - Harmony

What greater tragedy and heartbreak is there than ***conflict within the family***? When children rebel against their parents or parents neglect and abuse their children? Clearly those are among the most grievous violations of God’s intentions for this world. Family is the oldest institution – going back all the way to the Garden of Eden – and God designed the family to have one man and one woman together in marriage. And the man was to lead his family as a sacrificial servant-leader; the wife in support and the kids in happy obedience.

This whole book of Malachi is a documented conflict between God and His people.

* It opens with God saying “I have loved you.”
* His people immediately respond by asking, ***“How have you loved us?”***
* God challenges their sin and they deny it asking, “How have we despised your name?”
* God called for justice and the people said, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord.”

***The Old Testament started with perfect fellowship***, harmony and peace in the Garden. It ends with broken relationship, conflict and rebellion. Yet even in this low point of Israel’s history, God gives them hope of a day when relationships will again be restored and that original peace and harmony renewed.

Still today the devil’s favorite strategy in the church is **to divide us** – dividing believers ina local congregation, dividing congregations from one another in a city; and of course breaking up families in every way possible. Yet according to Ephesians 4 **we are ONE IN CHRIST**. Listen to how Jesus prayed for us in John 17:

**For God-Fearers there will be Peace and Joy**

“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, ***that they may be one*** even as we are one.” John 17:23

* Promise 4 - Harmony

There will be ***no divisions at all in heaven***. A Presbyterian died and went to heaven and as Peter was showing him around he saw a huge wall and asked what was behind it. Peter said, **“Oh, that’s the Baptists, they think they’re the only ones here.”** Pick on whatever group you want to with that joke. The point is there will not be any walls in heaven. Christ has broken down all dividing walls through His body. We ARE ONE spiritually. But for all of eternity we will be ONE practically.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus has given us His glory that we might be one just as Jesus is one with the Father. That is the kind of unity and intimacy we will enjoy forever – being drawn into the eternally overflowing love of our Triune God.

***This is the hope we have in Christ!*** When Jesus comes back for us, we will experience total healing, supreme happiness, perfect holiness and everlasting harmony! Be encouraged in HOPE, brothers and sisters.