

## MALACHI: CALL TO OVERCOME SPIRITUAL APATHY

### IX: God's Prophet For Leading Israel To Repent

(Malachi 4:5-6)

#### I. Introduction

- A. About 100 years after the Hebrew exiles had returned from Babylon and rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple, their "initial enthusiasm had worn off," with life and worship becoming mere routines. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the Book of Malachi: The Times," p. 1325)
- B. God sent Malachi to call His people to repent from spiritual apathy, and Malachi 4:5-6 predicted the prophet God would raise up to lead Israel to repent. We view this passage for our insight and application:

#### II. God's Prophet For Leading Israel To Repent, Malachi 4:5-6.

- A. After God through the prophet Malachi had predicted His end time judgment in preparation for the Millennial Kingdom in Malachi 4:1-3, He had called Israel to remember the Mosaic Covenant formed at Mount Sinai in Israel's Exodus from Egypt, for God still held Israel accountable to keep that ancient covenant, Malachi 4:4.
- B. Before closing his prophecy, Malachi added a final word from the Lord, the prediction that God would send Israel the prophet Elijah before the "great and dreadful day of the Lord comes," Malachi 4:5 NIV. Elijah would turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else God would come and strike the land of Israel with a curse, Malachi 4:6 NIV.
- C. This prediction about Elijah has led to problems of interpretation regarding its fulfillment (as follows):
  1. One view holds that John literally fulfilled Malachi 4:5-6:
    - a. The angel Gabriel told Zecharias that John would go before Messiah "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 1:3-19. Gabriel thus combined Malachi 3:1 about the messenger of the Lord with Malachi 4:5-6 about Elijah so that John fulfilled both passages. (B. K. C., O. T., p. 1587f)
    - b. However, though John admitted that he was the one who prepared the way for the Lord (Isaiah 40:3 with Malachi 3:1), he "expressly denied that he was Elijah" in John 1:21-23; *Ibid.*, p. 1588.
  2. Another view holds that John did not fulfill Malachi 4:5-6, but that Elijah is yet to come and fulfill it:
    - a. When Jesus was asked about the coming of Elijah before Messiah's glory in Matthew 17:10, He replied that Elijah truly was to come and restore all things, but that when John the Baptist came, Israel's leaders did not accept him, and that the Messiah would similarly be rejected, Matthew 17:11-12.
    - b. Consequently, some claim that "John did not fulfill Malachi 4:5-6 (for Elijah is yet to come)," but that "Elijah was a type of John in that there is a great deal of similarity between Elijah in Malachi 4:5-6 and the messenger (John the Baptist) in [Malachi] 3:1," *Ibid.*; brackets ours.
    - c. However, in Matthew 11:12-14, Jesus clearly stated that John the Baptist was the Elijah who had been predicted to come in Malachi 4:5-6. (*Ibid.*, Ryrie, fn. to Matthew 11:14)
  3. The solution to this interpretation problem is to view John the Baptist as a *type* of Old Testament Elijah rather than the very same person, that John *typologically fulfilled Malachi 4:5-6* (as follows):
    - a. In Matthew 17:1, 9-13, Jesus' disciples Peter, James, and John understood that Jesus referred to John the Baptist as the Elijah to come as predicted in Malachi 4:5-6, a view that Jesus did not critique, so John the Baptist indeed fulfilled the Malachi 4:5-6 prophecy about Elijah.
    - b. Accordingly, John the Baptist's John 1:21-23 denial that he was Elijah was a denial of his being the **same person** as Elijah, for John was a *type* of the Old Testament prophet Elijah **in fulfilling Malachi 4:5-6**.
    - c. That John was a *type* of Elijah explains Christ's Matthew 11:14 *conditional* statement that John was Elijah *if* His hearers *would receive it*, for this *condition* suggests a **typological** identify of John as Elijah!
- D. Elijah was to come before the great and dreadful "day of the Lord," before the Great Tribulation and the Messianic Kingdom (Malachi 4:5), what occurred with John the Baptist's arrival. However, Israel's rejection of John and Jesus led to God's postponing the Great Tribulation and Christ's Messianic Kingdom and His instituting the Church era, which era was unknown to Old Testament prophets like Malachi, Ephesians 3:1-10.

***Lesson:*** God promised to send Elijah to turn Israel back to the Lord. John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy, but Israel did not recognize him or the Messiah, so God postponed the day of the Lord and instituted the Church era.

***Application:*** (1) May we instantly heed God's call to repent that we might immediately enjoy His blessing. (2) May we rightly interpret Scripture in following Scripture's own interpretation of other Scripture passages.