

THE LAST WORD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Malachi 4:4-6

INTRODUCTION

Today, we complete our study of Malachi. I was actually able to make it a little more expositional manner rather than a summary which I anticipated at the beginning. But I believe we went through at a healthy pace.

READ Mal 4:4-6

We are finishing our study of Malachi this morning. But we need to realize as we unpack our remaining text, this is not just the ending of Malachi.

In my Hebrew Bible, just like in our English Bibles, when a new book starts, it starts at the top of the next page. You may have bunch of white space at the bottom of the preceding page. In the 12 Minor Prophets, each new prophet starts wherever the preceding one left off. → It is one 12 volume book in the Hebrew Bible.

So, the text before you this morning is not just the ending of Malachi, this is the conclusion of the 12 volume book of Minor Prophets.

And, our passage today is not just the ending of Malachi. It is not just the conclusion of the Minor Prophets. The text which was read this morning is the culmination of the Old Testament prophets.

Charles Feinberg – *“We should view these final words with solemnity of heart, for chapter 4 gives us the last message of the Old Testament prophets. After this prophetic word, the heavens were silent for four centuries until the voice of John the Baptist was heard calling Israel to repentance in view of the coming of the Messiah.”*

So, we come to our text, **Mal 4:4-6**.

As we approach this, let us draw back to a principle of which the foundation was laid out in the Old Testament and built upon in the New Testament...that of two or three witnesses.

Deut 19:15 – “A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the **evidence** of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.”

Matt 18:16 – “by the **mouth** of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.”

2 Cor 13:1 – “Every fact is to be confirmed by the **testimony** of two or three witnesses.”

1 Tim 5:19 – “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the **basis** of two or three witnesses.

2 or 3 witnesses – This is the biblical standard, from Old Testament to the New Testament and beyond.

Proposition: God closes His Old Testament revelation with
2 Witnesses → Elijah and Moses

2 Messengers who represent the Law and the Prophets, respectively. **2 Heavenly Men** who represent the Word!
The Old Testament → The entire Bible at time of Malachi.

In this last word, one Witness is looking back in time and the other Witness is looking forward in time.

The book of Malachi is a book of transition. It is the last book of the Old Testament and last in terms of the period of history it covers.

Transition of eras, from past to future
→ Malachi looks at the Old Covenant and anticipates the New Covenant.

Malachi is the late evening bringing a long day to a close.
And he is the morning dawn bearing a glorious day in its womb.

He transitions from the wailings of sorrow and breathings of hope in the Old to the richer song of Calvary and Heaven in the new.

As prophecy is closed for the ancient people of God, its last light is mingled with the rising beams of the Sun of Righteousness.

So That: You will remember the Law and anticipate the Cross.

1st Witness with whom God closes His Old Testament revelation, ...

I. Moses Mal 4:4

Point – God is immutable and unchanging (**3:6**).

So also, the **Law of God** is unchanging.

Matt 24:35 – “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away.”

Point – **Moses** is always relevant ... always contemporary.

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

“**statutes**” → think of as the **Categorical** Law of God – “thou shalt not” – laid out completely independent of man

“**ordinances**” → think of as more of the **Causation** Law of God – “if ..., then ...”

“**Horeb**” – same mountain as Mt. Sinai, although mentioned less frequently (17 times vs. 38 times)

Two interesting passages ...

Exod 3:1 – “Now **Moses** was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to **Horeb, the mountain of God.**”

1 Kings 19:8 – “So he [**Elijah**] arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to **Horeb, the mountain of God.**”

“**Remember**” – זכר – **Illustration** – Margie and I named our first born son “Zachary” because God remembered us. ☺

We remember that to “**remember**” is more than mere mental recollection.

Illustration – It’s like Christ saying, “Let him who has ears to hear.

- “Hear” is NOT merely acoustic waves traveling down your ear canal, vibrating your ear drum, and firing synapses and nerve endings into your brain.
- Rather, it is: hearing, understanding, agreeing, believing, and acting.

Application – In the same way, God is commanding you to “**remember**” is not merely retrieving a factoid from a mental registry. When God commands us to “**remember**,” He is commanding us to:

Remember, Do, Keep, and Guard!

Illustration – In December of 1835, during the **Texas Revolution**, Texas revolutionaries took the town of **San Antonio**. They occupied an 18th century Roman Catholic mission compound turned fortress originally called *Misión San Antonio de Valero*. This mission fortress was guarded by 150 men when the Mexican forces came against the town in February 1836. The Texans held off the enemy until March 6 when the siege ended in bloody hand to hand combat and every Texan was dead including two by the names of Jim Bowie and Davy Crocket. The name of the mission fortress, of course, was the **Alamo**.

The courage of these men inspired the rest of the resistance and the Texans defeated the Mexican forces six weeks later in the Battle of San Jacinto under the awe-inspiring cry, “**Remember the Alamo!**”

Illustration – At the southwestern tip of the Dead Sea, there is an isolated mountain top/rock plateau surrounded by cliffs

called **Masada**. Reaching the top of the mountain is difficult. There is only one pathway winding to the top known as the “Snake” because it zig-zags to the summit with many switchbacks. The “Snake” is so narrow, people have to ascend in single file.

Herod the Great fortified Masada between 37 and 31 B.C. as a fortress refuge. In A.D. 66, at the beginning of the First Jewish War against the Roman Empire, a group of Jewish zealots overcame the Roman garrison at Masada. After the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, other zealots and families fled Jerusalem to Masada and settled in the mountaintop fortress.

Roman governor of Judea, Flavius, laid siege to Masada in A.D. 72 with a Roman legion. They surrounded Masada and moved thousands of tons of stones and earth to build an embankment against the western face of the plateau in order to reach the Masada defenses.

The rampart took months to complete and was completed in April 73. When the Romans breached the defenses of **Masada** at daybreak of April 16th, they were amazed to find almost all of the 1000 Jewish defenders – men, women, and children – dead. All of the buildings burned to the ground ... except the food storerooms.

Only two women and five children were found alive hiding in an underground cavern.

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the leader of the zealots, **Eleazar Ben Yair**, gave the following speech leading to the mass death the day before the Romans breached the wall:

“Long ago we resolved to serve neither the Romans nor anyone else but only God, who alone is the true and righteous Lord of men. Now the time has come that forces us to prove our determination by our deeds. At a time like this, we must not disgrace ourselves. Until now, we have never submitted to slavery, even when it brought no danger with it. We must not

choose slavery now, and with it, penalties that will mean the end of everything if we fall alive into the hands of the Romans.

We were the first to revolt. And we shall be the last to break off the struggle. And I think it is God who has given us this privilege. That we can die nobly and as free men, unlike others who were suddenly overcome. It is evident that daybreak tomorrow will end our resistance. But we are free to choose an honorable death with our loved ones. This, our enemies cannot prevent, however earnestly they may desire to take us alive.

Let our wives die unabused, our children without knowledge of slavery. After that, let us do each other an ungrudging kindness, preserving our freedom as a glorious shroud. But first let our possessions and the whole fortress go up in flames. It will be a bitter blow to the Romans to find our persons beyond their reach withing nothing left to loot. One thing only let us spare -- our store of food. This will bear witness when we are dead to the fact that we perished, not through want but because, as we resolved at the beginning, we chose death rather than slavery.”

After each father-husband took the lives of his wife and children rather than allowing them to fall into the raping torturing hands of the Romans, 10 chosen men killed the others. Then one of the 10 killed the other 9. And then the last one committed suicide.

Today, the battle cries, “**Remember the Masada!**” and “**Masada shall never fall again!**” are two of Israel’s greatest symbols. Israeli soldiers take an oath at Masada. Next to Jerusalem, Masada is the most frequented destination of Jewish tourists visiting Israel.

Application – Now ... “**Remember the Alamo!**” “**Remember the Masada!**” are not shouted to bring a distant factoid to memory.

Application – The past, you see, has tremendous power when it flows through the channel of a challenging memory.

→ Memory has tremendous power to inspire and guide.

The **Enemy** wants to breach the walls of your heart with his lies.
The **world** wants to enslave you with her beguilement and error.

Application – God says, “**Remember the Law!**”

Gal 3:24 – “Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us to* Christ, that we may be justified by faith.”

Moses, look back. Now look forward, ...
2 Bridges – a bridge back and a bridge forward.

2nd Witness with whom God closes His OT revelation, ...

II. Elijah Mal 4:5-6

Point – God’s Law from the past is unchanged.
God’s promises for the future are also unchanged.

2 Cor 1:20 – “All the promises of God find their Yes in him. This is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” (ESV)

Point – God gives **3 Promises** surrounding this coming Witness:

- A. **Who** this Witness will be
- B. **When** this Witness will come
- C. **Why** this Witness will come

1st, God Promises...

- A. **Who** this Witness will be **Mal 4:5a**

Proof – “^{5a}**Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet**”

Imminent future again → **3:1; 4:1; 4:5**

Similar to the Promised Messenger in **3:1** and different
→ **2 Comings** of Christ (Already/Not Yet)

Elijah – 1 Kings 17:1-2 –no introduction - “Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.’ ²And the word of the LORD came to him”

1 Kings 18 – Elijah on Mount Carmel against the prophets of Baal

All 4 Gospel authors mention Elijah. Paul mentions him in Romans. And James also mentions him in his epistle.

1 Kings 19:8 – “went ... to Horeb, the mountain of God.”

2 Kings 2:11 – “it came about as they were going along and talking, that behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a “whirlwind to heaven.” – along with **Enoch**, translated without dying

John the Baptist was the fulfillment of God’s promise of the Messenger in Mal 3:1 who would prepare the way for Christ.

But is **John the Baptist** the fulfillment of this Promise of **Elijah**?
→ Yes and No.

We know what **Elijah** looked like from 1 Kings 1.

John the Baptist was from the mold of Elijah. **John the Baptist** came as the initial fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy. But neither **angels**, **John himself**, nor **Jesus** thought of John as the final Elijah.

The Angel to Zacharias

Luke 1:17 – “he will go *as a forerunner* before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

John the Baptist himself – **John 1:21** – “they asked him, ‘Are you Elijah?’ And he said, ‘I am not.’”

Jesus – Matt 11:14 – “if you care to accept *it*, he himself is Elijah, who was to come.”

→ Did they accept it? No.

After the transfiguration → **Matt 17:10-13** – “And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” ¹¹And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things; ¹²but I say to you, that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” ¹³Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.” → Yes and No
→ Already/Not Yet

Who this Witness will be, ...

2nd, God Promises ...

B. When this Witness will come

Mal 4:5b

Illustration– Just yesterday, we had another failed End of the World prophecy. **David Meade** claimed in his book *Planet X — The 2017 Arrival* that the “Planet Nibiru” would collide with the Earth yesterday, Sep 23rd.

Point – Beloved, God promises when. NOT in the way the sensationalist wants. But rather, in the way the believer needs.

God does not tell us the date of the when.

God does tell us the devastation of the when.

Proof – “^{5b}**before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.**”

Joel 2:31 – “The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.”

Zeph 1:14 – “**Near** is the great day of the LORD, **near** and coming very **quickly**.”

Let me pause for a moment and go back to **Moses** and **Elijah** at the Mount of **Transfiguration** (Mt. Hermon)

➔ **The Two Witnesses of Rev 11**

Some people say the **Two Witnesses** in Rev 11 will be **Moses** and **Elijah**. They may be these very men, these heavenly men. We don't know for sure. They will, to be sure, be Moses-like and Elijah-like ... just like John the Baptist was Elijah-like.

Elijah and **John the Baptist** were carved out of the same slab of fiery granite. So, will this messenger be.

Application – Beloved, God has appointed you to be Elijah-like in the Wilderness called America. Your Lord has appointed you to cry out, “Prepare for the Day of the Lord!”

God calls you to live a holy life and to preach a holy message.

Who this Witness will be,
When this Witness will come, ...

3rd, God Promises ...

C. Why this Witness will come **Mal 4:6**

The “**the day of the LORD**” is perhaps best understood as the **Victory** of God.

Point – The future will bring two things: the **Victory** of God
and the **Mercy** of God

How would you end a book?
A 12 volume book series?
How would you end the entire Old Testament?

Would you end with a statement about God?
At human level, maybe the importance of the people of God?
How about the importance of the church?
What God finishes with: ➔ **Family!**

Point – The **Family**—there is nowhere else that authority and submission, love and loyalty, obedience and trust can be:

- learned
- nourished
- validated
- modeled as in the family.

Proof – “^{6a}**And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers**”

→ Background of mixed marriages (spiritually) and divorce

Opposite effect of the 1st Coming of Christ –

Matt 10:34-36 – “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household.”

“**restore**” – interesting word – literally means: turn, return, bring back.

5 locations with different transitions: – **1:4** (“return”); **2:6** (“turn”); **3:7** (“return”), **3:18** (“distinguish”) **4:6** (“restore”)

Illustration– **Robert Lewis Dabney**, Oct 1879, Danville VA, spoke to a congregation of pastors and elders the Synod of Virginia of the Southern Presbyterian Church on the of Parental Responsibilities:

Application – “*Seeing the parental relation is what the Scripture describes it, and seeing Satan has perverted it since the fall for the diffusion and multiplication of depravity and eternal death, the education of children for God is the most important business done on earth. It is the one business for which the earth exists. To it all politics, all war, all literature, all money-making, ought to be subordinated; and every parent especially ought to feel, every hour of the day, that, next to making his own calling and election sure, this is the end for which he is kept alive by God —*

this is his task on earth. On the right training of the generation now arising, turns not only the individual salvation of each member in it, not only the religious hope of the age which is approaching, but the fate of all future generations to a large degree.”

These are strong words and this is the subject and topic with which God ends finishes Malachi, the twelve prophets and the Old Testament.

“^{6b}**lest I come and smite the land with a curse.**”

I gave this sermon the following title – “The Last Word in the Old Testament”.

The last word in the Old Testament is, literally, “a curse.”

Most Hebrew Bibles, based on the Masoretic text, repeats v.5 after v. 6. The Greek Septuagint places v. 4 after v. 6.

“**lest**” – The mercy of God; The Victory of God

Gen 3:3 – “but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, **lest** you die.’”

Gen 3:22 – “Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, **lest** he stretch out his hand, and take also from ^bthe tree of life, and eat, and live forever’—”

Illustration – Steve Lonetti was a missionary in a stone age tribe in Indonesia called the Taliabo. He had been preaching chronologically through the life of Jesus. He preached the Crucifixion on a Friday then sent the tribe back to their huts ... until Sunday morning.

I remember one of my fellow students asked him,

“Were you concerned one of them might die on Saturday?”

→ His response, “You have to trust in the sovereignty of God.”

The last word in the Old Testament is, literally, “**a curse.**” and then there are 450 years of intertestamental silence.

By the way, the salvation of the Lord poured out tremendously on that Taliabo tribe 😊

Jesus, you see, didn't come into the world to make bad people good. He came into the world to make dead people live.

Turn to: Acts 26:16-18

In our Men's Bible Study last Wednesday morning, we looked at this text. Paul was relating to King Agrippa the words that came from Christ to Paul.

CONCLUSION

Beloved, in the Old Testament, **Curse** has the last word.

In the New Testament, **Grace** has the last word.

→ The Last Word of the Old Testament – “**Curse**”

→ First word of Christ – “Repent”

→ Last word of New Testament –
“Amen”