

# Abiding Fruit

John 15:16



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## Healing In Its Wings Malachi 4:2

No prophet who loves his people enjoys pointing out their sins and warning them of impending doom. This is how Malachi must have felt, given the commission God gave to him. His prophecy is full of judgment, warnings, and threats. It is also full of encouragement, hope and blessing. Malachi longed for the returned exiles to find peace in God. He wanted them to be a happy people with happy homes. He wanted them to be a righteous people with righteous children, a people who were known for their godliness, truthfulness, commitment, love and hope in God. Are not these the very same things we need today? If they are, then Malachi should speak to us today. What can we learn from this great prophet? Whenever Malachi speaks of God's judgments, here and there he offers a glimmer of hope, like the rays of the sun stealing through the clouds after a fierce thunderstorm.

Malachi uses rhetorical questions as the device to draw the nation's attention to God (1:2, 6, 7; 2:17; 3:7, 8, 13). These are questions (from God) asked by the people. Israel was a favored nation (1:1 – 5). The priesthood had failed God in their service, sacrifices and their attitudes (1:6 – 14). God rebukes them severely for this. The people were also unfaithful to God (2:10 – 16), and so God was going to send forth his messenger (John the Baptist) (2:17 – 3:5). God accuses the people of robbing him through their neglect of the tithe (3:6 – 9), but he promises his blessing upon them if they respond and are faithful to him (3:10 – 12). God speaks a word to those who are unbelieving and those who believe (3:13 – 18) telling the nation that he will distinguish between the two. One will be his treasured possession, but the wicked shall experience his judgment and fury, and this brings us to Malachi 4.

Malachi 4 is about the coming great day of the Lord. This theme occurs regularly in the Old Testament prophets (Isa. 13:6; Jer. 46:10; Joel 2:31; Zeph. 1:14 – 2:3). It is also found in the New Testament (Matt. 24, 25; Rom. 2:5; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:14). Malachi speaks of this day coming as certain and fixed. He begins with a particle interjection (*for behold*) which lays stress on all that follows. What follows is a description of the coming day of the Lord. Verse 1 describes this day as "*burning like an oven*". This speaks of Jehovah's wrath that consumes, just as flames lick greedily at dry twigs and envelop them in searing heat, and consume them with destructive cracking and popping, so too, will God bring forth this day of his that is like the searing heat of an oven. Nothing can stand the fierceness of this day. It shall *consume all the arrogant and all evildoers*. They will be like stubble, like chaff which blows away and is gone, like the left over, unusable part of the grain that disappears quickly in the consuming fire. This great day that is coming will wipe away the enemies of God, and they will be no more. So powerful will be this destructive burning from God that no life will be left in them. They shall be unable to give birth to new roots and branches. This is a description of God's judgment on the wicked.

Verse 2, however, presents the complete opposite picture. To those *who fear my name*, God promises healing and ecstatic leaping like the calf from the stall. This is a promise for the future, because the day being described in verse 1 is future, and in verse 2, the sun of righteousness *shall* rise with healing in its (his) wings. Additional 'shalls' are found in verse 2 and 3, and *on the day when I act*, implies future fulfillment. If the great day of the Lord is like darkness and filled with the wrath of God for the unbeliever, it is a day of contrast for the believer. There is no reason to think that these are different days in verses

1 and 2 (one for the wicked and another for those who fear the Lord). They are the same day with different results for these two groups. The KJV has sustained the idea by capitalizing the word 'Sun' that this refers to a messianic figure, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament, however, never uses this figure (the sun) to describe our Lord, so other translations have kept the word in lower case. In fact, when the New Testament refers to this day, the sun is darkened (Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24; Rev. 6:12 cf. also Luke 21:25; 23:45; Acts 2:20).

The phrase "*sun of righteousness*" appears only here in Malachi. It has traditionally been used as a reference to Jesus Christ. Certainly it is an apt description of our Lord (refer also Psalm 84:11; Luke 1:78), but in the context of Malachi, it seems more appropriate to link it with the day of the Lord. This can be seen when you compare what the day of the Lord means for the wicked. Verse 1 goes to great lengths to depict the awfulness of that day, and leads straight into verse 2 with a comparison between the wicked of verse 1 and the righteous (those who fear the Lord) in verse 2. This comparison is not divorced from the day of the Lord. It is the same day, but for each group, it means different things with different ramifications.

The day of the Lord in verse 1 is a destructive day for the wicked, but in verse 2, the day of the Lord is a day of healing for the righteous. Darkness for the wicked, noonday sun for the righteous is the comparison. In the coming day of the Lord, there will be a blazing forth of dark judgment, and the blazing forth of healing righteousness. What happens to those who fear the Lord? They respond like young calves jumping around in their stalls, leaping forth from their stalls, frolicking, jumping this way and that, as they stretch their legs. It is the picture of unmitigated joy. As the little calves spring about, so righteousness surrounds the people of God who respond with unbridled joy. Can we fully capture the picture of this? Doom and punishment await the unbeliever as the wrath of Almighty God blazes forth – something we can never truly appreciate and understand, but are grateful that God has delivered us from. Healing and rejoicing await the believer in rapturous delight in God and what he has done for us. What a contrast!

Notice also in verse 3, that the righteous live, but the wicked are like ashes underfoot. As calves tread this way and that, so too the righteous tread underfoot the wicked as if they were not there on the day when the Lord acts. If the righteous suffer now in time on this earth, in the great and terrible day of the Lord, the wicked shall suffer, and since the righteous survive, the scene is depicted as if we tread the wicked underfoot who do not survive. It is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31) who is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:28).

God promises the nation that he will send Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord (vs. 5, 6). This is of course, John the Baptist (Matt. 11:14; 17:12; Mark 9:11 – 13; Luke 1:17). The arrival of John the Baptist brings the news of another coming person, namely; our Lord Jesus Christ. The day of the Lord shall occur because Jesus has come and has been rejected, and Malachi speaks of John's ministry as one that would turn the hearts of fathers to their children and vice versa. If they fail to honor Him who was coming (Jesus) then the great and awesome day of the Lord shall pour forth in judgment upon them. God shall indeed do so, for they rejected his Son, but for those who received him, He has given the right to become the children of God (John 1:12). We who have believed have experienced the healing that brings righteousness, and in this sense our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of Righteousness who heals us and saves us from sin and judgment. O what a day is coming, unlike any other when there will be those who perish and those who live! What will you experience on that great day? May it be Jesus and his healing!

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