

MALACHI WARNS AND ENCOURAGES HIS PEOPLE

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"For, behold, the day comes, it burns as a furnace; and all the proud, and all who work wickedness, will be stubble; and the day that comes will burn them up," says Yahweh of Armies, "that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings. You will go out, and leap like calves of the stall. You shall tread down the wicked; for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I make," says Yahweh of Armies. "Remember the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded to him in Horeb for all Israel, even statutes and ordinances. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." Malachi 4:1-6 WEB

In this short chapter ending the Old Testament the prophet Malachi both foresees evil upon the proud and those doing wickedness, and divine deliverance for God's people who remember and perform the law of Moses---all in adjacent verses.

The name

Malachi means "my messenger" in Hebrew. His message is only four chapters long, but carries great significance because it portends a combination of God's anger and threats to evil-doers with a consequent deliverance for his people who keep the law. The tribe of Judah has recently returned to Jerusalem from the dispersion into Babylon, yet has fallen back into its old ways of forgetting the clear commands of God for the institution of justice and mercy in the newly-installed government.

Malachi

announces the Day of the Lord that will burn into stubble those who work wickedness in Israel. Wickedness at that stage of history usually meant mistreatment of the poor and vulnerable at the hands of arrogant oppressors. About 50 years earlier the civil administrator Nehemiah had faced a similar situation when he rebuked tyrannical money lenders. His complaint was that because of the drought people had borrowed to pay their taxes, then discovered that they were virtually bankrupt because lenders had foreclosed on their farms. They mourned that

because of this stranglehold of money lenders upon the people they increasingly were forced to sell their sons and daughters into slavery for debt. That lament probably comprised most of what Malachi railed against.

Since these

Old Testament accounts are given for our learning (Rom. 15:4 and I Cor. 10:11), we might wonder if similar situations exist in our land today. They do exist, as was evidenced during the near-depression of 2008 in which mortgages actually created to fail were packaged by large banks for sale to unwary investors. The consequence was mortgage foreclosure on literally millions of vulnerable homeowners, including the proscribed abuse of widows and orphans. What goes around comes around!

Malachi

closes with the poignant comment that before the coming of the "great and terrible day of the Lord" the spirit of Elijah will return with a mission to "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

The need for

such reform has never before been so absolutely vital to our continued existence. The social compact between rulers and people has been stretched beyond its limits, with evidence arising daily as to how serious the failure of either party to govern is. And in the streets of the land we see mindless violence against imaginary enemies coupled with wild-eyed panaceas that are worse than the disease. The "glue" holding the union together is melting as we fragment into special interest groups and seek meaning in acquiring more "things," and more excitement to escape the purposelessness now evident everywhere.

A generation

of children and youth is in danger of being lost to the rampant spread of social media as a substitute for true relationships and the major source of useless information that rapidly replaces real knowledge. Malachi said that if this occurs God would send a curse upon the earth, and that curse is rapidly forming as the body politic and our general society rapidly fractures.

We need a

national turning to God without reservation or resistance. It will occur, not because we are good, but because God is faithful and merciful, as we will observe as time passes.