

Comments on Malachi 4

The final admonition. Chapter 3 verse 18 closes with a rather ominous tone, and these last few verses explain the details of the judgement alluded to there. The Hebrew Bible closes in a rather fearful manner. The Jews, particularly the Levites, are threatened with overthrow because of their apostasy. The imminent confrontation between the Lord and Judah is predicted to be a hostile one.

The division between ch. 3 and 4 is artificial, and in Hebrew-derived texts translated from the Masoretic texts (e.g., JPS Tanach) there is no ch. 4, these verses are the rest of ch. 3.

As noted in the general comments on Malachi, these verses can be arranged in an inverted parallelism. The entire text is included below to illustrate the obscure symbolism at work. The lettering below of d-e-f-f-e-d conforms to that appearing in the overview presented in the general comments.

d - 1 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.

e - 2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in [the corners of its garments];

f - and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

f - 3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.

e - 4 Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.

d - 5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the

coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: 6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

The meaning of the d's is easy to discern, the subject is the Day of the Lord and the need to hearken to the Lord's messenger and repent or be cursed. The f's are also fairly easy to understand, righteous Israel will tread their enemies, ostensibly including rebellious Israel, under their feet like an ox. However, the e's are difficult to discern the meaning of.

The first passage has an obscure reference to the Sun of Righteousness with wings of healing, and the second refers the reader to the Law of Moses. There is no apparent connection when superficially read. To discern the connection, the Hebrew must be reviewed. The "wings" are *kanaph* in Hebrew, for which Strong's has:

03671 *kanaph* {kaw-nawf' }

from 03670; TWOT - 1003a; n f

AV - wing 74, skirt 14, borders 2, corners 2, ends 2, feathered 2, sort 2, winged 2, misc 8; 108

- 1) wing, extremity, edge, winged, border, corner, shirt
- 1a) wing
- 1b) extremity
- 1b1) skirt, corner (of garment)

This is the same term employed in Num. 15:37-41 where the people are told to wear fringes on their garments (i.e., *tzitzi* on the *tallit katon*). Thus, rather than the KJV "wings" the translation should be "with healing in the folds of its garments" which is provided by the JPS. This garment of healing contrasts with the garment of violence from 2:16. While the Priests and Levites are harming Israel, this "sun of righteousness" rises and casts light on Israel to heal her.

Furthermore, the Midrash Rabbah on Exod. 31:10 interprets Mal. 4:2 as Messianic and that the Messiah will come with healing in his "wings".

The reference to the "Sun" is imagery drawn from 2 Sam. 23:3-4 and is blatantly messianic, see also Ps. 84:11, Luke 1:78.

And, the Book of Mormon uses Mal. 4:1-4 in a Messianic context in the quotation in 3 Ne. 25. Also, the Book of Mormon has "Son of righteousness" and not "Sun of righteousness". This is perhaps a scribal error due to homophones, but Smith left it that way in subsequent editions, probably to intentionally suggest a Messianic reading. And "Son of righteousness" is used in 2 Ne. 26:9, and "healing in his wings" in 2 Ne. 25:13 (it is interesting to note the 2 Ne. appearances predate the Malachi appearances, thus both Nephi and Malachi must be drawing on some earlier source, such as Exod. 31:10 as the Midrash Rabbah suggests).

Thus, we may safely conclude the first e passage is Messianic. The second e passage can also be read Messianically as well, as the Law points to Messiah, cf. Deut. 18:15, John 1:45, Gal. 3:24, 3 Ne. 15:5-9.

In summary, the d's are a warning to the wicked, with the e's being the qualifier for the f's. Those who will be happy and blessed as in the f's will be those who accept and are healed by Messiah as in the e's, while those who do not will be destroyed on the Day of the Lord.

1 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings;

and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. 3 And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do [this], saith the LORD of hosts.

4 Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, [with] the statutes and judgments. 5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: 6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

v1 "neither root nor branch", they will be utterly consumed, nothing will survive. Speaking figuratively, it is referring to the entire lineage being destroyed. The adults as well as children will be cut off.

v2 "healing in his wings", in addition to the comments above, the events described in Luke 8:43-48 are likely presented as a

fulfillment of this passage.

"and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall", a poor translation. The JPS renders it, "You shall go forth and stamp like stall-fed calves". Just as calves corralled in a stall trample the grass underfoot, so will Israel tread her enemies underfoot.

v3 A paraphrase of Micah 5:7-9.

v5 "Elijah the prophet", the ancient Elijah's intent was to overthrow the current religious and political regime, disposing of their idolatry, cf. 1 Ki. 18. He succeeded in defeating the wicked priests of Baal, which was the Lord's will, but not in overthrowing the political rulers, which was his own plan. Elijah was a success in ending state-sponsored idolatry in Israel, thereby making it possible for prophets to be active in Israel again, but he was not successful in ending Ahab and Jezebel's reign.

The reference here to Elijah is intentionally meant to imply Malachi's contemporary priests were on par with the ancient priests who corrupted Israel with Baal worship. Just as the ancient priests needed to be destroyed to restore Israel to worshipping the Lord, the Lord is saying the same thing here. Elijah will come to clean house just before the Day of Lord destroys the wicked, which these priests are.

In an LDS context, the literal resurrected Elijah returned on a Passover date to grant Priesthood keys, cf. D&C 2.

John Baptist, called in the spirit of Elijah, was also called to overthrow the religious leaders (cf. D&C 84:26-28), but similarly ran into trouble with the political leaders.

v6 "turn the heart of the fathers to the children", it is common for the LDS community to read this passage in an eternal context and have it refer to vicarious work for the dead following the interpretation forwarded by D&C 2:2.

However, D&C 98:16-17 uses this verse in a more temporal setting by referring to the relationship between mortal sons and fathers. Also, 2:4-10 tells the present Levites to look back to the good examples of their righteous fathers and emulate their behavior. Thus, this verse has reference to the entire human family, mortal and post-mortal, and the implicit theme is their reconciliation through righteousness.

"smite the earth with a curse", this curse appearing in as the Hebrew term *cherem*, is the worst possible. It threatens utter annihilation, complete extinction. It is the same curse leveled at the Canaanites when the Lord tells Israel to annihilate them from the land (cf. Josh. 6:17). This is not the kind of curse the Lord would typically aim at Israel, given the promises to Abraham, and is only mitigated by the promise of 3:6.

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