

Triennial Torah Study – 4th Year 07/09/2013

 sightedmoon.com /triennial-torah-study-6-year-04042015 /

By Joseph F. Dumond

We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf

Deut 34		Malachi	Rev 22
---------	--	---------	--------

Deu 34

As mentioned in the introductory highlights of Deuteronomy, though it was possible for Moses to have written this final chapter himself under God's inspiration, it seems much more likely that God used someone else to bring the book to its completion. An obvious candidate is Moses' successor, Joshua. However, the wording of verse 10 makes it appear that more time had passed than just Joshua. Perhaps someone else wrote the final three verses of the book.

Here we see that Moses dies at 120 years of age, but not because of ill health or the normal physical deterioration associated with aging (verse 7). In this way, God made it clear that He was taking Moses' life, not allowing him to enter the Promised Land, because of Moses' error in striking the rock at Kadesh. Still, this great man of God is given a glimpse of the Promised Land and full assurance that his people would enter it. More importantly, he one day will enter that land and a far greater Promised Land—when He is resurrected from the dead into the Kingdom of God, which will be ruled from Jerusalem (compare Matthew 16:28; 17:1-9).

Remarkably, God Himself buried Moses' body in a secret place (Deuteronomy 34:5-6). This was apparently to prevent his gravesite from becoming an idolatrous shrine, as it surely would have. In fact, we are told in the book of Jude that Satan and Michael fought over Moses' body (verse 9)—as perhaps Satan wished to make the location of the burial known for just this reason.

Although Joshua became a powerful leader, he did not reach the stature of Moses. "But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do..., and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of the people" (verses 10-12). Indeed, no one like him would follow in the remainder of the Old Testament.

However, Moses foretold that a prophet like himself would appear, whom the people should follow. That Prophet, appearing in the New Testament, was Jesus Christ. As the law came through Moses, grace and truth came through Christ (John 1:17). Jesus Himself attested to the credibility of Moses, when He said, "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me" (5:45-47). But as people really have not believed Moses' writings, so they don't really believe Christ's words either.

Finally, then, with the obituary of its author, we come to the conclusion of the first major division of the Old Testament—the five books of the Law, or Torah. We are left hopeful and excited, with the conquest of the Promised Land before us. May all of us have this same hope and excitement as we stand on the brink of entering our Promised Land—the Kingdom of God. Therein, we will join with all the faithful we've read about—such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Joshua and Caleb—under Jesus Christ, in reforming this world to make it the kind of place it's supposed to be. What a wonderful time awaits us!

Malachi

God's message begins with a declaration of His love for His people. Yet they are quick to challenge this love, asking, "In what way have You loved us?" (verse 2). Whether or not this sentiment is actually voiced is not clear. It may just be that God knows the people think this way. The Lord's reestablishment of the nation in the Promised Land should have served as a testimony to His faithfulness. And the deliverance of the Jews throughout the Persian Empire at the time of Esther was clearly miraculous. Yet the people in Judea had experienced many problems.

The time frame here may have been prior to or shortly after Ezra's arrival—after many years of letting down in following God's laws and, as a result, a withholding of blessings. Or it may have been several years later, after a halt in Jewish rebuilding due to neighboring resistance (see Ezra 4:7-23). A time soon after Nehemiah's successful reconstruction of Jerusalem's wall does not seem to fit. But it could well be that not long afterward the same doleful self-pity gripped the people again.

Indeed, we should recall the awesome events of Israel's Exodus from Egypt. The people went out with a high hand and experienced the incredible and miraculous Red Sea crossing. Yet it was not long at all before they began to complain against God, even accusing Him of bringing them out to the desert to kill them. People often have a short memory when it comes to God's blessings. When things become uncomfortable or when mere boredom sets in, there is a tendency to forget all about the wonderful ways God has helped us and about the wonderful destiny He has in store for us. We today are not immune to such thinking and need to combat it. One way is by regularly pondering the myriad things God has done for us, which helps us to place our trust in His great promises.

God is very patient in His response. He presents the contrast with Esau to exemplify His commitment to His people. Esau and Jacob were fraternal twin brothers, both of the line of Abraham. As the elder twin, Esau (also known as Edom), was in line to inherit the family birthright blessings. But he sold them to Jacob for a bowl of stew. While Jacob connived to obtain the blessings in this and a later episode, he at least saw the blessings as valuable. Esau sold the birthright away for almost nothing, basically showing contempt for what God gave—a bad example that Christians are warned against (Hebrews 12:16-17). God chose Jacob (later renamed Israel) and his descendants as His people and rejected Esau. The descendants of Esau, the Edomites, became Israel's constant enemy. Throughout the prophets, God declared that the people of Edom would suffer severe judgment for their terrible and ongoing hostility. And here He does so again.

God says He has "loved" Jacob and "hated" Esau (verses 2-3)—referring also to their descendants. This may well seem odd, given that Jesus taught us to love even our enemies as part of what it means to have godly character. "Hate" in Scripture sometimes has the hyperbolic meaning of "love less by comparison." Yet in this case it appears more concerned with God choosing the one as His people and rejecting the other. The Bible Reader's Companion says that "'hated' here is used as a legal term, meaning the decisive rejection of a claim" (Lawrence Richards, 1991, note on verses 2-5). The apostle Paul quoted this passage in Romans 9:13 to illustrate his point about God's prerogative to choose whomever He wants as His people. Yet we understand from other verses that God ultimately intends to call all people—though not all in this present life. (Few Bible students realize that Jesus spoke of bringing people back to life to give them a chance at salvation—a chance they did not have before. For more information on this little understood truth, see our booklets, *What Happens After Death?*, *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.)

God next refers to judgment that has befallen Edom—national destruction and impoverishment (Malachi 1:3-4). While it was true that God's people had suffered these things at the hands of the Babylonians, the Edomites evidently did not escape either. And it would yet be worse for the Edomites. God had many times promised to restore Israel and Judah—and had taken powerful steps in that direction with the reestablishment of the Jewish nation in the Promised Land. But this was not to be the case with Edom. Instead, while the Edomites would attempt to regain what they had lost, God would not permit it (verses 4-5). The prophecy against Edom here seems to stretch into the last days, as in other prophecies. God's indignation against Esau lasting "forever" in verse 4 probably means that the judgment continues as long as the conditions under which it is given exist—that is, as long as Esau exists as a nation. Moreover, given Paul's example above, Jacob here could also

represent all those called of God while Esau could signify the rest of mankind, which is presently rejected. Eventually, all gentile peoples must become part of the covenant nation Israel in order to have a relationship with God and escape perpetual indignation.

Despite His clear providential care for His people, God then points out that He is receiving neither the honor due Him as the nation's Father nor the reverence due Him as the people's true Lord and Master. Worse, this message is specifically directed not to the common people but to the priests (verse 6), who were supposed to be teaching the people God's ways and leading by godly example. While the priesthood of the fifth century B.C. was surely in mind, this message was likely intended for later times as well—continuing through the entire second temple period as problems resurfaced. While the prophecy is directed to the descendants of Levi, as chapter 2 makes clear, the priests here may on some level, in a modern context, symbolize the religious teachers of the nation in general and perhaps even represent some among the ministry of the true Church—spiritual Levites, so to speak.

Instead of honoring Him, God says the priests are actually despising His name. In an ancient context, one's name signified all that he was and stood for. Again, the insolent retort comes: "In what way...?" (verse 6). God says the priests are offering defiled food on His altar—which means they are treating Him in a defiling way—to which they yet again respond with, "In what way...?" (verse 7). God explains that they show contempt for Him in the offering of blemished sacrifices. People were supposed to present their best to God when giving offerings (see Leviticus 1:3). Offerings were not to be blemished or unclean (7:19-21; Deuteronomy 15:21). Even their human rulers would not accept such tribute, probably referring to taxation by Persian overlords (compare Malachi 1:8). Yet God is a "great King" (verse 14). Indeed, He is the King of all kings—the infinite and almighty Creator. "We can apply Malachi's test today. If we would be embarrassed to offer what we intend to give to God or do for Him to a person that we respect, our offering is unworthy of the Lord" (Bible Reader's Companion, note on verse 😊). Furthermore, consider that a sacrifice of something with little or no value to the one offering it is really no sacrifice at all.

Verse 9 in the New King James Version is better understood with the following bracketed insert: "But now [if you] entreat God's favor that He may be gracious to us, while this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably?" (compare Moffatt Translation; New American Bible). The answer is obviously no (see verse 10).

Verse 11 looks forward to the future when God's name would be honored with proper prayerful praise and offerings—even by the gentiles. This perhaps foresees in small part the spiritual sacrifices of the people of God's Church today, yet God's name being truly great among the nations is more directly applicable to the time when His Kingdom will be set up on the earth after Jesus Christ's return.

But for now, here were God's own people—His own priesthood in fact—profaning His name by their unholy attitude and service. Instead of having an attitude of humility and regarding God with awe, they had an arrogant attitude and regarded Him with contempt. These religious leaders view their duties as mere wearisome toil (verse 13). "Malachi put into words the thoughts of the priests. For them the holy service of God had become a bore, a labor of duty rather than of love, a yoke around their necks. The very men who were the mediators between God and his people (Exod 28:1, 43), the teachers of Israel (Lev 10:11; Deut 33:10; 2 Chronicles 15:3), and the court of appeal (Deut 19:17-19) were, by their own choice, profaning their office and bringing shame on the name of Yahweh" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on Malachi 1:12-13).

Applying this prophetic message to today, we must give our best to God. While there are no longer animal sacrifices today, each of us is literally a "living sacrifice" and our service must be "acceptable to God" (Romans 12:1). We must not become casual or sloppy in matters such as keeping God's Sabbath, in tithing, in our commitment to the Church's work of preaching the gospel and in modeling God's way of life every day. There are some for whom participating in worship services and even typical Christian responsibilities such as prayer and helping others become tiresome chores. When the time comes for Sabbath services, we must make sure our attitude is not one of, "Oh, no, not church again." For indeed, God looks on all His people as a special, chosen priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Are we fulfilling our spiritual duties with proper care and reverence? Do we give God our best, or are we just going through the motions?

There is an even stronger application to those who have the responsibility of preaching and teaching God's Word. Those called to the ministry must not wilt in their dedication to first living and then teaching it accurately. Their example and their message must be compelling, as they serve Christ. When they fail to do so, their bad

example will over time infect the congregants as well. Let us all take to heart the criticism God levels in this opening chapter of Malachi and examine ourselves accordingly.

The next chapter pronounces judgment on the priests for profaning their office and leading others astray.

Regarding Malachi 2:17, Charles Feinberg states in his book *The Minor Prophets*: “The third offence of the ungodly in Israel was an evil skepticism. By their ungodliness and unbelief they had wearied God; they had exhausted his patience [and still they again are quick to retort with “In what way...?”]. They brought forward the old argument against the providence of God from the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous. They had endured so many trials in exilic and postexilic times, that they were ready to believe that God delighted in and favored the cause of the wicked, the heathen who enjoyed prosperity, over against the ungodly.

“They complained that God did not judge wickedness severely enough. And if such were not the case, where indeed is the God of justice of whom they heard continually. Many connect this verse with the next chapter (and it is related in thought), because the answer to 2:17 is found in 3:1 [or, rather, starts in 3:1 and continues through chapter 4 in the description of the coming Day of the Lord]. God never fails to answer such a question put forth in such skeptical spirit. It rounded out the tale of their misdeeds and revealed them to be ripe for judgment” (pp. 258-259).

In Malachi 3:1, God says, “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me.” The beginning of this verse could also be translated as “Behold, I send Malachi...” Certainly, the work of Malachi, God’s messenger, was one of preparing the people for the coming of God—and His work continues even today, for his words are so preparing us who read and respond to them. Yet the reference, as the New Testament explains, was more directly to another, John the Baptist (Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27). The “Lord” whom the people sought was the long-promised Messiah. As the temple is said to be “His,” we should understand Him to be the very God who was worshiped in it. Yet He Himself is also referred to as a messenger, having been sent by God the Father. He would come as “the Messenger of the covenant.” He had presented the various covenants of the Old Testament, yet this probably refers to His coming to mediate the New Covenant.

“The phrase ‘whom you [seek or] desire’ [NIV] is interesting. Even in their sin, suggests 2:17, the people longed for deliverance through the Messiah. Amos, too, had people in his audience who ‘desired’ the Day of the Lord; but he bluntly told them that the Day of the Lord would be darkness and not light (Amos 5:19-20). So, too, Malachi asked in 3:2, ‘Who can endure the day of his coming?’ The coming Messiah would bring judgment—viz., vindication and exoneration for the righteous but condemnation and punishment for the wicked” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, note on verse 1).

The question “But who can endure the day of His coming?” recalls Joel 2:11: “For the day of the LORD [i.e., God] is great and very terrible; who can endure it?” This again identifies the messianic Messenger as being God. In this context, the question “Who can stand when He appears?”—essentially repeated in Revelation 6:17—also very clearly points to the coming of God. The likening of the Messenger to a refiner’s fire and launderer’s soap (Malachi 3:2) shows Him to be a purifier of His people. The reference to His being a refiner and purifier of silver, purging the sons of Levi so that they may offer acceptable offerings, recalls Isaiah 1, where God decried Israel’s unacceptable worship and offerings (verses 10-15) and proclaimed, “Your silver has become dross.... I will turn My hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross” (verses 22, 25).

In Malachi 3:5, the word translated “judgment” is probably better rendered “justice” here. That is, God will set the nation on the right track again and then actively intervene to righteously deal with those who don’t follow His laws. Again, this is in answer to the issue of 2:17, where God is accused of rewarding evil.

Malachi 3:6 provides great comfort. God is not fickle. His character is always constant. It is because of this that the people of Israel, both physical and spiritual, are not consumed. Though they often deserve to be destroyed for their sins, God’s great mercy and compassion, as well as the working out of His plan and purpose, are unswerving.

But God’s faithfulness has not been returned in kind. So He encourages the people to “return”—that is, repent. Yet they don’t see the need, now asking, “In what way shall we return?” (verse 7). God then gives them an

example of their disobedience—stating that they have robbed Him. “In what way...?” they come back with again (verse 😊). Then He makes clear that the issue is their failure to tithe and give offerings.

Holding back from God what rightfully belongs to Him amounts to stealing. This brought the people of Malachi’s day under a curse. The modern nations descended from ancient Israel experience this curse even still. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary notes: “Most churches still fall under this indictment [of robbing God]; their budgets are generally nowhere near 10 percent of the income of the members” (note on verse 9). And God’s tithing law applies to all, not only to those who choose to attend church.

If people complied with God’s laws in this regard, they would be greatly blessed. After paying tithes and giving offerings, God would help their remaining income stretch to cover all their needs and more. They would experience no lack of provisions. And there would be many tangible and intangible blessings besides (verses 10-12). Indeed, God told the people of Malachi’s day—and all people since, including us—to test Him in this matter (verse 10). God will demonstrate His faithfulness by keeping His promise. We, of course, must make sure we are remaining faithful to Him.

Continuing on from the previous chapter, God warns the priests that even though they are part of His blessed chosen people, if they refuse to repent of their wrong attitude and behavior, He will curse their blessings. Indeed, He says He has already done so (verse 2)—showing that some of the problems the nation was facing were really their fault (despite the people’s insinuation in 1:2 that God was unfaithful to His covenant, failing to bless as He promised).

The “refuse” of 2:3 was the “offal” (NIV) or “dung” (KJV) still within sacrificial animals that should have been removed and taken outside the community prior to sacrificing. It may be that, in their careless attitude toward their duties, the priests were not removing it. In any case, they were certainly not removing the spiritual filth from themselves. So God threatens that this disgusting uncleanness will mark their faces so that they and their corrupt descendants, like such refuse, will be taken away and disposed of.

In verses 3-4, we see that God’s judgment is intended for the positive effect of restoring His relationship with the priests. He recalls here His “covenant with Levi.” The actual person Levi, the son of Jacob, was not in mind here. Rather Levi’s descendants collectively, the tribe of Levi, is meant—despite the use of the pronouns “him” and “he.” The Levites were chosen for special divine service after their stand with Moses following the golden calf incident. Moses himself was a Levite. And from Moses’ brother Aaron sprang the line of the nation’s priesthood. So all priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests, the other Levitical sub-tribes having other responsibilities in God’s service. Some see the covenant with Levi as a reference to the provisions of Numbers 3:45-48 and 18:21-24. God refers to it as a covenant “of life and peace,” which seems to refer to what God said of Aaron’s son Phinehas: “Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel” (Numbers 25:12-13). God also refers to His unbreakable covenant with the Levites in Jeremiah 33:19-22.

Verses 4-7 give an idealized vision of how the priesthood should be. It appears from this passage that in the early days there were times when the priests did perform their duties as they should have and with the right attitude. No doubt others through the centuries shared the convictions of Phinehas. But the ideal here was a far cry from the general picture of things when the book of Malachi was written.

The priests were to proclaim God’s truth and law to the people, each serving as God’s “messenger” (verses 6-7)—this word pointing back to the name of the book (as the book’s author is fulfilling this responsibility that the priests ought to have been carrying out). Yet instead of turning people to the law and away from sin, the priests here are leading people to stumble over the law—that is, to sin! (verse 😊). This is an atrocious and appalling situation, and God says He will bring these leaders down in humiliation. In the New Testament we are warned, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1).

Malachi 2:1-16

The book of Malachi next addresses a problem with the nation as a whole (see verse 11)—the issue of intermarriage with neighboring pagans and men divorcing their first wives.

Malachi first refers to all having one father and one God (verse 10). One father could refer to Abraham or Jacob as a common ancestor. But as God declared Himself the nation's Father in 1:6, He seems to be the One referred to. The point is that the nation is a family with a common system of values and that those who are part of this family should treat each other with the care and respect one would expect in a proper family relationship. But the people of Judah have violated the sanctity of the national family "home." For one, they have "married the daughter of a foreign god" (verse 11). God had repeatedly warned Israel and Judah against intermarriage with pagans as these could influence His people into pagan false worship. Those who, knowing better, betrayed God in this way yet still persisted in forms of true worship were an utter affront to Him—and would be cut off from the nation either through death or expulsion (verse 12).

If this were not bad enough, God accuses them of making a great hypocritical show of repentance (verse 13). He informs them that He will not accept such worship. Once more, the people give an impudent retort—feigning as if they can't understand what the problem is: "For what reason?" (verse 14). God then calls them to account. Not only had the men of the nation married foreign wives, but they had evidently divorced their first wives in the process. "The reference to 'wife of your youth' in this verse suggests that the men were divorcing their aging wives in favor of younger women" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on verse 14).

This callous betrayal wrought terrible evil throughout the land. Broken homes made a mess of families and served to rip the nation apart in countless ways—made worse by the introduction of a pagan value system to influence the next generation. In verse 15, God explains that in marriage two spouses are to become one—unified in mind and values, as well as in flesh so as to procreate. And the relationship is supposed to last until death separates them. This spiritually healthy environment enables the upbringing of godly children. Indeed, society is built on the foundation of the family. When families are devastated on a wide scale, a society's downfall is not far off.

In verse 16, God states unequivocally that He hates divorce. Some translators see covering one's garment with violence in the verse as a separate reference—that is, that God hates violence also. Yet it makes more sense in context to understand the verse as the New King James Version interprets it—that is to say, divorce itself does violence to people's lives. Indeed, note the reference to one's garment. Commentator Charles Feinberg explains: "The reference is to the old custom of putting a garment over a woman to claim her as wife. (Note particularly Deu[teronomy] 22:30; Ruth 3:9; and Eze[kiel] 16:8.) Instead of spreading their garment to protect their wives, they covered their garment with violence toward their wives. The garment symbolized wedded trust and protection" (The Minor Prophets, 1990, p. 258).

"Take heed to your spirit," or as some translations have it, "Guard your spirit," is a richly informative phrase, for unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant begins in the thoughts and impulses of the mind, and they in turn produce the actions that break up the marriage. Conversely, one remains faithful in marriage by ruling his thoughts. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

So this pointed counsel from God certainly still applies today in a culture filled with divorce. All of us should, as God says, take heed.

In Malachi 3:13-15, we again see the people having the attitude expressed in 2:17—that God rewards evil and punishes righteousness. But as the rest of chapter 3 and chapter 4 show, this notion is utterly false. The righteous will ultimately receive great reward. And those who persist in wickedness will be destroyed.

God presents the righteous, those with a proper fear of Him, in verse 16. Here it says that they "spoke to one another"—demonstrating the regular fellowship and communication that God's people are supposed to have with one another. God takes great interest in the fellowship of His people, listening to what they have to say. The implication of the end of the verse is that their conversation revolved around Him and His ways. And for their proper attitude and practice, God says that they are written up in a special book of remembrance before Him. He of course needs no records for recollection, so this is perhaps more for our encouragement. God

further states that those who fear Him will be His special treasure and that they will be spared from destruction when it comes (verse 17).

God certainly draws a distinction between the righteous and the wicked—as the final outcome will make clear (verse 18).

Chapter 4 describes what will befall those who persist in rejecting God and His ways. They will be completely burned up and reduced to ashes (verses 1, 3), utterly annihilated during the reign of Christ (see also Matthew 10:28). This truth may surprise those who anticipate that the wicked will be tormented forever in a fire that never goes out. In spite of its widespread acceptance, that doctrine doesn't come from the Bible. (For more information, request, download or read online our free booklet *Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*).

Blessing is again promised to the faithful, for whom “the Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in His wings” (verse 2). Many reject this as a messianic reference because the figure is not used in the New Testament. However, since the word “sun” here would seem to denote the source of righteousness, then God is most likely intended. It employs a simple metaphor, comparing the comforting warmth that the rising sun brings upon the cold earth to the comforting healing that the Messiah brings upon a world cut off from God. And His arising on the world to bring healing is certainly the mission of God the Son, Jesus Christ. As for healing in the wings, Christ is compared to “a bird whose comforting wings bring healing to the chicks that gather underneath (see Ps. 91:1-4)” (Nelson Study Bible, note on Malachi 4:2). Jesus, Himself used this analogy in Matthew 23:37. In verse 3 of Malachi 4, the righteous are shown to be ultimately victorious over the wicked.

In closing, the book's message calls on readers to remember the law God gave through Moses (verse 4) and then describes the coming of Elijah in the future (verses 5-6). As stated in the Bible Reading Program's introduction to Malachi, the New Testament shows that John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy in part, preparing people for Jesus' first coming. However, Jesus stated that another Elijah was still to come (Matthew 17:11)—apparently to prepare the way before Jesus' second coming.

This Elijah, we are told, would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers lest God strike the earth with a curse—that is, wipe out its inhabitants. In an end-time setting, the people to be prepared are those being brought into the Church of God. So the mission here would seem to involve the building up of families—teaching parents the importance of loving and properly rearing their children as well as providing godly training for the Church's young people, turning their hearts to their parents. Yet there may be more intended by the prophecy.

In the context of John the Baptist's mission, turning the hearts of the children to the fathers is specifically interpreted in Luke 1 to mean turning “many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God” and turning “the disobedient to the wisdom of the just”—again, to “make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (verses 16-17). This may be why immediately before giving the Elijah prophecy in Malachi 4, God says to remember the law He gave through Moses (verse 4). It could be, then, that the “fathers” in the prophecy are the patriarchs and prophets, whose hearts' desire was for their descendants to be blessed through obedience to God, which they taught. The coming Elijah would then direct the “hearts” (or hearts' desire) of the patriarchal fathers to the children by proclaiming the wisdom and instruction of the fathers about obeying God to the disobedient descendants of Israel in his generation—as the original Elijah did in his day among the Northern Kingdom of Israel and as John the Baptist did in his day among the Jews of Judea. Thereby, the Elijah would in turn direct the hearts of many of these “children” to the “wisdom of the just”—to obeying God. This is the work that God's Church is to be carrying out today, as it preaches the gospel to the entire world and cares for those whom God calls.

With the close of the book of Malachi, we come to the end of the Prophets section of the Old Testament. We turn next to the Writings section. Having already read many items from this section, we will pick up those we have missed.

Revelation 22

A summary of the story of man When God created Adam and Eve, the first human beings, He placed them in a garden with the tree of life. The fruit of that tree represented the way of life God wanted them to accept and

follow. But near the tree of life was another tree, a tree whose fruit represented a mixture of good and evil. God commanded them to avoid the second tree. He would have preferred to spare them from reaping the fruits of a way of life that is

a mixture of good and evil. But Eve's curiosity overwhelmed her. She yielded to the deceptive influence of "that serpent of old," then persuaded Adam to join her in tasting the fruit of evil. All of mankind has followed them in that choice. The end result is the nearly unimaginable human tragedy depicted in the book of Revelation. But God was in no way defeated by this turn of events. He planned and intends to complete the redemption and salvation of all who will repent. When all is said and done, the community of repentant people will fill the vast city of New Jerusalem described in chapter 21.

In Revelation 22 we see the community of the saved in a setting similar to that of Adam and Eve. In New Jerusalem is a river "flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life" (verses 1-2, NIV).

The biblical story of man begins in the Garden of Eden with his of the tree of life. It closes with God's immortal family dwelling together before His throne while enjoying the fruits of the tree of life. It is the kind of fruit—the product of righteous relationships—that will make eternal life worth living.

John writes: "The angel said to me, 'These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place'" (verse 6, NIV).

Our world is confused and deceived. But it won't forever remain that way. Jesus Christ gave us the book of Revelation to inspire confidence, hope and a clear purpose in life in all who will believe and serve the living God.

Jesus Himself personally utters Revelation's closing message: "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last ... I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star" (verses 12-13, 16).

John ends with these words: "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all" (verses 20-21).

This wonderful future can be yours. You, too, can become one of God's immortal children, a member of His eternal family in the Kingdom of God. You must, however, experience true repentance, receive God's Spirit and learn how to "keep the commandments of God" by refusing to be entangled in the ways of this present evil world (Acts 2:38; Revelation 12:17; 2 Peter 2:20-21).