***Malachi 4:1-6 “For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” Says the Lord of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch. 2But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out
And grow fat like stall-fed calves. 3You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this,” Says the Lord of hosts. 4“Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments. 5Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 6And 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.”***

Tonight, we come to the end of the Old Testament. The prophets have spoken. We’ve seen how we rob God and that this robbery is not always done through activity, but more often through inactivity, more often in the thoughts of our minds, than the words of our lips. We learned that God sees and notes, not only the wicked, but the righteous, in book of remembrance. We smile when we think of one day being called His jewels, not because of our works, but because we trusted the work of His Son.

 The scripture brings into sharp focus the coming of His Son. God will fall silent for 400 years. During this time, kingdoms will rise and fall. Persians give way to Greeks, and Greeks to Romans. The pages of the calendar fan, while violence and destruction grip the Promised Land. Then a Light that no darkness can overcome dawns in a little town called Bethlehem, and the world awakes to the voice of angels singing the good news.

Verse 1*“For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” Says the Lord of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch.* ***F****or behold, the day is coming –* mortal men believe 400 years to be a long time, but in God’s view, it is nothing. Malachi assures the people and us that the day is coming. It will run us down and overtake us. Joel 2:31 calls this the great and terrible day of the Lord. *Burning like an oven –* Deuteronomy 4:24 says – *For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.* The execution of His judgements consume. In 70 AD, the Temple and the city of Jerusalem will be burned completely, just as Jesus said. The Roman General Titus was the instrument of God’s judgement. One of the interesting things I found while researching for this message – a study of the ruins revealed that the way the Temple’s roof was constructed caused the fire to fold in on itself and burn, an estimated, twice as hot. The very symbol of the Jewish nation destroyed, much as Earth will one day pass in flames. *And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble.* Sinners will be consumed, anyone not having received the Truth of Jesus. They shall be as dried wheat stubble, burning up in the consuming righteous judgement of God. *And the day which is coming shall burn them up –* the judgement will come speedily, consuming completely, utterly destroying both root and branch, leaving nothing from which to sprout new growth. This applies most completely to the end of the Earth and the creation of a new Heaven and a new Earth.

Verse 2 *But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves.* ***But*** *to you who fear My name –* Now, we recall those from Malachi 3:16, written in the Book of Remembrance, that are lifting up and encouraging brothers and sisters. They’ve believed and trusted, held to God, walked humbly before Him, waiting expectantly for His promises. Never losing hope. *The Sun of Righteousness shall arise –* Christ, the very Light of the world, as vital to the growth of our spirit as the sun to plants, will come. Luke 1:78 calls Jesus the Dayspring from on high. He brings healing of the divide between God and man, healing of the spiritual sickness called sin. Mercy, goodness, righteousness, grace, and truth. In Him, we are no longer ignorant. He heals our fallen souls, and gives us Peace, Joy, and the Promise of eternal life. *And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves –* Because of the persecution of the Christians, many fled Jerusalem and spread throughout the surrounding area. When Rome destroyed the city, God had already used the persecution and the growth of the Faith to preserve, not only Christians, but Jews as well. Christ predicted this destruction. As a result, the church grew in strength and vigor, being compared here as calves in a stall, secure, well fed, looked after. Even as Jerusalem burned, the Christian church grew. God provided.

Verse 3 *You shall trample the wicked –* we know that there will come a time when the church shall be victorious over all the wicked. In Psalm 110:1, we see that the enemies of Christ will become the footstool. Revelation 3:9 says the wicked will bow down and worship at Christ’s feet, and the feet of His beloved bride the church. *For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this Says the Lord of hosts. –* Some have suggested that this has the sense of treading on the ashes of the wicked when the righteous return to the destroyed city, but the majority agree that the larger idea is that the righteous will rise to everlasting life in the last days, while the wicked will be condemned to everlasting burning torment.

Verse 4 *Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments.* Malachi is communicating that, from this time until the coming of the Messiah, that the Law of Moses will be the way God speaks. There will be no prophets until John the Baptist in 400 years. The righteous are to keep the Law and continue in what they know to do, obeying God. He reminds us that God commanded all the people audibly from Mt Horeb in Exodus 19. God, through thousands of years and many prophets, has plainly told Israel to expect the Messiah. He charged them to keep the law, statutes, and judgements. God gave plain doctrines and commandments. Now, these will sustain the righteous until John the Baptist arrives.

Verse 5 *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.* Malachi will now fall silent and the next prophet will be Elijah, going before the Messiah, preparing the way. Elijah was known for his austere lifestyle, his zeal for God, his courage in the face of danger, and the work he did to bring about reforms. He lived in a time of Baal worship. The Jews literally expected Elijah the Tishbite, from 1 Kings… and still do! Nowhere in scripture does it say this. He will come in the spirit and power of Elijah – Luke 1: 13-17 *But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.* ***17****He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.* We know that this is referring to John the Baptist. *Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord* – This refers to the destruction of Jerusalem some 1950 years ago. It is strange to me that the Jews acknowledge that prophecy was sealed when Malachi finished speaking. They acknowledge that prophets will be restored with the coming of the Messiah. They acknowledge that John the Baptist was a prophet – In Matthew 21:26, we hear the chief priests and elders - *But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet.* Even the Sanhedrin asked John the Baptist in John 1:21 – *What then? Are you Elijah? Are you a prophet?* If they thought that the next prophet would make the way for the Messiah, why did they not believe when they thought a prophet had come? Listen to what Josephus, a very respected Jewish historian wrote: *“It was the opinion of the Jews,” says he, “that Herod’s army was cut off by the Arabs through God’s just judgment, for the sake of John, who was surnamed the Baptist. For he killed that excellent man, who excited the people to the exercise of all virtues, especially piety and justice, and to receive his baptism, which, he assured them, would be pleasing to God, if to purity of body they added purity of life, and first cleansed their souls, not from one or two, but every sin. But when the people resorted in numbers to him, eager to hear his doctrine, and ready to do anything by his counsel, fearing what might be effected through so great authority of the man, he first imprisoned and then slew him.”* — Antiq., lib. xviii, cap. 7. God cut off an army for his beloved… a prophet, in the spirit and power of Elijah… Messiah soon to follow.

Verse 6 *And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers.* The time after Malachi was a very divided, violent time. Civil war, disagreement, religious sects vying for power. Fathers and children opposed one another – a Sadducee resisted a Pharisee. Enter John the Baptist, preaching love, peace, humility, and repentance. Teaching One Master, Christ Jesus. He cried out for people to turn from their evil ways and turn back to the One True God. He did all this to prepare the people to receive the Messiah. *Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.* Lest I strike the land of Judea with utter destruction. Through the preaching of John the Baptist, many believed on Jesus, giving them escape from the utter destruction to come. A remnant was saved, as God told Elijah in 1 Kings.

And so ends the Old Testament just as Amos 8:11 said it would - *Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord God, “That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water,* ***But of hearing the words of the Lord.*** Thus starts the famine of words from the Lord. Four hundreds years of silence. No prophets. No light. Only darkness. Then, a Great Light, the Messiah, preceded by this austere, zealous, and courageous prophet coming in the spirit and power of Elijah named John the Baptist, telling people to prepare because the Messiah was coming. May we, as we await Christ’s second coming, prepare our hearts, keep the commandments, study the word, believe His promises, and teach others of His Truth. We prepare the way for His second coming. We wait expectantly. Even so come Lord Jesus.