

PROPHECIES OF THE ADVENT

Malachi 3; 4

Mention the two parts of the Bible and explain if necessary the meaning of the word *Testament*, before taking up the lesson for today.

Doctrinal Points

The coming of the Lord was prophesied at the very end of the Old Testament.

The prophets all spoke the words the Lord gave them to speak.

Trust in one's own wisdom is the opposite of faith.

The good will always be saved.

Notes for Parents

With this lesson we come to the end of the Old Testament. The name *Malachi* means “my messenger,” and the prophecies given through Malachi were among the chief comforts of the good among the Jews during the four hundred years which followed, before the Lord came into the world. For in spite of all the warnings given it and in spite of the bitter experience of captivity, the ancient Jewish Church as a church never returned to obedience. As we learn from the Gospels, the priests and elders overlaid the Word of God with traditions of their own, more serviceable to them in worldly ways, until the simple people did not know right from wrong. In all those four hundred years no more prophets were sent to them. Through Malachi they had their final warning.

But through Malachi the Lord had also promised that one day He Himself would come into the world and that those who remained faithful would be prepared for His coming so that they could receive Him with joy. Verse 17 of our chapter is a beautiful one for the children to hold in their minds. If they are good, they

will be counted among the Lord's jewels. And the second verse of chapter 4 is a beautiful promise, too. For the Lord's coming into our lives—if we are of those who really want to be good men and women—is like the sunrise, bringing the clear light of understanding to our minds and the warmth of love to our hearts, and healing the spiritual diseases which have been festering in our souls.

Primary

Although some of these children may not be able to read, they can be shown the two divisions of the Bible, learn their names, and the meaning of the word *Testament*. They may also be taught what a prophecy is and the difference between the Lord's means of speaking with the people in the Old Testament and in the New. Read them Malachi 3:17 and tell them that when they are good they are the Lord's jewels. Talk about the nature of the covenant between God and men and the difference in the way in which the Lord's coming affects the good and the evil.

Our lesson today is from the last two chapters of the last book of the Old Testament. Perhaps you know that our Bible is divided into two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Your teacher will show them to you. A testament is a solemn covenant or agreement. The testaments in our Bible tell us about the agreement the Lord makes with men on earth. You remember that all through our lessons the Lord has been promising that if the people would obey Him, He would take care of them and make them happy. In the Old Testament the Lord makes these promises through Moses and the Prophets. Man's part of the agreement is the promise to obey the Lord.

But we have learned that the people in the Holy Land did not keep their part of the agreement, and so the Lord could not keep them safe and happy. Let us read our lesson for today. [Read Malachi 3:1-2; 4:1-6.] You see that here at the very end of the Old Testament the Lord told the people that a time was coming when He Himself would come into the world. The bad people who had not been obeying Him would be afraid when He came, just as you are sometimes afraid when your mother finds you doing

something naughty. But the good people would welcome Him.

A foretelling of something that is going to happen is called a prophecy. Malachi 4:2 tells how the Lord's coming will seem to the good. You know that it is the sun which makes the daytime when we can see all the beautiful things around us and work and play together. So the Lord's coming is to be like the rising of the sun in the morning, making everything bright and clear.

Can you think of any kind of people who prefer darkness to sunlight?

The Lord says that the wicked will be afraid when He comes, but the good will welcome Him.

Who is to be sent before the Lord to prepare His way?

Who was Elijah?

This prophecy really means that someone very much like Elijah would come to prepare people for the coming of the Lord. This man was John the Baptist.

Junior

This is a good lesson in which to bring out the meaning of *Testament* and the difference between the Old and the New. The Juniors should get as definite an idea as possible of the structure of the Bible. The difference between willful wrongdoing and wrongdoing from ignorance is another important lesson; also that evil lies in putting self-interest above the desire to do what the Lord says is right. Stress the prophecy in regard to Elijah as a preparation for beginning study of the New Testament.

You remember that after seventy years of captivity in Babylon the people were allowed to return to the Holy Land. They did not all return. Some had become satisfied with their life in Babylon and did not want to go back. They helped the others, however, with money and supplies, and the king restored part of the vessels and treasures of the temple which had been carried to Babylon. After some delays and difficulties Jerusalem and the temple were rebuilt, but there is no mention that the ark was ever restored. No one ever knew what became of it.

After the return three prophets were raised up among them: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The word *Malachi* means "my

messenger.” Almost all the prophets foretell the coming of the Lord, but the prophecies in the last two chapters of Malachi are those which most directly connect the Old Testament with the New.

In the first verse of chapter 3 Malachi speaks of a messenger who shall prepare the way before the Lord, and then he speaks of the Lord Himself as the “messenger of the covenant.” So you see there are two different messages to be given. The first is only a preparation for the second. The Lord Himself will make a new covenant or agreement with men. To see what this covenant was to be, look up John 13:34-35 and then Matthew 5:17-18. The covenant which the Lord Himself made with men when He came into the world in person was based on the keeping of the commandments just as the Old Testament covenant had been, but the commandments were to be kept in a new spirit of unselfish love. More than mere obedience is required of those who want to be disciples of the Lord.

Two kinds of people are described in our lesson: the people whose first interest is in their own worldly prosperity and the people who want more than anything else to do right in the Lord’s sight. The Lord through Malachi for the last time warned those who were of the selfish kind and told them that if they would only change their ways and return to the keeping of the law, He would still spare them and prosper them. But His words had no effect on the worldly and selfish. The nation continued for four hundred years after Malachi before the Lord came, but no more prophets were sent to it. The people observed the outward forms of their worship, but their hearts were unchanged; we learn this from many things the Lord says in the Gospels.

Yet there were good people among them in Malachi’s time and there were still good people among them when the Lord came, as we shall see when we begin the study of the New Testament.

In our lesson how does the Lord say His coming will affect the evil?

How will it affect the good?

In verse 2 of chapter 4 to what does the Lord compare His coming?

In the Word the Lord is often compared to the sun, because He

gives warmth and light—love and truth—to our souls just as the sun gives warmth and light to our bodies.

Now read the last two verses of chapter 4, the very last verses of the Old Testament.

Who is to be the messenger who will prepare the way of the Lord?

What is he to do?

Why is this preparation necessary?

All of you come from homes in which you are taught what is right and wrong, and you go to Sunday school and learn about the Lord and what He wants you to do and to be. But you know that there are some children who do not have these advantages. They have just as good intentions as you have, but they grow up doing many very wrong things because they do not know any better. Do you remember how badly king Josiah felt when he found the book of the law and realized how many wrong things the people had been doing, partly because they didn't know any better? If people were to be brought too suddenly to see just how bad their lives were, it would be something like a stroke of lightning. They would feel that they were beyond all hope. They need to be shown first some of the wrong things they are doing and encouraged to give them up, and then when they find it is possible and that they are happier in right ways, they are ready to learn about the deeper things which the Lord requires of them.

That was the way it was with the good people when the Lord came. Their priests and the scribes and Pharisees had not been teaching them what the Lord really wanted them to do, but only things which would make these selfish leaders richer and more powerful. Read Matthew 15:1-9. So even the good people were doing many very wrong things from ignorance, and the messenger had to be sent to them to prepare them before they could receive the Lord.



Intermediate

The correspondence of a number of verses from the lesson has been suggested

in the Intermediate notes, but the principal lesson this time is the historical position of Malachi as the last prophet sent to the ancient Jewish Church and the general meaning of his prophecies in relation to the end of that church era.

We have come to our last lesson in the Old Testament. The last three of the Minor Prophets prophesied after the return from captivity in Babylon. In Malachi's time Jerusalem and the temple had been rebuilt and worship was being conducted according to the rites prescribed through Moses. But most of the people had not really changed at heart. They had come back not from any real desire to serve the Lord but in the hope of re-establishing their nation and becoming rich and powerful again. And they had been disappointed. They were neither rich nor great. They were not even really an independent nation. So they had begun to "rob God" by bringing unfit offerings (Malachi 1:7-8) and were asking what was the use of serving God at all; they were also beginning again to put away their Hebrew wives and marry wives from the other nations.

So for the last time they were accused by the Lord, their evils pointed out, and they were warned to turn from them if they wished the Lord to protect and prosper them. They did not heed the warning. The nation continued for four hundred years after Malachi before the Lord finally came, most of the time under foreign control, but no more prophets were sent to it. And the same charges against it which Malachi makes are made by the Lord in the Gospels against the people of that later time.

But there were good people among them in Malachi's day, and Malachi's chief message was a message of encouragement and hope for them—a message which, with others of the same kind in the other Prophets, supported the good and kept them faithful throughout the four hundred years, for we know that there were good people when the Lord came who, like Simeon (Luke 2:25), were "just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel." These people are especially described in verses 16 to 18 of chapter 3, and are promised that they shall be among the Lord's special possessions or "jewels." Swedenborg says in one place that precious stones

represent “truths translucent from the love Divine,” and we are told that angels love to feel that all the good they do and the wisdom they seem to have are the Lord’s love and wisdom acting through them. So we may think of the Lord’s jewels as angels, and we may all be angels insofar as we receive and transmit love and truth from the Lord. You remember that an “angel” is a messenger. The name *Malachi* means “my messenger.”

Two messengers are spoken of in our lesson. One is the Lord, who is called “the messenger of the covenant.” The word *testament* means a covenant or agreement. The Old Testament describes the working out of the covenant made through Moses that if the people would faithfully observe the laws and statutes given them at Sinai, the Lord would protect and prosper them. This covenant, as we have been learning, the nation repeatedly broke and finally completely violated. The Lord had foreseen that they would, and so again and again throughout the Old Testament we find promises that the Lord Himself would one day come into the world to establish a new covenant with the good people that should be left. The prophecies of our lesson are the last of these promises. They tell us plainly that the day of the Lord’s coming was to be a terrible day for the wicked. Read verse 1 of chapter 4. Thinking of this lesson as it relates to the history of the world rather than of the individual soul, we realize that this prophecy was historically fulfilled. But we should keep in mind that these chapters have also their application to us as individuals.

The effect of the Lord’s coming upon good people is described in verse 2 of chapter 4. In the Word the Lord is often likened to the sun, and we remember that in the Creation story, the appearance of the sun on the fourth day pictures the development of love to the Lord in the heart. Wings picture interior or spiritual truths, which have the power to lift our thoughts above worldly things. This is what the Lord brought to men when He came into the world, and what the good needed to enable them to distinguish between right and wrong and to overcome their evils; so the Lord brought “healing in his wings.”

But when the Lord came, even the good people would need to be prepared before they could receive Him. There have been actual cases of people who with good intentions have through ignorance done something which resulted in great harm and have committed suicide in despair when they suddenly realized what their deeds had caused. People need to be shown their faults one by one and led to correct them before the deep evils in their hearts are revealed to them. That is the wise and gentle way of the Lord in dealing with each one of us, and it was the way in which he dealt with the good remnant when He came into the world.

Verse 2 of chapter 4 tells us that they shall “grow up as calves of the stall.” Calves represent exterior goods. Then verse 3 says that they shall tread down the wicked, and this means that they shall begin to overcome the evils in themselves. And in verse 4 they are told to remember the law of Moses. This order is a picture of the way in which all who sincerely want to be good are reformed, first by learning to do right according to the commandments and then by fighting and overcoming the selfish desires that prompt them to do wrong. You remember that the whole wilderness journey of the Israelites was a picture of the period of reformation.

Now that the church had become completely perverted, good individuals were not able to learn from their church just what they ought to do and to be. But they were promised that the Lord would come and establish a new covenant with them and that Elijah the prophet would be sent to them first to prepare them to receive the Lord. What this promise meant and how it was fulfilled is the subject of a later lesson.

Basic Correspondences

the sun = the Lord, the divine love,
 love to the Lord
wings = spiritual truths
calves = exterior goods

Senior

The Seniors should know the general history of the return and its results and

have a clear idea of the state of the ancient Jewish Church in its last centuries and the reason why it would reject the Messiah to whose coming it nominally looked forward. More will be done later with the personal application of Malachi's last prophecy.

The word *Malachi* means "my messenger." Because it is so appropriate to the content of the book, some students have thought that it was not the name of a person at all. But we know that all the names in the Word have meanings related to the spiritual sense and were providentially given for that purpose. Every prophet is a messenger of the Lord, each with a particular message. The message of Malachi, the last of the twelve Minor Prophets, like all parts of the Word, has its deepest application with reference to the Lord's life, its secondary application to us as individuals, and its third application to the history of the Lord's church in the world, as well as its literal meaning. In general, in our Sunday school lessons we study the personal application of the Bible story, because as children and young people we must learn how the Lord wants us to live. But since this lesson marks the end of our Old Testament series and gives us the connecting links which join the Old to the New, we shall think rather of the literal story and of the internal historical application.

After seventy years of captivity in Babylon the people had been allowed and even helped by Cyrus to return to the Holy Land and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. This story is told in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. From them we learn that all the people did not return—not because they could not, but because they did not want to. And we also learn that those who came back were more interested after they arrived in reclaiming the land and rebuilding their homes than they were in completing the temple and restoring their worship, and that they easily fell back into their old evils of seeking worldly objectives and of intermarrying with the idolatrous people of the land. In these early days of the return the prophet Haggai was sent to spur them on to the completion of the temple. Zechariah followed Haggai, and finally Malachi was sent with a last warning. After Malachi, for four hundred years—until the appearance

of John the Baptist—no prophet was sent to the nation. Most of our Bibles do not contain the books grouped under the name “Apocrypha” which tell the history of this period. During the greater part of it the nation was under the control of foreign powers, and when the Gospel story opens, we find them, as you know, under the dominion of a Roman governor, although they also have their own nominal king. This is the external history.

In our chapters from Malachi we find the key to the internal states of the people in his time and during the rest of the nation’s history. Verses 5 to 15 of chapter 3 give a general picture of the evils into which the nation had already fallen, and others are described in the two preceding chapters. Notice particularly verses 14 and 15, which show that most of the people who returned from Babylon did not return because of devotion to the Lord but because they hoped to become rich and prosperous again. In other words, the motive in their worship was selfishness.

Another class of people, however, is described in verses 16 to 18 of chapter 3. You remember that all through the Bible story, as the successive churches declined, there has always been a “remnant” who remained God-fearing and faithful—even after they no longer knew the truth – out of whom a new church could be built up. This remnant continued to exist in the nation throughout the next four hundred years, as we learn from the Gospels. The shepherds at Bethlehem, Zacharias and Elisabeth, Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna could be told immediately of the Lord’s birth. In Luke 2:25, for example, we read of the aged Simeon that he was “just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel,” and when the Lord, an infant eight days old, was brought into the temple, Simeon was given to know that this was the promised “consolation,” the Messiah, and he took the Lord in his arms and spoke the beautiful words which we know as the *Nunc Dimittis*.

Malachi’s message foretells the effect which the Lord’s Advent was to have upon the evil and upon the good. The evil would reject Him and so would judge themselves. The good would receive Him gladly and submit willingly to the process of purifying which the

fire of direct contact with His divine love would begin in their lives. His coming is likened to the rising sun. The light of truth will bring joy and healing to the good, but the evil will be tormented by it because, as we read in John 3:19, they have “loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” The great majority rejected the Lord when He came.

In the good remnant, however, there were only a few when the Lord came, in whose hearts and minds there was still the innocence which could receive the Lord immediately. Most of them had been led, through the misrepresentations of their priests and leaders, into evils which would have thrown them into utter despair if the new light had come too suddenly into their darkness. So the last two verses of the Old Testament are a promise that a prophet will be sent to prepare them to receive the Lord when He comes, and Elijah is named as this prophet. The meaning and fulfillment of this prophecy will be the substance of a later lesson.

Adult

A little more has been done in the Adult notes with the personal application of the lesson than in the notes for the other classes. The teacher should study all the notes from the Junior up and be prepared to discuss whichever application seems to interest the class most. In any event, he should first make sure that the class is familiar with the historical events involved before proceeding to the meaning of the prophecies.

We may recall that in our lesson on the story of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, Korah and the two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly who were jealous of Moses and Aaron were slain by fire from the Lord as they offered their incense before the door of the tabernacle, and that this is a picture of how love from the Lord is turned into hatred in the hearts of those who seek to exalt themselves. In *Heaven and Hell*, n. 570 we read: “As infernal fire is the love of self and of the world it is also every lust of these loves, since lust is love in its continuity, for what a man loves he continually lusts after. Infernal fire is also delight, since what a man loves and lusts after he perceives, when he obtains it, to be delightful.

Man's delight of heart is of no other source. Infernal fire, therefore, is the lust and delight, that spring from these two loves as their origins. The evils flowing from these loves are contempt of others, enmity, and hostility against those who do not favor them, envy, hatred, and revenge, and from this fierceness and cruelty; and in respect to the Divine they are denial and consequent contempt, derision, and detraction of the holy things of the church; and after death, when man becomes a spirit, these evils are changed into anger and hatred against these holy things." Malachi 4:1 is one of several passages quoted in support of this interpretation.

That the people by and large were in this spiritually destructive self-love in the time of Malachi is evident from the charges made against them in the first two chapters of the book and in verses 5 to 15 of chapter 3. And that they were still in that state for the most part four hundred years later when the Lord was on earth is evident from many passages in the Gospels.

Malachi and the two Prophets whose books precede his in the Bible prophesied after the return from captivity in Babylon. Even in the time of Haggai, the first of these three, less than twenty years after the return, the people were already pursuing their own worldly affairs instead of completing the rebuilding of the temple, and were beginning again to intermarry with the idolatrous nations of the land. They refused to heed the warnings of the Lord or to learn the lessons taught by experience. So Malachi was the last prophet sent to them until the appearance of John the Baptist as the herald of the Lord. Their attitude toward their religion is well summed up in verse 14 of chapter 3: "It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?"

Yet throughout the two chapters of our lesson we see that there were good people in Malachi's time. Verse 16 of chapter 3 in its letter is a picture of the quiet drawing together of the good in times when evil forces seem to be in control, and the beautiful promise given them in verse 17 is one which every sincere worshiper of the Lord may cherish. The amazing thing is that the remnant of good

people persisted throughout the four hundred years in which there was no new voice from heaven, but we learn from the writings that when a church is being vastated, the Lord always preserves a remnant out of which a new church may be built; as we read in Isaiah 17:7: “Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the Lord God of Israel.” That during this long period the promises of the Messiah made through the Prophets were the support of this remnant we learn from many statements in the Gospels, notably from the stories of Simeon and Anna in Luke 2:25-38.

In Malachi 4:1-2 the effect which the Lord’s coming would have on the evil and on the good is told in the vivid contrast of the consuming fire and the rising sun. The only ones who do not welcome the sun—either natural or spiritual—are those who have “loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” To all the good its light and warmth are welcome, and the sun of righteousness—the Lord Jesus Christ—also brings “healing in his wings.” AE 283⁹ tells us that in this verse the sun of righteousness is the celestial divine and the wings of Jehovah the spiritual divine or the one is the good of love and the other truth from that good. Wings in general represent spiritual truths which have the power to lift our thoughts above the plane of worldly living to heights from which we can see life in its true proportions and relationships, and it is this higher view which enables us to cleanse our minds of many afflictions and limitations. And it is said that we shall become “as calves of the stall.” The Lord’s coming makes our outward affections wholesome and productive and, as verses 3 and 4 teach us, makes it possible for us to overcome our temptations and to live freely according to the commandments.

Later we shall take up the fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6, the prophecy with which the Old Testament leaves us, but there are one or two things in verse 6 which we may consider here as preparation. We might note that the word commonly translated “children” in both the King James and the Revised Standard

Version is actually *sons*, and Swedenborg consistently uses the more literal translation, which is important to the spiritual interpretation, since sons represent truths. In AE 724 Swedenborg quotes this verse (using the word *sons* instead of *children*) and gives us this interpretation: “From this it may be concluded what ‘turning the heart of the fathers to the sons and the heart of the sons to the fathers’ signifies, namely, that it means inducing a representation of the conjunction of spiritual goods with truths and truths with goods, thus of regeneration by the Lord by means of the Word. For regeneration is the conjunction of goods with truths and of truths with goods, and it is the Lord who regenerates, and the Word that teaches.”

We may perhaps understand a little of what is meant by the last words of this verse—“lest I come and smite the earth with a curse”—by thinking again of the Lord as the sun and of how dangerous it would be for a physical eye from which a cataract had just been removed to be suddenly exposed to the full sunlight. We know that one of the objects of the Lord in the Advent was “to open the blind eyes.” The simple good of that day were spiritually blind, because the knowledge of the Lord’s teaching in the Word had been obscured by the traditions of the elders. The full light of truth coming to them suddenly would have plunged them into despair and self-destruction. So a messenger was sent to prepare the way.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 8159²: “The temptations of those who were of the spiritual church, which they were to undergo after the Lord came into the world, and could then from the Divine Human fight for them against the hells, are meant by these words in Malachi . . . (3:1-4); clearly speaking of the Lord’s coming; ‘the sons of Levi’ here denote those who are of the spiritual church, for by ‘Levi’ is signified charity or spiritual good . . . ; ‘the refiner’s fire’ is temptation, whereby is effected purification, which is here meant by ‘purifying and refining them as gold and silver’; ‘the meat-offering which they shall bring to Jehovah’ is faith and charity; ‘the days of eternity’ and ‘the former

years' denote the ancient churches, and the states of worship of the Lord at that time."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. How many Minor Prophets are there? *twelve*
- J. When did the last three prophesy? *after return from Babylon*
- P. Who was the last one of all? *Malachi*
- P. What does *Malachi* mean? *my messenger*
- J. What bad things were the people doing? *disobeying the law of the tithe*
- P. What great event did Malachi foretell? *coming of the Lord*
- P. What did he say it would be like? *the sun of righteousness*
- J. How did he say it would affect the wicked? *would tread them down*
- J. How would it affect the good? *bring them healing*
- P. Who would be sent to prepare the way of the Lord? *"Elijah"*
- I. Why is the Lord's coming likened to the sunrise? *brings warmth and light*
- S. Why were no prophets sent after Malachi until John the Baptist? *church fully perverted*
- S. Why would the people need to be prepared by someone for the Lord's coming? *the full effect of His truth coming suddenly would have driven people to self-destruction*