

Malachi 4:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

Analysis

God's final Old Testament prophetic word promises: 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.' This prophecy links Malachi's conclusion to his opening promise of a forerunner messenger (Malachi 3:1). The name 'Elijah' (אֵלִיָּהּ, Eliyahu—'My God is Yahweh') identifies the messenger with the famous 9th-century BC prophet who confronted Ahab and Jezebel's Baal worship, called down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18), and was taken to heaven in a whirlwind without dying (2 Kings 2:11). The promise doesn't necessitate literal reincarnation but rather someone ministering 'in the spirit and power of Elias' (Luke 1:17). Jesus explicitly identified John the Baptist as the fulfillment: 'And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come' (Matthew 11:14, 17:10-13). John denied being Elijah literally (John 1:21) but functioned in Elijah's prophetic role—calling Israel to repentance before Messiah's arrival, confronting religious and political corruption (Matthew 14:3-4), and preparing the way for the Lord. The phrase 'before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD' places this ministry immediately before divine judgment. The 'day of the LORD' has multiple fulfillments: Christ's first advent (bringing judgment on unrepentant Israel, culminating in AD 70 temple destruction), the church age (ongoing judgment on the nations), and Christ's return (final judgment). Verse 6 explains Elijah's mission: '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.' This describes covenant restoration—reconciling families and generations in renewed faithfulness to God. John's

preaching produced exactly this effect, preparing 'a people prepared for the Lord' (Luke 1:17).

Historical Context

Malachi's prophecy concluded canonical Old Testament Scripture around 430 BC. For the next four centuries, no prophetic voice spoke in Israel despite continued expectation of 'Elijah's' return. This silence ended dramatically when John the Baptist appeared in the Judean wilderness (approximately AD 27), preaching 'Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matthew 3:2). His ministry fulfilled both Malachi's promise and Isaiah's prophecy of 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness' (Isaiah 40:3, Matthew 3:3). John's dress (camel's hair garment and leather belt) deliberately evoked Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), signaling his prophetic role. His message called Israel to covenant renewal, warning that God's kingdom was breaking into history and judgment approached for the unrepentant. When religious leaders questioned his authority, demanding to know if he was the Christ, Elijah, or 'that prophet' (John 1:19-25), John pointed away from himself to the coming Messiah. His preparatory ministry lasted approximately 18 months before Herod Antipas imprisoned and executed him (Matthew 14:1-12). Jesus lamented that while John fulfilled Elijah's role, 'they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed' (Matthew 17:12), meaning they rejected his message and killed him. Some interpreters see dual fulfillment—John fulfilled the prophecy regarding Christ's first coming, while another 'Elijah' will appear before Christ's return, possibly one of Revelation's two witnesses (Revelation 11:3-12). Regardless, the principle remains: God sends warning and opportunity for repentance before judgment.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does John the Baptist's ministry model faithful gospel proclamation that calls people to repentance?
2. What does it mean that God sends warning messengers before judgment, and how should this shape evangelistic urgency?
3. How should the promise of family/generational restoration influence Christian parenting, discipleship, and church life?

Interlinear Text

הֵן ה	אֶנְכִי	שִׁלִּי ה	אֶת לְךָ ה	אֵלַי ה	הַנָּבִיא
H2009	H595	Behold I will send	H0	H853	you Elijah
		H7971		H452	the prophet
					H5030
לִפְנֵי י	ב וְא	י וּם	יְהוָה ה	הַגָּד וּל	וְהַנּוֹכָא:
before	the coming	day	of the LORD	of the great	and dreadful
H6440	H935	H3117	H3068	H1419	H3372

Additional Cross-References

Luke 1:17 (References Lord): And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, 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.

Malachi 3:1 (References Lord): Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

Isaiah 40:3 (References Lord): The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

John 1:21 (Prophecy): And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

Joel 2:31 (References Lord): The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

Revelation 6:17 (Parallel theme): For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Malachi 4:1 (References Lord): 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.

John 1:25 (Prophecy): And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

Luke 9:30 (Parallel theme): And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: