

THE DAY IS COMING

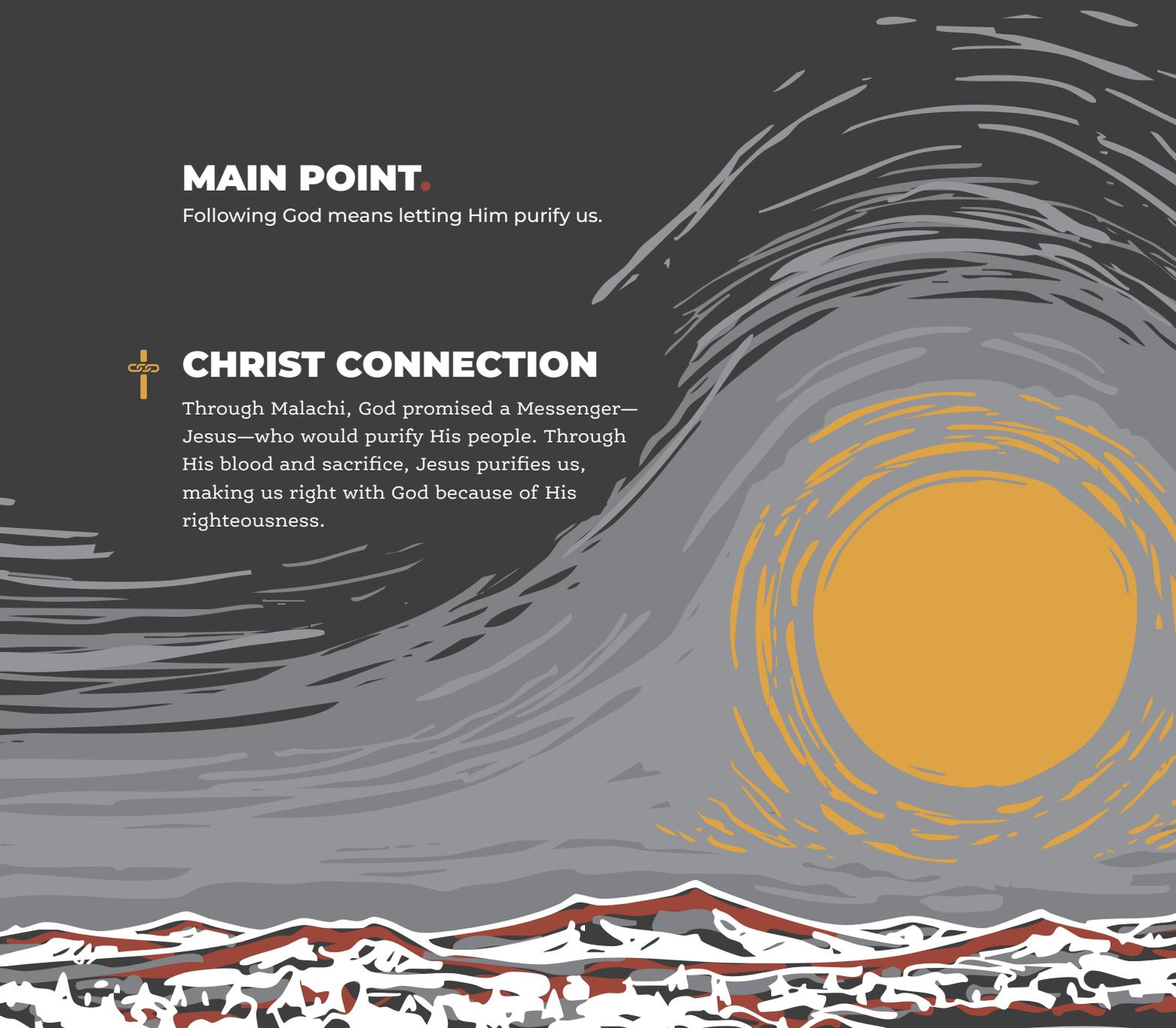
MAIN POINT.

Following God means letting Him purify us.



CHRIST CONNECTION

Through Malachi, God promised a Messenger—Jesus—who would purify His people. Through His blood and sacrifice, Jesus purifies us, making us right with God because of His righteousness.



REMEMBERING THE PAST

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to read all of the content on the timeline as you prepare to teach.

Malachi

GOD WILL PURIFY HIS PEOPLE

MALACHI 3:1-6

1 “See, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me. Then the LORD you seek will suddenly come to his temple, the Messenger of the covenant you delight in—see, he is coming,” says the LORD of Armies. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming? And who will be able to stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire and like launderer’s bleach. 3 He will be like a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver. Then they will present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. 4 And the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will please the LORD as in days of old and years gone by. 5 “I will come to you in judgment, and I will be ready to witness against sorcerers and adulterers; against those who swear falsely; against those who oppress the hired worker, the widow, and the fatherless; and against those who deny justice to the resident alien. They do not fear me,” says the LORD of Armies. 6 “Because I, the LORD, have not changed, you descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed.”

GOD WILL HEAL HIS PEOPLE

MALACHI 4:1-6

1 “For look, the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and everyone who commits wickedness will become stubble. The coming day will consume them,” says the LORD of Armies, “not leaving them root or branches. 2 But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and you will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall. 3 You will trample the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day I am preparing,” says the LORD of Armies. 4 “Remember the instruction of Moses my servant, the statutes and ordinances I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. 5 Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

BEFORE YOU TEACH

MAIN POINT.

Following God means letting Him purify us.

Leaders: Celebrate the progress you've made through Scripture with this last passage from the Old Testament! Spend time reflecting on seeing Jesus in the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

GOD WILL PURIFY HIS PEOPLE

MALACHI 3:2-3

“Malachi 3:2-3 cannot be about Jesus' first coming, since Jesus did not come to refine, but to redeem. Jesus came to give His life up as a sacrifice for all of mankind. He came to emancipate sinners and establish His kingdom. At His second coming, though, He will act as judge and purifier.”¹⁴

MALACHI 3:6

“Most of the time, when the Israelites are referred to as the children of Jacob, it's a rebuke for their disobedience. It's a reference to the name of their forefather before the divine blessing was bestowed. Yet, even though they were faithless, God would remain faithful to them, as He was to their father, Jacob.”¹⁵

GOD WILL HEAL HIS PEOPLE

MALACHI 4:2

“To confirm that Jesus was the rising of the sun, we may also look to Luke 1:76-79. . . . In this passage John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, has been mute for a season. When the silence is broken, his first utterance is a prophecy. He declares that John is preparing the way for 'the Dawn from on high.' Not surprisingly, John's ministry would be to prepare the way for Jesus Christ.”¹⁶

MALACHI 4:5-6

“That the Lord would send a messenger to prepare the way for Messiah's coming was prophesied in 3:1. Here this forerunner is called the prophet Elijah, not the ancient prophet reincarnated but one with the same prophetic power and mission—calling the nation back to God (v. 6). In Matthew 17:10-13, Jesus explained that John the Baptist was the Elijah who prepared the way for his first coming (Matt. 11:13-14) but made clear that another Elijah was yet future. This future Elijah would prepare the way for Messiah's second coming—before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.”¹⁷

CONTEXT

Background: Malachi was the final prophetic voice in the Old Testament period, until John the Baptist prophesied roughly 450 years later. Though the author could've been a prophet named Malachi, which means "my messenger," the book doesn't reveal any information about his life. The backdrop of the prophetic book is the postexilic period in Judah, likely somewhere during or just after the events in Ezra and Nehemiah. About one hundred years after the return from Babylon, Israel still served Persia. Many of God's people were dissatisfied with God because He hadn't restored Israel's glory. Because of the people's spiritual laziness and lack of faith, the nation fell into a state of corruption and injustice. The book's contents are presented in a question/answer format as disputes between God and His people, though most of the dialogue belongs to God. Malachi shed light on the grim reality that God's people were still just as unfaithful as they were before exile. Malachi's words exposed Israel's corruption, reassured the nation of God's love, and pointed to the coming Messiah, who would heal the world of sin and injustice. The message was a "call for Israel to return to God before the Messiah comes to earth, for it was written to a people who lived in expectation of Him, but who had not yet seen Him."¹⁸ The same could be said to the unfaithful today: Turn to the Lord and wait with hope for the day of Jesus's return.

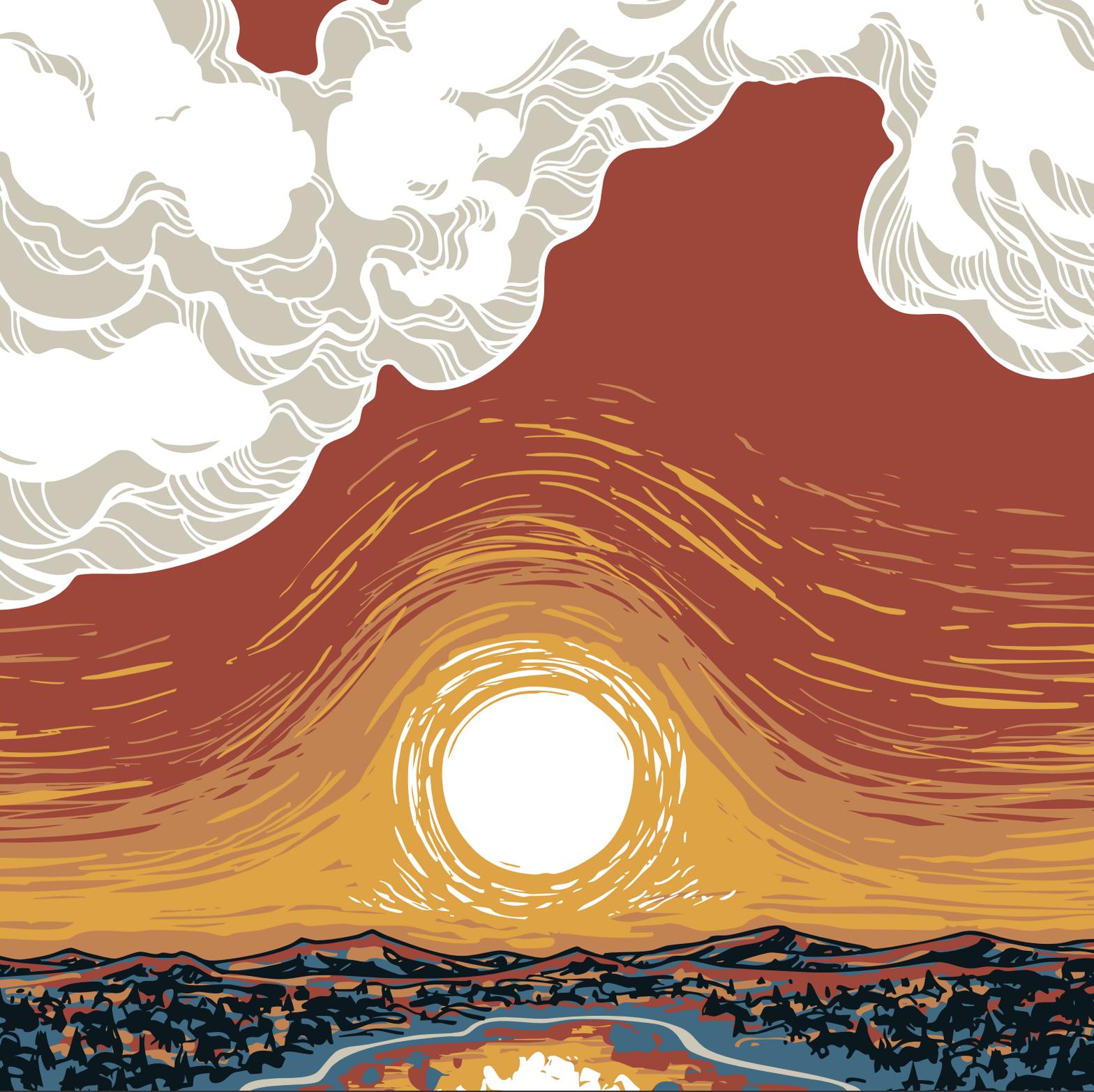
THEOLOGY CONNECTION

Imputation

When God pardoned sinners at the cross, our sins were imputed, or transferred, to Christ, who became sin on our behalf. Our sin was imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness was imputed to us (Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 1:30). When God the Father looks at those who have trusted in Christ, He does not see their sins but the righteousness of Christ as belonging to them (Rom. 4:6).

LEADERS' PRAYER

GOD, THANK YOU FOR JESUS. BECAUSE OF HIS SACRIFICE, WE DON'T HAVE TO FEAR THE DAY OF JUDGMENT. THANK YOU FOR THE WORK YOU DO IN OUR LIVES TO PURIFY AND REFINE US. HELP US TO LIVE AS PEOPLE WHO HAVE GREAT HOPE.



KICK STARTER

♥ HEART CHECK

Last week, we talked about not following through with commitments we make to the Lord. How have you taken steps to follow through with seeking God and leaving sin behind?

These optional activities are designed to help your students interact. You'll find a Discussion Activity and a Cultural Connection, which touches on a relevant topic in today's teen culture. Each group is different, so adapt these activities to fit your group's needs. The goal is for students to connect more to the lesson as they connect to the topic and to one another.

1

MEMORY

SUPPLIES LIST: NONE

Ask the following questions, allowing time for students to share responses:

- **IS MEMORIZING INFORMATION EASY OR DIFFICULT FOR YOU?**
- **WHEN HAS THE ABILITY TO MEMORIZE SOMETHING BENEFITED YOU?**
- **THINK BACK AS FAR AS YOU CAN. WHAT'S YOUR EARLIEST MEMORY?**

Some of us have the ability to memorize a lot of information. We're able to lock it in, benefiting us on tests and in other situations. Others of us struggle with remembering, and if we think back to our earliest memory, we can't think back very far. God calls us to remember His Word, and even though we may struggle in our own strength, He has given us the Holy Spirit to help us.

2

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Have you ever heard the phrase, "Don't forget where you came from"? We usually say this to someone who has reached a higher status in life. What we mean is that remembering our beginning, our history, and our progress is important. We mean that looking back is valuable because we can see how far we've come. Looking back helps us to remain humble and grateful instead of becoming arrogant. In our walk with the Lord, forgetting where we came from is dangerous because we forget that we were dead in our sin and slaves to sin. We risk thinking our goodness comes from our ability instead of from knowing Jesus and being transformed by Him. But when we remember where we came from, we are filled with gratitude. We remember that we were spiritually dead and without hope. We realize that we can only boast in Jesus because without Him, we would be lost (2 Cor. 10:17).

DISCUSSION

MAIN POINT.

Following God means letting Him purify us.

GOD WILL PURIFY HIS PEOPLE

READ MALACHI 3:1-6

Leaders: Explain that the passage is God's response to the people asking, "Where is the God of justice?" (Mal. 2:17).

WHAT ARE PEOPLE'S ISSUES WITH GOD OR REASONS FOR UNBELIEF TODAY?

God's people accused Him of being unfair, loving evil, and allowing their enemies to prosper (2:17). They even questioned His love (1:2). **They based their understanding of God's character on their circumstances, a result of their sin.** People still accuse God of being unfair, of allowing bad things to happen to good people. But really, no one is good because of sin (Rom. 3:10). People struggle to believe because they've felt deep pain or witnessed injustice. **The truth is that pain and injustice are results of the fall, of sin. The truth is that God is with us in our pain and calls us out of sin. The truth is that God is so just, so good, and so loving that He sent Jesus as a remedy for our sin.**



SINCE GOD DOESN'T CHANGE (V. 6), WHAT CAUSES DISTANCE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM?

You've probably felt distance between yourself and a friend. You didn't talk or hang out as much; you stopped being a part of each other's daily lives. The friendship faded, likely because both of you changed, which is normal. God explained to the Jews that He never changes. **God's character is always the same—always good.** The people were distant from God because they had changed. **If you once walked closely with God and now feel distant, evaluate when and how you changed.** Have you stopped spending time with Him in prayer and in the Word? Have your priorities shifted? What changed in you?



WHO ARE THE TWO MESSENGERS IN 3:1? WHY DID MALACHI THEN ASK WHO WOULD BE ABLE TO STAND WHEN THE "MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT" COMES?

Malachi prophesied about a messenger clearing the way for another Messenger—the One the people were seeking, the One coming into His temple, the One bringing a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). Jesus affirmed that the messenger who cleared the way was John the Baptist (Matt. 11:7-14). The other Messenger Malachi prophesied about was Jesus, the Messiah. In this passage, Malachi spoke of Jesus's first coming (v. 1) and His second coming (vv. 2-5), when He would refine and purify His people. He asked who could endure and stand when Jesus returned, a rhetorical question designed to encourage the people to evaluate their hearts. The Lord explained that He would come in judgment against sorcerers, adulterers, liars, oppressors, and those who don't fear Him (v. 5). **The Jews likely didn't see themselves in this description, but the book of Malachi revealed that they were all these things and more. And so are we.** God called them—He calls us—away from sin; He refines and purifies us. So, who can stand when Jesus returns? Only those who've confessed Him as Lord because He was the acceptable sacrifice. **Our redemption is great because our sin is great, and we're righteous only because of Christ's righteousness.**

GOD WILL HEAL HIS PEOPLE

READ MALACHI 4:1-6

HOW IS THE FIRE'S PURPOSE IN 4:1 DIFFERENT FROM THE FIRE'S PURPOSE IN 3:2-3?

The fires in these passages have very different purposes, one for the wicked and one for the people of God. The fire in verse 4:1 is destructive, all-consuming. This fire will reduce all wickedness to stubble, the unusable part of grain left behind after a harvest that burns immediately in fire. This fire will leave no branches behind—not even a root! In other words, wickedness and evil will have no hope of reviving, and those who don't belong to God will be held accountable. The fire in 3:2-3 is a refining fire, not a destructive fire. **This fire will cleanse and purify God's people of all sin, ridding us of everything that's offensive to God.** This fire for believers perfects us, making us like Christ and clothing us in white.



READ VERSE 2. WHAT DOES THE LORD WANT US TO REALIZE ABOUT THE REALITY OF BELONGING TO HIM?

Those who fear the Lord are compared to young calves being released at daybreak from a stall. After the long night, we'll break into a joyful run across fields of freedom on the day Jesus, the "sun of righteousness," returns to heal and restore everything that is now broken. **Think of the joy we'll experience when we're finally and forever released from a stall and a harness—from all sickness, pain, sorrow, disappointment, anxiety, depression, worry, heartache, and death. The weight and burden of our fall to sin will fall.** We'll enter eternal joy with our Father through Jesus, our Healer. This assurance gives us hope here and now as we wait.



WHAT WAS GOD'S LAST INSTRUCTION TO ISRAEL (V. 4)? BASED ON THEIR HISTORY, WHY WOULD GOD SAY THIS?

God would not speak through another prophet until the time of Jesus's birth—over four hundred years later! His last word of instruction was to remember the Word of God, to cling to the Torah, as Israel embarked on a season of silence and darkness. **They couldn't know God or follow God without following His Word; neither can we.** The Lord stressed the importance of remembering the law when prophetic voices ceased. Would they remember it well enough to sustain them? Would they remember all Yahweh had done on their behalf, how He remained faithful in their wandering, how He tenderly preserved them? **Israel's history proved that forgetting leads to unfaithfulness; remembering would tether their hearts to truth and faithfulness.**

WRAP-UP



HOW HAS GOD DIRECTED US IN THE SAME WAY HE DID ISRAEL (4:4)—TO REMEMBER? WHAT HAS HE GIVEN US TO HELP US?

Though God paused speaking through prophets, He still spoke through His Word; He was never absent. The call to remember wasn't just for Israel but for us too. **If we forget the ways God has been faithful—how He kept His promise to send a Savior—then we forget the costly price for our sin. If we forget God's Word, then we struggle with our identity; as Israel looked to pagan nations, we look to the world around us to tell us who we are. We forget how to live as God's people.** Israel had God's Word on scrolls housed in synagogues; we have God's Word in our hands! And unlike Israel, we have God's presence through the Holy Spirit living within us, guiding us to know God's will. Jesus stressed these truths to the disciples; He called them to remember all He had taught them. He reminded them that He would be with them always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20); He commanded them to remember His broken body and spilled blood through the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26). We have all these gifts helping us to remember as we wait for Jesus's return.