

Of Fathers.

Combine the statements of Malachi, Jesus, Paul, and John regarding *fathers* and you get a concise theology of the subject, right or wrong? I think, wrong. But I recently heard such an attempt.

The *fathers* theme of your Bible is an important one. What do we do without fathering? People with the best fathering are simply the best people. The fatherless are among the pitied of Scripture. And of us.

Pity the grown man who finds that his earthly father is not really his father after all, but that he is a bastard child.

Pity the child whose father is gone from soon after conception, never to reappear. He is raised by mom and grandma.

Pity the family whose father is a drunk, a loser, a terror to all who know him.

In Christ, all that can be reversed. But we're way ahead of the story. First, these Scriptures. Let's see how those four men above approached the subject, to see if they were talking about the same thing. Of course our understanding is that all four spoke from God, and that one of them is God.

Let's talk at this time of Malachi, who foretold the coming of the "great and terrible day of the Lord." Elijah the prophet is/was to come before that day, says Malachi. Well, that statement opens up a can of argument, doesn't it? Jesus Himself pointed to John the Baptist as the *Elijah* that was to come.

But then we see the real Elijah on the mount of transfiguration with Jesus, and we speculate further that he is one of the two great prophets that never died and who will return at the very end of history, perhaps joined by Enoch, who is similarly awaiting his appointment with death, as He stands now before the Lord. All of this we glean from the book of Revelation, and it is all surely in our future.

John the Baptist truly came in the spirit of Elijah, but when the Jewish leaders asked him if indeed he was the prophet Elijah, he denied it. That leads us to conclude, putting it all together, that this prophecy has a two-fold fulfillment.

But the bigger question in relation to Malachi might be, when is the "day of the Lord"? Most prophecies that deal with this day point to awful, cataclysmic events in the heavens, clear signals that it is all over. But Joel, quoted by Peter on Pentecost, seems to include the day of Pentecost in this end-time scenario. Could it be that here also we are looking at a two-fold event? First, the entire spectrum of the presence of Jesus on this planet, from His first coming to His Spirit-presence in the church to His appearing in the heavenlies to take us home? And in a secondary limited sense, the final climax of history?

The prophets, recall, saw precious little of what we call the church age. They saw His first and second coming as one event, and nothing in between. It would be easy for them to call this Jesus event from beginning to end, the "Day of the Lord."

With that discussion as our basis, we move to the question at hand: In what sense will fathers and sons be drawn together as Malachi prophesies, either in connection with John the Baptist, or the coming Elijah?

If we view this two-fold prophecy as one, and generalize the effect of Jesus on a society and a planet, it seems to come out like this:

Though it is true that often Jesus divides family members, if certain members reject Him and others do not, I think there is a stronger case to be made for the truth that when Christ and His Truth come into a family setting, for those that do accept Him, that family is put in order. Love flows from the father, creating respect from Mom and children, and God imbibes that orderly fragrance from Heaven and rejoices in it. Here is Eden again. Here is the intended purpose of God restored, a planet where He rules in love, and his fathers pass on to the rest of the clan, that wonderful aroma of eternity.

Not sure about Hebrew, friends, but of English I know a bit: the antecedent of "He" in the prophecy of Malachi, "He will restore..." is not Elijah, but the Lord Himself. I am not aware of any work of John or the prophet that matches up with family restoration, unless it be the call they both make to repentance. Repentance does change things.

Regardless of who does the restoring, the Lord or His message, we get a glimpse from Malachi of the value of fathers in the family unit. When all is as it should be, the true father is one with every one of his children. Hearts are melted together. The family functions properly. It's a beautiful thing.

There is a temptation here to spiritualize the text, and speak of spiritual fathers in the church. But if Elijah is literal, and the day of the Lord is literal, and the restoration is literal, I believe it is best to keep the fathers and their children literal also. There is enough in the New Covenant about the other fathering to allow us to let Malachi's prophecy be just what it is, a promise for God's order to be restored in the human families of Earth when Jesus comes on the scene.