

# Unexpected Day of the LORD

1Th 5:2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. (2pe 3:10)

Mal 4:1 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.

2 But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

3 And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

4 "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome 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, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction"

1 Thessalonians 5:2; Malachi 4:1-6

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# Elijah Comes

IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW, the Lord Jesus taught, “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come” (Matt 11:12-14). A little later the disciples asked him, “‘Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?’ He answered, ‘Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased’” (Matt 17:10-12).

The prophecy that Elijah would return comes from the last chapter of the last book of the Protestant Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> Malachi, whose name means “messenger” or “angel,” is the last prophetic word before 400 years of the Word not coming to his people. It is thus appropriate that this “angelic” prophet should predict the following. “Behold, I send my messenger [or angel; same word as Malachi], and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the

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<sup>1</sup> In the Hebrew canon, 2 Chronicles is put last. Rome and the Orthodox, because they include the Apocrypha, have the Maccabees (which take place some 200 years after Malachi) last.

messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap” (Mal 3:1-2). We will speak more of this angelic-messenger later.

For now, I want to focus on the language, “*the day of his coming*.<sup>2</sup>” This “day” returns in the last chapter. “For behold, *the day* is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. *The day* that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch ... Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before *the great and awesome day of the LORD* comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction” (Mal 4:1-2, 5-6).<sup>3</sup>

“*The day of the LORD*” is something we came across last week in our study of 1 Thessalonians 5. “For you yourselves are fully aware that *the day of the Lord* will come like a thief in the night” (1Th 5:2). We saw that this

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<sup>2</sup> “Coming” is the LXX’s *eisodou* not *parousia*. In 4:1 it is *erchomai*.

<sup>3</sup> The “day” also appears in vs. 3, “And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.”

verse has a parallel in 2 Peter, “***But the day of the Lord will come like a thief***, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” (2Pe 3:10). Both get it from Jesus who taught this in his Olivet Discourse, “**You do not know on what day your Lord is coming.** But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night **the thief was coming**, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into” (Matt 24:42-43). Today I want to focus on this phrase. This will help you better understand what the phrase means, but given the time of year, I think you will also see that it has practical importance not only for the Second Coming, but for Advent and the birth of the Lord Jesus.

## The Day of the LORD: The Day of Woe

When Jesus, Paul, and Peter use “The Day of the LORD,” even when Malachi does, they all follow in line with the great prophetic tradition of Israel.<sup>4</sup> Amos was the

<sup>4</sup> Helpful is John L. Harris, “The Day of the LORD,” *Biblical Illustrator* (Summer 2007): 53-55, <http://www.stjohnlutheran-elyria.org/images/4-28%20The%20Day%20Of%20The%20Lord.pdf>.

An older critical approach is John M. P. Smith. "The Day of Yahweh." *The American Journal of Theology* 5:3 (1901): 505-33.

first to use “the Day of the LORD,” though as we will see, he was hardly the first to use *the idea*. What he says is terrifying. “**Woe** to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is *darkness*, and not light, as if a man fled from a lion, and *a bear* met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and *a serpent* bit him. Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and *gloom* with no brightness in it?” (Amos 5:18-20). Zephaniah uses it, “The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is *bitter*; the mighty man *cries* aloud there. A day of *wrath* is that day, a day of *distress* and *anguish*, a day of *ruin* and *devastation*, a day of *darkness* and *gloom*, a day of *clouds* and thick *darkness*” (Zeph 1:14-15). As does Isaiah, “**Wail**, for the day of the LORD is near; as *destruction* from the Almighty it will come! Behold, the day of the LORD comes, *cruel*, with *wrath* and fierce *anger*, to make the land a *desolation* and to *destroy* its sinners from it” (Isa 13:6, 9). And Joel does as well, “The sun shall be turned to *darkness*, and the moon to *blood*, before the great and awesome day of the

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<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3153503>. Two Reformed perspectives are **Meredith G. Kline**, “Primal Parousia,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 40, no. 2 (1977): 245-303; **Brian Godawa**, *End Times Bible Prophecy: It’s Not What They Told You* (Los Angeles, CA: Embedded Pictures Publishing, 2017): 29-34.

LORD comes” (Joel 2:31; cf. Acts 2:20). Others use it too.

I want you to take note of **five things** about this day. **First**, it is associated with **a day of judgment**. Amos says, “Woe!” This is not a Day you want to be a part of. Alas, sooner or later, everyone will be. Who can stand? Is there anything you can do? This question is part of the reason for this sermon.

**Second**, this is a **noisy day**. We have seen this in 1 Thessalonians. “**The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God**” (1Th 4:16). The word “sound” (*phonē*, from which we get words like phonograph and phone) usually translates the Hebrew word *qol*, as in the verse just prior in the Isaiah passage. “**The sound of a tumult is on the mountains as of a great multitude! The sound of an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The LORD of hosts is mustering a host for battle**” (Isa 13:4). This noise adds to the terror of that Day.

**Third and fourth**, and unrealized by many Christians, the prophets do not speak merely of one day in our future, but of **many days** of judgment, and usually from our time

in history, those days have already happened. The “Day of the LORD” is often how they describe this. In other words, the Day of the LORD is often a past event. So for example, Isaiah’s prediction of the Day of the LORD was directed at Babylon, which came to fulfillment in 539 B.C. when it fell to the Medes.<sup>5</sup> Amos was describing the fall of Israel’s northern kingdom in 722 B.C. Obadiah predicted the fall of Edom as the Day of the LORD which took place sometimes after 586 B.C.<sup>6</sup> Joel predicted the siege of Jerusalem that took place in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> And so on. Thus, “‘Day of the Lord’ is a colloquial phrase that refers to any time that God judges a city, a people or a nation.”<sup>8</sup>

Probably the first Day of the LORD was all the way back in Genesis 3:8. This is the Fall. The context is judgment of Adam and Eve for their sin. It is accompanied by the Qol of the LORD, just as we have seen of others. So, scholars have argued that what we have here is not “the voice of the LORD” as he “walked in the Garden in the

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<sup>5</sup> See for example R. C. Sproul, ed., “The Day of the LORD (Zeph 1:7),” *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Orlando, FL; Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 1316.

<sup>6</sup> John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): The Minor Prophets, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 93.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, vol. 31, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 226.

<sup>8</sup> Godawa, 31.

cool of the day,” but “They heard the sound of Yahweh God traversing the garden as the Spirit of the day,” that is the Day of Judgment. The frightening noise of the approaching Judge told them *it was time to hide*. This is the first Day of the LORD, or what Kline calls *Primal Parousia* (Coming), “a record of the beginnings of what is known later in the Scriptures as the day of the Lord.”<sup>9</sup> If this is true, then there are many other Days of the LORD. The Flood. The Tower of Babel. The Exodus against Egypt. And so on.

Further, you should take note of language like this: “‘I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the rubble with the wicked. I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth’” (*Zeph 1:2-3*). This is common language associated with the Day that, if taken out of context, would literally sound like the end of the physical world. But *it is past*, and this happens often in the Old Testament.

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<sup>9</sup> See *Kline*, n. 3.

This particular apocalyptic language was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and resulting Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. So when you read language like, “**The sun, moon, and stars shall be darkened**” or “**the mountains melt like wax before the LORD**” (Ps 97:5), and you realize this has already happened on more than one occasion, then this ought to inform you when you read things in the NT. As my friend Brian Godawa points out, we have our own phrases that like this, “**earth-shattering event;**” “**turned the world upside-down,**” and so on.

In the Bible, this language is a poetic way of grabbing hold of your emotions so that you **feel the powerful judgment** of God in events that people without spiritual eyes look at and say, “**That’s just how things go.**” No. It isn’t. When nations fall, it is God who is judging them. It is never an accident. It is a Sovereign God Judging. When God comes in judgment, not only physical but spiritual things happen. Powers and principalities (the sun, the moon, the stars) are judged and so it is as if the heavens themselves are collapsing. And people are given over to doom. As Spurgeon puts it, the foundations of civilization are removed.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> I read this in a quote this week. “**There seem to be many indications of a coming tempest, and when the eagles are gathered together to the prey, the fight will probably thicken, and**

# The Day of the LORD: The Day of Salvation

But there is **a fifth thing** often associated with the Day of the LORD. Remember I asked, “What shall we do?” Sometimes there is something **more pleasurable** nearby. As Sproul notices, in the Old Testament, the prophets spoke of the day of visitation. It was seen sometimes as a day of great distress and judgment and *at other times as a day of great comfort and rejoicing.*<sup>11</sup> For example, Joel who has just spoken about the moon turning to blood continues, “**And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved**” (Joel 2:32; cf. **Acts 2:21**). This is very unexpected. Malachi says something about this also. “**For you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall**” (**Mal 4:2**). In other words, though it is a day of woe for many, **there**

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instead of a few combatants, it may be that there will be a multitude of nations engaged in a terrible slaughter, and the foundations of the various kingdoms of Europe may be removed.” ~ **C. H. Spurgeon** (1834-1892), “An Immovable Foundation (Sermon May 13, 1866),” in *Spurgeon’s Sermons* Vol. 12.

<sup>11</sup> R. C. **Sproul**(?), “Anticipating the Day of the Lord.” *Ligonier*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/anticipating-day-lord/>. An article on this which summarizes, “The Day of Yahweh as envisioned by Malachi is an eschatological day of judgement with a future day of renewal and restoration of the fortunes of those who fear the Lord,” is **Boloe & Groenewald**, “Day of Yahweh,” *OTE* 27.1 (2014): 53-81.

[is an escape](#). It does not have to consume you like a helpless tree in a forest fire. If you feel utterly burdened by your sins, helpless because you know the hand of God is hot against you, there is a way out!

## *Malachi Takes Us There, Slowly*

With all of this, let's now return to Malachi, for Malachi gets us to this Day in an important way, albeit slowly. As we have seen, the prophet says, “[Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch](#)” ([Mal 4:1](#)). So far, this is a Day of Woe. It is not possible to know with certainty when exactly this Day occurs. We've seen in the Olivet Discourse that there are [two Days](#) in mind. One is a judgment upon Jerusalem and Israel which was fulfilled in [70 A.D.](#) The other is the [Second Coming](#) of Christ in glory to judge the living and the dead. Malachi could be talking about either or both.

We are able to narrow down when it did not happen by moving ahead to the second to last verse of the OT.

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes” (Mal 4:5). Sirach, one of the books of the Apocrypha written a couple hundred years after Malachi sees a still future coming for Elijah in his day. He says that Elijah “was ordained for reproofs in their times, to pacify the wrath of the Lord’s judgment, before it broke forth into fury, and to turn the heart of the father to the son, and to restore the tribes of Jacob. Blessed are they that saw you, and slept in love; for we shall surely live” (Sir 48:10-11).<sup>12</sup> This acts as a kind of Jewish expectation of what the coming Elijah will do based on the life of Elijah the prophet in the past. Clearly, it does not see Elijah as having come yet.

It is into this expectation that Jesus speaks of John the Baptist being Elijah (not returned from heaven physically, for he was born of a woman and was an infant; much less reincarnated as cults teach, but Elijah in spirit). Thus, we know that the Day of the LORD in mind here must happen after John comes. But now, taken note of what this Elijah will do. “And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers,

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<sup>12</sup> Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton, *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament: English Translation* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1870), Sir 48:10-11.

lets I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction” (6). This is good news, salvation news. It is exactly what Sirach had said, for Sirach was using Malachi approvingly, as part of the expected works that he would do in the future. So this day of doom has good news attached to it.

R. T. France explains more about John. “The account of John’s ministry in [Matt 3] supplies clear links with the prophecy of Mal 4:5–6 … John preached the coming of judgment and warned people to repent so that they would escape its terror, and his requirement of baptism as a mark of that repentance and new beginning was a potent symbol of the ‘restoration’ of those of the tribes of Israel who were willing to respond. So ‘Elijah has already come.’”<sup>13</sup> That means that the Day of the LORD in Malachi comes after this. But when? It depends on the perspective. Are you talking about the doom and gloom or something else in Malachi?

In the NT, there are at least three Days of the LORD. We’ve mentioned one as the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in 70 A.D. at the hands of the Roman Empire. I do not want to recount that here other than to say

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<sup>13</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 654.

it was very clearly fulfilled, as Josephus providentially records as he parallels the very language Jesus used to predict the event to describe what he saw, surely not realizing that he was confirming Jesus! (See my sermon on Matt 24:3ff).

The **second** Day of the LORD is what we call *The Parousia*, the Second Coming or the Blessed Hope. All of the prophetic language used to symbolize what happened in those previous Days comes to bear on this Great Judgment Day of heaven and earth, when all must stand before the King and give an account—did they or did they not bow their knee to Jesus Christ, did they receive him by faith, did they do the things he commanded? Peter seems to take this language to its  $n^{\text{th}}$  degree saying that the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed (**2Pe 3:10**).

We saw **John MacArthur** last week takes that language quite literally of the total annihilation of heaven and earth (a “giant footprint” he said) sometime in the future. This is not the only way the church has read Peter’s words. Many **preterists** (by which I refer to orthodox preterists who do not take the Second Coming to have already occurred) see this as more language in line with OT usage,

and that Peter is predicting the destruction of the Temple. We've seen how similar language is in fact used of things that have already happened. But most of the church has seen this as referring to a still future event where God will judge not just Israel but everyone. I believe this is what Peter is talking about, though I confess I do not know exactly what that will look like. I am not as confident as MacArthur that this will be God literally wiping his feet on the earth in a destruction that only a Hollywood movie could emulate. I don't exactly *how* God will unfold this, though I do know *that* he will.

There is a **third** Day of the LORD, and Peter also talks about this one. He does this in his first sermon on the day of Pentecost when he quotes Joel, a passage we have talked about today. Thinking of the very moment when tongues of fire fell on them and they began to prophecy and speak in the tongues of the nations he tells them that this event was predicted by Joel. “**And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in**

those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18).

But he doesn’t stop there. He continues with the prophet, “And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:17-21). What is Peter talking about? Many people think that he is confused, for obviously the moon did not turn blood and there was no blood and fire and smoke and a dark sun on that day. He must be talking about the future. And yet, this apocalyptic language is followed immediately by something everyone thinks was happening on that day: everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved. Yes!

If the Joel passage starts with things being fulfilled at that moment, and if it ends with things being fulfilled at that moment, what about the middle? Gary DeMar explains using some of the same passages we’ve just seen with the Day of the LORD. “From what we know of how the Bible uses sun, moon, and stars in numerous contexts,

nothing physically happens to the sun, moon, and stars. The sun does not go dark and stars do not fall from heaven to the earth even though the Bible uses this type of language (**Isa 13:10; 24:23; 50:3; Ezek 32:7; Matt 24:29; Rev 6:12**).<sup>14</sup> For example, Isaiah 13:10—the Day of the LORD fulfilled against Babylon says, “For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light” (**Isa 13:10**). This actually happened ... spiritually. What do I mean? When you understand something like a Daniel worldview of the Prince of Persia fighting against the Prince of another nation (**Dan 10:20**), and that the heavenly beings are called stars and lights and likened to the moon and sun, suddenly you realize that in fact this was fulfilled in Babylon, when God punished the heavenly host over that nation. This is very real, but you can’t see it with human eyes (ordinarily).

So what about Acts? DeMar notices that Joel does not actually prophecy that the moon will be “like” blood but that it will actually be “turned ... into blood.” Even

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<sup>14</sup> **Gary DeMar**, “Don’t Be Led Astray By Another Blood Moon Prediction,” *Gary DeMar: Thoughts On Worldview Issues* (7-23-18), [https://garydemar.com/dont-be-led-astray-by-another-blood-moon-prediction//](https://garydemar.com/dont-be-led-astray-by-another-blood-moon-prediction/).

blood-moon eclipse prophets like Hagee have to take notice of this that the moon does not actually *turn* to blood, but it only *appears* blood-red. These are not unusual either, as we ourselves have had several blood-moon eclipses in just the past few years, and lo and behold, Hagee's predictions of Jesus coming back because of them haven't panned out. But Joel and Peter do not say the moon "appears blood-red." As much as he likes to say he's being literal, he just isn't.

What both Peter and Joel are talking about is the ending of a covenant age and [the beginning of a new one](#). Joel seems to be used by Peter as a kind of [double-fulfillment](#), since his prophecy was itself fulfilled many centuries earlier as I already pointed out.<sup>15</sup> For Joel, it was the temporary termination of the covenant with Israel through captivity, what Jeremiah and Isaiah called a divorce. But God took his wife back, reaffirming that covenant, as Hosea teaches us. Pentecost signals the final straw of that old covenant. For those who turn to Christ, especially Jews, as many did that very day of Peter's sermon, [this Day brings salvation](#). That's why you need to know it here.

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<sup>15</sup> Again, see the comments in the *Reformation Study Bible* from n. 4 above. It does not call out Joel 2:20, but it does Joel 3:14-16 which uses identical language.

For those who would not, it brings disaster. This was verified in such stark ways in 70 A.D. and signaled the end of the old covenant when the temple was destroyed. I have no problem with this same language also being used of the Second Coming when all who reject Christ will fall under eternal judgment. But it started with Peter and Pentecost. He couldn't be clearer about this. But in fact, for Pentecost to happen, this Day of Rejoicing had to begin even sooner.

## *The Advent of the Day*

These three Days are in the NT. But there is one more Day that I think we see hints at even here in Acts, that Malachi seems to imply as well, and the Luke (who wrote Acts) tells us about at the beginning of his Gospel. This is a Day of the LORD quite unexpected to most. It is tied directly to the Pentecost Day. It was a Day where Judgment was withheld. Notice, after Malachi predicts the Day like a burning oven that will consume evil-doers, pointing in my mind both to the 70 A.D. judgment day and the Final Judgment Day, he says, “But for you who fear my Name, the Sun of Righteousness shall rise with healing in

its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall” (Mal 4:2).

This seems to come immediately after Elijah comes, for vs. 2 is tied to the Day of the LORD in vs. 1 (even as vs. 6 is tied to vs. 5). So the thinking is, that Day shall roast some in an oven of fury (1), but others who fear the Name shall see the Sun of Righteousness rise with healing in its wings (2). This shall not happen until Elijah (John) comes before the Great and Awesome Day (3).

In other words, this is a Messianic Prophecy, for no one else could be the Sun of Righteousness. This part of the prophecy takes place *prior* to the burning and wrath! Let’s focus on this “sun.” It is sun as in the light in the sky rather than the Son of the Father. Calvin explains how Malachi can use this term for the Son of God, when the sun was usually worshipped by pagans as a lesser deity.

A most suitable term it is, when we consider how the condition of the fathers differed from ours. God has always given light to his Church, but Christ brought the full light, according to what Isaiah teaches us, “On thee shall Jehovah arise, and the glory of God shall be seen in thee.” (Is 60:12.) This can be applied to none but to Christ. Again he says, “Behold

darkness shall cover the earth,” &c.; “shine on thee shall Jehovah;” and farther, “There shall be now no sun by day nor moon by night; but God alone shall give thee light.” (Is 60:19.) All these words show that Sun is a name appropriate to Christ; for God the Father has given a much clearer light in the person of Christ than formerly by the law, and by all the appendages of the law.<sup>16</sup>

When did this Sun of Righteousness first dawn upon us? Here, I am not talking here about the various coming of the Son of God in the OT as the Angel. No, The Apostle John makes clear that the Son was the Light of Genesis (John 1:4) and that this Light *was in the world already* (10-13). But he says, “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The True Light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world” (John 1:6-9). He does this in vs. 14.

People think the Gospel of John has no advent story like Matthew and Luke. I beg to differ. This is very much his advent story. He just tells it in a different way. He speaks of the Light coming into the world. This refers to

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<sup>16</sup> John Calvin and John Owen, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 5 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 617–618.

the birth of Jesus—the Sun of Righteousness—out of the womb of the Virgin Mary.<sup>17</sup> He then speaks of the Word “tabernacling” among us. This is quite possibly a reference to the timing of his birth.

A few weeks ago, we saw how scholars have fixed the birth of Jesus to Sept 11, 3 B.C. This is because of John’s Apocalypse and the astral prophecy of Rev 12:1-4.<sup>18</sup> But long before this, the Puritan John Lightfoot<sup>19</sup> explains that the birth was indeed that month. “The time of his birth was in the month *Tisri* [which answers to part of our *September*] and about the Feast of Tabernacles, as may be concluded upon by observing that he lived just *two and thirty years old and an half*, and died at *Easter*. That month was remarkable for very many things. In it the World was

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<sup>17</sup> See Revelation 12:1-4 also written by John, and the sources in the note below.

<sup>18</sup> See Ernest L. Martin, “The Time of Jesus’ Birth,” Ch. 5 of *The Star that Astonished the World* (1991), <http://www.askelm.com/star/star006.htm>. Endorsed by F. F. Bruce and others. For a video and short commentary from someone else on the 9-11 date, see Michael Heiser, “The Birthday of Jesus Christ (September 11, 3 BC), YouTube (May 13, 2012), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWsPWkFz\\_14](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWsPWkFz_14). For a much longer written explanation of the following see Michael Heiser’s novel The Portent ch. 56, The Façade Saga (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2014). See also my sermon, “Jesus: When?” preached 10-7-18 at rbcnc.com.

<sup>19</sup> See his biography in Joel R. Beeke & Randall J. Pederson (eds), *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 393-95.

created, the Tabernacle begun, and the Temple consecrated: and ... *in it were the Fathers [before the flood] born.*<sup>20</sup>

John Gill goes directly at John's Gospel to show this.

The time of his birth was as it was fixed in prophecy; before the sceptre, or civil government, departed from Judah: Herod was king in Judea when he was born; before the second temple was destroyed; for he often went into it, and taught in it: and it was at the time pointed at in Daniel's weeks; see Gen 49:10, Mal 3:1, Hag 2:6, 7, 9, Dan 9:24, &c. ... The circumstance of the shepherds watching their flocks by night, agrees not with the winter-season. It is more likely it was in autumn, sometime in the month of September, at the feast of tabernacles, which was typical of Christ's incarnation; and there seems to be some reference to it in John 1:14, *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt, or tabernacled among us;* the temple of Solomon, a type of Christ's human nature, was dedicated at the feast of tabernacles: and as Christ, the Passover, was sacrificed at the very time of the Passover; and the Holy

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<sup>20</sup> John Lightfoot, *The Harmony, Chronicle and Order of the New Testament the Text of the Four Evangelists Methodized, Story of the Acts of the Apostles Analyzed, Order of the Epistles Manifested, Times of the Revelation Observed: All Illustrated, with Variety of Observations upon the Chiefest Difficulties Textuall & Talmudicall, for Clearing of Their Sense and Language: With an Additional Discourse Concerning the Fall of Jerusalem and the Condition of the Jews in That Land Afterward / John Lightfoot*, Early English Books Online (London: A.M. for Simon Miller .., 1655), 4. (spelling updated)

Ghost was given on the very day of Pentecost, typified by the first-fruits offered on that day; so it is most reasonable to suppose, that Christ was born at the feast of tabernacles, a type of his incarnation; and which feast is put for the whole ministry of the word and ordinances, to be observed in gospel times (Zech. 14:16).<sup>21</sup>

Finally, Joseph Mede explains,

But it will be objected, that the birth of Christ was in *December*, but the *Feast of Tabernacles* was kept the fifteenth day of the seventh month, which answered in a manner to our *September*; and therefore had the *Feast of Tabernacles* been a sign of his *Incarnation*, the time should as well have agreed here as it did in the Passover and his Passion.

In other words, the Christian celebration of Easter is tied to the timing of his actual death, but the birth of Jesus is not celebrated when he was actually born. Why? He goes on to conclude that you have to remember it wasn't until

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<sup>21</sup> John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, New Edition., vol. 1 (Tegg & Company, 1839), 552. M'Clintock and Stong summarize this, "Dr. Gill thinks it was more likely in autumn, in the month of September, at the feast of Tabernacles, to which there seems some reference in John 1:14." John M'Clintock and James Strong, "Nativity of Christ," *Cyclopædia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1894), 861.

“after the time of *Constantine* that the day we now observe was chosen.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, it was not original and there was an agenda behind choosing the December date.

This leads to a question. Why did the church choose December 25 to celebrate the Lord’s birth (there is nothing in Scripture saying we must celebrate it or must not; it leaves this as a disputable matter; cf. Rom 14:5-6)? There’s nothing in the Scripture that gives us this date, nothing that hints at this date, a plenty of evidence that actually precludes it. The timing of Christmas seems tied directly to Malachi 4:2 and the “Sun of Righteousness.”

December 25<sup>th</sup> is almost the shortest day of the year. But not quite. I suspected that those who formally chose this day did so because of the time of year when the sun reaches its lowest point and begins its new cycle of longer warmer days, spring, and new life. In fact, I’m writing these very words at the very moment this happens in 2018, on the winter solstice, the day when the sun miraculously starts to rise further and further north and life begins anew.

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph Mede, *The Works of the Pious and Profoundly-Learned Joseph Mede, B.D., Sometime Fellow of Christ’s Colledge in Cambridge*, Early English Books Online (London: Roger Norton for Richard Royston .., 1672), 266. (spelling updated)

I always used to wonder if this was related to the winter solstice, but if it was, why were they off by 4 days?

It is classic early-medieval church thought to take a day pagans celebrate and “subvert” it for Christianity,<sup>23</sup> knowing that in this kind of a case, it is God who made the seasons in the first place, so the pagans are only celebrating what he made! Someone explains,

The selection of Dec 25 addressed a second issue. The end of December was filled with pagan gatherings and festivities (in honor of the “sun god” as he became victorious over the “god of darkness” as the days slowly began to become longer (the winter solstice). Christians were falling back to pagan temptations with these festivities, thus the church fathers wanted to provide them with their own reason to celebrate.

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<sup>23</sup> Here is an excerpt agreeing with my thought. “One intriguing theory suggests that the choice of December 25 represented either an accommodation of or a challenge to the pagan ‘Birthday of the Invincible Sun,’ *sol Invictus*. Possibly, Christians chose the twenty-fifth so that they might continue to enjoy pagan festivals under the guise of Christian worship. Read a different way, Christians targeted the date in order to expunge and replace the pagan celebration with a Christian one. The end result was the same. Invincible Sun no longer owned the day—Jesus of Bethlem did.” He goes on in a note to say, “This theory is not a new one. The late fourth century Scriptor Syrus conjectured that ‘It was a custom of the pagans to celebrate on the same 25 December the birthday of the Sun, at which they kindled lights in token of festivity. In these solemnities and revelries the Christians also took part. Accordingly when the doctors of the Church perceived that Christians had a leaning to this festival, they took counsel and resolved that the true Nativity should be solemnized on that day.’ However, he notes, “Maximus of Turin came to a nearly opposite conclusion, namely that ‘the doctors of the Church’ imposed Christmas on December 25 as a challenge to paganism and a thrust against the festival of the sun.” Adam C. English, *Christmas: Theological Anticipations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), no page, but in the section “Birthday of the Invincible Sun” and n. 133.

This reason of course became the birth of the Son of God (who made the sun).<sup>24</sup>

My point isn't to justify this practice, merely to explain it. But this leaves an obvious question. If it was a solstice replacement, why not the 21<sup>st</sup> which is the day of winter solstice? Why the 25<sup>th</sup>? My suspicions were right. And there is a perfectly historical answer. It has to do with the Roman Calendar.

The Roman calendar is said to have been introduced by Romulus, 738 B. C., who divided the year into ten months, comprising 304 days; fifty days less than the lunar year, and 61 days less than the solar year. Its commencement, therefore, did not correspond with any fixed season. Numa Pompilius, they tell us, 713 B. C., corrected it by adding two months, and made it commence at the winter solstice. Julius Caesar, 46 B. C., sent for Sosigenes of Alexandria, who again corrected it, making the year 365 days, 6 hours, every fourth year being leapyear. This is denominated the Julian style, and prevailed generally throughout the Roman world. Julius made the first day of the reformed year begin with the day of

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<sup>24</sup> Fr. Andrew George, "What are the 12 Days of Christmas," *Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America* (no date), <https://www.goarch.org/-/what-are-the-12-days-of-christmas>.

the new moon following the solstice, which day thus became the first of January.<sup>25</sup>

Isaac Newton (of all people!) explains how while the early church didn't care about such things, those who came later (as we just saw) placed four major feasts at the cardinal points of the year, the two solstices and the two equinoxes. The birth of Christ was placed on the 25<sup>th</sup>, because “when Julius Caesar corrected the calendar [that] was the [solstice].” After time, the solstice gradually fell back to the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and finally the 21<sup>st</sup> as it is today, but the date of Christmas remained the 25<sup>th</sup>. I guess the church didn't keep up with the times!<sup>26</sup>

But that's why Christmas is on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December. It has nothing to do with the actual birth of Christ, but it does have to do with the prophecy of Malachi, a prophecy

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<sup>25</sup> Knight, ed., *Knight's Mechanical Encyclopedia* (Medford, MA: Perseus Digital Library, n.d.), 425.

<sup>26</sup> “The times of the birth and passion of Christ ... were little regarded by the Christians of the first age. They who began first to celebrate them, placed them in the cardinal periods of the year; as the annunciation of the Virgin Mary, on the 25th of March, *which, when Julius Caesar corrected the calendar, was the vernal equinox*; the feast of John Baptist on the 24th of June, which was the summer solstice; the feast of St. Michael on Sept. 29, which was the autumnal equinox; and the birth of Christ on the winter solstice, December 25, with the feasts of St. Stephen, St. John, and the Innocents, as near it as they could place them. And because the solstice in time removed from the 25th of December to the 24th, the 23d, the 22d, and so on backwards, hence some in the following centuries placed the birth of Christ on December 23, and at length on December 20.” Isaac Newton, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel*, trans. P. Borthwick, New Edition. (London; Cambridge: James Nisbet; T. S tevenson, 1831), 158.

attached to the Day of the LORD, a prophecy for the dawn of the sun of righteousness that tells of the Light of God coming into the world.<sup>27</sup> It is fascinating to think about, whether you agree with the practice or not.

We saw earlier that Malachi began this talk with a prophecy of the Angel. It is a two-fold prophecy that also predicts John the Baptist. “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts” (Mal 3:1). The first messenger-angel is John. As Mark tells us, he is “the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of

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<sup>27</sup> Another connection between Christ and the sun is made by Justin Martyr. “But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.” (*Justin, First Apology* 67).

Thus, Adam English writes, “December 25 marked the traditional winter solstice in the Julian calendar, the shortest day of the year, after which the days would progressively grow longer and the nights shorter. Greeks and Romans marked the season with midwinter festivals, the Lenaea and Saturnalia respectively. From a sociological perspective, it is not surprising that Christians would find a way to mark the season.

... Constantine popularized the image of the sun, but he did so within a Christian context. He had good reason to associate solar imagery with Christian worship of Jesus Christ. Indeed, a long-standing tradition of using solar imagery in Christian worship existed prior to Constantine. Constantine could point to the fact that Christians gather for worship on ‘the day named after the sun’ [Justin]. Malachi 4:2 spoke of the ‘sun of righteousness’ that would rise with healing in its rays ... And furthermore, the visions of Christ reported by Paul in Acts 26 and John of Patmos in Revelation 1 describe him as brighter than the sun.” English, see n. 20 (above).

the Lord, make his paths straight” (Mark 1:3). This comes from Malachi 3:1 who takes it from Isa 40:3.

John is preparing the way for “me” it says in Malachi. “He will prepare the way before me.” Who is the “me?” “The Lord.” Adonai. David’s Lord and David’s God. He will suddenly come to his temple. Tabernacling among us! Jesus then becomes the second messenger-angel in the prophecy.

Why call the incarnate Christ the angel-messenger? This passage is also taken from Exodus 23:20, where the Angel of the LORD, Christ preincarnate, is the guardian Angel (or Son of God) over Israel, sent by the Father, who must be obeyed, who forgives their sins.

The Origin of Malachi 3		
Ex 23:20-21	Isa 40:3; Jdg 2:1ff	Mal 3:1
"Behold, I send an angel ( <b>malak; aggelos</b> ) before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.  <sup>21</sup> Pay careful attention to him [ <b>malak; aggelos</b> ] and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will	A voice cries: "In the wilderness <b>prepare the way</b> of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (Isa 40:3)	"Behold, I send my messenger ( <b>malak; aggelos</b> ), and he will <b>prepare the way</b> before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple;  and the messenger ( <b>malak; aggelos</b> ) <u>of the covenant</u> in whom you delight,

not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.	break <u>my covenant</u> with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' <b>But you have not obeyed my voice.</b> What is this you have done? (Jdg 2:1-2)	behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.
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Angel thus becomes a parallel with “sun.” For what is an angel? He “makes his angels spirits, and his ministers a flaming fire” (Ps 104:4; Heb 1:7). Angels are light. “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2Co 11:14). Satan, the great counterfeit. Satan: *helel-ben-shachar*, “shining one son of dawn.” Lucifer in the Latin: Light-Bringer.

You see? This is why he is called the Angel. It parallels the Sun of Righteousness. This week, many will think about the birth of Jesus. They won’t know why they are doing it on this day. They won’t know that the actual birth is certainly another day. But you can know. And, you can know that this Day, the Day God brought Jesus into the world (whenever it was), was the Day that the Light dawned upon men. The Light shone in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. But you can. If you see by his Light.

Someone writes, “For the Christians, the day of the LORD was the coming of Jesus … the expected becoming the unexpected is a theme of the Christmas story.”<sup>28</sup> What could be more unexpected than a day of judgment becoming a day of salvation, a day of wrath becoming a day of incarnation as a baby in human flesh?<sup>29</sup>

Luke confirms all this when he takes the Day of the LORD prophecy at the end of Malachi 4 and sees gospel instead of wrath. He tells this in his first chapter, as he is

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<sup>28</sup> The entire quote is worth reading, as it relates to a lot of what we have talked about here. “For the Christians, the day of the LORD was the coming of Jesus, whom they recognized and proclaimed as the LORD. Much confusion has been caused by failing to realize that the early Christians proclaimed Jesus as Yahweh. That is what ‘Jesus is LORD’ meant, and so the day of the “LORD, with all its established expectations of the LORD appearing in glory in the temple to bring judgement on his enemies (for example, Isa. 66.6), was interpreted of Jesus as a human baby, who also appeared in the temple. John’s role was to prepare for the coming of Yahweh, the LORD, and so the Gospels show his ministry pointing to the adult Jesus. Here, his birth story shows that from the beginning John was his forerunner, his Elijah. Gabriel echoed Malachi’s words about Elijah, but replaced the curse with a message of hope: ‘He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with utter destruction’ (Mal. 4.6), became: ‘He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous ones, to make ready for the LORD a people prepared for him’ (Luke 1.17, my translation). The expected becoming the unexpected is a theme of the Christmas story.” Margaret Barker. *Christmas: The Original Story* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> I found this curious collection of anthem-hymns which seems to have been published around the turn of the last century (1908) called “Novello’s Anthem Book: A Collection of Popular Anthems for Festival and General Use Throughout the Year.” It came in eight books with 12 songs in each book. Each book has the choir go from advent to Christmas to Lent to Easter to Whitsun to Harvest to General, so it must be an Anglican or Catholic choir book. Book 5 has this curious song called “The Great Day of the Lord” by George C. Martin. I found the lyrics (it was tough) which are taken from Zeph 1:14 and 2:3. What’s so fascinating is that the book has this song sung at *Advent*, just before the Christmas song (*It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*). For the music see [https://www.jstor.org/stable/903720?read-now=1&refreqid=excell-sior%3Aa71f99b96f8d8b022eda254cef09d99b&seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/903720?read-now=1&refreqid=excell-sior%3Aa71f99b96f8d8b022eda254cef09d99b&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents).

preparing for us to meet the baby Jesus. Where Malachi says, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction” (**Mal 4:5-6**), Luke says of John, “and he will 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 for the Lord a people prepared” (**Luke 1:17**). Thus, the Day of the LORD in the comforting parts of Malachi’s prophecy is the coming of Jesus in the manger. The judgment begins later, after they put him to death, at 70 A.D., and at the Second Coming. These are all tied together eschatologically.

But, today, *this* is the Day of the LORD that brings *salvation*. And as the Apostle says, harkening back to the Day of the LORD imagery, “**Today is the Day of Salvation**” (**2Co 6:2**). It is a day for all to see that God comes not only in judgment again sin, but in mercy and grace to pardon sinners. And it is a day we celebrate on the First Day, the day of Resurrection, to prove it to you. Those who fear the Name, as the prophet-angel said. For them,

the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in his wings. And they shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. It is a joyous Day that you need not fear. If you hear. For God has come near, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Emmanuel. God with us.

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