

3 Nephi 25 — The Sun of Righteousness With Healing in His Wings — The Burning Day and the Turning of Hearts

3 Nephi 25: the continuation of Malachi (chapter 4), given by Christ to the Nephites. The day comes that shall burn as an oven; all the proud and all who do wickedly shall be stubble, burned up, left neither root nor branch. But unto those who fear the Lord's name, 'the Son of Righteousness' shall arise 'with healing in his wings'; they shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall, and tread down the wicked as ashes under their feet. The faithful are charged to remember the law of Moses, given in Horeb for all Israel. And the final word of the Old Testament: 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; 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.' The chapter is the great division of the last day — the burning of the proud as stubble, the healing dawn for those who fear God — and the closing promise of Elijah, sent to turn the hearts of fathers and children to one another, binding the generations together before the great and dreadful day.

This short chapter — Malachi 4, the last words of the Old Testament — paints the *great division* of the last day in two unforgettable images: the *burning* of the wicked as stubble, and the *healing dawn* that rises for those who fear God. And it ends with the final promise of the Hebrew scriptures, the prophecy of *Elijah*, sent to *turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers* before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. It is a fitting end to the Old Testament — judgment and mercy held in stark contrast, and a final word of reconciliation, the binding of the generations together. Christ gives these words to the Nephites because they too needed the witness of the last day and the promise of Elijah; and they are preserved for us, who stand nearer that day than any generation before.

Hebrew Word Studies

shemesh tsedaqah (שֶׁמֶשׁ צְדָקָה) — "Sun of Righteousness" — shemesh, sun; tsedaqah, righteousness, justice, rightness.

The image of the Messiah as the rising Sun whose righteousness dawns over the world, with *kanaph* ("wing," also the "ray" or "edge" of light) bearing healing — the dawn of righteousness and healing after the long night v. 2 (unto you that fear my name, shall the Son of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings). The image of the *Son of Righteousness arising with healing in his wings* is one of the most beautiful Messianic pictures in all of scripture, and it holds a rich wordplay. The Hebrew of Malachi reads *shemesh tsedaqah*, the *Sun of Righteousness* — and the Book of Mormon (with the King James and some other traditions) gives *Son of Righteousness*, a reading that captures a profound truth, for Christ is *both* the *Sun* that dawns over the world *and* the *Son* of God. The two are not in conflict but in harmony: the Son of God is the Sun of Righteousness, the divine light that rises to dispel the darkness. *Shemesh*, the sun, is the great image of light, warmth, and life — and to call the Messiah the *Sun of Righteousness* is to say that he is the *dawn* that ends the world's long night. After the darkness of sin and suffering and death, the Sun *arises* — and his *righteousness* (*tsedaqah*, the rightness and justice of God) floods the world with light. And the healing comes in his *wings* — the Hebrew *kanaph*, which means both *wing* and the *edge* or *ray* of something spreading out, so that the sun's first rays, spreading across the sky like wings, are imagined as bearing *healing*. The dawn does not merely give light; it *heals* — and this is the deep promise. The rising of the Sun of Righteousness over those who fear God brings *healing in his wings*: the warm rays of the new day mending what the long night of sin and death had broken, raising the sick, comforting the grieving, restoring the fallen. There is a tender precision in the image. A sunrise is gentle — it does not blast or scorch but *warms*, spreading gradually across the sky, touching the cold world with growing light and heat. And the Sun of Righteousness rises *gently* over the faithful, his healing rays spreading like wings, warming them into the new life of *calves let out of the stall* (v. 2), leaping in the spring pasture. The contrast with the wicked is total: to the proud, the day is a *consuming oven* (v. 1); to the faithful, it is a *healing sunrise* — the same day, the fire and the dawn, the burning and the healing, the ashes and the wings. And the deepest meaning is that *Christ himself* is this dawn. He is the *Sun/Son of Righteousness*, the Light of the World (3 Ne. 9:18; 11:11) whose rising ends the night — the same Light whose death plunged the world into three days of darkness (3 Ne. 8) and whose resurrection broke the darkness with the third-day dawn (3 Ne. 10). The whole drama of 3 Nephi is the setting and rising of this Sun: the Light extinguished in the darkness of the cross, and risen again with healing in his wings. And the promise of Malachi is that at the last day, this same Sun will rise over all who fear his name, flooding them with the warm, healing light of righteousness, so that they go forth into the eternal morning *as calves in the stall* — healed, warmed, leaping in the dawn of the Sun of Righteousness who is the Son of God.

yom Yahweh (יְוֹם יְהוָה) — "the day of the Lord" — yom, day; Yahweh, the LORD; the great day of God's decisive intervention in history — the day of judgment on the wicked and salvation for the faithful, both dreadful and great, terror and glory in one vv. 1, 5 (the day cometh that shall burn as an oven... before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord). The chapter turns on the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and the phrase *yom Yahweh*, "the day of the LORD," is one of the towering concepts of the Hebrew prophets. It names the day of God's *decisive intervention* — the day he steps openly into history to judge the wicked, vindicate the righteous, and set all things right. And its defining quality, captured exactly in Malachi's pairing *great and dreadful*, is that it is *two-faced*: it is *dreadful* to the wicked and *great* to the faithful, terror and glory at once, the same day falling as darkness on some and dawn on others. The prophets sound this double note constantly. Amos warns those who *desire the day of the Lord* that to what end is it for you? *the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light* (Amos 5:18) — for the presumptuous, the day they long for will be their judgment. Joel cries *the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand; a day of darkness and of gloominess* (Joel 2:1–2), yet in the same breath promises that *whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered* (Joel 2:32). Zephaniah calls it *the great day of the Lord... a day of wrath... a day of trouble and distress* (Zeph. 1:14–15). The *yom Yahweh* is the day the long patience of God ends and his justice acts — and so it is *dreadful*, a day no one can take lightly. And yet, for those who fear God's name, the very same day is *great* — the day of their deliverance, the day the Sun of Righteousness rises with healing in his wings (v. 2), the day they are gathered as God's jewels (3 Ne. 24:17). This is the precise structure of 3 Nephi 25: the *one day that burns as an oven* for the proud (v. 1) is the day the *Sun of Righteousness arises with healing* for the faithful (v. 2) — *yom Yahweh* in its full doubleness, dreadful and great, the same dawn that is ashes underfoot for the wicked and healing in the wings for the righteous. And the deep mercy of the chapter is *what comes before the dreadful day*: *I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord* (v. 5). God does not let the *yom Yahweh* fall without warning or preparation. Before the dreadful day, he sends Elijah to *turn the hearts* of the generations, to reconcile and prepare a people, *lest I come and smite the earth with a curse* (v. 6). The day of the Lord is certain and it is dreadful; but it is preceded by a work of mercy — the turning of hearts, the sending of the prophet, the gathering of the faithful — so that when the day comes, there is a people ready to meet it not as an oven but as a sunrise. The whole prophetic hope hangs on this: that the *yom Yahweh*, dreadful to the unprepared, is *great* to those who, warned and turned and gathered, fear the name of the Lord — for to them the day of wrath is the day of redemption, and the dreadful day dawns as the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in his wings.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references Mal. 4 (the source of the whole chapter); Mal. 4:1–2 (the day... shall burn as an oven... but unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings — vv. 1–2); Isa. 30:26 (the light of the sun shall be sevenfold... in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound — the healing light, v. 2); Luke 1:78–79 (the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness... to guide our feet into the way of peace — the dawn of the Sun of Righteousness, v. 2); John 8:12; 3 Ne. 9:18 (I am the light of the world — Christ the Sun/Son of Righteousness, v. 2); Mal. 4:4 (remember ye the law of Moses my servant — v. 4); Mal. 4:5–6; Luke 1:17 (he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children — the Elijah prophecy, vv. 5–6); Sir. 48:10 (to turn the heart of the father unto the son — Elijah's office, v. 6); Matt. 17:10–13 (Christ identifying John and the coming of Elijah — the fulfillment of vv. 5–6); Obad. 1:18 (the house of Esau for stubble... shall burn them — the stubble burned, v. 1); 1 Ne. 22:15, 23 (the day cometh that they must be burned... as stubble — Nephi's use of the same image); 3 Ne. 26:1–5 (Christ expounding all things to the great and last day — the judgment behind vv. 1–6). ```