

The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 13: The Sun of Righteousness and the Coming Elijah

Malachi 4:1-6

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this final lesson gathers up the whole study and aims it at Christ. Malachi 4 contains the last words of the Old Testament, and they do exactly what the entire Old Testament was designed to do: they lean forward in hope toward the coming of the Lord. Two great truths must be established with clarity. First, the certainty of God's judgment, the day "burning like an oven" for the arrogant and the evildoers (4:1), which is no idle threat but the settled and serious resolve of a holy God. Second, the radiant promise of salvation, the "sun of righteousness" rising "with healing in its wings" for those who fear God's name (4:2). Teach plainly that this sun of righteousness is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the light that dawns on a world in darkness (Luke 1:78-79; John 8:12). The two destinies are inseparable: the same day that consumes the proud as stubble brings healing and leaping joy to the humble.

Guard carefully against the most common error in this passage, which surfaces in the closing verses. The promise that God will send "Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord" (4:5-6) is not a prediction of a still-future appearance of the literal Old Testament Elijah. Jesus settled this question Himself: John the Baptist was the promised Elijah, the one who came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" to prepare the way of the Lord (Matthew 11:14; 17:10-13; Luke 1:17). Teach this with confidence. Likewise, handle the call to "remember the law of Moses" (4:4) accurately: the Old Law was holy, good, and authoritative in its time, and it has now been fulfilled and taken out of the way in Christ (Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:14-17; Hebrews 8-10). We honor it not by binding it on Christians but by seeing how every line of it pointed to the Savior who has come.

This passage was never meant merely to inform; it was meant to send the student into the dawn. A student who truly hears Malachi 4 will not only understand who the Sun of righteousness is, but will warm himself in that light, walk in reverent joy, and prepare his own heart and the hearts of those around him for the Lord. So aim at both targets. Because this is the closing lesson of the entire study, draw the threads together: send students home understanding that Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi all point to Christ, and send them home with one concrete step of worship or obedience, ready to live as people on whom the morning has risen, who fear God's name and go out leaping like calves released into the open pasture.

Question 1

Student Question:

Malachi says, "Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble" (4:1). What does this opening declaration teach us about the certainty and the seriousness of God's judgment? Why does God place this solemn warning at the very threshold of His final word to His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Malachi opens his final chapter with a thunderclap: "Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven." After three and a half chapters of the people's complaints, their cynicism, and their robbing of God, the Lord answers the question they had been muttering, "Where is the God of justice?" (Malachi 2:17). He is coming, and His coming is certain. The word "Behold" is meant to seize attention, to make a drowsy and skeptical people lift their heads and look.

Teach the seriousness of this without flinching. The image of an oven, a furnace heated to consume, communicates a judgment that is real, thorough, and inescapable for the unrepentant. The arrogant and the evildoers are named specifically. This is not God lashing out; it is the settled response of perfect holiness to persistent, hardened sin. A God who never judged evil would not be good; He would be indifferent, and indifference is not love.

Help students see why God places this solemn warning at the very threshold of His last word. Before He speaks the most beautiful promise in the book, He clears the ground with the truth that judgment is coming. The sweetness of the sunrise in verse 2 means nothing unless the reality of the burning day in verse 1 is felt. God is not trying to frighten His people into the corner; He is loving them enough to tell them the truth about where two roads lead.

Connect this to the whole tenor of Scripture. The certainty of judgment is not an Old Testament relic that the New Testament softens. Jesus spoke more of judgment than anyone, and the apostles preached it plainly (Acts 17:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Malachi's burning oven and the New Testament's "day of the Lord" are the same settled appointment. To teach the gospel faithfully is to hold the warning and the welcome together.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The certainty and seriousness of God's judgment; the day is coming and will not fail (Acts 17:31).
- God's judgment is the response of perfect holiness to persistent, hardened sin, not arbitrary wrath.
- A God who refused to judge evil would not be loving but indifferent.
- God lovingly warns His people of judgment before He comforts them with promise.
- The certainty of judgment runs unbroken from the prophets into the teaching of Jesus and the apostles (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the certainty of God's judgment actually evidence of His goodness rather than against it?
- Why does God place this solemn warning right before the most tender promise in the book?
- How can we speak honestly about judgment today without being harsh or fearful?

Question 2

Student Question:

The arrogant and the evildoers are pictured as stubble, dry stalks that the fire leaves "neither root nor branch" (4:1). When you look honestly at your own life, where do you see the brittle, dried-out things you have been quietly building, the achievements or attitudes that could not survive God's fire? What would it mean to stop investing in the stubble?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and the image God gives is unforgettable: the arrogant and the evildoers will be "stubble," and the fire will leave them "neither root nor branch." Stubble is what remains in a field after the harvest, dry stalks with no life left in them, fit for nothing but burning. It is a picture of a life that looked busy and productive on the surface but had no living root in God. When the fire comes, it simply disappears.

Lead students to apply this honestly, not in a spirit of dread but of clarity. Each of us is building something with our days, and the question Malachi forces is whether what we are building has living roots or is merely dry stubble. The achievement that consumes our energy, the reputation we guard, the grudge we nurse, the comfort we serve: which of these would survive God's fire, and which would vanish in an instant, leaving neither root nor branch?

Be careful to keep this at the level of the heart, not mere external accomplishment. The problem with stubble is not that it is small; it is that it is dead, cut off from the living root. A person can build an impressive life by the world's measure and still be building stubble, because the whole structure is rooted in self rather than in God. Pride is named first for a reason: it is the root sin that makes everything grown from it brittle.

Move students toward a concrete decision. The point is not to despair over the stubble but to stop investing in it and to plant deep roots in Christ, who alone gives a life that endures the fire (1 Corinthians 3:11–15). Invite each student to name one dried-out thing they have been quietly building, and one way to redirect that energy this week into what will last.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A life rooted in self is brittle stubble that cannot survive God's judgment, however impressive it looks (1 Corinthians 3:11–15).
- Pride is the root sin from which other brittle, dead works grow.
- External accomplishment is not the same as a life with living roots in God.

- The believer is called to examine what he is truly building and to invest in what endures.

Discussion Prompts

- What “stubble” have you been quietly building that could not survive God’s fire?
- Why can a life look impressive to the world and still be spiritually dead at the root?
- What is one way to redirect your energy this week toward what will last?

Question 3

Student Question:

To those who fear His name God promises, “the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings” (4:2). Who is this sun of righteousness, and how do passages like Luke 1:78–79 and John 8:12 help us see that this promise is fulfilled in Christ, the light that rises on His people? What does it mean that He rises with healing?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here we arrive at one of the most beautiful promises in all of Scripture, and it deserves to be unfolded slowly. To those who fear God’s name, the Lord promises, “the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.” After the burning oven of verse 1, the same coming day is described for the faithful not as fire but as sunrise. The contrast is deliberate and gracious: the very same advent of God that is terror to the proud is dawn to the humble.

Teach plainly that this sun of righteousness is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, picked up this very image when he prophesied that “the sunrise shall visit us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Luke 1:78–79). Jesus Himself declared, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Malachi is looking down the centuries to the dawn of the gospel age, to the rising of Christ over a world that had sat in the long night.

Dwell on the tender phrase “with healing in its wings.” The word picture is of the warm rays of the rising sun spreading like wings across the land, and those rays bring not judgment but healing. Christ rose on His people not merely to expose them but to mend them, to heal the brokenhearted, to bind up wounds, to forgive sin and restore what was lost (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18). The gospel is not first a demand; it is a sunrise of healing for those who have sat in the cold and dark.

Notice carefully who receives this dawn: “you who fear my name.” The sun of righteousness rises on the same world for everyone, but it is healing only to those who fear God, who revere Him and turn to Him. This guards the promise from cheap presumption. The dawn is free, but it is received by the humble and reverent heart, not the arrogant one. Help students locate themselves: do they walk in the warmth of this risen Sun, or are they still standing in the dark, refusing the light?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The “sun of righteousness” is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the light that dawns on a world in darkness (Luke 1:78–79; John 8:12).
- The same coming of God that is judgment to the proud is salvation to the humble; the difference is the heart that fears Him.
- Christ rises “with healing in its wings”: the gospel brings restoration, forgiveness, and the binding up of the brokenhearted (Luke 4:18).
- The dawn of salvation is received only by those who fear God’s name, not by the presumptuous.
- Malachi’s promise looks forward to the dawn of the gospel age in Christ, not to a future earthly kingdom.

Discussion Prompts

- How do Luke 1:78–79 and John 8:12 help us see Jesus as the sun of righteousness Malachi promised?
- What does it mean that Christ rises “with healing in its wings,” and where do you need that healing?
- Why is the same coming of God dawn to some and burning to others?

Question 4

Student Question:

God says that those who fear Him will “go out leaping like calves from the stall” (4:2). A calf shut in a dark stall and then released into the open pasture is a picture of pure, kicking joy. Where has the gospel set you free, and does your life actually look like the freedom and gladness of someone the Sun has shone upon? Where might that joy have gone cold?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question hangs on one of the most joyful images in the prophets: those who fear God “shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.” Picture it. A calf has been shut up all night in a dark, cramped stall, and in the morning the gate swings open and it bursts into the wide pasture, kicking and bucking and running in circles for no reason but the sheer overflow of being alive and free. That, says God, is what the dawn of the Sun of righteousness does to a redeemed heart.

Lead students to feel the freedom the gospel actually purchases. Christ did not rise on us to leave us in the stall; He opened the gate. The forgiveness of sins, the lifting of guilt, the reconciliation with God, the hope of glory, all of it is meant to produce not grim, gray religion but kicking, leaping joy. If our Christianity has become joyless duty, something has gone wrong, not with the gospel but with our grip on it.

Be honest about how joy goes cold. Calves can grow used to the stall. A believer who once leaped for joy at the gospel can settle into routine, let bitterness or busyness or disappointment crowd in, and forget that the gate was ever opened. Help students name where the kicking joy has drained out of their walk, not to heap on guilt, but to call them back into the warmth of the risen Sun where joy is restored.

Move toward something concrete and recovering. The remedy for cold joy is not to try harder to feel happy; it is to return to the light, to fix the eyes again on what Christ has done, to worship, to remember the open gate. Invite each student to name one place the gospel has truly set them free and to take one step this week to walk in that freedom with gladness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel produces real joy and freedom, pictured as a calf leaping from the stall into open pasture.
- Salvation in Christ is not grim duty but glad liberty (Galatians 5:1; John 8:36).
- Joy can grow cold through routine, bitterness, or busyness, and must be deliberately recovered.
- Recovered joy comes from returning to the light of Christ and remembering what He has done, not from trying harder to feel happy.

Discussion Prompts

- Where has the gospel genuinely set you free, and does your life show that freedom?
- Where has the “leaping calf” joy gone cold in your walk, and why?
- What is one step this week to walk again in the gladness of the risen Sun?

Question 5

Student Question:

The Lord promises that the righteous will “tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet” (4:3). What does this teach about the final triumph of God’s people and the ultimate vindication of righteousness? How does this guard a faithful person from despair when evil seems to prosper now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 3 completes the picture of the two destinies: the righteous “shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet.” This is strong language, and it speaks of the final and total triumph of God’s purposes. The wicked who seemed so secure, who prospered and oppressed and mocked the God of justice, will in the end be ashes, the burned-out remains of the stubble from verse 1. Righteousness is vindicated; evil does not get the last word.

Teach this carefully so it is not misread as a call to personal vengeance. The triumph here is God's doing, not the believer's score-settling. Vengeance belongs to the Lord (Romans 12:19), and the New Testament forbids the Christian from repaying evil for evil. What Malachi promises is the certainty that God will set all things right, that the moral order of the universe is not a sham, and that the faithful will be vindicated in the end by the hand of God, not their own.

Show how this guards the faithful from despair. One of the great trials of a believing life is watching evil prosper while righteousness suffers. The cynics in Malachi's day had concluded, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord" and "It is vain to serve God" (Malachi 2:17; 3:14–15). Verse 3 is God's flat answer: no, the books will be balanced, the scales will be made right, and not one act of faithfulness will be forgotten.

Apply this to perseverance. Because we know the end of the story, we can endure the middle of it. The Christian does not need to grab for vindication now, because God has guaranteed it then. This frees us to love our enemies, to keep doing good when it is not rewarded, and to wait in hope rather than bitterness. The promise of final triumph is the fuel for present faithfulness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God guarantees the final triumph of righteousness and the ultimate defeat of evil; evil does not get the last word.
- This triumph is God's doing, not a license for personal vengeance (Romans 12:19).
- The certainty of God's justice guards the faithful from despair when evil seems to prosper now.
- Knowing the end of the story frees the believer to persevere and to love even enemies in the middle of it.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the promise of God's final justice help you when evil seems to prosper?
- Why must we be careful not to read this verse as permission for personal vengeance?
- How does knowing the end of the story change how you live faithfully in the middle of it?

Question 6

Student Question:

Right after the great promise, God says, "Remember the law of my servant Moses" (4:4). Why do you think God anchors His people to His revealed word at the exact moment He points them forward to the dawn? Where in your own walk have you drifted from steady attention to God's word, and what would "remembering" it look like this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Immediately after the radiant promise of the sunrise, God gives a command: “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.” At first this seems like an abrupt turn, from the dawn of redemption back to the old law given at Sinai. But it is deliberate and wise. As God points His people forward to the coming day, He anchors them to His revealed word in the long waiting time between.

Teach why this anchoring matters. Four hundred years of silence were about to begin, with no new prophet and no fresh word from heaven. How would the faithful remnant hold on through that long night? By remembering what God had already spoken. His revealed word was sufficient to keep them until the dawn came. The same principle holds for us: between the comings of Christ, we are kept not by new revelations but by clinging to the word God has given.

Help students see the honor God places on His word here. To “remember” the law is to give it steady, obedient attention, to let it govern the life rather than drift from it. The people of Malachi’s day had grown casual and cynical precisely because they had let go of careful attention to God’s word. The command to remember is the cure for the very drift the whole book diagnoses.

Bring it home. Most spiritual drift in our own lives traces back to neglected attention to Scripture. We do not usually abandon God’s word in a dramatic moment; we simply stop opening it, and slowly the cynicism and casualness creep in. Invite each student to name where they have drifted from steady time in the word, and what one concrete habit of “remembering” it could look like this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God anchors His people to His revealed word, especially in seasons of waiting and silence.
- The faithful are kept through the long waiting between God’s acts not by new revelations but by clinging to what He has spoken.
- To “remember” God’s word is to give it steady, obedient attention rather than drift from it.
- Spiritual drift and cynicism usually begin with neglected attention to Scripture.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God anchor His people to His word at the very moment He points them to the dawn?
- How does neglected attention to Scripture quietly produce drift and cynicism?
- What is one concrete habit of “remembering” God’s word you could begin this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

God commands His people to honor “the statutes and rules” He commanded through Moses (4:4). The Old Law was holy and good, and it has now been fulfilled and taken away in Christ

(Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10). What does it teach us about God that He governs His people in different ages by His revealed word, yet that word has always pointed to the same Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This doctrinal question handles the relationship between the Old Law and the coming Christ, and it must be taught with both reverence and clarity. God calls the law “the statutes and rules that I commanded,” and that law was genuinely holy, righteous, and good (Romans 7:12). It came from God, it revealed His character, and it governed His covenant people for their good in that age. We never speak of the Old Law with contempt; God Himself gave it.

Yet teach plainly that the Old Law has now been fulfilled and taken out of the way in Christ. Jesus said He came not to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17), and in fulfilling them He brought them to their goal. Paul says God “canceled the record of debt that stood against us,” nailing it to the cross, so that no one should judge the Christian by the old festivals and regulations, which were “a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Colossians 2:14–17). Hebrews 8 through 10 develops this fully: the first covenant is “obsolete,” replaced by a new and better covenant established on better promises.

Help the teacher hold these two truths together without confusion. The Old Law was authoritative in its time and is no longer binding on Christians, yet it was never a detour or a mistake. It was a tutor leading to Christ (Galatians 3:24), a shadow whose substance is the Savior. So when Malachi says “remember the law of Moses” and then points to the coming Elijah and the dawn, he is not setting law against grace; the law itself was always leaning forward toward the One who would fulfill it.

Draw out what this reveals about God. He governs His people in different ages by His revealed word, the patriarchal age, the Mosaic age, and now the Christian age, yet that word has always pointed to the same Christ. The God of the burning bush and the God of the empty tomb are one God with one redemptive purpose. The unity of Scripture across the covenants is itself a testimony to the faithfulness of the God who authored it all.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Old Law was holy, righteous, and good, given by God for His people in that age (Romans 7:12).
- The Old Law has been fulfilled in Christ and taken out of the way; it is not binding on Christians (Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10).
- The Old Law was a tutor and a shadow leading to Christ, never a detour or mistake (Galatians 3:24).
- God governs His people in different ages by His revealed word, yet that word has always pointed to the same Christ.
- The unity of Scripture across the covenants testifies to the faithfulness of its one Author.

Discussion Prompts

- How do we honor the Old Law as holy without binding it on Christians today?
- What does it mean that the law was “a shadow,” and Christ is the substance (Colossians 2:17)?
- How does the unity of Scripture across the covenants strengthen your trust in God?

Question 8

Student Question:

Malachi says God will send Elijah “before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes” (4:5). In your own life, who have been the “Elijah” voices, the people God sent to turn your heart back to Him and prepare you to meet the Lord? And whose “way” might God be calling you to help prepare right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes the promise of the coming Elijah and presses it personally. Before the great and awesome day of the Lord, God promised to send a voice that would turn hearts back to Him and prepare a people to meet Him. Every believer can look back and name the “Elijah” voices in their own story, the people God sent to turn their heart toward Him and ready them for the Lord.

Lead students to remember with gratitude. For one person it was a parent who prayed and taught; for another, a faithful preacher, a patient friend, a teacher who would not give up, a stranger who spoke a timely word. God rarely brings people to Himself in isolation; He sends voices ahead, preparers of the way, people who turn hearts. Naming them cultivates gratitude and reminds us that we are part of a long chain of grace.

Then turn the question forward. The God who sent voices to prepare us still sends His people to prepare the way for others. Every Christian has an Elijah role to play, turning hearts toward God, pointing away from self and toward Christ, getting hearts ready to meet the Lord. This is not reserved for preachers; it is the calling of every disciple in the lives around them.

Move toward something concrete. Ask students to name one specific person whose “way” God may be calling them to help prepare, a child, a neighbor, a coworker, a wandering friend, and one step they could take this week to turn that heart, even gently, toward the Lord. The chain of grace that reached us is meant to continue through us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God sends voices ahead to prepare hearts; few come to Him in isolation.
- Every believer stands in a long chain of grace, prepared by those God sent before them.

- Every disciple has an “Elijah” role: turning hearts toward God and preparing others to meet the Lord.
- Preparing the way for others is the calling of every Christian, not only preachers.

Discussion Prompts

- Who have been the “Elijah” voices God sent to turn your heart back to Him?
- Whose “way” might God be calling you to help prepare right now?
- What is one step this week to turn someone’s heart, even gently, toward the Lord?

Question 9

Student Question:

The book closes, “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” (4:5–6). Who was this promised Elijah, and how do Matthew 11:14, Matthew 17:10–13, and Luke 1:17 show that this was fulfilled in John the Baptist, who came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” to prepare the way for the Lord? Why does it matter that we understand this as already fulfilled in John, who prepared the way for Christ’s first coming, rather than as a still-future return of the literal Elijah, and what does God’s concern to turn the hearts of fathers and children tell us about the kind of repentance He desires?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest and most climactic block of the lesson, and it deserves the most time, for it contains the final words of the Old Testament: “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.” Teach the identity of this promised Elijah with full confidence, because Jesus Himself settled the question beyond dispute.

The promised Elijah was fulfilled in John the Baptist. The angel Gabriel said of John before his birth that he would go before the Lord “in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to the children,” quoting Malachi directly (Luke 1:17). Jesus said of John, “if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come” (Matthew 11:14). And when the disciples asked about the scribes’ teaching that Elijah must come first, Jesus answered that “Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him,” and Matthew adds, “Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist” (Matthew 17:10–13). This is not a fringe interpretation; it is the plain teaching of Christ.

Be ready to address the common error directly. Some expect a still-future return of the literal Old Testament Elijah before a future earthly day of the Lord. But the New Testament forecloses this. John came “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” not as Elijah literally reincarnated, and Jesus declared the promise fulfilled in John, who prepared the way for the Lord’s first coming. To insist on a still-future literal Elijah is to ignore the explicit words of Christ and to detach this prophecy

from the gospel dawn it was always pointing toward. The Sun of righteousness rose, and the Elijah who prepared His way had already come.

Dwell on the content of John's mission: "he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers." This tells us the kind of repentance God desires. It is not a cold, ceremonial turning, but a turning of hearts, a restoration of the most basic and tender relationships, fathers to children and children to fathers. Genuine repentance toward God always works itself out in reconciled, faithful relationships among His people. A heart truly turned to God is a heart turned, in love, toward family and covenant neighbor.

Finally, set this in its grand place. With this verse the Old Testament ends, and four hundred years of silence begin. But notice that it ends not in despair but in promise, looking east toward the dawn. The whole Old Testament, every prophet and promise, leans forward in hope toward Christ. The silence that followed was the long gray hour before the morning, and when the gate of that silence finally opened, the first voice heard was John's, the Elijah crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord." And behind him rose the Sun of righteousness, with healing in His wings. Help students feel the wonder that they live on the far side of that dawn, in the light Malachi could only promise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The promised Elijah was fulfilled in John the Baptist, who came "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17).
- Jesus Himself declared the prophecy fulfilled in John (Matthew 11:14; 17:10–13); this is the plain teaching of Christ.
- This is not a still-future return of the literal Elijah; John prepared the way for Christ's first coming.
- The repentance God desires turns hearts, restoring tender relationships between fathers and children, not mere ceremony.
- Genuine repentance toward God works itself out in reconciled, faithful relationships among His people.
- The Old Testament ends not in despair but in hope, leaning forward toward the dawn of Christ after the four hundred years of silence.

Discussion Prompts

- How do Matthew 11:14, 17:10–13, and Luke 1:17 show that the promised Elijah was John the Baptist?
- Why does it matter that we read this as already fulfilled in John rather than as a still-future literal Elijah?
- What does God's desire to "turn the hearts of fathers and children" teach us about real repentance?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back not only across this final chapter but across the whole study, from Haggai's stalled temple, through Zechariah's pierced and coming King, to Malachi's closing sunrise. Name one specific way the Lord has used these three prophets to form Christ in you, and one concrete step of obedience or worship you will take this week in response to the God who kept every promise and sent the Sun of righteousness to rise on you.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question closes not only the chapter but the entire study, and it should be given room to breathe. Invite students to look back across all three prophets. Haggai called a discouraged people to consider their ways and put God's house first, with the promise "I am with you." Zechariah unveiled the coming King, humble on a donkey, pierced for His people, opening a fountain to cleanse sin, the Branch who would build the temple of the Lord. And Malachi held up the mirror to a tired, cynical people, then closed with the promise of the Sun of righteousness and the Elijah who would prepare His way.

Help students see the single thread that runs through all three: every promise, warning, and vision was leaning forward toward Christ. The God who refused second place in Haggai, the King who came lowly and pierced in Zechariah, and the Sun of righteousness who rose with healing in Malachi are one and the same Lord Jesus. The whole study has been a long road to the manger and the cross and the empty tomb. The point of the minor prophets is not antiquarian interest; it is to see Christ and be formed into His likeness.

Resist ending the study at the level of information. The aim of all thirteen lessons has been transformation, becoming like Christ, not merely knowing more about three old books. A student who closes this study with a fuller notebook but an unchanged life has missed the whole purpose. Press toward a specific, namable response: not a vague resolve to be better, but one concrete step of worship or obedience taken this week.

Close on the gospel, not on the demand. Remind students that they live on the bright side of the dawn Malachi could only promise. The Sun of righteousness has risen; His name is Jesus; and He shines with healing in His wings on all who fear God's name. Let them leave the study not with a heavy list but with warm hearts, going out, like calves released into the morning pasture, leaping in the light of the God who kept every promise and sent His Son.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi together point forward to Christ; the whole Old Testament leans toward Him.
- The aim of studying the prophets is not information but transformation into the likeness of Christ (Romans 8:29).
- Genuine response to God's word moves from agreement to specific, namable action.

- Believers live on the far side of the dawn the prophets promised; the Sun of righteousness has risen in Christ.
- The God of the prophets kept every promise; His faithfulness is the ground of our worship and obedience.

Discussion Prompts

- Looking across Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, how have you seen them all point to Christ?
- What is one specific way the Lord has used this study to form Christ in you?
- What one concrete step of worship or obedience will you take this week in response?