

THE PROPHET MALACHI

BY

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Introduction

We know nothing of the person of this prophet. His name only is given in the record. Critics have therefore doubted whether Malachi is really the personal name of the prophet, and many believe that it is merely an ideal name, given to the unknown person, on account of his message. Malachi means "my messenger" or "the messenger of Jehovah." The Targum Jonathan, an Aramaic paraphrase, adds after the name of Malachi, "Cujus nomen appellatur Ezra scriba," whose name is called Ezra the Scribe, thus claiming that the great and good Ezra is Malachi. But why should Ezra hide behind an assumed name? This is unworthy of the man, and more so of the Holy Spirit. Many of the leading expositors have accepted the theory that Malachi is the official name of the prophet, whoever he may have been. One of the reasons for this theory is that "the first verse does not contain any further personal description, and that nothing is said about his father or place of birth." But Obadiah and Habakkuk show the same omissions. Nor is it true that nothing was known historically of a person by name of Malachi. The Talmud has a statement which makes Malachi a member of the great synagogue, to which also the two post-exilic prophets Haggai and Zechariah belonged. Other traditions claim that he was of the tribe of Zebulun, born in Supha. There is no reason to doubt that Malachi is the real name of the prophet.

The Date of His Prophecy

This also has caused a great deal of dispute. That he prophesied after the captivity has never been doubted. Furthermore, the reading of his utterances makes it clear that he prophesied after Haggai and Zechariah. We learn that the temple has been completely finished, and the temple worship with priests has been restored for a number of years. After Ezra and Nehemiah's beneficent influence had passed the people went into a decline, and the conditions which the prophet rebukes were the results of backsliding. The abuses which were corrected by Ezra and Nehemiah had taken hold upon the people again. The exact time can hardly be fixed. It seems by comparing Malachi 1:8 with Nehemiah 5:15 and 18 that Nehemiah was no longer governor when Malachi exercised his office.

The Message of Malachi

As the last prophetic voice of the Old Testament, Malachi, in unison with all other prophets, announces the coming of the Messiah and Points once more to Him. The next prophetic voice, after the four hundred silent years, is the voice in the wilderness, the herald of the King, of whom Malachi predicted that he should come. But the message of Malachi is overwhelmingly condemnatory. "The great moral principle unfolded in this book is the insensibility of the people to that which Jehovah was for them, and to their own iniquity with respect to Jehovah--their want of reverence for God, their desposal of Jehovah. Alas! this insensibility had reached such a point that, when the very actions which proved their contempt were laid before their consciences, they saw no harm in them. Nevertheless, this did not alter the purposes and counsels of God, although it brought judgment upon those who were guilty of it" (chapter 1:2, 6, 2:14, 3:7, 13, Synopsis of the Bible.).

It is unquestionably true that the spirit manifested by the people in Malachi's day assumed later the concrete forms expressed by the two leading sects of Judaism, when our Lord was on earth, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. "The outward or grosser kind of idolatry had been rendered thoroughly distasteful to the people by the sufferings of the exile; and its place was taken by the more refined idolatry of dead-work righteousness, and trust in the outward fulfillment of the letter of the divine commands without any deeper confession of sins, or humiliation under the Word and the will of God." It has been well stated that "Malachi is like a late evening, which brings a long day to a close; but he is also the morning dawn, which bears a glorious day in its womb." The shadows are dark, but there is the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, still to take place, when all shadows flee away.

But beside the apostate masses of the people, steeped in a dead formalism, there is seen in the book of Malachi the faithful remnant. It is interesting to follow this remnant, we have so often mentioned in our annotations, through the entire Jewish history, past, present and future. There was always a godly remnant. We see that remnant in the wilderness wandering of Israel; there was a remnant during the period of the judges, and in every other period, like the sad days of Ahab's wicked rule, when despondent Elijah desired to die, and the Lord informed him that there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. There was a remnant when Jerusalem was captured by Nebuchadnezzar: a remnant returned from the captivity, and when the returned exiles degenerated, as seen in Malachi, there were still the few left who assembled together and whom the Lord owned.

In Romans 11 we read that at the present time, during this age, there is likewise a remnant according to the election of grace. It is not a small remnant, who, during this age, turn to the Lord, believe on Christ and thus become members of the Body of Christ, in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile. And when the age closes, and the nation faces the final calamity in the great tribulation, and the acceptance of the false Christ, there will be that godly remnant, as we have so often shown in our comments on the prophetic word.

The Lessons for Our Age

The Jewish age with all its glorious manifestations of the Lord in behalf of His people Israel, and the great revelations given by the prophets of the Lord, did not improve in its development and become a

better age. Neither does our age improve and become better, the age in which God has revealed His best and offers to man the riches of His graces in the Person of His blessed Son our Lord. It ends as Old Testament times ended, in failure and apostasy. The moral conditions of the Jews in the days of Malachi are the moral conditions of Christendom. But as then, so there is now, a remnant of God's own, who are faithful to Him, and whom He acknowledges as His true Church.

The Division of Malachi

We divide the prophecy of Malachi in six sections: 1. Jehovah's Love for His People (1:1-5). 2. The Rebuke of the Priests (1:6-2:9). 3. Rebuke of the Social Conditions (2:10-16). 4. The Announcement of the Messenger and the Day of the Lord (3:1-6). 5. Rebuke for Defrauding the Lord (3:7-15). 6. The Remnant and the Concluding Prophecy (3:16-4:6).

Analysis and Annotations

1. Jehovah's Love for His People

CHAPTER 1:1-5

The message of Malachi begins with the sublime statement, "I have loved you, saith Jehovah." It is the message to Israel. This love is written large on every page of their history. A former prophet gave the message from the Lord, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). And long before that Moses had told them, "Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day" (Deut 10:15). And the man of God in his final utterance burst out in praise, "Yea, He loved the people" (Deut. 33:3). And this generation, brought back through His mercy from Babylon, the generation that had listened to the marvelous words of Haggai and Zechariah, could brazenly answer back, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" How deep they had sunk! Greater still is the insensibility of nominal Christendom which rejects, yea, despises, the great love wherewith He has loved us in the gift of His Son.

Then the Lord in infinite patience answered them, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith Jehovah: yet I loved Jacob, and hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." This takes us back to Genesis, but in vain do we look for this statement in that first book of the Bible. Though it is quoted also in Romans 9, it is nowhere to be found in connection with the story of the birth of the twins. The late scholar, William Kelly, has expressed the whole matter so well that we can do nothing better than to quote his excellent comment. "It is only in Malachi that He says 'Esau have I hated.' I could conceive nothing more dreadful than to say so in Genesis. Never does Scripture represent God as saying before the child was born and had manifested his iniquity and proud malice, 'Esau have I hated.' There is where the mind of man is so erroneous. It is not meant, however, that God's choice was determined by the character of the individual. This would make man the ruler rather than God. Not so; God's choice flows out of His own wisdom and nature. It suits and is worthy of Himself; but the reprobation of any man and of every

unbeliever is never a question of the sovereignty of God. It is the choice of God to do good where and how He pleases; it is never the purpose of His will to hate any man. There is no such doctrine in the Bible. I hold, therefore, that, while election is most clearly taught in the Scriptures, the consequences that men draw from election, namely, the reprobation of the non-elect, is a mere reproduction of fatalism, common to some heathen and to all Mohammedans, the unfounded deduction of man's reasoning in divine things." With these good words we agree perfectly. The hatred against Esau is mentioned in this last book, because it was well-deserved, after all the opposition and defiance of God the descendants of Esau, Edom, had manifested. But the love wherewith Jacob was loved was undeserved. His love for His people had been fully manifested, as well as His displeasure against Edom by laying his mountains and heritage waste, and all their attempts at reconstruction failed. God was against him on account of Edom's wicked ways.

2. The Rebuke of the Priests

CHAPTER 1:6-2:9

The priests, the religious leaders of the people, are described first in their evil ways, and rebuked. But the rebuke includes the entire people, for it is true, "like priests like people." The Lord called Israel to be His firstborn son, and therefore, nationally, He is their Father. He is the Lord, and Israel called to be His servant. But they had not honored Him, as a son should honor the father by obedience; they did not fear Him, but despised His Name. This charge brought forth from the side of the priests another brazen statement, the result of their hypocritical self-righteousness. They answered back, demanding proof of the charge by saying, "Wherein have we despised Thy Name?" They seemed to be hardened in their consciences, though they kept up outward appearances. Such, too, is the religious condition in much of Christendom. Another charge follows, the charge that they offer polluted bread, which brought forth the retort, "Wherein have we polluted Thee?" They had considered the table of the Lord contemptible; instead of offering upon the altar the very best, as demanded in the law, they showed their contempt by bringing the blind, the lame and the sick, a thing which they would never have done to an earthly governor, who would have been sorely displeased at such an insult and rejected their person on account of it. They had treated the Lord of Hosts shamefully in their worship. Is it different in Christendom? Under such conditions, even if they were to pray to Him to be gracious, would He, or could He, regard their persons and listen to their prayers (verse 9)?

Verse 10 has often been interpreted to mean that the priests were covetous and demanded money for every little service, the opening of doors and the kindling of a fire. It has another meaning. The better rendering is, "O, that some among you would even shut the doors of the temple." The doors are the doors which lead from the outer court into the holy part. The Lord declares that it would be more profitable if they would shut these doors, and kindle no longer a fire upon the altar for nought; in other words, He wishes that the whole outward worship might be stopped. The last sentence of this verse shows this is the correct interpretation. "I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of Hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand." Nor has He today any pleasure in the unscriptural worship of ritualistic Christendom, or the dead, Spiritless worship of an apostate Protestantism.

The next verse (verse 11) is a prophecy. Is it fulfilled today, during this age? We think not; it refers to the millennial age. Critics say that the passage refers to the worship of God among the heathen, under different names, as expressed lines by a poet (Pope):

Father of all! in every age,
In every clime adored,
By saint, by savage, and by sage,
Jehovah, Jove or Lord.

Canon S.D. Driver says on this passage, "It is a tribute to the truer and better side of heathen religion." It is no such thing. But why should it not be applied to this gospel age, in which among all nations His Name is known and called upon? There is a statement which excludes this interpretation: "and in every place incense shall be offered unto My Name, and a pure offering." The Romish Catholic Church uses this passage as one of her proof texts for that abomination, the Mass. In the canons of the Council of Trent we read that "the Mass is that pure sacrifice which the Lord predicted by Malachi should be offered to His Name in every place." Another prominent writer declares that it is "the bloodless sacrifice of the New Testament, the holy sacrifice of the mass." All this is Satanic invention. It is true the Name of the Lord is known among the nations, but no incense, sacrifice or offering is connected with the worship of the Lord in the true Church. For His heavenly people the earthly sacrifices and incense, offering and priesthood, are all passed; and more than that, these things would be inconsistent with their heavenly standing and calling. It will be different during the age to come, the Millennium. The last chapters of Ezekiel reveal the fact that with the millennial worship in the millennial temple incense and offerings are connected. The prophecy of the eleventh verse will be fulfilled during the millennium. Now His Name is not universally great among the Gentiles; it will be otherwise when the Lord Jesus Christ has come back.

Then follow additional expostulations on account of these conditions. In the second chapter the priests are again addressed. If they do not hear, do not lay it to heart, if their consciences are not aroused, to give glory unto His Name, He would curse their blessings; yea, they had been cursed already; He would punish them severely for their contempt. Levi and the covenant with him is especially mentioned, on account of his faithfulness at the time when the golden calf had been set up by Israel in the wilderness, in contrast with Aaron who gave way to the demand of the people. But what a contrast between Levi and the priests in Malachi's day! For the priests' lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts. Such is the calling of the priest. But they had departed out of the way; they caused many to stumble at the law; they had corrupted the covenant of Levi. Therefore the Lord made them contemptible and base before all the people.

3. The Rebuke of the Social Conditions

CHAPTER 2:10-16

The priests were corrupt, and with their bad example the people were likewise corrupt. It is the prophet who speaks in verse 10. The One Father

was Jehovah, with whom the nation was in covenant relation. They had one Father, and they were one as a nation. By profaning that covenant they dealt treacherously every man against his brother. The abomination in social life, by which the covenant was profaned, and the holiness of the Lord outraged, was the marriage with the daughters of the heathen. They had put away their own Israelitish wives in order to enter into these unholy alliances. The Jew acted faithlessly toward his brother, both when he contracted a marriage with a heathen woman, and when he put away his legitimate wife, and thereby desecrated the covenant of the fathers, i.e., the covenant that Jehovah made with their fathers when He chose them to be a separated people. Those who have done this will surely be cut off. Verse 13 describes the weeping and the tears of the abandoned Jewish wives; it is the same condition, only worse, which is recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah. All was an abomination unto the Lord. Over fifty years ago a writer called attention to the divorce evil in the United States. He wrote then:

The frequency of divorce in the United States, so that in one of the States divorce is allowed for "misconduct," reveals the same state of things existing now, as was here condemned by Jehovah, and must bring with it the same evils, and the same punishment. What tongue can adequately tell, what heart conceive, the untold misery from this cause, especially to the deserted wives, and the children left without a mother's care! How little is the indissoluble nature of the marriage relation regarded! and the fact, that the Lord was the witness of it, and will be a swift witness against those who violate it! The Saviour only allows of one cause of divorce, and regards divorce for any other as adultery.

Since then this evil has increased a hundredfold or more among professing Christians, so that it threatens to undermine the home and all family life. It is the sign of the rapid disintegration of our nation.

And yet rebuked for these social conditions and wicked deeds, they could ask another, "Wherefore?" They were so hardened that they could not see why they were to blame. The difficult fifteenth verse refers to the marriage relation, in which God makes of twain one. He made the woman for man, though He had the residue of the Spirit, the creative power by which He might have made many women for one man. And wherefore one? that is, one woman for the man--that He might seek a godly seed, to perpetuate those who are godly, which is counteracted by divorce, such as they had practiced. It seemed as if the remnant who feared Him were being influenced by these corrupt practices, hence the warning. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth."

4. The Announcement of the Messenger and the Day of the Lord

CHAPTER 3:1-6

In this chapter and in the next we have the prophecies of Malachi as to the Messiah and His forerunner. The last verse of the preceding chapter belongs rightly to this chapter. "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied Him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" It is this last bold question, produced by their arrogant pride and self security which opens the way for the prophetic message in this chapter. "Where is the God of judgment?" The answer is, "Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me;

and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in; behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." The first announcement of the messenger, who goes before the Lord, is quoted in Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 1:76 and 7:27. Isaiah, too, had spoken a similar prophecy in chapter 40:3. This prophecy was fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist, as the herald of His first coming; still this prophecy considered in the light of the prophecy in the next chapter, concerning the coming of Elijah, remains yet to be fully accomplished. John the Baptist was not Elijah; Elijah is still to come and do his work preceding the coming of the Lord. The messenger is followed by the Lord, the Messenger, or Angel (the meaning of the Hebrew word) of the Covenant. The word Lord is here the word Adon with the article, always used of God. It is the Lord God who comes, and His official title is "The Angel of the Covenant." Many expositors have blundered here in that they imagined the word covenant means the new covenant of which the Lord Jesus is the Mediator (Heb. 9:15). But it is not the truth. The Messenger of the Covenant is the same "Angel of the Lord" who appeared frequently in Israel's past history, and generally in the form of a human being. The Angel of the Lord is the Son of God in His preincarnation manifestations, and He is announced here as the Angel of the Covenant. The nation believed in His coming, and in the question "Where is the God of judgment?" they had asked for Him. That there was a partial fulfillment of this prophecy when our Lord, the Messiah of Israel, came unexpectedly in the temple, must not be overlooked, but that it was the fulfillment of these words is not true. It will be accomplished in the day of His Return, preceded by another messenger. Their question "Where is the God of judgment?" will then be fully answered, and what it will be we read in the next two verses (verses 2 and 3). He will purge the nation of the dross, beginning with the sons of Levi. It is the same as in Zechariah 13:9. John the Baptist announced the same also, and when he gave his inspired testimony of the purging of the threshing floor and the burning of the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12) he referred not to the first coming of Christ, but to His second coming.

As the result of this judgment in store for the nation, when the sorcerers, the adulterers, the false swearers, and the oppressors will be dealt with, we read in the fourth verse "Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years."

5. Rebuke for Defrauding The Lord

CHAPTER 3:7-15

Another rebuke is administered. They were always a stiff-necked people, never obedient to His ordinances. His gracious call to return unto Him, and the promise that He will return unto them is answered by "Wherein shall we return?" They had robbed God of what was His right. The tithes and offerings which He demanded in the law covenant had been withheld. On account of it the blessing was lacking and curse was upon the nation. Then follows a command to bring all the tithes into the storehouse, the challenge to prove Him, the assurance of abundant blessing. It is strange that even those who have a good knowledge of truth, the dispensations and the heavenly position of a Christian, should fall back upon this verse and claim that it is binding and should be practiced among believers. For a system like Seventh Day Adventism, a system which has perverted the gospel

of grace, which denies God's oath-bound covenants with Israel, which claims to be the true Israel, the system to which applies the term "the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not;" for such a cult to make this command a binding law is not surprising. But well taught believers should never look upon this passage as in any way in force today. True Christian giving, like everything else in the life and service of a true believer, must be done, not by law but through grace, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Nowhere in the New Testament is there anything said about tithing. A believer must be a cheerful giver, giving as the Lord has prospered him, communicating to others, doing good, remembering the poor, ministering in temporal things to those who minister in spiritual things; but all this giving must be under the direction of the Spirit of God.

The day will come when His earthly people will minister to the wants of the Lord's house (a Jewish term), so that there will be an abundant supply for sacrifices. That will be in the future day of their restoration, when the devourer will be rebuked (verse 11). It is at that time, when the millennium has come, that all nations will call them blessed, when they shall be a delightsome land (Isa. 62:4). This has never been since it was written by the pen of Malachi.

6. The Remnant and the Concluding Prophecy

CHAPTER 3:16-4:6

In the midst of all these moral conditions, the apostasy of the masses, we find a pleasing picture of a godly portion, whom the Lord mentions in a special manner. There were those who feared the Lord. They had no sympathy with the wicked practices of their brethren; they did not share the contempt and unbelief manifested by the rank and file of the people. They were drawn together by the Spirit of God; they had fellowship one with another. They came together to think upon His Name, to honor Him, to read His Word, to call unto the Lord. And the Lord heard; He was pleased with them, and He is represented as recording their names in the Book of Remembrance, the bookkeeping in glory (Psa. 56:8). He has a special promise for such. "And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

Such a remnant of godly ones was in existence in Malachi's day, and when they passed away others took their places. The Lord preserved such a godly seed in every generation throughout the four hundred silent years. And when that silence was broken, by the Angel's message to the ministering priest Zechariah, we see such a remnant on the threshold of the New Testament. Good old Anna and Simeon, the shepherds and others belonged to this waiting, God-fearing remnant. And so it will be before His second coming. A similar remnant will then be on earth awaiting His glorious return.

It is so in Christendom. Departure from the faith soon manifested itself in the professing church. Decline followed decline, till the awful Romish apostasy was consummated. But in every generation the Lord kept a people separated unto Himself. The Reformation came, followed by revivals and recovery of truth. But the Spirit of God does not predict that this age ends in universal acceptance of the truth and universal righteousness and peace, but He predicts a universal apostasy. But even then He has a remnant

true to Him. That remnant is seen prophetically in the Church message to Philadelphia (Rev. 3).

In the fourth chapter is the final message of the Old Testament Prophetic Word. The day, that coming day of the Lord, so often mentioned in every portion of the Old Testament, is once more brought before us. It is the day of fire, the day of reckoning with the wicked, who will be consumed like stubble. But that day brings not only the fire of judgment, the winding up of "man's day," the dethronement of evil, but it will be the day of the sunrise. "The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings." The Sun of Righteousness is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the beautiful symbol of His personal, visible, and glorious coming to usher in that day, which will last for a thousand years, in which He will rule in power and glory. The Old Testament knows nothing of His coming as the Morning Star. That coming is exclusively revealed in the New Testament in relation with the Church. The Morning Star precedes the sunrise. Even so, before that day comes, before the great tribulation, with wrath poured out, He comes for His saints as the Morning Star. The Church does not wait for the rising of the sun, but for the rising of the Morning Star. While the world sleeps, and the world-church dreams its idle dreams, true believers look for the Morning Star. Some day we shall see that glorious Morning Star, when suddenly He descends with that long promised shout.

When the Sun of Righteousness arises, He will bring healing and blessing. His waiting earthly people, the remnant, will be filled with joy and gambol as calves, while the wicked will be trodden under foot.

The whole chapter is a future prophecy. While there has been a partial fulfillment of the first verse of the third chapter, everything in this concluding chapter awaits its fulfillment. Elijah the prophet is announced. John the Baptist came in the Spirit and power of Elijah, but he was not the Elijah promised here. If ye will receive it, said our Lord, this is Elijah who should come. It was a testimony to faith and not the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. If the Jews had accepted Christ, John would have been Elijah. Our Lord bears witness to this. "Elias truly shall come first and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them." When the age closes another one will appear, the Elijah announced by Malachi, who does his work of restoration before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. His work will be carried on among the people Israel. Deceivers and impostors have occasionally arisen who claimed to be this Elijah; the most prominent in recent years is the Dowieite delusion of Zion City. Such is the havoc produced by not dividing the Word of Truth rightly.

The close of the Old Testament prophetic Word is majestically solemn. In the beginning of the Old Testament stands written the sin and the curse which came upon the race through the fall of man. The final testimony in Malachi speaks of Him who comes to take the curse upon Himself, the promised Christ; who comes to deal with the wicked, who comes to bless and to remove that curse. The New Testament which follows tells us of Him and of His matchless work, the fullness of redemption and the all-sufficiency of Grace. And the final New Testament book shows the consummation, the coming judgments, the righteous judgments of the Lord, and the fulfillment of all "which was spoken by His holy prophets;" ending with the great words, "Surely I come quickly! Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

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