

# **The Prophets of Israel**

## **MALACHI**

The name "Malachi" signifies *Messenger of Yahweh*. He was the last of that luminous galaxy of "Holy men of God" whose names adorn the sacred pages of Old Testament records, and of whom Paul wrote, saying, God "at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets"; and of whom the Spirit also testified, saying that God will confirm "the word of His servants and perform the word of His messengers" (Heb. 1:1; Isaiah 44:26).

Therefore, their words are of the deepest interest and paramount importance to all God's children.

While Malachi's prophecy has an excellence and a personal interest peculiar to itself, the prophet himself, in some respects, resembles the hero of Mount Carmel. He comes suddenly upon the scene, as did Elijah, and we are not told from whence.

He reproved the extreme laxity and wrong-doing of his people, and predicted the coming of a day "that shall burn as an oven," consuming the wicked, leaving them "neither root nor branch." But unto them that feared God, and "thought upon His name," the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams. He foretold the return of the Tishbite, and then disappeared as suddenly as he came.

In chapter 1: 8, we learn from the prophet that in his day the Jews had a Governor, which proves that Malachi was a contemporary of Nehemiah, living and prophesying before the latter's death. To be exact, Malachi prophesied about the time of Nehemiah's resumption of the office of Governor, on his second return to Jerusalem from the Persian Court.

This was in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes Longimanus (Neh. 13: 6), the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther, the King of Persia having chosen Esther to be his queen. This was about B.C. 420.

Nehemiah had been recalled to the Persian Court, as was the custom in those days to give an account of his deeds as Governor of the Jews. His achievements were approved by the King and his counsellors, and Nehemiah "after certain days obtained leave of the King" to return.

Coming back to Jerusalem, he found much cause for sorrow and anxiety. The reformation effected by him in the earlier part of his administration had been maintained by his own personal presence and influence as a steadfast and devoted servant of Israel's God, as well as by the authority vested in him by the King of Persia and Babylon; and when his strong hand had been removed for a time, abuses revived and laxity increased.

Nehemiah would have had to stem this torrent of corruption alone if God had not at this time raised up another prophet, so in this crisis God sent Malachi forward to aid and assist in the great work of correcting and reforming the people, and with great courage and determination he unflinchingly reproved the delinquencies of the priests and the people alike.

Haggai and Zechariah, who prophesied a century earlier, reproved the people for neglecting to aid in rebuilding the temple; but Malachi in his day denounced the people for their failure to bring to the priests in the temple, then re-built, the tithes demanded in the Law of Moses.

Furthermore, he charged them with bringing the blind and the lame to the temple for sacrifice, and contracting marriages with outlandish women (women of other lands), all of which were the same evils that Nehemiah was labouring to correct.

Both men were working to the same end, as will be seen by comparing Mal. 2:11, with Neh. 13: 25-27; and Mal. 3:8, with Neh. 13:10.

It is true Malachi is not mentioned by name in Nehemiah's record, but that can scarcely be expected, seeing that Nehemiah was the Governor of the Jews, holding office by virtue of the authority given him by the Persian King; and his book was not a complete history of the times, but merely a personal record of his own acts.

Malachi, on the other hand, was not a man of high position among men, but a comparatively humble messenger of Yahweh, bearing "the burden of the word of the Lord" to the house of Jacob. His position was indeed a high and dignified office, yet very negligently regarded among the men of his time.

Both men were aiming at the same thing—the reformation of the people, each labouring in their own God-appointed way, yet by entirely different methods. Both were diligent in the Lord's business, "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." It was appropriate, therefore, that each should have his own personal record fitting to their calling and station in life.

The high and honourable governor showed his humility before God in that meek and lowly prayer recorded in the closing chapter of his personal narrative:

*"Remember me, O my God, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercy" (vs. 14, 22).*

On the other hand, and in an entirely different way Malachi's humility is observed in the low estimate of himself which he exhibited by his faithfulness in delivering God's burdensome message to His erring people, in consequence of which his name has been honourably inscribed upon the page of sacred history as one of these—

*"Holy men of God" who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21).*

Widespread doubt and incredulity marked the times of Malachi, and this evil was sapping the interest of the people in the covenants God made with Abraham and David, and their thought-benighted scepticism was undermining their trust in God's promises, and as a consequence their morals became corrupted.

The splendid prospect spread before the people one hundred years earlier by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (Hag. 2:6-9; Zech. 2:10-12 and 9:10) concerning the future of Palestine and the nation, had not been fulfilled, and things seemed to continue as they were, with no immediate prospect of a change; and as a consequence they murmured against God and began to doubt His ability to perform.

They failed to observe that the brilliant future predicted by the above and other prophets was not an immediate prospect; but on the contrary, many intimations were given that a long interval of time lay between the delivery of these glorious prophecies and their complete fulfilment—Zech. 4:1; 6:12; 10:9, 10; 13:9; 14:1-5.

Against these conditions of doubt, laxity and unfaithfulness Malachi contended most vigorously, leaving an example to succeeding generations and to ourselves to follow in his steps.

Malachi reasoned with the people that "the goodness of God" should lead them to repentance. He pointed out that in reality they were despising "the riches of His goodness, forbearance and long-suffering." He asks the question.

*"Was not Esau, Jacob's brother!" (vs. 2).*

Jacob was loved because of his foreseen faithfulness, but Esau was hated because God foresaw his unworthiness. Therefore, saith the Lord, I have —

*"Laid his mountain and his heritage waste."*

But God still loved the remnant of Jacob's people for the patriarch's sake, and had restored them to His chosen lands.

Thus the prophet set before them God's steadfastness and fidelity, keeping His promises from generation to generation, by calling to mind the differing experiences of the two peoples —the one had suffered ruin, the other were still favoured, and were now possible heirs to an age of glory and honour which although still in the distant future will endure forever.

Therefore, in verse 6, Malachi virtually enquires, Is such a loving Father not worthy of all honour? Is such an eminent and covenant-keeping Master not worthy of the most reverential fear? He certainly is! Such a reasonable conclusion should be allowed by all.

Still, they disregarded the love of their fond and kindly Father; yea, they dishonoured Him by offering the blind and lame in sacrifice, and polluted bread upon God's altar. This would have been declined and repudiated even by the Jewish Governor, but it was wholly rejected and vehemently denounced by the Law of Jacob's God as commanded through Moses, which Malachi enjoined them to remember, saying,

*"Remember ye the law of Moses my servant . . . with the statutes and judgments" (chap. 4:4).*

Is there not in this a solemn lesson for all succeeding generations including our own? The Bread of God is holy, and Christ is "the true bread" (John 6:32), and whosoever putteth on that saving name should "not profane the name of their God" (Lev. 21:6), with the errors of the "blind leaders of the blind," seeing that the apostle Peter stresses the matter by saying,

*"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12.)*

All such should "give attendance to doctrine," speaking only "the things which become sound doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13; Titus 2:1), for God who hath spoken unto us by His son (Heb. 1:1), hath said "IN VAIN do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9).

Teaching false doctrine is equivalent to offering the blind, the lame and the sick in sacrifice, and "polluted bread" upon God's antitypical Altar—Christ (Heb. 13:10).

The laxity against which Malachi so forcefully strove is a fitting type of the loose doctrines of all forms of Laodicean worship (Rev. 3:17).

As an inducement to maintain purity, the prophet follows with a glowing word-picture of what shall transpire in the Messiah's day—the day of the Lord, when —

*"From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my Name shall be great among the Gentiles: and in every place incense shall be offered unto my Name, and a pure offering; for my Name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of Hosts" (ch. 1:11).*

In the 14th verse, the words of the prophet read, "Cursed be the deceiver." These words are of similar import to those of Paul,

*"If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received let him be ACCURSED."* (Gal. 1:9.)

It is the same God that speaks, whether it be by prophet or apostle. In the last verse of the first chapter the Spirit in the prophet declares, "I am a great king, and my Name is dreadful (or awful) among the nations." Therefore, while we say, "Hallowed be Thy Name," we should ever remember that it is written:

*"Thou hast magnified THY WORD above all thy Name"* (Ps. 138:2.)

Therefore, it is incumbent upon us, as sons and daughters of the Most High to respect and esteem with reverential fear His word, which He hath been pleased to extol so very highly, seeing that it is only upon such as are of a poor and contrite spirit and "trembleth at His word" that He will look with mercy (Is. 66:2).

In the second and third chapters of his book, Malachi upbraids the priests who had taught the people false doctrines. His accusation reads: —

*"Ye have caused many to stumble at the law, ye have CORRUPTED IT. . . . Ye have WEARIED the Lord with your words."* (chap. 2:8, 17).

These words reveal God's attitude towards error: it wearies Him. The prophet also remonstrated with the people because of their own negligence and hypocrisy, and he censured the same offences that excited the righteous indignation of Nehemiah.

He denounced their multiplied divorces and their intermarriages with other nations. He threatened them with divine rejection, and exhorted them to repentance, promising those "that feared the Lord and thought upon His Name," the highest rewards in the day when the Lord shall make up His jewels—the precious sons of Zion, comparable unto fine gold (chap. 3:17, and Lam. 4:2).

Concerning "the Messenger of the Covenant"—the Bethlehem-born King of the Jews, the prophet declared, "He shall come, but who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire." The fire shall try every man's work, what sort it is, and only the "gold, silver and precious stones" shall abide (1 Cor. 3:12-13).

In the last chapter of his burning and glowing prophecy, Malachi makes this closing declaration: which is doubly related to the things which he had said before—

*"For behold the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my Name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with HEALING in his beams"* (verses 1 and 2).

As the power of the sun in "the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations" (Is. 61: 11): "truth shall spring out of the earth" (Ps. 85:11); and "the earth shall open, and bring forth salvation," for "I will redeem them from death," saith the Lord, when he (Christ) "shall let go my captives" (Is. 45:8 and 13; Hosea 13:14).

In closing let us diligently enquire, who is this Sun of Righteousness that arises in such resplendent light, glory and majesty, whose healing beams causes "Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29), to spring forth from the earth? Who is this brilliant orb of the New Heavens whose refulgent light and glory dissipates so thoroughly the darkness that now covers the earth? Is Christ this Sun of Righteousness? Harken to the following testimonies!

MATTHEW. — "The people which sat in darkness saw great LIGHT, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, LIGHT is sprung up" (chap. 4:16).

ZACHARIAS. — "The DAY-SPRING from on high hath visited us, to give LIGHT to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace" (Luke 1:78,79).

SIMEON. — "Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a LIGHT to LIGHTEN the Gentiles and the GLORY of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

JOHN. — "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the LIGHT, that all men through him might believe. He was not that LIGHT, but was sent to bear witness of that LIGHT. That was the true LIGHT that lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:6-9).

JESUS. — "I am the LIGHT of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the LIGHT OF LIFE" (John 8:12).

After Malachi the sun went down over the prophets and a prophetic silence brooded over the land until "those days came," when a voice was heard crying in the wilderness:

*"Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."* (Matt. 3:3).

This was a fulfilment of that part of Malachi's prophecy which reads, "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face which shall prepare thy way before thee" (Mal. 3:1; Mark, 1, 2, and 3).

The fulfilment of this portion of Malachi's prophecy in the past, is a guarantee of that which is yet to come — the realization of our Blessed Hope — the promise of a Glorious Dawn.

B.J.D.

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