

MALACHI

MALACHI — THE COMING OF THE DAY OF THE LORD

This book is a continuous discourse, so that, properly speaking, there are no intervening events. The prophet is a contemporary of Nehemiah, following closely Zechariah and Haggai. The evidence of this is chiefly internal and gathered from two facts:

- (1) that the second temple was evidently in existence at the time; and
- (2) that the evils condemned by Nehemiah are those which he also condemns. This will appear as we proceed, but compare ~~3007~~ Malachi 1:7-8; 2:11-16; 3:8-10 with the last chapter of Nehemiah, especially verses 10-14, 23-29.

INTRODUCTION (1:1-5)

What word in verse 1 indicates that the message, or messages, are in the nature of rebuke rather than comfort? With what declaration does verse 3 begin? While Jehovah thus declares Himself towards His Israel, how do they receive it? This skeptical insinuation in the interrogation, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" is a peculiarity of the book, and shows the people to have been in a bad spiritual frame, calculated to give birth to the practical sins enumerated later.

Be careful not to read a wrong meaning into that reference to Esau, as though God caused him to be born simply to have an object on which He might exercise His hate, or as if that hate condemned the individual Esau to misery in this life and eternal torment beyond. The hate of Esau as an individual is simply set over against the choice of Jacob as the heir to the promised seed of Abraham. Esau did not inherit that promise, the blessing to the world did not come down in his line, but that of his brother Jacob, and yet Esau himself had a prosperous life; nor are we driven to the conclusion by anything the Bible says that he was eternally lost. Moreover, the particular reference is not so much to Esau as a man as to the national

descendants of Esau, the Edomites, who had not only been carried into captivity as Israel had been, but whose efforts to rebuild their waste places would not be successful as in the case of Israel, because the divine purposes of grace lay in another direction.

SECOND DIVISION (1:6-3:4)

consists of an address to the priests and Levites, more especially the former, in which they are charged with three kinds of offenses. The first is neglect of their temple duties, see verses 1:6-2:9. The character of the offense is seen in 1:7-8, 12-13, while the punishment in the event of impenitence is in ~~<BIB>~~ Malachi 2:1-9. The second offense concerns unholy marriages, 2:10-16. It was for this sin as well as the preceding one that Jehovah refused to accept their offerings (vv. 13-14). Notice the strong argument against divorce found in verse 15. God made one wife for one man at the beginning though He had the power to make more, and He did this because of the godly seed He desired. The third offense is that of skepticism, and as Beecher calls it, a bad skepticism, for there is a species of doubt which deserves compassionate treatment and which cannot be called evil in its spirit and motive. That, however, is hardly the kind of doubt now under consideration (see 2:17). This division closes, as does the division following, by a predication "concerning a day in which the obedient and disobedient shall be differentiated and rewarded." This "day" we have often recognized as the "day of the Lord" still in the future both for Israel and the Gentile nations (3:1-4).

Notice the partial fulfillment of verse 1 in the career of John the Baptist, as indicated in the words and context of ~~<BIB>~~ Matthew 11:10; ~~<BIB>~~ Mark 1:2; ~~<BIB>~~ Luke 1:76. But the concluding verses of the prediction show that a complete fulfillment must be ahead. The offering of Judah and Jerusalem has not yet been so purified by divine judgments as to be pleasant unto the Lord as in the days of old, but it shall yet come to pass.

THIRD DIVISION (3:5-4:3)

consists of an address to the people as a whole, who like the priests, are charged with three kinds of offenses. The first is certain public wrongs in The second is the failure to support the temple and its ministers (3:8-12), in which case notice the charge of divine robbery, and the blessing promised to faithfulness in tithes. The third is the same kind of skepticism as with the

priests (3:13-15). The prediction concluding this section covers verses 3:16-4:3, and is more comforting in character than the preceding one.

FOURTH DIVISION (4:4-6)

This part is a grand conclusion in which the great day of the Lord is once more referred to, and Elijah the prophet named as His forerunner. We learn from ^{<0114>}Matthew 11:14; ^{<0911>}Mark 9:11 and ^{<0117>}Luke 1:17 that John the Baptist is to be considered the type of this forerunner, but that Elijah is to come again to this earth is the opinion of many. There are those who believe that he and Moses are the two witnesses in ^{<6100>}Revelation 11 that shall do wonders in Jerusalem during the reign of the Antichrist.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the peculiarity of this book?
2. Give the proof that Malachi is contemporary with Nehemiah.
3. How do you explain God's "hatred" of Esau?
4. What argument against divorce is found here?
5. How do some interpret the prediction about Elijah?