

A Survey of the Old Testament Prophetic Books

9 "Malachi"

I. THE PROPHET

Malachi's name in Hebrew means "my messenger." Although there is no description of Malachi in his prophecy as to parentage or birthplace, the Jewish Talmud lists him as a member of the great synagogue. Being the last of the minor prophets, Jewish traditions have referred to Malachi as "the seal and end of the prophets."

Malachi apparently carried out his prophetic ministry a hundred years after the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

II. THE PROPHECY

Two themes immerge from Malachi's prophecy. The apostasy of God's people (1,2), and predictions of judgment on the unfaithful and blessings upon the repentant (3,4).

In detail 1:2-5 God's love for Israel is argued by a contrast of Israel and Edom. In 1:6 - 2:9 there's a protest against the negligence of the priests in worship. Those who divorced their wives to marry foreign women are condemned in 2:10-16. God answers the complaint of indifference to injustice in 2:17-3:5. The people are rebuked in 3:6-12 and a promise is given to the faithful in 3:13-4:3. Finally, 4:4-6 is a call to God's law and a prophecy of Elijah's coming again.

III. THE PERIOD

According to Ezra 1:1 the Jews had returned to Palestine in 536 B.C. at King Cyrus' decree. When his son Cambyses ascended to the throne he suspended the work on the temple for 15 years. Following Cambyses, Darius lifted the suspension in 521 B.C. in his 2nd year of reign (Haggai 1:1). Four years later in his 6th year (516 B.C.) the temple was completed (Ezra 6:15). From 486 - 465 Xerxes (Ahasuerus) reigned and was succeeded by Artaxerxes (465 - 423). It was in the 20th year (445) of this Artaxerxes that Nehemiah heard that Jerusalem's walls were broken down (Neh. 1:1-3).

Nehemiah had gained permission to go to Jerusalem and to rebuild the walls (Neh. 2:7-9). Despite opposition, the walls were completed in 52 days (Neh. 6:15). After 444 B. C. Nehemiah was not in Jerusalem all the time, he had left his brother Hananah in charge (Neh. 7:2). In the 32nd year of Artaxerxes (433) we know Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem (Neh. 13:6,7).

After a period of revival (Neh. 10:28-39) the morals of the people degenerated and the state of

religious affairs was corrupt. The Levites were not receiving their portion (Neh. 13:10), the Sabbaths were not observed by some of the people (13:15), and some had divorced their wives and married heathens (13:23). Malachi, who prophesied against similar conditions, probably did so in one of the absences of Nehemiah to Persia. According to Neh.5:14, Nehemiah was governor over Judah 12 years but he was not at Jerusalem all the time (Neh. 13:6).

IV. NOTABLE THINGS

- A. Note that Nehemiah and Malachi rebuke similar abuses (Mal. 2:11; Neh. 13:23; Mal. 3:8; Neh. 13:10; Mal. 2:15,16; Neh. 13:23,27).
- B. Note the expression of 1:8 probably alludes to a time when Nehemiah was not acting as governor since Nehemiah took no things due a governor (Neh. 5:14-19). If this be true, Malachi prophesied during one of Nehemiah's absences.
- C. Note the expression of 1:3. According to its context - God is answering Israel's argumentative question "In what way hast thou loved us?" (2) And He is showing how He preferred Jacob's descendants to Esau's descendants. This is the first mention of this preference and is an answer based upon Esau's actions and the resultant consequences. This is said after the fact and to interpret it before the fact, as an argument for predestination, is unsound as well as lacking in the doctrinal understanding of predestination.
- D. Note how Israel had despised God's name - no fear and no honor (1:6).
- E. Note how Israel polluted God - they offered polluted bread and showed contempt with forbidden sacrifices (1:7,8; Dt. 15:21).
- F. Note how they profaned the Lord's name (1:11,12).
- G. Note how the people viewed God's service (1:13).
- H. Note what the priests did not do with God's Word and their rebuke (2:1-9).
- I. Note how insincere worship is a weariness to the Lord (2:17).
- J. Note the prophecy of the Lord's forerunner (2:1-6).
- K. Note how the people robbed God (3:8)
- L. Note that the Lord has a book of remembrance for those who fear Him and serve Him (3:16-18)

M. Note the pages of the O.T. close with the curse of the law for sin, still existing from the time it was first introduced into the human race (Gen. 3). The N. T. begins with the One who removed that curse for all who believe (Matt. 1:1; Rom. 8:3,4; 10:4; Gal. 3:13).

V. PERSONAL LESSONS

- A. God deserves and expects the best; any thing less is to profane His Holy Name (1:11-14).
- B. There's displeasure at those who hold out on the Lord (1:14) or rob Him of tithes and offerings (3:8,9).
- C. God's service demands service from the heart (2:2).
- D. God keeps a record of those who are faithful and those who are unfaithful (3:16-18).

OUTLINE

I. ANSWERS FOR THOSE DENYING GOD'S PROVIDENCE (1:1-5)

II. ANSWERS FOR THOSE DESPISING GOD'S PREEMINENCE (1:6-14)

III. ANSWERS FOR THOSE DISREGARDING GOD'S PRECEPTS (2:1-9)

IV. ANSWERS FOR THOSE DEFYING GOD'S PROHIBITIONS (2:10-16)

V. ANSWERS FOR THOSE DISBELIEVING GOD'S PROMISE (3:1-6)

VI. ANSWERS FOR THOSE DISHONORING GOD'S PORTION (3:7-15)

VII. ANSWERS FOR THOSE DESIRING GOD'S PLEASURE (3:16-18)

VIII. ANSWERS FOR THOSE DOUBTING GOD'S PURIFICATION (4:1-6)

