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Commentary

# **The Message of Malachi for Today**

Matthew Henry

God's prophets were His witnesses to His church, each in his day, for several ages—witnesses for Him and His authority, witnesses against sin and sinners, affirming the true purpose of God's providence in His interactions with His people then, and the kind purposes of His grace concerning His church in the days of the Messiah, to whom all the prophets bore witness, for they all agreed in their testimony.

Now we have only one more witness to call, and we are done with our evidence. Though he is the last, and in him prophecy ceased, yet the Spirit of prophecy shines as clearly, as strongly, and as brightly in him as in any who went before, and his testimony commands equal regard. The Jews say that prophecy continued for forty years under the second temple, and this prophet they call the seal of prophecy, because in him the series or succession of prophets broke off and came to a close. God wisely ordered it so that divine inspiration should cease for some ages before the coming of the Messiah, that this great Prophet might appear the more conspicuous and distinguishable and be the more welcome.

Let us consider the person of the prophet. We have only his name, Malachi, and no account of his country or parentage.

Malachi signifies my angel, which has given occasion for the conjecture that this prophet was indeed an angel from heaven and not a man, as in Judges 2:1, but there is no just ground for the conjecture.

Prophets were messengers, God's messengers. His name is the very same as that found in the original (3:1) for *my messenger*, Malachi.

Let us also consider the scope, or aim, of the prophecy. Haggai and Zechariah were sent to reprove the people for delaying the building of the temple; Malachi was sent to reprove them for neglecting it once it was built, and for their profanation of the temple-service (for from idolatry and superstition they ran into the other extreme of impiety and irreligion). The sins he witnesses against are the same as those complained of in Nehemiah's time,

with whom, it is probable, he was a contemporary. And now that prophecy was to cease, he speaks more clearly of the Messiah as nigh at hand than any other of the prophets had done, and concludes with a direction to the people of God to keep the law of Moses in remembrance while they were in expectation of the gospel of Christ.

This prophet is sent first to convince and then to comfort, first to discover sin and reprove it, and then to promise the coming of Him who shall take away sin. And this method the blessed Spirit takes in dealing with souls (John 16:8). He first opens the wound and then applies the healing balm. God had provided (and one would think effectually) for engaging Israel to himself by providences and ordinances; but it seems, by the complaints here made of them, that they

received the grace of God in both these in vain.

They were very ungrateful to God for His favours to them, and rendered not again according to the benefit they received (1:1-5). They were very careless and remiss in observing His institutions; the priests, especially, were so, who were in a particular manner charged with them (v. 6-14). And what shall we say of those whom neither providences nor ordinances work upon, and who affront God in those very things wherein they should honour him?

There are two great ordinances which divine wisdom has instituted, the wretched profanation of both of which is complained of and sharply reprov'd in Malachi 2.

- **First**, the ordinance of the ministry, which is peculiar to the

church and is designed for the maintenance and preservation of that; this was profaned by those who were themselves dignified with the honour of it and entrusted with its business. The priests profaned the holy things of God; this they are here charged with; their sin is aggravated, and they are severely threatened for it (v. 1-9).

- **Second**, the ordinance of marriage, which is common to the world of mankind and was instituted for the maintenance and preservation of that; this was profaned both by the priests and by the people, in marrying strangers (v. 11-12), treating their wives unkindly (v. 13), putting them away (v. 16), and herein dealing treacherously (v. 10, 14-15). And that which was at the

bottom of this and other instances of profaneness and downright atheism was thinking God altogether such a one as themselves, which was, in effect, to say, There is no God (v. 17). And these reproofs to them are warnings to us.

In the third chapter, we have a promise of the coming of the Messiah and His forerunner; the errand he comes upon is particularly described here, both the comfort His coming brings to His church and people and the terror it will bring to the wicked (3:1-6). There is also a reproof of the Jews for corrupting God's ordinances and sacrilegiously robbing Him of His dues, with a charge to them to amend this matter, and a promise that, if they did, God would return in mercy to them (v. 7-12). The wickedness of those who speak against God is described (v.

13-15), and the righteousness of those who speak for Him, with the precious promises made to them (v. 16-18).

In this final chapter of Malachi, we have proper instructions given to us (very fitting to close the canon of the Old Testament with) concerning the state of recompense and retribution before us, the misery of the wicked and the happiness of the righteous in that state (4:1-3). This is represented to us under a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and the unbelieving Jews with it, and of the comforts and triumphs of those among them who received the gospel.

Concerning the state of trial and preparation we are now in, we are directed to have an eye to divine revelation and to follow it; they must then keep to the law of Moses (v. 4) and expect a further discovery of God's will by Elijah

the prophet, that is, by John the Baptist, the harbinger of the Messiah (v. 5-6). The last chapter of the New Testament is much to the same purpose, setting before us heaven and hell in the other world and obliging us to adhere to the word of God in this world.

Taken from The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth,  
JULY/AUGUST 2020, Vol. 28, No. 4, Page 160-161. Used by  
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