

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

MALACHI

Nehemiah is the last of the Old Testament historians; Malachi the last of the prophets. He is called “the seal” of the prophets, because his book closes the Old Testament canon.

His name is thought to be significant—a contraction of Malachi-jah. The Septuagint translates “by Malachi” (1:1), “by the hand of his angel,” as if it were an appellative and not a proper name. Some, accordingly, think that Malachi, “*my messenger*,” is the official title of the prophet, and not his real name. Some of the fathers went so far as to assert that he was a supernatural being, an angel, for which of course there is no ground.

Malachi lived between B. C. 436 and 397; he prophesied probably B. C. 433-430.

- The first company of exiles returned to Judea, B. C. 536.
- The second, under the leadership of Ezra, took place fifty-seven years after the completion of the second temple, B. C. 458 (Ezra 7:6, 7).

About B. C. 444, Nehemiah went up to Jerusalem from the court of the Persian king, Artaxerxes Longimanus, and began his work of reformation, and after twelve years of arduous toil he returned to Babylon, and thence again to Judea.

There are clear intimations in the prophecy of Malachi that he was engaged in a like work with Nehemiah. The same abuses, unhallowed alliances, and flagging zeal are encountered in the prophecy as in the history.

What Haggai and Zechariah were to Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest, Malachi was to the reformer Nehemiah. But it can scarcely be doubted that the evidences of decline and apostasy are much more visible in these later books than in the former.

Priest and people alike are here turning away from God, and the prophet separates the remnant from the mass of the returned exiles, and addresses them, and holds out to them the hope of the speedy coming of the Deliverer, Messiah. The contents of Malachi may be distributed thus:

Chaps, 1-2:9. *The sins of the priests sternly reproved.*

Chap, 2:10-17. *Condemnation of marriage with heathen.*

Chaps, 3, 4. *Predictions of the appearing of Messiah's forerunner and the advent of Messiah Himself.*

Interspersed among the denunciations and warnings against the wicked are found gracious promises and assurances addressed to the faithful few who still adhered to the name and worship of the Lord; as the precious word in 3:16-18, where the little company who fear the Lord and who speak often one to another, are assured that God will remember them, has written down in His book of remembrance their sayings and doings, and will one day own and reward them; as in 4:2, where the sun of righteousness is promised to rise upon those who fear His name.

Chap, 3:1, announces the coming of the Lord's messenger and of the Lord Himself.

In Mark 1:2ff. these words which are quoted from Malachi, as also words from Isaiah 40:3, are all ascribed to Isaiah the prophet. There is in reality no contradiction here; for the prediction of Isaiah is unquestionably the foundation of that in Malachi, and accordingly the inspired evangelist goes back to the fountain of the prophecy, viz.-Isaiah.

There is a striking contrast between the close of the Old and the New Testaments.

The Old ends with the awful threat of the divine curse on the earth; the New with the gracious words **"Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."**

Thus closes the Old Testament canon.

With hopes and promises of a better day and better things, the rising of the sun of righteousness, the book of remembrance, the appearing of Elijah to restore all things—with such splendid assurances it closes.

It was in the night time of our race and of partial revelation that it closed; but a night thickly set with blazing stars and the roseate glimmer of the coming dawn. It closed with the sound of many voices along the shore, all uttering a cheerful and hopeful good night. The night passes round, and the shore of the New Testament becomes visible; evangelists and apostles cry, Hail to the morning. And their good morning is in blessed harmony with, and in full realization of, the cheerful and hopeful good night of the prophets from that other shore.

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