

Malachi

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

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The Lord has not been pleased to give us much express information of the prophets in general, with the exception of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, and in a measure of Ezekiel and Jonah. Of the rest we know but little, and of none less than of Malachi. So much so that some have indulged in no small imagination about him, yea, have doubted, as learned men will doubt (none more probably), of his proper existence, some of course making him out to be anybody else than himself. I do not see what is the object or the profit gained by such speculations; or why people should suppose that he was not a man at all but an angel. It may be well briefly to allude to these dreams if it were only to show the exceeding want of good sense, to say no more, of such as indulge in them, and to caution souls against the trashy way in which they occupy themselves and their readers.

It is clear that God has an object where He does not speak as truly as where He does, and the essential difference of the prophet from others lies in his giving us not man's mind but God's revelations, though surely for the good of man. If then the person of the prophet be hidden, we may gather that it is best to leave it so. The design is only met by what God had to say. It seems plain however both by position in the canon and by internal character that the last of the prophets is to be classed with the last of the sacred historians, Malachi with Nehemiah, as Haggai and Zechariah are expressly with Ezra.

"The burden of the word of Jehovah to Israel by Malachi." Let him be a person but little known, at least we should know the burden of the word of Jehovah by him. These were the last prophetic words. The nature of the case shows that, if we had no kind of tradition, a spiritual mind ought to say that Malachi is necessarily the latest of the prophets. As Moses himself has a place, naturally the earliest in the Old Testament so Malachi just as simply is the last. The whole strain of Malachi falls in with this. There does not therefore seem the slightest reason to question the soundness of the arrangement by which he is put at the end of the prophets in the Jewish canon. One ought never lightly to disturb facts of an external nature generally received though one may not make them a matter of faith. But it is not good to call everything in question. There is no small difference between not doubting and believing. We are not called to believe except where God speaks. On the other hand, where is the wisdom or the modesty of doubting what is without evidence for us, yet generally accredited. The best way is to let such parts alone?

But here there are moral considerations. The book consists largely of various moral appeals; and they are of such a nature as to indicate that they are the last words of the Old Testament. They leave nothing before or between the Messiah Himself except His messenger. From Him they pass by our calling altogether and go on to what follows Christianity — the mission of Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Jehovah. For we must remember that Christianity is no prolongation or improvement of Judaism. It is a thing of its own kind. If it follows, and could not but follow Judaism, it is none the less completely a thing of another clime and character, like the sheet that was let down from heaven and went up again in the vision of the Roman centurion.

The book opens with words just as suitable as those with which it closes. "I have loved you, saith Jehovah." It is the expression of sorrow, but certainly of affection. "I have loved you, saith Jehovah. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?" I was going to call it a disappointed affection; and in one sense this is true. But we must bear in mind that in another sense there is nothing that fails with God.

He steadily carries out what is wisest and best, though it may be ever so humiliating for man. He does not force His purposes, nor anticipate in His ways what is suitable to the present state of His people and testimony. But in a most real sense we may say that, if there be continual disappointment on the surface, there is always the onward accomplishment of what is for His own glory, and this is nowhere more verified than where all seems confusion on the outside. It is necessary that the creature should be put to shame, being now in a fallen state and its very condition one great lie against God — nay, a great lie against itself, false to its own nature, false to the law of its being as created of God or called of God, as the case may be.

In this case how unbecoming the language of Israel: "Wherein hast thou loved us?" What was it for Israel to ask such a question of Jehovah? Yet He deigns to answer in grace: "I have loved you, saith Jehovah; yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?" Jehovah, as usual, rises up to the source of things. "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith Jehovah: yet I loved Jacob." Then He adds, "and I hated Esau." I do not think it would be true to draw this inference at the beginning of their history. But it is just an instance of what the best of men do in their haste. God withholds the sentence of hatred till it is evidently justified by the conduct and ways of Esau, more particularly towards Jacob, but indeed towards Himself. In short, it would be quite true to say that God loved Jacob from the first, but that He never pronounces hatred until that be manifest which utterly repels and rejects Himself with contempt, deliberately going on in pursuit of its own way and will in despisal of God. Then only does He say, "I hated Esau." Along with this He draws attention to the fact that He "laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." Thus, apart from such profanity, if God "despise not any," we may be perfectly sure He hates not any. Such an idea could not enter a mind which was nurtured in the word of God, apart from the reasonings of men. I say not this because of the smallest affinity with what is commonly called Arminianism; for I have just as little affinity with Calvinism. I believe the one to be as derogatory to God's glory as the other, though in very different ways — the one by exalting man most unduly, and the other by prescribing for God, and consequently not saying the thing that is right of Him.

Abstract reasoning is like that of Job's friends, who were not bad Calvinists before Calvin, but they certainly did not say the thing that was right of Jehovah as Job did. The reason was this — that Job did not indulge in theories about God and His government as they did. Job held to what he knew. Not that he had not his faults; for he showed himself at length naughty and disputed against God's ways, as we know. But he was right in rejecting their effort to carry their point by human reasonings, which, ignorant of God's grace as much as of His government, insinuated that the tried saint was only a hypocrite after all. He was really farther from it than any of them; and justly crave to the Lord, no matter what they might urge: cockles might grow instead of barley before he would give up his integrity. He would not forswear God's grace nor his own faith. Things must lose their nature and the creatures of God change their being before Job would yield to man in what touched his relationship with God. No doubt there was too much vindication of himself, and there he was wrong; but he was right about God. He was quite sure that God was Himself, and would not deny Job, and held to both firmly. He was quite sure that none of his inquisitors loved God better, and this too was true. The book is a fine unfolding of man with God and God with man: nothing is finer in all Old Testament scripture in this way. Such is the value of a real knowledge of God; it may be imperfect and it may require to be corrected, but there is a real knowledge of God, and this too in the face of human reasonings which may come from pious men, but are none the better for that. I see little difference between the reasonings of the pious and of others when they judge by appearances and speak outside the revealed truth of God. Nobody can answer or feel for God. No one can by searching find Him out; still less can any by reasoning anticipate His ways. And there is seen the blessedness of the pursuit. For knowledge

of God is open to the simplest, yet withal is it the only joy and strength of the greatest saint or servant whom God ever formed. There is no difference as to this in principle: the most mature is as much beholden to the word of God as the least; and what lifts up the least is the only thing that gives real truth or solidity to the strongest.

This is a grave practical lesson, and Malachi, I think, is deeply interesting in this way. At the beginning of the history of Jacob and Esau we find the purpose of God before the children were born. Indeed to make election a question of the deserts in the two parties is simply to destroy its nature, if allowed in word. Election is necessarily from God entirely apart from those that are the objects of it, as it means the exercise of His sovereign choice. If there is the smallest ground in the party chosen because of which God chooses, it is not His choice, but rather a moral discernment, which, far from being sovereign, is only an appraisal whether the person deserves or not. One may hold then as strongly as the stoutest Calvinist the free sovereign choice of God, but the reprobation of the wicked which the Calvinist draws from it, as an equally sovereign decree, is in my judgment a grave error. I do not therefore scruple to say a word upon it now, inasmuch as it is an important thing in both doctrine and practice. The idea that, if God chooses one, He must reprobate another whom He does not choose, is a fallacy and without, yea against, scripture. This is exactly where human influence comes in; that is, the petty self-confidence of man's mind. Now I do not see why we as believers should be petty; there is every reason why we should gather what is great for God. To be simple is all well; but this too is a very different thing from being petty, and no reason why we should limit ourselves to ourselves; for what does God reveal His mind for? Surely that we should know Him, and be imitators of Him.

To my own mind then it is full of the deepest interest, that while God chose before the children were born, and decided what was to be the lot of the one relatively to the other, He never made any man to be a sinner. No doubt the children of Adam are conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity; mankind are born in that condition. Their whole being is lost in it. It is no question therefore of making man a sinner, because since the fall he departed from God and the race is evil without exception. Man belongs to a stock now wholly depraved — evil the sad and universal heirloom. God's election is entirely independent of what He finds, and spite of all evil. He elects angels no doubt that never fell: even so they had nothing to do with determining the rest who were not so kept. In every case it is simply a question of God's choice. But the fallen condition of man gives to God's election, where sinners are the only possible objects, an exceeding beauty and very deep moment. He chooses entirely apart from anything that deserves it, in the face of all that is out of harmony with Himself. It is not so where He judges and rejects.

When He says "Esau have I hated," He waits to the last moment, till Esau has shown what he is. The first book of the Bible lets us see His choice of Jacob. Only the last book tells us of His hatred of Esau. I do not say that we do not find His moral condemnation of Esau's spirit long before this, but He is patient in the execution of judgment. Long-suffering belongs to God, and is inseparable from His moral nature, while He delays to execute judgment on evil. All-powerful and good, He is nevertheless for that very reason perfect in patience. Now the sentence comes forth from His lips, and may well be felt to be a serious matter.

Yet Esau's ill-conduct to Jacob was not the only or the worst element of evil which comes into judgment. He was profane Godward, despising everything done on God's part, save that which brought sensibly before him the greater dignity to which his brother was promoted. Then he who sold it for a morsel of meat in the hour of want feels and resents keenly his loss of place and honour, even though he seemed one of those characters devoted only to that which man can do in this present life. He had no confidence in God: beyond this life no thought, no desire. If he could live in ease and honour, not

without energy and action, that was enough for Esau. Why should he seek more than to enjoy present life, or, if needful, carry his point by main force? But that is practically a denial of God, particularly of His goodness and His sovereign choice. It is also a denial of one's own sin, of the real import of death, of resurrection, and of glory. There was undoubtedly a great deal unsatisfactory enough in Jacob, just as there is alas! in most of us. There is a great deal beyond question which proves how brittle and broken we are as men. Jacob shows us the difference by comparison with one who walked with God, and hence styled with singular beauty the friend of God. Jacob stands in painful contrast with Abraham in many respects. Though Abraham, we know, failed gravely now and then, still failure was not what characterized him in the same way as it chequered (we will not say characterized) Jacob. Intercourse with God stamped its attractive, softening, ennobling influence with a wonderful disinterestedness on Abraham's life and ways; whereas Jacob has the feebleness that belongs to one who knew not so to walk with God by faith. Craft, or a mind ever seeking to manage and so accomplish his ends, belongs to such as he. Self tarnished, but did not shut out God, with nothing but will to govern: this is rather what we see in Esau. Jacob was really a different man. Even when going on with his devices to benefit himself, he looked to God for a blessing of which he realised the need. Thus it was certainly by no means the happiest form of the life of faith — far from it; hence a great deal takes the shape of warning to us in Jacob as in most, but genuine faith was there spite of all. Thus, not having a good conscience, he fell into a sort of fraud on his brother Esau in the first instance, and not much better when we last hear of the brothers meeting each other. We must remember he was a man naturally timid: only dependence on God does not find but make us what we should be.

"And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." God was against him. "Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places." Thus we see the strength' of will to the last: he would fight it out even with God. "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom Jehovah hath indignation for ever. And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, Jehovah will be magnified from the border of Israel."

Then the prophet comes to closer quarters. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith Jehovah of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?" The higher the relation, the greater the danger where God is not before the soul. It is not only that sin in such is more serious, but also there is greater exposure to it. A priest has to walk not merely as becomes a man outside the sanctuary, but as one who goes into it. There was a more perfect consecration in the case of a priest than with an Israelite; and familiarity with the presence of God, unless it be kept up in His fear, borders on contempt. "If I be a master, where is my fear? saith Jehovah of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?" Hardness of conscience goes where there is habitual carelessness as to God, while at the same time keeping up appearances Men thus become insensible to all. "Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of Jehovah is contemptible."

It had a voice of deep insult to God, however they might seek to excuse it. This is a serious thing practically for the Christian now. A man will endure in worship what he would not suffer anywhere else. Many who are critical enough about the preaching make very light of the prayers, have no sympathy with much, and would alter or throw it overboard. They bear with the general service often for the sake of the sermon. Now it is surely a serious thing when we remember what worship should be; and I am not speaking of an imaginary case. There is nothing which more betrays the state of people than their prayers, unless it be their hymns or, in general, their worship. Therefore the ordinary form of

prayer and hymns, being wholly beneath true worshippers adoring in Spirit and in truth, is a fatal sign and shows how low they are sunk. For certainly worship ought to be the highest expression of spiritual devotedness toward God. If real, it ostensibly rises up as the outgoing of the power of the Holy Spirit to God Himself. A sermon is quite a different thing; it has its place and value of course, but its direction is toward men, the hearers. Without being hypercritical about terms, let the discourse be addressed to the unconverted to show them the way to be saved, or to the converted to instruct them in the truth of God more perfectly, it clearly has man for its object, converted or unconverted, or both, but assuredly man.

But evidently what has God for its object ought not to be polluted — ought not to be what people know is beneath His grace and truth, or unsuited even supposing, it were true, and not according to the height of the faith of those that present it. There is scarce anything which has a more lowering effect than habitual contentedness in worship with what is not the character of praise our hearts feel to be due to God; and yet I suppose there is nothing in which even children of God put up with more shortcomings than here. Thousands of Christians know that what they acquiesce in as worship is not according to God's mind. They bear with it for reasons of their own, certainly not for God's honour. This is sometimes the case where there is not an outward or fixed form. We have known, among such as externally are free enough, how there may be an order formed by traditional habits and ways which is inconsistent with God's will. Do not be deceived by appearances: unwritten prayers may offend as really as written ones. Its being an extempore prayer does not make it spiritual: and if it be a bad one, it is the worse because unwritten. For he who prays by that very fact is free, and yet the prayer is low and bad. Of course nothing heterodox is supposed or anything morally injurious: I mean simply what is unsuitable to one who stands in conscious redemption, and has the Holy Ghost indwelling and making him the temple of God. Now I say that this is the position of every Christian, and that worship is founded on the place in which Christ has set him, — the revelation of Christ as He is risen and in heaven.

Take, for instance, the common habit of getting on the ground of the Almightyness of God or the name of Jehovah. How could a Christian who knows what he is saying fall back on either out of the place of a child with his Father or of a member of Christ? I can understand a person bringing both in by a slip; but there would be always the correction at hand — perhaps the person having a consciousness more or less that it was so, or the Spirit of God would give him something altogether better. On the other hand, it seems wrong above all in prayer or worship to be too critical about what is said by others. It is a miserable thing to be sifting prayers or worship where we ought to be praising God with simplicity. But it may be a necessary duty where there is that which falsifies what ought to go up to God acceptably.

This may show the great analogy between what is going on now in Christendom with the state described in Malachi; and I am perfectly persuaded that Christendom has taken a serious stride of late years into a farther departure from God, and that the Jewish spirit (and Gentile too) of love for outward forms and splendour of building and music and appearance in general has developed immensely: in short there is a kind of race of rivalry in Christendom generally as to this. Those who not many years since used to be remarkable for their simplicity, and in fact were wont to indulge in rather opprobrious comments on national bodies for it, are now really seeking to out-do them in the same taste. All this appears to be a very deplorable thing for the children of God. I do not say a word about men of the world. These people of course cannot be debarred from having temples if they please: God will judge them by and by. But our business surely, as children of God, is with the interests of Christ. We have the interests of His love and of His glory, and to me it is serious that the state of Christians should be so singularly like that which is supposed in the very verses of Malachi we have been looking at.

Now much of the negligence is due to the assumption that God has left nothing definite in His word as to a great deal which they consider outward and nonessential. Willing to bear all that in mind, still I say, how comes it that they should be false to their own position, and allow themselves to sink below their communion with God, and their own knowledge of the gospel in worship — the very place where we ought most to be at the height of what we know? The truth is that the scriptural idea of worship has never had its place in their souls. Hence they get into the habit of speaking of the preaching of the gospel as worship. The united praise of God, in contradistinction to teaching or preaching, is almost lost sight of. Then again men go on in their usual routine in that exercise of conscience as to pleasing God in it.

There is a Large class with whom one occasionally meets who have some thought of worship, and who know what is not worship; but unfortunately these may be obscure about the gospel. One dislikes referring to names; but those commonly called "high churchmen" have notions of worship though extremely wanting in sense of liberty: I am speaking now of godly persons — for there are such among them. They in general have stricter thoughts of worship, such as it is, than many who are before them in point of knowledge. Their standard may be low; but still, in their measure, they understand worship to be the outpouring of the heart to God. Consequently they all tend in their zeal for the expression of worship to slight preaching. Now it is very evident that Christian wisdom is to slight neither the one nor the other in its place. The true course here, as everywhere, is to leave scope for all the word and will of God, whatever the thing may be, without confounding them together. It is impossible for a soul that has not liberty to worship in the power of the Spirit.

But there are curious inconsistencies among real Christians. Often persons are kept back by the difficulties that seem so vast and insurmountable; and in this way frequently godly men are kept back by the idea of doing good. I do not know a greater hindrance, nor anything more evil, in fact, than allowing the desire to do good — more particularly in what people consider a large sphere — to embarrass their action for the Lord, and their faithfulness to what they know. In this way godly men are held in fetters, contrary to what they know. The state of the soul in the presence of God, independent altogether of position, has much to do with the spirit of worship.

In the case of such men as Samuel Rutherford, devout and God-fearing in tone and spirit, I should think there was much of the outgoing of heart which responded to the grace of Christ whose personal glory was dear to them. This mingled itself with their conversation and service of every kind, though they did not know the Christian's death to law, and were in the greatest bondage as regards the true expression of worship. It is thus we see now and then godly souls, where a burning sense of who and what Christ is imparts the tone of the soul which goes out in worship, and so we recognise it largely in Rutherford of old, though in controversy his severity was something tremendous. Like many mild men we may have known, he startled his opponents by the extremely hard blows he dealt out to his adversaries. When one turns from his keen and trenchant defence of Presbyterianism or legality, it is difficult to realize that the same man wrote the letters which charm all who love the Saviour. But when we look in a little more closely, we see that doctrinally he was as cold as Calvin, the secret of his difference from his fellows being his power of telling out the joy of his heart in Christ's love.

This spiritual tone is ever attractive, and justly so; but much more is needed to set a soul on the solid ground of Christian worship. For this is required another thing besides the living faith working by love, which is kindled by such a knowledge of Christ as the Holy Ghost gives. We need the sense of complete freedom through Christ our Lord — deliverance from flesh, world, law, everything that can come in between the soul and God. I speak now not of the power which here as everywhere is in the Holy Spirit, but of the condition antecedently requisite. That this is a matter of great moment will not

be contested by those who love the saints of God for Christ's sake, and desire His honour in and by them. It is what we have most of all to seek with our brethren wherever they may be. For it ought never to be assumed. Many a Christian knows the prophetic word fairly and the truth in general, who is far from being consciously dead and so serving God. We must not then too hastily take this for granted that real believers are in this respect thoroughly clear as to their own souls. The same principle applies of course to knowledge about ecclesiastical position and government. It does not follow in this case any more; though church truth, while distinct, is connected more closely than prophecy with that which clears the soul. But we ought to set the full delivering grace of the gospel before every one that has been converted to God Even if those we come in contact with have been ever so long following the Lord, we should seek to learn whether they are consciously clear before God, and thus brought out of all bondage of spirit; for without this there must soon be not a few hitches and difficulties, by which in the day of trial unestablished persons break down, cause trouble, and certainly suffer in their own souls.

However we shall see what Jehovah thinks of the neglect of His name, and the slight put on His worship. "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil?" It soon took the shape of what was really profane in Israel. "And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith Jehovah of hosts. And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us; this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith Jehovah of hosts. Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought?" And is not the love of mammon the known and confessed bane of Christendom?

Then we come to the next root of evil — intense selfishness, which God brings out by the prophet. "Neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith Jehovah of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand." But this very thing, the judgment of their evil morally, brings in, as in prophecy always, what God will do in His own gracious power; "for," says He, "from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles." For Israel were profaning His name and insulting His worship. Then Jehovah undertakes the care of it Himself, and declares that He will make His name great among the Gentiles whom the Jews despised, and this everywhere, from places at hand to the remoter isles which will await His law. I understand this to be a promise not yet accomplished. Many may apply it (and this may be allowable in the way of principle) to what is going on now under the gospel. But it is evident on a closer inspection that the passage looks onward to the millennial day. "And in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering." This is an instructive and interesting prophecy, proving as it does that, while the temple at Jerusalem is to be the metropolitan temple for the worship of all nations, it will not be to the exclusion of means and places of worship among the Gentiles.

It follows that there will be a universal testimony to the true God among all the nations; and one can see how right this will be, and suitable to the new age. For although I do not doubt that God will then provide better means of going to Jerusalem than man's wit or skill has yet devised, still there would be a void indeed if there were no maintenance of God's worship anywhere save in that one centre. Grace has now under the gospel gone out to the nations; and God, though He may display new ways for His own glory, will never go back from this at least Under Christianity Jewish exclusiveness is unknown, because grace puts the believer even now in relation with heaven. In the future kingdom the Lord will take the earth as well as the heavens under His manifest sway, and the Jews and the Gentiles will be owned and blessed in their respective place on the earth, Israel having the position of special nearness but the nations rejoicing and worshipping everywhere; for Jehovah shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Jehovah, and His name one. Thus it will not be the Jew superseded or superseding in any way, but Jehovah going out in His goodness to all the Gentiles, while

the mountain of His house is established in the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills, and the nations flow to it. Of that day, not of the present, Malachi speaks.

"In every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering," — in contrast with the polluted one which the priests of Israel presented then. I see no reason to conclude that the sacrificial terms are transferred from their original ceremonial objects and acts to such as are strictly spiritual, as we know now. (Heb. 13, 1 Peter 2) The later chapters of Ezekiel, which clearly bear on the future, not on our time and position, are too explicit to be thus explained away, if indeed we prefer scripture authority to the thoughts and wishes of men. There is the strongest possible proof that the offerings will then be material, though no doubt used with intelligence and as memorials of the great sacrifice, when the blessing of the Gentiles will not be as now a reproach to Israel, but these will be as life from the dead to all the world. We must leave room for both these things, which are distinctly revealed and contrasted by the Holy Ghost in Romans 11. It is not therefore a question merely of interpreting the Old Testament, but of believing the interpretation authoritatively supplied to us by the great apostle of the Gentiles.

Doubtless the Romanist use of the passage is to the last degree puerile, and the more as they pretend the mass to be a witness of Christ's sacrifice where blood-shedding is essential. But the painful thought to my mind is the poverty of Protestant teachers, who apply the passage equally with Roman Catholics to the church now, instead of confessing worship in spirit and truth for the Christian, but the resumption of incense and offering by Jews and Gentiles by and by in the new age. Thus it appears to me certain that, beside the great centre of earthly worship for all in Jerusalem, literal offerings (and from Ezekiel we can add more) are here predicated of all the Gentiles in every place. Compare also Zeph. 2: 11 for the latter truth, and Isa. 56: 6-8 for the former. But both are for the future exclusively in the world or age to come: and the more we reflect upon it, the less need we wonder, and the more its importance will be felt by unprejudiced minds which tremble at God's word. Universal profession of Jehovah's name, not testimony only, will be the specific character of the millennial age. There may be gradation in the results; as it is plain there will be the highest manifestation as far as earth is concerned in Jerusalem. Israel will compose the inner circle for the earth, but not to the exclusion of divine and acceptable worship everywhere among the Gentiles; "for my name," says He, "shall be great among the heathen, saith Jehovah of hosts."

With the new heart given then to the Jew, he will rejoice in the flow of God's mercy to the Gentiles, and will call on all lands to shout joyfully to Jehovah — will invite their old enemies to enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; as even before the blessing is fully established they will pray that God's grace may shine on them, so that upon earth men may know His way, among all nations His salvation. How deep the change when old narrowness shall thus yield to grace, and the Jews will delight in all nations as such flocking up to Jerusalem! We have not forgotten how they heard Paul till the word from the Lord that he should be sent far from Jerusalem to the Gentiles. This was intolerable to their pride and jealousy: it was not fit, they cried, that such a fellow should live; but in that day they too will be Sauls no longer but Pauls. Many of the Psalms breathe the new spirit which will animate the generation to come, in vain now because of their blindness and hardness of unbelief, but to be full of life and power then.

The real source of the difficulty then is not the ambiguity of scripture, for contrariwise its language is clear and precise. It is due entirely to the habits of what is called spiritualising, so ingrained in Christendom since the days of Origen among the Greeks and Jerome among the Latins, though at work subtly from earliest days, when it came into constant collision with the apostle Paul. Not to maintain the distinctively earthly glory to Israel, as their future hope under Messiah and the new

covenant, invariably undermines Christianity and the church, which flourish only in proportion to firmly holding Christ and union with Him in heavenly places. The danger of the Gentiles thus becoming wise in their own conceit, and forgetting that the natural branches are only broken off in part for a season from their own olive tree, is strongly laid down in Rom. 11. Hold fast the new and heavenly glory for us with Christ dead, risen, and glorified, and you keep the promised earthly supremacy for Israel, who will (not reign with Him on high, but) be reigned over by Him when He appears again in glory, the undisputed Head of all things, heavenly and earthly.

For the heavenly people (who by the Holy Ghost sent down are one with Christ at the right hand of God, the great high priest, gone in through the rent veil) earthly sacrifices and incense, priesthood and sanctuary, are all passed and inconsistent with their standing and relationship. But it will not be so with the earthly people or the Gentiles who shall be blessed under His visible glory in the day which hastens. Theologians may dogmatize in an abstract manner; and their disciples may scorn to receive what will not mix with their traditions or their inferences; but the word of God is so explicit that a reverent and lowly man, if his knowledge were ever so scanty, should hesitate before he rejects that which is to be the distinctly revealed condition of this earth when the days of heaven shine on it, simply because he cannot make it fit into his religious system — the principle of rationalism, even though it largely obtain among those who flatter themselves that they are most opposed to that system.

As to the re-appearance of a vast central temple on earth, a human priesthood, sacrifices, and every other peculiarity of a ritual religion, it appears to my mind indisputable in the end of Ezekiel. I am aware that the great mass of Dissenters are as opposed to such an idea as the less intelligent portion of the high and low church parties. None seem more horrified at it than the members of the Society of Friends. I may be allowed to say that I once glanced at a review of a book of mine in one of their organs, in which the writer gave me quite enough credit in other respects, but seemed to suspect a craze on the subject of a restored theocracy of Israel, converted yet with priests and sacrifices once more. Nor is it a question of a single, however considerable, portion of scripture. The Psalms and Prophets abound in anticipations of the new age, when the temple and its services and priesthood should be to Jehovah's praise, on a new ground indeed, but otherwise substantially similar. And as to Ezekiel 40 - 48 the evidence is so strong that even Dr. Henderson, trained in the most hostile school of Nonconformists, the Congregationalists, was forced to concede that, as far as the temple and its ordinances are concerned, the vision is to be interpreted literally, though he tries to take other parts symbolically. But it is plain that this is the inconsistency of a hard-pressed interpreter, and that the vision is homogeneous. The city, the distribution of the tribes, the healing waters, the return of the cherubic glory, all go together and point, not to an imperfect copy of certain points of the temple in the post-captivity state, but to the glorious renovation, the times of restitution of all things, spoken of by all the holy prophets since the world began.

Here, as is known, the so-called Fathers fell into the most serious error, even such as looked for the return of the Lord and His future kingdom over the earth. But not one of them, as far as I remember (and my friend Dr. D. Brown has proved the point well), bore witness to the future national restoration of Israel to the promised land. They on the contrary embraced the further error of supposing that the risen saints would be in the earthly Jerusalem: thus ignorantly were the best of them agreeing to blot out the distinctive hopes of both Israel and the church; and so rapid was the departure of the early Christians even from plain prophetic facts. Still earlier had they lost sight of our heavenly relations to Christ, and of the capital truth of the Spirit's presence and action in the assembly here below. The consequence was that then was consummated the fatal scheme of treating the church systematically as Israel improved. Maintain simply and firmly the literal restoration of Israel as wholly distinct from

Christianity, and you have a bulwark against pseudo-spiritualism, and a groundwork, if rightly used, for seeing our special and heavenly privileges. The Fathers thought that Jerusalem during the millennium would be the city of the heavenly saints, that the Jews would be Christians, and that all would be together, risen and uprisen, reigning in glory. Can one wonder that men such as Dr. B. should set themselves against so incongruous a mixture of things heavenly and earthly? Nevertheless there is no good reason to deny, as he does, that Christ's advent precedes the millennium, any more than to explain away the restoration of Israel to their land according to prophecy and Rom. 11, as his friend Dr. Fairbairn does.

Scripture reveals both headed up under Christ (Eph. 1: 10), the heavenly part distinct from the earthly, the glorified saints in the one, the Jews and Gentiles in the other, and all under the Lord Jesus, the risen Bridegroom of the church. It is a serious error to mix them up; is it less serious, because of the confusion of ignorant men, to deny the revealed truth as to either one or other? Let it be noticed further that in Ezekiel we see a temple as well as a city for the earthly people. It is remarkable, on the contrary, that in what is expressly said to be the bride, the Lamb's wife (that is, the church or heavenly city of which John speaks), no temple is seen. Thus the distinction is maintained even in glory. Where a temple is on earth, a priesthood accompanies it; and if there be a priesthood, it is hard to see the use of it without sacrifices. With us spiritual priesthood and spiritual sacrifices go together. (Compare Heb. 10 - 13; and 1 Peter 2: 5.) Nor does scripture leave it to inferential reasoning whether there be Aaronic priests, offerings, and sacrifices or not; for this is affirmed and even minutely described. (Compare Psalms 96: 8; Ps. 115: 10; Ps. 118: 26, 27; Ps. 132: 13-18; Ps. 135: 19-21; Isaiah 60: 6, 7, 13; Isa. 66: 21; Jer. 33: 18; Ezek. 43 - 46; Zech. 14: 16-21)

The chief source of difficulty and hindrance is the system which assumes that Christianity is a final condition for the earth, and that the testimony will be as now until all the earth is converted, the Jews being at length brought in among the rest. It is another thing with those who believe that there is another age to follow the present, characterized by the salvation of all Israel as such, with the Gentiles largely blessed also, but not brought into the one body as we know now, but the Jews in their own land with the temple and its ritual and all the nations not only coming up there year by year, but having worship each in his own place also by the will of God. When the national restoration of the ancient people is seen, it is hard after this to deny their priests and sanctuary, their incense, and sacrifices. Further we learn that just as certain changes came in with the temple of Solomon, so will it be yet more conspicuously in the future day. Absolute silence as to Pentecost; but we see Tabernacles observed with special prominence, when the nations go up to worship Jehovah. Nobody need be afraid that all this will interfere with the value due to the sacrifice of Christ: we may trust God and His word that no dishonour shall be done to that only efficacious atonement. I presume that the sacrifices will be of a purely memorial character and nothing more. In that day no Israelite will ever again use the form to slight the substance. All will know that there is nothing efficacious in such sacrifices, any more than we acknowledge in baptism or the Lord's Supper. So with the Israel of that day. That they are to have sacrifices is a revealed fact; so they are to have priests over again on earth. It is well to see that this will not for them interfere with their resting on Christ; but, understanding it or not, we should believe, and not seek to explain it away. The saints since redemption will be above, as also the Old Testament saints, then risen from the dead; but on the earth will be the converted Israel of that day in their unchanged bodies, and the spared Gentiles, not possessed of exactly the same privileges, for Israel will then have the better place, but all blessed richly under Jehovah Messiah. As it is quite a different state of things from Christianity, so there will then be two distinct positions, heavenly and earthly, instead of one and the same as now.

As to the details of the future sacrifices of Israel, one could not expect them given everywhere. It is enough that God has been pleased to give the particulars in one clearly defined prediction. And whatever may be thought of obscurity elsewhere, it is impossible to say that Ezek. 43: 18, Ezek. 44: 15, Ezek. 45: 15-25, Ezek. 46 leave any question as to shedding blood sacrificially and offering victims on the altar of Jehovah. The Popish application of Mal. 1: 10, I may remark in addition to what has been already said, is a striking proof of the evil of the so-called "spiritualizing" of scripture. They draw the mass from it, as is well known, construing the pure offering of the wafer changed into Christ's body. This would be without force, but for the error prevalent among Protestants that it is here a question of the church, an error derived from the Fathers. In this as in other things the Papists simply took up the mistakes of the early writers, and worked them into a still more fatal system; while Protestants have but partially cleared themselves from that general and early declension, and in no way serve as a testimony to the authority of the word or the power of the Spirit.

"But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of Jehovah is polluted." Thus Jehovah resumes His expostulation, after having brought in the bright promise of millennial worship among the Gentiles. "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith Jehovah of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith Jehovah. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto Jehovah a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith Jehovah of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen."

This leads to further appeals, and still with the priests more particularly in view. "Like people, like priests:" if the people were bad, the priests were worse, as must usually be the case. "And now, O ye priests, lay it to heart." It was not only that they acted wrongly, but where was their conscience? "Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it." Jehovah proceeds to speak with the greatest contempt of the state to which He would reduce them as a chastening on their unfaithfulness. "And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith Jehovah of hosts." Levi is purposely introduced, because of his faithfulness at the crisis of the golden calf, in striking contrast with the conduct of him who ought to have been the most careful of Jehovah's glory, even Aaron the high priest "My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name." Jehovah looks back to the time when Levi consecrated his service at the cost of every human consideration, in not less striking contrast with once bitter revenge for his outraged sister. Here again we see how habitually the Lord goes, as in Malachi 1, to the source of things. So He took up Esau and Jacob at the beginning, and judges at the end. He pronounces on Levi and the priests. "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of Jehovah of hosts." Then comes His solemn estimate: "But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith Jehovah of hosts. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law."

As thus the sanctuary was polluted, and its ministers, and the offerings, so further we shall see the social life of Israel suffered no less. There is the deepest connection between a false religion, or a non-religion, and the practical ways of the people. "Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers? Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for

Judah hath profaned the holiness of Jehovah which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god." Thus, though not idolators, they had contracted the nearest relationship in life with the heathen. "Jehovah will cut off, the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar, out of the tabernacles of Jacob, and him that offereth an offering unto Jehovah of hosts. And this have ye done again, covering the altar of Jehovah with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that he regardeth not the offering any more, or receiveth it with good will at your hand." The prophet describes the weeping of the Jewish wives, now repudiated for the sake of the heathen they chose. It is the same state of things in Ezra, and especially Nehemiah. The heart of the people was sick as truly, yea, much more sick than in the earlier days when Isaiah laid it to their charge.

Nor was the moral insensibility less now but more. "Yet ye say, Wherefore?" They could not see wherein they were to blame. "Because Jehovah hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant." They were both placed on a common footing with God. "And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For Jehovah, the God of Israel, saith he hateth putting away." What alienation from God's mind and ways! They were given up to self. Their light spirit in divorce was now reaching its head among the Jews — in the remnant. "For one covereth violence with his garment, saith Jehovah of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously."

Thus, as the first chapter looks more at their religious life, the second, at least the latter part of it, takes in their social life; and in both we see total ruin and hardness of heart before God. Nevertheless it is well to observe how He connects together both elements, the social and religious. He begins with the root of it. If the soul is wrong towards God, there is not much hope for man, even in the closest relationships of this life.

Then we come to Malachi 3 which runs on really to the end, the third and fourth forming one strain of which the fourth is more a division than a separate chapter; and so it stands in the Hebrew. We find now the introduction of that which introduces the day of Jehovah in the last verse of Malachi 2, which, it seems, should rather be the first of chapter 3. "Ye have wearied Jehovah with your words; yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of Jehovah, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" Did any thus complain that evil prospered? The answer follows: "Behold, I send my messenger." It is rather the introduction that we see here. "And he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple." There is more than a messenger now; it is Messiah Himself, "even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith Jehovah of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi" (beginning with what most needed it, and what was nearest to the Lord), "and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer them unto Jehovah an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto Jehovah, as in the days of old, and as in former years. And I will come near to you to judgment." Here is the challenge of Malachi 2: 17 taken up by the God of judgment. The blessing of Jehovah is bound up with the judgment of Jehovah. It is a totally different thing from the gospel. Christianity shows us Christ bearing our judgment, and consequently brings in perfect grace towards the believer, except only that, being thus received on the ground of grace, he becomes a subject of the government of God in his earthly life of every day. Hence arises the need for patience on God's part, and growth on man's part, with watchfulness, prayer, self-judgment and the

Father's chastening, as well as above all the priesthood of Christ. But this supposes a soul resting on righteousness: Christ is made unto him righteousness. Then he has to walk accordingly; and this is carried on under the moral government of God. But it is a different thing from what we have here, where public power accompanies righteousness.

John the Baptist, as we know, was an accomplishment of the messenger in the past; Elijah the prophet seems to be the one who will make it good in the day that is coming. Why should we reason on these things? Let us receive the word of God with simplicity. We are fertile in difficulties. Our minds easily find hindrances in the way, and plenty of reasons not to believe what is revealed. Yet I think it plain that Elijah as a prophet is to be sent, but not before the Lord comes for us. Man makes a great mistake in confounding grace and judgment, the present with the future. Here it is in view of coming to judgment. Now the Lord has brought in grace, and He will finish its testimony and its dealings before He brings in judgment. The coming of the Lord in grace is the complement of the work, of grace. He will fulfil His new work with its eternal consequences. Then will come another age.

I should think Malachi 3 was fulfilled at that time, but that, being so very like what Elijah will do by and by, it is put in this general way. Then the Spirit of Jehovah by Malachi would still present to Israel the Lord's coming to them. One fully allows a partial accomplishment of Malachi both in John the Baptist and in Christ's coming to the temple (chap. 3); while it is evident when we come to the fourth chapter that it is exclusively the future. The third chapter touches partially on the past; but we can see that we are constantly arrested — that the first coming of Christ did not bring out all that is said even here. "And then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto Jehovah as in the days of old and as in former years." It is well known how far this was from fact. Consequently what follows far exceeds anything then realized in the judging of all wickedness among them. "And I will come near to you to Judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith Jehovah of hosts. For I am Jehovah, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them."

Then the call to return met with an unreasonable and rebellious reply: "Wherein shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." Jehovah takes them on the lowest possible ground. "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation, Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith Jehovah of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed." Such will be the case in the millennium: they will prove the Lord thus. They will humble themselves; they will trust Him; and all nations shall call them blessed. "For ye shall be a delightsome land" — which they have never been since this was written. On the contrary, "Your words have been stout against me, saith Jehovah. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before Jehovah of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."

But then the wickedness of the people in general was used of God for rousing the conscience of some in their midst. Among the returned remnant there was a godly portion. "Then* they that feared Jehovah spake often one to another: and Jehovah hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance

was written." It is plain that we have the spirit of this verified when Christ came. We see the Annas, the Simeons, and the shepherds, who show us exactly this state of spiritual feeling. They could and did communicate with all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And what was known then will be true again in a still more manifest way before the Lord comes and brings in the great and dreadful day of Jehovah.

*Venema takes verse 16 in contrast with the preceding verse, as the pious of old set thus off against the evil ways of the present generation. Hence the particles of time are taken in opposition. This, I confess, is to me more than doubtful; for the sense conveyed in the English Bible, which is that of other versions I have examined, seems preferable.

"And they shall be mine, saith Jehovah of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." The Jews themselves will no longer take the ground of being mere Jews. They will see the vanity of an outward place; they will value what is of God; they will abhor the more those who are wicked because they are Jews. The transgressors are to be made an abhorring to all flesh by the judgment of God in Jerusalem, as we find in the end of Isaiah 66; but here we find the discerning of it even before that judgment is accomplished. The heart of the righteous will be brought to feel the nature of what Jehovah will do when judgment comes.

"For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble." What matters where pride and wickedness may be? It is everywhere hateful to God, whether among Jews or Gentiles. It is even, if possible, more heinous among the Jews. "And the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith Jehovah 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 wings." This is not the morning star, which is rather the way in which we know Jesus, and look for Him. The morning star is as decidedly for those who during the night look up into the heavens, as the Sun of righteousness causes His force to be felt in calling man to be occupied with his work here below. It is the sun that rules the day. Be it that the day of Jehovah is come; the Sun of righteousness rules it. You cannot avoid seeing sunlight unless you shut your eyes, and even then may have an instinctive sense of it. But with the morning star it is not so: you must look for it when others sleep. This is the way therefore in which the Spirit of God shows us our watching for Jesus. It is exclusively heavenly, and supposes faith, love, and hope in the power of the Holy Ghost.

There is more however to notice here. "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked." Here is a twofold issue — mercy to the righteous, and judgment to the wicked. This is not at all applicable to Christianity, because every one is now judged by Christ's cross as wicked until they receive Jesus; and then, no matter what they may have been before, they are justified by faith and enter on an entirely new course. But there is no treading down the wicked yet, nor will it be at any time as long as Christianity goes on. It is wholly future, and will be when Jehovah takes up the Jews and judgment comes upon the world. "And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith Jehovah of hosts."

Next follow two points of interest. One is the remembrance of the law of Moses. They look back; and this is the test to judge their whole course from first to last. Again they will look forward: "Behold I send you Elijah the prophet." Thus, though about Israel, it shows us the two ways of judging aright the present — in the light of the past, and in that of the future. It always therefore requires faith to

judge according to God. Hence Malachi brings in morally the giver of the law and the restorer of the law, the two great pillars of the Jewish nation, heralding the way before Jehovah who alone can bestow and sustain the blessing.

"And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Such is the warning note given here by Him who is the best blessing He can bestow. Heaven and earth and all things shall be shaken, but Jehovah abides; and blessed are all they that put their trust in Him. We know that the restoring of all things morally will be wrought in the hearts of fathers and sons in Israel, and that God will make them as life from the dead to the world, and thus spread His saving health among all nations who shall be blessed, not cursed, in the Seed of promise.

In the spirit and power of Elijah came Jehovah's messenger, John the Baptist, and many of the sons of Israel did he turn to Jehovah their God. The language seems expressly to guard against the error of supposing that it was the predicted mission of Elijah the prophet. If ye will receive it, said our Lord Himself, this is Elijah who should come. It was a testimony to faith, not the fulfilment of the terms of Malachi's last intimation. (Malachi 4) Even in our Lord's own case all that was bright and manifest blessing for Israel was arrested by the unbelief of the people, and thus the door was opened on His rejection to heavenly blessings for all believers indiscriminately. Hence for the time the moral restitution of the Jews was partial; and (the mass being impenitent, and family bonds utterly relaxed and broken) the land was smitten with a curse from that day to this. But it will not be always thus. For grace will work in a remnant once more in the last days when the full accomplishment of Elijah's mission shall be realized (Matt. 17: 11), and, the apostates perishing under divine judgment, all Israel shall be saved to the joy and blessing of the earth and of all its families. And such is the common voice of the holy prophets since the world began.

We have now in the goodness of God followed the course of the lesser prophets from beginning to end. We have glanced at themselves and briefly compared them with each other. How solemn for the believer to see the same ominous sign of sure coming judgment in Christendom as we may have discerned throughout the course of Israel, The possession of much truth no more guarantees now than then that we are true witnesses for God in our own day; still less the assumption that we have a position according to God because we are in a certain historical line of succession. So thought those who broke the law, rejected the prophets, slew the Messiah, and refused the fresh testimony of the Holy Spirit. Let us beware of making the same fatal mistake, and rather examine whether we are walking in the distinctive truth God has revealed to us for His own glory in Christ, not merely in truths, however momentous, which do not so much put conscience to the proof. The unity of the Godhead was perverted by the Jews to the dishonour of the Son; the Son as He was on earth under law is now abused in Christendom to ignore redemption, union with Him on high, the presence of the Spirit in the assembly of God here below, and the constant hope of Christ's coming. These are the truths which try the ground of the heart in the Christian. May we be found faithful and strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus!