# Malachi

by Edward Dennett

*Edward Dennett's exposition of Malachi, the last Old Testament prophet, covering the priests' degradation, the people's lack of love for God, the promised messenger and the coming of the Sun of Righteousness.*

5 Chapters

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Chapter 2

# Mal 1:1-14

Mal 1:1-14.

THE law and the prophets, we read, were until John; and the Baptist indeed closed up the dispensation of which they were the expressions, inasmuch as he was the fore-runner of the Messiah Himself. But Malachi* was the last of the prophets, the last canonically (for if there were any after him, their prophecies have not been preserved), and the last morally; for he testifies of the coming of the Lord, and of the shining forth of the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings. His prophecies therefore have a grave and solemn importance, and on two accounts. First, as showing the state of the remnant who, in the tender mercy of God, had been brought back from Babylon that He might declare His faithfulness, and fulfil His purpose in the presentation of Messiah to His people; and secondly, because of the correspondence of the position of this remnant with that of God's people at the present moment. As there was nothing between them, so there is nothing to intervene between ourselves, and the expectation of the Lord's return. The message to them was, "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple;" to us it is, "Behold, I come quickly." Whether there is any similarity in our moral condition to theirs, it will be for our consciences to detect as we ponder the revelations found in the book, and the instruction it affords. One other preparatory remark may be made. Though all the people addressed were the descendants of those who had returned from captivity, and all alike were in fact on the ground. of, as well as actually by descent, God's people, yet a remnant is discerned in the midst of this remnant, and it is these alone who meet the mind of the Lord. (See especially Mal 3:14-18) The book has therefore a special voice in a day like this for those who have been brought out from the corruptions of Christendom, and for those amongst them whose one desire is to be found keeping the word of Christ, and not denying His name.

*It is interesting to note, especially in connection with chapter 3, that "Malachi" means the messenger of Jehovah. The prophet therefore, as was not unusual, had a typical character.

There is something almost sublime in the simple and emphatic way in which the book commences.

"The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, saith the Lord." (vv. 1, 2.)

Whatever the state of His people, the Lord never forgets, and never hesitates to declare, His love for them. it is in this way indeed that He brings their true condition to light. We might have supposed that the first word would be one of warning and rebuke on account of their sins; but no, God's first word is one that ought to have recalled the length and breadth, the depth and height, of that unchanging love which had flowed out in the activities of His mercy and grace from the call of Abraham until now. It is so also in the epistles. The heart of God for His saints is always displayed before the needed admonitions and corrections are given. As we read in another prophet, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." (Jer 31:3.) We are thus brought face to face with the source of our redemption, and of all the blessings we enjoy; for we cannot be too often reminded that we do not belong to the Lord because we love Him, but because He has loved us and made us what we are. (Cp. 1Jn 4:9-10; Rev 1:5-6;Deu 7:6-8, &c.)

With this simple declaration of Jehovah's love the state of the people immediately appears in their response, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" the expression of a moral insensibility, as well as of spiritual

blindness, which is their characteristic in this prophecy. Blind indeed they must have been to question the truth of Jehovah's love; for had they not the records of the wonders He had wrought in their redemption, in the guidance of their fathers through the wilderness, in dispossessing the heathen and setting them in a land flowing with milk and honey? And was not their own position at that moment the proof of it. Ah! but they would have probably said, "If the Lord loves us, why have we suffered chastisement and judgment, and why are we now so feeble and impoverished?" This is but a common deception which souls in every age practise upon themselves; that is, these poor Israelites wanted to turn every one after his own ways, and to have at the same time the blessing of God, to please themselves and yet to be surrounded with the tokens of God's favour. (Compare Jer 44:1-30) They had not, as so many of us have not, learned the truth, "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

But the Lord proceeds to give His own proofs, and puts the question through the prophet, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." (vv. 2, 3.) It must be carefully observed that this is not an appeal to God's sovereignty in His choice of Jacob as in Rom 9:1-33, where the apostle indeed cites this passage (after he has recalled the scripture which announced the divine purpose respecting Esau and Jacob) to show, not only that Israel was entirely indebted to grace for the difference God had put between themselves and Esau, but also that God's ways with the two branches of Isaac's descendants had been in accordance with His purposes. The evidence here given is drawn wholly, not from God's action towards Esau himself, but from God's judgments upon his posterity — "I laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." And in other scriptures we find (see especially Obadiah) that these judgments were visited upon them because of their irreconcilable hatred of Israel, and their triumph over, and their vengeance upon, them in the day of their calamity. God had chosen Jacob — let not this truth be ignored, albeit Esau despised his birthright; but the scripture before us concerns the ways rather than the sovereignty of God.

Moreover the Lord takes occasion to proclaim His everlasting indignation against Edom (seeIsa. 34:5-8; Isa 63:1-4; Jer 49:9-17, &c.), and that though Edom would seek, in the energy of their own strength, to build, God, being against them, would throw down, and manifestly make them a byword amongst their neighbours who should call them "The border of wickedness," and "The people against whom Jehovah hath indignation for ever." Thus the issue of God's dealings with Israel and Esau respectively would prove His love for His chosen people; but He says, "Your, eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The Lord will be magnified from the border of Israel." From the revelation thus made flow two most instructive lessons. First, that God is not to be judged by present circumstances. It is the result of His ways that vindicates His name. Faith always justifies God in His dealings with His people; but eventually all His ways will be seen, as in the case before us, to be the expression both of His love and His truth. The second lesson is, that God never allows the state of His people to interfere with the accomplishment of His counsels of grace. Thus at the very moment that He is about to expose the wretched spiritual condition of Israel, He declares their future blessing. Truly the knowledge of this should humble us, and at the same time give us a deeper sense of the sin of coldness, indifference, and backsliding in the presence of such unchanging grace and love. He can righteously act thus, because He has been (and all His ways with Israel had respect to this) so abundantly glorified in the death of His beloved Son, who died for that nation, and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. (Joh 11:51-52.)

The Lord having reminded His people of His relationship to them, and of His unalterable purposes of grace, now commences on that foundation to search them as to their practical condition. This principle is of all importance. The believer can never measure his true state before God unless he does it by the standard of the position in which he by grace has been set. It is a common error to deduce our place from our state; but nothing could more completely contradict the truth of God. If a saint, if a child of God, a member of Christ, a believer, does not cease to be this because he has backslidden, and become insensible to the claims which are thus established upon him, it is only, on the other hand, by the acceptance, without question, of every position in which he has been put, that he can either understand what grace is, or gauge the depth of his fall, if he has fallen. It is on this principle that Jehovah acts in this scripture, and hence He says: "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 the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?" (v. 6.)

In this solemn manner does God arraign, not the people merely, but especially the priests. These He had chosen to stand before Him, to offer the sacrifices of His people, to instruct them in His word, and to have compassion on the ignorant and those that were out of the way; but so far from meeting their responsibilities they had sunk into complete moral degradation. The state of the priests, even as now the state of those who presumptuously take the place of such, as well as those who are really "pastors and teachers," is always more or less the state of the people. And what is the indictment that God brings against these sons of Aaron? He says, 'You profess that I am a Father to you' (and the adoption belonged to Israel), 'and that I am your Master: where then,' He asks, 'are the honour and the reverence due to me as such?' Nay, He tells them, "You despise my name."

The response to this charge brings out a characteristic of the whole book. "Wherein," say they, "have we despised thy name?" (See vv. 2, 6, 7; Mal 3:7-8; Mal 3:13.) Not only were they pursuing a course of forgetfulness of God, and dishonouring His name in all that they did, but, what was still worse, they were also ignorant of their actual condition. Hence in reply to the charges brought against them, they say, almost in surprise, "Wherein" have we done this or that? The counterpart of this may be seen in every age. Together with declension, spiritual perceptions grow ever more feeble, and keeping up, and it may be diligently and zealously, the outward forms of religion, souls are astonished if their attention is directed to their state. "An evil prophet," say they;" he takes a gloomy view of things; it is not well to be occupied with evil. Are we not the Lord's people? Ah! he should see us as the Lord sees us, and then he would look more constantly on to the time when the Church will be presented to Christ in all her spotless beauty and glory." But the work of a prophet is to deal with the state of the people, and to set their consciences in exercise in the presence of God, to cry indeed with Paul, "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you a chaste virgin to Christ." (2Co 11:1-33)

Let us then see how God proves to these careless priests that they were despising His name. He says:

"Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? 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 the Lord 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 the Lord of hosts. Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand." (vv. 7-10.)

It should be noted that the altar and the table of the Lord, in this scripture, are one and the same thing. The altar is thus denominated because the sacrifices were termed, as also Christ whom these typified, God's bread. (See Lev 21:6; Lev 21:8; Lev 21:17; Lev 21:21-22; Num 28:2; Joh 6:33.) Hence the priests here are charged with offering polluted bread upon God's altar in proof that they despised Jehovah's name; for in so doing they plainly showed that they had lost all conception of the holiness of Him to whom they professed to sacrifice, and that the altar was in their eyes but a common thing, saying, by their act, that the Lord's table was contemptible. But the charge against them is even more distinct: they offered the blind, the lame, and the sick for sacrifice, thereby violating, and knowingly violating, one of the most rigid precepts of the Scriptures. In every case the animal offered upon the altar was to be "without blemish" (see Lev 22:17-25), that it might be a more fitting type of Christ. But this was to give God of their best; and these men, as they surveyed their herds and flocks, lost to all sense of the divine claims, and the meaning of the sacrifices He required, were willing to give Him what was of no use to themselves — their valueless animals, but nothing more, thereby truly despising His name, polluting His altar, and making the Lord's table contemptible. They were thus treating Jehovah as they would not have dared to do with their governor. 'Offer what you offer me, saith the Lord, unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person?' They knew he would not.

Is there no voice to us in this solemn language? Are we never betrayed into offering to the Lord our useless things? When, for example, the opportunity is presented of giving to the Lord of our substance, to minister to His poor, or to have fellowship with His work in encouraging those who go forth, whether at home or abroad, taking nothing of the Gentiles, in what way do we act? Do we give of our best, of our first-fruits, or of our superfluities or useless things? Do we lay, so to speak, upon the altar as much as we can, or only as much as we may think necessary? Do we, in a word, acknowledge that the Lord's claims — we speak after the manner of men — are first and foremost? Do we begin first with Him or with ourselves? And do we never give more to man, when he asks of us, than we should have done if left to ourselves to act in secret before the Lord? Has not man indeed often more influence upon us in these things, because he is seen, than the Lord who is not seen? We might well search our hearts by the light of such words, that, while learning from them the state of this poor remnant, we may gain practical instruction for ourselves.

The prophet thereon proceeds (as it seems to us) in a tone of irony, "And now, I pray you, beseech God that He will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means" (or, from your hand): "will He regard your persons? saith the Lord of hosts." "If I regard iniquity in my heart," says the Psalmist, "the Lord will not hear me." But these priests, spite of their condition — utterly indifferent and insensible as they were — did not hesitate to appear before God as if all were well. Pray, then, says the prophet, intercede that God may be gracious to us, and see if He will regard your persons. It is often a characteristic of a backslidden state that the outward forms of piety are continued, and sometimes with increased zeal. In proportion as life decays the attention is directed to rites and ceremonies. The soul thus deceives itself, and slides, as in the case before us, into a state of ignorance of its real condition. Losing all sense of its relationship with God, it places its dependence upon the exact performance of the required ceremonial. The Pharisees, for example, were most scrupulous in cleansing the outside of the cup and the platter, while they were perfectly indifferent concerning their inward cleansing.

Another charge is now formulated against these wicked priests. "Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought?" (evidently the doors of the temple) "neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought." (v. 10.) So low had these sons of Aaron fallen that, forgetting the election of grace which had

distinguished them from their brethren, and conferred upon them the privilege of being Jehovah's ministers, they now only regarded the work of their office as a means of profit. What a contrast to the spirit of the psalmist as he exclaims, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. . . . A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." (Psa 84:1-12; see also Psa 122:1-9, etc.) God Himself had provided for the maintenance of His priests; but they were not satisfied indeed to be in dependence upon Him; they desired to extort their remuneration from their fellow men. No greater revelation of the state of their hearts in their alienation from God could possibly be made. And is not this same spirit to-day the curse, as well as the evidence of the condition, of Christendom? Is it not notorious that so-called "sacred offices" are sought for and held for the sake of position and emolument? What "section" of the Church is free from this deadly taint? There are individual exceptions, thank God, but these are few and far between — the vast majority of preachers and "ministers" seeking for and obtaining specified salaries for the work which they engage to do. The cry therefore might be sounded out through the professing Church with equal propriety at the present time — "Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought." And yet there is no lesson, more plainly written in the word of God than that He Himself undertakes for His servants, that, if it be His work they are engaged in, He will see to their recompense, for He will be debtor to none. Thus if the Lord borrowed the boat of Peter to speak from to the people on the shore, He will immediately reward Peter (not to enter upon the deeper significance of the incident) with a draught of fish. How much happier for us all (for none of us are exempt from the danger) to learn to be dependent on God, that we may be independent of men.

The climax of their spiritual condition having been indicated, Jehovah declares that He has no pleasure in them, and that He would not accept an offering at their hands. (Compare Isa 1:1-31 andHebrews 10) This announcement becomes the occasion of the revelation of His purposes of grace towards the Gentiles. "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts." (v. 11) These two things are ever conjoined in Scripture — the unbelief and apostacy of the Jew, and the bringing in of the Gentile. The apostle explains it when he says, "I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." (Rom 11:25. CompareIsaiah 49, Act 13:45-48, etc.)

In the remaining verses of the chapter (12-14) the Lord reaffirms His charges against His people, bringing out even more fully how completely they despised His service, esteeming it a "weariness;" and He then pronounces a curse upon "the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing." (Compare with this the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, in

Act 5:1-42.) He affirms His word (so to speak) by the declaration, "For I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen." Together with moral insensibility — the special characteristic brought out in this chapter — there is always of necessity the loss of all sense of the holiness of God, and of what is due to His name. But whenever and wherever this is the case, God will cause His name to be honoured and reverenced even by those who hitherto had not known Him. He will be glorified, and in this way convict His people of their sin, and turn that sin, blessed be His name, into the opportunity for the outflow of the streams of His grace towards those — the Gentiles — who had no claim upon Him but for judgment. The introduction of the word king in this connection is significant. Not only is it

the assertion of the divine authority in the kingdom, but it also contains a warning of the approach of the time when the kingdom would be established in power and righteousness, and when, as a consequence, there would be a limit to Jehovah's long-suffering and forbearance towards those who despised His name.

Chapter 3

# Mal 2:1-17

Mal 2:1-17.

THIS chapter is chiefly devoted to the priests. They were formally addressed in the first chapter, but there rather as being the expression of the state of the people, on the principle, "Like priest, like people." Here it is their own fearful degradation that is brought to light, in contrast with what they ought to have been as chosen of God for the communication of His mind and will, and as intermediaries between Himself and His people, Most abrupt and severely solemn is the opening of the chapter: "And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you." Then, from verses 2 to 4, we have the denunciation of judgment unless they should repent; from verses 5 to 7, what God intended the priest to be; and then, in verses 8 and 9, their actual condition, and God's action towards them Such is the outline of the first part of the chapter, which we now proceed to examine.

Every reader of the Scriptures must have noticed that there is always, so to speak, a period of grace before the visitation of judgment. So here. God first exposes the sorrowful moral state of His people, and then, while warning them that He cannot continue to tolerate their highhanded iniquity, He gives them space for repentance. "If ye will not hear," He says, "and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart."

This passage is very instructive. It teaches us what God desires from His people while in the place of testimony. It is to give glory unto His name. Thus at the very outset He said to Moses, "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him, and obey His voice, provoke Him not; for He will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in Him." (Exo 23:20-21.) The glory of His name (and this name is now fully expressed in the Lord Jesus Christ; for the divine name signifies the truth of what God is, and all the glory of God shines forth now, as we know, in the face of Christ at the right hand of God), is the one object God has at heart, and the dishonour of that name is consequently the one thing which He cannot overlook. What a lesson to us in this day, brought as we are through the death and resurrection of Christ into God's immediate presence, — and possessing as we do the blessed privilege, while here upon the earth, of being gathered unto the name of Christ! How zealous it should make us, in all the details of our meetings and of our service, to uphold the honour of the name of Christ, to make that our first aim in all connected with the Church of God; for it is only then that we can be in the enjoyment of fellowship with the heart of God. Through all and by all He is working for this one end — the glory of His name; and if we have entered in any measure into His mind and will, His aim and end will also be ours. In this way also we have a certain test for all our own actions and activities as well for all the schemes and work of the professing Church. The simple question, "Is it for the glory of the Lord's name?" will elicit the character of everything that claims our attention.

A second lesson is, that the object of God's ways in government with His people is that they may lay their condition to heart. On this account it is He uses His rod. This is strikingly exemplified in the book of Haggai "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways." For there the remnant were occupied with their own interests, building their own houses, and neglecting the house of the Lord. God therefore, as in Malachi, "cursed their blessings," saying, I smote you with blasting, and with mildew, and with hail, in all the labours

of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the Lord." (Hag 1:1-15; Hag 2:1-23) On the same principle He still acts in government, and many a chastening which falls upon His people has for its end that they may lay their condition to heart. And nothing proves so distinctly the insensibility of our hearts when, after passing through trials, whether individually or in connection with the Church, we pay little or no heed as to the object God had in view, and flatter ourselves that all is well. Every stroke of God's rod should produce great searchings of heart, and where it does not, it is the sure precursor of the sorer chastenings of His hand. For, as we learn from this scripture, God does not forget; for He says, "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, I WILL curse your blessings."

He goes still further: "Behold, I will corrupt" [see margin] "your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it." (v. 3.) This passage is somewhat obscure as it stands in our translation, but it is not difficult to ascertain its general meaning.* It was ever a characteristic of the Jew, that the farther he had departed in heart from the Lord, the more he prided himself upon the externals of the Mosaic economy, and upon all the ritualistic observances he himself had connected with it. (See Mat 15:1-39) It was so at this time, and Jehovah warns them that He will humiliate them in the very things by which they exalted themselves. Thus, as they had said, "The table of Jehovah is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even His meat, is contemptible" (Mal 1:12), so He would pollute and make them contemptible by means of the very beasts — blind and lame and sick — wherewith they dishonoured Jehovah's name. But again, in His tender mercy, even this dealing of His hand should have the correction of His priests as its aim; for He says, "And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the Lord of hosts."

*Some translate, "I will rebuke the seed for your sake i.e. that it should not grow. In this way, since the priests received the tithes, God would deprive them of a considerable part of their means of subsistence.

The mention of the name of Levi leads to the introduction of the nature of God's original covenant with him, and the statement of God's own thought of the priesthood when He first established it. Connected with this is a principle of great importance, affirmed everywhere in the Scripture. It is, that in times of apostasy the real state of those in it can only be understood when tested by what it was at the outset, For example, if we would comprehend the condition of the Church at the present moment, we must compare it with Pentecost. So when the Lord sends His message to Ephesus, He says, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen; and repent, and do the first works." To Sardis He also says, "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard," &c. (Rev 2:1-29; Rev 3:1-22) In like manner God, in this scripture, puts alongside the corruption into which the priests had fallen what the priesthood was in its first institution. This principle contains a greatly-needed lesson for this day. We are continually exhorted to go back to the "fathers" for guidance in ecclesiastical matters. Go back by all means, not, however, to the fathers, but to the fountainhead, the apostolic and inspired writings. Only thus can we detect our departure from the truth and our fallen condition.

Let us now examine this beautiful picture of the priesthood as delineated by the Lord Himself through the prophet. It was a sovereign act of God's favour in choosing Aaron and his sons for the priesthood. (Exo 28:1.)* It was not till afterwards that God made a covenant with "Levi," and then on the ground of their faithfulness in the midst of apostasy and sin. (Read Exo 32:26-29;Num 25:10-13; and Deu 33:8-11) "My covenant" says the Lord, "was with him of life and peace." What a blessed conjunction! Life here would seem to be that generally spoken of under the Jewish dispensation, though doubtless in the mind of God it had a fuller and deeper meaning, which could not then be explained, since life and incorruptibility were to

be brought to light by the gospel. Peace could have but one signification — peace with Him who had put "Levi" into the office, not in the divine sense in which it is now enjoyed through the blood of Christ, but still peace. And the same order still obtains — first life, and then peace. Born again through the action of the Spirit by the Word, we have, together with a new nature, life; and then, led to a knowledge of the efficacy of the work of Christ, we have peace. This is ever the divine order, and peace can never be enjoyed — let it be carefully noted — without or before life. The difference between the life and peace covenanted to Levi from that bestowed now on those who believe in Christ may be seen from the fact that they were given to Levi as a reward for fidelity — "And I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name." This is in accordance with the truth of that dispensation, under which life was to be the result of obedience. These distinctions must be observed if we would enter intelligently into the instructions of the Old Testament.

*All the Levites were taken for the service of the tabernacle, given unto Aaron and his sons for this purpose, sanctified to God on the day that He smote the firstborn of Egypt (Num 8:1-26); but the priesthood was confined to the family of Aaron.

A remarkable description follows. "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." In these expressions we cannot fail to see a greater than "Levi;" for they contain God's ideal of the priesthood which was realized only in Christ, Taken absolutely indeed they could only be spoken of Him of whom the priests of old were but the types, of the One who answered every thought of the heart of God, tested too as He was by the perfect standard of His own holiness. Yea, none but He who was the truth ever had the law of truth in His mouth; and hence when asked by the Jews who He was, He replied, "Altogether that which I have said unto you" (Joh 8:25); i.e., His words were the perfect display of what He was, every one of them being the revelation of His own perfection. Iniquity consequently was not, could not be, found in His lips; and since He always did the things that pleased the Father (Joh 8:29), He walked with Him in peace and equity, and at the same time turned many from iniquity.* While, however, bearing in mind that Christ as the perfect priest is here adumbrated, the words are spoken of "Levi," and we may thus learn the perfect standing which God gives to His own in His presence, just as, for example, when Satan attempted through Balaam to curse the people of God, the answer was, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel." (Num 23:21.)†

*Compare as to this last expression Isa 53:11 — "By His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many;" more truly rendered, "by His knowledge turn many to righteousness."

†See also 2Sa 7:1-29 as an example of how the Lord could take up Solomon as a type of Christ, using expressions which will only find their complete fulfilment in the Prince of Peace.

In the next verse we have the responsibility side, together with the character of the office — "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." This is what Jehovah intended His priests to be in the midst of Israel; that is, in the aspect of their office towards the people. They represented the people before God, and they were charged to represent God to the people. The apostle therefore in writing to the Hebrews says, "Consider the apostle and High Priest of our profession, Jesus;" and the first chapter of the epistle exhibits Him as the apostle or the messenger of God — the One coming out from God, while the second sets Him forth as going in on behalf of the people to God — as the merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people, thus laying the efficacious foundation on which He

could take up and exercise His office in the holiest of all. Doubtless in the wilderness it was Moses rather who acted as the "apostle;" while Aaron filled the functions of the priesthood Godward, the two together being in this way a type of Christ. (Compare Lev 9:23-24) Still the two aspects were combined in the instructions given to Aaron. We accordingly read, "And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations: and that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; and that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses." (Lev 10:9-11) We thus see that the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they (the people) should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But the priest could only be this when he was occupied with the mind of God, as embodied in His law and statutes, when he treasured it up in his heart so that his own life might be the outflow of the power of the Word within. Thus "keeping" knowledge with his lips, he would be the ready instructor of those who sought counsel at his mouth. Alas! instead of this the priests in this book were the leaders in transgression, falsifying the holy position in which they had been placed, and the seducers of those of whom they ought to have been the guides in right paths. On this account it is that the Lord says, "Ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law: ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord 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." (vv. 8, 9.)

We see exemplified here the same thing as obtains everywhere in the Scriptures; viz., that responsibility is increased by position and privilege. Thus if the priest or a ruler sinned, he had to bring a larger sacrifice than one of the common people. (Lev 4:1-35) So in this chapter the priests, being the appointed instructors of the people, are dealt with more severely — with unsparing judgment. Instead of guiding the people aright, as we have seen, they caused many to stumble. Whenever leaders go astray, the consequences are more grave, for they are more influential, both for good and for evil. Many illustrations of this may be found in the history of the Church of God. A private Christian falling into error or immorality exerts an influence only upon his own circle; but if a teacher, prominent in the Church, departs from the way of truth, he oftentimes draws away thousands after him in his own evil path. On the other hand, just as we read here, "I have made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways," etc., so will it be when such are guilty of glaring inconsistencies. If the walk of those who assume "sacred" offices, or of those who are really gifts to the Church, be not according to godliness, they will soon be despised and regarded as contemptible. Even a man of the world has no respect for those whose lives belie their profession.

But in the application of these solemn truths to ourselves, it must not be forgotten that the priests under the Mosaic dispensation typify the whole Church as the priestly family. We may all, therefore, well enquire whether these charges could be sustained against ourselves; whether we, whose boast, by the grace of God, it is that we have been made kings and priests to God and the Father, are stumbling-blocks to others because we have not kept the ways of the Lord, and have been "partial" in His word.* Would that this word of God might prove, as we read it, living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and be a discerner of the thoughts and intents of our hearts; that we might truly take the place of self-judgment before God as to our state and ways, and so receive restoring grace and blessing at His hands!

*In the margin "accepted faces" is given instead of "partial," and this indeed is the literal rendering. The priests therefore were guilty of interpreting the law to please persons, and it may be for the sake of advantage.

In the second section of the chapter (vv. 10-12), the offences of God's people against their brethren, and their sin in uniting themselves with idolaters, are exhibited. It is no longer the priests especially, except indeed their conduct might be taken as indicative of that of all, that are addressed, but the Spirit of God now includes both Judah and Israel. The first sin mentioned is that of dealing treacherously every man against his brother by profaning the covenant of their fathers. (v. 10.) And how does the prophet meet it? or rather, what are the truths he adduces to show the evil of their conduct? They are two — their common standing before God, on the ground of His covenant (Have we not all one Father?), and their common relationship to God as their Creator (Hath not one God created us?). Knit thus by common ties to God, both in creation and (as we might say) redemption, they were bound together by common relationships, interests, and blessings, the knowledge of which should have guarded them from thus sinning against their brethren. In doing so, they profaned the covenant which had been made with their fathers, the second great commandment of which was, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The apostle Paul, it will be remembered, uses a similar argument in writing to the Ephesians. "Wherefore," he says, "putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour; for we are members one of another." (Eph 4:25.) The moment, indeed, we realize that we are bound up together with our fellow-Christians by imperishable ties as members of the same body, and also as members of the same family, we shall look upon their welfare and interests as our own. But when all sense of the oneness of God's people is lost, as in the case before us, every. man will seek after his own things; self and selfishness will predominate and rule, to the destruction of all brotherly care and love.

Another thing may be observed as arising out of the connection. The priests had "departed out of the way," and then they are found dealing treacherously every man against his brother. In the gospel of Matthew we find a very similar thing. The evil servant says in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming," and he immediately begins to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken. In both cases alike, losing all sense of the divine claims and of the nature of their position is followed by evil conduct towards their brethren. The comparison indeed goes further; for as the next thing the evil servant does is "to eat and drink with the drunken," so here, after the dealing treacherously every man with his brother, we have union with "the daughter of a strange god" — in both cases alliance with the world. And this is ever the moral order: first, relationships with God ignored, then with our brethren, and finally association with the world. There are four terms employed in this passage to indicate this grievous form of the iniquity of God's people: dealing treacherously (not, as in the preceding verse, with their brethren, but with God — compare

Jer 3:6-10), committing abomination — a frequent expression in the Scriptures for idolatry (seeJer. 4:1; Dan 9:27; Mat 24:15, etc.), profaning the holiness of the Lord which he had loved, and marrying the daughter of a strange god. (v. 11)

Almost from the time that God redeemed Israel out of Egypt, this last sin is mentioned as that into which they were continually falling. Balak, under the advice of Balaam, succeeded in tempting them into it at Baalpeor. (Num 25:1-9) It was the head and front of Solomon's offending, and the cause of the alienation of his heart from God. It was the difficulty that Ezra had to contend with almost immediately after God in His mercy had brought the remnant from Babylon and set them again in their own land. And may we not say that it is the prevailing sin of the Church? Satan is the god of this world (2Co 4:1-18), and those who

worshipped idols really worshipped demons (1Co 10:20); so that alliance with the world partakes of the same character as marriage with the daughter of a strange god. We see how the apostle Paul lifts up his voice against this besetting sin when he cries, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel [unbeliever]? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God," etc. (2Co 6:14-16.) The same apostle also explains the only way by which we may overcome the attractions of the world when he says, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom [or whereby] the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Gal 6:14.) But judgment swift and sure, if there be no repentance, will be visited in such a case; for the prophet says, "The Lord 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 the Lord of hosts." No position, neither age nor youth, nor any external religiousness, should shield the offender; for the God who had redeemed them out of Egypt was holy, and He required holiness on the part of His people. (See Lev 11:44-45; 1Pe 1:15-16.)

The last part of the chapter is comprised in verses 13-16. The seventeenth verse really belongs toMal. 3. From verse 13 we learn that, together with all the moral corruption which we have considered, there were all the outward signs of devotion to the service. of Jehovah. And what would seem so strange, did we not know the immense amount of deception it is possible to practise upon ourselves, is, that knowing how they had departed from the living God, they yet could not, or professed that they could not, understand why the Lord did not accept their offerings. "This," says Malachi, "have ye done again, covering the altar of the Lord 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. Yet ye say, Wherefore?" How often is this the case with God's people even now — cleaving to their sins, and yet surprised that He does not hear their cries, forgetful of the truth uttered by the apostle, "If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." (1Jn 3:20.) But if they say, "Wherefore?" the answer is at hand; and it reveals another form of evil existing at that time amongst this poor degraded people: "Because the Lord 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." (v. 14.) We learn, from the answer of our Lord to the Pharisees, that divorce was permitted to the Jew, under the Mosaic dispensation, "because of the hardness of their hearts;" but He expressly adds, "from the beginning it was not so." (Mat 19:3-9) And the farther they departed in heart and ways from God, not only did they the more frequently avail themselves of this permission, but they also so abused it that the marriage bond became relaxed on every side, and they separated from their wives at their own will and pleasure.

This is the evil which the prophet here denounces, and from which he takes occasion to show the oneness of man and wife according to the original institution of marriage. There could be no greater evidence of moral corruption than what has been termed the levity of divorce. Even now, when a people or nation make it easy for man and wife to obtain a legal separation, it is a sure sign of the decay of public morals. And we cannot but again call attention to the order of the sins here enumerated. First, there was the corruption of the covenant of Levi, and then the dealing treacherously every man against his brother, dealing treacherously with God in the matter of idolatry, and lastly, dealing treacherously with the wife of their youth. It is religious, social, and domestic corruption; and let it be carefully observed that the last two flow from the first. The modern doctrine is that an atheist even may perform the duties of this life. It is utterly impossible; for where the conscience is not in exercise before God there is no guarantee for fidelity to man, or even, as in this scripture, to those who are united by the closest of all ties. Dissolve the tie

between man and God, and you dissolve every other tie that unites man to man. These of whom the prophet speaks were the professing people of God, and were still punctilious in the observance of their sacrificial ritual, and yet they were unfaithful in every relationship in which they stood (compare Mic 7:1-6); and the flesh is the same in every age, and, though social restraints may vary in different ages, it will ever find its outlet in corrupt channels. If, therefore, there be no fear of God before the eyes of men, sin and iniquity must continually and increasingly abound.

Moreover, the object of the oneness of man and wife, the inviolability of the marriage bond (save for the one sin specified by our Lord (Mat 19:1-30) — the sin itself being, in fact, its violation) is declared by the prophet. "And wherefore one? That He might seek a godly seed." The Lord thus looks to find His people among the children of His servants; and it is on this account indeed that the apostle enjoins believing parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The Lord's interest in, and His care and love for the children of His people, have not been sufficiently remembered, nor that the godliness of the children — "a godly seed" — is divinely connected with the maintenance of the indissoluble sanctity of the marriage relationship. We have even further light now, because the Lord has been pleased to show us that the union of husband and wife is a figure of that between Him and the Church, and hence our responsibility is the greater, both to understand the nature of marriage, and also God's attitude of grace and blessing towards the offspring of His saints.

Based on this revelation which God makes through Malachi is the exhortation, already enforced by these solemn considerations, "Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth." The Lord lays, in this way, great stress upon, attaches great importance to, the godly maintenance of natural relationships;* and wherever these are slighted under whatever pretence, whether spiritual or otherwise, the door is already opened to the worst forms of licence and corruption. It is well to press the importance of this subject in a day when so many, under the specious pretext of a higher spirituality, seek to emancipate themselves from natural claims, and in many cases from the irksomeness of home duties or parental control. One of the plainest evidences of a desire to please the Lord is the faithful and diligent discharge of our responsibilities in the domestic circle.

*See Mar 10:1-52 : on the whole subject.

But not only has God made man and his wife one, He also hates putting away. The prophet introduces this in a most solemn way: "For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away." If therefore His people are in communion with His own mind, they will do so also. And how abundantly, through the whole history of Israel as a nation, is it proved that the Lord does hate putting away! If He had not done so, Israel would long since, and many times, have been renounced. They broke His covenant again and again, thereby forfeiting all claims upon His favour and love; but He endured them with much long-suffering, for His gifts and calling are without repentance. And in the prophets He continually reminded them of His union with them, that He was married to them, and that, therefore, He could not cast them off. (See Isa 50:1-11; Jer 3:1-14, &c.) It was this same spirit He would have them show in their relationships, insteadof covering violence with their garment; and "therefore" the prophet repeats, closing up this part of his subject, "take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously."

There is little doubt that verse 16 contains a general principle, and one, therefore, that has been rightly applied to discipline in the Church; for the heart of God must be expressed in discipline as much as in brotherly fellowship. If this were borne in mind there could be no room for haste or harshness, no forgetting the object of true and divine discipline, no satisfaction felt in the cutting off of the offender; but

every step would be taken in tenderness, yea, in divine pity, identifying ourselves with the one over whom Satan had obtained a temporary advantage; and we should thus proceed with many searchings of heart, taking his burden on our own shoulders, considering ourselves lest we also be tempted. Discipline thus administered, having solely for its object the honour of the Lord, the glory of His name, would become a means of grace to all who took part in it, and would be far more frequently used for the restoration of the one who had sinned, as. well as to reveal to all the terrible nature of the evil, which could not otherwise be reached than by putting away from fellowship with the saints. It would then be seen that the offender was put away only because he could no longer be retained if the saints themselves would continue in fellowship with the Lord. The sentence, "The Lord, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away," should therefore be deeply graven upon all our hearts, and especially upon the hearts of those who have the place of lead and government in the assembly.

Chapter 4

# Mal 3:1-18

Mal 3:1-18.

THE last verse of Mal 2:1-17, as we have pointed out, introduces the subject of chap. 3, wherein another phase is taken up of the moral state of the corrupted remnant. "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words," says Malachi; and then the characteristic answer of this book is returned, "Wherein have we wearied Him?" Poor people! They had departed from God; they drew nigh to Him with their mouth, and honoured Him with their lips, but their heart was far from Him. And yet in their ignorance, real or professed, of their own condition, they are surprised to hear that they had wearied the Lord. The truth was, they were in the path of self-justification, excusing themselves, and laying the blame of everything on God — sure evidence of their own backsliding. The prophet, therefore, speaks plainly, and tells them wherein they had wearied Jehovah. He says, "When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment? So blind were they in their self-righteousness, that they ventured to accuse God of unrighteousness, insinuating that He could not discern between good and evil. They were like the Pharisees of a later date, who were displeased because the Lord in His grace consorted with publicans and sinners; whereas, in their estimation, it was with themselves that He ought to be found. It is the same in every age; for just in proportion as we justify ourselves we are keen to detect the evil in others, and to exalt ourselves at their expense. What the Lord's people showed by their wicked complaints was: first, that they were utterly ignorant of the character of God, as the One who is of purer eyes than to behold evil; and secondly, that their sinful hearts had deceived them into thinking that they, spite of what they were, had a special claim, a meritorious claim, upon Jehovah's favour and regard. Observe also that it was their words that had wearied the Lord. How often is it forgotten that our words are recorded, and brought up for rebuke or judgment! (See Mat 12:36-37; Joh 20:24-27.)

It is the last clause of the verse — "Where is the God of judgment?" — that leads to the declaration of the first verse of the next chapter. "Where," say they, "is the God of judgment?" The answer is, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek [as the God of judgment], shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." This weighty announcement is worthy of our most careful consideration. It may be said generally, first of all, that it is the declaration of the first coming of Christ, together with, as is so usual in the prophets, the full consequences and results of His appearing in glory. The Church period is not, could not be at that time, regarded. Prophetic interpretation is impossible where there is no intelligence of this divine method in the Old Testament. Then there are two things in the scripture: the sending of the messenger, and the advent of the Lord Himself.

The messenger is clearly John the Baptist; for this passage, as well as another from Isaiah, is specially applied to him in the gospels. (Mar 1:2; Luk 1:76.) This must be distinctly observed in order to understand the difference between his mission and that of Elijah "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." (Mal 4:5-6.) True, our Lord said, "Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed; "but His meaning is explained by another passage. Speaking to the multitude concerning the Baptist, He said, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: not withstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than

he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it [viz., that which the Lord was teaching], this is Elias, which was for to come." (Mat 11:11-14.) Thus, if the Jews had received John the Baptist, they would also have received the Messiah, and the kingdom would at once have been established in power; and in that case Mal 4:5-6, would have been true of John. But in fact it was not; for though multitudes gathered around him when he first rang out the cry, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," there was but little conscience work, and scarcely any turning "the heart of the fathers to the children," or "the heart of the children to their fathers;" and finally, as we know, he died by the hand of the executioner in his solitary prison. Although, therefore, his mission was "in the spirit and power of Elias," and he would have been Elias, in all that his mission signified, had the Jews received him, he was not the fulfilment of the prophecy in the next chapter. That remains, and God will yet send "Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." But the Baptist was the Lord's messenger, and prepared the way before Him by heralding His coming and preaching the baptism of repentance; and few as they were, he did undoubtedly "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (See Joh 1:35-51)

We read moreover, "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple." Two things are here to be noticed: first, the Person who should come, and then the manner of His coming. It is Jehovah who speaks: "I," He says, "will send my Messenger;" and He who sends His Messenger is also Adonai — the Lord in the words, "The Lord, whom ye seek," being Adonai, not Jehovah. The two appellations are combined in Psa 110:1-7 : "Jehovah said unto Adonai, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." He is also the Messenger of the covenant" whom the Jews professed to delight in. This title may be understood by a scripture in Exodus: "Behold, I send an Angel before thee to keep thee in the way . . . my name is in Him" — proof that he was a divine Person, inasmuch as name in the Word is always the expression of the truth of what the Person is. Thus the One who should come is Jehovah, Adonai, and the Angel of the covenant; and all this Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth was, and proved Himself to be in manifold ways in His presentation to Israel. But their eyes were blinded, and they would not see; and they closed their ears that they might not hear; so that while, as with this poor backslidden remnant, they asked, "Where is the God of judgment?" the Lord whom they sought came suddenly to His temple, and coming to His own they received Him not, but they took Him, and with wicked hands crucified Him on Calvary.

The manner of His coming is described as "suddenly" — coming suddenly to His temple; and it was there that the pious remnant in Jerusalem found Him. Simeon "came by the Spirit into the temple," and there met in the babe of Mary the Lord's Christ, and was permitted in infinite grace to take Him up in his arms, and as he did so he said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." There was also "one Anna . . . and she, coming in that instant, gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." (Luk 2:29-38.) And again and again did the Lord come to His temple during His earthly sojourn (Joh 2:1-25; Mat 21:1-46), though His people knew Him not; and now it remains that this prediction shall be accomplished when He returns in power and glory for the salvation of His people, and to establish His dominion over all the kingdoms of the earth.

From verses 2-6 we have the character and consequences of His coming; i.e., His appearing. The form of the second verse springs from the words already noticed; viz., "The Lord, whom ye seek," in connection

with, "Where is the God of judgment." They professed to desire the presence of the God of judgment. They little knew the force of their own words, and hence the prophet says, "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." Their spirit indeed was in perfect contrast with that of the psalmist, as expressed when he said, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." (Psa 143:2.) Who indeed could abide the application of the holiness of God, as the standard of judgment, to his walk and ways? But this is what fire symbolizes, and the baptism of fire is that part of the work of Christ which will take place at His appearing. He has baptized His Church with the Holy Ghost; He will baptize Israel with fire when He returns. (CompareMatt. 3:10-12; Isa 4:4; Zec 13:8-9.) It is in this way that He will effect the purification of His people, though it will be accomplished on the ground of that perfect atonement which He made in His death. It will be indeed by His judgments that He will lead them to afflict their souls (seeLeviticus 23:27) and to faith in Himself; and thus will they be brought under the efficacy of His sacrifice, and so cleansed from their guilt and iniquity. Otherwise indeed not one could abide the day of His coming; whereas now we learn from Zechariah, He "will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God." Such are the blessed results of God's purposes in grace which will be accomplished in Christ.

So here in our scripture, although, as more or less throughout the book, the prophet's view is confined to the sons of Levi. Their corrupt condition we have seen, but when the Lord suddenly returns to His temple, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." (v. 3.) The figure which is here employed has often occupied attention. It is said that as a refiner of metals watches by the crucible until his face is reflected in the molten mass, so the Lord Jesus sits as the refiner and purifier of His silver until His own image is mirrored in it, and that this is the end and object of all His dealings with His people. And there is undoubted truth in the comparison; for as God has predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren, we may be sure that He will never rest until His purpose is fulfilled, and that He will use all His appointed means for the accomplishment of His end and purpose. It should be added, however, that Christ before our souls in the power of the Holy Ghost — a glorified Christ — is God's means for bringing us into conformity with His beloved Son. (See

2Co 3:18; 1Jn 3:2-3.) But then it is through the chastenings of His hand, through the trials and sorrows of their path, as here through special judgments, that He weans the hearts of His own from other objects, that Christ alone may fill the vision of their souls.

A very important truth is brought out in this scripture, applicable alike to ourselves and "the sons of Levi." There can be no presentation of an offering to the Lord in righteousness, nor can the offering presented be pleasant, acceptable, to the Lord until the purification of His priests is effected. This in fact is also the teaching of the epistle to the Hebrews. There the apostle shows that Christ by one offering hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified, before he points out that we have boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus. The difference is only in the fact that now all believers are priests, that it is no longer the title of a privileged class, as with the sons of Levi, to appear in the immediate presence of God; but that every one who is cleansed by the blood of Christ, and having therefore no more conscience of sins, has freedom, yea, boldness of access, and is exhorted to draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, on the ground of having the heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, and the body washed with pure water. (Heb 10:19-22.) But whether then or now, under the Mosaic economy, or under the reign of grace,

or, as in Malachi, in the time of the kingdom yet to be established, all who are priests must have a divine qualification and a divine cleansing in order to discharge acceptably the functions of their office, to enable them to approach with acceptance before God. Testing by such a truth as this those who claim, by virtue of a human ordination, the prerogatives of the priesthood, their presumption, not to say profanity, is at once discerned. What indeed can more completely set aside the truth of Christianity, ignoring as it does the place of Christ Himself, and of His people as associated with Him! And the solemnity and the peril of those who intrude into the office without being divinely called and qualified may be learned from the history of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Lev 16:1-34) The fulfilment of this scripture, in its application to the sons of Levi, is yet future; for it is after the appearing of the Lord that He will purify the sons of Levi; and that the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years. (SeeJer. 33:19-22; Eze 44:1-31)

If, on the one hand, the Lord will purge His priests as gold and silver, on the other He will set His face in judgment 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, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts." (v. 5.) This clearly explains the difference in character between Christianity and the kingdom. Now God sends out His entreating message of reconciliation (2Co 5:1-21) to all these classes which are here named — to all sinners without distinction; for it is the day of his grace, and He waits to save everyone that comes to Him in the name of Christ. Grace reigns through righteousness; but when the Lord appears He will come to reign in righteousness. Justice and judgment will be the habitation of His throne, and consequently sinners — those who refuse to submit to His royal sway — must be destroyed out of the land. Now He lingers in long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Then He will strike through kings in the day of His wrath, and in His majesty He will ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and His right hand will teach Him terrible things. (Psa 45:1-17, Psa 110:1-7, etc.)

In connection with the various classes of sinners which are named, it is very interesting to notice, as unfolding the heart of God, those who are mentioned as drawing forth His compassion — the hireling, the widow, the fatherless, and the stranger. It is ever so in the Scriptures — that those who are lonely, sorrowful, or oppressed are the special objects of His tender mercy — those described in one of the psalms as the needy, the poor also, and him that hath no helper (Psa 72:1-20), concerning whom it is said, "He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in His sight." Surely we may gather instruction for ourselves from such a scripture, teaching, as it does, how we may have practical fellowship with the heart of God; for if we would walk with Him, His interests and objects must be also ours. What a field of service is, therefore, opened to the saints of God — a field which has no limit, and which surrounds us on every side. Yea, as the apostle James says, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (Jas 1:27.)

In the sixth verse we have what may be termed a solemn affirmation of the certainty of His coming by the truth of the Lord's name, and the principle of His dealing with His people; for He says, "I am Jehovah, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." In these words, containing the sublime statement of Jehovah's unchangeable character, we have combined His truth and His grace. Because He is immutable in His holiness, He must be a "swift witness" against all sin and iniquity; and because His purposes of grace and blessing are unalterable, His people are not consumed. When, for example, the golden calf was set up in the camp, whereby they broke the covenant of Sinai and incurred the penalty of

death, on what ground did the Lord spare His guilty people? It was on that of His oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob Exo 32:12-13); and thus it was in the sovereignty of His grace, and in His faithfulness to His word, that He was gracious to whom He would be gracious, and showed mercy to whom He would show mercy. Exo 33:19.) This is a sure foundation on which His people can rest in every age and in every dispensation. It is a rock that no storm can shake; and hence the writer to the epistle to the Hebrews says, "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable thing., [the oath and the promise], wherein it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us," etc. (Heb 6:17-18.) It is thus the guarantee of the certainty both of His judgment of evil and of the accomplishment of all His counsels of grace in Christ; and this too in its application, as in this scripture, to Israel.

Commencing with the seventh verse, the state of the people is again dealt with. And what a bill of indictment is brought against them! "Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them." This, in one sentence, is the summary of the history of Israel under law. Their fathers had said, when standing at the foot of Sinai, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" Exo 19:1-25); but ere ever the tables of the covenant had reached the camp they had been false to their promise, and had apostatized from Jehovah. Judgment after judgment was visited upon them during their wanderings in the desert, but they would not keep the ordinances of the Lord. It was the same in the land both under judges and kings. Through all their history indeed they went "astray like lost sheep, and turned every one to his own way." Still, according to the proclamation of the name of Jehovah to Moses, He was "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." Exo 34:6-7.) Mercy and truth met together in His government of His people; and His name, as so unfolded to Moses, was abundantly exemplified in all His dealings with them. Here it is mercy that rejoiceth against judgment; for the invitation goes forth, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord." He had been compelled to depart from them because of their iniquity, but His heart was still towards them (Cp. Hos 5:14-15); and thus He cries, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts." The reply to this gracious invitation is one with which we are familiar in this book, and one which betrays the hardness as well as the corruption. of their hearts, "Wherein shall we return?" They did not even know that they had departed from God, so wonderful is the deceitfulness of sin; for how could it be possible, that those who had known what it was to be walking in the enjoyment of the light of God's countenance should be unaware that they had passed out of it into the chill and death of moral night? And yet so it was, as it still often is. Samson, for example, wist not that the Lord had departed from him; and the path of backsliding, and even apostacy, is often so gradual that the soul, occupied now with other objects and interests, is unconscious, lulled to rest also by the artifices of Satan, of the change that is taking place. Nothing can be sadder or more dangerous than ignorance of our true spiritual condition.

It is to awake His people, if possible, that the Lord proceeds to bring a specific proof of their departure from Him. He would fain open their eyes, and compel them to see; and thus He says, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me" Then comes the usual rejoinder of this misguided and deceived people, "Wherein have we robbed thee?" The answer is clear and distinct, "In tithes and offerings." (vv. 7, 8.) It was impossible for them to evade the truth of such a charge; for the Lord through Moses had laid down the most minute directions concerning tithes and offerings, and they could not but know whether they had

complied with them. (See

Lev 23:1-44; Num 15:1-41; Num 28:1-31;Deu 14:22-29; Deu 14:26, etc.) They knew precisely, therefore, what was required of them, and they had no excuse for their disobedience. They might indeed have argued within themselves that it was a matter of no consequence, but their thoughts were not the thoughts of God; for He tells them, "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." (v. 9.)

We are not under law, but under grace, and we therefore have no such prescriptions as to what we are to give to the Lord; but may there not be some most valuable instruction for us in these solemn words? Nay, is it not true that now all that we are and have belong to Him who has redeemed us through His precious blood? Much more, then, should we enter into' such a word as this, "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase," if we have understood at all the responsibilities of grace, the grace which has been displayed in our redemption through God's unspeakable gift. Or if any have failed to apprehend the bearing of this truth, let them read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the teaching of the apostle Paul in 2Co 8:1-24; 2Co 9:1-15. And with these chapters before us, let us be candid with ourselves, and solemnly interrogate our hearts in the presence of God, to learn whether we have risen to the height of our privilege in this respect, in honouring the Lord with our substance, in devoting the first-fruits of our increase to His service. Let us not be afraid even of figures, asking ourselves, if need be, "How much have we given of our income for the Lord's use?" or, "What proportion have our gifts borne to what we have. received?" Ah! beloved, if we thus examined ourselves on this subject, would not many of us have to own that the Lord might also have a controversy with us, and truly say, "Ye have robbed God"? Or else how comes it to pass that almost in every place the saints have to be reminded, again and again, that there is not enough money in the Lord's treasury for even necessary uses, and that collections, private and public, are continually being made to conceal our shortcomings, and to provide means for the sustenance both of the Lord's poor and the Lord's work? All this only reveals the fact how feebly grace is operative in our hearts, and how unlike we are to the giving-God, by whose bounty it is that we have been set in the possession of such priceless blessings. And may we not ask also, whether our own barrenness, and whether the lack of blessing among the Lord's people — in their meetings for praise and edification — may not be traced to our own narrowness of heart, to our withholding from God of the substance, small or great, which He has entrusted to our stewardship? (See 2Co 9:8-15.) For here the Lord expressly connects His blessing His people with their faithfulness to Himself in the matter of tithes. "Bring ye," he says, "all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord 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." (v. 10.)

But this scripture demands a still closer examination. Remark, first, that the Lord desires the tithes to be brought that there way be meat in His house; i.e., that those whose office it was to attend to the service of the sanctuary might be properly cared for and sustained. (See on this subjectNeh. 10:32-39, Neh 13:4-10.) For it was a grievous thing in the eyes of Jehovah that the Levites and priests should be neglected. Moreover the Lord. condescends to say, 'Prove me now herewith, and I on my part will bestow abundant blessing upon you.' it is not, it will be observed, "PRAY, and I will open the windows of heaven," but, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse." It would be well if this passage were sometimes read and explained at meetings for prayer, as it might be used to remind us of the real hindrances to blessing. To pray is always well, but to pray while we are withholding from God, and without self-judgment on this account, is useless. Our prayers may be enlightened and fervent, and may commend themselves to the

children of God; but let us not forget that He is the heart-knowing God, and may therefore be keeping back the answers to our petitions because we are not practically responding to the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich." (2Co 8:9.)

Still further blessing is promised, if they are but faithful in bringing the tithes. "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 the Lord of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts." (vv. 11, 12.) These promises are on the principle which obtains everywhere in the Old Testament; viz., that of blessing on the condition of obedience. This was in fact the very essence of the Mosaic economy. (See, for example, Deu 28:1-68) Their continued possession of the land, their freedom from disease, earthly blessing of every shape and form, were all made dependent upon their walking according to the statutes and ordinances which they had received. So in this scripture. Let the people but return to obedience to the law, and they should receive blessing without stint or limit, their land should again become fruitful, and so manifestly should the favour of God rest upon them that all the nations around would call them blessed. It would be seen that theirs was "a land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." (Deu 11:12.)

It must be remembered, however, that all these promises are temporal, and have nothing to say to the spiritual state of the people, or rather that they relate to time and not to eternity. If the people did but honour the Lord by subjection to His word, He would bless them in the way described; i.e., in the land, and with temporal blessings in accordance with the nature of the covenant under which they were living. It is different with Christians. They are saved by pure unconditional grace; but being saved, their blessing and their enjoyment of spiritual blessing are made dependent upon their walk, upon obedience to the Word. This must always be insisted upon. They do not obey, we repeat, in order to be saved, except indeed it be with the obedience of faith, and this is the gift of God; but having been brought to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, their blessing, during their sojourn in this world, is conditioned by their subjection to the mind and will of God. Thus our Lord says, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." (Joh 14:21.) Such is the blessed portion of those, and of those alone, who treasure up the commandments of Christ in their hearts.

The next section, which, commencing with verse 13, extends to the end of Mal 4:1-6, clearly separates a faithful remnant from the rest of the nation. This is often the case with the prophets (see Isa 8:1-22; Isa 9:1-21; Isa 10:1-34, &c.), and connected with this is another thing. Whenever the godly remnant is distinguished, it takes the place of the nation before God. They are isolated in the view of God and regarded as the heirs and depositaries of the promises. The reader will find it both interesting and edifying to trace out this principle in the prophets of the Old Testament. In the scripture before us the prophet first brings out the hopelessness of the moral condition of the mass of the nation, and shows not only that they had lost all moral perception, but also that they were charging God with identifying Himself with and favouring the proud and the wicked — proof of their utter deception as to their own condition, and of their ignorance of the character of God. He says, "Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord." The gradation in these several charges is particularly to be observed. Israel had gone from one degree of sinfulness to another, and now they had not hesitated to speak boldly against God. But although they are brought face to face with their iniquity, they profess, as ever, to be ignorant of the sin alleged against

them. "What," they say, "have we spoken against Thee?" The answer is at hand. "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 the Lord of hosts? And now we" (they added) "call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered." (vv. 13-15.) Like the Pharisees again of a later date, they punctiliously attended to certain ritualistic observances, at the same time neglecting the weightier matters of the law, and then wondered how it was that the Lord did not acknowledge and reward their meritorious conduct. while they condemned Him because He received sinners and ate with them. Nothing confuses our moral perceptions like self-righteousness, and there is no iniquity before God like that of Pharisaism. It is withal one of Satan's most potent weapons for the deception and the destruction of the souls of men. This form of spiritual wickedness is, alas! never extinct. It abounds in the Church at the present time, and it may be detected under different, and sometimes most subtle, disguises. But wherever it is found, whether allied with ritualism or a transcendental spiritualism, it is marked by the divorce of morality from the forms of godliness. In plain language, it ever combines a high profession with a low walk.

We have now the introduction of the remnant — a remnant within the remnant (vv. 16, 17); and nothing can be more beautiful than the contrast which is thus drawn between these hidden saints and the self-righteousness of those by whom they are surrounded. They have but two characteristics — they feared the Lord, and they spake often one to another, and we may add, what is necessarily connected with this, they thought upon the Lord's name. He Himself was the subject of their thoughts and meditations. Let us look a little at these several features.

They feared the Lord. This is precisely what the nation were not doing; indeed, they had cast off the fear of God from before their eyes, as shown by their high-handed transgressions of His statutes and ordinances, and their entire insensibility to His claims, and the honour of His name. But this pious, feeble remnant feared Jehovah, feared Him with the fear due to His holy name, with a fear which showed itself in obedience to His word. He Himself was their object and hope, their stay and support, amid the confusion and evil by which they were surrounded; yea, their sanctuary from the power of the enemy on every side. Then, they spake often one to another. They were drawn together in happy, holy fellowship by their common objects, common affections, and common needs; and in this way their piety, their fear of the Lord, was sustained and encouraged. It is one of the consolations of an evil day, that in proportion as religious wickedness and corruption abound, those who have the mind of the Lord are drawn more closely together. The name of the Lord becomes more precious to those that fear Him when it is generally dishonoured; and, on the other hand, the power of the enemy drives those together who are seeking to lift up a standard against him. The object of the special hostility of Satan, because they form the one barrier to the success of his efforts, they find their resource and strength in united communings in the presence of God. Lastly, they thought upon the Lord's name. We do not mean lastly in order of importance, only in that of mention in this scripture; for at the close of verse 16 it is associated with the fear of the Lord. These two things can never indeed be disjoined. The name of the Lord, as before remarked in these pages, is the expression of all the truth of Jehovah as revealed to His ancient people, just as now the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to which His people are gathered, is the symbol (if we may use this term) of all that He is as unfolded to us in these several terms — The Lord — Jesus — Christ. What is meant, therefore, when it is said, "They thought upon His name," is, that they set themselves to uphold all the truth which had been committed to Israel; this truth being their testimony in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, and also that they were drawn together by their common fear of Jehovah, to maintain the honour of His name. This was their one end and object — not the welfare and blessing of one another, not the conciliation of

diverse interests among the professing people of God, not the cultivation of that spirit of charity, the creed of which is to agree to differ, and to be indifferent to evil; but ever seeking to vindicate Jehovah's name, to affirm His supremacy, and thus to give Him His rightful place in the midst of Israel. And in doing this, though their brethren might have despised and contemned them for not swimming with the stream, they were adopting the one and only means for the blessing of the nation.

In the gospel of Luke (Luk 1:1-80; Luk 2:1-52), as often remarked, we have a living picture of this God-fearing remnant. In Zacharias, Simeon, and Anna we behold a few, together with those associated with them, who united all the characteristics which are here given. Thus of Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth it is said, "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless" (Luk 1:6); of Simeon, that he "was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him" (Luk 2:25); of Anna, that "she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." (Luk 2:37.) Such is the lovely picture, drawn by the unerring pencil of the Holy Spirit, of a few in Jerusalem, amid decay and spiritual death, who "feared the Lord, spake often to one another, and thought upon His name." Outside of the activities of the day, and unknown to those in power and influence, they were known by the Lord, and by one another. This was enough for their souls, for their hearts were fixed on "the consolation of Israel," "the Lord's Christ," and He was sufficient to satisfy their every desire, even as He was the object of all their hopes.

Is there, it may be enquired, in a word or two, any remnant at the present day corresponding to that here described? To answer this question, it must be remembered that all whom the prophet addresses were the remnant gathered out of Babylon; and hence that those who feared the Lord, and spake often one to another, were a remnant in the midst of a remnant, both alike occupying the same public ground before God. It does not follow, therefore, because there are those today who are separated from the evils of Christendom, and gathered professedly to the name of Christ, that they answer to these who thought upon the Lord's name. No. To correspond with these there must be the possession of the same characteristics; in a word, there must be the same. spiritual state. As in Philadelphia, so here, state is the prominent feature; and consequently no ecclesiastical position, however scriptural, constitutes a claim to correspondence with these "Philadelphians" in the midst of Israel.

Having shown us what this pious remnant was in the eyes of the Lord, the prophet now reveals Jehovah's attitude towards them. He says, "The Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord 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." (vv. 16, 17.) First, "the Lord hearkened, and heard." His eyes and His heart were upon these despised few who encouraged themselves, amid surrounding corruptions, in fellowship one with another concerning the Lord and the Lord's things. And when thus gathered together, the Lord was a spectator, delighting in the conversation He heard, their communings being as grateful to His heart as the sweet incense which in happier days ascended before His throne from off the golden altar. We have examples in the New Testament of His intimate acquaintance with the thoughts and conversation of His people. The commission He gave to Ananias concerning Saul of Tarsus, His repetition to doubting Thomas of the words he had spoken to his fellow-disciples, bear witness to the fact that our words never escape His ears; and the journey of the two disciples to Emmaus, when He Himself drew near and walked with them, tells us how interested He is in all that concerns His own, yea, even in their doubts and fears. But in the case before us it was not doubt nor apprehension that occupied those that feared the Lord, but

when they spake, often one to another, it was in the language of faith and hope; and hence when we are told that "the Lord hearkened, and heard," it is not only an attentive, but also an approving, yea, a delighted, Listener that is brought before us. And how sweet is the revelation thus made! And what an encouragement to His own, especially in times of indifference and darkness, to be found together, speaking often one to another! And how near it brings the Lord Himself to us! And, we may add, what solemnity it gives to the fellowship of the saints, reminding us that our meetings, whether in private or in public, are held in the presence of the Lord! These reflections moreover ought to have additional force for those of the present day who have, in any measure, entered into what it is to have the Lord Himself in the midst when gathered to His name.

Secondly, "a book of remembrance was written before Him," &c.; that is, the Lord condescends to use a figure to teach us that He records for everlasting remembrance the conversation — may we not rather say the names and the words? — of those who were drawn to His name, and to one another, in separation from the evil around at such a time. An illustration of this may be found in the book of Esther. When the king could not sleep, "he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles;" and they were read before the king. And therein was found written an act. of loyalty and fidelity on the part of Mordecai at a time of danger to his sovereign the king; and he was immediately recompensed, besides being thereby used to become the saviour of his people. In like manner, but in a more perfect way — for He never forgets — the Lord causes a book of remembrance concerning the faithfulness of His people to be written, and nothing escapes His eye or ear; and thus it will come to pass, as we learn from many scriptures, that every act and word, wrought and produced in His people by the power of the Holy Spirit, will, in the same grace that has called, justified, and glorified them, be imputed to them for acknowledgement and recompense before the tribunal of Christ.

Finally, the Lord will mark them out as His own. They shall be mine, saith Jehovah of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." He refers to the time of His appearing; for then it is that He will publicly distinguish and claim His own. The principle is contained in the familiar passage in the Apocalypse: "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." (Rev 3:9; (Cp. Isa 60:14.) The Lord will manifestly set His seal upon those who were faithful to His name in a time of ruin and apostacy. The term jewels" when I make up my jewels "shows the preciousness of the saints to God, their value in His eyes, and that though they are now concealed in obscurity His eye is upon them, and He will collect them together, recognizing their beauty and excellency, the beauty and excellency which He Himself has put upon them, preparatory to their being put for ever in the treasury of His eternal kingdom, It is then added, "And I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." It must be remembered that when the Lord thus comes.) it is for judgment on the one hand, as for blessing on the other. Sparing His people, therefore, is sparing them from the judgments; and He will spare them as a man spareth his own son, bringing out the Lord's heart and relationship to His own, showing His recognition of their fidelity and devotedness. Bound to His own by such ties, He will not suffer them to be overwhelmed in the day when He deals with the nation for their iniquity; but God Himself will be their refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, and He will publicly exhibit them as those who were precious in His eyes when they were scorned and contemned by the apostate nation.

The last verse, we apprehend, is addressed to those who, in verses 14, 15, had charged God with identifying Himself with evil. They had said, "They that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are delivered" — as if God were confounding all moral distinctions. But the prophet now tells them

that, when God will appear for the feeble few who had thought upon His name, they — those who had arraigned the righteousness of God's ways — should return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not. Wilfully blind heretofore, they would then be compelled to see; and the Lord would once again be justified when He was judged, and publicly vindicate the rectitude of His ways before the eyes of ungodly men. The prophet proceeds to explain that this severance between the wicked and the righteous will be made at the Lord's appearing; but this is the subject of the next chapter,

Chapter 5

# Mal 4:1-6

Mal 4:1-6.

THE division also between chapters 3 and 4 tends to obscure the connection, inasmuch as verse 1 of chapter 4 explains the declaration of the last verse of Mal 3:1-18. The prophet had said that the time would come when those who were arraigning Jehovah should see that there was in His eyes an everlasting distinction between the righteous and the wicked, and now he teaches that this distinction will be publicly manifested at a future day. The word "for" is the connecting link between the two chapters. "For," he continues, "behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord 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," &c.

Before we examine this important passage, we may call attention to the principle it exemplifies. Man in his short-sightedness and unbelief is ever prone, like the apostate priests in the preceding chapter, to judge God by the circumstances of the moment. It was so also with the three friends of Job, yea, with Job himself. But we learn there, as from innumerable scriptures, that the issue of God's ways and dealings will not be manifested till a future day, and that He waits for that time to declare His righteousness even before the world. We must therefore, as the apostle teaches, judge nothing before the time until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man (if he have matter for praise) have praise of God. In the meantime faith says with Abraham, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" for the God that faith knows is infinite in wisdom, holiness, and love. Now this scripture brings us to the moment when Jehovah will manifest His holiness and truth in His judgment of the wicked, and in blessing for those that fear His name; but even here the judgment is not eternal, as it is in connection with His appearing, and preparatory, therefore, to the establishment of His kingdom on earth.

These two aspects of the Lord's appearing must be carefully observed in order to distinguish it from His coming for His Church, a truth not revealed in the Old Testament, because the Church never comes into view in the prophetic writings. (See, for example, Eph 3:1-21) When He returns to claim His Bride, it is in pure unmingled blessing, and has for its object only His own people. (Joh 14:1-3;1Th 4:14-18.) The world will not even be aware of the event, save, perchance, from the unwilling recognition of the absence of so large a number with whom they had been conversant The shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God are exclusively for the saints, and will not even be heard by the world around; or if they are heard, like the companions of Saul of Tarsus, when the Lord met him on the way to Damascus, they will not understand the significance of such unwonted sounds. The language will be incomprehensible to their ears, as it will come from a land to which they do not belong, and which they have never visited. No; when the Lord fulfils His promise to His waiting Church, "Surely, I come quickly," He has regard to it alone; and none but the saints will be caught up in the clouds to meet Him in the air, to be for ever with Him. But "the day" of which our passage treats will be public; it will be introduced when the Lord returns with His saints. It is of this John speaks when he says, "Behold, He cometh with clouds: and every eye shall see Him, and they which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." (Rev 1:7.) Our Lord Himself also describes it in Matthew's gospel: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun

be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man, in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory." (Mat 24:29-30.) And in the same chapter we find the same two aspects — judgment and blessing — linked together. We thus read, "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left." (vv. 40, 41.) And be it noticed that those "taken" here are taken for judgment, while those "left" are left for blessing in the kingdom which will then be established. This conclusively shows the difference between the Lord's return for His Church and His appearing, because when He comes for His people they, unlike these in Matthew, are taken away for blessing — to be with Himself; while those who are left are left for judgment.

Another thing may be pointed out to establish the difference between these two important things. After describing the thorough character of the judgment which will be executed when "the day" cometh, the prophet, speaking in the name of the Lord, says, "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings." (v. 2.) This figure entirely accords with the distinction we have made. The appearing of the Lord is, as already explained, the introduction of the day; and hence it is set forth here as the rising of the Sun of righteousness, as it will be for His earthly people. David uses similar language of the same event: "He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds." (2Sa 23:4.) On the other hand, this figure is never employed in relation to the Church, but another equally significant is used, and expressive of the truth it is intended to convey; viz., the Bright and Morning Star. (Rev 22:16; see also 2Pe 1:19.) Now these two figures, rightly understood, explain both the character and the order of the Lord's coming for His Church and His appearing. The morning star appears before the day, towards the closing of the night, at the dawn, and is thus the harbinger of the rising of the sun. So will it be when the Church is rapt away from this world. It will be caught up to be associated with Christ in His heavenly beauty, who has been displayed before the eye of faith as the Bright and Morning Star; and this event will be preparatory to the Lord's appearing as the Sun of righteousness, as set forth in this scripture. An interval — greater or less — there will be between the two events; but the relation between them, in regard to the earth, is that which is symbolized by the Morning Star and the Sun of righteousness.*

*See, for further instruction on this subject, The Blessed Hope.

The "day" then of which the prophet speaks has a double aspect — judgment without mercy (for the day of grace will then be past) upon the proud and all that do wickedly; and pure, unmingled blessing for those that fear the name of Jehovah. (See Isa 24:1-23; Isa 25:1-12; Isa 26:1-21; Zec 12:1-14; Zec 13:1-9; Zec 14:1-21 &c.) There is moreover another thing. "Ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. 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 the Lord of hosts." (vv. 2, 3.) This promise, which the Lord makes to His people Israel in connection with their deliverance and blessing at His appearing, again distinguishes this event both from His return for the Church, and from the closure of all dispensations at the end of the thousand years. There are some who affirm that the coming of the Lord for His saints and His appearing are identical. In what sense, if this were so, will His people, who will then be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, as those who hold this view admit, tread down the wicked as ashes under the soles of their feet? There would be a manifest incongruity in such a figure with the circumstances of those who will then be for ever with the Lord. There are others who deny any coming or appearing of the Lord until after the millennium. Let such

then tell us how the saints of God, who, according to their own thought, enter at that time upon eternal blessedness, will then come into conflict with and triumph over the wicked. To mention these views is sufficient to show that they are opposed to the truth of Scripture.

This passage, we may repeat for the sake of clearness, has no application to the Church; it concerns itself with God's ancient people, who, then in the land, had been brought back from their captivity in Babylon. There are two classes, as we have seen, amongst them — those who had departed from God while they kept up the forms of their ritual, and those that feared the Lord, spake often one to another, and thought upon Jehovah's name. These latter met the mind of Jehovah; and were the objects of His heart; and, addressing to them words of consolation and promise, He takes them up as characteristic morally of the remnant that will be found at the Lord's appearing. There was such a remnant at the Lord's first coming; but the nation rejected Him, and all was lost on the ground of responsibility. The realization of these blessed promises was consequently postponed — only postponed, because what was forfeited on the ground of responsibility will be finally made good in grace according to the unchanging counsels of God on the foundation of the finished work of Christ. These promises yet remain therefore for Israel, though they have no title to anything, save in and through the Christ; and when He shall return to them in power and glory, as shown in this scripture, He will accomplish their fulfilment. Then will His people — the remnant brought through the fire, but viewed as the nation — be not only put into the enjoyment of these blessings, but they will also, under the sway of their Messiah and King, and as thus associated with Him, tread down the wicked, who will be as ashes under their feet. (See

Psa 2:1-12, Psa 110:1-7, etc. etc.) It is thus the earthly people, and not the heavenly saints of this dispensation, that are here described by the prophet.

The three last verses (4-6) constitute a kind of appendix. In verse 4 Jehovah recalls the people to the unchanging basis of His covenant with them; viz., the law. This was His standard for them, the measure of their responsibility, and thus the condition of blessing. Their safety, as the safety of God's people in all ages, would lie in obedience to the word. Testing all by that infallible standard, and refusing all that answers not to it, while seeking grace at the same time to restore it to its supremacy over our own hearts and ways; such is the only path of recovery and blessing. They were thus to go back to the beginning — a principle that has before occupied us, not to the times of Nehemiah and Ezra, neither to the glory of the kingdom in the days of David and Solomon, but to Horeb — "the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb." In like manner we, in days of confusion and ruin, must not stop short of Pentecost, if we would gauge the extent of our decline, and discover the means of restoration. This is an abiding principle, and on this account it is solemnly affirmed just as God was about to silence the voice of prophecy for the long period of four hundred years.

Jehovah, moreover, lays the foundation in this exhortation, and in the principle which it contains, for the announcement of the mission of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. (v. 5.) We have explained the relation of John the Baptist to Elijah in connection with Mal 3:1. If Israel, when our Lord first came, had received the Baptist, he would have been Elijah for them, and as it was his mission was in the spirit and the power of Elijah. But John was beheaded, and the Christ, of whom he was the forerunner, was crucified; and God, who is as immutable in His holiness as in His grace, will as surely perform His truth unto Abraham, as execute his judgments upon the wicked. In the day of judgment, however, He remembers mercy, and therefore, before the advent of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, He will send Elijah to test the hearts of His people, and to recall them to His unchanging faithfulness and grace. And the very mention of Elijah is significant of the state in which Israel will then be found. The

mission of Elijah, historically, was at a time of general apostacy, when Jehovah had been publicly disowned, and Baal had been chosen in His place. And we gather from many scriptures that apostacy will characterize Israel as a whole in the last days. As in the time of Ahab there was a hidden remnant, so will it be again, for God will never leave Himself without witness on the earth. But outwardly, under the sway of Antichrist, idolatry will mark the condition of the people. The mission of "Elijah" will be in the midst of this state of things, and the character of his ministry in the time of Ahab and Jezebel will enable us to understand its nature at the end. Its object is here given: "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." (v. 6.) John the Baptist never fulfilled this promise, at least in the largeness of its import. Crowds gathered about him at the commencement of his labours, but the most of these only rejoiced in his light for a season, and then turned back to the darkness of their own pride and self-righteousness. With "Elijah" it will be different, for the Lord hath spoken the word, and He will perform it. Labouring as the prophet will, under far greater difficulties than even the Baptist, the effects of his work, if not outwardly seen, will be greater; and in this way there will be once again a people prepared for the Lord on His return. The object, however, here is, "Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." There will be judgments, as we have seen from verse 1; but the existence of a people whom God has called and prepared in grace will once again be the salt of the earth, and on their account the earth, or more probably the land, will be exempted from that which is here termed a curse — pure and unmingled judgment.

The conjunction of Moses and Elijah (vv. 4, 5) at the close of the Old Testament cannot fail to be observed. They are, as we know, the expressions of the law and the prophets, and these abide for ever — till the close of all God's ways on the earth. (Compare Mat 5:17-19; see also Rev 11:1-19 — the ministry of the two witnesses being characterized by the features of Moses and Elijah.)

With these words the light of prophecy is quenched, and God ceases to send His messengers to His people until the days of the Baptist; and, while never failing in His love and faithfulness, He withdraws for a season from all active and direct intervention in their affairs. All has now been prepared to test their hearts by the coming of Christ, and God waits four hundred years, until the fulness of the time should arrive when He would send forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, who would be for Israel a Minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers. (Rom 15:8.) But though He came unto His own, and His own received Him not, God, in His infinite long-suffering, still waits, and eventually, in pursuance of His eternal counsels of grace and mercy, Christ will be a light for the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel.

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