

Preface To The Prophet Malachi

(1532)

The Hebrews believe that this Malachi was Ezra. We let that pass, because we can know nothing certain about him, except that, so far as we can gather from his prophecy, he lived not long before Christ's birth and was certainly the last prophet; for he says, in chapter 2, that Christ the Lord shall come soon.

He is a fine prophet, and his book contains beautiful sayings about Christ and His Gospel, which he calls "a pure offering in all the world"; for by the Gospel God's grace is praised, and that is the true, pure thank-offering. Again, he prophesies of the coming of John the Baptist, as Christ Himself points out, in Matthew 11:14, calling John His angel and the Elijah, of whom Malachi writes.

Besides, he denounces his people severely because they do not give the priests their tithes and other services. Even when they gave them, they did it faithlessly; sick and blemished sheep, for example, had to be good enough for the poor priests and preachers. That is the way it usually goes; those who are true preachers of the Word of God must suffer hunger and want and false teachers must always have their fill. To be sure, the priests, too, were denounced because they took these offerings and sacrificed them. That was the work of dear Sir Avarice.

But God here declares that He is greatly displeased with this, and calls this faithlessness and wickedness a disgrace, put upon Him. Therefore He threatens to leave them and take the Gentiles as His people.

Afterwards he denounces the priests especially, because they falsified the Word of God and taught it faithlessly, and abused their priestly office, and did not rebuke those who offered blemished things or were otherwise unrighteous, but rather praised them and called them righteous, so that they might get offerings and profit from them. So avarice and care for the belly have always injured the Word and worship of God, and always make hypocrites of the preachers.

He denounces them also because they troubled their wives and despised them, and thereby defiled their sacrifices and worship. For it was forbidden in the law of Moses to offer troubled sacrifices to God, and those who were troubled dared not sacrifice or eat of the sacrifice. They did this who troubled their wives and made them weep, and they tried to help themselves by the example of Abraham, who had to drive out Hagar and trouble her. But he did it not for self-will, just as he had not taken her to wife bemuse of a whim.