

F.B. Hole

**Comments on
the book of
the Prophet Malachi**

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Malachi 1

Unlike the Prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, who furnish us with dates in regard to their utterances, Malachi gives us no such details. It seems certain, however, that he wrote about a century later; hence his words reveal how little effect the ministry of these two earlier prophets had produced amongst the masses of the people in the land. As we read through the short book we shall notice that every statement the prophet has to make — usually by way of correction — is repudiated. The people and their leaders were not prepared to admit anything. They were quite self-satisfied.

Satisfied with themselves, they were dissatisfied with God. Hence when the prophet made his first assertion — 'I have loved you, saith the Lord' — they challenge it at once. Many troubles afflicted the Palestinian Jews in those years, which God permitted as a chastisement, because of their state: these afflictions they resented, regarding them as harshness and contrary to love. Hence they challenged the assertion, in an insolent way, asking, 'Wherein hast Thou loved us?'

The answer of God to this was to recall them to what marked His attitude and action from the beginning. He had loved Jacob and hated Esau. Human opinion would have reversed this: Jacob stooped to crooked and crafty schemes: Esau a fine manly fellow. Yes, but the 'birth-right', which carried with it, we believe, the advent of the Messiah, meant so little to Esau, that he sold it for a bowl of pottage, whereas Jacob esteemed it of highest worth. Here we have perhaps the earliest forecast that 'What think ye of Christ' is the test.

Now God maintained His attitude of judgment against Esau, as verses 4 and 5 show, and thus magnified Himself beyond the border of Israel' (New Trans.). But, on the contrary, Israel had been brought into relationship with God, who in regard to them had taken a father's place, as verse 6 shows. Love had established this relationship. How had they acted as to it?

To them God was both Father and Master. Both honour and fear should have been His, and yet the very priests had despised His name. They should have been the very first to have revered His name, and have acted consistently with it. They had not done so, and this brought the hand of God in govern-

ment against them. They treated this as a denial of His original love towards their nation.

But it was not so. Nor are the fatherly chastisements that come upon His saints today, any denial of His love, as Hebrew 12:6 plainly declares. Let us remember this, and never ask, when trying circumstances arise — If God loves me, why does He send, or permit this?

In Malachi's day the priests did not for one moment admit the charge laid against them. They repudiated it saying, 'Wherein have we despised Thy name?' This brought forth a more specific accusation as to their offering 'polluted bread' upon God's altar; and verse 8 gives further details as to this. The kind of offerings they were bringing meant that they treated 'the table of the Lord' as 'contemptible'. It was not, we judge, that they were saying this in so many words, but that was what their actions declared; for, as we know, actions speak louder than words, and God knows perfectly how to interpret them.

The fact was that they were offering to God animals that they would never present to a secular governor; and further, as verse 10 shows, they expected to make some material gain for the

simplest things they did in the temple service. They were putting their own things first and treating God's service as subservient to themselves. Has this no voice for us? We believe it has very definitely. The flesh in each of us would naturally and easily put our own earthly interests first, and treat 'the kingdom of God and His righteousness' as something that may conveniently fill up any little gaps left as we pursue our own things. It is all too easy to forget the Lord's words in Matthew 6:32.

Through the prophet God made it plain that though they profaned His name, He would yet make it 'great' as we see in verse 11, and that even among the heathen, whom they so greatly despised. When the wise and mighty utterly fail, God takes up the weak and despised to achieve His ends, as is stated so clearly in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29. And what about the fulfilment of this prediction? It will be literally fulfilled in the coming millennial age, but we can make a spiritual application even today. We have humbly to admit that many of us, easy-going, English, speaking Christians, living amid luxuries, may have to take a back seat in the coming Kingdom of reward, compared with simple saints — often but babes in Christ — who live and die for their faith under Communist or Romish persecution.

The three verses that close this chapter again bring home the evils that were prevalent. Twice further the prophet charges home upon them what they were saying — 'The table of the Lord is polluted', and also, as to the service rendered, 'What a weariness is it!' They themselves had polluted it, and if the heart be not in God's service, what a weariness it can become! To have 'a form of godliness' without the 'power', leads to all the evils delineated in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. We must never forget the closing words of the chapter. In Christ God is known to us as the God of all grace, but at the same time He is 'a great King', and His name is 'dreadful', or 'to be revered', among the nations. His grace does not cancel out His majesty; indeed His majesty enhances His grace.

Malachi 2

Chapter 2 continues the solemn warnings that have been occupying us. The priests, who were, so to speak, the finest specimens of the tribe of Levi, are further denounced for their sinful practices, and warned that already a curse lay upon them. They are reminded in verses 4-6, of God's original covenant with that tribe, when for a time they answered to it and walked suitably

before their God. Now all was sadly changed. As ever, God viewed their defection in the light of the original calling and behaviour. How do we stand? we may well ask, in the light of the original calling and behaviour of the church, as we see it in the opening chapters of the Acts. Another matter to search our hearts very deeply.

Another very serious thing about the priests of those days comes to light in verses 7 and 8. The priest was intended to be a 'messenger', who should possess a knowledge of the law, and so be able to convey it to the masses of the people. Though the 'law of truth' was in the mouth of Levi at the outset, it was not so in Malachi's day. It was departed from the hearts and lips of the priests. They were not only out of the way themselves, but they were a cause of stumbling, leading many others out of the way. Thus they had corrupted God's original covenant with their tribe.

Once again we have to note how God always reverts to that which He establishes at the beginning. Man's beginnings are imperfect. His inventions are crude at the outset, and improved as time goes on. God establishes that which is perfect in its time and place. If men think to improve, they actually only de-

face. In the things of God today, let us remember this. As soon as departure from the faith of Christ became manifest. the Spirit of God began to emphasize 'that which was from the beginning', as John's epistles show. Amid the confusions of Christendom we are on safe and right ground if we revert to the simplicity, both in faith and in practice, of that which was divinely established at the outset of the dispensation.

Verses 9-13 that follow, show how departure from God's purpose and plan had disorganized and corrupted all behaviour amongst the people themselves. The priests had become contemptible in the popular view, and false dealing abounded amongst the people. Idolatry crept in, and the holiness of the Lord outraged. When this brought down God's judgment upon them, there was much outcry and covering the altar with tears, but this was not real repentance, but only a protest against their troubles. Hence God paid no regard to it.

This disregard on God's part was an offence to them, and they in petulant fashion asked, 'Wherefore?' This led to a more specific charge being laid against them. There was much marital infidelity: much putting away of their wives in treacherous fashion, in disregard of God's original purpose in making both

man and his wife to be one. Here once more we see that God's original design stands unshaken, no matter how far it may be forsaken and forgotten. We also see that when God is ignored and His things forgotten, confusion soon ensues as to our own things.

We have to notice also that when evil of this sort is allowed, it not only spreads but persists. When some centuries later our Lord was on earth, the Pharisees came with the question, 'Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?' (Matt. 19:3), which infers that these loose practices were still common. We know how our Lord referred them at once to what God established at the beginning.

Having read thus far, the last verse of Malachi 2 does not surprise us. They had indeed wearied the Lord with their words, refusing to admit any charge that had to be brought against them, but rather challenging the accusation in very insolent fashion. But even this remonstrance they met in the same self-satisfied way, asking, 'Wherein have we wearied Him?' They were not prepared to admit anything. They would rather cast an aspersion on God Himself.

So the prophet is led to bring home the charge against them in two specific ways. First, there were those who sought to make God to be, so to speak, a partner in their evil, as though He approved of it, treating as good that which was evil. This is a religious trick, not uncommon, we fear, in our day. All too many would claim they are serving God and pleasing Him in practising things wholly astray from His truth. The priests and people, that Malachi addressed, were religious folk, and this is an evil specially seen in the religious sphere.

But then again, there were others, who did not attempt to make God a partner in their evil. They were less crafty, but more bold. They apparently challenged God's judgment, when He by the prophet challenged them. Their question, 'Where is the God of judgment?' may not have insinuated that He had no right to judge, but rather that He had not exercised His right of judgment in the matters that were in question. Whatever was their exact meaning, they evidently endeavoured to thrust God, and His word, out of the whole matter. The spirit, that lay behind this form of reasoning in self-defence, is not dead in our day.

Malachi 3

The full answer to all this is that God Himself was going to intervene in a very personal way. In the first verse we have in the first place, 'My messenger', or 'angel.' 'He is to prepare the way before Me'; the 'Me' here evidently being Jehovah. Then, thirdly, there is the 'Lord', or 'Master', who is the 'Messenger', or, 'Angel of the covenant', clearly distinguished from the angel first mentioned. In this very close way the coming Messiah is identified with the Jehovah who sends Him. In this remarkable verse the two advents are predicted, though not clearly distinguished: a feature we also see in Isaiah 61:2. At His first advent the messenger sent in advance was clearly John the Baptist, who prepared the way of the Lord, and came in the spirit and power of Elijah, though not the Elijah of which Malachi 4:5 speaks, for he is to come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord in judgment. John came after the fashion of Elijah, but before the coming of the Messiah in grace, who is the Master, identified here with Jehovah.

Suddenly to His temple the 'Lord', the 'Master' came. And He was the One in whom they delighted, as a matter of theory, in expectation, though, when He did appear, they saw no beauty

in Him, that they should desire Him, as Isaiah had predicted. Hence He was rejected and crucified as we know; though that is not predicted here. In contrast thereto our thoughts are turned at once to His second advent, when He will be like fire and soap in their testing and cleansing power, and who will then be able to stand before Him? He will then be in majesty on the throne, and not standing as the Prisoner in Pilate's judgment hall.

So, as we said, both advents are here predicted, and the exact fulfilment of the first part gives us the assurance that the second part will in its season be fulfilled with equal exactitude.

In Malachi's day this was not apparent, and the point to the people of his time was that things would be brought to an issue, and their state judged by an intervention of God, such as they had never before known. All their hypocritical self-satisfaction would collapse, and reality be brought to light when He appeared.

It may be profitable now to digress a little and point out two things. First, let us observe that behind all this state of things so clearly manifested, lay the work of the adversary, making it

certain that when Christ came in grace, He would be rejected. A few centuries passed and the state of things exposed by Malachi, developed into the Phariseeism and Sadduceeism, exposed in the Gospels and in the Acts. The former ardently followed a religion of outward observances; the latter favoured something of a more intellectual type, and therefore were unbelieving as to certain things that did not appeal to their reason. Both therefore were absolutely self-confident as to their own position, and bitterly resented anything that undermined it. The spirit that we see among priests and people in Malachi's day was so intensified, that when the Messiah did arrive His coming was no joy to them. This we see in Matthew 2:3. That an evil king like Herod should be troubled, when tidings of His birth came by the wise men from the east, need not surprise us. But look at the words, 'and all Jerusalem with him'. Let us each underline in our minds that word, 'all'. It evidently signifies — Pharisees and Sadducees included. True, these religious men had a knowledge of their Scriptures, for they could at once quote Micah 5:2, in reply to Herod's demand. Yet the only practical use made of their knowledge was to furnish Herod with an opportunity to kill the infant Messiah. There is no record of their doing anything about it, or welcoming Him.

There was of course a work of God, going on amongst the people in Malachi's day, as we shall presently see, and this worked out also, and was maintained till the coming of Christ as we see in the lovely picture of devout souls, who gladly received Him, given us in the opening of Luke's gospel. Through the years, however, these were few in number and comparatively unknown.

There is a second thing we ask our readers to observe. This strain of self-satisfied complacency, that resents and repudiates all criticism, evident in Malachi's day, and more decisively manifested when Christ came, is predicted in Revelation 3, as characterizing the end of the church's history. We refer to the Laodicean church, that felt itself to be so 'rich, and increased with goods', doubtless of a spiritual sort, as well as a material, that they had 'need of nothing'. To have need of nothing is for all practical purposes to lay claim to perfection, and therefore to be beyond all criticism; and bitterly to resent it, if offered, even as they had begun to do when Malachi prophesied.

And let us note another feature. The outward ruin of Israel fairly started when 'that woman Jezebel' was married to Ahab, and nearly diverted the ten tribes to the worship of Baal. Then

with the two tribes there was that time of deadness Godward in the days of Jeremiah, ended by the captivity. And then the mercy of God, permitting a remnant to return to the land and re-establish the temple worship, and amongst these were a number of really godly and devout souls. It was amongst that remnant that the evils, we have had before us, had developed.

Now notice a painful analogy. It may not be very pronounced and distinct, but it is there nevertheless. The addresses to the seven churches give us a prophetic outline of 'things which must shortly come to pass', as Revelation 1:1 states; and when we reach the latter part of Rev. 2, we find 'that woman Jezebel', dominating things in the Thyatira stage. And this is followed by the spiritual death that marked Sardis, and then some measure of recovery in Philadelphia, not anything great, for their strength was 'little', and they had the rather negative virtues of keeping the word of the Lord, when others were forsaking it, and of not denying His name, when others were doing so.

But then comes Laodicea. If God has granted a measure of recovery during the last century or two, and some of us have entered into a heritage of spiritual blessing, let us beware of this Laodicean spirit of self-occupation and self-conceit which

so naturally would entangle us. Today we have not only the high class intellectualist, who believes he has a modernistic version of Christianity, which is beyond all criticism, but also a mystical type, great on the experimental side of things, who feel they have entered into something which is also beyond all criticism. They feel 'rich' because they increase in 'goods', in the form of increased light and further revelations.

We see the Laodicean delusion, if we may so call it, beginning in the days of Malachi. It is sadly evident in our day, and hence we need to be warned against it, for it is a deep-seated tendency of the flesh, which is in every one of us. The more worldly-minded believer may be tempted to glory in wisdom or nobility, and the more spiritually minded to glory in spiritual experiences, imagined or real, but the only safe ground of boasting is that stated by the Apostle Paul, 'He that glories, let him glory in the Lord' (1 Corinthians 1:31).

The first verse of our chapter, as we saw, has in it predictions that found a fulfilment at the first advent of Christ. The second and third verses, however, make it clear that the main emphasis is on His second coming. Then it is that the fire of the refiner will come into action with purifying effect, and this means

judgment as verse 5 states. The bringing of the advents together is not unusual in Old Testament prophecy. Take the later chapters of Isaiah for instance, where the humbled 'Servant' of Jehovah and the mighty 'Arm' of Jehovah, achieving His purpose, come before us. Isaiah 53, which predicts the sufferings of the Servant, begins by asking, 'To whom is the Arm of the Lord revealed?' In other words, 'Who identifies the glorious and irresistible Arm with the despised and humbled Servant?' This was not so plain in the days when the prophets spoke; but very plain in ours; so that we can all reply — Thank God, we do with joy identify them.

What His second advent will accomplish is stated in verses 4 and 5. There will be first a work of purification, and at last the offerings of a restored people will be pure and acceptable, as it had been at the beginning. The 'fuller's soap' will have had its effect. So also the 'refiner's fire' will have come into action judging and removing all the sins and evils, then so prevalent among the people. The fear of God will be established in every heart, and express itself in life.

And the guarantee of all this is found in verse 6. It is the unchangeable character of Jehovah. We might have expected the

next words to be, 'Therefore ye sons of Jacob must be consumed;' but they are just the opposite. God exercises much forbearance, and He has power to reach His own purpose in the end. The Apostle Paul asks the question, 'Hath God cast away His people?' and he at once answers, 'God forbid' (Rom. 11:1). At the time of the second advent judgment will fall on the Jew, yet a godly remnant of the 'sons of Jacob', will be preserved and blessed. The same thing of course is true today.

In verse 7 the prophet returns to his earlier theme, and lays against them the general charge of having departed from God and His Word, with the promise, if they returned to Him, He would return to them. The charge was most apparently true, yet they did not admit it, but rather called it in question. Again they resented and repudiated these words. So, in verse 8, the prophet brings against them a specific charge. They robbed God. by withholding that which was His due, according to the law.

Did they admit this? No. Once more they challenged the accusation. They had to be told that 'tithes and offerings' had been withheld. and so what should have been given to God had been spent on themselves. This it was that brought a curse upon them in the government of God. At the opening of Haggai's

prophecy we saw how their ancestors were doing the same kind of thing, though perhaps on a smaller scale, when they stopped the building of the house of the Lord, and started the building of nice houses for themselves. In both cases the practice was to give the first place to their own things, and then any surplus to be given to God.

And what is the practice in Christendom today; and even among true Christians? We fear that very similar charge could be maintained against all too many of us. Small wonder then, if we see but small result from the work in which we do engage.

Thus they had been robbing God, and the prophet had to confront them with this solemn fact. But he also was authorized to assure them that if they reversed their practice and gave to God His due, there would open 'the windows of heaven' and pour out more than they could receive. The emphasis here is of course on material things for as the Apostle tells us, God 'is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think' (Eph. 3:20). So there is no limit on His side, though such failure, and so often, on our side.

The delightful state of things promised in verses 11 and 12, will only be reached in the age to come, when Christ returns, for only then will God be fully acknowledged and His claims fully met. Palestine will at last be a 'delightful land', when Christ is on the throne. In Malachi's day things were different, and the people in their spirits far from God. This comes before us once more, and for the last time in verses 13 and 14.

Their words had indeed been 'stout' against the Lord, as this short book bears abundant witness. Yet they did not admit even this. If we have counted rightly, the prophet cites what they were saying no less than twelve times, and of these twelve no less than eight were cases of priests and people indignantly repudiating the accusation that God had to bring against them. They were not prepared to admit anything, and resented the words of God. They would not even admit that they had resented and repudiated the truth.

If we glance at such scriptures as Jeremiah 2:30; Jer. 6:3; Jer. 7:28; and Zephaniah 3:2; we find that a similar spirit prevailed among the people in Jerusalem just before its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar. They who refuse 'correction', thereby claim to be all they should be. In Malachi's day, as we are seeing, all

correction was being refused; and the same thing meets us in Revelation 3, since Laodicea is so rich as to have need of nothing, and therefore no need of correction. So again we have to remind ourselves of our danger in this direction, which is specially acute as we draw near to the end of the church's history.

The disastrous effects of this spirit we see in verses 14 and 15. The people had been serving God in this official and ceremonial way, and they felt they got nothing out of it in the form of material gain, which was what they wanted. Hence their sense of real values was entirely perverted. In their view to be proud was to be 'happy'; and evil amongst them became exalted. This is just what we see in the record of the Gospels; the proud Pharisee was accounted the happy man. Because of this, when on the mountain the Lord 'opened His mouth and taught', the very first of His beatitudes was, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit; for their's is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5:3). To be 'poor in spirit' is the exact opposite to being proud in spirit, as the leaders were in Malachi's day, as well as in the day when Christ came; and we fear it is not absent in our day also.

In verse 16 we find something more in keeping with our Lord's beatitude. Amidst all this proud self-conceit and intolerance of

correction, there was found a godly remnant, who are characterized as 'they that feared the Lord'. This 'fear' produced a reverence for God and His will, that made Him the governing factor in their lives. This at once put them into complete contrast with the mass of priests and people, that surrounded them.

Certain features that marked these pious folk are given, and we find them very instructive. The fear of the Lord was the fundamental thing, but this led them to think 'upon His name'. They recognized that they were a people called into relationship with Jehovah, according to the way He had revealed Himself to their fathers, and they were therefore responsible to live lives in keeping with the revelation made, so that His name might be honoured. Consequently, they could be acknowledged as 'righteous', and as serving God, as verse 18 shows.

These features, we have just noticed, were Godward, but they led to a happy state of things manward; that is, among themselves. They did not remain as a number of isolated units, but recognized each other and sought one another's company for spiritual help and encouragement. This they did 'often', and their intercourse was of so good a character that though it has

not been recorded on earth, a heavenly record has been kept. No small honour this!

We turn to the opening chapters of Luke's Gospel, and we find that though several centuries have passed a godly remnant still persists. And here we are permitted to read a few of their utterances. Let us take as a sample what old Anna spoke about when she went visiting 'all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem' — they could not have been a very great number; could they? — her theme was this, 'she spake of Him', The advent of the long looked-for Messiah was her only theme.

Once again we may turn to Revelation 3, for in the address to the assembly at Philadelphia we find similar good features appearing. Though having only a little strength they too had kept the word of the Lord and had not denied His name — and the name, in the light of which they walked, went in its claims beyond anything known in Malachi's day, or even in the day when Anna spake of Him.

It is an encouragement to know that, however dark the day, God will maintain a witness to Himself. Let us seek grace and humility from God to be within that witness today; for, as this

scripture shows, it is of value in His eyes. A day is coming when these obscure, unknown saints of Malachi's day are going to be owned as 'Mine', by the Lord of hosts and that will take place when He will 'make up My jewels'; the inference being that He will count even them, as being jewels in His sight. A person might point to a casket of jewels and tell us they are but small pieces of stone. Yes, we should reply, but they possess the property of reflecting light, and sparkling in various hues as it is turned upon them. The figure therefore is an apt one, for the saints of God are partakers of the divine nature, and so have the capacity to reflect the light into which they are brought. In Revelation 21, the foundations of the heavenly city are precious stones, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Malachi 4

The day when the Lord of hosts makes up His jewels will be a day of discrimination, and therefore of judgment as well as blessing. This comes clearly to light as we commence to read the last chapter of this short prophecy. The earth is of course in view, and when judgment does arrive it will be final and com-

plete. Neither root nor branch will be left as far as the wicked are concerned. The Sun of righteousness will arise to exterminate the wicked, while He will bring healing and full blessing to those who fear His name.

In the Old Testament the Lord Jesus — the coming One — has been presented under a variety of beautiful figures; this closing figure comes home to us all, we trust, with singular force. He who has read through the 39 books, up to this point, has certainly surveyed a very dark scene with here and there little patches of light. We now close with the promise of God's resplendent day, introduced by the rising of the 'Sun', in whom all true light is concentrated, and who is specially to be the display of, and the enforcer of, righteousness in perfection. In a world ruined by sin everything is wrong: hence if an order of things is to be established according to God, the first consideration must be what is right. This is seen even in the Gospel that we preach today, as expounded in the epistle of the Romans. Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel since it is the power of God to salvation; and it is that because in it righteousness of God is proclaimed, and made available by faith for sinners such as we were. Behind the righteousness lies of course the

love of God, but that is not actually mentioned in the epistle until we reach Romans 5.

If righteousness be fully established it must mean the elimination of all that is wrong. Hence the beams of that glorious 'Sun' will burn like an oven destroying the ungodly, while bringing healing and fertility to those who fear God.

How different is the final presentation of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament, where He comes before us as the bright, Morning Star, which is the harbinger of the coming day. No thought of judgment enters here for, as the Lord Jesus Himself says, He sent His angel 'to testify to you these things in the churches'. For only those who are in 'the churches', have the knowledge of Him, who is the 'Morning Star', and who are on the look-out for Him, while the world is still in darkness before the rising of the 'Sun'. When the Morning Star appears, there will be the first sign of the rising of the Sun of righteousness, and the coming of the day of the Lord; for there will be the 'rapture', or snatching away of saints, both dead and living, to present them before the Father in their heavenly home.

We now have to call attention to verse 4 of our chapter. It might strike us at first as a rather extraordinary command to be interjected at this very late hour in Israel's history, about a thousand years after the law was given through Moses. But enshrined in it we see two important principles. First, the law was given for 'all Israel' and it was given 'with the statutes and judgments'. The people in the land, to whom specially Malachi wrote, were comparatively few and in surroundings very different from the days of Moses, or even the days of David and Solomon, but if a man was an Israelite the whole law, in all its details was still binding upon him, and to be obeyed.

And in the second place, not only was it a case of all the law for every Israelite, wherever he might be, but it was also a case of all the time. The fact that many centuries had passed made no difference. In Malachi's day some Israelite might have been saying to himself — But circumstances are so different today; surely a lot of these minor details of the law are not so binding as at the beginning. Here then was the necessary word for one, such as that.

Exactly the same tendency confronts us today. As an instance of what we mean, take Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians,

written at the outset of our dispensation, nine. teen centuries ago. There was much disorder among the Corinthian Christians, so the Apostle was inspired to lay down the order that should prevail amongst them both in their individual lives, and in their functions as members of the body of Christ, which is the church. In 1 Corinthians 14 he lays down the Divine administration for their assembly meetings, and concludes by calling upon them to recognize that the directions he gives are 'the commandments of the Lord'. Are any of us tempted to say, or even to think, — Yes, but the changes that have supervened during these many centuries are far greater than at any other period of the world's history, surely we are hardly bound to these small details of assembly life and practice. If we are so tempted let us consider this verse.

It is happily true that we, 'are not under the law, but under grace' (Rom. 6:14), and yet we are furnished with many commandments. The commandments of the law were given, that by keeping them men might establish their righteousness before God. This they never did. Grace brings salvation to us who believe, and then teaches us to live sober, righteous and godly lives, as is stated in Titus 2:11-12, and then issues command-

ments, to guide us in so doing. But commandments they are, and not to be brushed aside while the dispensation lasts.

What we have indicated is further supported by the closing chapter of the New Testament. We have already noticed how Revelation 22 ends with the 'Morning Star', rather than the 'Sun of righteousness', and now we notice that it closes also with a strong assertion of the sacred integrity of the Word of God. No man is to add to, or take away from, its words. This has doubtless special reference to the Revelation, but coming at the close of the New Testament, we believe it has reference to the whole New Testament revelation, in a secondary way, just as the verse we have been considering applies to the whole Old Testament revelation.

In these closing words the minds of the people were not only carried back to Moses, but also onward to Elijah, as we see in verse 5. Through Moses the law had been given. By Elijah the ten tribes had been recalled to God and His law, in days when they were almost swamped by the worship of Baal. Before the coming of the predicted day of the Lord an 'Elijah' is to appear. We may remember that when John the Baptist was asked if he were Elijah, he answered, No. Yet he came in the spirit and

power of Elijah, so that in regard to the first coming our Lord could say, 'If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come' (Matt. 11:14).

But the first coming of our Lord was the introduction of the day of grace. It is His second coming in power and glory that will introduce 'the great and dreadful day of the Lord'. Hence, we judge, this prediction in its fulness must still await its fulfilment. In Revelation 11:3-6, we read of 'two witnesses', marked by features in their testimony, reminiscent of Moses and Elijah, and these precede the second coming of the Lord. We may connect the Elijah of our verse with one of these. What we can say with assurance is that God ever raises up adequate witness, and gives adequate warning, before He acts in judgment.

What is stated in the last verse may seem rather obscure, but if we read Luke 1:17, the bearing of it is plain. The 'disobedient' will be turned to 'the wisdom of the just', and thus a people prepared for the Lord. Thus a godly remnant will be found, otherwise the whole earth would be smitten with a curse.

The Old Testament is the history of man under the law: hence its last word is, 'curse'. The New Testament is the story of the

appearing of God's grace: hence the last word is, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints' (New Trans.). How happy are we to live in a day when grace is on the throne, reigning through righteousness!

