Malachi - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

Minor Prophets, Malachi 4:6: John the Baptist and Elijah

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

I would add a little by way of postscript.

The John the Baptist of the gospels is identified (officially, not personally) with the Elijah of Malachi. (See Matt. 11; Mark 1; Luke 1; Luke 7.) John the Baptist stood ready to fulfill the promise of the prophet to Israel. He was, as the messenger that went before the face of the Lord of the temple; and as the one who would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers. But Israel was unbelieving; and, as the ancient oracle is a standing oracle in the story of that people—"If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established," (Isa. 7:9), Israel remained unblessed.

Elijah, in Ahab's day, was a restorer, as we see in 1 Kings 18. But this was but for a season. His light was rejoiced in by the people, but Jezebel forced him out into the wilderness again. So with the Baptist. His light was rejoiced in also. But, again, this was only for a season. The multitude were baptized of him; but the wicked hated him; and there was another Jezebel in that day that had him beheaded; and Israel was left unestablished, whether by Elijah or the Baptist.

But the promised Elijah will still appear and lead on to the throne and power of Messiah. For God is true, though every man be a liar. His gifts and calling are without repentance. He will be faithful to Israel, though, as we have seen, Israel under every trial has been unfaithful to Him. He will accomplish His purposes in grace, be the world, be Israel, or man, never so angry or never so perverted. "God is unchangeable both in righteousness and grace."

"All Israel shall be saved; as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26).

Behold the mountain of the Lord

In latter days shall rise,

On mountain-tops above the hills,

And draw the wond'ring eyes.

Courtesy of BibleTruthPublishers.com. Most likely this text has not been proofread. Any suggestions for spelling or punctuation corrections would be warmly received. Please email them to: BTPmail@bibletruthpublishers.com.

Minor Prophets, Malachi 1:5-14

Malachi 1

It opens with a terrible exposure of the moral condition of the returned captives. Was the state of Israel ever worse? If idolatry had marked it from the beginning hitherto, infidelity does now; the spirit of scorning, the spirit that contemns and repudiates all the claims of God, and only mocks His pleadings and entreaties. So that, we may say, if the unclean spirit has at this time of Malachi gone out, a more wicked one has entered. We cannot say that the old unclean spirit has returned, bringing with him seven other spirits; for we do not find, under the word of this prophet, a return to idolatry. But we may say that a spirit more wicked than the old one has entered.

The "wherein" of this chapter, used by the returned captives again and again, as they answer the appeals and rebukes of the Lord, sounds awfully in our ears.

Minor Prophets, Malachi 1:4: Messiah Presented and the Test Failed

In due season, the hour of the New Testament arrives, and we find the same before us, just as Malachi had promised us it should be. Messiah, the Lord of the temple, appears, introduced by John Baptist, the messenger of Malachi 3:1, and the Elias (if the people would receive him) of Malachi 4:5. The series of tests which have been made from the day of the Exodus to the day of the returned captives is resumed now. Messiah is offered, ("If ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come," are words which clearly tell us, that the ministry of the Baptist of Christ was a testing time.) and He presents Himself, in full and varied forms, to the acceptance of Israel. And, at last, the Spirit is given, and apostles full of the Holy Spirit call on Israel to repent and believe, and thus enter the times of refreshing and restitution promised and spoken of by all the prophets. These are the brightest, richest, visitations: the last, yet the best; the closing, yet the most promising; but, like all the rest, they fail. Israel is not gathered. In Egypt, in the wilderness, and in the land; as a pilgrim-people, or as captives; as a nation, or as a kingdom; as presented with Messiah and His works, or as visited by the Spirit and His virtues—still, from first to last, under all the patient exercise of this long-suffering, grace, and wisdom, they are untrue still. "They always resist the Holy Ghost," as one inspired voice says of them. "They fill up the measure of their sins always," as another inspired voice pronounces against them.

The nation had been preserved, as we saw, and kept in their own land until the king, the house of David, was set up—and now they are restored to their own land, and kept there until Messiah appear and offered Himself to them. “The rod of the tribe of Judah is preserved, in order that the Branch of the root Jesse may be presented.”

At the opening of the gospels we find passages from Malachi quoted, as belonging to that moment of the evangelists. The close of the Old thus links itself with the opening of the New Testament, and these connections, simple, and striking, and self-widening as they are, illustrate the unity of the divine volume. They display something of the moral glory of the Book, and let us learn, what we learn from another and a more direct witness, that is, from a passage in the Book itself, that, “known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18).

Minor Prophets, Malachi 1:3: A Bright Beginning

I must, however, turn aside from this for a moment.

The returned captives at their beginning, give some beautiful samples of faith and service. They are left, as we may see presently, by Malachi, in a very sad moral condition. But there had been brighter, earlier moments. Great events, greater than had been known for centuries in Israel, had been witnessed: such as their journey from Babylon, the building of the temple, the building of the wall, the purifying of the congregation again and again. Yet there was no miracle: all was accomplished by force of moral energy—the Spirit of God working in the people, rather than the hand of God working for them. There was no cloudy pillar to conduct them across the second desert; but they went, the fast and the prayer on the banks of the Ahava bespeaking the virtue of the Spirit that was among them. They refused Samaritan alliances, as a people that knew their Nazaritism. The customs of the nations, the traditions of the elders, their own thoughts and wisdom, had no place in forming their character or conduct. The word of God was their law. Individual grace and gift shine eminent, as in Ezra and Nehemiah. The light that was in Ezra, the single-heartedness that mark Nehemiah, could carry the people through difficulties, when the rod of Moses was no longer in the camp to do its marvels, as in the sight of the enemy.

I speak not of Mordecai and Esther, though strange and admirable was their way, without a miracle in their behalf, because they represent Israel in the dispersion, and not as returned captives. (The virtues which would have duly given character to the remnant of Israel, or the returned captives, showed themselves to perfection in the Lord Jesus, who was, as we may say, the Remnant in His day. He would have His disciples refuse Samaritan alliance, and yet bow to the Gentile. “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s,” may be read as the summary of the religion of returned captives.)

But these brighter moments had now faded, and Malachi gives us our last Old Testament sight of the state of Israel, sad and humbling as indeed it is.

Minor Prophets, Malachi 1:2: A Return to Failure

This, surely, was a new condition. But they are put into it, that they may be again tested, tested to the full, and thereby proved and convicted to the uttermost. For so it comes to pass that when the trial of them is made in their new circumstances, failure ensues, as it had ever done. The book of Judges had already witnessed against them as a nation; 2 Chronicles had already witnessed against them as a kingdom; now Ezra and Nehemiah, and this prophecy of Malachi witness against them as returned captives.

Minor Prophets, Malachi 1:1

Malachi closes the writings of the minor prophets, as they are called, and with them the volume of the Old Testament. This suggests and warrants a short review of things in the previous story of Israel.

From the beginning the Lord had been, in various ways, testing and proving that people, whom He had made His people. After having delivered them from Egypt, and borne them through the wilderness, under Joshua, He set them in the land promised to their fathers; and then, in a certain sense, began afresh with them. This is seen in the days of the Judges who succeeded Joshua. But what was the story? The people transgressed; the Lord chastened; the people wept under the rod; the Lord raised up a deliverer. Thus it was, again and again.

But during all this time the Lord kept Israel before and under Himself. In those days there was no captivity of the people, or conquest of the land. Israel was still at home. The land was still their own, and Jehovah their king as well as their God.

In due season, the Lord gave them the house and the throne of David. They flourished into a kingdom. But the kingdom became untrue to Him as the nation had been. Much longsuffering towards the house of David the Lord exercised, as before He had exercised towards the nation. The books of Judges and of 2 Chronicles show us all this. But at length, loss of home and country, with sore captivity, ensued; and a worse condition than had been known under the rod of the Philistines, Midianites or Canaanites, was now known under the kings of Assyria and Babylon. Scattering of the people among the Gentiles, and possession of their land by the Gentiles now takes place.

This was fearful. There is, however, restoration. There is a return of captives from Babylon. Jerusalem is regained, rebuilt, re-peopled. The house of God is raised up again, and the worship of His name and the service of His altar are observed again. But this state of things was something quite new. Israel was not now a nation set in their own land, as they had been under Joshua and the Judges; nor a kingdom with one of their own children on the throne, (such a throne as the glory could accompany) as under David and David’s sons. The people were now the vassals of the Gentile. They were debtors to the Gentile for permission to occupy the land of their fathers, and to observe the laws and do the service of their God. They were the subjects of the Persian, and their ruler was his vicegerent.