

## **James Philip Bible Readings**

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THE BOOK of  
Malachi

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**THE BOOK of Malachi**

The following Notes are based on a series of Bible Readings given at an IVF Conference some years ago. They have been adapted for more general reading and study, in the hope that the living message of the prophecy will come through as something very relevant for our own day.



**I) 1:1**

In a study such as this, it is particularly necessary to have some idea of the historical background against which the prophet exercised his ministry. Without such an introduction it would be almost impossible to appreciate the significance of his message. Malachi, along with Haggai and Zechariah, belongs to the period of Jewish history known as the post-exilic period. Not to go too far back into the earlier history of God's people, we should simply remember that Judah, the southern kingdom, was brought into captivity in Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, in 586 BC, and remained there until about 538 BC, when Cyrus of Persia, who had crushed the power of the Babylonian empire, released the captives and allowed them to return to their own land, under Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel. The following dates for the Persian period 'place' the post-exilic prophetic activity:

Cyrus the Great	539-529
Cambyses	529-522
Pseudo-Smerdis	522
Darius I (Hystaspis)	521-485
Xerxes I (Ahasuerus)	485-464
Artaxerxes I (Longimanus)	464-424
Xerxes II	424-423
Sogdianus	423
Darius II	423-404
Artaxerxes II (Mnemon)	404-358
Artaxerxes III (Ochus)	358-338
Arxes	338-335
Darius III (Codomannus)	335-331

The kings that we are concerned specially with in this list are Cyrus, Darius I, Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) and Artaxerxes I. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah exercised their ministries during the reign of Darius I and the Temple was rebuilt between the second and sixth years of his reign (520-516). Attempts were made to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem under Xerxes (485-464), but especially under Artaxerxes I (464-424), under whom Ezra in 45, and Dehemiah in 445, arrived in Jerusalem.

**2) 1:1**

George Adam Smith makes the following division of the period:

From the taking of Babylon by Cyrus to the completion of the Temple in the sixth year of Darius I, 538-516. Haggai and Zechariah prophesying in 520 ff.

1. From the completion of the Temple to the arrival of Ezra in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I, 516-458; sometimes called the period of silence, but probably yielding the book of Malachi.
2. The work of Ezra and Nehemiah under Artaxerxes I, 458-425.
3. The rest. Xerxes II to Darius III, 425-331. The book of Joel.

Others, however, place Malachi a little later, and consider him a contemporary of Nehemiah, ministering during the second reform of Nehemiah, between 432 and 424 BC, the sins denounced by the prophet being, as we shall see, precisely those which were corrected by Nehemiah. Malachi thus stands to Nehemiah as Haggai and Zechariah stood to Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel, Isaiah to king Hezekiah, Jeremiah to king Josiah. If, then, these dates are held to be reasonable - and on either interpretation we cannot be very far out - Malachi's prophecy belongs to a period in which the great, high hopes associated with the return from exile had turned into disillusionment, and the dedication and heart-warming consecration that had marked the first repatriates had been chilled into a desolating mediocrity, with an accompanying loss of vision which had led to a general lowering of both spiritual and moral standards. It was to such a situation, and to such a people, that God sent His servant Malachi.

**3) 1:1**

Our concern in these readings is not simply to speak of these far-off days in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, for the word of God is a living Word, and has a message for today. Malachi speaks down the centuries to us, as well as to his own age, and we must seek to interpret his message in such a way as to see that it is relevant for us. There are two ways in which we may legitimately and relevantly apply what he says. On the one hand it is a message to those who have lost the first flush of their high consecration to God and the things of God. In this connection this may be said: it is obvious that for a great many young people, the days of their early Christian experience represent a time of deep and genuine dedication to Christ and of unbounded enthusiasm in His service. But it is also, alas, fairly predictable that within a few years, many will have lost their first love and lapsed into this very spiritual mediocrity of which the book of Malachi speaks. We must look, then, at his prophecy as into a mirror, where we may see the dangers that await us, temptations that seek to drag us down from the heights of dedication to the dreary commonplace of low-level Christian experience, pressures and atmospheres which, because of their very subtlety, may deceive and betray us before we are well aware of their existence. This is one great value of the book for us. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

**4) I:I**

On the other hand, and on a wider canvas, we must learn to see Malachi as a stirring and challenging message to the evangelical church of our day, in this sense: It is now about half a century since the end of the Second World War. The immediate post-war years, as Christians who lived through them will recall, were years of great expectancy, when the word, and hope, of revival was on many lips, and there were great and profound stirrings in evangelical life. To be an evangelical then was certainly to be a member of a despised minority, in a way that is not so now, but it was also to be burdened with a great burden of prayer for the work of the Lord in Scotland, and to have a steady fire burning within for the things of God. One recalls - to give but one instance of the spirit of those days - how one young man politely declined an invitation to a social gathering in the home of an evangelical couple who were genial and charming worldlings because he felt that such a gathering was incompatible with the burden on his soul for spiritual awakening. It may seriously be questioned whether this kind of earnestness of spirit obtains by and large in evangelical life today. Not very long ago invitations were issued to some to become associated with a scheme to charter a pleasure liner for the purpose of running an evangelical cruise for the delectation of wealthy evangelical worldlings round the coast of Scotland with - as a sop to their consciences - a landing or two here and there to hold an open-air meeting for Christian witness. It is not merely the fact that this could have been thought of at all, but that so many should have been blind to the horror and shame of it, that makes one realise that over the years there has come a gradual but nevertheless incontrovertible drop in spiritual temperature, and a spiritual laxity which is characterised by the loss of a true biblical separation and a lowering of former high standards. This is the kind of situation for which we require to see that Malachi has resounding and unequivocal challenge and warning. It is to be hoped that as we read and study his words we shall be able to see how applicable they are to the problems and failures of our own day.



**5) I:I**

The following general analysis of the prophecy may be usefully followed:

1:2-5	Gods love for Israel
1:6-14	Israel's neglect of God's holiness
2:1-9	The sins of the priests
2:10-16	Divorce and mixed marriages
2:1-3:5	Where is the God of judgment?
3:6-12	Repentance by tithes
3:13-4:3	The judgment to come
4:4-6	The return of Elijah

In our present study, we shall divide these more or less well-defined sections into three parts, as follows:

1. a. Introduction: background of prophecy  
b. God's love for Israel  
c. Israel's neglect of God's holiness
2. a. The sins of the priests  
b. The sins of the people
3. a. Answer to the discouraged  
b. Tithes  
c. Judgment to come  
d. Return of Elijah

The first section, as will be seen, covers the first chapter of the prophecy, and deals with God's love for Israel and Israel's neglect of the holiness and majesty of God. Before we begin to look at this subject, however, one further consideration must be underlined: some commentators tell us that throughout the prophecy there are two classes in view, (i) the sins of the people, and (ii) the discouraged and downcast and despairing. In this connection they suggest that the first two chapters deal with the former, while the remainder of the book deals with the latter. It may be, however, that this is too clear-cut a distinction to make; for is it not the case that very often it is discouragement and lowspiritedness that leads to carelessness of living and the consequent lowering of former high standards? It is perhaps wise for us to bear this in mind as we read, not making too rigid a distinction between the two classes, and recognizing that believers who become discouraged are precisely those who may be in danger of lapsing into the kind of backslidden state that is mirrored in the words of Malachi.

**6) 1:1-5**

The name 'Malachi' is taken by some to be a proper name, by others to mean simply 'My messenger'. Arguments in favour of both can be adduced but are not our concern in this study. More important for us is the formula used by the prophet to introduce his message to the people. Throughout the prophecy there is a series of questions beginning with 'Wherein....?' The prophet first makes a statement; the people are represented as objecting. 'Wherein have we....?'; the prophet rejoins with a full answer to their objection. This pattern is repeated seven times throughout the prophecy, in 1:2, 1:6, 1:7, 2:17, 3:7, 3:8, 3:13 (in this last the AV reads 'What', but in the original the word is the same as in the other references and should read 'Wherein'). It should be clear from these questions that the people were unaware of their real condition in the sight of God, a fact which bears witness to the terrible blinding power of sin. When men sin - and this applies to believers as much as to unbelievers - they lose their sensitiveness to reality and their perception of spiritual issues (cf Hosea 7:9) which also emphasises this solemn truth: 'Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not'.

**7) 1:1-5**

The first question and answer deal with the disappointed hopes that gripped the people when the promised restoration of the Temple was followed by hard times of discouragement and difficulty, and that made them doubt God's love and interest in them and over against the disheartening of the people Malachi sets this gloriously assuring word, 'I have loved thee'. The prophet does not do what many of his predecessors did, namely rehearse God's mighty redemptive work when He brought Israel out of Egypt, or even when He brought them out of Babylon; instead, he holds up to their view the contrast between God's treatment of Esau (who is Edom) and His treatment of Israel. Edom was the hereditary enemy of Israel, and had summed up all her antagonism, hatred and contempt of God's people in the merciless treatment they had meted out to them when Babylon took them captive in 586 BC (see Obadiah 10). Obadiah's grim prophecy against Edom was fulfilled, when the Nabataean Arabs destroyed Edom utterly, beyond any hope of recovery. It is this destruction that Malachi refers to here, and it is cited to Israel as a proof of the Divine love for them. For, after all, Israel was still in existence as a nation, while her former captors, Babylon, and enemy, Edom, were no more. God's judgment of Israel's enemies was final; His treatment of His own people corrective and remedial, because He loved them. The reference here is therefore to His distinctive covenant purpose for His people. No power on earth could destroy those whom He called to remain in existence as a people for whom He had a glorious calling.

**8) 1:1-5**

This, then, is the evidence of God's love for them, His taking them up, bringing them through the fires of exile and captivity, preserving them, and going on again with them unremittingly in the fulfilment of His purposes. The implication of this, of course, is that God's love for His people was to be seen, for those who had eyes to see, just as much in the disciplines that were and had been upon the people as in the more obvious manifestations of His deliverances in the past. As the writer to the Hebrews says, 'Whom the Lord loveth, He chastened'. To doubt this, to lose sight of this, is the cause of many ills in the spiritual life.

Thus, at the outset of the prophecy, we are shown the reality of the Divine love, hovering over His people, overshadowing them even when they were least conscious of Him, seeking to break through to claim their love anew. This is really what the remainder of the prophecy is about, it is an exhortation to the people to renew their covenant with Jehovah, and to let the claims of the covenant-relationship, which they had sadly broken and neglected, lay hold upon their lives afresh. The message of the Messenger is therefore a recall to the covenant.

**9) 1:6-14**

The prophet's words here are addressed first of all to the priests - 'O priests' (6), but clearly, in the subject matter of the verses, the people as a whole are involved in the worship of the Temple and the sacrifices offered there, and it is better to refer the verses to the neglect of the people as a whole, including the priests, and influenced by them; especially since the priests themselves are made the special subject of 2:1-9, a passage which, as we shall see, has deep and significant application to our own day in a number of ways.

We should note first of all that, once more, the complaint of the Lord against His people provokes a response of blank incomprehension and bewilderment in them. 'Wherein have we despised Thy Name?' (6). They are blind to the dishonour they have paid Him. There is something very serious here, when a people are unaware of the gravity of their sin. Let us see the gist of the prophet's complaint. The majesty and holiness of God have been wronged and insulted by the low and unworthy thoughts the people have entertained about His altar, and by the cheap and blemished sacrifices they have offered on it (vv 7, 8). Such contemptuous gifts would certainly not be offered to their earthly governor; how then should they think that God would be pleased with them? It seems clear that 9 is meant to be taken ironically: 'Go then, with such ragged offerings, and intercede with God.... Think you that He will accept such an insult? I tell you nay.' (Moore). The meaning of 10 is best taken from the RSV rendering. What God is saying in effect is that it would be better for sacrifice to cease altogether than that such offerings should be presented in such a spirit. 'Is there no one to close the doors of the Temple, to prevent such vain and worthless sacrifices on My altar?'

**10) 1:6-14**

There are three points to make here, in relation to the prophet's teaching in this section: First of all, we look at an example from an earlier period of Israel's history, the story of the return of the Ark to Jerusalem in the days of king David recorded in 2 Samuel 6. The Ark of the Covenant had been out of Israel for twenty long years, and in bringing it back to Jerusalem David was advocating a return to the things of God on a national level; he was attempting to renew the nation in spiritual things. Was the summary on Uzzah, then, hard and severe, in the light of this desire on David's part? No; for Uzzah's action betrayed a presumptuous, complacent spirit towards the things of God. The Ark was the symbol of God's presence, and there were Levitical ordinances designed to secure the strictest reverence for it (Numbers 4:5, 15, 19, 20). It was to be carried by Levites, but not to be touched, on pain of death. The instructions were clear, and what happened on this occasion was a plain neglect of God's law. It was one thing to desire the return of the Ark as the first step in the inauguration of a new era of worship, but if breaches of the Divine law were to mark this, where would it have led? To be careless in such a matter, as Uzzah was, indicated a lack of seriousness in the desire to return to God. The Ark had been neglected for long years, and now it was being casually treated. But we cannot turn back to God in a moment, casually, and resume intimate fellowship with Him as if there had been no estrangement. We are to learn that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (6). Alas, this was at a discount in Israel in David's day, and also in Malachi's. This is the ground for the complaint in this passage. A serious and sinister complacency about holy things, indeed, a weariness of them (13) had crept in all unawares, and had awakened the displeasure of the Lord against them. It is not difficult to imagine parallels to this in spiritual life today. Take one instance: in the first stages of a movement, you will often find great enthusiasm and dedication and a burden of prayer; then as time goes on, the prayer becomes more a duty than a joy and delight; then, presently, people begin to find that they have other important engagements to fulfil and are no longer able to come to prayer; and finally, excuses are made, and devices employed, to extricate them from what is now an unwelcome and wearisome commitment. They are tired of the whole business.

**11) 6-14**

The second point is this: Malachi's attack on the abuses of the Temple worship and sacrifices is something that he has in common with earlier prophets - one recalls Isaiah's strictures in the first chapter of his prophecy against the emptiness of a ritual performed by those with hearts that were far away from God. On the whole, however, the earlier prophets, in their reactions against such hypocrisy, were intent on teaching the people that it was the ethical that God wanted in religion, not the ritual. 'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God' (Micah 6:8). But in this exclusive emphasis, the prophets sometimes seemed to give the impression that the sacrificial cultus was not of God at all, which, of course it was. We should remember that there are two Tables of the law, and that although the prophetic emphasis on the ethical points to the second Table (man's duty to his fellows), the first table speaks of man's relation to God, and this is what the sacrificial cultus is meant to fulfil. Now, Malachi does not sweep away the Temple worship because it is slovenly, fraudulent and indecent; rather he attacks it as the evidence of the false ideas of God that had developed in the minds of the people, and of what was due to Him. So that, although Malachi's emphasis is at first sight very different from the earlier prophets, in that he wants to see the ritual renewed and honoured, not swept away, nevertheless fundamentally he was doing the same thing as his predecessors, namely going to the root of the problem in the people's misconceptions of the nature of God and His demands on His people. It was wrong of Israel in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC to neglect the ethical content of religion; but it was just as wrong of Israel in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC to neglect the ritual itself. Both attitudes betrayed something serious at the head of the nation.

**12) 1:6-14**

There are parallels to this in our contemporary life that we will do well to consider. Spiritual life is often subject to swings of the pendulum. For example, we all know how at certain times a very narrow pattern of life tends to develop in groups, fellowships, and even communities, and in fact in evangelical life as a whole. There is nothing wrong with this, as such, for after all, Jesus Himself said, 'Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life', and such a pattern has often emerged as the expression of a great and wonderful spirit of dedication and consecration and separation. But we know also that when the original inspiration for such a spirit disappears, wanes, or departs, the outward pattern has tended to remain and persist; and so what we find is the crystallisation of a way of life characterised by narrow prejudices and taboos, which are observed because they have been there for years. They become the shibboleths by which not only consecration, but also orthodoxy itself, and standing in grace, are alike judged. A hard and unattractive and negative legalism holds the field. And how many Christians are in bondage to it, hag-ridden and hamstrung by it, until real Christian life is utterly caricatured! In such a situation nothing is needed so much as the message of Christian liberty, and we should be thankful that a breath of liberty from such a bondage has touched evangelical life in our time. But it is possible for the pendulum to swing much too far, and for liberty to pass into, and be mistaken for, licence. And it has. Christian liberty for many evangelical believers today has become carelessness, and indulgence in many of the things of the world that are beguiling them away from the simplicity that is in Christ, and corrupting their testimony. There is a new and urgent need for a new Puritanism in life and behaviour among Christian people today - not a recall to the old legalism and bondages and taboos, any more than Malachi was calling for a return to the old multiplication of sacrifices when hearts were far from God, but a reinvestment of the biblical idea of separation with a new spiritual dynamic, which will worthily express the truth that this world is not our home, that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, and look for a city, whose builder and maker is God.



**13) 1:6-14**

The third point has to do with the interpretation of 10 and 11. One commentator says that 'the wish that the doors of the Temple should be closed conveys an intimation that if no one is found to shut them God will do it Himself; or rather will forsake that Temple, and leave it an altar without a promise, and a shrine without a divinity' (Moore). It is in this connection that 11 follows with its reference to God's name being praised among the Gentiles. Is there a suggestion there that if His own people continue to violate the covenant He has made with them, God will turn elsewhere to find instruments of His purpose in the world? It is certainly true in the history of the Church that times have come when, due to the unfaithfulness and failure of the Church, God has turned from it and raised up a witness to Himself outside it. Think of the Wesleys, think of the Brethren movement! But do not forget that if those He has called out to be a witness for Him themselves prove unfaithful - evangelicals often are - then God will cast them away also, and look elsewhere. This is, after all, Paul's argument about the Jews and the Gentiles in Romans 11:17-21. No group of people, however orthodox and impeccable in doctrine, are indispensable to God. The words spoken by Mordecai the Jew to Queen Esther are very applicable to us also: 'If thou altogether hold thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance come....from another source, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?' (Esther 4:14). Here, then, is the challenge of the passage. Declension in the people of God may lead to their becoming castaway. He wills to have a people separated unto Himself for the furtherance of His purposes, and invites their co-operation in the work of His hand. His work will certainly go on; but the great question is whether it shall do so through the instrumentality of willing and dedicated lives, or in spite of them.

**14)2:1-9**

With these verses we come to the second division of the prophecy, which covers the whole of the second chapter, except for the last verse. It contains two subjects: The sins of the priests (1-9) and the sins of the people (10-16). This passage gives us a moving and disturbing indictment of the sins of the priests in Malachi's day. We may take it in two parts; the prophet speaks in the central verses of the true calling of the priest, as messenger of the Lord of hosts (5-7), and it is against this idealised picture that the actual failures of the priesthood are set and condemned by the prophet, speaking in the Lord's Name. It is certainly true that this passage is connected with the verses that immediately precede it (1:6-14), for the sins there mentioned are also the priests' sins. We may recall an earlier prophetic lament and condemnation, 'Like people, like priest' (Hosea 4:9). It is a truism that the people take their lead from their leaders, and there can be no doubt but that if Israel had had wise and dedicated leadership, and the inspiration of a good example from the priests, they would have been a very different people than we see them in this prophecy. This, then, is the lesson of the passage: A people will live as truly and as highly as their spiritual mentors and leaders allow them to. If a river is polluted at the source, the lower reaches will share in the contamination.

**15)2:1-9**

The indictment here is so clear and plain that it scarcely requires detailed comment. It is the application of what is said that is important for us and these words can be applied in one or two simple and indeed obvious ways. First of all, however, there is one point we should note particularly, for its significance in relation to Malachi's ministry and its purpose. It is said that the meaning of 4 is something like this: 'Ye shall know that I have sent to you this commandment, that it might be (a confirmation of) my covenant with Levi, saith the Lord of hosts'. That is to say, the commandment (referred to in 1) with its threats of judgment and indeed the imminent fulfilment of it upon their continued impenitence, was designed to re-establish the original covenant with Levi, and bring the priests back to the purity of their sacred order, and thus effect a complete reformation (Moore). Moore adds, 'This verse then explains the special mission of Malachi as a Reformer. It was to bring back the priests to the original Levite covenant, and restore the true spirit of the mosaic institutions that he came forth'.

But this threat of judgment has sometimes to become a reality before a true reformation can take place. And the Church, and the ministry, sometimes pass through the disciplines of barrenness, in order to bring them to an end of themselves and to make them utterly dependent once again on the living God. This is one explanation of the spiritual barrenness of our day and generation. God is intent upon bringing His Church to its knees in helplessness and true contrition, so that at the last He may pour out a blessing upon her. This was one of the purposes of the difficult times that Malachi's generation was even then passing through.

**16)2:1-9**

Let us make one or two applications of this to our own situation, one directly, and one rather more indirectly, but nevertheless relevant. First of all, a word to those who may have thoughts of the ministry as their God-appointed life's work, or who have already committed themselves to it. This will apply particularly to such, but is of course of more general application also, for although not all are called to the ministry of the gospel, yet all who know the Lord and love His Name should be very concerned that the ministry of the Church should be godly, devout and faithful. What follows should therefore be fuel for prayer for all who read these Notes whether called to minister or not. What are the marks of the true servant of God? They are given us here in 5-7. We should read 5 as in the RSV. The covenant of life and peace was given Levi, we are told, that he might fear. This might be, and has been interpreted in more than one way, but let us take it thus: to Levi, as the priest of the Lord, there was given a ministry of life and peace; first of all he was to enjoy these blessings, then minister them to others. And it is the inestimable privilege of the gift, and the awesomeness of the responsibility involved in exercising a faithful stewardship in it towards others, that must surely bring a holy fear and awe upon him. This is what Paul expresses in 2 Corinthians 2:16, in the words, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' As Malachi puts it, 'He did fear; he stood in awe of My Name'. This is the basis and foundation of all true and effective service for God. If a man fears the Lord, and holds His holy Name in reverence and awe, then there will be no possibility of the indictment in 1:6-14 ever being true of him.

**17)2-1-9**

Two things are to be said in this connection. Firstly, when this fundamental fear of God and reverence for Him grips a man, he will be forever saved and delivered from either light or superficial views of his calling, and from the desolating and almost blasphemous spirit of near-cynicism that seems to afflict some of our once-hopeful young men studying theology. We have known men who have developed a 'blasé' attitude to their life and their work and their studies and their calling, and it is almost the most frightening thing we have seen in all our experience. It is something they must shun like the plague, for it will ruin their future ministry if they are not delivered from it. It is ruining some of them now. Secondly, this fear of God will impart something to his whole being that will inevitably communicate itself to those to whom he ministers. They will know he is a certain kind of person rather than another kind, and will treat him accordingly. Denney, commenting on a phrase in 2 Corinthians 7:15 which speaks of how the Corinthians received Titus with fear and trembling, quotes Calvin as saying that this is the true way to receive ministers of Christ, and goes on to add: 'Sometimes, with the most innocent intention the minister, though received with the utmost courtesy and kindness, is not received with fear and trembling at all. Partly through his own fault, and partly through the fault of others, he ceases to be the representative of anything that inspires true reverence or excites to conscientious earnestness of conduct. If, under these circumstances, he continues to be kindly treated, he is apt to end in being, not the pastor, but the pet lamb of his flock. In apostolic times there was no danger of this, but modern ministers and modern congregations have sometimes thrown away all the possibilities of good in their mutual relations by disregarding it. The affection which they ought to have to each other is Christian, not merely natural; controlled by spiritual ideas and purposes, and not a matter of ordinary good feeling; and where this is forgotten, all is lost' (J Denney, 2 Corinthians p 260. See 9; the indifference and contempt with which the ministry is often regarded finds at least one explanation here).

**18)2:1-9**

Malachi goes on in 6 to stress a holy and blessed combination in the true man of God - right doctrine, and right living. What a picture these words paint for us! And notice how the prophet goes on in 7, to stress the man of God's calling to guard knowledge, and to be the messenger of the Lord from whom men will seek instruction. They are to be men with something to say, men with a message, men who will teach the things of God. Few passages could exalt more than this the desirability of the teaching ministry; and as in Malachi's day, so also in ours, it stands over against the mere sacerdotal conception of the priesthood communicating a magic grace by the sacraments, on the one hand, and on the other, that which makes it appeal to the emotions of men either by spectacle, atmosphere, or aesthetics. Here is God's ideal for His ministers, whom to make as flames of fire - men with the fear of the Lord in their hearts, men with purity in their lives, men with the law of truth on their lips, to teach men and instruct them in the Word of life. These are the lives that tenor God; as Malachi says, they turn many from iniquity. If God has called us to be His servants, in the work of the gospel ministry, then this is the kind of men we are to be, and this is the kind of ministry we must fulfil. And this is the kind of man we are to pray into the pulpits of our land.

**19)2:1-9**

The other application of this passage is more general. Malachi obviously implies that the priests, as leaders of the people, have a strategic importance in the life of the community. It is they, so to speak, who 'call the tune' in society, who form and shape its interests and habits and general character. How true this is! This being so, here is a word of particular relevance for those young people who in the providence of God have been given the kind of opportunities in education and learning and culture that are in process of equipping them and qualifying them to become key people in society in the future. Some will become teachers, some doctors, some social workers, some scientists, some industrialists. And in the nature of the case, most will be in positions in which they will inevitably influence many other lives. One is almost staggered to think of the potential represented by any gathering of young people for good or ill to our national and community life for they can hardly avoid, by reason of the qualifications and skills which they will eventually attain, influencing many lives, touching them at many of the most critical points in human experience, for weal or woe. Whether they realise it or not, whether they want to be or not, they are not as other men and women; they have been given particular privileges and responsibilities in life, and one of the lessons of the ministry for them must surely be to recognise this, and face up with a due sense of solemnity to the debt they owe to society because this is so. This is the kind of people that leaders in society must be, with the law of truth on their lips, walking with God in peace and uprightness. We live today in a society that desperately needs cleansing; and we need the whole body politic of our national and communal life interfused and inter-penetrated with a new spirit. We need Christian members of Parliament, Christian councillors in local government, Christian teachers in schools, Christian doctors in family practice and in the hospitals, Christian nurses, Christian industrialists, Christian trade unionists, to exercise a regenerating influence on a society that has corrupted itself with crass materialism and practical atheism. This is the sphere in which there is a crying need for a robust and unequivocal Christian witness, and you, as the future leaders of society may not, and must not, contract out of it.

**20)2:10-16**

We come now to the sins of the people. When we read through these verses it becomes clear that there are two closely related problems discussed and challenged, namely mixed marriages with those outwith the covenant, and the divorce of Jewish wives in order to enter into these unhallowed unions. A brief background word is necessary here to make the situation quite clear. When God's people were taken captive to Babylon in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar left behind those whom he deemed not worth taking captive, the dregs of the race. These were left in Palestine, along with the mixed race of the Samaritans, who possessed a rich land, 'which they had cultivated long enough for many of their families to be settled in comparative wealth. With these half-pagan Jews and Samaritans, the families of the true Israel, as they regarded themselves, did not hesitate to form alliances, for in the precarious position of the colony, such alliances were a sure way to wealth and political influence. How much the Jews were mastered by their desire for them is seen from the fact that, when the relatives of their half-heathen brides made it a condition of the marriages that they should first put away their old wives, they did so. Divorce became frequent, and suffering was afflicted on the native Jewish women' (G A Smith. See Ezra 9/10; Nehemiah 13:23 ff). Such is the background of these verses. It is clear that it was a crying and urgent problem in the mind of the prophet.



**21)2.10-16**

We look first at one or two textual problems, before commenting in general. One concerns 13, and the reference to covering the altar of the Lord with tears. G A Smith and Moore both take this to mean that the husbands, by their sin against their wives in divorcing them, have so wetted the altar of God with their tears, that God does not even see the sacrifices the men offer to Him, but only the tears. As Moore puts it, 'The mute supplication of a sacrifice may rise to invoke a blessing on the offerer, but above it, and rising first to heaven, is the language of injured innocence that calls down a curse on the man who has wronged the helpless and confiding wife of his youth'. Another textual difficulty is 15. The AV rendering is quite incomprehensible. The RSV reads at least intelligently, but it is a question whether it is the right intelligence! Perhaps Moore's idea is the most likely, when he refers the 'one' back to 10, to the oneness of the people of God, in the covenant relationship with Him, which these mixed marriages would violate. God separated Israel from the other nations in order to bring forth a godly seed, the Messiah, through Whom all nations were to be blessed. The prophet therefore exhorts the people to remember their separate calling, and preserve it, by having no more to do with such alliances. We should therefore read (with Moore) 'Did He not make (us) one? And the remainder of the Spirit was with Him. And wherefore (did He thus isolate us as) one (people? Because He was thus) seeking a seed of God. Take heed then to your spirits, and do not act treacherously to the wife of your youth'.

**22)2:10-16**

There are lessons here that we shall do well to consider. Paul takes up one of them in the second Corinthian epistle (6:14) when he warns Christians, 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers'. It is the arguments that Malachi presents about the oneness of the people of God and their peculiar calling in the world that gives us as Christians the deepest reasons for this unequivocal standpoint. How could anyone who is not within the covenant of grace ever prove to be a true helpmeet for one who is? It would mean that for the unbelieving partner there would be an area of experience in the other's life - and that the deepest and most sacred and precious - into which he or she could never enter, and which they could never share. If fellowship is the basis of a true marriage, then such an alliance must be seen to be unthinkable, for fellowship in such circumstances would be utterly impossible. It would be doomed to failure from the very start. This is something to consider, and to get settled in our minds, before ever we become emotionally involved with another. It is too late to try to come to terms with it, and to convince ourselves that in our case it would somehow surely work out, when once we have become involved. It is very, very difficult for any man or woman to think straight on this issue when they have fallen in love.

**23)2:10-16**

There is an even more important lesson for us, paradoxically, in the other part of this problem that faced Malachi, that of divorce. But a word of explanation is needed: we do not mean that here is a passage of Scripture which gives the Lord's own view of divorce - 'I hate divorce' - although this is certainly true, and we may gather a good deal that is definitive in the biblical, Christian position from what Malachi says. What we do mean is this: Is there so much difference, after all, between married men putting their wives away for base advantage, and unmarried men trifling with the affections of girls whom they lead on for a time, then drop, perhaps in favour of another? The altar of God is wet with different kinds of tears, and it is certain that the sacrifices that some young men lay upon that altar are not seen for the tears that have flowed from the heart of a girl they may have rather heartlessly and casually dropped. This needs to be spoken about frankly. As a minister of a congregation which includes quite a number of young folks, one sees more than a little of this very thing, and it disturbs one greatly. One sometimes sees a fellow and a girl becoming friendly, and more than friendly. Both are convinced that the relationship is of the Lord. It may be; one has hoped it is. Then, after a long and intimate friendship, lasting months, or even a year or two, one or the other comes with the news that it is all off. And the thing that disturbs is that, all too often, it is the young man who suddenly becomes convinced that the relationship is not of the Lord, and that therefore the right thing to do is to break it off. Well, of course, if it is not of the Lord, then it is best broken off. But so often, the Lord and the Lord's will are used as a convenient way out of a relationship that has become an embarrassment to him. More of this in the next note.

**24)2:10-16**

What needs to be said very plainly is this: if the relationship was not the Lord's will, then it never was the Lord's will; for God does not change His mind about such things. The man had no business in the first place to become so involved with a girl. He has snatched at something that God was not pleased to give, and convinced himself it was God's will, because he wanted it. It is as simple as that. And, of course, the time was sure to come when a heart would be broken, a head that had been led on by protestations of love and assurances that God was in it. After all, they prayed about it together, didn't they? Do you perceive the basic dishonesty of this? Prayed about it together! What right has a fellow to be praying with a girl about love, and whether it is God's will for them to be together? What a shabby practice this is! Praying with a girl about these things is just a form of lovemaking, and men need to get wise to themselves about it, and stop kidding themselves, and above all, stop larding their natural desires with a veneer of spirituality which anybody worth his salt can see through in a moment. There was a time once, when a sense of honour used to be strong enough to keep a man's emotions in control. Does a Christian think he can contract out of honourable behaviour towards girls by blaming the Lord for his emotional aberrations? God hates putting away! The obvious thing therefore, is to avoid all necessity for it taking place, by being sure first of all that a relationship is in the will of God. If it be asked, 'How can anyone be sure without some form of trial and error?' the answer must be, can we not trust God with our lives? We have known young people who have kept company for long enough, trying to find out if the friendship had Divine approval; but in our experience, God does not usually take very long to make His will known in those relationships that are of His making. Why should He? Why should He keep people guessing for a long while? He does not torment His children. The torment of uncertainty usually comes when we try to make a relationship of our own choosing into the will of God. It is our inability to do so that makes for uncertainty and torment. We should leave it to God. He gives the best to those who leave the choice to Him.

**25)2:10-16**

What was said in the previous note is somewhat removed from the original complaint of the prophet, but it serves to underline the fact that the principle is the same as in the matter of marriage and divorce. We must therefore see that what the prophet says in general on the matter is also applicable to us. In 14, we have the people's query, 'Wherefore has God thus refused to receive our offerings?', and the answer given is that God was a witness to the nuptial contracts they had now broken. How could God accept their offerings when this violation of His covenant was obtaining among so many of His people? And when it is a commonly accepted pattern among believers today that this can happen with nothing very much thought about it by those who practise it, is it really surprising that God is as a stranger in the land, and does not accept our offerings when we bring them? It may be that this is one of the areas of Christian experience in which a good deal of new, and penitential, thinking requires to be done, so that a whole new attitude may emerge, in which different, and more biblical, standards of honour and integrity begin to assert themselves in the lives of young people within the Christian faith.

Such were some of the problems that faced the prophet in the restored Israel of his day, and to which he was enabled to speak the word of the Lord. We turn in the next note to others, as we come to the third and final section of Malachi's prophecy.

**26) 2:17 - 3:5**

The final section of the prophecy comprises four parts,

- (i) Answer to the discouraged (2:17-3:5)
- (ii) Repentance by tithes (3:6-12)
- (iii) Judgment to come (3:13-4:3)
- (iv) Return of Elijah (4:4-6)

We turn to the first of these now. In the introductory word to our first study, we said that some commentators think there are two classes in view, viz. the sinners of the people, on the one hand, and the discouraged and despairing on the other, with the former being the concern of the first two chapters, and the latter occupying the rest of the prophecy. This section certainly does have such an emphasis, but it may well be that, for all that, it is but another complaint the Lord has against the same people, the discouragement being in fact a further indication of their sin, and perhaps one of the explanations of it. At all events, here is a people complaining bitterly against the Lord, doubting not His love this time, but His justice and righteousness. Undoubtedly, this requires to be understood against the background of the hardships and difficulties that the returned exiles had encountered, after the bright and glowing hopes with which they had come back to Zion had faded or diminished. Difficulties were not only not yielding to their endeavours to further the work, but were actually increasing. Evildoers were seeming to prosper, and evil seemed to be a better-paying proposition than righteousness. God was therefore indifferent to sin and evil, and there was no real moral principle of justice in the world. This is the meaning of the cry, 'Where is the God of judgment?' We will continue this further in tomorrow's Note.

**27) 2:17 - 3:5**

Following what was said at the end of the previous Note we can interpret this cry 'Where is the God of judgment?' in the two possible ways according to whether the prophet is speaking of discouraged believers as distinct from the sinners among the people, or of the same people essentially as in the previous chapters. First, as to discouraged believers: the question would then represent the agony of doubt that sometimes comes when the whole moral structure of the world seems to be called in question by the seeming persistence of evil against all rational understanding. This is a very terrible agony to experience, as may be illustrated by the mystery of human suffering. When we suffer, a number of reactions is possible. We may seek to interpret it in the light of what the Scriptures say about the meaning of suffering. We may conclude that it has come upon us for our sin; and if we do, and it has, then we understand it, and we learn from it, albeit hard and bitter lessons; or we may think it is for our chastening and discipline, in terms of Hebrews 12, and if it is so, then we may deeply profit from it. In both these instances, there is no real or complete darkness, for we can see the point of it, and see reason for it. But if the suffering and the pain go on beyond the point where we feel, perhaps rightly, that we can learn any more from it, then we enter a realm of mystery in a new way. So long as we could see the point of it, all was well, we had light on it. But when the point is reached and is passed, beyond which there is no possibility of learning anything, or benefiting in any way, and the pain and suffering still go on, then there is real darkness. That is the really terrible point in which we experience utter desolation. Then, there is nothing: the darkness is complete. It may be that this is what the words in 2:17 mean; and if so, the answer given to them in 3:1-5 will be terribly important for us: for these verses speak of the vindication of God, that alone can bring light.

**28) 2:17 - 3:5**

If we are dealing, however, with just one further expression of the sin of the people, we must say something rather different. For here is then a further manifestation of their complaining spirit, a querulousness that had developed in them because things were not going their way, this itself being the evidence that they were out of joint with God. It is the easiest thing in the world in such circumstances to develop a 'chip on the shoulder' without realising it. And the Lord is absolutely right, a man with a chip on his shoulder is a very wearisome person, this is why people tend to avoid him. The Lord is not the only one Who is wearied by his words! There is the kind of person who has a perpetual moan about being hard up (we all are, aren't we? But we do not need to be obsessed about it to the extent that it becomes the unconscious topic of our conversation!) It is an attitude of mind. We should examine our general tendencies in conversation a little more than we do. We give away a great deal about ourselves, without being aware of it!

But there is another consideration. For whatever reason, the people were doubting the control of God over history, and saying, 'Either there is no providence, or it favours the wicked'. Consequently, they were looking for a Messiah to come, who would reverse matters, and restore prosperity to Israel, just because Israel was God's chosen people, and punish the enemies of the Lord. And the answer given them is that the Lord will come, to vindicate right and justice. But this is not necessarily the same as vindicating them, just because they are His people. When He comes, sin will be punished, whether it be in those outside or those within the covenant. Only those who are right with God will abide the day of His coming. This is the point that is being made. 'He will come as you expect, but not with the results that you expect'.



**29) 2:17 - 3:5**

The verses which deal with this theme (3:1-5) are particularly interesting in that they are referred to in the New Testament in relation to John the Baptist; and in this sense, it may be said that their fulfilment comes with the coming of the gospel. But it is just as clear, from the verses themselves, and from what follows, that this does not, and cannot exhaust their meaning. For they clearly adumbrate the final Day of Judgment also, and we cannot not make application of them in this way also. As a matter of fact, even this does not exhaust their meaning, for a careful examination of the context of the verses seems to indicate that, in the first instance, they may have referred to a 'coming' of the Lord before the coming of Christ. In other words, it was a coming in judgment unto cleansing and renewal. It is said that in this coming He would 'purify the sons of Levi' - that is, purge the backslidden priesthood, and restore it to its true place and function in the Divine economy, and re-establish proper sacrifices. Then the immoralities of the people would be purged and corrected. This is a typical New Testament emphasis also. Judgment must begin at the house of God, and then there is cleansing and renewal there, and in the servants of God, blessing will come among the people, and there will be a raising of standards. But, of course, the main reference is to the coming of Christ; and here we see what is so often seen in Old Testament prophecy - the blending of the near and the far, of the first coming and the second. There is a sense in which this work began in the first coming of Christ (of John the Baptist's ministry in the gospels, Matthew 3:10-12, and compare Malachi 4:6 with Luke 1:17). But at the same time it is clear that the final coming of Christ and the last judgment are also in view, and this is confirmed in 4:1 ff, and particularly in 4:5, which speaks of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

**30)3:6-12**

This next section stresses and enforces the need of the people's repentance and return to God, if He is to return to them. When they ask how they are to return, Malachi answers, 'In tithes and offerings'. There are several things for us to learn here, but first, a word is necessary about 6. It may be taken either with what has gone before, or with what follows. Moore makes the connection with the previous verses, as follows: 'In view of this prevalent wickedness, there were two conclusions that might be drawn. First, that of the sceptic – that God had ceased to punish sin, since the sinning people still continued to exist; and secondly, that of the timid believer, that with so much sin, Israel must be destroyed. God replies that neither of these conclusions is correct. They are spared and not consumed because I am Jehovah, the covenant God of their fathers, and they, sons of Jacob to whom I am bound by covenant; and while I spare them I will also punish them, and while I punish them, I will also preserve them from total extinction'. But G A Smith takes it as belonging to what follows. He translates the Hebrew in fact very differently, thus: 'I, Jehovah, have not changed, and ye are the sons of Jacob unworn', and adds in a footnote, 'The same old cheats as ever'. Then he goes on with 7, 'From the days of your fathers ye have turned aside....' It is an obscure text.

As to the significance of the passage, we can take a lesson from the connection the passage has with the previous one, whichever way we interpret the latter. If we take the opening verses of the chapter to refer to a temporal coming of the Lord to purify His priesthood and renew the face of the people - i.e., a coming in revival, then the significance of this passage for us relates to the need for the Lord's people to get right with Him in repentance and new obedience. This, in fact, is what Malachi explicitly states in 7, 'Return unto Me, and I will return unto you'. Here then, is a challenge about getting right with God.

**31)3:6-12**

'How do we get right with God?' ask the Israelites, and God replies, 'In tithes and offerings'. What did the tithes and offerings symbolise and signify? They signified a right relationship with God, and were the symbol of Israel's recognition that all they had, and all they were, belonged as of right to the Lord. It was a symbol of their giving themselves to the Lord, and thus in withholding them, they were withholding themselves from the consecration God had a right to expect from His redeemed people. Without question, this is the proper way for us to understand the Old Testament legal statutes - not as legalism, although they can be, and have been, misinterpreted in this way, but as the expression of grateful hearts for God's great mercy in redeeming them. The Ten Commandments, we should note, are prefaced by the words, 'I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt'. Grace first, then the enactments, that is, the legislation shows forth the kind of behaviour a redeemed people should offer to God in return for His mercy. The New Testament parallel to this is Romans 12:1, 'I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice....which is your reasonable service'. The offerings - and the tithes - were Israel's reasonable service to God for His mercy to them. It was the least they could do, and when they did it, they were recognising that all they had, and were, belonged to Him, in just the same way that, in devoting one day in seven to the worship of God, they recognised that all their days were now His, by reason of the fact that they were not their own, but bought with a price.

**32)3:6-12**

A word about what Malachi says in 10. One is very struck by the way in which Christian people often bridle when it is suggested that the tithing of one's income for the work of the Lord should be the pattern nowadays. This is sheer legalism, they protest, and Christ is the end of the law for everyone that believeth. There is much confusion here. It is conceded that there was much legalism in Old Testament times, and in the New also, with the Pharisees. But from what we have said already about the significance and symbolism of the tithes and offerings, it should surely be clear that it was not in essence a legalistic enactment, nor was it ever meant to be. And it is unwarrantable to believe that all the genuine saints of God in Old Testament times had legalistic conceptions of the law. It is true also that in Christ we are delivered from the law, in the sense that as Christians we do not order our lives by the law, but in grace, and by love. Yes; this is so. We do not go to church on Sundays because there is a commandment which says, Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy, but rather because it is our joy and delight to worship God in the company of His people. We do not refrain from stealing other people's property because there is a commandment which says, Thou shalt not steal, but because as a new creature in Christ, we do not think that way at all. But it is still wrong to steal, for all that. We are not under the law, inasmuch as we are now controlled by the law of Christ, and the Spirit of God. But the sanction of the law remains for us, unaltered. We are not free from the law in the sense that we are free to break it. It is still binding on us, should we feel inclined to break it. We are only free from it inasmuch as we allow ourselves to be controlled by the Spirit of God. In the same way, we are not under the law as regards the matter of tithing our incomes. There is no New Testament injunction that we should do so. But we are not free to ignore that law, or neglect it, in its true sense and meaning. We are, much more surely in the New Testament than in the Old, bound to give ourselves to God as the least we can do, in response to the mercies of God in the gospel. And if we are to give of our substance to the Lord as a token and symbol of our self-giving, it would be very odd and strange, would it not, if we were to interpret our liberty in Christ in the dispensation of grace as liberty to give less, sometimes much less, to Him than those of the old dispensation were prepared to give. We are, after all, supposed to have more light than they had. It is not an injunction, no; but it is a useful working principle for all that and realistic as a general guide. And it can all be worked out with paper and pencil, if we have not already done so!

**33)3:13 - 4:3**

This passage is deeply interesting and significant. It begins with a reiteration of the sins already mentioned earlier in 3:1-5, viz., the complaint that it was vain to serve the Lord (14) etc. Again, the Divine answer is concerning the judgment that will settle, once for all, whether or not God is indifferent to evil and unrighteousness, for He will come in final judgment and destroy the proud and the wicked. But the particularly significant part of the passage is the verse referring to 'those that feared the Lord' (3:16). G.A. Smith refers them to what has gone before, translating 'then' as 'Thus spake....', but surely they rather stand in contrast to those who have been murmuring against the Lord and speaking stout words against Him. They speak, in fact, of a faithful remnant, through whom the Divine light, was still shining, and the Divine purposes were being fulfilled. They are described as 'They that feared the Lord'. Look back to 1:6, 'If I be a father, where is Mine honour?' and 'If I be a master, where is My fear?' Here is His fear; and here also is His honour, for they also thought upon His Name. The thought underlying the idea of the fear of the Lord is surely that of obedience and service, as the word 'Master' indicates. Here was a people giving the Lord the obedience He desired, and the true service was therefore possible. There is more to say on this and we shall continue in the next Note.

**34) 3:13 - 4:3**

The word 'Thought' in 3:16 has the force of 'regard', that is, they set high regard upon His Name, cherishing it as their true riches. And valuing the name of the Lord as their chief treasure, as someone has put it, 'their character became responsive to all that the Name signified, and their life grew in closer correspondence to the will of God'. 'They spake one to another' - concerning that Name, and that Divine purpose for which they were apprehended by Him, concerning their joys in Him, and their sorrows at the state of the nation as a whole. 'And the Lord hearkened and heard' - that is, He 'pricked up His ears', at the sound of their speaking, and 'bent down so as not to miss a single word' of all they were saying, so precious it was to Him. In the multitude of false and empty sacrifices, and sinful behaviour, the Lord was able to discern the true, in the elect remnant of His people, and wrote it down in a book of remembrance. 'And they shall be Mine, in the day that I act - My jewels'. 'The day when I act' - this is described for us in the opening verses of chapter 4, the day of judgment. In that day, a process of separation between the false and the true will take place; to the wicked, it will be as a desolation and fire, but to those who are faithful, the dawning of a morning without clouds. The descriptions in 4:2 are very beautiful - this, then, is the consummation of faithfulness - transformation and transfiguration by the Sun of righteousness. Who shall heal forever the inconsolable ache that is in all our hearts, and bring us into the everlasting joys of His kingdom.

**35) 3:13 - 4:3**

Here, then, is a remnant – a church within a church, not separated from it, or dissociated from it, but within it. It is a significant thing that in all the moral and spiritual declension down the history of God's people, there was never any question of withdrawing or seceding from the main body to form a pure group of the faithful, the remnant was a remnant within, maintaining its testimony within, in the midst of the apathy and indifference, and it was of such that the Lord said that a book of remembrance was written. Here is a word to our generation, in a time when there is much stirring and much agitation for secession in the interests of forming a pure church. This is not the true way. God ever has His 7000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal and is prepared to work through them. The history of the past twenty-five years in Scotland bears this out. The facts are that God has raised up in these years a body of men in the national Church which is exercising an increasing influence in the life of the people, and is acting like a slow leaven throughout the land. From the strategic point of view, it is hardly likely that having placed these men here and there in significant positions He will proceed to call them out again. God works on a long-term plan, and does not change His mind half-way through. He knows the end from the beginning. One of the real needs of our time is to be able to discern the strategic workings of God in the life of the Church. Let us learn from the existence of this remnant in Israel, that this is how God is pleased to work and fulfil His purposes.

**36)4:4-6**

The reference here to Elijah is interesting and significant. Jesus expressly refers this to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:10 and Matthew 17:10,12, and the reference in Luke 1:17 to 'the spirit and power of Elias' is surely sufficient to convince us that it is not a literal return of a literal Elijah that is meant. Moore says that the fact that it says 'Elijah the prophet', not 'Elijah the Tishbite', means that it is Elijah in his official capacity, rather than in his personal relations, that is referred to. If this is so, then the significance of the prophecy is that it foretells a revival of prophetic ministry in the spirit and power of Elijah towards the end-time before the coming of the Lord.

This is true, either of the 'coming' of the Lord in revival power, or of His first coming, or of His second coming. In this connection, we can only view the restoration of a biblical prophetic ministry in the life of the Church as one of the most hopeful signs possible and this is how revival and reformation are likely to come. And the fact that after so long a time this has begun to appear in our day may be some indication that the days are short, and that we should be girding our loins and trimming our lamps, against the coming of the Day of the Lord.