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SIXPENCE

sees the glory that is to be : ' Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood ; and He made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father ; to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.'

STUDYING THE MINOR PROPHETS

By the REV. J. STAFFORD WRIGHT, M.A.*

IN this final study we shall turn to one pre-exilic and one post-exilic Prophet.

IV. HABAKKUK

Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah, and lived shortly before 600 B.C. when the Chaldean (Babylonian) empire was threatening Palestine. Jerusalem was finally captured in 586 B.C. Habakkuk is an example of a man facing up to the problem of how God can use a heathen nation to punish His own people. His book is partly a dialogue with God.

Habakkuk. I am horrified at all the evils I see around me. I live in terrible days (i.1-4). (Do we ?)

God. I am about to deal with your countrymen by means of a great and terrifying nation, and one that has no regard for Me (i.5-11). (Are there such nations today ?)

Habakkuk. But surely this would be dishonouring to Your own character ! This heathen nation will attribute its success to its own power and its own gods (i.12-17). I will wait for an answer (ii.1).

God. I will give you a vision that all can understand, though I cannot promise you a quick solution ; but there will be an ultimate solution (ii.2,3). (God very rarely gives a quick answer.)

The remainder of the book gives a twofold solution.

(a) *On the plane of history* (ii.4-20). Although God may use the Chaldean king, his methods and character are far from having divine approval. His actions will recoil on his own head. God's main quarrel with him is indicated in verse 4, where the contrast is given between the self-sufficient man and the man who rests humbly upon God for his life. This is the division between the unbeliever (whether religious or irreligious) and the believer. Note how this verse is quoted in Rom. i.17 and Gal. iii.11, where the quotation serves to emphasize the connection between 'just' and

* Earlier studies on the Minor Prophets by Mr. Stafford Wright appeared in the Michaelmas, 1948 and Spring, 1949 issues of this Magazine.

'faith,' and in Heb. x.38, where the emphasis is upon faith as the ruling principle of daily life. One man does the best for himself in this life ; the other lives in the light of God and of eternity.

The thought is carried on in verses 5-8 where the Chaldean greed for power is likened to the drunkard's never satisfied desire for wine. But the nation that is greedy for more and more power and shows no mercy receives no mercy (6-8). Great Babylon, with its impregnable walls, had been built with cruelty, and its stones and timbers cry aloud for vengeance (9-11). All the weary toil in the building will count for nothing, since the city will be destroyed. For the only permanent thing is not earthly power but the knowledge of God, which will one day dominate the world (12-14). (Is there anyone greater than a missionary ?) No nation that is built on licentiousness and violence can last (15-17). No trust in idols or in anything other than the Most High God is of any use. Be silent before Him (18-20).

Thus it is shown that God does work in history. One oppressor falls before another oppressor, and there is no way of breaking the chain except by a total committal to God in silent faith that will result in a God-inspired life.

(b) *On the heavenly plane* (iii). This psalm is an integral part of the book. God is not confined to working through history, but there are times when He breaks into history. Habakkuk describes in poetic symbols the way in which God once intervened through the agency of fire, earthquake, and other miracles, to bring the people from Egypt to the Promised Land. In vision he sees the great God Himself. What God has done once, He can do again. Habakkuk thus closes his book with that calm faith that God urged upon him in ii.4. When his world crashes around him, he is lifted up to the heavenly places (iii.19 ; cf. Eph. i.3). So we may know that God is in His holy temple, and that the day is coming when He will once again reveal Himself.

V. MALACHI

In our Bible Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. In the Hebrew Bible Chronicles is the last book, though Malachi is still the last book of the Prophets. It is an appropriate conclusion to the Prophets, since its moral teachings are wide in scope, and it contains prophecies of the coming of Christ and promises for the future.

'Malachi' means 'My Messenger,' and may be either a title taken from iii.1, or a proper name. The exact date of the book is not given, but it was probably written between 450 and 400 B.C., after the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah. Note the argumentative style in i.2,6, ii.14,17, iii.13.

The book falls naturally into sections which make it convenient for study, and the problems with which Malachi deals are all relevant to the present day.

(a) *The providence of God in history* (i.2-5). God in His sovereignty chose Israel, and not Edom, through whom to reveal Himself to the world. God's hatred, here mentioned, is explained by Ob. 10-14. Edom's treacherous conduct at the fall of Jerusalem in 586 had brought God's judgment upon herself, and she had herself been ravaged through the treachery of allies, as Obadiah had foretold in 6-9.

(b) *Unspiritual worship* (i.6-14). Malachi now warns Judah. God was only a semi-reality to the Jews. They realized the obligation to offer worship, but felt that the second-best was good enough. Thus they offered the lame and the blind (8), and treated God in a way that they would not dare to treat their parents (6) or their earthly governor (8). (Do we?)

(c) *The worldwide scope of God's message* (i.11,14). Whether the verbs in 11 are translated as future (R.V.) or present (A.V.), the significance is that the revelation of God is not for the Jews alone. Nor is it for our country alone.

(d) *The character of the servant or minister of God* (ii.1-9). Cf. the picture in the Interpreter's House in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The priesthood had lost touch with God (2), given a wrong impression of God's message to men (8), and was consequently despised by men (9). Is the Christian ministry institutionalized, or is it a means of life?

(e) *Mixed marriages and divorce* (ii.10-16). Cf. Ezr. ix,x; Ne. xiii.23f. Malachi censures marriages between a believer and an unbeliever (11). Do they ever turn out happily? He also censures the practise of divorcing Jewish wives to make this possible (14-16). The first clause of 16 may have a wider application and refer to all divorce.

(f) *The warning note of the coming of the Lord* (ii.17-iii.6). The prophet speaks of what will be accomplished at the two comings of Jesus Christ, though the emphasis is on the first coming. In iii.1 John the Baptist is the first 'messenger' (Mk. i.2), and Christ the second. His work in the next verses is shown to be that of purification and of fulfilling the reality of the Old Testament priesthood and sacrifices. This work will be completed only with the second coming. The first coming was foretold and came to pass. What about the second?

(g) *Failure to give to God's work* (iii.7-12). Malachi declares that a mean spirit towards God brings leanness into the life. The prophets frequently declare that a connection exists between spiritual or moral evil and physical disasters (e.g. Am. iv.6-13; Hg. i; cf. Lk. vi.38). Jewish tithes and offerings were regulated,

though some offerings were voluntary. The Christian standard of giving is stated in 1 Cor.xvi.2. Should it be less than the Jewish ?

(h) *The ultimate vindication of righteousness* (iii.13-iv.3). Malachi presents this as one solution to the problem of evil. Man may be misled by events into thinking that it pays to be unrighteous (14,15). But God's people are to meet and encourage one another in the presence of God (16), knowing by faith that one day God will adjust the ill-balanced judgment of man (iii.17-iv.3). The redress is connected with Jesus Christ (iv.2). Is there any other solution to the world's problems ?

(i) *The converting power of the Word* (iv.4-6). God has spoken so that men may turn from sin to God. John the Baptist was one fulfilment (Mk.ix.11-13; Lk. i.17) but Mk. ix.12 and Mt. xvii.11 suggest a further fulfilment.

D. E. HOSTE : A MODERN MISSIONARY STATESMAN

By ROBERT GILLIES

IT was a memorable Sunday morning when James Hudson Taylor, the young medical missionary invalided from China, went far out on the sands of Brighton to be alone with God. He had prayed, pleaded, and tried to plan for some way to evangelize Inland China. Now he was burdened and perplexed. It was then like a ray of sunlight dispersing thick fog that the vision came—a vision of Christ the Captain bearing the burden of His own work. Taylor resolved to be humble, willing and obedient, awaiting each progressive command.

Anxiety was gone. A note was written there and then on the margin of his Bible, 'Prayer for twenty-four willing, skilful labourers, June 25th, 1865.' He went back to dinner a happy man, and on the following Tuesday a donation of £10 was placed to the credit of a new customer in a Lombard Street Bank. 'The China Inland Mission,' a mighty work of God, had got under way.

Thirty-five years passed. Men, methods and means had all been given in answer to prayer, and it was time for Mr. Taylor to appoint his successor. The inland provinces had been opened. Hundreds of missionaries, called by God from a score or more countries, were at work in places near and distant. The C.I.M. with its headquarters at Shanghai and friends in many lands had become one of the great missionary societies.

The vision on Brighton sands was still the basis of its methods, and only one imbued with the spirit in which the work had begun