

ment for twelve years. After this Nehemiah returned to the Court of Persia, and Ezra disappears from the scene. Then came a sad decline that crushed the hopes that had been kindled by the restoration from the exile. Eliashib, the High Priest, who was not in sympathy with the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah, appears to have become the chief director of affairs, and great religious degeneracy followed. A spurious liberality, partly caused by contact with Babylonian ideas, became the chief characteristic of the time. The influx of the heathen population was encouraged. Mixed marriages with the heathen women were allowed. Divorces for this purpose became common. As the Levites were the chief opposers of this wickedness, their tithes were withheld, so that they were compelled to engage in secular labor. The Sabbath was desecrated. Idolatrous worship, if not actually practised, was not regarded with disfavor. Canon Rawlinson thus portrays the condition of things at this juncture: "Meanwhile they allowed the house of God to be 'forsaken,' the choral service to be discontinued, the treasuries to become empty, and the once crowded courts to remain without ministers or worshippers." This was the condition of faithless recreancy and wickedness, against which the last of the great prophets of Israel exercised his faithful and fearless ministry.

"The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi" is in a most emphatic sense "preaching for the times." The sins of priests and people are portrayed and condemned. God's displeasure, and the consequences of their sins, in preventing blessings and bringing judgment and punishment upon them, are scathingly proclaimed. The transgressors are urged to repentance and obedience by dark threatenings, and by glowing promises of blessing which are conditional upon their turning from their evil ways. The prophecy closes with a prophetic announcement of the forerunner of the day of the Lord. We can only briefly notice some of the more salient points in this pointed and practical message to an erring and backslidden people.