

# MALACHI

or

## WILL A MAN ROB GOD?

by

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### CHAPTER ONE

#### THE LORD GOD'S LOVE QUESTIONED

Malachi 1:1-5

THE BOOK OF MALACHI has been spoken of as a late evening which brings a long day to a close. And what a day! It was characterized by ruthless disregard for the high and holy precepts of the Almighty. Spreading like a forest fire, rebellion against God reached the proportions of anarchy.

The burden of the word of the Lord (1:1) denotes concern, urgency and grief. There have been references to the burden of Babylon (Isaiah 13:1), the burden of Habakkuk (Habakkuk 1:1), the burden of the word of the Lord in the land of Hadrach (Zechariah 9:1), and the burden of the word of the Lord for Israel (Zechariah 12:1). But the burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi, in the light of the context and existing conditions, is, without doubt, a most magnificent manifestation of divine concern.

Though freighted with sublime importance, the word of the Lord nevertheless did not register in the distorted minds of those addressed. It was lightly dismissed as being of no particular interest. Their attitude, however, was not merely passive. They were argumentative in their unspiritual vindictiveness. They were quick to cavil and complain.

Without introduction or preamble, unlike most books, there is an immediate beginning of the message—a revelation of the heart of God. **“I have loved you, saith the Lord”** (1:2).

With the fever of unbelief burning in their breasts, they asked blasphemously, **“Wherein hast thou loved us?”**

Thus they questioned the love of God.

This was the derailment which turned them into a perilous detour, and proved to be the forerunner of disaster. All divine favor toward men is predicated on love. Looking askance upon God's love became the headwaters of a rising tide of serious indignities as God was robbed of devotion and man deprived of blessing.

It seems almost incredible that the Lord would dignify the unscrupulous query of the people by furnishing an answer, but herein is further evidence that His thoughts are higher than ours, even as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:9).

He answers, **“Was not Esau Jacob's brother? . . . yet I loved Jacob”** (1:2).

Then, in verses 3 and 4, it is shown how much Jacob and the Israelites were favored by the Lord God more than Esau and the Edomites. The people could not deny that divine intervention on their behalf was granted time and time again while Esau's descendents were torn by wars and pestilences.

**“I loved Jacob and I hated Esau”** (1:2, 3; Romans 9:13) is purely a *Hebraism*. It is using the negative *to supply the want of the comparative*. When two principles or matters or ideas are in mind, and the speaker or writer wishes to show the relative value, the negative is used for the inferior and the positive for the superior. Such is the construction here and in the following passages:

**“When the Lord saw that Leah was hated”** (loved less than Rachel by Jacob), He gave her power of conception and she bore four sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah (Genesis 29:31-35).

**“If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated . . . he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn”** (Deuteronomy 21:15, 17).

**“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple”** (Luke 14:26).

In verse 2, we note:

- (1) *declaration*—**“I have loved you”**;
- (2) *disputation*—**“Wherein hast thou loved us?”** and
- (3) *affirmation*—**“I loved Jacob.”**

Here the word **“Jacob”** is a plural noun, and the history of these ancient people is replete with the proof of the Lord God's affection. Moses stated, **“The Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them”** (Deuteronomy 10:15). And further, **“The Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance . . . he kept him as the apple of his eye . . . the Lord alone did lead him”** (Deuteronomy 32:9, 10, 12).

**“But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen”** (Isaiah 41:8).

Three servants of the Lord God are mentioned in Isaiah:

- David (37:35),
- Israel the Nation (41:8-16) and

- Messiah (42:1-12).

This proves how highly the Lord had exalted these people. That He held them in tender esteem is seen in the statement, **“Thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee”** (Isaiah 43:4).

If the **“wherein”** is a demand for proof of the divine assertion, let it be stated that they had a rich display of historical antecedents from which to draw an overwhelming list of evidential facts.

Take Joshua's valedictory for instance. Summoning the leaders of Israel to Shechem shortly before his death, the great general delivered with convincing eloquence a rehearsal of the goodness of the Lord to the people of His love:

**“Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: . . . I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood . . . I multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac. And I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau . . . I sent Moses also and Aaron and I plagues Egypt . . . I brought you out . . . put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them . . . I brought you unto the land of the Amorites, which dwelt on the other side of Jordan . . . I gave them into your hand, that ye might possess their land . . . I delivered you out of his [Balaam's] hand . . . I have given you a land for which ye planted not”** (Joshua 24:1-13).

Still more comprehensive and persuasive is the rehearsal of the Lord God through the Psalmist concerning His wonderful works to the children of Israel (Psalm 103, 105, 106). The terse summation is thus expressed: **“He saved them for His name's sake, . . . He led them through the depths . . . [He] redeemed them from the hand of the enemy”** (Psalm 106:8-10).

The reaction of the people, just as tersely stated, was this: **“Then believed they his words; they sang his praise. They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel; but lusted exceedingly . . . and tempted God”** (Psalm 106:12-14).

This is the status of God's covenant people in Malachi, only they were then in the advanced stages of spiritual malignancy.

The unchangeable God can never become accustomed to the indifference, ingratitude and disobedience of His people. He is ever grieved.

**“What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?”** He demanded (Jeremiah 2:5).

**“Have I been a wilderness to Israel?”** He inquires further. Has He, like a desert, failed to furnish food and drink that they should be so pitifully desolate?

**“I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?”** (Jeremiah 2:21).

This is perhaps the saddest of the Lord God's many inquiries.

Why should a noble vine produce such ignobility, and how could certified seed yield a degenerate plant? How can such monstrosities develop in the realm of spiritual profession? They are resultant hybrids of unbelief in a believer. **“If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!”** (Matthew 6:23).

The question, **“Wherein hast thou loved us?”** indicates an irritation on the part of the people which led them to accuse the Lord of failure to prove His love.

They had a bitter recollection of the attitudes and actions of the Edomites when Jerusalem was plundered by the Philistines and Arabians (II Chronicles 21:16, 17). These descendants of Esau were there aiding and abetting the enemy in the defeat of their brethren, and the Lord did not restrain them (Obadiah 11).

- They showed sadistic pleasure over Judah's misfortune by mocking at her calamities (Obadiah 12).
- They shared the spoils with the enemy when the city was captured (Obadiah 13).
- They assisted the enemy by blocking the retreat of refugees (Obadiah 14).
- They turned over to the insurgents those that could not escape (Obadiah 14).

Thus, in Judah's trying hours, the Edomites looked, laughed, insulted, robbed, trapped, and murdered because of their inherited hatred toward Jacob (and his posterity) for fraudulently obtaining the blessing.

The Lord's people carried a painful grievance concerning this. It was a festering sore in their memory. They recalled how their fathers, as captives, sitting along the rivers of Babylon, cried out, **“Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof”** (Psalm 137:7).

*The question in Malachi's day is, in substance, “Why did God permit this if He loved us?”*

Deity can never be on the defensive. God never needs to justify or explain His action or inaction, but He does deign to comfort the hearts of His people by reminders of the past, and to encourage them by prophecies of the future concerning His lovingkindnesses and tender mercies—His love for His own.

When their forefathers worshiped acceptably, the people went to their tents **“glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the Lord had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people”** (II Chronicles 7:10). Obedience could have restored this joyful estate at this late date, but the prevailing attitude precluded it.

When Jacob was greatly perturbed over the bitterness of his brother Esau, caused by his taking the birthright from him, God met Jacob in a marvelous way.

**“Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children”** (Genesis 32:11).

That night, *Jacob the supplanter* became “**Israel, a prince with God**” (Genesis 32:28).

He saw God face to face there at Penuel and knew that his life was preserved (Genesis 32:30). In the next scene, unbelievable as it may seem, “**Esau ran to meet him [Jacob], and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him and they wept**” (Genesis 33:4). Herein God showed His love for Jacob.

The people should have been conversant with the promises of the Lord God relative to His judgment on the Edomites.

“**My sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea**” (Isaiah 34:5).

“**Edom shall be a desolation: every one that goeth by it shall be astonished**” (Jeremiah 49:17).

“**Therefore thus saith the Lord God; I will also stretch out mine hand upon Edom, and will cut off man and beast from it; and I will make it desolate . . . I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel**” (Ezek. 25:13,14).

There are similar prophecies in Amos 1:11, 12 and in Obadiah.

In Malachi 1:3, the Lord God said, “**I . . . laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.**”

The people's complaint against God simmered down to the fact that the descendants of Esau, though impoverished, claimed they would return to prosperity; they would rebuild their desolate places (1:4). They apparently feared a rebuilt Idumea as the Russians of our day fear a restored and reunited Germany.

“**But,**” said the Lord through Malachi, “**they shall build, but I will tear down**” (1:4).

The Lord promised that the Edomites would not extend their borders of wickedness. It must become universally known that they were the people against whom the Lord had indignation forever.

In spite of Jewish criticism and Edom's claims, the Lord revealed that He would be magnified from the border of Israel (1:5). “**For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem**” (Isaiah 2:3).

How sadly may desperation becloud a picture and induce panic—even to the point of engendering doubts relative to God's great love!

Nor does it require perplexing circumstances.

Passivity with its attendant apathy and irresponsibility, while not doubting the revelation of divine love, nevertheless questions its outreach.

God wants to love sinners through human instrumentality. This is one reason He has shed His love abroad in the hearts of believers (Romans 5:5). This was the overwhelming, overpowering dynamic in Paul's tireless efforts, through indescribable hardship, to lay the gospel of Christ at the heart's door of the lost (II Corinthians 5:14).

To question God's love is irreverence and blasphemy of a most serious nature.

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