

MALACHI

or

WILL A MAN ROB GOD?

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE THREE TENSES OF THE LORD'S SOVEREIGNTY

“I am the Lord” (Malachi 3:6)

AS THE GOSPEL OF JOHN scintillates with the identifying **“I am”** of Jesus, even so the Book of Malachi is radiant with the **“I am”**; of the Lord God. These revealing identifications fall into three tenses.*

** As shown in the Authorized Version. The Hebrew perfect and imperfect tenses may appear in the English as the past, present or future.*

It would be well to observe their occurrence before proceeding to an explanation.

PAST TENSE:

- **“I have loved you”** (1:2).
- **“I have sent my commandment”** (2:4).
- **“I gave them to him [life and peace]”** (2:5).

PRESENT TENSE:

- “I am a great king”** (1:14).
- “I am the Lord”** (3:6).
- “I change not”** (3:6).

FUTURE TENSE:

- “I will send my messenger”** (3: 1).
- “I will come near”** (3:5).
- “I will be a swift witness”** (3:5).
- “I will return”** (3:7).
- “I will rebuke”** (3:11).
- “I will spare”** (3:17).

The student of the Scriptures will be quick to perceive the biblical involvement and the vast coverage of Truth these quotations suggest. How great is the God of Jacob and of Elijah! Yet, in the blindness of unbelief, the people's words were stout against Him, making necessary these marvelous affirmations.

THE PAST TENSE

“I have loved you.”

Evidence to substantiate this statement abounds.

First, there is the witness of Truth itself.

It was God speaking and His **“Word is true from the beginning”** (Psalm 119:160).

- Jesus affirmed that His **“word is truth”** (John 17: 17).
- Paul argued, **“Let God be true but every man a liar”** (Romans 3:4).

Second, there is the witness of history.

God loved them at the inception of or in the choosing of the nation (Deuteronomy 7:8).

- He loved them during their national infancy (Hosea 11:1).
- He loved them all the while they were whoring after other gods (Jeremiah 31:3).

Third, there is the witness of experience.

Leadership perception was never clearer than when Jeremiah exclaimed, **“It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not all consumed, because his compassions fail not”** (Lamentations 3:22). **“His banner over me was love”** (Song of Solomon 2:4).

This was true in Egypt, during their wilderness journey, at the Red Sea, crossing the Jordan, and when enemies attacked. **“God is love”** (I John 4:8); therefore, **“love is of God”** (I John 4:7), and His lovingkindnesses were but the outflow of His very nature. Yet, for all of this, they questioned His love.

“I have sent my commandment.”

The word **“commandment”** is most comprehensive. It refers to the Lord God's established instructions, His unalterable directives.

It became crystallized in Solomon's summation of human responsibility toward Deity: **“Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man”** (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

The matter is reduced to an irreducible minimum in Jeremiah 7:23:

“This [one] thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God.”

His voice is the voice of revealed Truth. It was to be obeyed, but the record reveals that it was not obeyed: **“Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof”** (Proverbs 1:25). Turning from God's perfect law (Psalm 19:7) is the great **“transgression”** (Daniel 9:24), the one from which David prayed to be spared (Psalm 19:13).

God sent His Word through His Spirit.

He is the Author of divine revelation. He employed human instrumentality, but the Bible is His production. Holy men of old were borne along by His power and direction (II Peter 1:21).

- He wove the element of life into its lines as the wool is woven into the fabric (I Peter 1:23).
- He infused into its texture the manna of Heaven to nourish the life it produces (Job 23:12; II Peter 1:3).
- He electrified its content with hallowed illumination capable of dissipating the densest darkness along our wilderness pathway (Psalm 119:105).
- He incorporated a power within its message to bulwark the believer against the militating forces of evil.
- He built into its structure a potent provision capable of dismantling the strongholds of Satan.

In Psalm 119 is to be found the most profuse eulogy to the Scriptures extant.

The Psalmist spoke:

- Of its trustworthiness (v. 86),
- Of its eternity (v. 89),
- Of its appeal (v. 97),
- Of its sweetness (v. 103),
- Of its illumination (v. 105),
- Of its wonders (v. 120),
- Of its veracity (v. 142).

Its development covered more than 1,400 years, employing more than 40 human penmen, mostly unknown to each other and living at different times in various places and under differing circumstances, yet its unity is an amazing proof of its divine authenticity. Its unity can successfully stand the test from the structural, historic, ethic, prophetic, organic, mathematic and personal points of view.

This was the authority rejected and the message refused.

“I gave them life and peace.”

As love is of God, even so is life. Moses in his closing counsels to the people was dynamic in his appeal for them to,

“Love the Lord thy God, that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for HE IS THY LIFE, and the length of thy days” (Deuteronomy 30:20).

And the life which God gives is always attended by the benediction of His peace. God clearly stated that He had only thoughts of peace for them (Jeremiah 29:11). Had they gone down the pathway of obedience, the Lord would have met them there with the abounding joys of life and with the sweetness of His peace. Instead, their feet trod the course of disobedience into suffering and sorrow. What might have been a romance of victory became a cavalcade of disaster.

The life which God gives is His own life, even His own nature (II Peter 1:4).

It is not mere existence with harassing trials to mar and scar but a walk and a welfare with God in the center, producing a joy and blessing unobtainable and undiscoverable from any other source. Jesus reduced the matter to simple terms for this age: **“This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent”** (John 17:3).

Neither in Old Testament days nor in the New have men evidenced much desire for the life that is of God.

Life and peace are inseparable.

Life unites us to God, and peace is perfect union with Him. Peace is:

(1) *exclusive in its origin.*

It is **“not as the world giveth”** (John 14:27).

- Look where you will and you look in vain for peace apart from the Prince of peace.
- Search as you will for peace and your efforts will mock you unless you reach Him by faith.
- Fight for peace and your wounds will be worthless, your dying folly.

Real peace comes from but one source.

(2) *Peace is exceptional in its character.*

The peace which God gives is not what the world speaks about, fights and dies for—an uncertain, unstable, unsatisfying something at which to grasp but never to be sure the grip is firm and lasting. No, it is something real, something restful, something refreshing.

(3) *Peace is excellent in its exhilarating effect.*

- It is the refreshing atmosphere of heaven inhaled by an exercise of faith.
- It is the assurance of sins forgiven,
- It is the confidence of a present salvation
- It is the certainty of future glory.

God, who is rich in mercy according to the love wherewith He has loved us, provided through the Saviour a living, lasting peace for all who will surrender their wills to Him. Nor is this only New Testament teaching. Isaiah assured, “**Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee**” (Isaiah 26:3).

THE PRESENT TENSE

“I am a great king.”

Again, we have the voice of veracity. God declares His sovereignty. How pathetically Israel had overlooked this transcendent fact.

When they demanded a king like the nations, they were not cognizant of the fact that God had never intended for them to have a king like the heathen. The adjective “**great**” contains more than a superlative connotation; it suggests inimitability.

- Moses, pursuant to the Red Sea miracle, exalted the Lord with such references as “**glorious in power**” and “**the greatness of thine excellency**” (Exodus 15:6, 7).
- David sang of “**The Lord's throne in heaven**” (Psalm 11:4).

Now, through prolonged disobedience, the verdure is stripped from their former confessions of reverence and devotion, leaving the dried leaves of lifeless unbelief. Thus the Lord God must remind them that He is a great King and that He should be honored and obeyed.

The Lord Jesus is prophetically pictured in three ways:

- (1) As the “**King,**”
- (2) as the “**Prince of peace,**”
- (3) as the “**Chief Shepherd.**”

Each designation characterizes a particular ministry.

- As the King of kings, He will rule.
- As the Prince of peace, He will bring order to a restless, frustrated world.
- As the Chief Shepherd, He will feed and care for His sheep.

But in each instance, we must note well, it is an earthly scene. Heaven does not need a king to rule, a prince to bring peace, or a shepherd to feed.

- There the residents never hunger or thirst.
- There the atmosphere is one of sublime peacefulness.
- There the need for ruling is nonexistent.

That Jesus is king of the Jews is well established.

- There is the testimony of the angel Gabriel at the annunciation (Luke 1:30-32),
- The word of the wise men at His birth (Matthew 2:2),
- The word of the Roman government inscribed on the cross at His death (Matthew 27:37),
- The word of Peter concerning His resurrection (Acts 2:30),
- The word of Christ Himself (John 19:21). “**The Lord is King for ever and ever**” (Psalm 10:16).

Yet His own chosen people disesteemed His name and disowned Him (John 1:11).

“I am the Lord.”

What a pitiful situation when the infinite God finds it necessary to remind people, especially His own, that He is the Lord!

In Leviticus, it is stated 21 times, “**I am the Lord**”, and 21 times, “**I am the Lord thy God.**”

Now the lordship of the Most High was lost sight of in their pursuit of personal pleasure and earthly satisfaction. The enemy of the human soul has reached the paragon of success when he has erased from the consciousness of man all sense of the holiness and transcendent greatness of Deity.

Non-recognition of His Deity was reflected in:

- Their lack of proper worship,
- Their refusal of His entreaties,
- Their rejection of His Word,
- Their disregard for His name.

This is the travesty of unbelief. God's people must know He is a great king to be honored and obeyed; that He is equally the Lord to be worshiped and adored.

Until His lordship is acknowledged, there can be no hope for these people or for any people.

It is the acknowledging of His lordship which brings one under His control and promotion. Saul of Tarsus, in his experience along the road to Damascus, is a striking illustration: “**Lord,**” he said humbly and sincerely, “**what wilt thou have me to do?**” (Acts 9:6). This was the turning point which eventuated in perhaps the most exemplary spiritual conduct and service the world has ever witnessed. And He is still Lord of lords.

“I change not.”

Here is stated immutability, and the inference is a strong indictment against the people.

- He is still the “**I AM**” who accompanied Moses (Exodus 3:14).
- He is still the glorious One who filled the tabernacle with His glory (Exodus 40:34).
- He is still the thrice holy One high and lifted up (Isaiah 6).

- He is still the One who doeth wonders (Jeremiah 32:17).

No, He has not changed. It was the people who had changed.

They had changed:

- To unbelief,
- To indifference,
- To unconcern,
- To self-reliance,
- To unspirituality,
- To godlessness.

With the changeless God on one side and the constantly changing people on the other, a divergence developed which wrought the downfall and misery of these ancient people.

God has not and cannot change in His character or in His attributes.

- Through an Old Testament priest, He said, “**Be holy, for I am holy**” (Leviticus 11:45).
- Through a New Testament apostle, He utters the same words (I Peter 1:16).

He does not change as to His plan and purpose: “**The Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?**” (Isaiah 14:27).

- He cannot change as to His Word, for it is forever established in heaven (Psalm 119:89).
- He cannot change as to His love because it is His very nature (I John 4:8).
- He will not change as to His promises because He cannot deny Himself (II Timothy 2:13).

From whatever angle we view the Most High, we are led sooner or later to assert, “**Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever!**” (Hebrews 13:8).

THE FUTURE TENSE

We observed a trinity of divine identifications on the part of the Lord God in the past tense, and a trinity in the present tense. We now meet a duo-trinity in the future tense, three concerning the immediate future and three the remote. They sketch for us a prophetic picture of profound proportions.

“I will send my messenger.”

Prophetic language may seem confusing at times since the Lord, not limited by time, may employ the present tense for a matter yet in the future; but when He uses the future tense it never refers to the present or to the past. It is the future. Thus the “**messenger**” promised in 3:1 postdates Malachi (“**my messenger**”).

The fact is there are two messengers seen in this verse.

The first is John the Baptizer, the forerunner of Christ (Matthew 11:10). The second is Christ Himself, but in His second advent, for two pointed questions are immediately asked, **“Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?”** (3:2).

It is very clear that Malachi, the messenger, cannot set things right. It will require God's incomparable Messenger. And concerning Him, it is prophesied, **“Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high”** (Isaiah 52:13). And when He ultimately arrives in power and great glory, He shall be called **“Faithful and True”, “The Word of God”, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS”** (Revelation 19).

In a parabolic explanation of human reactions to divine agents, our Lord related how a proprietor leased his vineyard to tillers (Matthew 21:33). When the vintage time approached, the owner sought his share. The lessees took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned the third. Others were sent and received like treatment. Finally he sent his son, believing they would honor him; but when the workers saw the son, they said, **“Come, let us kill him and get hold of his inheritance.”**

How pictorially true this was of the prophets who were stoned and beaten and sawn asunder, and of the Father's own Son (Proverbs 30:4), Who was conspired against and caused to be crucified.

This was God's true Messenger for Whom the Jews still wait and Whom the New Testament Church joyfully anticipates, the Church to be raptured to heaven (I Thessalonians 4:17); Israel to be returned to the land (Ezekiel 37:21).

Hated, despised, rejected was He
Whose word commanded the wind and the sea;
By Whose compassion the hungry were fed,
Who healed the living, whose voice raised the dead.

“I will come near.”

This is doubtless the incarnation, for the Lord identified Himself with His people in the flesh, being **“made of a woman, made under the Law”** (Galatians 4:4).

But as Israel failed to recognize His transcendence in Malachi's day, neither did they recognize His condescension in John's day. The last prophet of the legal regime lamented, **“There standeth one among you, whom ye know not”** (John 1:26). How terribly condemning that it should be divinely stated, **“He came unto his own, and his own received him not”** (John 1:11).

Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, came near, even into their midst, to offer them life and peace and joy, but He was neither recognized nor received.

This raises the question, How near must the Lord come to one to be recognized?

The law and the prophets were filled with the announcements of His coming near:

- His supernatural birth (Isaiah 7:14),
 - His advent declaration (Isaiah 9:6),
 - The place of His nativity (Micah 5:2),
 - His humility (Isaiah 53: 2),
 - His counseling (Isaiah 9:6)
 - His presentation to them as King (Zechariah 9:9).
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- He came near enough for their reach of faith (Matthew 1:21).
 - He came near with words such as man had never uttered (John 7:46),
 - He came near with miracles that man had never seen (Mk. 4:41),
 - He came near with an authority that amazed His hearers (Matthew 7:29).

His predicted ministry was fully accomplished (Isaiah 61: 1, 2; Luke 4:17-19), and thirty-three distinct prophecies were minutely fulfilled the day of His death.

He came near enough to be received but was rejected.

“I will be a swift witness.”

Here is an allusion to the Omniscience of the Lord. From the beginning it was made clear that all are in full view of **“the living One.”**

- He sees His people in their problems and perplexities (**“La-hai-roi”**, Genesis 16: 13).
- He sees them in their pursuit of happiness (**“La-hai-roi”**, Genesis 24:62).
- He sees them in the practical procedures of life (**“La-hai-roi”**, Genesis 25:11).

Nothing can be done in secret that shall not be known to Him. This truth is prodigiously developed in Psalm 139.

The word **“witness”** here in 3:5 combines in meaning with the same word in 2:14 to show that God quickly, readily, promptly takes note of all actions and words.

- He witnessed the antagonism toward Christ on the part of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians.
- He observed their attempts to ensnare Him during His earthly ministry.
- He noted the conspiracies of the chief priests and elders to make riddance of Jesus and to silence His message.
- He noted the schemes of the Sanhedrin to indict Christ and to demand of the Roman court His crucifixion.

The immediate context gives an impressive list of those who come under divine scrutiny—sorcerers, adulterers, swearers, oppressors, extortioners, and those who fear not the Lord (3:5).

Surely **“the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth”** (II Chronicles 16:9).

“I will return.”

We move now to the more remote future in the plans of the Almighty. It is true there is an immediate promise involved here contingent upon the return of His people unto Him. However, the fact that the people in Malachi's day refused to return, did not humble themselves and repent, projects the thought of the text into the yet future.

The return prophesied herein does not pertain unto the appearing (*parousia*), the unveiling (*apocalupsis*), or the manifestation (*epiphanea*), namely, the second coming of Christ. It has to do with His coming back into dealing relationship with them. This relationship was broken (interrupted) when Messiah was “**cut off**.” It will be resumed in the 70th week of Daniel (Daniel 9:24).

This will be the tribulation and great tribulation period—a time of severe and unprecedented judgment.

If the Lord is not to resume His dealings with His covenant people, the Bible would leave much to be explained.

- What about His “**everlasting covenant**”?
- What about His promises concerning the land?
- What about His plans to give them a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11)?

How else could His resumption of dealings fit the case apart from chastisement when, in taking His leave of them, they were in a state of unprecedented apostasy, questioning His love, profaning His name, corrupting His worship, refusing His entreaties, with their words “**stout**” against Him? He will resume His dealings with His ancient people to honor His Word, to keep inviolate His integrity and to fulfill His promises through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

“I will rebuke.”

The position of this promise in the context, together with the suggestion respectively of the prophecies, “**I will return**” and “**I will spare**”, would surely justify our belief that this “rebuke” concerns the day of “**Jacob's trouble**” (Jeremiah 30:7), or the great tribulation (Matthew 24:21).

The devil hates the Jews for they constituted the line and lineage for God's Son (Matthew 1; Luke 3), and the repository for His Word (Romans 3:2). The evil one, knowing his days are few, will try to destroy the woman (Israel, Revelation 12:3, 4) who gave birth to the “**man child**” (Christ, Revelation 12:5). But God will restrain him.

If he manifests his fury through Gog of the land of Magog (presumably Russia); the Lord will rain fire upon him (Ezekiel 38:1, 22). However Satan may attack the people of God, divine power will discomfit him.

The Lord will ultimately magnify Himself with His people (Ezekiel 38:23; Malachi 1:5).

“I will spare.”

The Bible concerns itself with three classes of people, namely, the Jew, the Gentile, the Church of God (I Corinthians 10:32). The message of Malachi has to do with the Jew. The Church is not in view in it. When God speaks of sparing some, we naturally want to know who, how, when and under what conditions. The Scriptures fully satisfy our inquiries.

The Lord, witnessing the transgressions of His people (3:5), returns to His dealings with them in tribulation judgment (3:7), and rebuking the fearful adversary (3:11), promises that some will be spared. They are characterized as “**jewels**” in a dark day (3:17) and as those who “**feared the Lord**” (3:16).

Who are they? They are the 144,000, twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel (Revelation 7:14). These shall be spared to enter the restored kingdom.

There is a sense in which the preservation of these people has been nothing short of a miracle. It is not at all hyperbolic to use the expression, “*the indestructible Jew.*”

Mrs. Helen Mael is quite correct in her observation:

- The king of Egypt could not diminish him (Exodus 1:9-12).
- The waters of the Red Sea could not drown him (Exodus 14).
- The gallows of Haman could not hang him (Esther 5:14; 7:10).
- The great fish could not digest him (Jonah 1:17; 2:10).
- The fiery furnace could not destroy him (Daniel 3:16-28).
- Balaam could not curse him (Numbers 23:7,8).
- The lions of Babylon could not devour him (Daniel 6:3-28).
- The nations of the world cannot assimilate him (Deuteronomy 33:29).
- The dictators of the world cannot annihilate him (Isaiah 14:1-3).

However, the most miraculous “sparing” is yet to take place. With the “**man of sin**” bent upon the utter extermination of the Jew, the Lord will intervene.

In a previous dark day, it was said, “**If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou** (Haman) hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him” (Esther 6:13).

This will be even more true in the day of “Jacob's trouble.”

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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