

MALACHI

or

WILL A MAN ROB GOD?

by

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CHAPTER TWO

THE LORD GOD'S NAME DISESTEEMED

“O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, “Wherein have we despised thy name?”
(Malachi 1:6).

TO SIN AGAINST LOVE is more reprehensible than sinning against law, though the latter is the result of the former and is not without seriousness.

Having questioned God's love, the people then displayed a disregard for His name.

The leadership—poor, proud and profligate—was severely charged in this connection, but quickly and brazenly countered with a self-justifying **“Wherein have we despised thy name?”**

The name of the Lord should appeal to every noble instinct in man's nature.

To disesteem it betrays an inward perversion; and to pretend otherwise when thus divinely charged is mockery. It is as ignoble as when Pilate claimed his innocence of Christ's death by washing his hands before the multitude. The extent to which they had declined spiritually in Malachi's day becomes evident when we recall that their forebears held God's name in such awe and reverence, sacredness and majesty, that they would not allow themselves to pronounce it. They alluded to the divine appellation as *“the incommunicable name.”*

“I am the God of thy father . . . the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, and My name is I am” (Exodus 3:6, 14).

No other name can possess so much dignity, sublimity and transcendence. The root idea in the **“I am”** is that of underived and independent existence. It connotes eternity and unchangeableness.

As the Lord, God is the self-existent, supreme and sovereign Will. There is nothing transitory or successive about Him. There cannot be since change is the consequence of imperfection.

Following is a terse rundown on the significance of divine titles.

Jehovah-Elyon	“The Lord most high”	Psalm 7:17
Jehovah-jireh	“The Lord will provide”	Genesis 22:14
Jehovah-M'Kaddesh	“The Lord that doth sanctify you”	Exodus 31:13
Jehovah-nissi	“The Lord thy banner”	(Exodus 17:15)
Jehovah-rohi	“The Lord is my shepherd”	(Psalm 23:1)
Jehovah-rophe	“The Lord that healeth thee”	(Exodus 15:26)
Jehovah-shalom	“The Lord our peace”	(Judges 6:24)
Jehovah-shammah	“The Lord is there”	(Ezekiel 48:35)
Jehovah-Sabaoth	“The Lord of hosts”	(I Samuel 1:3)
Jehovah-tsidkenu	“The Lord our righteousness”	(Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16)

The above titles of Deity, suggesting greatness, holiness, perfection, faithfulness, inexhaustibleness, fullness of mercy, permanence, majesty, righteousness, graciousness and uniformity, are expressive of God's attributes bearing upon His essential nature and essential relations.

They denote His wisdom, justice and love. They call for honor and fervor of an orderly and sober character, but now the day has come when even the leadership must be charged with taking lightly this all-important name. The absurdity of such conduct is seen in the folly and misery occasioned by forsaking God.

And to forget Him, as another has said, is:

- “(1) not to think of Him,
- (2) not to thank Him,
- (3) not to serve and obey Him.

It is to forget:

- (1) His presence,
- (2) His providence,
- (3) His precepts.”

To disesteem His name is the forerunner of these dangerous divergencies. For those who thus turn, hoping to find wider circuits of power or larger fields of opportunity or greater extents of prosperity face an inevitable disillusionment which will prove too severe to bear.

A SAD INQUIRY

“**Where is mine honor?**” (1:6).

A name-despising nation could not be an honor-producing people, and the divine inquiry is as pitiful as it is pointed. Honor has a most prominent place in God's dealings with men and men's dealings with God. At an earlier date, it was explicitly stated, “[They] **that honour me, I will honour**” (I Samuel 2:30).

Honor shown to parents by the respectful attitude and conduct of children has ever been the cornerstone of happy family life and is the symbol of reverence and devotion to the Most High.

Now, however, the Lord must observe that such honor for Him is not forthcoming. Disesteeming His name accounts for this lamentable indignity.

That the divine question was met with an evasive counter-question evidencing rebellion instead of repentance is but one of the unsightly colors in this picture of spiritual deterioration.

It is not here a denial of sovereignty, but it is a step toward such a disastrous end.

“O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” (Romans 9:20).

It is apparent that one of the symptoms of backsliding is insensibility toward spiritual values, an inappreciation which throws the heart's door wide open to carnal interests and worldly appeal. And where was God's honor? It was a missing quality in the lives of His people.

GREATNESS OF NAME UNAFFECTED

As the veracity and power of God's Word cannot be depreciated by unbelief, even so the greatness of God's name cannot be diminished by dishonor.

“For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts” (1:11).

“From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the Lord's name is to be praised” (Psalm 113:1-3).

“I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon my name” (Isaiah 41:25).

“So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun” (Isaiah 59:19).

This last reference makes clear that the expression **“from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same”** means (literally) *from east to west*, conveying the thought of universality.

The three verses, respectively, call for adoration, praise and reverence for the name of the Lord. Regardless of the disesteem of God's people for His name and the disrespect of the unbelieving world, the day of universal triumph for that Name is assured:

“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Philippians 2:10).

In the meanwhile, there is unapproachable prominence to that Name, because “**God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name**” (Philippians 2:9).

In the meanwhile, as well, there is inexplicable profit in that Name:

- There is salvation (Acts 4:12).
- There is forgiveness (I John 2:12).
- There is worship (Matthew 18: 20).
- There is prayer (John 15:16).
- There is operating authority for words and deeds (Colossians 3:17).

How irrefutable is the proof that His name is WONDERFUL (Isaiah 9:6).

WORTHY IS HIS NAME

“**In every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering**” (1:11).

While couched in ceremonial language, appropriate for the day, the practical import is that of sincerity, esteem and reverence for His name.

Between the place of sacrifice and the Holy of Holies was the altar of incense. This was always pleasing to the Lord God when the incense was proper and the lire not strange. But when was the incense proper? There were four requirements.

First, It must be sweet: “**And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning**” (Exodus 30:7).

Second, it must be pure: “**And he made the holy anointing oil, and the pure incense of sweet spices**” (Exodus 37: 29).

Third, it must be perpetual (Exodus 30:8).

Fourth, it must be unto the Lord: “**It is most holy unto the Lord**” (Exodus 30:10).

The Name of the Lord, being both sweet and pure, demands and deserves unalloyed and unaffected esteem.

No voice can sing, no heart can frame,
Nor can the mem'ry find,
A sweeter sound than Thy blest Name,
O Saviour of mankind.

Yet the priests profaned it. And this in spite of its effectual and indispensable place in covenant blessing and promise.

- It was the hallowed watermark of relationship: “**If my people, who are called by my name . . .**” (II Chronicles 7:14).

- It was the guarantee of protection: “**The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe**” (Proverbs 18:10).

- It was the assurance of victory. **“I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts . . . This day will the Lord deliver thee [Goliath] into mine hand”** (I Samuel 17:45, 46).

While it is obvious the people of Malachi's day suffered irreparably as have their descendants, because of disesteeming and profaning the Lord God's name, it would be unmitigated blindness if we could not see the Lord's grief in the question He put to them.

He was deprived in three ways:

- (1) He did not receive the honor a father should be accorded by his children.
- (2) He did not receive the obedience servants give to their masters.
- (3) He was not shown the reverence rightly due Deity.

Yet for all this, **“the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake”** (I Samuel 12:22).

His name remains and ever will remain unchangeably and unchallengeably worthy!

A GREAT NAME AND DREADFUL

“My name shall be great among the heathen” (1:11c).

“My name is dreadful among the heathen” (1:14c).

Because God is infinite, incomparable and transcendent, it naturally obtains that He is unique in nature, attribute and title. He did not become great. As the eternally self-sufficient One, He does not inherit or derive. His name is great because He is great.

The nations must learn the greatness of His Name; and, indeed, they shall! **“Why do the heathen [nations] rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?”** (Psalm 2:1) is a question of considerable current importance.

It envisions a world in revolt—the rebellion of nations. The open issue, which will prove to be an empty dream, finds a block of nations whose rulers conspire to destroy all that is of the Lord. It is then that the greatness of His Name becomes painfully realistic to them for **“He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision”** (Psalm 2:4).

Confidence in the integrity of divine Truth must convince one that nothing is out of control with the Lord. When, in His wise counsels, it is propitious to act, God will move to set things right. When it becomes Him to speak, He will glorify His Name in so doing. As in creation, God stayed the boisterous waves with **“Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further”** (Job. 38:11), even so shall the raging nations be curbed, discomfited, destroyed. The Lord is His Name!

When Jehovah-Sabaoth says, **“My name is dreadful among the nations”** (1:14c), it is implied that the greatness of His Name does not need to wait for future demonstration to prove the fact. It is already proved.

Pharaoh, both in Egypt and at the Red Sea, was thus convinced, as were Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar in their day. The demonstration to the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel was phenomenal. The word “**dreadful**” means “*to hold in awe.*” Nebuchadnezzar was particularly awed when Daniel recovered his lost dream and gave the interpretation thereof. How did Daniel do it? Listen to his prayer: “**Blessed be the NAME of God for ever and ever; for wisdom and might are his**” (Daniel 2:20).

HIS NAME TO BE MAGNIFIED

“**If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you**” (2:2).

“**To give glory**” means “*to laud*”, “*to magnify.*” There are some interesting involvements. First, the prerequisites: *To hear or give careful attention is demanded*; serious reaction by laying it to heart is strongly enjoined. The former concerned the instruction; the latter, the engagement. Second, the warning for failure: “**I will even send a curse upon you**” (2:2).

Magnifying His name is a form of praise, a spiritual engagement in extolling the Most High. It solicits association: “**O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together**” (Psalm 34:3). It calls for royal etiquette: “**Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving . . . let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker . . . sing unto the Lord, bless his name . . . give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name . . . O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness**” (Psalm 95:2, 6; 96:2, 8, 9).

The warning God sounded for failure to magnify His Name with sincerity of heart, that of a curse, emphasizes the fact that this is indeed an important matter with the Lord. To disesteem His Name spells failure in every area of one's life. This must be guarded against vigilantly and the reproof is God's red light to prevent transgression. His Name is great!

HONORING GOD'S NAME

“**My covenant was with him [Levi] of life and peace . . . he feared me, and was afraid before my name**” (2:5).

The Levites were those that did “**execute the service of the Lord**” (Numbers 8:11). They were set aside for divine service and proved exemplary to no small degree. The mention of Levi in 2:4 has reference to Aaron who was of the tribe of Levi. “**Behold, I give unto him [Aaron] my covenant of peace**” (Numbers 25:12), which was “**the covenant of an everlasting priesthood**” (Numbers 25:13). The Lord God took notice that Aaron was “**zealous for my sake**” (Numbers 25:11) and “**zealous for his God**” (Numbers 25:13).

Now the Lord reveals Aaron's attitude toward His name. He was afraid (2:5). The word “**afraid**” means “*to prostrate*” hence, “*to break down, either (literally) by violence, or (figuratively) by confusion and fear*” (Strong's Conc.). Since the reference in 2:4 and 5 connects with Numbers 25, one may readily see why the faithful priesthood exhibited pronounced concern.

It was at the time of God's judgment against the people for their sinful involvements of Baal-peor. So hideous and sordid was the sin that an exact description is scarcely discoverable. **“The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel”** (Numbers 25:3), and twenty-four thousand were destroyed (Numbers: 25:9), twenty-three thousand in one day (I Corinthians 10:8). Only those were spared **“that did cleave unto the Lord”** (Deuteronomy 4:4). It was Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron who ended the plague (Numbers 25:7) by thrusting a javelin through two remaining offenders, thereby turning divine wrath from the children of Israel (Numbers 25:11).

Now, some 1155 years later, the Lord God cites this incident to reveal His pleasure in those who revere His Name and stand unswervingly for its glory and praise when the vast majority; with no evident compunction, are bringing reproach upon it.

The reference to Levi (2:5), that is the ministering priests of another day, is an intended comparison developing a sad contrast.

- Once God's servants were **“zealous for my sake”** (Numbers 25:11). Now they question His love (1:2).
- Once they were **“zealous for God”** (Numbers 25:13). Now they despise His Name (1:6).

The late Dr. Wm. L. Pettingill, shortly before his decease, made mention of the godly dauntless, set-for-the-defense-of-the-faith leaders with whom he had rubbed shoulders for fifty years. Then, in homely but expressive language he observed, “The present crop is not made of the same stuff.” And so it was in Malachi's day.

NAME PONDERED BY GOD-FEARING

“A book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name” (3:16).

What mental engagement could be so pleasant and profitable?

“Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast.”

We may think upon His name regarding His love, His providences, His guidance, His protection, His promises. It was for such a cause that Joshua called upon the leaders to assemble at Shechem (Joshua 24).

His rehearsal of the goodness and grace of God should have elicited much favorable reaction; but, apart from Joshua and his family, none seemed sufficiently impressed to declare full dedication to the Lord.

Just a casual glance at the above verse (3:16) will reveal that only those who fear the Lord ponder with any real seriousness the transcendence and glory of that Name.

- The ritualist employs it.
- The materialist mentions it.
- The carnal-minded will acknowledge it.

But only the God-fearing will laud and magnify it and be motivated and controlled by it. These are evidently comparatively few in number, especially in decadent days.

Further comment will be made concerning the book of remembrance in a later chapter. Suffice it to state here that divine pleasure is specifically indicated concerning those who ponder His name prayerfully and appreciatively.

THE NAME AND THE FUTURE

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings” (4:2).

This is a climactic statement. It was the ultimate of Jewish hope—the anticipation of the prophets.

The name of the Sun of righteousness was amplified in His incarnation: **“His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).**

- His Name was qualified in the annunciation: **“Thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).**
- His Name will be glorified in His Revelation: **“His name is called The Word of God . . . and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:13, 16).**

In this hallowed Name is:

- The hope of the saint,
- The fear of the sinner,
- The end of the nations,
- The glory of Israel and
- The destruction of Satan.

This is the Name the priests despised and the people disesteemed, grieving the heart of the Lord God and moving the nation into darkness and despair.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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