

MALACHI

or

WILL A MAN ROB GOD?

by

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CHAPTER SIX

THE LORD GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY DENIED

“Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord” (Malachi 3:13).

AN ATTITUDE OF THIS NATURE

Toward the Almighty is more than careless indifference or casual irreverence. It is premeditated blasphemy. It is tantamount to a denial of His lordship and authority, and such denial, either in word or in action, is the ultimate of unbelief.

THE ANTAGONISM

God calls the attention of His people to the kind of language they had been employing, especially as concerning Him, His commands and His worship. Their words had been **“stout.”** This is not mere impoliteness or discourtesy. It reflects an obstinacy and relentlessness, an impenitence and obduracy. They had **“refused to receive correction; they had made their faces harder than a rock; they had refused to return”** (Jeremiah 5:3).

This is the unsightly portrait of a spiritual recalcitrant—an incorrigible—one **“bent to backsliding”** (Hosea 11:7).

As pathetic as is the catastrophe which has blackened the history of these people, the cause is attributable, not to their avowed enemies, but to themselves. Here is the authority for this statement:

“O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself” (Hosea 13:9).

One fact is certain, they will never be able to successfully charge the Lord God with the seemingly interminable hardships which have been their lot these many centuries.

The Record is replete with tender divine entreaties designed for their good.

Following are some examples:

“O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever” (Deuteronomy 5:29).

“Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns . . . set up the standard toward Zion . . . O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness . . . ” (Jeremiah 4:3, 6,14).

Despite this outflow of incomparable love, their words were “**stout**” against Him, often clothed in the character of an ultimatum—**“But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem”** (Jeremiah 44:17).

Their posterity has lived to rue the day their forefathers bit on these sour grapes to put their teeth on edge (Jeremiah 31:29). And the end of their hardship is not yet. The darkest hour is yet to come, an hour of persecution and misery, for it shall be **“As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?”** (Amos 5:19, 20).

A VOCAL ASSAULT

“Ye have wearied the Lord with your words” (2:17).

They were words of selfishness, of sacrilege, of rebellion, of utter defiance. How contrary to David's counsel: **“Bless the Lord, ye his angels . . . Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure”** (Psalm 103:20, 21).

How different from David's personal longing: **“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer”** (Psalm 19:14).

Words may be filthy, foolish or idle (Ephesians 5:4). They need not be directed to the Lord or spoken about Him to be displeasing to Him. Everything that is unspiritual is an offense to the Spirit who indwells the believer. This occasions the necessary exhortation: **“Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord”** (Ephesians 5:10).

Those sufficiently interested in words acceptable to the Lord will find a catalog of helpful suggestions in Philippians 4:8: **“Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report . . . think on these things.”** If these things characterize our thoughts, then our words will be most pleasing to Him, and our conduct as well. With apostate Israel, there was little that could be termed honest, just, pure, lovely or of good report, either in their words or in their actions.

And what, exactly, was the Lord God's reaction when we are told He was wearied with their words? The word "**wearied**" means, literally, "*to gasp*." Thus it results that the very people whom He brought to himself for His glory (Isaiah 43:7), instead of bringing Him glory are causing Him "*to gasp*."

This had been a complaint of long standing. "**Thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities [when] I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake**" (Isaiah 43:24, 25). They wearied Him with empty ceremonies and vain words: "**I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt-offerings and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts**" (Amos 5: 21, 22).

God wants people to speak. This is proved in His question to Adam and Eve: "**Where art thou?**" And to Cain, "**What is this that thou hast done?**" "**O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God . . . take with you words**" (Hosea 14:1, 2).

And when the right words are communicated—words of truth and sincerity, words of faith and repentance—heaven will hear and respond. This is precisely what God desired; this is what His people so sorely needed.

THE SPECIFIC CHARGE

When the people bluntly asked, "**Wherein have we wearied him?**" the answer was, "**When ye say, everyone that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them**" (2:17).

Does the point here seem obscured? It is a betrayed self-justification. It is the agelong question which usually incubates in the hearts of discouraged or afflicted believers: "Why do the wicked prosper? Why do they go unpunished?" It is a self-pity which gives rise to baseless, indicting charges against the justice of God.

It is a sad state of affairs when such thoughts invade the mind and escape the lips. That the wicked prosper can never be a determining factor in judging the justice of God. The "**far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory**" (II Corinthians 4:17) awaits the faithful believer who, like Lazarus, may have experienced hardship and destitution here, while the prosperous in this world, like the rich man (Luke 16), may not so much as have a mere drop of water to soothe or to comfort in a lost world. God will make all things right.

He doeth all things decently and in order. The righteous will be properly rewarded and the wicked will be fairly punished.

Just because fire does not fall from Heaven to consume the unrighteous at the hysterical cry of disciples furnishes no basis whatsoever for the conclusion that God views evil as good. That which is evil can never be good. It is condemned forthwith.

THE MORE SERIOUS OFFENSE

“Where is the God of judgment?” they complained (2:17).

The implications here are many.

It was one thing for the enemy to taunt a righteous man with the jibe, **“Where is thy God?”** (Psalm 42:3). It is quite another for the Lord God's own covenant people to ask, **“Where is the God of judgment?”**

It was charging:

- The unfailing One with insubordination,
- The merciful One with unconcern,
- The changeless One with failure,
- The victorious Lord with defeat.

Reduced to simple language, they were saying in their panic, **“Why doesn't God do something?”**

But God was doing something! He was promising what men had never heard nor seen in the way of blessing IF they would **“wait for,” “long for,” “adhere to”** Him (Isaiah 64:4). He was offering to meet him who **“rejoiceth and worketh righteousness”** (Isaiah 64:5).

And more—God was standing nearby, saying, **“I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts”** (Isaiah 65:2).

Once again they are proved false and foolish who, being out of fellowship with God, attempt to charge Him with their failures. This never brings an iota of peace to a troubled heart. Such peace only comes through a simple, honest, willing concurrence with the divine will.

FLAGRANT CONTEMPT

When the Lord God indicated that their words caused Him *“to gasp”* (**be wearied**), they asked, **“What have we spoken so much against thee?”**

The Lord answered them, saying, **“Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?”** (3:14)

Here is a revealing diagnosis of their attitude:

- The Word: too exacting—No Desire
- The Walk: too narrow—No Delight
- The Work: too difficult—No Dedication.

In this state of serious spiritual debility, they engage themselves in another tirade of flagrant aspersions. Through imperfect perception and unwise comparison:

- They called the “**proud**” (arrogant, haughty, insolent) happy (3:15).
- They apparently were unaware of the fact that, apart from the superficial happiness of those cited, this was a description of themselves.
- They had emulated the heathen.
- They had imitated the wicked, but they had no happiness. “**Their drink is sour**” (Hosea 4: 18).
- They “**walked mournfully**” (3:14).

Instead of the emptiness of their own lives condemning them, they were constantly accusing or excusing.

It seems inconceivable that the people of God could charge their glorious Sovereign with exalting the wicked or with favoring those who tempt Him. These people had earlier declared they had plentiful provisions and saw no ill when they did what the heathen did (Jeremiah 44:17). This can only be the outburst of deceived hearts.

Now they add to their sin and judgment the ridiculous complaint that it is vain to serve God. But what saith the Record? He that gives cold water in the name of the Lord “**shall in no wise lose his reward**” (Matthew 10:42). Again, “**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord**” (I Corinthians 15:58).

- John Mark may contend that God's way is too exacting and give up.
- Demas may become enamored of the glittering world and succumb to it.

But men like Moses make the wise choice, “**Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season**” (Hebrews 11:25).

The motivating factor in this choice was due to a clear vision:

“**He had respect unto the recompense of the reward**” (Hebrews 11:26).

BRIGHT SPOT ON THE HORIZON

“**Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name**” (3:16).

Here are the proverbial seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. It is a remnant of faithful ones who have kept themselves unspotted from the world of unbelief and wickedness.

They did two commendable things.

- (1) They feared God.
- (2) They fellowshiped with one another about the Name above all names.

- **“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him”** (Psalm 25:14).
- Those who fear God lack no good thing (Psalm 34:9).
- **“In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence”** (Proverbs 14:26).
- The fear of the Lord is also **“a fountain of life”** (Proverbs 14:27).

It is clear that the Lord is pleased when His people fellowship in His name (Matthew 18:20). He evidences His pleasure:

- (1) by listening in;
- (2) by making a record for their future remembrance.

One day, while visiting the old homestead, the author's aged mother, summoning him to an upstairs bedroom, produced from an old trunk several rolls of age-worn papers. Removing the ribbon by which they had been held together, the papers were placed in my hand. They proved to be class papers from early school days, papers which contained perfect grades.

With some surprise I asked the purpose of preserving these products of childhood, long since forgotten.

Mother replied: “When, as a lad, you rushed home from school excitedly to share the news of a perfect paper, it brought great joy to your mother. Knowing these occasions would be forgotten by you in passing years, I have kept these papers for this moment to remind you, as an adult and parent, of former days when you brought pleasure to an appreciative mother's heart.”

In some such manner, there awaits the God-fearing and Name-fellowshipping saints a divine reminder that, when others were forgetting and departing, their devotion was noticed and appreciated from on high.

In every age, it is the anointed few who keep:

- the light of testimony glowing,
- the witness of truth moving,
- the spiritual heritage of posterity alive.

Schools of thought may multiply, schisms may work havoc in the professing church, fears may flourish and strife abound, but the stable minority:

- Keeps close to the Lord,
- Fellowships in His name,
- Enjoys the simplicity in Christ,
- Witnesses a good confession,
- Waits patiently for God's Son from heaven.

Those who would join them, these God-fearing saints, must give themselves to a work of faith, a labor of love and the patience of hope (I Thessalonians 1:3).

In Abraham's day, not ten righteous could be found in Sodom. The Lord would have spared the city had even so small a number been discoverable who loved Him.

In Jeremiah's day, the prophet was commanded to run to and fro even in the street to see if he could find a discerning spiritual man who knew the way of the Lord (Jeremiah 5:1).

Such may be the scarcity of true believers in any age. It should constitute a challenge for every sincere person of our day to **“lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, . . . [to] run with patience the race that is set before us . . . looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith”** (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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