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***By the Book™*** A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from **Jerry Vines Ministries**  
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### Let's Begin

While the book of Malachi was written four hundred years before the New

Testament, there are striking parallels between Malachi's day and our day. He prophesied in the last days before the first coming of Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ; and we are living in the last days before our Lord's second coming. In Malachi's day the children of Israel should have been looking for their Messiah's coming, but instead they were filled with complacency and indifference. Isn't that what we see today? How many believers are truly looking for the Lord's return? Socially, morally, and spiritually, conditions in Malachi's day were also very similar to ours today. Adultery was rampant, and divorce was common. It was a time of crass materialism as the people had lost their understanding of right and wrong. This is so much like today. In the days of Malachi we also see the beginnings of formalism and skepticism, which would result in the "Phariseeism" and "Sadduceeism" during the days of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we have already noted, instead of being open and responsive to their Messiah's soon coming, the children of Israel had a sense of indifference and unconcern. In fact, they had an almost sarcastic attitude towards the Lord. As we read the book of Malachi we will see that they use the word "wherein" seven different times. As God makes affirmations and appeals to the hearts of His children, they respond each time with "wherein?" What they were saying was "Oh, yeah?" Their replies to God were filled with indifference and even contempt. As we use the outline below, we want to consider what God says through Malachi to the children of Israel and why they would reply, "Oh, yeah?" We also want to see how the truths of Malachi's day apply to us today.

#### I. The People Doubted God's Love (1:1-5)

#### II. The People Despised God's Name (1:6)

#### III. The People Defiled God's Altar (1:7-14)

### I. The People Doubted God's Love (1:1-5)

Malachi begins his prophecy, "The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi" (v. 1). The word "burden" means "to lift a heavy load." Malachi had the heavy load of delivering the message of the Lord to the people. This reminds us that a preacher cannot just preach the

love of God. If he is going to be faithful to the whole counsel of God, he has to preach both the good and the bad. He has to be willing to preach the wrath of God too. So, Malachi starts with "the burden of the word of the Lord."

Malachi's first message from God is that is God declaring His love to the people. We read, "I have loved you, saith the Lord ..." (v. 2). The tense of the verb "loved" that God uses in this verse means He had loved them in the past, He loved them in the present, and He would always love them.



In the book of Jeremiah, God told Israel that He loved them with an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3). It was actually a word that means “from vanishing point to vanishing point.” As far back as the children of Israel could look in the past, God had loved them. He was now saying He loved them then, and He would always love them. Did you know He says the same thing to us today? We can look back in our past and know God has loved us. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (cp. Rom. 5:8). We can look at our present life and know that He still loves us; as believers we are His workmanship (cp. Eph. 2:10). And as far as the ages can go into the future, we know God will always love us (cp. Eph. 2:7). He is a God of love, and He declares His love for us throughout the Bible. In fact, the Bible is His love letter to us to let us know that though we do not deserve it, He loves us, and though we doubt it, He still loves us.

Remember, Malachi is sharing “the burden of the word of the Lord to Israel.” Why then is God declaring His love to Israel? Their response will help

us to understand. They reply to God, “... Wherein hast Thou loved us?” or “Oh, really?” The children of Israel doubt God’s love and want Him to prove it; so after declaring His love, He demonstrates His love. He tells them in verses 2 and 3, “... Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? saith

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the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau ...” What was the Lord saying? We have to keep in mind the Semitic languages of the Oriental world. They spoke with great emotion and often used hyperbole and other figures of speech. God was saying that His love was so great for Jacob

that in comparison it would seem that it was hate for Esau.

As we read down in verses 3 through 5 God points out that anything Esau had tried to do didn’t materialize. It seemed to fall flat. Verse 4 says, “Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the Lord of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever.” The Lord had made up His mind. He was not going to bless Esau (or Edom) because of their sin. Yet, on the other hand, in spite of their sin, God would marvelously bless Jacob (or Israel). God demonstrated His love, beyond question to Israel, but they chose to doubt it. As a result, Malachi was going to share the burden of the word of the Lord.

### Reflection Connection

Read Romans 5:8 and discuss how this verse also shows how God demonstrated His love for us.

## II. The People Despised God’s Name (1:6)

Notice the second “wherein” in verse 6. God says, “A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master ...” The fifth commandment of Israel’s Ten

Commandments was “Honor thy father and thy mother ...” (Ex 20:12). A son was expected to honor his earthly father. Everyone should have known

this command; yet, at the same time, the children of Israel also had to know that God was their heavenly Father (cp. 1 Chron. 29:10; Isa. 64:8). This fact



meant that He was deserving of even greater honor than their earthly fathers, but they were not honoring Him as their heavenly Father or their Lord.

What about believers today? Did you realize that during Jesus' earthly ministry, He used the title "Father" for God more often than any other name for Him? We do know that when we receive Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, the Bible says that we are born into the family of God (cp. Jn. 1:12; 1 Jn. 3:1). So by means of regeneration, God becomes our heavenly Father; but by means of redemption, He is also our Master. We are told in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 that we have been bought with a price and are no longer our own. So,

when we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, we receive Him as our Lord and Savior.

## When people look at us and see our lifestyle, do they see a life that honors our heavenly Father?

As believers, we need to also ask ourselves if we are living in such a way that we are bringing honor to our heavenly Father. When people look at us and see our lifestyle, do they see a life that honors our heavenly

Father? When we do not honor Him, do you see how we actually despise His name or consider Him worthless or of no value? The Jews of Malachi's day are a warning to us today that we can actually get to a point in our spiritual lives that we can despise the holy name of God. If they did, we can too.

### Reflection Connection

Read 1 Timothy 1:17 and discuss why God is deserving of our honor and we should never despise His name.

## III. The People Defiled God's Altar (1:7-14)

In verse 7 the Lord shows the people another way they were despising His name. He says, "Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar ..." They were bringing worthless sacrifices to the Lord. Again, their response: "Wherein?" or "Oh, yeah?" They wanted to know how. It is helpful at this point to understand Old Testament worship. We are accustomed to placing our money in offering plates as we worship the Lord with our tithes and offerings on Sundays. But in those days when they would worship the Lord, they offered

their livestock and produce as sacrifices and offerings. In fact, the Bible was very specific about what they were to bring and how they were to bring it. Deuteronomy 15:21 gives us just one of the instructions about their offerings, "And if there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the Lord thy God." When the children of Israel came to God's altar with their sacrificial animals, the animals could not have any blemishes or be crippled.

The children of Israel were to bring the Lord the best they had to offer, but they were not doing that in Malachi's day. Instead, when they would get ready to go to the house of the Lord, they picked out the animal they didn't want or need as their offering. It may have been the runt of the herd, the sickly one, or the one with a broken leg. Do you see what were they doing? They were giving the Lord their leftovers or rejects, things they would never give to their leaders. But people still do the same thing today. The use of our time is one



example. How many people plan their church attendance each week based on if it is convenient for them and they do not have any conflicts? The Lord's Day has become *their* day, and they forget the admonition to not forsake the assembling of ourselves (cp. Heb. 10:25). Money is another example. People have no problem spending a hundred dollars or more to go to a sporting or entertainment event but then will grudgingly drop a \$5 or \$10 bill into the offering plate. We may as well be giving a lame lamb, a diseased cow, or a blind goat to the Lord.

The children of Israel defiled God's altar with their offerings because they did not understand the purpose of their worship. Their sacrifices and offerings were to be offered according to God's commandments because they needed to be reminded of God's holiness and man's sinfulness. Their sacrifices were also to teach them about the sacrifice of their Savior. When the Old Testament saints would bring their offerings and lay them on the altar, it was a picture of the day Jesus Christ would come and die on the cross for the sins of the world. So when the children of Israel brought their defiled offerings, they were saying they didn't understand the holiness of God. They were also saying they didn't understand the seriousness of sin and had no appreciation for God's promise to send the Redeemer one day (cp. Job 19:25).

Look at what the Lord says in verse 10: "Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on Mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand." God was saying that He wished somebody would just close the doors of the temple and put out the fire on the altar. He was so tired of the people's insincere worship that He was no longer going to accept their offerings. Even today God wants our worship and offerings to be sincere. We can be sure He knows when our hearts are far from Him and whether we give joyfully or not.

**When the Old Testament saints would bring their offerings and lay them on the altar, it was a picture of the day Jesus Christ would come and die on the cross for the sins of the world.**

Not only were the children of Israel defiling God's altar with their offerings, but look at their attitude in verse 13, "... Behold,

what a weariness it is!" They had come to the point that their offerings and their worship of the Lord was boring to them. Going to church had become a burden and not a joy. When God says they had "snuffed at it," it is the picture of sticking up one's nose and snorting. This is what they were doing to the Lord God Almighty! God then asks them, "... should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord." These words were not Malachi's words. The people needed to understand that Malachi was proclaiming the words of God.

At this point, the Lord tells them, "But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing ..." (v. 14). The people had also come to the point that they would promise to bring their best animal but then substitute a blemished one, thinking God would not know the difference. But He goes on to remind them, "... for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and My name is dreadful among the heathen" (v. 14). This is not the first time in the book of Malachi that God talks about His name, nor is it the last time. In verse 6 He talks about the priests that "despised" His name. Then in verse 11 He makes a prediction that during the millennium the Gentiles will bring honor to Him. He says, "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." In verse 14 God again reminds His people who He is. He says, "... I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts, and My name is dreadful among the heathen." The children of Israel may have forgotten who their God was, but He assures them that His name will be great among the nations

of the world. They had also forgotten to fear His name and the truth that it was a "glorious and fearful name, The Lord Thy God" (Deut. 28:58).

### Reflection Connection

Read Leviticus 22:2 and discuss why the children of Israel should have realized the importance of reverencing the altar of God and His name.

### Wrap Up

*It is so easy to read about the children of Israel in Malachi's day and wonder how they could have treated God the way they did and even talked back to Him like they did. But before we do, let's take time to examine our own lives. Maybe we have not audibly said "Wherein?" or "Oh, yeah?" but have our actions or attitudes basically said the same thing? When things have not gone our way, have we been tempted to doubt God's love? If so, all we need to do is to remember Calvary, and we will know there is no doubting His love for us. What about despising His name? Psalm 113:3 tells us, "From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the Lord's name is to be praised." God's name is never to be looked down upon but is to be honored and praised. Last of all, when we give our tithes and offerings to the Lord, how do we give them? Remember, we are not to give grudgingly or of necessity, but God loves a cheerful giver (cp. 2 Cor. 9:7). Let's make sure we are never known for saying "Oh, yeah?" Instead, may our lives reflect the words of the psalmist, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" (Ps. 107:8).*

