

## **LOVE AND GRACE IN MALACHI**

### **I : QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS. 1: 1 – 8**

Malachi means 'my messenger', but nothing more is known about him. Possibly associated with Ezra & Nehemiah in their reforms. Or, Malachi could be a title expressing his mission. In Malachi's time, the re-built Temple was neglected, worship was perverted and profaned; served by degenerate priests, inferior sacrifices, neglected tithes; prevalent divorce and idolatrous intermarrying with neighbours. The covenant nation was reduced to the southern kingdom of Judah: people were discouraged, wedded to sin, with lethargic minds waiting for the promised Messiah. Malachi assured them that Messiah would come in God's time but there would be judgment; imbedded with, **love and grace.**

First person is used in a question & answer method with 47 of 55 verses in first person. Written in prose, this envisages a most serious *encounter* between a holy God and His unholy people. **V1**; the *oracle* or *burden* encompasses all the chosen people of God; **the word of the lord to Israel.**

**V2 & 3** cf. Romans 9: 10 - 16 & Genesis 25: 22 - 34. Malachi refers to the two nations from Jacob & Esau; Israelites and Edomites. Both were defeated by the Babylonians with Israel restored but Edom desolate. This was proof of God's electing love for Israel. *I have loved you, says the Lord*; summarises Israel's entire history of covenant. Note the KEY word; **HOW.** The word 'love', describes a parent's tender expression of lifelong love for an erring child; God's agreement or Covenant with His people. Hosea showed God's love like a marriage; here is longsuffering love. *How have you loved us? Where's the evidence?* This perverse objection describes self-centred people who are no longer a distinctive people of holy covenant in worship. The reminder of Jacob & Esau teaches that proof of God's love emanates from His sovereign election; He chose Jacob and rejected Esau before they were born. **John Calvin**: "It is clear that when God elects individual people, His choice is governed by His free favour and pure compassion". **G. Bingham**: "**God's movement of mercy is of Himself and not of obligation - otherwise it is not mercy. Likewise, with grace.**" Grace is prior to election and grace has nothing to do with natural rights or works. A close parallel to the emotions for Jacob and Esau is Jacob's reference to Rachel and Leah; Genesis 29: 30 – 33; *he loved Rachel more than Leah*; Deut. 21: 15 - 17; cf. Matthew 6: 24 & 10: 37 & Luke 14: 26. Unlike us; God does not know psychological hatred nor show favouritism.

The sovereign God is Lord and King, and initiates the covenant in both Testaments. Implicit in Covenant is His undeserved love and call to unworthy people. Personal animosity to Esau is not implied but Esau and his descendants, by nursing resentment and hostility to Jacob and his descendants, did bring God's judgment upon themselves. For us as the people of God; in a marriage relationship as the Bride of Christ; the response: *How have you loved us?* illustrates blindness, contempt from familiarity, love taken for granted, illusion of projection and death of love in the one who is blind.

**I have loved you.** Why did God love Israel? Why does God love you? Why does this little book commence with a message of God's love? The message of love and grace is in the

context of warning; there is little here by way of comfort in circumstances of everyday life. Israel was complacent in worship and theology; they did “church”!! The blatant worship of idols before the exile had been covered over with the worship of self. They forgot (??) that electing love has the purpose of declaring God’s love and grace to other peoples. If worship; picturing our relationships, snuggles into the blanket of complacency; being loved but not loving, hoping the pleasant atmosphere will continue without change; we align ourselves with Edom; v4 & 5. Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel, cf. v11 & Genesis 12:1 - 3. God is identified as Father of his people corporately.

**V6 – 8:** Israel’s worship is spotlighted with a rhetorical question concerning honour. The priests [ministers today] cannot escape for by whom is God honoured? V6: Do the priests honour God when they conduct worship? *O priests, who despise my name.* They answer: *How have we despised your name?* In contrast to Gentiles who, although pagan, did acknowledge the God of creation, v11. Israel was weary of worship and the priests were not only in a rut but they despised the Lord.

**V7 & 8** cf. 2: 1 – 3. It is possible, as Amos perceived, to follow ‘proper forms’ of worship, but it is meaningless because the worshippers have lost all knowledge of God; **Amos 2: 4 – 8 & 5: 21 - 24**. God’s people despised God’s name and so His truth, with the result that their relationship and knowledge of Him was meaningless. Despising God’s name denotes continuous practice and a state of mind which becomes characteristic and habitual. Worship continued from tradition but it didn’t matter so polluted food, blind, lame & sick animals were offered. They were going to die & we despise the Lord’s table so better keep up appearances!! The priests knew they were contravening God’s prohibitions from **Deuteronomy 15: 21 & Leviticus 22: 17 - 20**. They thank God by mocking him, sneering at his name and at the revelation of his will. Neglecting the truth that the altar, as is all worship; belongs to the sovereign Lord, not to us. Problems in worship; 24/7; reflect deeper problems in our relationship with the Father and fellow people of God. **John 4: 13, 14 & 24**.

*When you offer; v8*, includes people with priests for neither group regarded their worship as evil; it was glossed over with convenience; the common custom. Present such offerings to your Persian governor and try to obtain his favour!! Attitudes of people in Malachi’s day are a mirror of our era where ‘truth has fallen in the street’: Isaiah 59: 1 – 60: 3. --- *I have loved you, says the Lord; 1 John 4: 10, In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

God the Father is the initiator in calling us and coming to us in *his only begotten Son, the one and only*, the God-Man, Christ Jesus. In his death on the Cross, Christ absorbed and totally removed the wrath of a Holy God against all our sin. As our substitute, he diverted sin from us to himself and became sin for us; *became a curse for us for he was hanged on a tree* (the great exchange). *Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.*

The complacency of love and grace must be; will be; disturbed by the Holy Spirit; and by the unexpected twists and turns of life; **Romans 5: 8**.