

# Malachi Chapter One (vv.1-5)

Malachi chapter one contains the *first* dispute (vv.1-5) and begins the *second* (vv.6-14). The *people* had **doubted** God's love by focussing on their present difficult circumstances, and the *priests* had **dishonoured** God's name by offering inferior sacrifices. The root of each dispute was a failure to appreciate the greatness of God (the word 'great' is used *three* times in the chapter, cf. 1.11, 14). As such they treated the things of God as ordinary, mundane, and bothersome.

## The Burden of the Prophet [v.1]

**v.1:** In Hebrew, the prophecy begins abruptly, "A burden!" or "An oracle!". The word 'burden' is a technical term for a 'heavy message' in the form of a prophetic utterance or oracle. It often carries overtones of *urgency* and *judgment*. Clearly the prophet felt the weight of his responsibility to deliver the message – though not palatable, it was most necessary! In like manner, Paul was 'pressed' or 'wholly absorbed' with proclaiming the word of God to the Jews (Acts 18.5). What spiritual burdens do we have? For individuals, the assembly, or a particular sphere of service? Malachi's message was the 'word of Jehovah' and therefore a divine revelation. **Jehovah** is the most frequently used word in the prophecy (x49). The name unfolds the *unchanging* character of God and His claims upon those in personal covenant relation with Him. His name had been dishonoured by the immoral behaviour of His very own people.

The oracle concerns "Israel". Malachi does not use the word 'Judah' because the prophecy is post-exilic, and there were no longer two separate Jewish kingdoms. Individuals of *all twelve tribes* had returned to the land and therefore represented the whole nation (cp. Matthew 4.13; 10.6; Acts 2.22, 36; James 1.1). Some of the northern tribes of Israel remained in the cities of Judah after the division of the kingdom (1 Kings 12.17). "Israel" would also remind the people of their *obligations* and *accountability* in relation to the covenant. The message is "to" not 'against' Israel presenting a hopeful note of *blessing* upon repentance. The oracle came 'by the hand of' Malachi (meaning 'my messenger'). He was merely an *agent* of Jehovah reporting the word of God (cf. Daniel 9.10).

## Dispute One: Doubting God's Love [vv.2-5]

### Love Declared [v.2a]

**v.2:** The oracle begins with a statement of divine love (*'āhab*). God's love for Israel is compared to a *father's* love for his son (Genesis 22.2; Hosea 11.1-4), and a *husband's* love for his wife (Hosea 3.1). This love was *unmerited* and *undeserved* (Deuteronomy 7.7-9; Hosea 11.1) as well as *unending* (Jeremiah 31.3) and *unchangeable* (Romans 11.28). The word 'loved' is *perfect* in tense indicating that God *had* loved (past) and *continued* to love (present) them even though they had departed from Him. Campbell Morgan says, "Right through the prophecy love is the master note of the music. It rises high above all the other notes. Whether we listen to the thunders of judgment, or to the plaintive complaint, we hear the great love-song of Jehovah." The love of God (though offended) is **not** dependent on the state of His people. There is nothing in me that *merited* God's love, so there can be nothing in me to *turn His love away*.

### Love Denied [v.2b]

**v.2b:** Each disputation in the prophecy follows the same basic structure. After the *declaration* of Jehovah, there follows an *objection*, voiced either by the priests or people. Each of these objections begins with the same Hebrew word translated "Wherein"<sup>1</sup> – 'In what way?' or 'How?' – probably a question of *insolence* rather than *distress*. The people sought proof of the love of God. In their eyes, the present, pitiful circumstances were proof of God's displeasure rather than His love! The temple had been finished for over 100 years, yet the promised golden Messianic age of peace and prosperity had not yet come. In this context, the word 'love' is not an emotional feeling but a term describing the *behaviour* and *commitment* of a personal relationship. The people were therefore questioning the faithfulness of God's actions towards them – and the fulfilment of His promises. We must never infer that the afflictions and trials (circumstances) of life are evidence that God does not love us. To prove God's love, we must look to **His** character (actions), not **our** circumstances. We must maintain our appreciation and enjoyment of the love of God else spiritual decline is guaranteed (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3.5; Ephesians 3.19). Jude 21: "Keep yourselves in the love of God", i.e. remain consciously in the enjoyment of divine love. How? Through *building* (spiritual growth by the word of God) and *praying* (Jude 20).

---

<sup>1</sup> In Hebrew the word מַה *māh* or מַה *meh*: An indefinite interrogative pronoun meaning 'what?' It occurs x10 in Malachi 1.2, 6, 7; 2.14 (wherefore), 15 (wherefore), 17; 3.7, 8, 13 (what), 14 (what).

### Love Defined [vv.2b-4]

**v.2b:** Following the *objection*, Jehovah responds with evidence to prove His *declaration*, “Yet I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau”. The terms ‘love’ and ‘hate’ are not used in an emotional sense, and do not refer to Jacob and Esau as individuals (rather the posterity that sprang from them – Israel and Edom). The contrast of ‘love’ and ‘hate’ is a Jewish idiom referring to a *decision of the will* – a *choice* or *preference*.<sup>2</sup> God chose Jacob and his descendants to be the recipients of the Abrahamic covenantal blessings. Thus, theirs was a special purpose in the world: to be the channel of blessing to the nations and the people through whom Messiah would come. As the firstborn in the family, the birth-right and blessing was due to Esau. Instead, Esau was ‘hated’ or *disfavoured* and *disregarded* (in preference to Jacob). This choice was evident in the word God spoke to Rebekah before they were born. God chose that the *elder* should serve the *younger*, a reversal of natural order (Genesis 25.23). This choice was not based on works, but the sovereignty of God.

**v.3:** As noted above, ‘I hated Esau’ refers to the fact God did not choose the line of Esau for covenant blessing. This is not an *emotional hatred* or *personal animosity*, and nothing to do with individual salvation, or eternal destiny. This choice or preference proved to be well-placed because the Edomites were an *immoral* and *godless* people who continually oppressed Israel (see Ezekiel 35; Amos 1.11-12; Obadiah).<sup>3</sup>

As such Esau became an object of divine displeasure – his “mountains” (the place of his ‘habitation’, Obadiah 3) and “heritage” (territory) were turned into a deserted wasteland for “dragons” (probably *wild jackals*, an unclean, predatory scavenger). These promises had already been fulfilled, for the Babylonians had not only taken Israel into captivity but were also used of God as an instrument of judgment upon *Edom* (Jeremiah 27.3). And yet Edom, unlike Israel, had not been restored! God repeatedly promised to restore Israel (Deuteronomy 4.29-31), but He condemned Edom to destruction (Jeremiah 49.7-22; Ezekiel 25.12-14). AP Ross says, “*The Edomites were an easy prey for the Persians, and then the Nabateans – Arab Bedouin tribes who drove them out of their land so that they moved west. They settled more to the south of Israel, in the region later called Idumaea in the Negev desert, and they became known as the Idumeans. But they were subjugated by the Macedonians, Maccabees, and finally the Romans. The only sore spot about them for Israel was that in the days of Jesus, the Romans installed on the throne a client king (probably by bribe) Herod the Great – an Idumean, a descendant of Esau!*”

**v.4:** Despite her destruction, Edom still had a great resolve to rebuild their land. “*If Edom say, We are broken down (shattered), but we will build again the ruined places*” (JND). But her self-confidence was unfounded for though Israel had enjoyed restoration, there was no such promise given to Edom (Ezekiel 35.3-4). Thus, the “LORD of hosts” speaks. This is the military name of God and describes the various hosts (armies) at His disposal. If He has the will to bring destruction, He also has the means! Edom might seek to build, but the Lord would ‘destroy’ (overthrow) anything they built so they would be remembered as a wicked nation that God had judged (Jeremiah 49.13). It is difficult to pinpoint the exact date of this destruction, but Antigonus, a general of Alexander the Great, crushed Edom and spoiled Petra in 312BC. The “border of wickedness” describes the *people* living in the land of Edom as those characterised by immorality. Indeed, the Edomites would be known as those perpetually under the ‘wrath’ (enraged indignance) of a holy God *because* of their sins (cf. Genesis 12.3)

### Love Displayed [v.5]

**v.5:** The final statement of the dispute declares how God will yet (future) display His love for His erring people. A day was coming when Israel would “see” this great judgment upon Edom, recognise His love and be compelled to ‘magnify’ the Lord (to proclaim His glory). This is a likely reference to the glorious millennial kingdom (cf. v.11), when Israel shall be delivered from her enemies. Then Israel will be caused to ‘magnify’ or *declare* the greatness and glory of God “from” or *beyond* (literally ‘above’) the “border of Israel”, i.e. to the Gentiles. His love for Israel will be beyond doubt when His glory, centred in Israel, radiates throughout the whole world. We do well to remember that all God’s love has purposed for us has not yet been seen or realised, but that makes it no less certain. We shall yet be “holy and without blame” in the presence of God and full enjoyment of His love for eternity (Ephesians 1.4).

---

<sup>2</sup> See the use of the terms in Matthew 10.37. This is not an emotional hatred, but a choice of priority. Christ must be pre-eminent. A disciple must submit to the authority of Christ over the authority of the family headship.

<sup>3</sup> The underlying cause of Esau’s enmity towards Jacob was his profanity (Hebrews 12.16). ‘Profane’ describes a person who considers the holy things of God to be common or lawful to be trodden down. He was Godless! In selling his birthright for a bowl of stew, Esau was rejecting and despising great spiritual and covenant blessings to satisfy his fleshly desires. “*To satisfy the hunger of a moment, his fleshly appetite, he gave up the rights of the firstborn, the title to land and the ancestorship of the Messiah.*”