

November 2, 2025
Return: Questioning God's Love
Malachi 1:1-5
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction... Malachi is the last of the Minor Prophets and the last book of the Old Testament not only in order, but also historically, as it was the last book written before the 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testaments, meaning from the end of Malachi's message until God starts to speak again to begin the accounts of four gospels, God didn't speak through his prophets. Not that God was any less God or not at work, he was just silent in the anticipation of His coming Messiah.

Malachi was a contemporary with Ezra and Nehemiah, and we read in the book of Nehemiah that after the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt that Nehemiah returned to Babylon for a period of time. And it's during this time, scholars believe, that Malachi began ministering as a prophet in Jerusalem and began calling the people to repentance. This would be the late 5th century B.C. sometime between 433-424 B.C. It's interesting that many of the reforms that took place in Jerusalem when Nehemiah returned, as we see at the end of his book, were the very things that Malachi speaks about so we get the impression that the people heeded the message, at least initially.

The book of Malachi is written in what is called a disputation form, which means it is made up of a series of rhetorical debates, or disputes, where God presents a charge, an objection is then voiced either by the people or by the prophet representing them and then God refutes the objection. The book contains six of these "debate" sections and we're going to look at the first of these sections this morning. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the word of God. [Read Passage]

Now, we know next to nothing about Malachi the person other than his status as a prophet. He is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. His name means "my messenger." Some even believe that this is not an individual's name, but a title and that the author is anonymous. But more likely than not, it is the author's name just like all the other prophetic books named for the prophet that brings the Lord's message to his people.

Malachi opens this way, "The oracle of the word of the LORD." This is an interesting phrase that opens a few of the other prophetic books. As mentioned when we look at similar opening phrases in Zephaniah and Zechariah, this word translated "oracle" is a word that means "burden" or "something to be lifted up." The King James Version translates this verse literally as "the burden of the word of the LORD."

What does this mean? Often when a prophet opens a book this way it means that the prophet has a rebuke or judgement from the Lord to the people which isn't always easy to share and can feel like a weight or a burden to carry. That is certainly the case with this book written by Malachi to the people of Israel.

So, Malachi has a "burden of the word of the LORD" to deliver to the people of Israel. And we should take note that this message is a message from the Lord to the people of Israel, and throughout this book the covenant name of God is used. In your Bible it is written as "LORD" in all capital letters. In Hebrew, this is the name "Yahweh" and it

describes God as the self-existent One, the “I AM,” which was the name given to Moses in Exodus 3. The people of Israel would recognize this name as God’s covenant name and it would no doubt get their attention.

Malachi’s first statement of truth, or charge, is a statement of God’s love. “I have loved you, says the Lord.” (Malachi 1:2a) This is not a general statement of God’s love for all people. Here, this is the covenant God of Israel speaking to his chosen people. The one who made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the one who made a covenant with the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai. The God of Israel had called her into existence and has ruled over her as her God and great King on the basis of His covenant with her. Israel was the object of the Lord’s steadfast and everlasting love.

And this is not the first time that the Lord has expressed His love for Israel in the OT. Listen to these words of love written by Moses in Deuteronomy 7:6-8,

“For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

Even when the people were rebelling against the Lord and worshiping other gods, even then, He declared His love for them. As we’ve seen throughout the minor prophets, the Lord sent His messengers to call the people to repentance and warn them of coming judgment if they continued in their rebellion against Him. Hosea declared in Hosea 11:1, “When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son,” and the Lord’s words to Israel in Jeremiah 31:3, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”

The Lord loved Israel in that He sovereignly and graciously chose her to be His own possession. Love was the very heart of the covenant relationship that the Lord had with Israel. What Israel’s response to God’s love should have been is given to us in Deuteronomy 6:4-9,

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”

Malachi’s first charge and statement of truth is that Israel is “loved by God” has been clearly seen in God’s character and His actions towards them. And this should have been a statement that was accepted by the people because they had seen God’s love for them in their lives.

But, instead of acknowledging the Lord’s love for them, the people of Israel object and ask, oh yeah, “How have You loved us?” And by questioning God’s claim of love for them, the Israelites were revealing a distrust for the Lord and a lack of faith in His word. This was not only a distrust in Malachi’s statement, but also a distrust in the Lord’s

faithfulness to His covenant. Because Israel failed to believe the Word of God, this resulted in Israel failing to love God and instead even to be hostile toward Him.

Israel was looking at their own circumstances and thought that their complaint was valid. About 100 years had past since the first exiles had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. The temple had been rebuilt, the sacrificial system was in place again, the walls of the city were rebuilt and people had rebuilt their homes.

They had returned with excitement and zeal but the promise of the coming Messiah to deliver them hadn't happened yet and they were beginning to wonder if it ever would. They were still in bondage, not to the Babylonians anymore by now to the Persians. As a nation they were feeble and weak and even their crops were not doing well. The people thought they could just maintain the covenant with the God of Israel by ritual alone, by simply going through the motions. But God wanted their hearts.

Before we come down so hard on the Israelites, it's important that we acknowledge that we have the same attitude from time to time don't we. We question God's love when things aren't going the way we want. "God if you loved me, why am I sick?" "...why didn't I get that job?" "...why am I still struggling in my marriage?"

Brothers and sisters, the truth is, God has already demonstrated his love toward us and our circumstances can't take that away. And there is coming a day when Jesus comes again and we won't have to worry about those things anymore. But maybe, right now, you're asking the same question the Israelites did, "Oh yeah, how have you loved me?"

Well, the Lord gives his answer through Malachi and gives them proof of His love toward Israel. God uses two facts to do this. First, His love was expressed to Israel in God's free choice, or His election, of Jacob and his descendants, even those who were questioning His love for them in Malachi's day. The Lord chose Jacob to inherit the promise given to Abraham, even though this was contrary to the custom of the day which said that the firstborn son should receive the blessing. Remember Esau, later named Edom, whose descendants became known as the nation of Edom? It was Esau who was the firstborn of the twins that Rebekah bore to Isaac. The Apostle Paul makes clear in Romans 9 when he says that even before they were born, before they could do anything good or bad, God freely chose Jacob as the heir of the promise.

It's important for us to realize that the Hebrew words for "loved" and "hated" used by Malachi here do not refer to God's emotions but of His free choice of the one over the other for a covenant relationship. To "hate" someone in this sense is to reject him and deny any loving association with him by sovereign choice not through an emotional response. These words by themselves do not in any way indicate the eternal destinations of either Jacob or Esau or their descendants. Like each of us, their salvation is based on faith in Christ alone, God's Messiah, believing that His death paid the price for sin, that He was buried and on the third day rose from the dead.

But the verbs "loved" and "hated" here refer to God's acts in history to both Israel and Edom the two nations which descended from Jacob and Esau. Both of these verbs are in the perfect tense which means they not only refer to God's past relationship with these nations, but also His historical and present relationship and future dealings with them.

Which leads us to the second proof of the Lord's love for Israel, which was the destruction of Edom. God wants the people to consider what it would be like for them if

they had not been elected to a covenant relationship with the Lord, like Edom had experienced. In their respective recent pasts, both Israel and Edom were judged by God using the Babylonian Empire. And over and over the prophets promised that Israel would be restored by the Lord, but He condemned Edom to complete destruction, never to be restored to their land and never to rebuild. The prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Obadiah all prophecy against Edom and declare their complete destruction forever. And this is exactly what happened.

Here in Malachi the Lord describes how He has laid waste the hill country of Edom through the hand of the Babylonians and how it is now left to the jackals of the desert to pass onto their descendants. And even if Edom should declare that they will rebuild, the Lord of hosts will bring those plans to nothing. God declares that men will call the land of Edom the “wicked territory” in contrast to Israel which is the “holy land,” the land set apart to receive the covenant blessings. The people of Edom will be known as those whom God is angry with forever in comparison to Israel whom the Lord loves and desires to pour His blessing on.

In this passage, we see the Lord's great love for the nation of Israel and this is the basis upon which the rest of the book of Malachi is built on. Because the Lord loves you, Malachi says to Israel, He is calling you to respond in love towards Him. But as we'll see, Israel was not responding with love towards God, but with disobedience instead. Malachi will rebuke them for their sin several more times in this book, using this same debate-style formula, and will continually call them to repentance.

So, what does this have to do with us? I think it's quite simple. The same principles found in this passage apply to us as God has declared His love for us as well. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” And God has shown us how much he loves us by giving up His Son, so that we could have life. Paul makes this point in Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Just as God chose Israel to be the heir to the covenant, God also chose you and me to be a part of His family. If you are in Christ, meaning you are trusting in his atoning work on the cross on your behalf, then you are chosen by God, you have been adopted into his family and He has set his love on you. You may ask, “How has God loved me?” Listen to these words of God's love for His children from Ephesians 1:3-14,

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His

purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

God in His infinite wisdom chose you, if indeed you are his child, to receive all the spiritual blessings in Christ. Do not be like the Israel. Respond to God's love for you by loving Him with all your heart, soul and might and by living your life according to His Word in everything you do. Make His Word a part of every part of your life, teach it to your children and your children's children. Talk of God's Word when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. The Lord says, “I love you,” and has demonstrated that love toward us in our redemption through the shed blood of His Son. Let us respond with lives that reflect that love in obedience to Him. Let's pray and prepare our hearts for the communion table of the Lord.