

### God Loves His People Israel

#### Malachi 1:1-5

**Malachi 1: 1-5** – *“The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. To Israel, Beloved of God:*

*<sup>2</sup> “I have loved you,” says the Lord. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’*

*Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” says the Lord. “Yet Jacob I have loved; <sup>3</sup> but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness.” <sup>4</sup> Even though Edom has said, “We have been impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places,”*

*Thus says the Lord of hosts:*

*“They may build, but I will throw down. They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness,*

*and the people against whom the Lord will have indignation forever. <sup>5</sup> Your eyes shall see, and you shall say, ‘The Lord is magnified beyond the border of Israel.’”*

#### Background Notes

Malachi is a “Post-Exilic Minor Prophet.” He’s called a “Minor” prophet because his book is small in size - not because he was less spiritual than the “Major” prophets, but because they wrote larger books. He is a “post-exilic” prophet because he wrote after the Jews came back from their seventy-year exile in Babylon.

Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament in our English Bibles. However, in Hebrew Bibles, Chronicles is the last book. Why? The reason is that English Bibles follow the order of the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, known as the Septuagint. (It was named after the seventy ancient scholars that did the translation back in the 3rd century BC.) However, the order of the books is not sacred, and the order in which they are placed doesn’t affect the doctrine of inspiration! The Hebrew Bible has the same books as our English Bible - just a different arrangement of some books.

By the way, the so-called “apocryphal” books, that are included at the end of some English Bibles, are not in the Hebrew Bible. This is significant, because God gave the Old Testament Scriptures to the Jews. Romans 3:2 says that *“the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God.”* The Jewish people never considered the apocryphal books as part of Scripture. Some of them have good history, but we don’t believe these books to be part of the inspired Word of God.

Malachi is dated at the end of the Old Testament period, soon after the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. There was a revival in Nehemiah’s time after Jerusalem’s city walls were rebuilt (445BC) - but that revival was short-lived. The people were once again in a backslidden state. Thus the theme of Malachi’s prophecy is “Rebuke for Backsliding.” This theme certainly has plenty of application for today.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. God's love was proved by His "election" of Jacob.

God's Word to His backslidden people through His prophet Malachi was: **"I have loved you"** (v2). But the people questioned God's love by actually questioning God, saying, *"In what way have you loved us?"* Imagine the nerve and the audacity of the Jewish people to question God's love - and challenge God to prove that love! It's a wonder that God didn't zap them right there and then! But, in His grace, God patiently reasoned with them. "Do you want proof of my love? Here it is." Verse 2: *"Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the Lord. "Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated."*

This "proof of God's love" needs some explanation. The people of Israel were descendants of Jacob. The people of Edom descended from Esau. In His sovereignty, God chose Jacob rather than Esau for a covenant relationship. God favored Israel over Edom. That's why the apostle Paul quoted this verse in Romans 9, that great chapter on "election."

The Jews were God's chosen people. The descendants of Jacob were the recipients of the "Abrahamic Covenant" - the covenant relationship God made with Abraham. The descendants of Esau were not recipients of God's covenant with Abraham. God promised that the Messiah would come through the line of Jacob, not through the line of Esau. How much more proof of God's love did the Jewish people want?

What about the phrase *"Esau I have hated"*? Does that bother you? What does it mean? God did not "hate" Esau the way we use the word. The idea is not an "emotional hatred," as we use the word "hate." Rather, the idea is **contrast**. God's relationship with Jacob was superior to His relationship with Esau. In Luke 14:26, the Lord Jesus said, *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."* Here again the word "hate" doesn't mean emotional "hatred," but "hate" only in the sense of contrast. **God must be superior**. He must be #1 in our lives, above all other relationships. In actuality, when the Lord is #1, you will love your family more than if you were to put them above the Lord! His sovereign "election" of Jacob proved God's love.

### 2. God's love was proved by His destruction of Edom.

The destruction of Edom was the second proof that God gave the backsliders who were questioning His ways. God had allowed His own people, Israel, to go into exile at the hands of the Babylonians, but in His love and grace He had brought them back. God moved the heart of the pagan Persian Emperor Cyrus to issue an edict allowing His people to return to Jerusalem. God had raised up Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah as leaders, and He also raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage and exhort - all on behalf of His people. The Temple and the city walls had been rebuilt.

Now contrast that with the condition and status of the nation of Edom, the descendants of Esau. The prophet Obadiah had pronounced judgment on Edom years before, but God made no promise of a return or a rebuilding for Edom. Look at verse 4: *“Even though Edom has said, ‘We have been impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places.’ Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘They may build, but I will throw down. They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, and the people against whom the Lord will have indignation forever.’* Nebuchadnezzar invaded Edom in 586BC, and later the Nabateans drove the Edomites out of their homeland. Any attempt to return and rebuild the nation of Edom has failed.

Petra was the capital of ancient Edom. Go to the ruins of ancient Petra today in modern Jordan, and you will see the literal fulfillment of verse 3: *“But Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness.”* Edom’s land would even be called the “wicked land,” in contrast to Israel as the “holy land.”

Obadiah and Jeremiah also prophesied Edom’s destruction. Jeremiah’s prophecy against Edom is found in Jeremiah 49:7-22: *“Against Edom. Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Is wisdom no more in Teman? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom vanished? <sup>8</sup> Flee, turn back, dwell in the depths, O inhabitants of Dedan! For I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him, the time that I will punish him.*

*<sup>9</sup> If grape-gatherers came to you, would they not leave some gleaning grapes? If thieves by night, would they not destroy until they have enough? <sup>10</sup> But I have made Esau bare. I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself. His descendants are plundered, his brethren and his neighbors, and he is no more.*

*<sup>11</sup> Leave your fatherless children. I will preserve them alive; and let your widows trust in Me.” <sup>12</sup> For thus says the Lord: “Behold, those whose judgment was not to drink of the cup have assuredly drunk. And are you the one who will altogether go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, but you shall surely drink of it. <sup>13</sup> For I have sworn by Myself,” says the Lord, “that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse. And all its cities shall be perpetual wastes.”*

*<sup>14</sup> I have heard a message from the Lord, and an ambassador has been sent to the nations:*

*“Gather together, come against her, and rise up to battle!*

*<sup>15</sup> “For indeed, I will make you small among nations, despised among men.*

*<sup>16</sup> Your fierceness has deceived you, the pride of your heart. O you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill! Though you make your nest as high as the eagle, I will bring you down from there,” says the Lord.*

*<sup>17</sup> “Edom also shall be an astonishment. Everyone who goes by it will be astonished and will hiss at all its plagues. <sup>18</sup> As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbors,” says the Lord, “No one shall remain there, nor shall a son of man dwell in it.*

*<sup>19</sup> “Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the floodplain of the Jordan against the dwelling place of the strong, but I will suddenly make him run away from her.*

*And who is a chosen man that I may appoint over her?*

*For who is like Me? Who will arraign Me? And who is the shepherd who will withstand Me?”*

*<sup>20</sup> Therefore hear the counsel of the Lord that He has taken against Edom, and His purposes that He has proposed against the inhabitants of Teman. Surely the least of the flock shall draw them out. Surely He shall make their dwelling places desolate with them.*

*21 The earth shakes at the noise of their fall; at the cry its noise is heard at the Red Sea.*

*22 Behold, He shall come up and fly like the eagle, and spread His wings over Bozrah. The heart of the mighty men of Edom in that day shall be like the heart of a woman in birth pangs.*

What a contrast to what God had done and was doing – and is still doing - for the descendants of Jacob! And yet they stood there before Malachi and rebelliously questioned God's love for them! God's love was proved by the destruction of Edom.

## Practical Application

### Do we ever question God's love?

As we read these verses, we wonder how Israel could have ever questioned God's love, after all that He had done for them. But wait a minute! Do we as believers ever question God's love?

God said to His people Israel, *"I have loved you"* (v2) - and God says to His people today, *"I have loved you"* (John 3:16). But many times we're like backslidden Israel. We actually have the nerve and the audacity to question God's love! We need to remember how God has shown His great love to us.

Just think of our salvation. Think about how God worked circumstances together to draw us to Himself. Think about how He has forgiven our sins, and given us eternal life and a wonderful future forever! We have all these things through God's amazing love that was demonstrated in the cross of God the Son, Jesus Christ. How can we dare to question God's love, just because our jobs aren't going well, or if we lose money on investments?

If we question His love, we need to remember to get the "big picture," instead of concentrating on our small problems.

**God loves us!** In fact, God even uses the problems we face to make us stronger because He loves us. (Read James 1 and 1 Peter 1 in this connection.) Even when God has to discipline us (and He does), it's because He loves us! Hebrews 12:6 says that God disciplines His children because He loves them.

Are you questioning God's love? Am I? This is a convicting question for all of us. Do we ever question God's love?