

“I Have Loved You.”

Malachi 1:1-5

Malachi 1:1

The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.

So, we called the series "Malachi: My Messenger" because that's what Malachi means, "My Messenger." Given that that's what his name means, some scholars question whether that's even his name. **"The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by My messenger."** I wonder about that too. This verse is the ONLY place in scripture where he's mentioned. Apart from his name and message, NOTHING ELSE IS KNOWN ABOUT HIM. There's also no exact date to attach to his writing either. Some scholars believe he wrote just after the completion of the Temple before the governorship of Nehemiah. Based on the descriptions of the neglected tithes contained in the text, others think it takes place during Nehemiah's second journey to Jerusalem as governor as described in Nehemiah 13.

The main thing we know is that Malachi was the next to last Old Testament prophet. "Say what?!" True, there's no inspired scripture between Malachi and Matthew, but there is one last prophet of the Law before Jesus. That's right, John the Baptist, whose coming, as we'll see, is foretold by Malachi. He prophesies the coming of this forerunner as well as the One he was preparing the world to meet, both of whom are simply referred to in the text as "messengers." Malachi's words would be the last revelation from God to be heard for 400 years, until the coming of John.

The Lord had used the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah to bring about the completion of the Temple, but things seemingly went DOWNHILL from there. Malachi now comes calling the people to REPENTANCE, just like the one who would come 400 years later. Why? Well, as I said, things had gone downhill...

As one commentator summarized, the priesthood had become CORRUPT, worship had become ROUTINE, divorce was WIDESPREAD, social justice (like the oppression of the poor) was being IGNORED, and tithes were being NEGLECTED. Sound familiar? Hmmm...

- Corrupt priesthood...
- Dead worship...
- Widespread divorce...
- Oppressed and overburdened poor...

These are the conditions that metastasize into the DEAD PHARISAISM of Jesus' day! Many believed that returning to the Land after such a time of tribulation and rebuilding the Temple

and Jerusalem would've ushered in the long-awaited Messianic Age. When it didn't, it's as if they just rolled over and gave up. It's as if they stopped looking for His coming.

Just before going silent, God sends one more messenger to them. Yes, a rebuke was certainly in order, but before that, the Lord's message simply starts out saying...

Malachi 1:2a
I have loved you, says the Lord...

Nearing the end of the age of Law, after the Nation had rebelled heinously, after they had suffered devastating punishment at the hands of the Babylonians, and after they had *RETURNED* with an apparent desire for God's Word (Nehemiah 8:1, if this matches the timeline) and to rebuild the Temple, there was *STILL* a slowness, possibly even a flat refusal, to SUBMIT to God.

Instead of a beginning with a scathing rebuke or the ominous threat of judgment, God sends His messenger saying, "**I have loved you...**"

Have you ever had to have a difficult conversations with someone, a conversation that you *knew* was going to make you the bad guy, that would likely result in you getting your head bit off, that would result in *zero benefit* to you, and you did it anyway? Who's been there? Why in the world did you go through with it? To argue and win? To get your kicks out of tearing someone down? No, it's LOVE, right?! There's no other reason to put yourself through that heartache. It would've been easier to have said NOTHING, right?! But you couldn't do that because you love the other person too much. Love compels us to speak up. King Solomon said...

Proverbs 14:25
A truthful witness saves lives,
but one who breathes out lies is deceitful.

And James, who was fond of teaching from Solomon's writings said...

James 5:19-20
19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back,
20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Paul said...

Ephesians 4:25
Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor,
for we are members one of another.

If there's a time to speak truth *with grace and love*, it's in the day in which we live. Carelessly allowing others to live apart from truth isn't love, even when the truth is offensive. We've got to SPEAK IT, and as we speak, we must make sure we keep our love at the forefront. The adage holds up: people don't care what you know until they know that you care.

When someone who has ruthlessly antagonized you comes to you with "words for your edification," how likely are you to receive what they have to say? "*SERIOUSLY?! After the way you've treated me, you expect me to care about what you have to say?!*" Such presumption would be laughable if it weren't so real.

However, when someone comes to you with a difficult word of correction, someone you know wouldn't hurt you for the world, would you be more likely to hear what they have to say? Of course. It's the sum of our words and works that either lends or denies us a platform to speak into another's life. That's why Paul could say...

1 Corinthians 16:14

Let all that you do be done in love.

If you do, your heart will be for the other person, the harsh words WON'T slip out, and when they lash out over what you say, you'll see their immaturity for what it is, and you'll be able to handle them gently rather than lashing back. Trust the Holy Spirit to help you in those times, and He will.

While we're on the topic of not lashing back, how do you handle it when you're the one being confronted? Do you receive what is said in quiet resentment? Do you get defensive, firing back with an answer (or excuse) for every criticism? Can you be wrong? Can you be taught? Is there any potential for growth in you? As we'll see throughout our study, the Lord's rebuke through Malachi wasn't just for all their disobedience; it was also for having an excuse or smart reply to every correction. Do you fly off the handle and crucify them for having the audacity to correct you? Or do you look full in the face of the one *WHO* was speaking, knowing that they're braving your potential fury over the difficult conversation and hear them because you know **THEY HAVE LOVED YOU?**

In the letter to Laodicea, the letter to the church age that I believe we're living in, God said...

Revelation 3:19

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

The One who calls us to repent--not just at the moment of salvation, but also in our daily walk as believers--does so in LOVE! And we partner with Him as we carry the truth in love to others (Ephesians 4:15). God could've come to His People in fury. **THEY WERE HIS!!!** However, He came saying, "**I have loved you,**" and it's out of that love that He corrects them. The prophet says...

Malachi 1:2a

I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, How have you loved us?

YIKES! I almost feel the need to duck as I read that! What a contentious response! This is actually the first of EIGHT TIMES that we'll see this *BRAZEN* response throughout the book. God the Father is calling out His wayward bride Israel, and in response, she essentially says, "*Big whoop.*"

"How have you loved us?" *"Where's the PROOF of Your love?"*

Wow. Isn't that how it goes, though? When our life's circumstances begin to sour, what do we begin to doubt? GOD'S LOVE. *"Don't You see me? Don't you care?"* Have you been there? I'll admit it, I have. What was Israel looking for as "*proof*" of God's love? It's the same things we tend look for: prosperity, comfort, health, absence of anxiety, smooth, effortless relationships. If life's easy, God loves me. If it's hard...maybe He doesn't... What a lie. Satan's always been good at using our circumstances to make us question God's love.

You see, the exile Judah had just escaped didn't exactly convey God's love for His people, never mind the fact that it was He who brought them out of it. No matter how much we say that we discipline our kids because we love them, to the erring child, in that moment, punishment doesn't feel like love.

WHEN HAVE YOU FELT UNSURE OF GOD'S LOVE FOR YOU? HOW DO YOU WORK THROUGH AND OVERCOME THAT NOTION?

GIVE HIM THANKS. Remember His PROMISES in His Word, and His PROVISION in your life, and RECOGNIZE His goodness and love in your life with THANKSGIVING. Psalm 136 is precious...

Psalm 136:1, 23-26

**1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever...**

**23 It is he who remembered us in our low estate,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
24 and rescued us from our foes,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
25 he who gives food to all flesh,
for his steadfast love endures forever.**

**26 Give thanks to the God of heaven,
for his steadfast love endures forever.**

I feel like I bring up thanksgiving often, but the most oft repeated words spoken by God in the Bible tell us to thank Him. If Israel had just thought about it for a moment, how had God shown them His love?

- He saved them from Egypt!
- He saved them at the Red Sea.
- He gave them the Law.
- He entrusted them with the Tabernacle and Temple service.
- He sustained them through the Wilderness.
- He gave them the Promised Land.
- He rescued them from exile by moving in King Cyrus' heart to send them home!
- He provided for them as they rebuilt the Temple and reinstated Temple service.

However, ALL these stem from one main even in Israel's history. So, when Israel snidely replies, "Exactly how have You loved us?" God responds...

Malachi 1:2-3

2 I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, How have you loved us? Is not Esau Jacob's brother? declares the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob 3 but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.

God said He had made a *DISTINCTION* with Jacob (the Nation of Israel) that He did not make with other nations, especially with Esau (the nation of Edom), Jacob's *older* brother. He loved Jacob, but He hated Esau.

Now given the overall context of Malachi and this reference to "Jacob," invoking the Abrahamic Covenant, the words "loved" and "hated" can be understood as technical covenantal terms synonymous with "chosen" and "rejected" respectively. Paul quotes from Malachi 1 in Romans 9, pointing out that...

Romans 9:11-12

11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— 12 she was told, The older will serve the younger.

And we see that in Genesis 25:23...

Genesis 25:23

And the Lord said to her,

**Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the older shall serve the younger.**

When anyone heard or read about this event in the family life of the Patriarchs, it was shocking! It completely upended the practice of primogeniture--the practice of bestowing the birthright upon the FIRSTBORN. The Law says...

Deuteronomy 21:17

but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the firstfruits of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his.

Along with inheritance, the birthright included the passing of the role of family leadership, and in the case of the Patriarchs, covenant blessings. The birthright was Esau's, or it would've been had he cared anything about it. The same passage of Genesis fast forwards and says...

Genesis 25:27-34

27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. 28 Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted! (Therefore his name was called Edom.) 31 Jacob said, Sell me your birthright now. 32 Esau said, I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me? 33 Jacob said, Swear to me now. So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

When the scriptures say, "**Thus Esau despised his birthright,**" it isn't saying he hated his birthright because he gave it up. No! God is saying that, by selling his birthright for a single meal, Esau demonstrated how little he cared about it or the things of God.

Do you think this scene had anything to do with God's choosing of Jacob over Esau? God declared that the older would serve the younger before they were even born, which is why Paul said God's choice was determined not by works but by "**him who calls.**" *HE KNEW WHAT WOULD BE IN THEIR HEARTS*, and that Jacob (the younger) would have an appreciation and desire for the things of God while Esau (the older) would spurn the things of God.

So, that's how Esau the MAN started out. He was godless. God revealed to Rebekah that the older of the twins would serve the younger, but J. Vernon McGee points out, He waits 1,500 YEARS to make this statement of His "love" or *choosing* of Jacob and His "hatred" or *rejection* of Esau. By this time in history, it should've been clear to all why God hated Esau. The prophet Obadiah describes the wretched state of Edom, saying...

Obadiah 1:8-14

8 Will I not on that day, declares the Lord,

destroy the wise men out of Edom,
and understanding out of Mount Esau?
9 And your mighty men shall be dismayed, O Teman,
so that every man from Mount Esau will be cut off by slaughter.

10 Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob,
shame shall cover you,
and you shall be cut off forever.

11 On the day that you stood aloof,
on the day that strangers carried off his wealth
and foreigners entered his gates
and cast lots for Jerusalem,
you were like one of them.

12 But do not gloat over the day of your brother
in the day of his misfortune;
do not rejoice over the people of Judah
in the day of their ruin;
do not boast
in the day of distress.

13 Do not enter the gate of my people
in the day of their calamity;
do not gloat over his disaster
in the day of his calamity;
do not loot his wealth
in the day of his calamity.

14 Do not stand at the crossroads
to cut off his fugitives;
do not hand over his survivors
in the day of distress.

They were so ARROGANT! Like Haman, who we just studied about in Esther, Edom thought they could do to God's People whatever they wanted without consequence! Not only did they stand "**aloof**" as Judah was attacked by Babylon, they joined in, even massacring those who were escaping! Then they looted what was left! They thought they were untouchable living in their cliff dwellings, and this was their cliff dwellings...



This is Petra. You might recognize it from Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade. These dwellings that are only accessible by narrow passageways through rocky ravines and canyons are the dwellings from which Edom made its boast. However, no fortress can stop the Lord. He said...

Obadiah 1:3-4

**3 The pride of your heart has deceived you,
you who live in the clefts of the rock,
in your lofty dwelling,
who say in your heart,
Who will bring me down to the ground?
4 Though you soar aloft like the eagle,
though your nest is set among the stars,
from there I will bring you down,
declares the Lord.**

Isaiah prophesied that...

Isaiah 34:13

**Thorns shall grow over its strongholds,
nettles and thistles in its fortresses.
It shall be the haunt of jackals,
an abode for ostriches.**

And we saw in Malachi 1 verse 3 that that judgment had occurred and the new tenants, the jackals, had assumed residence.

Then Malachi goes on to say...

Malachi 1:4-5

If Edom says, We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins, the Lord of hosts says, They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called the wicked country, and the people with whom the Lord is angry forever. 5 Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel!

Did you notice the change in God's Name? If Edom got cocky and started thinking, "*We'll be back in good shape in no time,*" they wouldn't be dealing with the Lord anymore. They'd be dealing with the *Lord of Hosts, the Lord of Heaven's Armies*. He's already told them that there's no heights to which they can ascend at which He can't reach them and tear them down.

God says, "You want to know how I've loved you? Look at Edom. I didn't decimate you." You see, the Babylonians came after Jacob *AND* Esau, but as Warren Weirsbe simply yet elegantly put it, "**To the Jews, the Babylonian invasion was chastening, but to Edom, it was a judgment.**" Again, the Lord chastens those He loves.

God would never allow Edom to become reestablished in Seir. In the fifth century BC the Nabateans drove the Edomites from their cliff dwellings in Seir, forcing them to relocate to the region known as Idumea, south of Beersheba. After this, they're lost to history altogether.

Malachi said that Israel would see this proof of God's love for them and praise Him saying, "**Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel!**"

HOW HAVE WE SEEN THE LOVE OF GOD?

Yes, we've seen it through the many blessings He bestows upon us daily, but as we've seen, if our focus is on the blessing, when those dry up, we can begin to doubt His love. There's ONE UNMISTAKABLE WAY we can see that God *HAS* loved us.

Romans 5:8

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

He did it while we were still sinners! Before He said, "Let there be..." He saw every sin you and I ever committed and every sin we will ever commit, and He sent His Son to die for us anyway. Paul said...

Ephesians 2:11-13

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

That was our condition. That's where we deserved to be, and we had no way of changing it.

Ephesians 2:13

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

All world religions have attempted to get to God since the Tower of Babel, but we couldn't. So, God came to us. Just that fact alone is TOO GOOD! HE CAME! He left heaven, became a man FOREVER, lived in this sin-broken world for 33 years, and laid down His life to ransom ours.

Just like Jacob and Esau, we don't deserve the love of God, but PRAISE HIS NAME! His love isn't bestowed on the basis of merit, and it isn't revoked for the lack thereof. God never loved us because we're lovable. He loves us because He chooses to, and there's no one to whom God refuses to extend His love. No one's too far gone. Yes, we see God's hatred focused on the wicked nation of Edom, but had individuals from Edom repented and trusted in the Lord, like Abraham, their faith would have been credited as righteousness. GOD. LOVES. SINNERS. His Word says that **"everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).**

"I HAVE LOVED YOU." The Lord had loved Israel, and had shown it in sundry ways, most notably by choosing her to reveal Himself to the world. Despite Israel's unfaithfulness and doubt in God's love, He refused to give up on her. His love for Israel wasn't based on her, but on Him. Tonight, God says, **"I have loved you."** He loved you before the foundation of the world. He loved you in the midst of your sin. He proved it on the cross, and nothing can separate us from it.

1 John 4:10-11

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. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.