

Sunday, October 16, 2022

Malachi 1:1-5 (Loved by God)

Intro

Why study the Old Testament? After all, the New Testament speaks to local churches not a nation with civil laws, dietary laws, and sacrificial laws. Why study a book about priests when the priesthood has been fulfilled in Christ?

Several reasons come to mind.

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).

“These things [Old Testament experiences in the time of Moses] took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they [Israel] did” (1 Cor 10:6).

Studying the Old Testament forces me and you to deal with the whole counsel of God.

We learn who God is.

We learn how to relate to God.

We learn God’s promises. Promises that we’ve become partakers of!

And the Old Testament speaks to the human struggle with sin. We face the same struggles the people in Malachi’s day faced.

With that in mind, let’s look to Malachi to spur us to present faithfulness.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

We’ll consider Israel’s situation when Malachi spoke. Then we’ll consider Israel’s accusation: God hasn’t loved us.

Point 1: A humbled and confused people (1:1)

The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. – 1:1

The oracle – Malachi’s message is God’s word and it’s heavy.

by Malachi = God speaks to Israel through Malachi’s words.

to Israel = the exiles who’ve returned to the Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity.

Malachi Date?

Temple exists (Mal 1:10; 3:1, 8). So sometime after 516 BC when the temple was rebuilt.

Similar problems existed when Nehemiah was governor: temple neglected (Neh 13:4-5, 11), tithes withheld (Neh 13:10), marriages with Gentile wives (Neh 13:23).

The problem is Ezra and Nehemiah never mention Malachi. And Malachi never mentions Ezra or Nehemiah. Sometime before Nehemiah or during Nehemiah’s absence (Neh 13:6-14) is plausible. Sometime around 475-425 BC.

Key OT Dates

To help you understand Israel's experience, let me recap Israel's history before Nehemiah arrived.

- Solomon king 970-930 BC. Peak of Israel's glory. Queen of Sheba visits to marvel (1 Kgs 10:1-13).
- 930 BC: The kingdom of Israel was divided when Rehoboam took over for Solomon (1 Kgs 12:1-20).
- The Northern kingdom named Israel and consisted of ten tribes (1 Kgs 11:26-40; 12:16-20).
- The Southern kingdom named Judah and consisted of Judah and Benjamin (1 Kgs 12:21-23).
- 722 BC: Samaria (Northern kingdom) was captured by Assyria (2 Kgs 17:6). Israelites were carried away to Assyria and Samaria was resettled by peoples from other lands (2 Kgs 17:24-41). This was the end of Israel as an independent nation.
- 609 BC: Babylon defeats Assyria. A shift in world powers.
- 605 BC: Babylon invades Jerusalem. Daniel and others taken to Babylon (Dan 1:1).
- 597 BC: Babylon invades Jerusalem again. More are taken into exile (2 Kgs 24:10-16).
- 586 BC: Jerusalem falls and the temple is burned to the ground. More taken into exile and only the poor are left (2 Kgs 25:8-12).
- 539 BC: Babylon falls to Persia. World power shifts again.
- 538 BC: Persian king Cyrus decrees that Jewish exiles return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4).
- 537 BC: Exiles back in Jerusalem.
- 520 BC: God speaks to the people through Haggai and Zechariah, encouraging temple completion (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14).
- 516 BC: temple rebuild completed (Ezra 6:14-15).
- 458 BC: Ezra arrived at Jerusalem (Ezra 7:1-9).
- 445 BC: Nehemiah arrived at Jerusalem (Neh 2:1-11) to rebuild the city (Neh 2:12-17).

So what's going on when Malachi speaks?

Malachi Setting

- 1) Israel is still divided.

Samaria (northern kingdom) is conspiring against Judah when Nehemiah arrives (see Neh 2:10, 19; Sanballat was governor of Samaria).

- 2) Israel is a shrunken nation (number of people and land size) given what they once were.
- 3) Israel is under foreign rule = Persia.

So they were **a humbled people**.

- 4) While in exile, the exiles were promised a number of things that hadn't yet been realized.

*"For thus says the LORD: When **seventy years** are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and **bring you back to this place.**" – Jeremiah 29:10*

*"then say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and **bring them to their own land.**"* ²² *And I will make them **one nation in the land,** on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be **no longer two nations,** and no longer divided into two kingdoms." ²³ *They **shall not defile themselves anymore** with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. ²⁴ "My servant **David shall be king over them,** and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. ²⁵ They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. ²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and **will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore.**" ²⁷ *My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ²⁸ Then **the nations will know that I am the LORD** who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore." – Ezekiel 37:21-28***

After returning to their land, Israel remained under foreign rule, never regaining independence. What had become of the promises? That's what Israel was thinking.

How shall we understand these promises? **Fulfilled in stages:**

- a) Judah's exiles return to Jerusalem.
- b) Jesus ratifies the New Covenant with his blood/death (Matt 26:28).

Some promises we experience today as believers. Sins remembered no more, God's law in our hearts, all New Covenant participants know God in a saving relationship (Jer 31:31-34).

- c) The new heavens and new earth.

God's people with God forever in a place where death and sin are abolished (Rev 21:1-4; 22:3). Ultimately the promises only belong to Israel's believing remnant. Gentiles like us have become fellow partakers of New Covenant promises given through Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Rom 11:11-24; Eph 2:11-19).

Ezekiel 37:21-28 promises belong to us!

The Jews likely thought the promises would be fulfilled in one stage. Expectations didn't happen. So they were a **confused people.**

- 5) Humbling circumstances and confusion gave way to depression and hopelessness.

Has God abandoned us for good?

*You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "**Where is the God of justice?**" – 2:17*

*You have said, '**It is vain to serve God.** What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?' – 3:14*

Application

Discouragement, despair, apathy happen when we doubt God's promises.

Delay can give way to doubt.

Can you identify?

Illustrations

Thinking I was called to pastoral ministry. Thinking it was going to happen in 2007. Struggling through a job I lacked interest in that was unsuitable to my skill set to provide for my family while longing to do ministry full-time. Wondering if I was a deluded fool. Giving up at times. Delay = it's never going to happen. Even wondering if I was deluded while in Kentucky getting a master's degree. Am I wasting my family's money for something that's never going to happen?

A Christian woman in her 30's with five young children who loses her husband to cancer. Has God abandoned me? What did I do to deserve this? How am I going to raise these children by myself? How will my children turn out without a father? Romans 8:28 says "*for those who love God all things work together for good.*" How is this good for me? For my children?

Can you identify?

Let's consider how God addresses Israel's despair.

Point 2: We're loved because we've been chosen and not rejected (1:2-3)

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

"I have loved you" (past event with ongoing effects) = God declaring his love for Israel.

"How have you loved us?" = God speaking for Israel. Stating their objection to God's love. In other words, our **circumstances** = he can't love us. **Promises not fulfilled** = God is done with us.

God answers their objection:

"Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob³ but Esau I have hated."

Is this what were you expecting God to say? I'm guessing God's response wasn't your 1st or 5th guess. So what is God saying?

Esau and Jacob

From Abraham's line, there was a division between Ishmael and Isaac. Isaac was a child of promise. Ishmael wasn't. From Isaac, there was a division between Esau and Jacob.

God's promises to Abraham were passed on to Jacob's descendants, not Esau's. Jacob became Israel, and the nation Israel came from Jacob. Esau's descendants became Edom = Gentiles.

And the LORD said to her [Rebekah], "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." – Genesis 25:23

Love

Love = what we have affection for, what we enjoy, what we treasure.

Used of Samson's love for Delilah; Ruth's love for Naomi; love for food; love for God's law (Ps 119); love for good; love for evil.

Different Hebrew word than God's steadfast love for those who fear him (obligated commitment in covenant). But this affectionate love results in steadfast love.

Hate

Used of hatred for God. Humans hating one another. The Psalmist's hatred for false ways (Ps 119). God's hatred for pride, deception, murder (Prov 6:16).

An emotional opposition to someone or something, the opposite of love. Hate involves separation and distance (no relationship exists), an enemy.

In context, hate involves rejection. Israel is loved. Esau is rejected. Rejected meaning excluded from the blessings given to Israel. Not chosen for the blessings Israel was given. Rejected meaning punished for their sins.

Israel is loved

How was Israel loved in ways Esau wasn't?

- 1) Rescued from Egypt.
- 2) Given the promised land.
- 3) God entered into covenant with Israel (Mosaic covenant).
- 4) Promised prosperity, military success, health if they kept the covenant terms.
- 5) Failure to keep the covenant terms resulted in military defeat and exile, but God continued to preserve the nation and a believing remnant.
- 6) God sent Israel prophets like Malachi.
- 7) The Messiah, Jesus Christ, came from Israel.

Israel did nothing to merit these blessings. They were simply chosen to receive these blessings because God set his affection on them (Deut 7:6-8).

Romans 9

The New Testament links Malachi 1:2-3 to the doctrine of election. Some of you are excited for me to talk about these things. Some of you not so much. Some of you don't really know what to make of predestination and election.

- 1) In Romans 9:13, Paul quotes Genesis 25:23 and Malachi 1:2-3.
- 2) Promises were given to Israel, but the majority of Jews were under God's judgment (9:1-5). But God's word hasn't failed (9:6).
- 3) Because physical descent from Abraham doesn't guarantee spiritual descent (9:6-7).
- 4) Paul uses God's selection (election) of Isaac and Jacob as proof (9:7-13).
- 5) Paul then applies God's choice of Jacob to individual salvation (9:14-16, 22-24).

Like God chose Israel for unique salvation blessings, God chooses individuals for salvation's blessings: forgiveness, new birth, glorification. If we believe, it's because God chose us. The way in which God dealt with Israel illustrates election.

The fact that I chose you is proof of my love. That's what God's telling Israel.

Application

Believer, are you struggling to believe God loves you? Look to the salvation blessings you've been chosen for. Forgiveness, new birth, glorification. When I wondered if I was deluded about pastoring, I didn't doubt that God loves me. Knowing I was chosen assured me God loved me! I also found proof in the cross. Regardless of what happens, I know God cares about me and my family. Election and the cross are my proof. Election = comfort and confidence in God's love according to Malachi.

Non-Christian, apart from faith and repentance you remain like Esau. Rejected by God. If you recognize your rebellion. If you comprehend the cross. If you understand your sins and need for God's forgiveness, there's hope in

Christ. Turn from rebellion to faith in Jesus' death and resurrection. You'll move from rejected to loved. That's the move every human ever born has to make.

Point 3: We're loved because God will punish our enemies (1:3-5)

"I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert."

That's past judgment that proves Esau is rejected. Esau represents Edom the nation. Edom was believed to be impenetrable because of their mountain layout.

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.'"

That's future judgment. If Edom tries to rebuild, God will thwart them every time. That's not to say repentant Edomites won't be spared.

In Malachi, what's God answer when we question his love? I know it's not what you expected! It's you've been chosen for salvation's blessings. You're not rejected like Esau. And it's I will punish your enemies. God avenged the wrong Edom did to Israel (Obadiah 10-14). Edom prevented fleeing Jews from escaping Babylonian armies.

History repeats itself when Jesus returns. In 2 Thessalonians 1:5-7, Paul speaks of believers being persecuted in this age and Jesus repaying those who afflict his people at his return. Like Israel, our relief comes through judgment.

Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel!"

When God judges the world, we and Israel's believing remnant will see God's universal greatness.

Conclusion

Christian, when you question God's love. When your circumstances say otherwise. When God's promises are delayed. Remember, you've been chosen for unique salvation blessings. Remember, you're not rejected like Esau and the enemies of the gospel.

Non-Christian, ponder the end of Esau. Turn to Christ and move from rejected to uniquely blessed by God.