

Malachi

Chapter 1

Spurred on by the prophetic activity of Haggai and Zechariah, the returned exiles under the leadership of their governor Zerubbabel finished the temple in 516 B.C. In 458 the community was strengthened by the coming of Ezra the priest and several thousand more Jews. King Artaxerxes of Persia encouraged Ezra to develop the temple worship (Ezr 7:17) and to make sure the law of Moses was being obeyed (Ezr 7:25–26). (CSB)

Thirteen years later (445) the same Persian king permitted his cupbearer Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls (Ne 6:15). As newly appointed governor, Nehemiah also spearheaded reforms to help the poor (Ne 5:2–13), and he convinced the people to shun mixed marriages, to keep the Sabbath (Ne 10:30–31) and to bring their tithes and offerings faithfully (Ne 10:37–39). (CSB)

In 433 B.C. Nehemiah returned to the service of the Persian king, and during his absence the Jews fell into sin once more. Later, however, Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem to discover that the tithes were ignored, the Sabbath was broken, the people had intermarried with foreigners, and the priests had become corrupt (Ne 13:7–31). Several of these sins are condemned by Malachi (see 1:6–14; 2:14–16; 3:8–11). (CSB)

Heat and flame from glowing charcoal caress the bottom of a pot full of powdery ore. Slowly the ore begins to weep drops of lead mixed with silver, which flow to the bottom of the pot, lifting the dirt and debris that resist the heat. When the contents are poured out and cooled, the dirt breaks away, leaving a purer alloy that is ready to be heated and refined yet again. (TLSB)

In the heat of suffering and persecution, Malachi saw the Lord at work to refine and purify the Levites, who were the spiritual leaders of Judah. Their unfaithfulness and impurity had the Lord’s attention. Because He loved them, He could not leave them as they were. (TLSB)

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

1:1 *oracle.* The word “oracle” is the translation of the very first word in the Hebrew text of the book of Malachi. The word actually comes from the word meaning to carry something and is in other places translated “burden.” (PBC)

The idea of burden is right and good. When God comes to his messenger he places a burden on him, a burden of words that he must take to the people. Jeremiah felt this “burden.” He said, “But if I say, I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,’ His word is in my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones. I am very weary of Holding it in; indeed, I cannot” (Jeremiah 20:9). (PBC)

The Apostle Paul also felt this burden of being the Lord’s messenger when he said, “Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16). (PBC)

Malachi – Malachi means *my messenger*. May refer to an actual person named Malachi or to an anonymous prophet whom God called “My messenger.” He prophesied after the rebuilding of the temple. Luther: “Almost all the words which are here spoken in the name of the Lord echo a sort of

disgust. The Lord has had enough and is, as it were, nauseated by their ceremonies.... But they themselves preserved them for their own gain and profit, not with a sincere heart but with a greedy one, giving no glory to God.... The stomach is the greatest idol in every religion. Unbelief is the cause for greed" (AE 18:391). (TLSB)

The LORD's Love for Israel

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." 4 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!"

1:2 *loved you.* The Lord's reassuring word to his disheartened people. (CSB)

God wanted Israel to believe this basic truth (Hos 11:1). (TLSB)

How have You loved us? Israel challenged God's claim with a confrontational question. (CSB)

The question could be rephrased: "What have you ever done for us?" God's love appears elusive and hidden, especially when times are hard. And the question springs from our lips: "How can a loving God do such things?" There is usually indignation in the voice of the one asking the question, as if God is somehow betraying his creation. (PBC)

The fact is that if God is really true and right, he must hate evil and he must hate people who do evil. How can he do anything but punish the evil and banish it forever from himself? This is the curse; this is hell. (PBC)

Is not Esau Jacob's brother? Rhetorical question referring to a well-known fact. God introduced the names of Esau (Edom) and Jacob (Israel), twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Since they were twins, one might suppose equal treatment. (TLSB)

I have loved Jacob. Again the Lord affirmed His love for Jacob (Israel), just as Rebekah loved her son Jacob, but Isaac loved Esau (Gn 25:28). (TLSB)

1:3 *Esau I have hated.* If Israel doubts God's covenant love, she should consider the contrast between God's ways with her and his ways with Jacob's brother Esau (Edom). Paul explains God's love for Jacob and hatred for Esau on the basis of election (Ro 9:10–13). God chose Jacob but not Esau. For the use of "love" and "hate" here, cf. how Leah was "hated" in that Jacob loved Rachel more (Ge 29:31, 33; cf. Dt 21:16–17). Likewise, believers are to "hate" their parents (Lk 14:26) in the sense that they love Christ even more (Mt 10:37). (CSB)

A surprisingly strange statement. God's love and care for all people and all creation is affirmed throughout Scripture. God's "hatred" of Esau must be understood in light of what Jesus said about hating one's "own father and mother and wife and children" (Lk 14:26). Such hatred refers to the choices a person must make between Jesus and loved ones. So God showed hatred for Esau when He chose the older, Esau, to serve the younger, Jacob (Gn 25:23; Rm 9:12–13). Prophecies around the time of the Judean exile (beginning in 587 BC) are especially condemning of the Edomites. (TLSB)

The record stands: "[God] wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). There is also the fact that some reject this desire of God to save them – people like Edom in this

chapter. The sin is recorded in Numbers 20. Moses pleaded for passage through that country as the children of Israel made their way back home from the bondage of Egypt. They even volunteered to pay, and they began their request with the words, “This is what your brother Israel says.” But Edom refused, “You may not pass through here; if you try, we will attack you with the sword. The Edom came out against them not with a large and powerful army.” And in Psalm 137:7 it also states, “Remember, O Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. ‘Tear it down,’ they cried, ‘Tear it down to its foundations,’” (PBC)

The gravity of this situation is expounded in Hebrews 10:31 when it states “*It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*”

laid waste. Malachi’s words about Edom echo those of the earlier prophets (see Isa 34:5–15; Jer 49:7–22; Eze 25:12–14; 35:1–15; Obadiah). Between c. 550 and 400 B.C. the Nabatean Arabs gradually forced the Edomites from their homeland. (CSB)

God had given Edom its own territory and commanded Israel to respect this heritage (Dt 2:4–5). But in 553/2 BC, the Babylonian king Nabonidus destroyed Edom, likely the event to which the Lord refers. God’s hatred for Esau was shown by permitting this judgment to happen. (TLSB)

1:4 *ifd Edom says.* Her proud self-reliance has not assured her security and will not secure her future (cf. Jer 49:16). (CSB)

rebuild the ruins. Just as Israel rebuilt Jerusalem, so Edom vowed to do the same. (TLSB)

LORD of hosts. Name for God used more than 20 times in Mal. (TLSB)

I will tear down. In contrast to blessing the rebuilding of Israel’s temple, the Lord declared that the Edomites’ building projects would be futile (cf Jer 49:7–22). (TLSB)

the wicked country. God’s judgment against Edom resulted in a new name that expressed His hatred. (TLSB)

1:5 *Your own eyes shall see.* God demonstrated His power and majesty before Israel’s very eyes as proof of His love. (TLSB)

Great ... Israel. When she sees the ultimate fate of Edom, doubting Israel will acknowledge that the Lord is the great Ruler over all the nations. (CSB)

Common refrain in Psalms (35:27; 40:16; 96:4). (TLSB)

beyond the border of Israel! The Lord is not an idol, the invention of a particular nation, but the international God, the one and only true God over all creation (Is 46:9). (TLSB)

1:1–5 God impresses the truth of His love for Israel (Jacob) by contrasting what happened to them with what happened to Edom (Esau). To justify rebellion against God, human beings sometimes question God’s love. Despite all rebellion, God maintains His steadfast love for sinners. He demonstrated this love conclusively when Christ died for all on the cross (2Co 5:15). Believers know for certain that nothing can separate us from His love (Rm 8:38–39). • Dear God of love, forgive my doubts and graciously move me to trust You completely. Amen. (TLSB)

The Priests' Polluted Offerings

6 “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’ **7** By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the LORD's table may be despised. **8** When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts. **9** And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts. **10** Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. **11** For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. **12** But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. **13** But you say, ‘What a weariness this is,’ and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. **14** Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

1:6–2:9 The Lord rebukes the priests. (CSB)

1:6 *son honors his father.* Cf. Isa 1:2–3. (CSB)

The Lord begins the second part of Malachi, addressed to the priests, by alluding to the Fourth Commandment. (TLSB)

where is My honor?... fear? The honor and reverence due to God was lacking in the priestly worship. (TLSB)

despise. Hbr *bazah*, “to show contempt.” Used repeatedly with related terms (vv 7, 12; 2:9). (TLSB)

My name. The priests are charged with breaking the Second Commandment. (TLSB)

How have we despised Your name? The priests asked for proof just as the people did in v 2. (TLSB)

1:7 *polluted.* By offering defiled sacrifices they defile the Lord himself. (CSB)

the LORD's table. The altar (see Eze 44:16). Since the priests ate from the sacrifices, the altar was also the table from which they got their food. (CSB)

By word and deed, the priests made plain to the people that they were despising God's Law and sacrifices. (TLSB)

despised. As the priests considered the Lord's altar and its sacrifices (v. 12) contemptible, so the Lord would cause the priests to be considered contemptible by the people. (CSB)

Their practice of offering sacrifices which were expressly forbidden by God and their manner in the entire administration of their work were an insult to the holiness of Jehovah. Cf. LeV.22; 22. (Kretzmann)

1:8 *blind ... lame or sick.* Animals with defects or serious flaws were unacceptable as sacrifices (see Dt 15:21). (CSB)

In Lv 22:20–22 and Dt 15:21, the Lord forbade the sacrifice of animals that were blemished. (TLSB)

governor. Probably the Persian governor. (CSB)

God asks sarcastically if the Persian governor would look favorably on such gifts. (TLSB)

1:9 *entreat ... gracious to us.* The Lord expressed what the priests were really saying by their worship practices. If the governor will not show favor because of such gifts, can the priests expect the Lord to do so? (TLSB)

favor of God. Lit, “face of God” (cf Nu 6:25–26). (TLSB)

1:10 *shut the temple doors.* Better no sacrifices than sacrifices offered with contempt (cf. Isa 1:11–15). (CSB)

An appeal to end this mockery of true worship and sacrifice. Luther: “It would be preferable to abstain from prayer than to pray in an evil manner” (AE 18:396). (TLSB)

no pleasure in you. As God had “no regard” for Cain and his sacrifice (Gn 4:5), so He was displeased with the priests. (TLSB)

1:11 *from the rising ... setting.* All over the world (cf Ps 113:3). (TLSB)

great among the nations. Cf. v. 14. God’s judgment on Edom (v. 5) and other nations demonstrates his superiority over their gods, and it ultimately will evoke their recognition of him (see Zep 2:11). (CSB)

The priests despised the Lord’s name (v. 6), but the time will come when “at the name of Jesus every knee...in heaven and on earth” will bow (Phil 2:10). Not only will Israel cry out, “Great is the Lord!” (v. 5), but all nations will do likewise. This reverses the Lord’s hatred of Esau described in v. 2. (TLSB)

incense...pure offerings. Cf. the acceptable offerings presented by foreigners in Isa 56:6–7; 60:7. Some interpreters understand “incense” to mean “prayer” (cf. Rev 5:8) and “offerings” to mean “praise” (cf. Heb 13:15). (CSB)

This means not a ceremony by the outward act, but all those sacrifices through which the name of the Lord becomes great: faith, invocation, the preaching of the Gospel, confession, and so on... We include the preaching of the Word among the sacrifices of praise...Malachi speaks about all the services of the NT.... He requires service of the heart, through which the name of the Lord becomes truly great. (Ap. XXIV 332-33). (TLSB)

1:12 *polluted... despised.* The priests’ words showed that they thought sacrifices commanded by the Lord were nothing special and so could be despised (v 7). (TLSB)

1:13 *weariness.* God had commanded morning and evening sacrifices. In time, the priests became weary of carrying out their duties. (TLSB)

snort at. Cf. the behavior of Eli's sons in 1Sa 2:15–17. (CSB)

taken by violence. In addition to the blemished animals in v 8, there are stolen animals, a violation of the Seventh Commandment. (TLSB)

1:14 *cursed be the cheat* – A divine curse concludes this series of questions addressed to the priests (vv. 6-13). It was their responsibility to make sure that the animals people brought to fulfill a vow had no blemish (Lv 27:9-12). The curse fell on the priests as well as the cheaters. (TLSB)

vows ... a blemished animal. An animal sacrificed in fulfillment of a vow had to be a male without defect or blemish (see Lev 22:18–23). (CSB)

great king. See Zec 14:9. (CSB)

This is more than just a father and master (v. 6), the Lord demands the honor due the greatest King of all. (TLSB)

my name ... feared. More than the governor of v. 8. (CSB)

The nations will do what Israel failed to do (cf. c. 11). (TLSB)

1:6–14 The Lord calls to account His OT priests for the way they despised Him, as evidenced by their worship practices. Our fallen human nature also makes us quick to serve our own interests by giving leftovers rather than firstfruits. In contrast, God gave us the very best, His One and only Son. People of all nations worship Him because of His love and compassion, His grace and mercy. May we join in the praise of Him who is the great King! • Dear Father in heaven, open my heart to appreciate the abundance of Your grace so that I may serve You with the first and best of all You have given me. Amen. (TLSB)