

- When we begin a new book, we should thoroughly examine it...zoom out to understand the context of the book in its setting in terms of subgroups, the testament in which the book is found, and where the book exists in the entire Bible...and zoom in to examine the book in its elements, including the historical background and structure of the book, the author and date, and the themes of the book...
- It is generally undisputed that the author is Malachi, but there is a difference of opinion about who he is..."Malachi" means "my messenger," so some scholars understand the word as a title, not a name...for my part, I accept the word as the author's name...
- Malachi is a prophet, the last of the Twelve and the entire OT...the book is God's final word to the period of creation, the patriarchs, the Egyptian bondage, the Exodus, the entry into Canaan, the period of both the monarchies, the national exiles into Assyria and Babylon, and the age of the prophets...this is the last message God had for his people, and indeed for the world, before the coming of his son, Jesus Christ the Messiah...
- We need to understand the book in detail...the historical background and setting of the book places it in Jerusalem and Judah, in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, as a prophetic work written to the Jewish community still trying to establish themselves in Jerusalem and Judah...the Temple and the city wall had been rebuilt, but the people were still struggling, surrounded by hostile neighbors, occupied by a foreign empire, and trying to rebuild an economy...the glorious days of Israel under David and Solomon seemed very distant, as did the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah...these were hard times in Judah...
- As to the date of writing, we believe the book of Malachi, while undated, was written after the book of Haggai and Zechariah's visions, written in 520 BC...after the rebuilding of the Temple in 515 BC... and even after Zechariah's oracles, which were probably recorded in about 480 BC...Malachi's prophecy was likely written about 460 to 420 BC...the end of this book begins the so-called "400 years of silence" as God temporarily stilled the prophetic

voice until Gabriel's announcement to the priest, Zechariah, of the coming forerunner of the promised Messiah...

- Regarding the primary themes of the book, I think it's important to link Malachi to the other two latter prophets, Haggai and Zechariah...Haggai challenged the people of Judah physically...he addressed their self-centered priorities that resulted in self-centered actions...they were guilty of building their own homes first and neglecting God's house, the Temple in Jerusalem...Zechariah challenged the people spiritually...he gave them God's "good words, comforting words" and encouraged them to remain steadfast as they looked beyond their current circumstances to the amazing future God had promised them, moving them toward deeper faith in Yahweh...lastly, Malachi challenges the people relationally... over time, the people had allowed their eyes to stray back to the difficulties they faced and they let that dishearten them, eroding the closeness of their relationship with their faithful covenant God...Malachi confronted them with their own disbelief of, and disregard for, the Lord, and gave them a divine mirror to reveal to them their own sin, so they might forsake it and return to a right relationship with God...other important themes include the coming of the Messiah and the forerunner, the proper worship of the Lord, stewardship, and right relationships within the people of Israel...
- Regarding the content and structure of the book, Malachi is unique ...there is no other book in all of Scripture put together like the book of Malachi...there are elements of prophecy about future events, but much of the book isn't prophetic in that sense...nearly the entire book is the direct speech of God to his people...it is neither historical narrative nor symbolic visions, but a straightforward conversation between the Lord and his chosen nation...the book begins with a brief prologue and ends with an epilogue, but almost all the content is a series of six short dialogues between Yahweh and some or all of his people...this form of literature is called a "disputation" – Malachi records these short

“disputes” from 1.2 to 4.3 in a series of statements or responses from Yahweh, and questions from the people...

- Malachi is often quoted or alluded to in the New Testament, most notably in Romans 9...the passage about Esau and Jacob in 1.2-5 is picked up by Paul and interpreted as an opening argument about the relationship between God and the Jewish people, a topic which occupies most of Romans 9 through 11...we’ll come back to that thought later...
- This final prophetic word from the Lord set the stage for the advent of both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ...Malachi did his part in preparing the people of Israel for the arrival of their coming Messiah as he challenged them regarding their attitudes toward the Lord and as he foretold both the rise of the forerunner and the Savior himself...let’s get started!

### Prologue

- The opening of the book is very brief and straightforward...  
<sup>1</sup> **The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.**
- The word “oracle” renders the Hebrew ‘massa’ meaning a heavy burden...we saw this word twice in the oracles of Zechariah...there, the burden was a severe judgment coming for the Gentile nations and for Israel herself...here in Malachi, the burden seems to be grief for the brokenness of the relationship between God and his people...this word was to all Israel, as Malachi looks beyond the present to a larger future for God’s people, including the promised coming Messiah...

### “I have loved you”

- God speaks first...  
<sup>2</sup> **“I have loved you,” says the Lord.**

- God gives us a divine example for how to approach someone with whom you have a dispute...he would have been justified in beginning with any of the other accusations in the book, but he doesn't...he begins by affirming his love for Israel to set a positive tone...but there is a surprising Hebrew word choice here...it is 'a-haav'...this is the common word for "love," used most often of love between or among people, and it's the word used when God commands Israel to love him, such as **Deuteronomy 6.4-5**...<sup>4</sup>**"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>5</sup>You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.** ...God did not often use this word, 'a-haav,' of his love toward Israel...I could find only two other instances of this word being used of God speaking to Israel...**Hosea 11.1**...**When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.** ...and **Deuteronomy 7.13**...**He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock, in the land that he swore to your fathers to give you.**
- Why would he use this word, 'a-haav,' not the more common word for God's love, 'he-sed,' translated "steadfast love"? Because he's telling Israel that he loves them with family love, spousal love, parental love...the same kind of love they had for each other, God had for them, too...it was a love they could comprehend, an accessible love, an understandable love...God said he loved them as a son, as a wife, as a friend...
- Of course, it was true that God loved them with his perfect, steadfast, covenant-keeping love, too, but here, he emphasizes a very meaningful yet more ordinary human love...
- And let's not lose sight of the obvious miracle here...God really did love Israel, with both 'a-haav' and 'he-sed' love...not because Israel was lovely, but simply because of God's sovereign grace and mercy, and his relentless faithfulness to keep his word to his

people...God did not love Israel because of some inherent value or goodness in them, but instead he loved them simply because he chose to love them...

### **“How have you loved us?”**

- Now to Israel’s response...usually when you say, “I love you” to another person, the person responds with, “I love you, too”...but Israel doesn’t...instead, they ask the Almighty God to prove his love for them...

### **But you say, “How have you loved us?”**

- It would be reasonable, and mostly justified, to condemn Israel for their surprising ingratitude and petulance toward their covenant God...it’s surprising to hear anyone question God’s love for Israel, knowing what we know today...but we need to look a little deeper, and think back in time to when the book was written...why would they respond this way? If we stop and consider their lives, it might be more understandable...certainly the people of Israel had the national stories of all of God’s faithful blessings, from the patriarchs, to Joseph, to the Exodus, to conquering at least most of the promised land, to David and Solomon...but they also had vivid memories of long periods of idolatry, the corrosive influences of false prophets, their own persistent and tenacious sin, and two punishing national exiles to Assyria and Babylon...their memories of God’s goodness and love must have felt distant and detached from their daily lives...even though the Jews of Judah had returned to Jerusalem, it was still a very difficult time...that might be where their question comes from...
- And that isn’t too difficult for us to understand, is it? Have you ever been in a place of pain and hurt and despair and disappointment, of broken relationships and financial problems and scary diagnoses, and wondered to yourself, “If God loves me, why is my life like this?” I think if we were honest with God and ourselves, we would have to admit that we, too, at

times, have questioned the truth of God's love for us, wondered if he was listening to our prayers, or was even aware of us at all...and while we might not say it in exactly the same way, we might ask God for some examples of his love, just to remind us...

**I have loved Jacob<sup>3</sup> but Esau I have hated.**

- Let's see how God answered Israel...

**"Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob<sup>3</sup> but Esau I have hated.**

- Please stay with me in this portion, because I'm going to address this passage, particularly the first part, in two different ways...first, we'll see how this would have been heard by the Jews of Malachi's day...then, because of the importance of this short passage to Romans 9 and the doctrine of sovereign election, we will shift to the NT and examine Paul's understanding of this important truth...
- The Lord answers the people's impertinent question with another question, one intended to draw their thoughts to a comparison of the two brothers...one might expect God to defend his love for Israel by reciting all he had done for them, but instead, he defined his love for Jacob by comparing it to his hatred of Esau, and by extension, Edom, the nation descended from him, by reciting how he has treated Edom without love or compassion, and in fact, with active harm...the point of this was to assure – or even convince – Israel of his love...it would make sense if these brothers were treated the same, but they were not...
- One point of grammar here: in an effort to soften this passage, some teachers will diminish the word "hated" to "loved less"...but that isn't what the word means...I have access to eleven Hebrew dictionaries, and they all define this Hebrew word as "hate"...it's used 146 times, and 139 of those times, it's translated "hate" "hated" "enemy" "adversary" or a

similarly strong word...only 7 times is it anything less than “hate”...so we have to reckon with the fact that God intentionally used this meaning here...

- One author termed God’s choice here as “covenantal hatred”...many Christians are uncomfortable with that idea and with this verse...those who are often describe this as unfair treatment on God’s part, as if he is not entitled to make any choice he wishes according to his sovereign authority...but to address the fairness issue for a moment, by our usual standards of fairness, God should have waited and seen which brother turned out to be better, then chosen him...but the truth of the Genesis account is this: neither brother was deserving of God’s grace and mercy, much less his election...both were deeply flawed and, by that standard, not a fitting choice for a good and holy God...if fairness were the criteria, God would have rejected both men...what is truly miraculous is that God would, and did, choose to love either of them...and the same is true of all of us...
- And if we need more to understand God’s hatred of Esau, just continue into verses 3 and 4...verses 2c and 3a are often quoted, but not the next couple of sentences...**I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.”**<sup>4</sup> **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.’”** ...Edom would be laid waste, abandoned, shattered, and would be unable to rebuild, declared ‘wicked’ and be the focus of God’s anger...wow...
- While we may not fully understand it, it is beyond doubt that God is making a clear distinction between these two brothers and the peoples who are descended from them...Jacob, or Israel, was the object of his favor, and Esau, or Edom, was the object of his wrath...now let’s turn see how the Holy Spirit spoke to Paul about this same verse...

## The New Testament Understanding

- As Paul begins a three-chapter passage in Romans on Israel, he begins with this discourse hinged on **Malachi 1.2-3**...please listen or read carefully...

<sup>6</sup> **But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, <sup>7</sup> and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” <sup>8</sup> This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. <sup>9</sup> For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” <sup>10</sup> And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, <sup>11</sup> 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— <sup>12</sup> she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” <sup>13</sup> As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” <sup>14</sup> What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! <sup>15</sup> For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” <sup>16</sup> So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. <sup>17</sup> For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” <sup>18</sup> So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.**
- God has a purpose of election, as he says in verse 11, and it is not based on human works but on “**him who calls**,” God himself...it is clear from all of Scripture that God is a universal sovereign King, and he is free to act as he wills...**Ps 115.3...Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.** ...he chose Abraham...then Isaac, not Ishmael...then Jacob, not Esau...and he is just in these choices, not unjust, as Paul says in verse 14...<sup>14</sup> **What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!** No one can place an obligation or

expectation upon the Almighty, and no one can charge him with wrongdoing or injustice...God will bring about his purposes in his way and in his time...verse 18 is the conclusion to this exposition of God's sovereignty: <sup>18</sup> **So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.** ...given that all human beings are, by nature, 'sinners and an affront to God's holiness, we must be grateful for his undeserved grace...

- This can be a difficult truth to accept, but it helps to define the contours of our understanding of three key concepts: who God is and how he acts...God's justice, grace, and love...and our own salvation...

### Great is the Lord!

- Ultimately, all human history will result in one certain outcome: glory to God...  
<sup>5</sup> **Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel!"** ...not just within Israel, as if the God of the Bible were a regional deity, but God will be honored with universal glory, unbounded and limitless...

### Application

- So as we close, we see that the electing love of God is the focal point of this first passage... how are we to respond to it?
- **When you are unsure of His heart, trust that He is both just and merciful.**...His justice and wrath do not overwhelm His love and grace...He is perfect and holy in all of His character...**John 3.16-18...** <sup>16</sup> **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.** <sup>17</sup> **For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.** <sup>18</sup> **Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe**

**is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.** Please...believe God and trust him with your life...

- **When you are unsure of His ways, dig deeper into His word**...let the Holy Spirit lead you to all truth...**John 16.13...When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.** Rely on Him to explain his ways and his word to you...
- **When you are unsure of his love, turn to Jesus**...Jesus is the perfect and complete expression of God's love...**John 4.9-10...<sup>9</sup>In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.<sup>10</sup> 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.** If God said to you, "I have loved you," what would your response be? Does your love for God rise and fall with your circumstances, or is it a constant truth despite your circumstances? You can be assured of his love as you believe in him...turn to Jesus Christ and trust Him...
- The truth of Malachi's first oracle is clear: God loved Israel and had not forgotten them...He was present with them...just so, the coming of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the gospel assure us of God's continual presence through his Holy Spirit...the love and faithfulness of God to Israel foreshadows his love and faithfulness to his church...and to you.