

## Malachi Chapter 1

Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament, it was the last book to be written, bc 430, about 100 years after the Jews returned to Israel from the captivity of the Assyrians, then the Babylonians and then the Medes and Persians.

This book starts off with a huge statement from God to Israel; 'I have loved you,' says the Lord. It's followed by a stupid, petulant response. 'In what way have you loved us?' What do these two statements tell us about the state of relations between Israel and God? Have you ever found yourself in attitude of, what I do for God is more than enough, in fact, it's more than what most people do? And even when God challenges you, you're thinking, what is your problem God?

Notice, God's statement is past tense. Had he stopped loving Israel? Can you ever recall a moment in your relationship with God, honestly asking yourself; does God still love me? When you think of all that God has done for you, that would take a huge amount of blind irrationality or ungrateful arrogance to ask that question of God. But we are irrational beings and can be prone to moments of arrogance.

This is like a one way romance. Have you ever loved someone who believes it's better to receive than to give? A love so selfish, they neither realise nor care about their lover's disappointment or frustration; all they care about is their own well-being and happiness. Can you think back to periods when your love had gone cold, so cold that even when pulled up about it you become defensive or blame God rather than apologise and repent?

Another diagnosis of such a situation is mental health. This is linked to irrational thoughts. People do become fixated with the notion that somehow they've stepped outside of God's love. Time and again I've come across people who are convinced that they've blasphemed the Holy Spirit Matthew 12:31-3. How can you comfort and reassure someone with such a fixation?

God reminds Israel they descended from one of two brothers, Esau and Jacob, as covered in Genesis chapter 25 onwards. The story of a pretty dysfunctional family with lots of sibling rivalry. Esau was a bit clueless and rebellious, Jacob was a bit more switched on but very devious though he loved God. Jacob cheated his older twin brother out of his inheritance and Esau married out of his tribe against the wishes of God and his parents. Jacob loved God but in Genesis there's no reference that indicates Esau ever had any regard for Him. Jacob had 12 children and was accredited as being the father of Israel, Esau was accredited as being the father of Edom.

Edom and Israel clashed on a number of times in their histories. Notably, Numbers 20:14-20, the King of Edom refuses to allow Israel to pass through Edom on their journey from Egypt to the promised land. Though it's not documented in any of books that cover the Babylonian invasion of Judah, apparently the Edomites celebrated the invasion and even prevented some from escaping and looted their houses after they were carried away. Obadiah 1:14. The book of Obadiah dwells almost exclusively on God's dim view of the people of Edom and how they turned out and rejected Him, just as their ancestor Esau did, and that despite God giving them honour, Deuteronomy 23:7-8. If you read the book of Obadiah there's a litany of catastrophes lined up for Edom but unusually there's something missing in this book; a call to repentance and a promise of blessing if they do. Had they stepped outside of God's love? So does God hate some races, individuals or populations? Romans 9:14-18. Hebrews 4:4-6.

With reference to Malachi 1:3, Did God actually hate Esau and by implication, Edom?

Does Jesus want you to hate your mum and dad in contravention of the 5th commandment, Luke 14:26? Of course not, the word hate here is a comparative term. God does not hate anyone - 2 Peter 3:9. God loves everyone, yes, everyone, even the people that we hate; rapists, drug dealers, paedophiles, and mass murderers; it's their sin he hates. This is how Jesus puts it:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that WHOEVER believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16 NKJV.

Verse 6, a swipe at the priests, God is feeling He's slipping down His beloved Israel's priority list. In what ways are we prone to not honour and/or not reverence God? Our love of God and desire to please Him can drop down our top ten priority list. On the other hand, is it possible to be over familiar with God?

When challenged, the priests have no idea what God's talking about, even when He tells them directly that their efforts defile them. So God has to explain further with an example - And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favourably?" Says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 1:8 NKJV

Bear in mind that the priests more often than not, were sacrificing animals that were brought to them by the people, so the fault lay with both the priests and the people but the priests were quite happy to accept these deformed animals and they had no idea that God might not be delighted with leftovers.

There were 5 main types of offerings or sacrifices. Two mandatory sin offerings and 3 voluntary offerings. The 3 were a burnt offering of an animal for commitment and devotion, a grain offering or a cake and or a wine for thanksgiving and a peace offering of an animal's offal to God and the carcass shared as a fellowship meal.

We don't sacrifice these days. Firstly, there's no temple to sacrifice in and secondly, in Hebrews 10:11-12 we're told there's no point because Jesus was God's perfect sacrifice. So does that make Old Testament and Jesus's teachings on sacrifice obsolete or is there an equivalent for us of sacrifice? There were two functions of sacrifice as we said earlier, sin, which has been dealt with once and for all by Jesus's death and resurrection, and worship. So in what ways do we worship God today?

So is there a relevance of Malachi 1:6-8 vis-a-vis our worship? Can we give examples of second rate worship? Eg: 'I'm running 10 minutes late so I'll skip church this week.' Imagine phoning your boss; 'I'm running 10 minutes late, so I'll give it a miss if you don't mind.'

Malachi 1:9 The customary call to repentance that follows God's every warning to Israel, no exceptions. But then there's more warnings. Verse 10, someone shut the door of the Temple, I don't want your sacrifices.

V10. Someone, please shut the Temple door. I don't want your sacrifice, it does nothing for me. Sacrifice, and the whole Jewish religion had become ritualistic. You can imagine the order of service, chanting, readings, rituals, prayers etc. More like a Masonic meeting than a coming together in worship and praise. But where was God in all this?

Then another bombshell in verse 11, God will reach out to the Gentiles and they will respond positively, whereas the Jews profane God's name with their polluted sacrifices. What does the prophet mean by incense in this context? Some Catholic, high Anglican and Orthodox churches do use incense in their church services. What does the prophet mean by a perfect sacrifice, given that no animal is perfect? It may have won awards at agricultural shows, but it's not perfect. So what might this perfect sacrifice be?

V12 - 13. God is frustrated that the Jews even admit the problem but do nothing about it. In fact, their worship had become a chore. Can you honestly say that that's never been a problem with you. You've never had to drag yourself to prayer, Bible study and church?

V14. This chapter is aimed solely at the rich. If you're a very poor subsistence farmer and you can only afford disabled cattle, then by all means bring that, but if you have a large healthy herd with a few runts in it, don't send them. Instead, treat God with the reverence His majesty demands. God will not only be King of the Jews, but also king of all the nations.