

WRONG WAY!

Short Bible Studies in the Book of Malachi

#1 Malachi 1:1-5



Photo by [Tasha Lyn on Unsplash](#)

“I have loved you,’ says the LORD. But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’” Malachi 1:2

These short Bible studies are written for small-group use as well as for people who are unable to join a group Bible study. Bible studies work best in groups where each encourages and builds up the others in the group in their faith (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Even so, these studies don’t require a group, a leader, or a marker. Please feel free to pass them to others. They can be downloaded, emailed, printed or posted. I’d encourage you to share your thoughts, answers, and questions, with at least one other person: phone them up if you can’t meet.

INTRODUCTION TO MALACHI

The last book in the Old Testament of the Bible, Malachi provides an effective bridge from the Old to the New Testament. The Old Covenant sacrificial system was being abused, highlighting the need for a perfect sacrifice; a herald of the Messiah is promised; and above all, God’s love for the people he loves and redeems in Christ is highlighted. The date of the book is not indicated, but comparisons between this book and Ezra and Nehemiah, along with the fact that the temple is functioning (ie this must be after the return from Babylon and the temple’s rebuilding) and the existence of a “governor” (a Persian institution) suggests somewhere between 500-450 BC.

It becomes quickly apparent that the people of Israel and Jerusalem to whom Malachi comes as God’s prophet are comfortable in their life and worship, and confident of God’s favour. But through Malachi’s prophecy, God brings confronting condemnation and the promise of judgement to them. Would this have surprised and shocked them ... or perhaps not, as they seem to be hardened in rejection of God?

INTRODUCTION TO MALACHI 1

Malachi’s prophecy just “appears” with no obvious context. It is not linked to any particular historical event, other than that it obviously comes after the exile. Many of the sins Malachi identifies are the same as those condemned by Ezra and Nehemiah, but does this mean that Malachi is prophesying to the same people or that Israel continued in those sins after the days of Ezra and Nehemiah? By going back to the birth of the twins, Esau and Jacob, it would appear that while Malachi proclaimed God’s word to a specific audience, the intent is for us to view this as a word of judgement, warning and hope spanning virtually the whole of the Old Testament in preparation for the New. (cf Ezra 9:7)

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WRONG WAY! #1 Malachi Chapter 1:1-5

GETTING STARTED

Please remember that this is God's Word. So...

- Pray, asking God to guide you by his Spirit to understand his word, and learn how to live for Jesus.
- Read the passage listed above for this study.
- Now discuss/think about/answer the questions that follow. *Write answers in the spaces provided.*

1. What is this passage mainly about?

2. This chapter can easily be divided into three sections. What is each section mainly about? *Your Bible probably has headings – but don't be too quick to adopt those as in some versions they are quite misleading!*¹
 - a. Verse 1

 - b. Verses 2-5

 - c. Verses 6-14

WHO IS MALACHI?

3. We know nothing about Malachi apart from his name (which means "Messenger") and the message that comes "through Malachi." Why, according to verse 1, should the Jews at the time pay attention?
 - a. How is the message described?

 - b. Whose words make up the message?

 - c. Who is the message for?

GOD BOTH LOVES AND HATES

It is inescapable that this passage attributes hate to God. Even unbelievers attribute love to God, but that God hates comes as a surprise to some, and is denied by many. Take a quick look at these Bible references to see that God truly hates: Psalm 5:5,6; Isaiah 61:8; Amos 5:21; Zechariah 8:17; Revelation 2:6. Malachi 1 reveals that God does not hate in the same way we hate. Yet, don't deny that God has emotions that the Bible reveals are truly his; and don't make the mistake of thinking God's nature or will is changed by his emotions.²

4. In Malach 1:1,2 God declares a particular love for some and also declares their doubt:

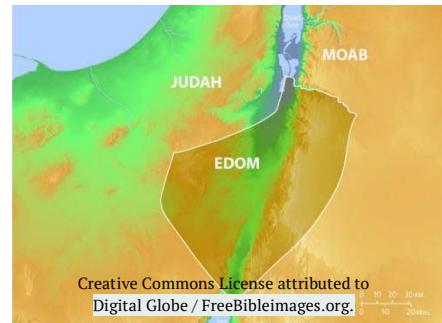
¹ The headings given by translators are not part of God's inspired word. eg one version heads the section at verse 6 "Breaking Covenant." This could fit, but as you will see below, "covenant" is not mentioned, so the passage may point to something quite different.

² This is known as *God's impassibility*. To better understand this, have a look at my booklet, *God is Our Rock* pages 13-22.

- a. Who does God say he has loved?
 - b. God says he loves them. What reason do they use to doubt God's word?
 - c. Comparing Genesis 3:1 with Hebrews 11:1, what is the relationship between faith, what we see, and what we know?
5. According to Romans 9:22, what does God make known by showing wrath to sinners?
6. According to Romans 9:23, what does God make known by showing mercy to some?

A SHORT BUT NECESSARY HISTORY LESSON

If you are not familiar with the story of Isaac and Rebekah's twins, Jacob and Esau, it's probably helpful to read Genesis 25:19-34; but at this point don't stay in the story in Genesis – read Romans 9:10-25 and let the Apostle Paul explain it! In summary, Esau, Isaac's first-born son, despised what he would have inherited from Isaac, including the promises God made to Abraham. He became the founder of the nation of Edom that hated Israel (in the land of Judah) and conspired with the Babylonians against them. Isaac then lied and cheated Esau, taking his blessings. In these ways, both sinned, but God, having chosen Isaac and hated Esau, turned their sinful choices to work out his purpose in election.³



GOD SHOWS HOW HE LOVES BY CONTRASTING THAT WITH HOW HE HATES

Israel asks “How have you loved us?” The Jews of Malachi’s day would anticipate that God would now list the ways he has loved Israel. But God responds by saying, “This is what it is like for those I do not love.” This contrast between those God loves and hates both answers the question *and* judges Israel!

7. According to Malachi 1:3-5
- a. How did God “hate” Esau?
 - b. How will God continue to “hate” Esau?

³ This enigmatic passage in Malachi gives a brief mention of an event back in Genesis 24 with which Malachi’s Jews would have been familiar, but which can leave us with more questions than answers! You may want to take extra time looking at [Wrong Way! #1a Additional Notes: God's Purpose in Election](#) to better understand God’s sovereign decisions about those he loves and those he hates.

- c. Why will they always be under God's wrath?
 - d. What will people learn about God from all of this?
 - e. In what ways did God's loving Jacob contrast with his hating Esau?
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EXPLANATION We think of love and hate as emotions that change us, drive us, and may show in our actions or our attitudes – usually led by our feelings without submission to justice, righteousness or self-sacrifice. God's love and hate are self-sacrificing expressions of his perfect justice and righteousness that, rather than changing him, show who he truly is, the only true God, a God of justice and holiness. Those he loves receive his underserved blessing; those he hates receive his deserved wrath. When God loves, he justly saves sinners when they are dead in their sins, sacrificing his own Son to turn away his wrath from those he loves, giving them life in place of their birthright of death. When God hates, he justly condemns sinners to wrath when they are dead in their sins, giving them over to their love of sin, confirming them in their birthright of death.

HONOUR GOD

- 8. In the light of these verses in Malachi
 - a. What can you thank God for?
 - b. What can you pray for others?
 - c. What can you trust God for?
 - 9. In the light of these verses in Malachi, what changes do you need to make
 - a. In your faith?
 - b. In your worship?
 - c. In your attitude and thinking?
 - d. In your life?
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