

THE BOOK OF MALACHI

Lesson 2, Chapter 1

The opening words of the first chapter of Malachai...which we shall shortly read in full... begins with what is called a superscription. A superscription gives us a top-level view of the context for what follows it (in this case, the writings and message of the Prophet Malachai). In the Bible, it will sometimes tell us something about the author, sometimes the occasion or reason for what is about to be presented, and in the Psalms it will at times tell the reader what musical instruments are to accompany the singing of the Psalm. So, knowing what the superscription is telling us sets the necessary stage for how we are to understand the purpose and underlying message of the main body of that particular document.

The superscription (that is verse 1) of Malachai says this:

CJB Malachi 1:1 *A prophecy, the word of YEHOVEH to Isra'el through Mal'akhi:*

At least that is the CJB translation. Other translations differ in one major aspect: the opening word.

KJV Malachi 1:1 *The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.*

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

Notice we have 3 different English words to open this verse: prophecy, burden, and oracle (and another common translation is "utterance"), each characterizing the nature, tone, mood, and thrust of the entire Book of Malachai. The Hebrew word being translated is *massa*. It has been a challenge for Bible translators for centuries to try to properly convey to us exactly what the meaning of that term is... or was... in the era it was used. I repeat: the key is to understand the INTENT of the author at the time it was written, because even after more than 2000 years, that is still the intent.

The literal meaning of **massa** is to lift, bear, or carry. Very early Bible commentators like Aquila and Jerome, and later Luther and many others, properly noticed something important about the context of the occurrences of the word **massa**: whenever it appears in the Bible, it is in a grave situation that is most weighty and serious. However, when Greek and Latin Bible translations appeared, they tended to make translate this term with a rather neutral tone and generic sense by using “oracle” or “utterance”. That is quite in error. And, the CJB translation is simply not at all true to the word **massa** by saying it means “prophecy”. The correct way of understanding **massa** in English is “burden”. The term “burden” is neither pleasant nor neutral. It inherently implies a warning or a threat. Therefore, this word describes the nature and substance by which we are to understand the next part of the superscription which is: “the word of the Lord”.

In Hebrew, what this literally says is **debar Yehoveh**. So, word (or speech) is certainly correct, but the English word Lord is not. God’s formal name... Yehoveh... is used. As I have discussed with you countless times, substituting the term Lord for God’s name (Yehoveh) was and is an intentional act of Christian translators to obscure. There has never been any issue among language experts in knowing what the basic Hebrew word **adonai** means, nor what the word Yehoveh means. **Adonai** means lord or master, and Yehoveh is the unique name of God the Father. But, Constantinian Christianity has always intended to relegate The Father to the background, and to replace Him with The Son. Thus, by using the word Lord, it makes the uninitiated reader think this must be speaking of a preincarnate Jesus. So, by substituting the word “Lord”, this is simply a means to achieve an agenda.

Then, since we know that “the word of Yehoveh” in this case means something God is saying directly to someone either audibly or through some mysterious inspired thought-connection, the nature of the communication from God to Malachai is that it is a serious and weighty warning concerning a matter God is not happy about. Next comes the general recipient of this warning, which is Israel. Here, Israel is meant as all of Israel... not just those members of the former northern kingdom of Israel... and not as meaning only Judah as the former southern kingdom of Israel... but rather it is a message to *all* who are part of Jacob’s family whether or not they are residing along with Malachai in

the Persian province of Yehud. So, this message is NOT a warning to the gentile nations (as are some prophecies), but rather it is to God's own chosen and set-apart people. To His worshippers.

What is important to grasp in order for us to keep things balanced and real, is that even though God's worshippers (Israel) had so perverted their original Hebrew faith and turned it into something different, even opposite (for the sake of labeling it, we can call it the religion of Judaism), that the Jewish people still intended to worship Yehoveh. So, when I explain to you that Constantinian Christianity is a perversion of the biblically mandated faith that Yeshua and His Old Testament predecessors taught, that is not to say that Christians are no longer intending to be God worshippers. Rather it is that, like Judaism, manmade doctrine had overtaken God-given holy writ in authority and thus in moral guidance, in how ritual was to be performed, in how and which holy days were to be observed, etc. And, so, I am perfectly comfortable calling those who adopted this Judaism along with those who adopted Constantinian Christianity as God worshippers.

On the surface that sounds like maybe Judaism and Constantinian Christianity aren't so bad or so far off the mark after all since their intentions seem to be good. The problem is, God does not see it that way. He sees their choices and behavior as unfaithfulness, disobedience, rebellion and even idolatry. This is why Prophets of the Hebrew Bible are constantly warning the God worshippers that their relationship with Yehoveh has been greatly harmed, they have broken the terms of the covenant God made with them, and that catastrophic punishment is at hand for their corruption and stubbornness and refusal to listen, repent, and change. Thus, just as the goal of God and the Prophets was to get the Jews to recognize the predicament, they have put themselves in and do something about it, so do I (and many others over the ages) have a heart to expose the predicament Christians have put themselves in, in order to avoid catastrophe. It's a message that no deliverer of that message enjoys giving. We all know that such criticisms will result in most God worshippers seeing us in a negative light or as too severe and harsh and condemning of their sincerely-held faith beliefs. Malachai, as with all biblical Prophets, knew he wasn't going to gain popularity when he revealed this prophecy... because history itself tells us how it will go. So, Malachai is to be

admired for his courage and trust in God at a time when, unlike today, a Prophet could be (and regularly was) run out of town or killed by his own people for his efforts.

The final word of the superscription of verse 1 (Malachai) identifies the particular person to whom God gave this prophetic warning for the purpose of delivering it to Israel as God's authorized messenger. As we discussed last time, there is no consensus on if Malachai is a proper name of a certain Prophet, or, since it means "my messenger", if the Prophet who received and wrote down this message is anonymous. I think it is a proper name. Interestingly, there is a Hebrew word that precedes the name of Malachai that is rarely (if ever) translated and included in English Bibles. That word is **beyad**. Literally it means "by the hand of". Malachai is the instrument that God is mysteriously using to transfer this "word" from the spiritual world and dimension, Heaven, to the physical world of space-time, Earth. God's will is always manifested by means of the hands of people. It is a biblical principle that prophecies are only set into motion once God gives it to a Prophet and he reveals it to the people. Once set into motion, nothing will ever stop it from coming about.

The essence of Malachai is a message of one single, focused prophecy, and it is one in which The Father is expressing His great displeasure with Israel, and being most specific about who among Israel is being held accountable. So, with that, let's read Malachai chapter 1.

READ MALACHAI CHAPTER 1 all

In my introduction to Malachai, I said that we need to pay close attention to what is being said because it's application is not narrow, nor does its meaning lie solely in the past. God is addressing an existent and ongoing issue that applies to those who He has given charge over His worshippers. As often as not, in all ages and eras, some of these leaders are self-appointed and yet, that doesn't necessarily make them illegitimate. But what it does make them (however they wound up in leadership) is responsible and accountable. Responsible and accountable to Yehoveh. So, this prophecy is speaking

primarily about religious leadership even though the scope can be extended to civil leadership even if only to a degree.

Thus, whomever finds themselves in leadership of a religious group that purports to be leading in the name of the God of the Bible... regardless of what name that group might give itself... we all share a common charge throughout history: be truthful and faithful to God and to His written word. Not just true to the learning of the principles laid out in God's Word, but also to the duties and obligations that are necessarily involved as leaders to carry them out as prescribed, and never to deviate or to invent new doctrines to oppose or to displace God's.

As I pointed out in the introduction, Christendom is essentially the twin brother of the Judaism of the Bible, just as Christian teachers, pastors, and other Church leaders are essentially the twin brother of the Levite Priesthood (comparatively; not in reality). This twin-ness is nearly identical in nature except that the Levites are Hebrews and the Church leaders are gentiles. Thus, what applies to the ancient and Hebrew, also applies to the modern and gentile. Many great thinkers and Bible scholars have pointed this out in centuries past... so I stand on firm ground. I referred to Kierkegaard in our previous lesson and I'll appeal to yet another great Believing thinker today to help frame how it is that we are to comprehend Malachai and then how it is we are to react to it in our present circumstances of the 21st century.

In all but the most recent times... starting in the late 20th century... the righteous criticisms leveled at Christendom by these great thinkers who were also Yeshua Believers, were contained mostly to the tightly guarded and restrictive bubbles of our Theological institutions. Even those thousands of students in the basic teaching and occupation preparation academies that we call seminaries, hardly ever heard of these critical thinkers, nor were their thoughts and criticisms ever allowed to be faced and addressed. But, today, technology has allowed for that Theological bubble to be burst and the institutional gates to be flung wide-open so that long-obscured, if not altogether hidden, knowledge and understanding could be made available to any and all who care to know. What it reveals is exactly what we are reading in Malachai. And the verdict is harsh.

Jacques Ellul was a French scholar who died in 1994. He was not a Theologian; rather, he was a Professor of Sociology and the History of Institutions at the University of Bordeaux. He authored more than 60 books, and published more than 600 articles, so revered were his views on Sociology. He insisted that he was a Believer in Christ, yet clearly was not well trained in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and held more typical European Christian views. A famed WWII French resistance fighter who saved the lives of so many Jews at great risk to himself, that he was given the elite award of Righteous of The Nations from Yad Vashem... the famed Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. So, he speaks from a unique point of view that is worth listening to.

One of his last books is titled "The Subversion of Christianity". I'd like to quote these several words of his because even he could see some fundamental problematic issues with the Church...

How has it come about that the development of Christianity and the church has given birth to a society, a civilization, a culture that are completely opposite to what we read in the Bible, to what is indisputably the text of The Law, the Prophets, Jesus and Paul?... There is not just contradiction on one point but on all points. On the one hand, Christianity has been accused of a whole list of faults, crimes, and deceptions that are nowhere to be found in the original text and inspiration. On the other hand, revelation has been progressively modeled and reinterpreted according to the practice of Christianity and the church. Critics have been unwilling to consider anything but this practice, this concrete reality, absolutely refusing to refer to the truth of what is said. This is not just deviation, but radical and essential contradiction or real subversion.

Now, compare that to what God says to the Levite Priesthood in the 6th verse of Malachai chapter 1:

CJB Malachai 1:6 6 "A son honors his father and a servant his master. But if I'm a father, where is the honor due me? and if I'm a master,

where is the respect due me?- says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot to you priests who despise my name. You ask, 'How are we despising your name?'

We'll vet this verse as we get to it, but I wanted you to hear how God is reacting to what the Levite priests are teaching and doing. And then how the priests respond to God's indictment against them. Their response is denial. It would in no way be out of bounds to take Ellul's comments that I just read to you and replace the word Christianity with Priesthood and the word Church with Judaism. That is how closely related the condition of the Levite Priesthood Malachai is addressing with that of the Church. Let me illustrate that by modifying 3 of those statements of Ellul.

- 1) How has it come about that the development of Judaism and the Priesthood has given birth to a society and culture that are completely opposite to what we read in the Bible?***
- 2) Revelation has been progressively modeled and reinterpreted according to the practice of Judaism and the Priesthood.***
- 3) They have been unwilling to consider anything but this practice, this concrete reality, absolutely refusing to refer to the truth of what is said. This is not just deviation, but radical and essential contradiction or real subversion.***

Twins. But, I want to be clear about what Ellul is saying. When he speaks of the "practice" of the Church and of Christianity, he is speaking about how the religion is actually carried out and performed by Church leaders in ritual, and in the daily activity of the lives of the worshippers. That is, he understands that Christianity developed its own rituals, and laws, and rules, and holy days, and doctrines. Together, these are what Ellul calls "practice". What Christianity did was first to create a new gentile religion based on the salvation offered by Christ, and then too God's word and twisted and reinterpreted and changed it to fit with all the practices the Church leaders had instituted. But, says he, these practices are not only very different from what The Law, the Prophets, Jesus, and even Paul taught, they are virtually the opposite. Again: this is the essence of what God is saying to the Levite Priesthood through Malachai as a reprimand.

What I've been speaking about for the last several minutes is essentially my personal superscription to how I'm going to approach Malachai and explain what is being taught. The result is hard truths that we are going to encounter, and hard truths are indeed a burden, as said in the opening words of Malachai. I'm asked all the time to present you with "application". Well, here it is. And, the application is as hard for us to swallow as it was for the Priesthood and the people of Malachai's day to accept. It's painful. It's disappointing. It isn't going to win us friends if we act upon it. But what else is a warning from God than Him presenting us with a chance to repent and change before it is too late? People being what they always have been, however, means that a few will humble themselves, take heed and act upon it, and the majority will simply feel they have been unjustifiably offended, blame the messenger, and go on just as before. The few who heed God's warnings and return to faithfulness are what the Bible calls the Remnant. The burning question is: which will you be and how will you accomplish it?

Verse 2 is this:

CJB Malachi 1:2 ***"I love you," says YEHOVEH. But you ask, "How do you show us your love?" YEHOVEH answers, "'Esav was Ya'akov's brother. Yet I loved Ya'akov***

Fascinating. The Father is about to issue a severe rebuke to the Priesthood, but first He tells them: "I love you". Yes, Israel has rebelled against The Father. Yes, the Priesthood has failed and become corrupt to its core. But, God assures all Israel that the loss of His love towards them is not going to be the consequence.

Love is an interesting word to deal with, especially when we apply it to when it appears in the Bible. Norman H. Snaith says that there are 3 main attributes to inform us about God's love. The first is that His love is a sovereign love. That is, God is the sovereign king and it is from that high place and mindset of a sovereign king that His love flows. It flows from a being who has no needs. It is His essence to love. If we are to understand what love is, then His love towards us is the benchmark, just as if we want to understand what justice is, His justice is the standard.

Snaith says the second attribute of God's love is that it is not conditional nor based upon some scorecard of our merit. We learn this early on in the Bible, in God's Torah.

CJB Deuteronomy 7:6-8 ***⁶ For you are a people set apart as holy for Yehoveh your God. Yehoveh your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his own unique treasure. ⁷ Yehoveh didn't set his heart on you or choose you because you numbered more than any other people- on the contrary, you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ Rather, it was because Yehoveh loved you, and because he wanted to keep the oath which he had sworn to your ancestors, that Yehoveh brought you out with a strong hand and redeemed you from a life of slavery under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.***

God's natural inclination to all people is to love them. God loves people NOT because of what they are like, but because of what HE is like. And the third attribute is that God's love is intimately personal. Moses expresses it this way:

CJB Deuteronomy 10:12-15 ***¹² "So now, Isra'el, all that YEHOVEH your God asks from you is to fear YEHOVEH your God, follow all his ways, love him and serve YEHOVEH your God with all your heart and all your being; ¹³ to obey, for your own good, the mitzvot and regulations of YEHOVEH which I am giving you today. ¹⁴ See, the sky, the heaven beyond the sky, the earth and everything on it all belong to YEHOVEH your God. ¹⁵ Only YEHOVEH took enough pleasure in your ancestors to love them and choose their descendants after them- yourselves- above all peoples, as he still does today.***

By any human standard, there is no explanation for God's love. He had an affinity and affection for Israel and their descendants; something that didn't come and go.

The Bible makes many attempts to use metaphors to try to explain things that are beyond human vocabulary to explain. Clearly, marriage and all that it

entails, is one of the living metaphors used often as an example of something... and usually it has to do with the way God operates as if He were a husband in a proper marriage relationship. Forgiveness and mercy are at the heart of marriage. Generosity of forgiveness and mercy will often dictate the long-term survival of a marriage, and there is no more generous in forgiveness and mercy than Yehoveh.

Or, another metaphor I prefer is the love of a parent to a child. Our child can do wrong and deserve justice... and we acknowledge it. But, that doesn't taint or end our love for them. God didn't lower His standards (as Christianity is certain happened when Yeshua was born) because Israel couldn't or wouldn't live up to those high standards. Israel's failures did not result in the loss of God's love towards them. At the same time, God never winks at sin nor does He minimize it. It has always astounded me the pure honesty and transparency that we see in the many Bible stories about the human moral failures of what are simultaneously held up as mighty men, or as venerated men, of the Bible. They are always presented warts and all, and yet God loves them.

The Hebrew word for love is **ahab** (or **ahav**). It is used for a range of meanings from erotic love, to the warm-feeling emotion of love, to the type of love among brothers, to the kind between parents and offspring. Love is also part of God's admonition about what our human attitude ought to be towards our fellow man, and our love based on our allegiance to a king. So, what kind of love is God giving to Israel? While I wouldn't want to limit it based on human perspective, which itself is so narrowly focused, I think the best way to see it is as a covenant love. That is, God's love for Israel is based on the covenant He made between Himself and them. He chose... He elected... to make this covenant with Israel and not with any other. Covenant love is, much like marriage love, based on a reciprocal love. A covenant cannot stand in which one party expresses love, but the other doesn't.

So how does a human being respond to God's love for us if it is intended and expected that we are to reciprocate? There is no way we can go about it from the same direction as Him, because He is far above us, and is able to generate a kind of love that we can't. The Torah tells us that the kind of love God

expects back from us in return for His loving us, comes ONLY from our obedience to Him; and obedience to Him MEANS obedience to His covenant because that's where the terms of our relationship with God are established. This is something that the Bible is abundantly clear on, but Christianity denies. Christianity, being based on Greek ideas of love, sees human love towards God as warm affection. In other words, a love whose genesis is human emotion.

Some weeks ago, we had among the many visitors that come to our facility each week a fellow who had a fascinating story that I want to relate to you regarding loving God. As humans, we are emotional creatures, and so it is natural for us to "feel" love towards God. And, the depth of that feeling is what we usually measure to judge just how much or little, or even if, we love God. But this fellow explained he was autistic. He didn't have the kinds of emotional feelings as other people have and it has troubled him all of his life (as one can imagine). A feeling of warmth and affection towards God or people was not possible for him. He said he thinks he earnestly loves God, but he lived in constant fear and doubt because all the emotion that other Believers feel and speak about towards God he didn't because he inherently couldn't. He "felt" nothing, and so he didn't know if he loved God or not, and the not knowing tormented him. What he learned was that he had been relying on the wrong criteria to indicate love towards God.

One day he was listening to a Torah Class lesson about loving God, and everything changed. He heard that God says that to love Him is to obey Him. Obeying God is something this man earnestly strived for and it was tangible and quantifiable for him. Now he finally knew that his daily intent on obedience to God meant that God saw it as this man directing love towards Him, and now this gentleman could relax. It turns out he DOES love God after all!

The irony is that those who are capable of normal warm feelings (which is almost everyone), and use that as their indicator of their love for God, are the ones in jeopardy. This is because God doesn't use or consider our warm emotions towards Him as the proof of loving Him. The fruit and proof of our love for God is one thing only: obedience to Him, and this obedience must be

to God's Word to us and not according to our own standards or to the Church's or Judaism's standards.

In verse 2, when the Priesthood responds to God's declaration that He loves them, they ask in what tangible manner did He display this love so that it could be recognized. What they are really doing is challenging God and saying that He doesn't love them (and they think this, no doubt, because of having to live under Persia's thumb, the lack of contributions to the Temple, and the poor economy). Yehoveh responds by saying: "Esau was Jacob's brother, but even so I loved Jacob". That is just a partial response that is added to in the startling words of verse 3. So, it was the election... the choice... of Jacob over Esau that God says is the proof of His love for Jacob and his family (Israel).

Now, I want to get slightly technical to make an important point. The opening words in Hebrew of verse 2 are: **ahabti etkem amar Yehoveh**. We've already talked about how **ahab** is the Hebrew word for love (of which there are various kinds of love). The suffix added to **ahab** in this verse makes it **ahab-ti**. And, **ahab-ti** carries a nuance of "love" that is quite intimate and personal. It is relational. This is why I can say that this kind of love is a covenant-love, because it is God's covenant with Israel that makes Israel, Israel, and the covenant lays out the terms of the relationship, just as the terms of a marriage are laid out in the covenant of marriage.

Even more, **ahab-ti** is given in a grammatical form that indicates an *ongoing* emotional response. But, next are the words **amar Yehoveh**. **Amar Yehoveh** is an ancient and standard messenger protocol. It's inclusion in a statement is the verification that the message (the prophecy) is indeed authentic, and also that the messenger himself (Malachai in this case) is God's authorized. But, just as with the word **ahab-ti** having the nuance of being something personal and intimate, so does the word **amar** indicate the same. When **amar** is used in this way, it indicates a divinely-sourced revelation. And, the further nuance of those opening 4 Hebrew words is, that because of the intimate covenant relationship between God and Israel, then it is expected that Israel will hear it and respond. As you can see, only by going to the ancient Hebrew can we grasp the deep love and intimacy being expressed here. Translating it to English results in a substantial loss of intent and meaning. As a footnote: while

I could probably do this word study with every verse of Malachai, I'll refrain because we'd be a year in studying this 3-chapter book.

At this point we need to add the opening words of verse 3 (verses 2 and 3 should never have been separated into 2 verses as it blunts the overall impact). Those words are: "But I have hated Esau". So let me speak this together with verse 2 such that we get that intended impact.

CJB Malachai 1:2-3 ² "I love you," says ADONAI. But you ask, "How do you show us your love?" ADONAI answers, "'Esav was Ya'akov's brother. Yet I loved Ya'akov ³ but hated 'Esav.

Are you startled to hear those last words? That God says straightaway that He hates Esau? And, yes, that is a proper translation. This opens a certified can of theological worms. Does God really hate? We believe (and count on) His love; but can this same God also hate? There has raged-on a theological argument for centuries over whether God has emotions or not. Is He capable of feelings in the same sense we mere humans are? If so, and like here, where God's love for Jacob is compared to God's hate for Esau, are we to take this in emotional terms? This question, of course, also expands to such things as does God really get angry?

Many mainstream Church denominations (often in the Evangelical branch of the Church) have taken the view of denying that God could ever experience anger, frustration, hurt, the warmth of friendship, nor could He suffer. Most of the basis for these Church denominations who think this way come from a Gnostic view of the New Testament. The infamous Marcian of the 2nd century A.D., who was considered a heretic by the early Jewish-dominated congregations of Yeshua followers, loudly declared this same Gnostic viewpoint.

I think that Walter Kaiser, Jr. handled the discussion on this problem... which, to me, you all ought to be wondering about now after hearing the love Jacob, hate Esau words... very deftly. Since this is truly a difficult, but foundational and basic issue on how we, as Believers, are to view God especially when we

read those alarming words of Malachai 1, verses 2 and 3, I want to quote a bit from his commentary on the Book of Malachai.

It was the Church Father Lactantius (last half of the 3rd century) who put the question in a more biblical perspective. "He who loves the good also hates the evil, and he who does not hate the evil does not love the good because on the one hand to love the good comes from the hatred of evil, and to hate the evil rises from the love of the good".

Kaiser continues by saying: ***Our problem with anger (or hate) in the character of God is usually in the result of our poor definitions. Anger is not what Aristotle argued "the desire for retaliation" or a desire to get even for some slight... anger...is a motion of the soul rousing itself to curb sin. God's anger is never explosive, unexplainable, or unreasonable. It never controls Him.***

I want to supplement what Kaiser said about anger by saying that hate and anger are of the same fabric, which is why the two terms are regularly coupled in biblical speech and often in human dialogue. And yet, we must never attempt to unpack the meaning of the terms love and hate within the human mode of thinking or restrict it to our human vocabulary when it is God's love that is being discussed. It is the same with hate and with anger. So, let's not get too hung-up on the love Jacob, hate Esau statement, or think as the Church does that "isn't it nice that with the New Testament God, who is Jesus, all this divine hate and anger stuff is gone". Is it?

CJB Luke 14:26 *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, his mother, his wife, his children, his brothers and his sisters, yes, and his own life besides, he cannot be my talmid.*

I'll leave it here for you to ponder until we meet again for the next lesson in Malachai.