

**THE BOOK OF MALACHI**  
**Lesson 3, Chapter 1 Continued**

As Malachai represents the last of the Old Testament Prophets and the Old Testament Prophet system and era, it probably isn't surprising that we find ourselves staring at monumental and complex God-principles that appear, but which come with no explanation. This is partly because all the previous books of the Hebrew Bible long ago established these principles that we're confronted with, and it is expected that the reader will already know much about them. Malachai assumes this in his writings, and while I suppose that ideally, I ought to be able to assume the same about all of you avid Bible students, experience has taught me to tone-down that expectation.

It is no secret to Torah Class followers that I regularly pester you with the request to not skip around among the various books in the Bible at random, but to begin at the beginning, and then go book by book in the order as we find them in our Bibles. I ask you to not attempt to start your biblical journey of discovery at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, then return to kindergarten for a while, then from there spend a few weeks in High School only to return to the elementary grades, and so on. If such a public education system were designed to operate that way it would, of course, make no sense to you and you'd never advocate for it. Yet so many Bible students think it is entirely different when studying, and trying to make proper sense of, God's Word. Step by step, beginning in Genesis 1:1, God leads us through a long and logical learning process that first introduces us to the most basic of principles, and then in time adds nuance and context, and then next introduces some other but more complex principles, and eventually at the end of our journey brings us to a culmination and conclusion in Revelation. A logical and orderly process.

We would not attempt to learn Trigonometry without first knowing how to multiply and do long division, otherwise it would be a mostly fruitless endeavor that may teach us something about the math of trig, but we'll never be able to use it as meant because we won't understand the underlying fundamentals and thus can't properly apply it. In the end, we are guaranteed to arrive at wrong answers. Yet, it's one thing to get a math question wrong, but quite another to get a biblical principle wrong.

Now, I say that somewhat tongue-in-cheek because I know the majority of you will nod your heads in agreement with me and then will go home and start skipping around the Bible, anyway. So, that necessitates me having to spend time talking about some of these principles that were lightly touched or skipped over altogether in your personal studies, and so seem new to you in Malachai. That's not necessarily a bad thing, and by no means am I intending to upbraid you for it. But I promise you that those who have diligently gone through the Bible, from the beginning, in a step-by-step orderly way are going to get far more from it than you who haven't. Therefore, our march through Malachai is going to be pretty measured and deliberate.

The last time we were together, we spent much effort on the matter of the opening verse of Malachai that literary academics call a superscription, and how the key word of this opening verse is variously translated. The CJB says:

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

Other Bible versions call what is coming, instead of prophecy, a burden, an oracle, or an utterance. The reason it is important to discern which of these possibilities is correct is because it will set the tone and context for understanding and applying the content of the entire message of Malachai. And, I told you that I have no doubt the proper English word that ought to be used is a rather negative and weighty one: "burden". We must never underplay the importance of a superscription. While I doubt I'd get the *entire* universe of Bible scholars to agree with me, I contend that the opening words of the Book of Genesis are, and so ought to be taken as, a superscription rather than part of the main body of content. Those familiar words are:

**CJB Genesis 1:1** ***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.***

Since the function of a superscription is to identify the author, and to set the context and tone for all that follows, what could be more superscript in form and intent than establishing that the Universe had a beginning (something that

only within the past few decades have scientists finally agreed is true), and that God existed before that, and that it was He that brought everything into existence. After the superscription, there is a sort of built-in pause, and then the content or story or narrative begins. If we skip Genesis or don't understand that verse 1 is essentially a superscription, then we can head off in an unintended direction. If we go immediately to some other later Bible book, then we lose the needed background for all Scripture that Genesis and its superscription gives to us. Most pastors typically tell brand new Christians to go directly to the Gospel accounts of the New Testament. That is a grievous error, and it causes all kinds of confusion and misunderstandings, because the most valuable and pertinent contextual background of all biblical content goes missing: the superscription for the entire Bible.

After the Malachai verse 1 superscription, we moved to verse 2 where the body of the prophetic content begins. It brings a most important element to all that is said and warned in Malachai: God says to Israel: "I love you". Simple, right? Hardly. Here's something that requires some deep thought and background study to actually understand. From God's viewpoint, what is love? And I have to tell you that Constantinian Christianity, that is based entirely on Greek culture and thought, has it wrong. That view is that God is nothing but love, and that as far as concerns human love towards God, and perhaps even God's love towards us, that love is primarily based on mutual warm affection. I won't go through all we covered in our previous lesson except to say that over and over in the Scriptures, God is abundantly clear that the ONLY thing He accepts as love towards Him is our obedience to His laws and commands. All else matters little to nothing. We can feel total affection to a beloved pet; or to a child; or to a spouse and call it "love". That's all well and good. But, such "love" is rejected by God as the form of reciprocal love that He expects from us in return for Him loving us.

Concluding last week's lesson, we took on the very difficult final words of verse 2 and beginning words of verse 3 that, when strung together, say: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated". Here we have a major biblical principle appear that we must deal with before we go any farther. We're told the astounding fact that the God of love can also "hate". I also demonstrated to you that "hate" is

not a mistranslation. It is found in the oldest extant Biblical scroll fragments. It is correct and it is virtually universal in all Bible translations.

Further, we discussed how anger and hate are from the same cloth. They are tied together, and that is why the Bible will often use hate and anger as a kind of connected expression in various narratives. And, finally, we dispelled the false narrative that while the Father of the Old Testament speaks of hate and anger as legitimate, the Jesus of the New Testament doesn't. Except in the New Testament, we read Yeshua say:

**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."***

So, does all this mean that God and Yeshua are hateful? Clearly there are people and objects that merit their or our hate. But in what sense are we to understand this? We read more about that topic in Isaiah 1, Amos 5, in Proverbs 6, and in several other places in the Bible. As Kaiser says, **"Hate can be a proper emotion for disavowing, differentiating, and espousing its opposite... love. Only one who has truly loved can understand how it is possible to hate with a burning anger all that is wrong and evil"**.

I generally agree with him, yet I think we need to be quite cautious in trying to create an actual parallel between the emotion of hatred in humans, and the reaction or condition of hatred in God. While we can use the historical reality of Jacob and Esau to explain hate, or even to then extend that to the biblical comment that Jacob loved his wife Rachel but hated his other wife Leah, we need to confine those examples each to their own sphere. That is, one to the sphere of humanity and the other to the sphere of the divine. God does NOT harbor psychological hatred and anger, or even (as so many commentators insist) that God uses love and hate as a means to rank His preferences, or as comparing preferences. As concerns God, I think a far better English word to help us understand the most usual sense of God's kind of hate as we find it in Scripture is "rejection". Such as God rejects evil, but embraces good. He rejected Esau, but He embraced Jacob. I also think that God's hate often more resembles the concept of love and hate within the realm of the political sense

of it. That is, in biblical political terms, and even up through the Middle Ages and on to today where a few monarchies still exist, to hate one's king means to reject his authority or to not offer your loyalty, and to love one's king is to accept his authority and therefore to show allegiance to him. Therefore, within that political sense of love and hate, it is appropriate to say that God showed allegiance to Jacob but He rejected Esau, because Jacob showed allegiance to God, but Esau rejected God as his king. We'll take that a little deeper.

We talked last week about the concept and type of love that is called covenant love. I realize that we'll never find that term or expression in the Holy Scriptures. But, we have to come up with some vocabulary term to help to label and explain the various kinds and circumstances of love that we find in the Bible, and so I'm choosing "covenant love" for this particular kind. Covenant love is a kind of love based on an actual covenant that is made between two parties. This kind of love is based on the fundamental term and condition of all covenants: reciprocal love. That is, in covenant love God gives love to the other party and in return expects love back. If God does not get that returned love, then He can "hate" those who refuse. That is, He can "reject" those who refuse to honor this basic understanding of a covenant because that refusal to give reciprocal love essentially breaks the covenant bond or at least excludes that person from the benefits and terms of the covenant, thus placing them outside of the covenant.

Taking that one step further, for a person who wants no part of the covenant God made, but that person has the liberty to take part if they chose to, within covenant love/hate vocabulary God considers that person as someone who hates Him. So, the very essence of covenant involves a situation of the obligation of mutual love. I'm sorry to say that, once again, Church doctrine in many cases has created a non-biblical fantasy that the dynamic of God's covenant love to humans happens regardless of if we reciprocate or not. But what about the bulk of humanity who is not part of that covenant? Then the reality of covenant love for them doesn't exist; rather it is covenant hate. Thus, this principle of covenant hate would apply more to those who are NOT God worshippers, and who are NOT followers of Yeshua, because they have not ever signed on to God's covenants in the first place. But, Believers claim

they *have* signed on to God's covenant. And that covenant requires reciprocal love.

As I pointed out a few moments ago, Yeshua put that same proposition to all those who would follow Him. If a person is not willing to reject (to hate) their own beloved family (if necessary) in order to have allegiance (to love) Him, then He won't let him/her be His disciple. They don't get His covenant love. Loyalty to Yeshua must be above one's family and it must be active. Thus, as I quoted from Kaiser last week, where we get hung up in this issue of God's love, hate, and anger is in our wrong definitions or false mental pictures of those words. And, to my thinking, these wrong definitions result from our propensity to believe that God's reactions or emotions (if one wants to call it that) are to be equated with our own, because too much God is viewed as but a Super-human.

What I have just explained may have some heads spinning. Yet, in reality it is basic and simple. It is all quite logical and rational. The problem is that religious doctrine has complicated matters, by teaching some irrational things about God's love and hate that make no sense, but it can have the effect of making us feel better about who we are and who God is or as we would prefer He is.

Let's look even closer now at this issue of Jacob and Esau. Genesis 25 tells us that God had foreknowledge of what the unborn babies inside of Rebecca's womb would become.

**CJB Genesis 25:23** *...**"There are two nations in your womb. From birth they will be two rival peoples. One of these peoples will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."***

The "why" of it, however, is not really explained; only the outcome. Why is the younger getting the attention, and the older getting the shaft? Paul seeks to fill in that blank with what he says in Romans 9:

**CJB Romans 9:10-13** ***<sup>10</sup> And even more to the point is the case of Rivkah; for both her children were conceived in a single act with***

***Yitz'chak, our father; <sup>11</sup> and before they were born, before they had done anything at all, either good or bad (so that God's plan might remain a matter of his sovereign choice, not dependent on what they did, but on God, who does the calling), <sup>12</sup> it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." <sup>13</sup> This accords with where it is written, "Ya'akov I loved, but Esav I hated."***

Paul was dealing with the sticky issue of election. So, first of all, what Paul was doing was drawing upon Malachai, and then making a midrash about what we read in Malachai 1 verses 1 and 2 to validate a point about the concept of God's actions of choice and election. And Paul claims that it was not only that God knew beforehand what Jacob and Esau would do and become, it is that while they were still in the womb, God CHOSE Jacob for one destiny and Esau for a different destiny. This gets awfully personal, doesn't it? Mothers, if you were carrying twins, would you like to believe that even before they were born, God had already decided their futures... and that it was unchangeable? And that He would love one of your children but hate the other? He would embrace one but reject the other? This is tough stuff to deal with.

Not surprisingly, this has brought about a big split in Church opinion and doctrine, with some denominations believing in election as meaning God predetermining each human's destiny prior to their birth. And, other denominations of course rejecting such a doctrine. The proponents say that the Bible clearly says God predetermines who will be loved and saved versus who will be hated (rejected) and marked for eternal destruction. The opponents say that cannot be, because all those who believe in predestination are but interpreting the Bible in order to inject or validate the Greek philosophy of the divine Fates determining every person's life, and therefore one should accept whatever lot you were born into and whatever way your life goes as being totally out of your hands. But, let's look a little closer at what Paul said. He said that the result of God's choice of Jacob meant that Esau (the firstborn from the womb) was to serve the younger (Jacob), which is a complete reversal of Hebrew... and all Middle Eastern... cultural tradition in this regard. That, in itself, was hugely shocking to the Hebrews! The typical way that many Christian scholars have looked at this is that Paul is saying that God predetermined that He would have emotional and psychological love and



affection towards Jacob, in a show of some kind of divine bigotry, and conversely God would have emotional and psychological hatred of Esau, simply because God can. Why does much of the Church teach and believe this? I contend it is because of attempting to incorrectly assign the same definitions of love and hate to both God and man.

Let's back-up for a moment. I have told you that we need to understand this scenario of Jacob and Esau (love and hate) in terms of covenant love. That is, when it comes to the concept of God loving Jacob (Israel), it is by means of the agency of the covenant He made first with Abraham, then passing it on through Isaac, then it being picked up by Jacob. And then this led to another covenant (not a replacement, but a new and additional one) that He made with the descendants of Jacob at Mt. Sinai, using Moses as its agent and mediator. So, God's relationship of love towards the Hebrew people was entirely based on the covenants God made with them. Thus, from the ancient Hebrew perspective, the Hebrew word for love, which is **ahab**, is being used in this situation as a covenant term and it automatically includes the act of divine election. The Hebrew word for hate, **sane**, is also used sometimes as part of ancient covenant language and vocabulary, and in that same context it denotes those who are NOT in covenant relationship with God and thus do NOT receive His covenant love. God elected (chose) Jacob to be that agent of a covenant relationship with Him, but He did NOT choose Esau to be the agent of that covenant relationship with Him.

Let's take this further yet, because we are dealing with one of the most important principles and issues in the Bible and we need to get it as right as we can. As it was in those ancient times, and in accordance with God's long-range plan of Redemption, only ONE person could carry on as the instrument or agent through which the covenant with Abraham was to be carried on. It was no different with Jacob and Esau's father, Isaac. God chose Isaac over Ishmael. And going back to Abraham, God chose this one person over all other humans, with whom to make this covenant. I'm way too uncomfortable with supposing that we humans are going to figure out God's exact criteria for making the particular plan of Redemption the way that He did, and for choosing Abraham, then Isaac, and then Jacob as agents of that covenant, as He did.



Even though God chose Jacob instead of Esau to be the agent of the Abrahamic covenant for the next generation, never did this mean that Esau was prohibited or prevented from signing on to what that covenant promised by being a member of the covenant. Being part of, or not being part of, the covenant with Abraham was purely Esau's free will choice. Esau could have signed on to the covenant, served his twin brother Jacob as God said he was to do, and lived firmly anchored to God's love. But, instead, Esau chose the path of rebellion. He refused to be a servant to his covenant agent brother, and so refused to have anything to do with the covenant. Thus, on the one hand God did indeed predetermine that Jacob and not Esau would be the next leader and agent of the Abrahamic Covenant, but God did NOT predetermine Esau's future by barring him from participating in the covenant. Esau determined that for himself. He decided he was going to be the leader and agent or he would serve no one except himself, and so Esau struck out and developed his own nation of people called Edom, based on their own gods, ethics, morality, and laws.

I readily admit that we could continue for much more time discussing the fascinating depths of divine love and hate and anger versus human love, hate, and anger (and I could probably write a book on the subject in order to adequately cover it all) but we won't do that. We'll leave the topic for now, assume that at least its principles are understood and established, and move on.

Let's re-read chapter 1 beginning with verse 3.

#### **RE-READ MALACHAI CHAPTER 1:3 – end**

As evidence of God's election of Jacob over Esau to be the next agent of God's covenant with the Hebrews, this verse explains that Edom suffered the desolation of its lands and the wasting of an otherwise good inheritance (Esau, Hor, Edom, and Seir are all interchangeable terms that are used in the Bible to point to the nation that Esau spawned). The residents of Edom were naturally called Edomites in the Bible, and they occupied an area that bordered on the southeastern edge of the Dead Sea. A very ancient nation, it existed before

Israel. But, once Israel came into being, generally the two nations remained peaceful, each recognizing their common family heritage. This changed about the time Israel anointed their first king... Saul. At that point, the norm between the 2 nations changed to unrest and war, with King David eventually defeating the Edomites at the Valley of Salt.

Judah controlled Edom from then until the time of King Jehoram (around 850 B.C.) when Edom successfully rebelled, and re-established their own sovereignty. But, in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Edom aligned with Babylon to help them sack Jerusalem, and later Babylon turned the tables and took over Edom. Sometime around the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the Nabateans (who were Arab in heritage) overpowered Edom and took control. By sometime in the mid to late 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the Nabateans destroyed Edom once and for all. They actually replaced Edom with a nation of a new name: Idumea.

Whatever Edomites remained either lived in Idumea or through a long period of assimilation through intermarriage were absorbed into the Nabatean people. These are the people who built and made the incredible rock city of Petra their capital.

Thus, this destruction of Edom was probably in progress at the time Malachai wrote. When history records these wars and destructions, it sounds as though they were confined in time to specific dates and compact time frames; not so. In reality, in that era these wars and battles could go on for years, if not decades, before the final outcome happened. So, the Jews were aware, if not witnesses, to what was happening to Edom, and thus this was used by God as a most dramatic and fresh proof of how He demonstrated His love for Jacob (Israel) but hated Esau (Edom) and what that amounted to. After all, the Jews of Judah were back home even if it was now a province of Persia called Yehud. And, the people who were expressly non-covenant people who came from Esau (the nation of Edom) had come to an end that Judah did not have to suffer. So, what are the Jews to draw from this according to Malachai? Very simply it was God saying to watch out! If I did this to Edom because they took themselves outside of the covenant, I can certainly do it to you, too, for the same reason. I'll say again: on what grounds might God decide to do to Israel

what He did to Edom? On the grounds that the Jews (and mostly at the fault of the Levite Priesthood) were falling so far short of their required reciprocal covenant love to Yehoveh (which by definition meant obedience to His Torah), that at some point God might classify the Jews in the same non-covenant light as He classified the Edomites, and so, they would suffer the same kind of destructive catastrophe.

I'll be so bold as to reiterate a warning that we find given by Yeshua's own biological brother, that we find in a book of the New Testament, because it takes this same principle about covenant love and demonstrates that nothing about it changed because of the advent of Yeshua.

**CJB James 2:14-24** ***<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith but has no actions to prove it? Is such "faith" able to save him? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food, <sup>16</sup> and someone says to him, "Shalom! Keep warm and eat hearty!" without giving him what he needs, what good does it do? <sup>17</sup> Thus, faith by itself, unaccompanied by actions, is dead. <sup>18</sup> But someone will say that you have faith and I have actions. Show me this faith of yours without the actions, and I will show you my faith by my actions! <sup>19</sup> You believe that "God is one"? Good for you! The demons believe it too- the thought makes them shudder with fear! <sup>20</sup> But, foolish fellow, do you want to be shown that such "faith" apart from actions is barren? <sup>21</sup> Wasn't Avraham avinu declared righteous because of actions when he offered up his son Yitz'chak on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that his faith worked with his actions; by the actions the faith was made complete; <sup>23</sup> and the passage of the Tanakh was fulfilled which says, "Avraham had faith in God, and it was credited to his account as righteousness." He was even called God's friend. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is declared righteous because of actions and not because of faith alone.***

Of course, nothing could be further from what Constantinian Christianity teaches. And, this is why the Book of James was taken in and out of Christian Bibles for century after century since the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

Ah, but says Edom in verse 4: we're not going to worry about that destruction, we'll just rebuild. To which Yehoveh responds with "not on your best day". Actually, it says: "They can build, but I will demolish". Edom, even during and after the slow-moving Nabatean disaster, retained their arrogant pride and tone-deaf confidence that they would be able to rebuild everything back to where it used to be based upon their own industrious determination. The problem was, the ultimate cause of their destruction was not the Nabateans but rather that God was against them for refusing to sign on to the covenant, and thus serving Israel as they were supposed to do. Not serving in the sense of being slaves, but serving in the same sense that we, today, speak about serving the Kingdom of God. Thus, for them to even try to rebuild Edom would be an effort of futility because God would prevent it. In fact, says Yehoveh, henceforth the former Edom will be known as the Land of Wickedness. Men will know that their humiliating desolation is at the hand of God, and it is for Edom's unrepentant sins and covenant hate that it occurred. There is a point that God's judgment of hate (rejection) can go from being repairable to permanent. Edom's became permanent.

Sort of buried in plain sight in this verse is the intent of God calling Himself Yehoveh of Hosts. Inherent in that concept of "hosts" is that Yehoveh is not a god that can be controlled or fenced-in by national boundaries, as was the traditional and virtually universal belief in all god systems in that era. His presence can be anywhere and everywhere. His power is not subservient to national gods or borders, and His power can be projected everywhere all at once. This is a kind of ancient way of expressing the universality of God. This is said explicitly in the next verse:

**CJB Malachai 1:5 *<sup>5</sup> You will see it and say, 'Yehoveh is great, even beyond the borders of Isra'el.'***

As we move on to verse 6, the second burden against Israel begins, and it is directly and specifically against the Levitical priests.

**CJB Malachi 1:6 *"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 cohanim (priests) who despise my name. You ask, 'How are we despising your name?'***

This second burden continues through the end of chapter 1, and it is God accusing the Levitical Priesthood as not being authentic. It is the fashion today for the current and younger generations to blame the previous generations for being greedy, deceitful, selfish, and generally insincere. This has morphed into a massive societal distrust of virtually all of our institutions from our public schools, to all levels of government, to law enforcement, to businesses, and especially to the Church. And frankly, there is a measure of validity to this accusation that cannot be denied.

I'll again quote Kaiser, because he, too, sees this and has an excellent response to the accusation and how it relates to this second burden of Malachai.

**This (reality) will not excuse us for not heeding the divine call to an authenticity that exceeds all current fashions, slogans, or eddies of our day. There is indeed a credibility gap, but is not located primarily in the news releases of our governments or in the mass media or in the advertisements of big businesses. To be sure, these all have their problems; but even more basic is the issue of credibility and the authenticity gap of the clergy; for as so go the clergy, so goes the people.**

That is harsh, hard hitting, and absolutely true. And, it is what God is saying through Malachai to the "clergy" of Israel, the Levite priests. What is sort of ironic and sarcastically comical, is that by the long-established mindset of the Church, I suppose we could call God an Israel-basher or a Hebrew faith basher because of what He is saying in this second burden. That is, it isn't considered very nice of God to be so highly critical of a religious organization that insists it represents Him and is all about Him. I, and a growing group of others in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, have found ourselves in a similar boat. We accuse the Church of not being truthful or authentic, and thus we are dismissed as little more than angry Church-bashers. And, yet, when the Levitical Priesthood and the Church is held up to the light of day via God's Holy Scriptures, the truth of our

accusation is validated. But who wants to hear it? God, and human followers of Christ, are supposed to be nice and not judgmental, and so to say such things out loud just isn't to be done.

Here's the bottom line: a very sacred trust had been given to the Levitical Priesthood through Moses' brother Aharon, to teach the people the Law of Moses... which is sometimes called the Law of God in the Bible. They had completely failed. Therefore, the people were led astray for the lack of TRUE knowledge of God. This same sacred trust has been handed to those followers of Yeshua who proclaim themselves as the gentile replacement of the Levite Priesthood: the Church government and clergy, in all its many branches and forms. It too has failed to teach God's Word, and in doing so has broken that trust. The result is millions upon millions have been led astray. We'll pause here and continue with the second burden, next time.