

There are six disputations in Malachi.

Each disputation begins with an assertion from the LORD,
the expected challenge from the accused (“But you say...”),
and the LORD’s answer – through his prophet –
vindicating God’s actions and warning of his judgment
against those who oppose him.

Let’s take a moment and see how this all works together:

The first assertion is here in verse 2:

“I have loved you, says the LORD.”

The question – the challenge – is in verse 2 as well:

“But you say, ‘How have you loved us?’”

And then the LORD answers with the story of Jacob and Esau.

The second assertion comes in verse 6:

where God claims that the priests despise his name.

The question, at the end of verse 6,

“But you say, How have we despised your name?”

And God answers by pointing out the worship errors of the priests and people.

The third assertion comes in 2:10-12 –

where God claims that Judah has been faithless

because they have intermarried with those who worship other gods.

The question of 2:14 is why does God not accept our offerings?

And God answers because you have divorced the wife of your youth.

The fourth assertion comes in 2:17 –

where God claims that Judah has wearied the LORD with their words –

and so they ask “How have we wearied him?”

and God replies that they have wearied him

by saying that God delights in those who do evil.

The fifth assertion comes in 3:6 –

where God asserts that Israel has not kept his statutes – and calls them to return,

and so they ask, How shall we return?

And God accuses them of robbing him –

and so they ask, “How have we robbed you?”

and God replies that they have withheld their tithes and contributions

again returning to the theme of worship.

The sixth and final assertion comes in 3:13 –
where God asserts that Israel’s words have been hard against the LORD,
and so they ask, “How have we spoken against you?”
and God replies, “You have said, it is vain to serve God”

Each of these six assertions end with a warning of judgment.

- 1st Chapter 1, verse 4 speaks of God’s judgment against Edom.
- 2nd Chapter 2, verses 1-6 warn that God’s curse is coming upon the priests.
- 3rd Chapter 2, verse 16 is more implicit – if a man covers his garment with violence,
that only implies what God will do to him...
- 4th Chapter 3, verse 5 says that God will draw near in judgment against sorcerers, adulterers, etc
- 5th Chapter 3, verse 10-12 promises blessing to the one who is faithful
(and a rebuke to the devourer)
- 6th Chapter 4, verse 1-3 speak of the coming judgment against the wicked
and blessing for those who fear the LORD.

It’s also worth noting that the second and fifth assertions each have a double “but you say” –
suggesting that there is a chiasmic structure to the whole book.

The book opens with a declaration of God’s love for his people –
and ends with a promise of blessing for those who fear him –
and judgment for those who oppose him.

The 2nd and 5th disputations focus on worship.
And the central disputations (the 3rd and 4th) focus on the moral and ethical lapses of the people.

1. The Oracle of the Word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi (v1)

The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

We don’t really know anything about Malachi.

His name means “my messenger” – which is a fitting name for a prophet!
We don’t know exactly when he prophesied –
but from the connection

Zechariah ends with two oracles –
the oracle concerning the nations and Israel (ch 9-11),
and the oracle concerning Israel (and the nations) (ch 12-14).

Malachi consists of one oracle that follows up on Zechariah.

The Minor Prophets are sometimes called “the Book of the Twelve” –
and were sometimes treated as a single book.

Part of the reason for that is because there are all sorts of interesting connections between the 12.
Together, the Book of the Twelve shows us God’s message to Israel through his servants.

“the prophets give us this great scope of how God expects his people to live in the land that he has given them, the message that he intends them to take to the nations and how he expects all nations to live before him. So they tell us about truth. They also tell us about love and hope, as we look not only to the day of the Lord and the removal of sin from the earth, but we look to the salvation that will come through that day, through the Messiah; and we can look forward to the time when God will put his people in Zion with him in the absence of sin, suffering, sorrow, and death, forever.” (House)

<https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/book-twelve-2/understanding-old-testament/paul-house>

And so we come to God’s first assertion:

2. Jacob and Esau – A Twin Study in Contrasts (v2-4)

² *“I have loved you,” says the LORD.*

This is the first thing that God wants to say to his people.

“I have loved you.”

I know – sometimes it may not feel like it.

Indeed, that is the initial question:

But you say, “How have you loved us?”

It’s okay to ask that question!

It’s okay to come to God with your questions –

when you wonder – *does God* really love me?

How has he loved us?

When you come to God in faith – you can ask him anything!

Obviously, if you come to him in unbelief – if you come to him in rebellion –
then your questions will themselves be an act of unbelief and rebellion.

But you can always come in faith – you can come to God saying,

“God, I know that you are God, and I am not –

so can you remind me –

‘how have you loved us?’”

“Is not Esau Jacob's brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob³ but Esau I have hated.

Jacob and Esau were twins.
God loved Jacob, but Esau he hated.

What does that mean?
Let's take a moment to retrace the story of Jacob and Esau.

The first point is simple:
Before Jacob and Esau were born –
God chose Jacob to be the one who would receive the covenant blessing.

In Genesis 25, Rebekah conceives twins – and she felt a struggle within her.
And she inquired of the LORD, and the LORD said,
“Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you^[c] shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the older shall serve the younger.” (25:23)
In other words, before the twins were born,
God had determined that Esau would serve Jacob.

At its most basic sense, then,
this is the meaning of “I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated.”

It's not because Esau was so wicked.
Before the twins were born – before they had done good or evil –
Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have hated.

Paul makes that point in Romans 9:13.

God had set his electing love on Jacob – so that Jacob would be heir of the promise.

I think that is the easy part.
It's easy to see how God loved Jacob by giving him the promised blessing of Abraham!

But what does it mean for Esau to be “hated”?
The word ‘hate’ can have a range of meanings.
Jesus will say that unless a man hates his father, mother, wife, children, etc.
he cannot be Jesus' disciple!
In other words, following Jesus must always be the chief and highest priority.

If anything else gets in the way of Jesus, it's gotta go!!

So in the same way that God's *love* for Jacob means his choosing Jacob to be his people,
so also his *hatred* of Esau means his rejection of Esau –
not any sort of personal animosity.

For evidence of this, consider how Deuteronomy speaks of Esau:

In Dt 2:5, God warns Israel not to contend with the Edomites (the descendants of Esau),
“because I have given Mt. Seir to Esau as a possession.”

And Dt 23:7 says, “You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother.”

Think of how this played out in the lives of Jacob and Esau.

Rebekah had believed God's promise.

She had heard the Word of the LORD that the older would serve the younger.

So when she saw that her husband was about to bless Esau –

in other words, when she saw that her husband

was walking *contrary* to the Word of the LORD –

she acted in faith because she believed the Word of the LORD.

We often hear that Jacob was greedy and grasping –

and that is why he bartered for the birthright, and then “stole” the blessing.

But think about what he gets when he gets the blessing!

What was the blessing?

The blessing of Abraham.

What had God said to Abraham?

Your descendants will be enslaved for 400 years –

but then I will bring them back to this land.

In other words, Jacob would have *known*

that he would never personally inherit the land.

Why would he go to such lengths to get a promise – a blessing –

that would give him no personal benefit?

Because he believed God's promises!

He believed the gospel.

You might say, “Whoa! Wait a second –

didn't the birthright mean that Jacob would receive a double portion

of the inheritance from Isaac?”

In theory – yes.

But in practice?

When Jacob returns to the promised Land,

Esau leaves for Mt. Seir – *and takes all of Isaac's property with him!*

Jacob doesn't care about the property – he doesn't care about the *stuff*.

He wants the blessing and promises of God.

What about Esau?

Esau's decisions *all* point to a desire for stuff and status.
When Jacob offered him a bowl of stew for his birthright,
Esau demonstrated that he despised his birthright.
What's the point of a promise that I will never enjoy?
Sure, he's angry about Jacob "stealing" his blessing –
not because he wants the blessing of *God* –
but because he wants the stuff and status of the firstborn.

When Jacob returns to the Promised Land,
Jacob makes it clear that he will not enforce his "claim" to the birthright.
Esau gets to take all the stuff.

Jacob even offers him presents!

What does Jacob get?
Jacob gets the land!
Esau moves to Seir and vacates the Promised Land.
But of course, the Promised Land is currently occupied by Canaanites!
So what does Jacob get?
The burial plot of Abraham.
Jacob gets *nothing* for himself – except a blessing for his distant descendants.

Think about that!
The promise had been that the older will serve the younger.
But when Jacob returns to the Land, he bows before Esau –
and *five times* he calls Esau, "my Lord."
In that way, Jacob prefigures our Lord Jesus as he *humbles himself*.
The promise is that the older will serve the younger –
but Jacob does not assert his prerogatives!
Think of Jesus who did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped...
Jacob says to *Esau*, "I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God,
and you have accepted me."

In other words, in the time of Moses, and throughout the early years of Israel,
Edom was considered a brother –
the Edomites were to be treated with brotherly kindness.
Of course, by the time of the prophets, there is a very different tone!
Jeremiah 49:8 says, "I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him,
the time when I will punish him."
The prophet Obadiah consists of one chapter –

and the whole chapter is a prophecy of the coming destruction of Edom!
“There shall be no survivor for the house of Esau, for the LORD has spoken” (18)

Why is this?

Well, the roots of it go back to the time of Moses,
when Edom refused to let the people of Israel pass through their land (Num 20).
The Edomites don't appear very hostile during the days of Joshua or the Judges –
but in Saul's day you start to hear rumblings that Edom is causing trouble.
David and Solomon were able to subdue Edom –
thus fulfilling what Isaac had said about how “the older would serve the younger,”
but in later years, the Edomites revolted –
they refused to accept the blessing of Jacob.

Think of it this way:

if Edom had been content to serve Jacob,
then they would have been included in the salvation of the nations!
But because Edom refused – because they were proud and insisted that *they* be first –
they fell under God's wrath and curse.

*I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.”⁴ 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.’”*

If Edom had repented – if they had yielded to the will of God –
and if they had humbled themselves before God,
then the story of Edom would have been very different!

In one sense, I totally get it.

On our vacation this summer, we met the younger brother of a very famous man.
It is galling for him to live forever in the shadow of his famous brother.
He's tired of always being known as the ‘little brother’ –
and he is certainly an interesting enough person in his own right! –
but his older brother is famous!

How would Edom respond to having his *younger* brother become the famous one?
How should the older brother respond when God has ‘loved’ Jacob?

The proper response is to give thanks to God!
God has provided a way of salvation through my little brother!

But how well do we *thank God* for the gifts and graces given to others?
When *someone else* has what we want –
we tend to covet –

we tend to think that *we* could do better than they have done!

Maybe there were some Edomites who got it –
but in general the sons of Esau rebelled against the idea of serving their younger brother!

And that is why:

⁴ *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.’”*

If a people is hostile to the gospel – if people refuse to obey Jesus –
then all their efforts to rebuild will be in vain!

This is the promise of the LORD of Hosts.

Notice that until this point, Malachi has used the name “LORD” – or Yahweh.

But now he says “LORD of hosts.”

Each name of God seems to have its own particular story behind it.

“God Almighty” – El Shaddai – was the name of God associated with the call of Abraham.

“The LORD” – Yahweh – is the name associated particularly with the Exodus.

“LORD of Hosts” – Yahweh Sabaoth – is a name used most commonly here after the exile.

While you find it used periodically earlier in Israel’s history,

LORD of Hosts becomes more and more common

until here in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

it is the most common name used for God.

In other books of the Bible you might find “Lord of Hosts” used occasionally –

but rarely more than once per chapter.

In Haggai and Zechariah it is used every 3-4 verses.

And here in Malachi it occurs in almost every other *verse* –

“says the LORD of hosts...says the LORD of hosts...says the LORD of hosts...”

Why is this so important?

Because after the exile, Judah was really tiny.

After the exile, Judah was powerless.

Judah had no army to speak of.

Against the hosts of Persia – the hosts of Greece – the hosts of Rome –

Judah would be helpless.

They needed to remember that their God was the LORD *of hosts* –

he doesn’t need his people to field a massive army!

The hosts of heaven obey him –

and indeed, as we see over and over throughout history –

even the armies of earth are at his command!

And this is just as important for us!

We may feel small and unimportant.

We may feel as though we are helpless against all our foes!

But our God is the LORD of Hosts.

He has all the hosts of heaven at his command –

and he governs even the armies of earth.

And he exemplifies this in the subsequent history of the Edomites.

The Edomites were driven out of Edom – away from Mt. Seir.

They settled in southern Judah

(this is part of the reason why the prophets are so upset with them!).

They displaced Jews and took over their land!

So in Malachi's day, the Edomites would have been very close neighbors –
and they would have been thinking about when *they* could 'go home'
and rebuild the ruins.

And Malachi's answer is *no*, you can't go home.

If you are willing to stay in Judah and become part of God's people –
then you will be saved.

If you insist on 'going home' – and running away from God –
then God will tear you down.

I've had some people ask me,

"Is God angry with me?"

It is always tempting to say, "Oh, no! of course not!!"

But before you go there, you first need to ask,

"Have you repented of your sin?"

Have you turned away from your sin and turned to Jesus?

Are you seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness?

Or are you seeking first your own kingdom and your own righteousness?

Because if you are seeking first your own kingdom –

then *yes, God is angry with you!*

And God will tear down your kingdom –

because you are building your kingdom in rebellion against His Son!

3. The Lesson for Those Who See: Great Is the LORD Beyond the Border of Israel

(v5)

⁵ *Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel!"*

When you see the judgment of God against the nations –
when you see the way that God tears down those who oppose him –
it should cause you to declare that the LORD is great – he is powerful –
he is mighty!

The LORD – he is God!

He is God – not just of your spiritual life –
He is the God of *all of life*.
He is God