

## Malachi 1:1-5

### Introduction

How can we know that God really loves us?

Where is the evidence for that statement when you find yourself wrestling with discouragement or in profound physical distress or deep spiritual turmoil?

### Summary

**In Malachi 1:1-5, the Lord declares his love for His people and responds to their challenge of “how so?”**

#### 1. Prophetic Disputation vv. 1-3

The Lord's opening declaration is 'I have loved you', which Israel immediately challenges with the question, 'In what way have you loved us?'

**The Lord's response to their question may be surprising to us**, centering as it does on the contrast between the Lord's attitude to Jacob and Esau. This pattern of election was not based on anything in the boys' behavior, but rather on the Lord's sovereign election of the one, Jacob, and the rejection of the other, Esau.

'Love' in this context is not an emotional feeling, but rather a covenantal term that expresses the behavior that flows out of a committed relationship.

'Hate' is the antonym of love and, like the latter, it is a covenantal term that includes the behavior that flows from a rejection of relationship.

The Lord's electing love takes his people safely through their trials and sanctifies them through that means, while those who are 'not elect' experience no such intervention in their lives (**Heb. 12:5-6**).

This was exactly the experience of Malachi's generation. In contrast, unloved Esau's descendants were now facing a destruction from which there would be no return.

#### 2. Sovereign Election vv. 4-5

**The backdrop for this prophecy is Ezekiel 35-36**, which contains a prophecy against Edom and also contains a promise that the Lord would cleanse Israel of their sins, return them to their homeland and rebuild the ruins.

The Lord's election, both for blessing and curse, is irrevocable.

Yet His election is not arbitrary. Like their forefather Esau, those whom God has not chosen, do not secretly long to be included among the elect; on the contrary, they are content to live their entire lives without reference to God or his righteousness.

When it becomes clear that this distinction between those whom God has chosen and those whom he has passed over is not based on anything in them, the result is not pride and boasting on the part of God's chosen ones, but astonishment and praise that acknowledges God's universal greatness.

How amazing is our salvation, and how great is the grace of our God!

### Application

How do you know whether God really loves you?

When you find yourself tempted to doubt, compare your situation with that of those whom the Lord does not love, and you will soon see the difference.

God's grace is not based on our works, but solely on predestining love, which is itself based on God's sovereign choice. This not only explains God's continuing grace to his own people, Israel, when Edom is cut off for their sins, but also the fact that in Jesus Christ God's grace comes ultimately to the Gentiles themselves.

To be 'not chosen' by God is to be destined for eternal destruction: the non-elect are Vessels of wrath' (**Rom. 9:22**).

God's implacable hatred of Edom is the proof of his undeniable love for Israel, for whom even severe judgement is not terminal but a purifying fire.

The real question that the passage poses is not, 'How can God hate Esau?'; it is, 'How can God continue to love Jacob, in the light of his ongoing rebellion and covenant-breaking?' The answer that the New Testament shows us is that his enduring faithful commitment to his people is possible because the destruction that we deserved has been poured out on Christ in our place.

God's sovereign election is not an abstract idea, but works its way out in redemptive history. Election is election unto life and sanctification, albeit through a slow and tortuous process in which we never outgrow our need for grace, whilst reprobation simply confirms sinners in their natural sinful tendencies.

It is striking that the prophet begins his message with a reaffirmation of the electing love of God for his people, before he begins to condemn their sins and failures.

If God has been faithful in spite of Israel's repeated covenant-breaking, why have they not been faithful to him? They are left without excuse. In the same way, we frequently blame God's perceived unfaithfulness or unfairness towards us to justify sin in our hearts, but we too are without excuse. God has been faithful to all of his promises.

The goal of electing grace is that God's glory should be made evident before the eyes of his people.

We were created and redeemed to glorify God and enjoy him forever, and the plan of our salvation and sanctification has been distinctly designed with that end in mind.

All is of God, from beginning to end, so that He might receive all the praise that is his due.