

Post-Exile Prophets
JACOB HAVE I LOVED

Tuesday, September 30

Reading: Malachi 1:1-5

Malachi 1:2 *"I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have You loved us?' "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob, **3** but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals."*

It has been about 100 years since the Jewish people had returned from their Babylonian exile. The temple had been rebuilt and life was somewhat getting back to normal. But when God tells them through the prophet Malachi of His love for them, they demand proof! They don't believe in God's love. And so God says, "I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated."

Abraham's son Isaac had twin boys, Esau and Jacob (Genesis 25). Before they were born, God said that the older (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob). These brothers fought for much of their lives. But while Jacob and Esau would reconcile, the nations that sprang from them did not. The Edomites moved south of the Dead Sea and were constant enemies of Israel. The prophet Obadiah describes how the Edomites cheered when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and even turned over those who escaped to the Babylonian army (see also Psalm 137:7 & Ezekiel 35). But Edom did not escape Babylon either. They were conquered and exiled by Nebuchadnezzar around 587 BC, about the same time as Jerusalem fell. While they would return from exile just as the Jewish people did, Edom would gradually be conquered and scattered by a desert tribe known as Nabatean Arabs (Idumeans) between 550-400 BC. These desert people may be alluded to by the "desert jackals" of verse 3. This defeat was in progress as Malachi writes this prophecy. Despite their attempts to rebuild their county, God promised Edom were "a people always under the wrath of God."

What does all this have to do with God's love for Israel (Jacob)? Both Israel and Edom had known the true God, and both had rejected and rebelled against Him. But while Edom was crushed never to regain their power, the Jewish people were loved by God. They would see God's judgment on Edom – a judgment they too deserved – and cry, "Great is the LORD – even beyond the borders of Israel."

Sadly, the people of Malachi's day were oblivious to God's great love. He had chosen them out of all the nations to be His special possession, not because of anything they had done, but because He loved them (Deuteronomy 7:6-10; 10:15). But the people of Jerusalem had become lax in their obedience and worship. So they insolently ask, "How have you loved us?" (Malachi 1:2).

Many churches and Christians today have this same attitude! Worship has become routine with little to no meaning or purpose. They look pious in church on Sunday but live for themselves the rest of the week. We have forgotten about God's great love. Like Israel, we need to remember that God chooses us and loves us, not because we deserved or earned it, but because of God's mercy and love.

Titus 3:4-6 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior