***Malachi 1 The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. 2“I have loved you,” says the Lord. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” Says the Lord. “Yet Jacob I have loved; 3But Esau I have hated, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness.” 4Even though Edom has said, “We have been impoverished, But we will return and build the desolate places,” Thus says the Lord of hosts: “They may build, but I will throw down; They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, And the people against whom the Lord will have indignation forever. 5Your eyes shall see, And you shall say, ‘The Lord is magnified beyond the border of Israel.’***

Tonight, we’ll start a study of the Book of Malachi prophesied by the Prophet Malachi. We’ll look at the background of this book, makes some connections, and cover verses 1-5. Let’s start with the meaning of the name Malachi. It means My Messenger. Unlike many other prophets, we don’t know anything about Malachi’s family lineage or where he comes from. The Book of Malachi is the only place that he is mentioned in the Bible.

This Book is the last book of the Old Testament. It is estimated to have been written around 430 BC. Artaxerxes was the king of Persia at that time. Now, Artaxerxes should sound very familiar to us. He was the son of Xerxes I, better known as Ahasuerus from the book of Esther – Esther’s husband. Theologians agree that it’s unlikely that Artaxerxes was the son of Esther though, but certainly he knew her and this gives us connection.

Being in a time period around 430 BC means that Malachi is prophesying during the time of Nehemiah as well. Well, guess who the king is that allowed Ezra and Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem – that’s right, Artaxerxes. We learn this in Nehemiah 2:1 *And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before.* The 20th year of the king would have been around 444 BC that Nehemiah received permission to return to Jerusalem. He stayed as governor for 12 years. In 432 BC, he returned to Babylon for a short while. When he returned 2 years later (because trips weren’t quick from Jerusalem to Babylon), he found the Temple defiled again and Tobiah, an enemy of the Jews, had a room in back for his comfort. In Nehemiah 13:29-30, Nehemiah says *– Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan. I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each to his service, and to bringing the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed times. Remember me, O my God, for good!* The priests defiled the priesthood and their covenant with God.

That is exactly what we find Malachi talking about as we study this book. He is speaking to the remnant, the people and the priests that should be strongest in their belief. But they have chosen to defile the priesthood and to try to deceive God. Malachi is speaking to people that have convinced themselves that they have a great relationship with God, regardless of their sin, regardless of their violations of covenants. 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 says, referring to those that will not receive the Truth of Jesus in the last days - *And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* People delude themselves into thinking they have a close walk with God, regardless of sin. In John 14:23-24, it says *Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.* Malachi points out the hypocrisy of the people, saying they’re serving while deceiving God, the people, and defiling the altar.

Malachi is the last prophet to speak before what is known as God’s 400 years of silence, the period of time between the Old Testament and the New Testament. From 430 BC, with the warning in Malachi 4:5-6 *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”,*  until around 6 BC with the coming of John the Baptist, no prophecies of God are recorded. Silence. Then, John the Baptist comes – he is the Elijah Malachi speaks of. How do we know? In Matthew 11:13-14, Jesus confirms John the Baptist as the fulfillment when He says, *“For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.”* Folks, it doesn’t get any clearer than that.

God returned His people to Jerusalem, gave them the kings credit account to rebuild the Temple and the walls, raised up leaders like Ezra and Nehemiah, and protected the people from the enemies all around. It is sad how little time it took for the hearts of the people to begin questioning God’s love, while turning away from faithfully following His directives. Sadder still is to know that people don’t change… and I am people… I am weak without the indwelling Holy Spirit.

 Verses 1-3 *The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. 2“I have loved you,” says the Lord. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” Says the Lord. “Yet Jacob I have loved; 3But Esau I have hated, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness.”* ***T****he burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.* The word for burden here means the utterance or prophecy of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. Prophets had the word of the Lord laid heavy on their hearts and they felt compelled to speak this truth. *I have loved you,” says the Lord. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’* The people choose to see their worldly woes and short-term cares instead of seeing what God has done. God has shown His love for the people of Israel and pronounced them chosen. Yet, the people miss it. They reply, “How and where have You loved us?” They miss their blessings because they don’t believe God is truly on their side. They look for worldly signs of a Heavenly God. And again, people don’t change… and I am sometimes people. The people sought a sign from Jesus. We too miss all the evidence of God today by looking at a dying and decaying world. We fail to focus on the eternal. Matthew 13:22 Jesus says – *Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.* And so it is today. The seeds of God fall abundantly, opportunities everywhere we look, but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and we become unfruitful. Verse 3 *Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? Says the Lord. “Yet Jacob I have loved.”* Esau and Jacob were both born of the same mother and father, yet God preferred Jacob to Esau. The people Malachi is speaking to are the descendants of Jacob, blessed with the birthright as God’s people. God is saying, “This is how I have loved you.” Both the Edomites and the Israelites descended from Isaac. *But Esau I have hated,* The word for hated here simply means a lesser degree of love, as in not the chosen. The Bible uses this word when speaking of Leah and Rachel in Genesis 29 – we know that Rachel was preferred over Leah. It also uses this word in Luke 14 when Jesus speaks of hating mother and father, It simply means to have a the highest love for one and a lower or lesser love for the other. It would be dishonoring to God to believe He is hate-filled and uneven in His judgement*. And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness.* Though both the children of Israel and the Edomites were conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, the Jews returned from captivity to their lands, while Edom was destroyed and left for the wild beasts, never to be rebuilt. The KJV uses the word dragons, which the Hebrew dictionary describes as snakes, lizards, and creeping animals living in desolate places.

 Verse 4 *Even though Edom has said, “We have been impoverished, But we will return and build the desolate places,” Thus says the Lord of hosts: “They may build, but I will throw down; They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, And the people against whom the Lord will have indignation forever.* The Edomites believed that they too would rebuild and flourish, after being brought low and impoverished, but God declared that what they build, He will throw down because of their wickedness and idolatry. Of course, we know that the Edomites never came to flourish again, instead they ceased as a people. God declares the rise and the fall of nations and peoples. True then… true now.

 Verse 5 *Your eyes shall see, And you shall say, ‘The Lord is magnified beyond the border of Israel.* The eyes of all will understand the wickedness of Edom. The Lord will be magnified beyond the borders of Israel, even to the Gentile nations. We know that this is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Malachi is not only a prophet of condemnation for the sins of the people, but also of great Hope that will arrive in 400 years.

 This week, let’s consider our service and sacrifice to God. Is it our best or is that simply too much trouble? Are we serving others or has God not blessed us enough for that? God sees the heart and He knows the Truth in our every move. May we know His great blessings in our life. May we know the Mercy and Grace He has given us through Jesus. We can never work our way to heaven. The fact that we are already on our way to heaven must give us a joyful inspiration to give our best and work while people may yet be saved.