

# The God who hates: The significance of Esau/Edom in the postexilic prophetic eschatology according to Malachi 1:2–5 with a systematic theological postscript



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## Dates:

Received: 18 Nov. 2021

Accepted: 21 Jan. 2022

Published: 18 Mar. 2022

## How to cite this article:

Wielenga, B., 2022, 'The God who hates: The significance of Esau/Edom in the postexilic prophetic eschatology according to Malachi 1:2–5 with a systematic theological postscript', *In die Skriflig* 56(1), a2822. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v56i1.2822>

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This research wants to clarify the significance of Esau/Edom in Malachi's postexilic prophetic eschatology. Hence, its focus is on the declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom in Malachi 1:3, applying the Deuteronomic covenant concept, predominant in Malachi, for a deeper understanding of its significance in the acrimonious dialogues between God and his people. As much as this declaration of divine hate is coordinated in Malachi 1:2–5 with the declaration of divine love for Jacob/Israel, nevertheless, it has a distinct communicative intent of its own in Malachi's prophetic address. Postexilic Jacob/Israel is confronted with the possibility of a judgement such as Esau/Edom's if return to God does not occur – ultimate judgement imagined as a burning furnace leaving nothing but ashes on the Day of the Lord. This article wants to contribute to a deeper understanding of the function of divine hate in the judgement prophecy of Malachi.

**Contribution:** This article intends to contribute from a biblical-theological perspective to the systematic theological discussion about the doctrine of God within the Christian community of faith, focusing on the divine names and attributes in Malachi 1:2–5.

**Keywords:** Malachi's eschatology; Esau/Edom; divine love and hate; Deuteronomic covenant curses; treaty betrayal; names and attributes of God.

## Introduction

This article investigates the significance of Esau/Edom in the postexilic prophetic eschatology of Malachi.

They appear only in the dual declaration of divine love for Jacob/Israel<sup>1</sup> and divine hate for Esau/Edom in Malachi 1:2–5. However, this article contends that the reference to Esau/Edom also has relevance for the other disputations. In the history of research, the declaration of divine love for Jacob/Israel has always correctly been acknowledged as decisive for understanding the message of the disputations between God and Jacob/Israel that follow. The declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom has been a bone of contention among scholars. Is it only mentioned as an argument corroborating God's declaration of love for Jacob/Israel that should not be used in a distinctly different discourse of a theological or political nature (Snyman 2015:35–38)?<sup>2</sup> This article interprets the declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom in the covenantal context predominant in Malachi: the Deuteronomic concept of an asymmetrical but mutual relationship, officially concluded between God and his people as partners (Wielenga 1998:45–164).<sup>3</sup> Like the ancient Near Eastern vassal treaty traditions, blessings and curses reflecting God's response to either covenant fidelity or infidelity by the people are attached to this covenant as explained, for instance, in Deuteronomy 4:25–31 and 28:1–68 (Wielenga 2021).

The divine hate for Esau/Edom is understood in this article against the background of the covenant curses that will be visited upon postexilic Jacob/Israel again on the so-called Day of the

1. In this article, the composite word pair Jacob/Israel and Esau/Edom is used to indicate that, in Malachi 1:2–5, as in most of the prophetic literature (Van der Woude 1982:87), the distinction between the nation and its ancestor is rhetorically blurred. See Genesis 36:1, 8, 19 *Esau (that is, Edom)* (Anderson 2010:147).

2. See Tebes (2011:243–244) for advocating a nationalistic perspective: the hate for Esau/Edom is part of a scape goat theory, blaming them for the fate that had overcome Jacob/Israel in 587 BCE. Van der Woude (1982:87) refers to the doctrine of the *reprobatio aeterna* in Calvin's predestination discourse based upon Romans 9:12–13, quoting Malachi 1:2–3.

3. See Verhoef (1972:66–67) for a covenantal approach to Malachi 1:2–5 with attention being paid to the stipulations of the covenant and its blessings and curses (see also Anderson 2010:229–234).

Lord if they persist in showing *contempt for God's name* (MI 1:6) and in ignoring *the law of God's servant Moses* (MI 3:22 [4:4]). The declaration of divine love for Jacob/Israel is preponderant in Malachi's eschatology, essential as it is for his message of hope beyond judgement. In all the following disputations, divine love is the point of departure of the prophetic message. The declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom is nonetheless the other side of the same coin (the covenant) that needs special attention if one wants to do justice to this unique expression (*but Esau I have hated*) in the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> A better comprehension of the significance of the declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom in Malachi<sup>5</sup> could lead to a better appreciation of the function of divine hate in the judgement prophecy in postexilic eschatology. This, in turn, could contribute to the systematic theological discussion about the doctrine of God within the Christian community of faith.

## Outline

Firstly, as an introduction to the investigation, some linguistic and thematic links will be pointed out between the declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom in the first disputation (MI 1:2–5) and the announcement of judgement on the Day of the Lord in the last one (MI 3:13–21 [4:3]).<sup>6</sup> This will underscore the relevance of this investigation in the appearance of Esau/Edom in Malachi's prophetic eschatology. Secondly, the postexilic prophetic eschatology in Malachi will be summarily outlined with special attention being paid to its Deuteronomistic roots. Thirdly, the position of Esau/Edom as Jacob/Israel's southern neighbour within the geo-political context of the ancient Near East will be sketched. Fourthly, this will be followed by an investigation into some Old Testament traditions regarding Esau/Edom and Jacob/Israel as brothers with attention being paid to the fierce condemnation of Esau/Edom in (post)exilic prophecy. In the fifth place is the significance of the declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom within the context of the acrimonious dialogues between *Yahweh Tsebaōth* and his people. In conclusion, this divine hate declaration will be biblical-theologically evaluated for its contribution to the discussion about the systematic theological doctrine of God within the Christian community of faith.

## Divine hate on the Day of the Lord

Kessler (2007:240–242; 2009:219, 227) connects the declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom in Malachi 1:2–4 with the divine judgement announced over the God-forsaking majority of the people in Malachi 3:13–21.

Just as Edom/Esau is excluded from God's dialogue with his people, no matter how much they are being discussed, so is

4. Not even of Assur it is said that they are *hated* by God in the prophecies of Nahum, no matter how strong God's vengeance on them is stressed (Nah 1:2–3). It is an intensive emotion that comes from deep down God's *soul* (Ps 11:5) and is directed against social evil and idolatry especially among his own people and can lead to divine vengeance and judgement (Peels 1992:233–257).

5. It must be noted that this unique declaration appears in the last volume not only of the *Book of the Twelve*, but also of the Old Testament canon that is taken up in the New Testament again in Romans 9:10–13.

6. See Snyman (2015:10–12) for the delineation of these disputations (MI 1:2–5; 1:6–2:9; 2:10–16; 2:17–3:7a; 3:7b–12; 3:13–21) with Malachi 3:22–24 as a later editorial addition.

most of Malachi's audience in God's final session with the ones who are faithfully seeking him (MI 3:16). He directly addresses the God-forsakers (MI 3:13) who persistently refuse to honour God's name and to remember the *Torath Mosheh*<sup>7</sup> (MI 3:22). The promise made to the remnant of God-seekers (MI 3:17–18) is, however, not directly made to the majority of God-forsakers unless they return remorsefully to God in compliance with the *Torath Mosheh*. If not, they will face the same fate as Esau/Edom on the day of the Lord. This is also the case with the Levites neglecting their temple duties (MI 2:4–6; 3:3). They are central to the revival of the people and their return to God. They were directly addressed by God, (MI 2:1) but excluded from God's final meeting with the God-seekers, even though they could still return to him by judgement as a refiner's fire (MI 3:2). In Malachi 3:19–20 [4:1–2], on the Day of the Lord (MI 3:1), judgement as a burning furnace will be executed, differentiating between the God-seekers and the God-forsakers.

Divine love is prevalent in Malachi's message as is clearly indicated by the fact that the expression *and God says* occurs 46 times in Malachi (Snyman 2014:599). *Yahweh Tsebaōth* is not silent among his people, but, compelled by his love, he is the one who takes the initiative to talk to them. Despite the spiritual lethargy of the returned exiles amid the hard economic and politically oppressive circumstances of the time, *Yahweh* continued a dialogue with his people (*massa' debar Yahweh* – MI 1:1; see Weyde 2000:59–61). The deliberate use of the name *Yahweh* (Ex 3:14–15) in Malachi 1:2–5 alludes to the covenantal basis for the dialogue that is about to begin (Scoralick 2012:43). The intended absence of Esau/Edom from Malachi's audience is a clear indication of God's rejection of them.

The intentional exclusion of Esau/Edom from this dialogue between the God and his people, while they are central to the argument (MI 1:2–5), should be understood as a harbinger of the judgement to come on the Day of the Lord, described as a burning furnace leaving nothing but ashes (MI 3:19 [4:1]). The effect of both judgements is similar in both disputations. In Malachi 1:4, Edom will be called a 'Wicked Land', being demolished, always under the wrath of God. In Malachi 3:18, the God-forsaking majority is also called *wicked*; they will be like stubble in a burning furnace (Kessler 2009:226). The declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom can be said to be programmatic of what follows in the last disputation. The question is whether or not it plays a similar role throughout the whole acrimonious dialogue between God and his people.

## Malachi's postexilic prophetic eschatology in outline

As indicated above, the declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom forms part of the eschatological discourse in Malachi.<sup>8</sup>

7. For the expression *Torath Mosheh* see Wielenga (2021:1, notes 1, 2).

8. Malachi shared his eschatological vision with precursors in the *Book of the Twelve* such as Haggai, Zechariah or Joel (Wielenga 2016:6–8; 2018:1–3). Also, Hosea could be mentioned (Scoralick 2012:41–43; Watts 2000:209–217 –).

Hence, in the first place, Malachi's eschatological vision is summarised in three points. Attention will be paid to its Deuteronomistic roots. Secondly, the link will be explored between the declaration of divine love and hate in Malachi 1:2–5, and the covenant blessings and curses as spelled out in Deuteronomy 4:25–31; 28:64–68; 30:1–10.

### Structure of Malachi's eschatology

The structure of Malachi's prophetic eschatology has a temple-based centre and therefore it is theocentric. Like his precursors in the *Book of the Twelve*, Malachi too focuses his attention on the temple as the place chosen by God for worship from where the temple staff covenanted to the altar, teaching and intercession ministries should lead the people in a way of life that reflects the holiness of God in compliance with the *Torath Mosheh* (Wielenga 2021:3). The eschatological future beyond judgement on the Day of the Lord (MI 3:1; 3:20 [4:2]) would start right there in the temple (Ezk 47:1–12; Hg 2:6–9, 20–23), predicated on the declaration of divine love for Jacob/Israel (MI 1:2).

The second feature of Malachi's eschatology is its judgement-shaped character. The covenant breaches were of such a serious nature that divine judgement became inevitable in accordance with the warnings in the *Torath Mosheh* as could be found in Deuteronomy 4:25–31 and 28:15–68 (Wielenga 2021:5–6). In Malachi, the judgement to occur on the Day of the Lord (MI 3:1), is imagined in two ways: as refiner's fire and as a burning furnace, reflecting the division among the population between God-seekers who will return purified to God and the God-forsakers who will not do so (Wielenga 2016:6–7). People with the judgement of exile still fresh in their memories could surely imagine that divine judgement would be more devastating this time around (burning furnace) than previously if return to *Yahweh Tsebaōth* would fail to materialise.

The third component of Malachi's eschatological prophecy is its delay-intended focus (Wielenga 2018; 2021:4). The execution of divine judgement was to happen *suddenly* (MI 3:1) at an unspecified moment in the future. However, before the Lord as Judge arrived at his temple, first *my messenger* (MI 3:1a), later identified with *the prophet Elijah* (MI 3:23 [4:5]), had to appear to prepare his way, creating time and space for the people to return to God in compliance with the *Torath Mosheh*. In the process, judgement, which was not an irreversible future fate to happen notwithstanding the response of the people was delayed. In accordance with the *Torath Mosheh* in Exodus 34:6–7, the delay of judgement is evidence of the compassion of a merciful God who is willing to forgive wickedness, slow to anger as he is, even though he does not leave the guilty unpunished. Just as little as in Malachi 1:2–4, there is no parallelism between divine love and divine anger here. No matter how serious God's anger is, it is always balanced out by his compassionate love.

### Covenant curses in Malachi

Elsewhere (Wielenga 2021:4–6) the influence of the relevant texts in Deuteronomy (4:25–31; 28:15–68; 30:1–10<sup>9</sup>) on Malachi's eschatology has been analysed. Now the focus will only be on the covenant curses attached to the covenant concluded between God and Israel at Mount Horeb and updated on the plains of Moab before entering and conquering the land promised by God to their ancestors as their inheritance (Dt 11:26–32; 26:16–19).

Remembering the *Torath Mosheh* (MI 3:22 [4:4]) also pertains to the instructions of Moses, the servant of the Lord, about the curses that will befall Israel in case of ignoring the *Torath Mosheh*. Like the covenant itself, blessings and curses were still operational in the postexilic dispensation. The warning for the ultimate judgement (burning furnace) on the coming Day of the Lord should have stirred up their memory, making them aware of the curse of losing their inheritance and being dispersed among the nations (Dt 4:26; 28:64–68) as happened before during their exile in Babylon. This time, divine judgement would even be more severe than the exilic one, being definite and total as is suggested by the declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom (MI 1:2–4) and confirmed by the image of the burning furnace as a reference to the ultimate judgement. The promise of hope beyond judgement in Deuteronomy 30:1–10 was also taken up in Malachi's reference to judgement as a refiner's fire with its application in Malachi 3:20–21 [4:2–3], predicated on the declaration of divine love for Jacob/Israel (MI 1:2).

### Esau/Edom as Jacob/Israel's southern neighbour

First in this section, Esau/Edom will be looked at from a historical perspective as a neighbouring nation of Jacob/Israel in the geo-political context of the ancient Near East. Secondly, this leads to a brief examination of kinship terminology as a parity treaty idiom.

#### Esau/Edom as Jacob/Israel's southern neighbour

The land of Esau/Edom was located East of the Arabah, bordering the South-Judean territories of the Beersheba Valley and the Negeb wilderness. The relationship with Jacob/Israel was fragile as the history of cross border raids since the days of David and Solomon in the 10th century BCE shows (2 Sam 8:14; 1 Ki 9:26–28; 11:14–22) with Israel having the upper hand over Esau/Edom till its rebellion against Jehoram in the 9th century BCE (2 Ki 8:18–27).

Economic interests motivated Jacob/Israel's treatment of Esau/Edom, because trading routes from Arabia via Elath at the Gulf of Aqaba ran through Esau/Edom, crossing the southern areas of Judah to ports at the Mediterranean Sea

<sup>9</sup>For the choice of just these texts, see Wielenga (2021:4–5).

such as Gaza and Ashkelon, and from there up to the seaport of Tyre (Dykehouse 2008:97).<sup>10</sup>

Trade interests motivated Esau/Edom when it moved across the Arabah into Judaeen land from the 8th century BCE onwards (Dykehouse 2008:112–114; Levin 2012:26–28). Judaeans, Edomites as well as Arabian tribes (Qedarites) lived harmoniously together in the Beersheba Valley and the Negeb during the Assyrian empire's dominance of the region (Langgut & Lipschitz 2017:138–143; Tebes 2006:27). In the interim between the departure of Assyria from the region and the rise of Babylonia as a new world power, Judah established its administrative and military presence in the Beersheba Valley and the Negeb and took control of the trade routes.

The Babylonian invasion in 588 BCE and their conquest of Jerusalem in 587 BCE changed the situation dramatically. Esau/Edom switched sides to support Babylonia and took the opportunity to take over control of the Beersheba Valley (Dykehouse 2008:173–207). Esau/Edom broke the anti-Babylonian parity treaty with, among others, Jacob/Israel to promote its own economic interests (Dykehouse 2008:80–87), and so became a traitor in its partner's eyes that was even more serious a crime, because Jacob/Israel considered Esau/Edom as kinship related, sharing a common ancestry. According to the biblical narratives, their ancestors, Esau and Jacob, were twin brothers.

The trade routes were also valuable for Babylonia, first for the taxes that could be extracted from its allies, the Edomites (Dykehouse 2008:133–134). A geo-political interest also played a role. Control of the southern territories of Judah secured a safe border with archenemy Egypt down south. This imperial interest caused the end of Esau/Edom as an independent nation in 552 BCE during the campaign of Nabonidus in Arabia (Glazier-McDonald 1995:30–31; Miller & Hayes 1986:429). It had no presence east of the Arabah anymore – only west of it in the southern territories of Jacob/Israel, the Persian province of Yehud.<sup>11</sup>

### Esau/Edom as Jacob/Israel's brother

In the ancient Near East, kinship terminology and parity treaty idiom were coalescing. The kinship term *brothers* did appear in this treaty context and covered not just family relationships, but also legal partnerships in a geo-political sense. The social responsibility for one another in a kinship relationship (Tebes 2006:19–20) could also be transferred to a socio-political level, framed in a political treaty with its stipulations and with blessings and curses attached. Certainly, from the late 7th to 6th century BCE onward, brotherhood language was incorporated in parity treaty

10. Solomon already tried to establish trade contacts with Ophir in Arabia to transport gold to Jerusalem via the southern trading routes (1 Ki 9:28–29; Miller & Hayes 1986:211–213, 277).

11. Langgut and Lipschitz (2017:135–162) refer to paleo-environmental research into climate change in the southern border areas of the Persian province of Yehud with consequences also for Edom's previous territory east of the Arabah. From 520–450 BCE, serious drought devastated the agricultural economy (Langgut & Lipschitz 2017:152–155). This could be reflected in Haggai 1:6, 10–11, Malachi 3:10–12 and Nahum 3:5, and interpreted as a covenant curse (Dt 28:22–24).

idiom. In the border area between Judah and Edom where mixed population groups coexisted, the parity treaty context should be taken into account when interpreting the relations between both nations. They were not just genealogically connected, but also geo-politically affiliated – allies in the political vacuum between the fall of Assyria and the rise of Babylonia (Dykehouse 2008:36–47, 64–66, 80–87). Esau/Edom's switching sides in 588 BCE could only be interpreted by Jacob/Israel as treaty betrayal that was even more serious because of the kinship relationship between them, going back to the twin brothers Esau and Jacob.<sup>12</sup>

### Esau/Edom in the Biblical narrative

Within the limited space of an article, not too many references to the relevant traditions in the *Torath Mosheh* and the prophets can be studied.<sup>13</sup> Just as elsewhere in the *Book of the Twelve*, familiarity with the traditions about Esau/Edom and Jacob/Israel as kinship related nations is also implicitly assumed in Malachi (Assis 2006:8; Kessler 2009:211). Hence, firstly, a brief look into the Genesis narrative will be followed by attention being paid to the confrontation between them during Jacob/Israel's wilderness journey from Egypt to the promised land. Secondly, the position taken concerning Esau/Edom by one of Malachi's precursors in the *Book of the Twelve* (Obadiah) will be studied. Remarkably, in the *Book of the Twelve*, the brotherhood between Esau/Edom and Jacob/Israel is mentioned seven times, while in the major prophets such a mention is absent (Scoralick 2012:45).

### The origin of Esau/Edom: Genesis 25–36

The point of departure of the Esau/Edom narrative is the birth oracle in Genesis 25:19–34, announcing the divine choice of the younger twin Jacob as the heir to the divine promise given to his grandfather Abraham and after him to his father Isaac (Gn 12:1–3; 25:5), passing over the legal heir, the elder twin Esau.

It must be noted, however, that the election of Jacob does not imply the rejection of Esau (Anderson 2010:169).

He is not excluded from the covenant concluded with Abraham, even though his position would be subordinate to that of his younger twin. Should he have accepted this divine arrangement and respectfully followed the lead of his younger brother as the chosen one (Gn 27:37), he would have shared in the blessings of the covenant.<sup>14</sup> The fact is that Jacob's behaviour did not make this option attractive to Esau

12. Dykehouse (2008:135–207) refers to the *Arad ostraca* 7 and 24 as archaeological evidence for an Edomite attack on Judaeen positions in the Beersheba Valley in 588 BCE at a time that Babylonia was attacking Jerusalem.

13. See Anderson (2010:26–190) for the Pentateuch. See, for instance, Dykehouse (2008:214–267) for the prophets.

14. The socially scandalous choice of the younger over the older occurs quite regularly in the Old Testament narrative: a prime example is the choice of David as king ahead of his seven older brothers (1 Sam 15:5–13). Theologically, it refers to the primacy of divine grace in the context of an asymmetrical but yet mutual covenant.

who did not abide by God's choice and did not subject himself to Jacob. Nevertheless, he was not deprived of a divine blessing (Gn 27:39–40) inferior to Jacob's one as it may have been.

It is then noteworthy that Esau's genealogy, which includes the kings of Edom (Gn 36:31–39), has been framed within the Genesis narrative through the *toledoth* formula (Gn 36:1, 9; 37:2). Anderson (2010:158, 161, 169) correctly contends that Esau/Edom remained a part of God's history with Jacob/Israel. The brothers were able to bury their father Isaac together in peace (Gn 35:29); however, peaceful co-existence between them in the same area was not possible (Gn 33:16–20; 36:6–8). The relationship between the twins remained fragile as it was between the two nations descending from them.

### Confrontation in the wilderness

On their journey to the promised land, Jacob/Israel had to cross Esau/Edom's territory. From Deuteronomy 2:4–8,22, it is clear that Esau/Edom had already been granted their land by God in the same way as he was going to grant it to Jacob/Israel (Vogt 2013:65). Jacob/Israel was prohibited from violating Esau/Edom's inheritance, seeing that it was allocated to them by the God of their common forefathers (Anderson 2010:152).

Moses' admonishment not to despise an Edomite, a *relative* (Dt 23:7), affirms this positive attitude of God towards Esau/Edom that should have influenced Jacob/Israel's attitude towards their brother nation (Anderson 2010:188).

This seems to contradict Numbers 20:14–21 where Esau/Edom does not trust Jacob/Israel to behave peacefully during their passage through their country despite their assurances of good behaviour out of respect for the integrity of Esau/Edom's God-given inheritance. In the monarchic era, the relationship between both nations was not less fragile as pointed out above. The reality on the ground between both nations in Numbers 20 proved to be programmatic of the development of this relationship's history. The divine intentions with Esau/Edom, as described in Deuteronomy, did not come true. The positive attitude of God towards Esau/Edom because of their covenantal origins turned into his declaration of hate for Esau/Edom (Mt 1:3–4) as a response to their betrayal of Jacob/Israel, his chosen people, and their violation of the land he had given to them as their inheritance.

### Esau/Edom in Obadiah

In this section, attention will only be paid to Malachi's precursor in the *Book of the Twelve*, Obadiah,<sup>15</sup> whose anti-Edom rhetoric resonates in Malachi 1:2–4.<sup>16</sup> In Obadiah 1:10–14, Esau/Edom is condemned for their participation

15. For a discussion about the provenance of Obadiah, see Renkema (2003:29–36). In this article, a post-exilic date is assumed rather before than after 552 BCE when Nabonidus ended Edom's existence as independent nation.

16. For Hosea, Amos or Joel as precursor of Malachi's anti-Edom pronouncement, see Scoralick (2012:40–49). For Isaiah 63:1–6, see Koole (1995:312–315).

in the downfall of Judah, a kinship-related nation (*your brother Jacob*). Afterwards, Esau/Edom is even involved in hunting down Judaeans survivors who tried to escape from the disaster that had befallen Jerusalem (Ob 1:14).

In response, it is God who will execute judgement over Esau/Edom on the Day of the Lord (Ob 1:15), using other nations as agents (Renkema 2003:40–41). In the eyes of the spiritually worn-out returned exiles (Mt 2:17b), it looked as if Esau/Edom was the nation favoured by God, and not his own people, Jacob/Israel. The reality was actually the opposite. The Day of the Lord would bring a new future for Jacob/Israel in its God-given inheritance (Ob 1:17–19). The *utterly despised* (Ob 1:2) land of Esau/Edom would be burnt down to *stubble* with no survivors (Ob 1:18), but Jacob/Israel would repossess their land as a unified nation even centred around Mount Zion (Ob 1:17, 21; Dykehouse 2008:260–261).

The betrayal by Esau/Edom was not just a break-up in kinship relations based upon a common ancestry and a shared genealogy. For Jacob/Israel, it was a treaty betrayal, a stab in the back by a political partner who, they thought, could be trusted. The originally peaceful coexistence between both nations in the Beersheba Valley and the Negeb wilderness of pre-587 BCE, later consolidated in a parity treaty,<sup>17</sup> was maliciously destroyed out of self-interest. The history of the fragile relationship between Esau/Edom and Jacob/Israel ended abruptly.

## The divine declaration of hate for Esau/Edom

The central message of Malachi 1:2–5 is the declaration of divine love for Jacob/Israel, accompanied by the declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom. However, this does not exhaust the significance of the last declaration. It is more than just an argument that supports the declaration of divine love for their 'brother'.

Within the covenantal context of Malachi in which both expressions (love and hate) function, both declarations have their own communicative intent – correlated but distinguishable. The focus of this article is on the declaration of divine hate.<sup>18</sup>

In this section, Malachi 1:2–5 will firstly be briefly studied; and secondly, the function of the divine declaration of hate for Esau/Edom will be examined as a covenant curse, affecting the whole acrimonious dialogue between God and his people in all disputations.

17. Dykehouse (2008:246, 255–256) finds ancient Near Eastern treaty terminology in Obadiah, for instance in 1:7 (allies, friends, eating your bread), or in 1:11–14, accusing the treaty partner of its transgressions of the treaty stipulations, comparable with ancient Near Eastern examples.

18. See Wielenga (2021:5) about the communicative intent of covenant curses in Deuteronomy. It is to persuade the people to fear the Lord in compliance with the *Torath Mosheh* to avert the execution of divine judgement. Not only the blessings, but also the curses should be 'remembered' as intrinsic parts of the *Torath Mosheh* (Mt 3:22).

## The declaration of divine hate

According to Malachi 1:2–5, the prophecies<sup>19</sup> about Esau/Edom's downfall have been fulfilled: *I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals* (MI 1:3b; Ob 1:18). This refers to what happened in 552 BCE to Esau/Edom at the hands of Nabonidus. It is plausible also to consider the change in climate with its severe drought that occurred from 520–450 BCE, devastating the agricultural economy of Esau/Edom (Langgut & Lipschitz 2017:135–136). This disaster forced people to emigrate from the area for survival, moving across the Arabah into previously Judaeen territory where they already had a foothold.

The relationship between Esau/Edom and Jacob/Israel was special according to the traditions of the Old Testament as indicated above. It was special foremost, because both of them were included in the covenant, albeit in different positions, concluded with Abraham and reconfirmed with Isaac. God's hate for Esau/Edom did not follow from his love for Jacob/Israel; both were loved by him. He expected covenant fidelity as response from them – each in their own position. As has been shown, God confirmed his love for Esau/Edom by blessing them with their own inheritance (Gn 33:16; 36:8; Dt 2:8, 12).

The point of no return in this relationship between God and Esau/Edom came with their betrayal of Jacob/Israel and their invasion in Judah, part of God's inheritance allocated to Jacob/Israel (Verhoef 1972:91). Esau/Edom violated the holy triangle of God, Israel and the land,<sup>20</sup> and in the process not only antagonising God's people, but also destroying God's positive disposition towards them, Esau/Edom. Their basic attitude, namely deep-seated arrogance (Ob 1:3–4, 10–14), is also noted by Malachi as the core of their resistance against God and his people (1:4). It is rejected as unacceptable in the eyes of *Yahweh Tsebaōth*, whose greatness can now already be seen also outside of Israel: the devastated land of Esau/Edom (MI 1:5), while the inheritance of Jacob/Israel would be restored to its former glory and beyond (MI 3:20 [4:2]; Verhoef 1972:99–100).<sup>21</sup>

In conclusion, the origin of the emotional term *hate*, used for God's attitude towards Esau/Edom, is to be found in the context of the ancestral covenant.<sup>22</sup> Divine judgement over Esau/Edom did not happen overnight; also, with regard to them, God was slow to anger, but did not leave the guilty unpunished (Ex 34:6). In this way, Esau/Edom became an example of the working of the covenant curse that Jacob/Israel should take seriously, even more so because they

19. For instance, Obadiah 1:10–14; Isaiah 63:1–6; Jeremiah 49:7–12; Ezekiel 35:3–13.

20. See Block (2013) for a discussion about the relationship between God, nation and land in the ancient Near Eastern context and in the Old Testament.

21. Theologically, one could refer to the third promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 (*and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you*): Esau/Edom's violation of the holy triangle of God, Israel and the land threatened the purpose of God's universal plan to restore and renew creation through Israel (Block 2013:72).

22. See Snyman (2015:34) for the term *love* ('ahab) as a covenant term with emotional connotations too. This seems to be not less relevant for the term *hate* (šāné).

themselves had recently experienced the severity of the divine curse in exile.

The communicative intent of the declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom was to warn the wayward people of God. Their attitude towards him would be irrevocably punished (burning furnace) unless there was remorseful return to him in compliance with the *Torath Mosheh* (MI 2:2; 3:7).

## Divine hate for Esau/Edom as warning for Jacob/Israel

One could recapitulate with Malachi 1:6 the spiritual crisis in Jacob/Israel as *contempt for God's name, Yahweh Tsebaōth* (Wielenga 2019:5–6) as exposed in the negligent altar and teaching ministries of the temple staff (MI 1:6–2:9) to which they were covenanted (MI 2:4–5). It is clear evidence that they did not *remember the law of my servant Moses* in this respect (MI 3:22 [4:4]). The teaching of the *Torath Mosheh* in Deuteronomy 12 about where and how to worship *Yahweh Tsebaōth* was ignored<sup>23</sup> with dire consequences for the sanctification of the daily life of the people.

The contempt for God's name was also obvious in the way men ill-treated women in marriage and divorce procedures (MI 2:10) in conflict with Deuteronomy 24:1–4, focusing on marrying outside of the community of faith (MI 2:10–16; Dt 7:3–4).<sup>24</sup> In Malachi 3:5, the ill-treatment of the socially vulnerable classes in society is mentioned as evidence of the contempt of God's name in daily life and for the disregard of the *Torath Mosheh* among the people.<sup>25</sup> This horizontal covenant breach is framed within the announcement of the Day of the Lord (MI 3:1) upon which divine judgment will be executed either as a burning furnace or as a refiner's fire (Wielenga 2020:6–7).

The prophetic judgement preaching undoubtedly had a pastoral intent: to persuade the people, to start with the temple staff, to turn back to God in compliance with the *Torath Mosheh*. This was predicated upon the covenant love of God for Jacob/Israel (MI 1:2). The warnings for a final and definite judgement to be executed on the Day of the Lord can also be interpreted as confirmation of the divine love for his people. It is intended as a wake-up call to return to God and to avert judgement as a burning furnace leaving nothing but ashes. The curses of the covenant, as spelled out in Deuteronomy 4:25–31; 28:15–68, were not less important to the covenant relationship between God and Jacob/Israel than its pre- and post-exile blessings. The reality of the people's regression into pre-exilic covenant infidelity (Zch 1:2–6), necessitated a realistic approach that included the pronouncement of the covenant curses.

23. For the theme of willful forgetting the *Torath Mosheh* over against remembering it, compare Deuteronomy 4:9–10; 6:10–12; 8:12–18; Malachi 3:22 (see Wielenga 2019:3).

24. For a fuller treatment of Malachi 2:10–16 in the socio-religious context of postexilic Yehud, see Wielenga (2019).

25. Robbing *Yahweh Tsebaōth* of the tithes (MI 3:8–12), negatively impacted on the social care for the poor: the triennial tithe was meant to support them (Dt 14:28–29).

The declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom functions in the context of the postexilic dispensation. Jacob/Israel should understand that the judgement of exile was not the conclusion of the history of divine judgement that commenced with the fiasco at Kadesh-Barnea (Dt 1:19–46). The Babylonian exile was a calamitous halfway station during the journey that God took with his people from the days of their ancestors (Gn 12:1–3; Wielenga 2021:7–8). As serious as this judgement was, it would be surpassed by the future one to be executed on the eschatological Day of the Lord that was announced (Ml 3:1). God's hate for Esau/Edom is pronounced within this context. It does corroborate his love for Jacob/Israel, but it also exacerbates the covenant curses appropriate for the new, postexilic situation which was more dire than the pre-exilic one. The temple staff and the people were confronted with the threat that they could share in Esau/Edom's final destiny.

The communicative intent of the hate declaration was to shock the people out of their spiritual lethargy to face the looming danger of a final judgement with an Esau/Edom ending in order to avert it from happening through their return to the Lord in compliance with the *Thorath Mosheh* for as long as the coming Day of the Lord was deferred (Wielenga 2018:5).

## The doctrine of God in Malachi 1:2–5

This investigation in the declaration of divine hate for Esau/Edom will now be completed with some brief remarks about its implications for the systematic theological discussion about the doctrine of God within the Christian community of faith. This doctrine is predicated on God's knowability by humans created in his image and living in a covenant relationship with him as revealed in the canonical Scriptures<sup>26</sup>. In this section, firstly, the names and attributes of God as ways to know him will be discussed. Secondly, the question will be addressed whether or not hate, like love, is a divine attribute.

### Divine names and attributes in Malachi 1:2–5

In systematic theology, the names and attributes of God are understood as media of God's self-revelation (Van den Brink & Van der Kooi 2012:117–141). Through them God reveals who he really is and what God he wants to be for his people and also for Esau/Edom. Human knowledge of God is based upon divine self-revelation through the canonical Scriptures<sup>27</sup>.

Two names of God with their own attributes attached to them are used in Malachi 1:2–5 (Wielenga 2019:5). Firstly, God is called *Yahweh*, referring to the covenant relationship between him and his people since the days of Moses

26. This implies belief in God as the One who initiated a covenant relationship with his people from the beginning, accepting that the anthropomorphic/phatic language of the Old Testament adequately defines his character and being as a relational God. About anthropomorphic/phatic language in the doctrine of God, see Kuitert (1969:122–163, 222–225). For a discussion about divine accommodation as foundational for revelation, see Van der Kooi (2005:46–65).

27. For the discussion about general and particular revelation, see Van den Brink and Van der Kooi (2012:173–180) and Berkhof (1993:45–49, 78–80) who is critical of the distinction.

(Ex 3:14–15)<sup>28</sup>, assuring the people of God's presence among them and of his approachability to them in the place of worship chosen by him (Dt 7:6; 12:5). Within the covenantal context of this name, divine love as a permanent attribute of God's being, reveals his character. Its emotional component<sup>29</sup> is merged with the more formal one of covenantal fidelity. In Malachi, this love is evidenced by God's initiative to talk to his people (Ml 1:1) despite their spiritual apathy. Other divine attributes like *chèsèd* or *tsedekah* have their roots in this core attribute of divine love. In Malachi, this divine name and attribute reveal who God really is – also in the spiritually deplorable situation of post-exilic Yehud: compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness (Ex 34:6).

The additional name *Tsebaōth*<sup>30</sup> refers to him as universal God who is all-powerful as Commander-in-chief of the angelic hosts. He is great also beyond the borders of Jacob/Israel (Ml 1:5, 11,1 4)<sup>31</sup> as his involvement in Esau/Edom's affairs testifies. Power as a divine attribute is associated with this divine name (Eichrodt 1957:147–148). God as the mighty Warrior wields his power against Esau/Edom for the sake of his people (Isa 63:1–6; Ml 1:3–4). The divine attribute of holiness (Lv 19:2) must also be mentioned here (Eichrodt 1957:176–185; Loonstra 2003:96–100; Peels 1992:244). This core attribute assumes divine power, and is the source of divine anger, vengeance, judgement and even hate in case of the desecration of his holiness. The spiritual blurring of the dividing line between the holy and the profane is implied in Malachi's prophecy (Ml 1:6–2:9).<sup>32</sup> If one could call divine love, holiness and power core attributes of God, this cannot be said of the divine responses to human desecration of his holiness and provocation of his love. As König (1982:95) concisely formulates it: 'God is love but He *became angry*.'

### Hate as a divine attribute?

That the holy One of Jacob/Israel, *Yahweh Tsebaōth*, is capable of hatred is beyond any doubt, considering the testimony of the different tradition streams in the Old Testament. God hates abominable acts such as idolatry (Dt 12:31). God also hates other transgressions of his covenant law such as injustice, robbery or a nominal altar ministry (Ps 45:7; Isa 1:14; Am 5:21; Hos 9:15). Hence, *Yahweh Tsebaōth*, the God of Jacob/Israel, is capable of hatred, a deeply emotional movement within him, called up by the wayward behaviour of his covenant partner, Jacob/Israel. But hate for Jacob/Israel is only attributed to God through his enemies (Dt 9:8).

28. See Kuitert (1969:192–196) for a systematic–hermeneutical treatment of the connectivity between the name Yahweh and the Mosaic covenant.

29. For a discussion about (the language of) God's emotions, see Talstra (2009:166–175).

30. For *Tsebaōth*, see Wielenga (2015:6, note 23; 2019:5, note 21). In Malachi, this name is used 26 times.

31. For the different interpretations of Malachi 1:5 (11, 14), see Wielenga (2016:6, note 17 with literature references). The eschatological interpretation is most likely because of the universal implications of the divine name *Tsebaōth* who is in control not only of his own people, Jacob/Israel, but of all the nations too.

32. See Kuitert (1969:253) for the salvific aspect of divine holiness with reference to Hosea 11:9. Holiness and love are not mutually exclusive but are correlated.

There is no evidence that God hated his own people despite his hate for their detestable transgressions of his law. God's hate of evil brings about his vengeance and judgement over the transgressions of his people such as his hate for Esau/Edom was brought about by their traitorous behaviour towards their 'brother' nation Jacob/Israel, God's chosen people. However, from Malachi 1:2–5 it becomes clear that divine hate for evil among his people can change into his hate for the evildoers who intentionally ignore permanently his warnings to return to him. Divine love can change into divine hate, as the image of final judgement as a burning furnace leaving nothing but ashes indicate. It reveals the seriousness of the postexilic situation that the persistent God-forsakers among his people could at last become objects of divine hate.

Nevertheless, God's hate is not intrinsic to his being such as his love is. Rather, it is brought about by the consistent and intentional desecration of his holiness within the context of the covenant, moving him to withhold his blessings and execute his curses. Hate is not an attribute revealing God's character and being. It is his ultimate reaction, indicating a real emotion in him (Ps 11:5) with actual consequences in the life of his people and the history of the nations (Zph 3:8c) as will be recognised on the eschatological Day of the Lord.

His hate for Esau/Edom also shows that *Yahweh Tsebaōth* is not a national, but a universal God beyond the borders of Jacob/Israel. The effects of his attributes are not confined to just Jacob/Israel alone.

## Conclusion

Divine hate does not form part of God's being and does not reflect his character such as his love, holiness and power. The declaration of this hate should therefore be treated within a pastoral frame with a specific communicative intent that reveals his genuine wish for his people to return to him in compliance with the *Torath Mosheh*. God is love, but it is a holy love; He *can* hate if the situation calls for it. This revelation of the knowledge of God in Malachi 1:2–5 should be taken into account in the systematic theological discussion about the doctrine of God within the Christian community of faith.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author has declared that no competing interest exists.

### Author's contributions

B.W. is the sole author of this article.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

## Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are exclusively those of the author.

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