

Malachi should be dated somewhere between the building of the second temple (around 515 BC) and the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (around 440 BC). That means these words of prophecy come after Israel's return from exile. This book, then, is written to God's people after their return to what remains of the Promised Land. We can break this book down into six mini-sermons from the prophet. The first comes in 1:2–5 and speaks to Israel's doubts about God's love for them.

Here are some questions to consider as you study Malachi 1:1–5 together:

- Who was Jacob? Who was Esau? Why might it be important for Malachi to remind Israel about this distinction between brothers? ("Edom," by the way, is the name of Esau's people, like "Israel" is the name of Jacob's.)
- It is uncomfortable to meditate on God's words to Israel here: "I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated." Why does the Lord say this? What does it mean that the Lord loves Jacob? Why might the Lord love Jacob? Why might the Lord hate Esau?
- The distinction between Jacob and Esau should remind Israel of their status with the Lord. They are God's *chosen* people (despite the fact that Esau was Jacob's twin brother). What could the Lord point to to remind Israel of their special status? How can Israel know the Lord loves them?
- It seems that Israel has fallen into a less than worshipful state before the Lord. How does a right understanding of God's sovereign gracious love correct that? What are some signs that you've forgotten or devalued God's love for you?
- Have you ever experienced a time or season when your love for the Lord waned? What brought you out of that? What evidence of God's love can you point to in your life?