

# DEEP DIVE

THE BOOK OF MALACHI

May 2026 - June 2026

REV. AARIF G. BRADLEY, M. DIV

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# LESSON 1

SUNDAY MAY 3, 2026

## QUESTIONING GOD'S LOVE

Malachi 1:1-5

### KEY VERSE

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I have loved you, says the Lord. Malachi 1:2 NIV

### LESSON AIMS

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As a result of this lesson, you should be able to:

1. Recognize God's sovereign love
2. Identify misperceptions about God
3. Cultivate Faith Amid Uncertainty

### KEY TERMS

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I have loved you – an active, affectionate love

Esau – Jacob's brother who represents the people not chosen for God's covenant promise

Jacob – Chosen by God; represents Israel as the recipient of His covenant love

Edom – Nation descended from Esau; an example of judgment and opposition to Israel

Hated – Rejected or not chosen for covenant purposes

Sovereign – God's complete authority to act according to His will

Election – God's choice of a people for His purpose, based on His will, not merit

Jackals – Wild animals symbolizing ruin and desolation

We have historically been taught that it is sin or at best improper to question God or ask God why. This stems from a holy reverence of God that has been passed down from generation to generation that is not necessarily biblical. Reverence for God does not equate to not being able to ask God questions. We see people asking God questions throughout Scripture from Abraham asking God what He would do with the wicked (Genesis 18:23-33), Moses asked incessant questions of God, Job questioned his very day of birth to God, David asked questions like “Lord, why are they increased that trouble me?” (Psalm 3), Jeremiah questioned why do the wicked prosper? (Jeremiah 12:1). Asking God “why,” is an expression of faith and not rebellion. These were mere men just as we are. If they were able to ask God questions, so are we. Hard conversations with God are not new. They are the heartbeat of honest faith. Sometimes we pray, we worship, we obey, and yet life still doesn’t line up with what we expect. In those moments, it’s tempting to wonder: Has God forgotten me? Does He really love me? Today, we’ll explore how God chooses to respond to Israel when they question His love for them.

### | Analysis of the Biblical Text

## THE WORD OF GOD (MALACHI 1:1)

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### | KJV

The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

### | NIV

A prophecy: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi

Little is known about the prophet Malachi. Other books of the prophets either give the timeframe of their writing in the book, or it can be easily identified by the king who is mentioned in the book. However, the time of kingship has passed in Malachi and Israel only has a governor. Malachi seems to address some of the same issues addressed by Nehemiah, so scholars place the time of his writing between 440 and 420 BC. He was the last prophet to write, and his writings predicted the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist. Malachi is the last of the twelve minor prophets [Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah,

Malachi] but these twelve prophets span over the course of 400 years. The twelve minor prophets were originally one chronological book and later separated into twelve books. Malachi delivered his messages to expose and rebuke the sins of the people and admonish them to change. He found in the people an outward appearance of faith expressed in a perfunctory or routine means with no inward conviction or devotion.

## QUESTIONING GOD'S LOVE & GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY (MALACHI 1:2-3)

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### | KJV

- 2 I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?  
Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob
- 3 And I hated Esau and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness

### | NIV

- 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."

Malachi anticipates the resistance of his audience and structures his message as a series of assertions met with skeptical questions. He begins with God's declaration, "I have loved you," yet the people respond almost instinctively, "How have You loved us?" Their question reveals not just confusion, but a deep misreading of their situation and of God's character. The phrase "I have loved you" is expressed in a way that points to a past action with continuing results, emphasizing God's ongoing, covenantal love for His people.

Despite this, the people struggle to see that love because their present circumstances feel inconsistent with it. Having returned from exile, they face hardship, instability, and the slow work of rebuilding their community and identity. Prosperity, security, and national honor seem distant. In their minds, God's love should be reflected in visible success and ease. As a result, they measure His faithfulness by their conditions and conclude that something does not add up. Their question, "How have You loved us?" ultimately exposes the gap between God's covenant faithfulness and their limited expectations of what God's love should look like.



## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What does it mean to believe in God’s love when everything around you feels contrary to it, and how do we hold onto that belief without always needing proof that appeases us?

Jacob and Esau function here as representatives of nations rather than merely individuals. Jacob stands for Israel, the covenant people chosen by God to receive His promises, while Esau represents Edom, the brother nation that would not share in that covenantal role and would ultimately experience God’s judgment. Malachi uses this contrast to confront Israel’s misunderstanding of God’s love. They assume that love should look like equal treatment according to human standards of fairness, but God points them instead to His covenant dealings in history.

In this context, God’s love is not primarily an emotion but a covenant commitment, His decision to set His favor on Israel, remain faithful to His promises, and accomplish His purposes through them. His love is demonstrated not by treating all nations the same, but by preserving His people and keeping the promises He made to them, even through hardship. The contrast is not that Israel avoided difficulty while Edom suffered, but that Israel was sustained because of God’s covenant, while Edom stood outside of it.

The question then arises: why Jacob and not Esau? Scripture consistently points back to God’s sovereign choice. Before either nation had acted, God declared to Rebekah, “two nations are in your womb... and the older shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:22–23). This decision was not based on merit or achievement, but on God’s divine purpose. While this may challenge our natural sense of fairness, Scripture defines God’s love not by equal outcomes, but by His sovereign will and faithful commitment. Jacob was chosen to carry the covenant forward, and through his lineage God’s redemptive plan would unfold, ultimately leading to the Messiah.



## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

If God’s love and choice are not based on what we’ve done, how do we respond when His plans for others, or even for us don’t seem fair?

When Malachi says that God “hated” Esau, he is using covenant language, not describing an emotional hostility. The term “hated” functions as a contrast to “loved” is a theological statement of election rather than personal malice. In this context, it means that Esau’s descendants were not chosen to carry the covenant promises, unlike Jacob and his line. Malachi then points to the

visible outcome of that distinction: the judgment and desolation of Edom. The imagery of their land being turned into a wasteland inhabited by “desert jackals” vividly portrays abandonment and ruin. This reflects Edom’s historical judgment, as also described in Obadiah 1:1-21. In contrast, Israel, though disciplined and tested, continued to experience God’s preserving hand. The difference between the two is not the absence of hardship, but the presence of God’s covenant faithfulness toward His chosen people.

## EDOM'S JUDGMENT & THE GLORY OF GOD (MALACHI 1:4-5)

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### | KJV

- 4 Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the Lord of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the Lord hath indignation forever
  
- 5 And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The Lord will be magnified from the border of Israel.

### | NIV

- 4 Edom may say, “Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.” But this is what the Lord Almighty says: “They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the Lord.
  
- 5 You will see it with your own eyes and say, ‘Great is the Lord—even beyond the borders of Israel!’

The destruction and continued desolation of Edom serve as evidence of God’s covenant faithfulness to Israel. By Malachi’s time, Edom had already been conquered and reduced to poverty. While both Israel and Edom experienced devastation, the key difference between them was not the presence of hardship, but the presence of God’s covenant. Israel endured discipline, yet remained preserved because of God’s promises, while Edom stood outside of that covenant and faced lasting judgment.

Edom expressed confidence that they would rebuild what had been destroyed, but God declared that their efforts would ultimately fail. This demonstrates that human determination cannot override God's sovereign will. What God has purposed, whether in blessing or in judgment, cannot be undone by human effort. In contrast, Israel's restoration would not depend on their strength, but on God's faithfulness to His covenant with them.

Through this, God continues to answer Israel's question, "How have You loved us?" His response points them to history and to what they will witness: the downfall of Edom alongside the preservation of Israel. The evidence of His love is not found in ease or immediate prosperity, but in the fact that He has chosen them, sustained them, and committed Himself to them. In essence, God is showing them that while others may rise and fall, His covenant with them remains secure, and that is the clearest demonstration of His love.

### | A Closing Thought

The real issue Malachi exposes is not whether God has loved His people, but whether they will trust His love when it does not match their expectations. Israel's question reveals how easily the heart can reinterpret God through present circumstances, rather than interpreting circumstances through God's character.

What God offers them is not an explanation that satisfies curiosity, but a reminder that demands their trust. Faith, then, is not the absence of questions, but the decision to rest in what God has already made known about Himself even when life feels incomplete or unclear.

In that sense, spiritual maturity is not found in having every "why" answered, but in refusing to let unanswered "whys" redefine who God has already proven Himself to be.

### | Your Life

This week, reflect on areas in your life where you may be doubting God's love for you. Allow yourself to bring honest questions to Him, trusting that His love is enduring and His plans for your life are sovereign. Just as Israel learned to see God's faithfulness in their covenant history, you must also look for God's hand in your life – past, present, and the unfolding future.

## | Your World!

In a world marked by injustice, inequality, and suffering, it is important to remember that human effort cannot override or reshape God's purposes. History itself bears witness that God is not absent from what unfolds in the world, but actively at work governing, preserving, and directing events according to His will.

This truth should shape both our perspective and our response. We are called to live with integrity, faithfulness, and diligence in what is before us, while at the same time refusing to carry the weight of outcomes that belong to God alone. Our responsibility is obedience, the results rest in God's sovereign hand.



### Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

When life feels uncertain and Your ways are not clear to us, keep our hearts from drawing wrong conclusions about You. Strengthen our trust where our understanding falls short and anchor us in who You are rather than what we see. Teach us to walk in faithful obedience without fear, to rest in Your sovereign care without anxiety, and to believe that Your love remains steady even when our circumstances are not. Shape our lives to reflect unwavering confidence in Your wisdom and Your timing.

In Jesus' name, Amen.