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MALACHI

A 4-Week Group Bible Study

By Greg and Kayla Gibson

WEEK 1 OF 4 • GENERAL / MIXED GROUP EDITION

I Have Loved You — Malachi 1:1–14

Scripture Scope: Malachi 1:1–14 (ESV) • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

PARTICIPANT STUDY EDITION

Synchronized Section-by-Section with the Leader Guide Edition · Includes Group Reflection Workspace

Malachi — 4-Week Group Bible Study (Participant Study Edition)

Week 1: I Have Loved You (Malachi 1:1–14)

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- **The title:** The Hebrew word mal'akhi means "my messenger." It is traditionally treated as the prophet's name, though some interpreters understand it as a title or designation. Nothing else is known of his life. The name fits a book that promises the LORD will send his messenger (3:1).
- **The setting:** Malachi addressed the postexilic community after the temple had been rebuilt. Similarities with conditions described in Ezra and Nehemiah suggest a fifth-century BC setting, a generation or more after Haggai and Zechariah, but the book does not name a Persian king or permit an exact date. The temple had been rebuilt and was functioning, but the people and priests had grown tired, careless, and doubtful of God's love and justice.
- **The main theme:** Honoring the LORD who loves his people. Malachi calls a weary people back to wholehearted worship, faithfulness, and fear of the LORD, and promises that the Lord himself will come.
- **The main characters:** The LORD of hosts, the prophet Malachi, the priests, and the people of Judah. The LORD speaks through a series of disputes in which he makes a statement, the people answer, "But you say," and he replies.
- **The structure (six disputes and a closing word):**
- I have loved you (1:1–5).
- Where is my honor? Priests and offerings (1:6–2:9).
- Faithless to one another; the wife of your youth (2:10–16).
- Where is the God of justice? I send my messenger (2:17–3:5).
- Return to me; robbing God (3:6–12).
- Those who fear the LORD; the sun of righteousness; Elijah (3:13–4:6).
- **A note on chapter numbers:** The ESV and most English Bibles print Malachi in four chapters. Many Hebrew Bibles number 4:1–6 as 3:19–24, so some editions show a chapter offset in the last week.
- **Why it matters:** Malachi speaks to anyone whose faith has grown routine or whose heart doubts God's love. It shows that God's love comes first, that worship and faithfulness matter, and that God remembers those who fear him. As the last book of the Old Testament, it points directly to John the Baptist and to Jesus, the Lord who comes to his temple.

How This 4-Week Study Works

You may notice this study is shorter than our usual eight weeks. Even though we are 8weekbiblestudy.com, stretching Malachi to eight weeks would have left it thin on content, and we never want to trade quality for quantity.

Designed for weekly small groups, mini-churches, and community gatherings (75–90 minutes per session) rather than daily homework checklists, each week of Malachi invites you to move with a prophet through a series of disputes, from "I have loved you" to the promise of the sun of righteousness, and close the Old Testament together through six repeatable sections:

- **Section X.1 — Opening:** Sets the scene, the Week at a Glance, Head, Heart, and Hands objectives, the Opening Frame, and the Opening Entry Question.
- **Section X.2 — Historical & Literary Context:** Places the week's chapters inside the structure of Malachi and the ancient Near Eastern world.
- **Section X.3 — Movement 1:** The week's first guided passage: Guided Scripture Reading, Anchor Verses, Teaching Narrative, and Group Discussion Questions.
- **Section X.4 — Movement 2:** The week's second guided passage, following the same flow.
- **Section X.5 — Canonical Horizon:** Traces how the passage echoes across Scripture and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- **Section X.6 — Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer:** Moves the week's study into everyday life, previews next week, and closes in prayer.

Key anchor verses are printed in each section for quick reference. Longer focal passages are read aloud together from the ESV. Malachi is short (55 verses), so the study prints only a small number of verses and retells the rest in its own words. The book speaks of contempt in worship, failed leaders, divorce, and a coming day of judgment; the study handles these with care, as a call to return and to hope, never as a tool to shame or to keep anyone in danger.

Choosing a Bible Translation: Top 5 Translations Compared

Every English Bible translation falls along a spectrum between two primary approaches: word-for-word translation (formal equivalence, which prioritizes literal accuracy to the original phrasing and sentence structure) and thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes immediate modern readability by translating idioms and ideas into natural contemporary expressions). Here is how five widely used English translations compare:

- **ESV (English Standard Version) — Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Follows the wording and sentence structure of the original Hebrew and Greek closely while using modern English; well suited to close study.
  - Cons: Because it tracks the original sentence structure, some phrasing can feel more formal than everyday speech.
- **NIV (New International Version) — Balanced (Between Word-for-Word and Thought-for-Thought)**
  - Pros: Widely read; balances accuracy to the original languages with natural, everyday readability.
  - Cons: Because some idioms are rendered as modern expressions, a few literal wordplays or technical terms can be less visible.
- **NLT (New Living Translation) — Thought-for-Thought**
  - Pros: Warm and conversational; reads smoothly aloud and helps readers follow the big picture of long passages.
  - Cons: Because it prioritizes meaning over literal phrasing, it can be harder to use for close word study.
- **CSB (Christian Standard Bible) — Optimal Equivalence (Balanced)**
  - Pros: Stays close to the original words where possible while smoothing awkward phrasing into natural modern English.
  - Cons: Because it is a newer translation, some well-known verses may sound different from the wording many readers remember.
- **KJV / NKJV (King James Version & New King James Version) — Traditional Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Historic cadence that shaped English literature and church history; the NKJV updates archaic pronouns ("thee/thou") while keeping the classic rhythm.
  - Cons: Often reads like older English poetry, with complex sentences and archaic or formal vocabulary that can be harder for modern readers to follow.

This study quotes the ESV.

Greg & Kayla's Recommended Study Bibles

Having a trusted study Bible on hand is one of the best ways to go deeper as you read through Malachi:

- **Greg's Favorite Study Bible:** The MacArthur Study Bible (ESV), which contains extensive explanatory notes beneath almost every verse, ideal for detailed study.
- **Kayla's Favorite Study Bible:** The ESV Study Bible, containing over 20,000 study notes, articles, and explanations.

The 4-Week Malachi Study at a Glance

Week	Title & Passage	Movement 1 / Movement 2	Canonical Horizon
1	**I Have Loved You** (1:1–14)	How Have You Loved Us? (1:1–5) / A Name Great Among the Nations (1:6–14)	The Father's love in the Son, a name great among the nations, and a pure offering
2	**Where Is My Honor?** (2:1–9)	This Command Is for You, O Priests (2:1–4) / The Covenant with Levi (2:5–9)	Christ the faithful priest and messenger, and lips that guard knowledge
3	**Faithless to One Another** (2:10–3:5)	The Wife of Your Youth (2:10–16) / Behold, I Send My Messenger (2:17–3:5)	One Father, the faithful Husband, and the messenger who prepares the way
4	**The Sun of Righteousness Will Rise** (3:6–4:6)	Return to Me; I Do Not Change (3:6–15) / A Book of Remembrance, and Elijah (3:16–4:6)	The unchanging LORD, the sun of righteousness, and Elijah who was to come

WEEK 1 OF 4

WEEK 1 SESSION GUIDE · MALACHI 1:1–14

Week 1: I Have Loved You

Scripture Scope: Malachi 1:1–14 (ESV) • Focal Passages: Malachi 1:1; 1:5–6; 1:8; 1:11; 1:14 • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

Section 1.1

Opening: I Have Loved You (Malachi 1:1–14)

Opening

In the previous study, Zechariah ended with a vision of the LORD as king over all the earth and everything in Jerusalem holy to him. Malachi speaks to the same community a generation or more later. The temple stands, the sacrifices go on, though whether Malachi spoke before or after Nehemiah's wall rebuilding cannot be established from the book, but the great promises have not yet arrived and worship has grown tired. Malachi opens with the LORD's simple declaration that he has loved his people. They answer with a question: how has he loved them? The LORD points to their history as the chosen family of Jacob, and promises that they will see him honored as great beyond the border of Israel.

Then he turns to the priests with a pointed question of his own: "If then I am a father, where is my honor?" They have brought blind, lame, and sick animals to his altar, gifts they would never dare to present to their governor.

Yet the LORD declares that from the rising of the sun to its setting his name will be great among the nations, for he is a great King.

Week 1 At a Glance

Scripture Scope	Malachi 1:1–14 (the oracle of the word of the LORD by Malachi, the LORD's declaration of love and the people's question, Jacob and Esau, the LORD great beyond the border of Israel, a son's honor and a servant's fear, priests who despise the LORD's name, blemished offerings and the governor comparison, the LORD's desire that someone shut the temple doors, a name great among the nations and a pure offering, the weariness of worship, the cheat who vows and offers a blemished animal, and the great King)
Focal Passages	Malachi 1:1; 1:5–6; 1:8; 1:11; 1:14
Literary & Structural Anchor	Malachi is built as a series of disputes. The LORD makes a statement, the people answer, "But you say," and the LORD replies with evidence. Love comes first (1:2), and honor follows (1:6). The LORD's name widens through the chapter, from "beyond the border of Israel" (1:5) to "from the rising of the sun to its setting" (1:11) to "feared among the nations" (1:14). The almost comic comparison with a governor (1:8) is answered by the true comparison: "I am a great King" (1:14).
Big Idea	The LORD who has loved his people deserves their honor, and his name will be great among the nations because he is a great King.

Week 1 Learning Objectives (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	**Know His Love and Honor:** Understand the LORD's declaration of love and his call for honor in Malachi 1.
HEART	**Honor the Great King:** Recognize the difference between faithful worship and knowingly contemptuous worship without equating honor with wealth, performance, or emotional intensity.
HANDS	**Respond with Integrity:** Take one safe, concrete step toward truthful, attentive worship or toward keeping an acknowledged commitment.

Opening Frame: I Have Loved You

Zechariah ended with the LORD as king over all the earth and even the cooking pots holy to him. Malachi spoke to the same community a few generations later, after the temple had been rebuilt and the first excitement had faded. The people were tired, their worship had grown careless, and they were asking whether God really loved them at all. Malachi, whose name means my messenger, is the last book of the Old Testament, and it unfolds as a series of disputes: the LORD makes a statement, the people push back with a question, and the LORD answers. This week the LORD opens with a declaration of love, then asks the priests where his honor is, and promises that his name will be great among the nations. The question for this week: how do we respond when God says he loves us, and what does honoring him look like? Before we read together, take a moment to share with the group:

Opening Entry Question (Icebreaker)

1.1 Q1 (Opening Entry Question): Describe a gift, meal, or welcome that clearly showed thoughtfulness and care. What made it meaningful?

Section 1.2

Historical & Literary Context: After the Rebuilding, Before the Fulfillment (Malachi 1:1–14)

Entering the World of Malachi and the Weary Community

1. Historical Background

After Cyrus captured Babylon in 539 BC, the initial return from exile is commonly dated to 538–537 BC, and the temple was completed in 516 BC. Malachi addressed the postexilic community after the temple had been rebuilt; similarities with conditions described in Ezra and Nehemiah suggest a fifth-century BC setting, though the book does not name a Persian king or permit an exact date. Judah was then a small province of the Persian Empire under a governor. The hopes raised by Haggai and Zechariah had not yet been fully realized, and the people had grown discouraged and careless.

2. Cultural Setting

The law required unblemished animals for sacrifice, and a vowed animal was to be given as vowed (Leviticus 22:17–25; Deuteronomy 17:1). The priests, descendants of Levi, were responsible to accept and offer sacrifices and to teach the law. A Persian governor received tribute and gifts from the province.

3. Literary Structure of Malachi 1:1–14

- **The oracle** (1:1)
- **I have loved you** (1:2–5)
- **Where is my honor?** (1:6)
- **Polluted food and blemished offerings** (1:7–10)
- **A name great among the nations** (1:11)
- **The people's weariness** (1:12–13)
- **The cheat and the great King** (1:14)

4. Key Themes

The LORD's love; honor and fear; true worship; the LORD's name among the nations; the LORD as great King.

5. Theological Considerations

The LORD's love is declared before his honor is demanded. Worship that gives God leftovers reveals that his worth has been forgotten. The LORD's purpose reaches beyond Israel to all nations.

6. Relevant Scholarly Insights

Malachi's question-and-answer pattern is often called a disputation. The name "Malachi" means "my messenger," and some have wondered whether it is a title, though most treat it as the prophet's name.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.2)

1.2 Q1: Why do you think Malachi's people could ask how the LORD had loved them? What had happened to their hopes?

1.2 Q2: Malachi comes a generation or more after Haggai and Zechariah. What tensions appear in a community when promised restoration feels delayed and ordinary life drags on?

1.2 Q3: Why do you think the LORD speaks first of his love before confronting their worship?

Section 1.3

Movement 1: How Have You Loved Us? (Malachi 1:1–5)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Malachi 1:1** (focal passage) — The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

- **Summary of Malachi 1:2–4** — The LORD tells his people that he has loved them, and they ask how. He answers by pointing to Jacob and Esau: he chose Jacob, the ancestor of Israel, while Edom, Esau's descendants, lies in ruins, and though Edom may try to rebuild, the LORD will tear down.
- **Reader 2: Malachi 1:5** (focal passage) — Their own eyes will see it, and they will say that the LORD is great beyond the border of Israel.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

> **Malachi 1:1:** The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.
>
> **Malachi 1:5:** Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel!"

Teaching Narrative: How Have You Loved Us?

1. The Oracle (Malachi 1:1)

A weighty word from the LORD to his people through his messenger.

2. I Have Loved You (Malachi 1:2–4)

The LORD declares his covenant love, and points to his choosing of Jacob as evidence.

3. Great Beyond the Border (Malachi 1:5)

The people will see the LORD's greatness reach beyond Israel.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.3)

1.3 Q1: "The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi" (1:1). What does it mean that this message is a weighty word from the LORD rather than the prophet's opinion?

1.3 Q2: The LORD begins by saying, "I have loved you," and the people answer, "How have you loved us?" What in postexilic Judah's circumstances might help explain why that question sounded plausible to them?

1.3 Q3: The LORD answers by pointing to his choice of Jacob, their ancestor. Why would remembering God's past faithfulness answer present doubt?

1.3 Q4: "Your own eyes shall see this" (1:5). Why does the LORD promise they will see his greatness for themselves?

1.3 Q5: "Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel!" (1:5). What does this reveal about the reach of God's purposes, even at the start of a dispute with his own people?

Section 1.4

Movement 2: A Name Great Among the Nations (Malachi 1:6–14)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Malachi 1:6** (focal passage) — A son honors his father and a servant his master. If the LORD is a father and a master, where is his honor and his fear? He speaks to the priests who despise his name, and they ask how they have despised it.
- **Summary of Malachi 1:7** — They offer polluted food on his altar and treat the LORD's table as something to be despised.
- **Reader 2: Malachi 1:8** (focal passage) — When they offer blind, lame, or sick animals, is that not evil? Would their governor accept such a gift?
- **Summary of Malachi 1:9–10** — The LORD wishes someone would shut the temple doors rather than kindle fire on his altar in vain. He takes no pleasure in such worship and will not accept their offerings.
- **Reader 3: Malachi 1:11** (focal passage) — From the rising of the sun to its setting the LORD's name will be great among the nations, and in every place a pure offering will be offered to his name.
- **Summary of Malachi 1:12–13** — The priests profane his name by treating his table with contempt, calling the service a weariness, and bringing stolen, lame, or sick animals.
- **Reader 4: Malachi 1:14** (focal passage) — Cursed is the cheat who vows a good male animal and sacrifices a blemished one, for the LORD is a great King, and his name will be feared among the nations.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

Malachi 1:6: “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’

Malachi 1:8: When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 1:11: For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the

nations, says the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 1:14: Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

Teaching Narrative: A Name Great Among the Nations

1. Where Is My Honor? (Malachi 1:6)

The LORD asks for the honor a son gives a father and the respect a servant gives a master.

2. A Despised Table (Malachi 1:7–10)

Blemished offerings reveal contempt; the LORD would rather the doors be shut. Malachi confronts people who knowingly withheld acceptable offerings while presenting prohibited ones. The passage should not shame people whose best is limited by poverty, disability, illness, caregiving, exhaustion, or crisis.

3. A Name Great Among the Nations (Malachi 1:11)

The LORD's name will be honored from sunrise to sunset.

4. The Weariness and the Cheat (Malachi 1:12–14)

Bored worship and broken vows are set against the great King.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.4)

1.4 Q1: "If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear?" (1:6). In Malachi's dispute, what does the comparison to a father and a master reveal about how the priests were treating God's name?

1.4 Q2: The priests ask, "How have we despised your name?" (1:6). Why is it possible to dishonor God without realizing it?

1.4 Q3: "Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor?" (1:8). Why does the governor comparison expose hypocrisy in public worship without implying that God requires wealth, status, or high-energy performance?

1.4 Q4: "From the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations" (1:11). How does this promise challenge a small or tired view of worship?

1.4 Q5: "For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts" (1:14). How does remembering who God is change what we bring to him?

Section 1.5

Canonical Horizon: A Great King and a Name Among the Nations

Tracing the Thread Across Scripture

God showed his love by giving his Son (John 3:16; Romans 5:8), Paul reflects on God's choosing of Jacob as mercy and calling (Romans 9:10–13), people from every nation worship the Lamb (Revelation 5:9–10; 7:9–10), believers offer a sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15), and Jesus is the King of kings (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16). Turn to each passage as the connections are traced.

1. God's Love in the Son (John 3:16; Romans 5:8)

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

2. Mercy and Calling (Romans 9:10–13)

Paul cites Malachi to show that God's choosing rests on his mercy, not human merit, never as a reason for hatred of any people.

3. The Nations Worship (Revelation 5:9–10; 7:9–10)

People from every tribe, language, and nation praise the Lamb.

4. A Pure Offering (Hebrews 13:15)

Believers continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God through Jesus, a canonical development of the theme of pure worship rather than an explicit quotation-and-fulfillment relationship.

5. The King of Kings (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16)

Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Anchor Verse (ESV)

Malachi 1:11: For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.5)

1.5 Q1: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). How does the cross answer the question "How have you loved us?"

1.5 Q2: "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God" (Hebrews 13:15). How does Hebrews 13:15 develop the theme of pure worship in Malachi 1:11 without being an explicit quotation-and-fulfillment claim?

1.5 Q3: Revelation pictures people "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" worshiping the Lamb (Revelation 7:9). How does Revelation 7:9–10 resonate with Malachi's vision of the LORD's name being honored among the nations?

Section 1.6

Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer

Application

Personal & Group Application (Head, Heart, Hands)

- **Head:** The LORD loves his people first, and that love calls for honor. Malachi's priests drifted into giving God leftovers while assuring themselves nothing was wrong. Believers today can do the same, in time, attention, money, or worship. Remembering that God is a loving Father and a great King moves us to bring him our first and best.

Take a few minutes to move this week's study into everyday life. Discuss these three questions together and write down what you want to remember:

1.6 Q1: Where has routine dulled your sense of God's worth, and what is one honest, non-performative way to honor him this week without measuring yourself by wealth or exhaustion?

1.6 Q2: How does hearing "I have loved you" first change the way you respond to God's call for honor?

1.6 Q3: What is one way you can help others, near or far, see that the LORD's name is great?

Looking Ahead to Next Week

Recap: In Week 1, the LORD declared his love for his people, asked the priests where his honor was, rebuked their blemished offerings, and promised that his name would be great among the nations because he is a great King.

Transition: The LORD has asked, "Where is my honor?" Next, he speaks directly to the priests with a command and a warning, and reminds them of the covenant with Levi.

Week 2 Overview — Where Is My Honor? (Malachi 2:1–9): Movement 1, This Command Is for You, O Priests (2:1–4), covers the LORD's command and warning to the priests to give honor to his name. Movement 2, The Covenant with Levi (2:5–9), covers the covenant of life and peace, true instruction, lips that guard knowledge, the priest as the messenger of the LORD of hosts, and the priests who turned aside. The Canonical Horizon traces Christ the faithful priest and messenger and the call for teachers to guard knowledge.

Focal Readings to Preview

- Malachi 2:1–2
- Malachi 2:4–7

My One Concrete Step for the Week Ahead

Write down or name aloud the specific rhythm, boundary, or conversation you want to practice before next week's gathering:

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by inviting each person to share a one-sentence takeaway or prayer request, then pray together along these lines:

Closing Group Prayer

LORD, you have loved your people first, even when they asked how. We confess our tired worship and the times we give you our leftovers. We praise you as the great King whose name will be great among the nations. We pray for pastors and worship leaders who serve week after week. Thank you for Jesus, your Son, in whom your love is shown. Give us hearts that bring you our best. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.