

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL EXILE and RETURN GOD THE PROVIDER

## *The Problem of Shallow Worship*

This lesson concludes our 18-month chronological study of the Old Testament. People do Bible study for many reasons: for devotions, leisure reading, to prove someone wrong, for homework, and to understand what it means. However, the main purpose for studying the Word of God should be to KNOW (follow Jesus), GROW (become like Jesus) and GO (call on others to do the same).

Our journey concludes with Malachi – the final book of the Old Testament. The time between the last writings of the Old Testament and the appearance of the Messiah of the New Testament is known as the “intertestamental” (or “between the testaments”) period. Because there was no prophetic word from God during this period, some refer to it as the “400 silent years.” Malachi had much to say to the social, political, and religious compromise in his time. However, his message is also contemporary and convicting even though it was first spoken 2500 years ago. Next week, we will begin our study of the New Testament which tells the story of how hope came, not only for the Jews, but for the entire world.

Malachi is a noun meaning, “my messenger,” or “my angel.” Malachi is not mentioned anywhere else in the Old or New Testaments. No kings are mentioned in Malachi’s book making it difficult to date exactly when it was written. At the beginning of this book he does not give the name of his father like many of the other prophets did. Because of this, some scholars believe that this name ‘Malachi’ is not a proper name but just means ‘my messenger’. For sure Malachi is the last prophet who wrote Old Testament scripture.

The use of the Persian word for “governor” in **Malachi 1:8** indicates Malachi’s prophecy was made some time after the people had returned from the Babylonian exile to rebuild Jerusalem. Last week’s study of Ezra’s reading of the Law was a period when the people drew closer to the LORD. As the years passed, the high expectations of those early days seemed unfulfilled. The faith of many diminished. People cynically began to doubt the love, power, and justice of God. Malachi’s prophecy came during this ‘waiting’ period. Their spiritual life had become mundane. There were no great signs or wonders occurring. They were just waiting – waiting for their coming Messiah.

Perhaps we could say Malachi was prophesying during a waiting period similar to the period Christians are living in today. We live after the apostolic age, the time of great signs and wonders in the New Testament. God’s Word has been fully revealed to us and we possess His complete written word. And yet, often we find ourselves in the midst of shallow worship and low expectations for our future. Our worship should not be shallow. We are waiting –and anticipating the magnificent return of our Messiah from heaven – the Lord Jesus Christ! Our worship should not be shallow – our worship should fill us with joy and bring gladness to the heart

of God. An old Puritan prayer says ‘keep me from prayerless prayers and praiseless praise’. Be reminded today that shallow worship trivializes God’s greatness.

**Read Malachi 1:6-8 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> *“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?’<sup>7</sup> By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the LORD’s table may be despised.<sup>8</sup> 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*

The father and the master received honor and respect from their sons and servants. The people (especially the priests) were not giving God the Father the honor He deserved. The priests were to be the spiritual leaders and yet they were giving God their leftovers instead of giving Him their best and in turn they were allowing the people to do the same. Warren Wiersbe says, “no ministry rises higher than its leaders.” Besides not honoring God they were not fearing Him. **Proverbs 8:13 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup> *The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil...* They were ‘acting’ worshipful while doing evil in the sight of the LORD.

Despise is a strong word, but the priests were literally despising God’s name through their actions. And instead of acknowledging their sin, they turn around and question God! *How have we despised your name?* They were giving God less than they were give their governor. If they had offered these defective beasts to their governor, he would have rejected them, yet they considered polluted things as good enough for the LORD. Our offerings to the Lord are representative of our heart for the LORD. **Matthew 6:21 (ESV)** <sup>21</sup> *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Ron Mattoon helps us get the picture of how they were treating the LORD. Mattoon writes, “Radio commentator Paul Harvey shared a true story of a woman and her frozen Thanksgiving turkey. The Butterball Turkey Company set up a telephone hotline to answer consumer questions about preparing holiday turkeys. One woman called to inquire about cooking a turkey that had been in the bottom of her freezer for 23 years. That’s right... 23 years. The Butterball representative told her the turkey would probably be safe to eat if the freezer had been kept below zero for the entire 23 years. But the Butterball representative warned her that even if the turkey was safe to eat, the flavor would probably have deteriorated to such a degree that she would not recommend eating it. The caller replied, ‘That’s what I thought. We’ll give the turkey to our church.’”

**Read Malachi 1:9-11 (ESV).** <sup>9</sup> *And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts.<sup>10</sup> Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.<sup>11</sup> 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.*

Their shallow worship was not sufficient to gain the favor of the LORD in order to receive His graciousness. Malachi told these disobedient priests that it would be better to close the doors of the temple and stop the sacrifices altogether than to continue practicing such hypocrisy. Do you see how these words regarding shutting the temple doors 2500 years ago are still relevant today?

Yes, today, there are so-called 'Christian' churches that water down the Word to the point of ignoring the truths of God's Word. False teaching is propagated by false prophets. Churches that act godly when they are not godly should be closed.

Shallow worship was true of Paul's day. He wrote in **2 Timothy 3:5 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. We should refrain from being smug in our own worship.* Dr. G. Campbell Morgan once said, "I am more afraid of the profanity of the sanctuary than I am of the profanity of the street." Profanity in the sanctuary is not necessarily vulgar language it can simply be prayerless prayers and praiseless praise.

In verse 11, Malachi looks forward to the day when the Gentiles will worship God and magnify His great name. *For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations.*

Across the bridge of time, Malachi saw the time when the message of salvation would be taken to everyone – not just the Jews. God's promise to Abraham was that his descendents would become a blessing to the entire earth. God's commission for the church is to take the good news of Jesus Christ to all nations. Jesus said in **Mark 16:15 (ESV)** <sup>15</sup> ... *"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.*

Shallow worship minimizes God's worth.

**Read Malachi 3:7-10 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> *From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?'* <sup>8</sup> *Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?'* *In your tithes and contributions.* <sup>9</sup> *You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.* <sup>10</sup> *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*

We know from Jesus' parable of the prodigal son that the prodigal son did not get a whipping when he came home; his whipping while sojourning in the far country. The LORD says: *From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes.* Over the past 18 months, we have studied how time after time the people sought their own way and their willfulness got them into trouble every time. *Return to me, and I will return to you* that was the cry of the God of Israel to His people throughout the Old Testament. It is still His cry to the people of Israel today, and it is still His cry to His church today: *Return to me and I will return to you.*

David Legge says, “I think ... one of the greatest problem that a child of God can ever have...is the problem of spiritual delusion... Many Christians feel that repentance is something you did the night that you were born-again, and once you do it then that's the end of it - well, that's not New Testament Christianity.”

The question posed in Malachi: *Will man rob God?* – is frequently used in tithing sermons. Tithing as an act of worship is as old as Abraham, who gave tithes to Melchizedek, acknowledging that Melchizedek was the representative of God Most High. Jacob vowed to God that he would tithe, so tithing pre-dates the Law of Moses. However, tithing was officially incorporated into the Law of Moses as a part of Israel's worship. In bringing the tithes and offerings, the people were not only supporting the ministry of the temple, but they were also giving thanks to God for His bountiful provision for their own needs.

Since God made and owns everything, He doesn't need anything that we can bring Him. Paul in the New Testament teaches ‘grace giving’. Many Christians feel that if believers under the Old Covenant brought their tithes, how could Christians under the New Covenant give anything less? Whenever we rob God, we always rob ourselves – we rob ourselves of the spiritual blessings that always accompany obedience and faithful giving. Shallow worship deserves judgment.

**Read Malachi 4:1-6 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”* <sup>2</sup> *But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings...* <sup>3</sup> .... <sup>4</sup> “...<sup>5</sup> *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.”* <sup>6</sup> *And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”*

Malachi says that the day is coming when the arrogant and all evildoers will be nothing but stubble. Scary thought, isn't it? People who do not place their faith and trust in Christ do not have a permanent foundation. Their fake foundations will be set afire and will burn up. Nothing will remain. **1 Corinthians 3:11 (ESV)** <sup>11</sup> *For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* On the other hand, when we receive Christ's great salvation,, we become ‘living stones’ that make up God's temple. Our foundation will be eternal.

John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah even though he was not literally Elijah himself. He was the first prophet in 400 years to prophesy of the coming Messiah. Old Testament scripture indicates that before Jesus returns at His Second Coming a prophetic Elijah will again appear. Whether he will literally be Elijah, who never died, or a person with the same anointing as Elijah and John the Baptist, we do not know. We do know this: **Psalms 150:1-2, 6 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens!* <sup>2</sup> *Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness!* <sup>6</sup> *Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!*