



11

Worshipping God

Key Theme

- God's Word is the foundation for our lives.

Key Passages

- Malachi 1:6–2:9, 3:8–15; Psalm 51:16–19

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe the proper attitude of worship.
- Explain the importance of teachers.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, "What does God expect from our worship?"

Students will practice the memory verse by working on a crossword puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend.

- Print one Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



Studying God's Word

The priests were leading the people in disobedience to God's commands by sacrificing blind, lame, sick, and defiled animals. After they were warned, the priests were unrepentant. God was greatly displeased and put a curse on them.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Read through the lesson key passages.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Our Sacrifices

Students will examine passages that identify the sacrifices that we offer to God under the New Covenant.

- Student Guides
- Pencils or pens



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along with this background.

The final book of the Old Testament was written by the prophet Malachi. We know Malachi only from this writing; there is no mention of him in any other books of the Old Testament. Based on the themes of his prophecies, Malachi may have been a contemporary of Nehemiah and Ezra, or his ministry may have come shortly after their prominence in Israel. This places the writing of Malachi between 440 and 400 BC (see historical section below for more details).

Malachi was surely writing after the restoration of the Temple since he talked about the role of the priests in offering sacrifices. Like Ezra and Nehemiah, Malachi confronted Israel's sins: offering improper sacrifices, marrying foreigners, not paying the tithes and offerings, and the leaders unfairly treating the people. The book has two main thrusts: to call the people to right worship and to point forward to the coming of the Messiah. In this lesson we will be looking at the worship aspect and then deal with the coming of the Messiah in the next lesson.

At the beginning of Malachi, God reminded the Israelites that He chose them as His special people even though they continually rejected Him (Malachi 1:1–4). He then rebuked the priests for their failures in conducting the worship in the Temple in the way God had commanded Moses. Specifically, the priests were offering the blind, lame, and sick animals as sacrifices to God—animals they would not offer to their earthly governors. They either didn't care that they were offering defiled sacrifices or they were unaware of what God had commanded. In either case, they were responsible for their failure to study and obey the Law. God had clearly commanded them to offer only animals that were without blemish, and He clearly described the things that were unacceptable to Him (Leviticus 22:18–25).

In chapter 2, God reminded the priests that He had made a covenant with the priestly line of Levi—

Aaron being the first priest of the Levites—and they had broken that covenant. Since they had failed in their duty to teach the people the truth, the sins of the people were also on their heads (2:1–8). For this failure, God was angry with them.

The people were also divorcing their wives and marrying foreign women, another clear violation in worshipping God as He desired. On top of this, the people were not giving God the tithes and offerings He had commanded the Israelites to give. In this, the people were robbing God, and He was withholding His blessing because of their disobedience (3:8–12). These offerings were to support the Levites serving in the Temple (Numbers 18:21–32), as well as to pay for the festivals and to care for the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28–29), but the people rejected God's plan and went their own way. By robbing God, they robbed themselves of His blessing.

If the people had stayed married and paid their tithes, would God have been pleased? Well, God is not concerned only about outward actions but also about the motives of the heart. God addressed this in Malachi 3:13–15. The Jews had thought it was useless to serve God, so they were just going through the motions. Because their hearts were not attached to their actions, God was not pleased. They pretended to be sorry for their sins, but they were faking it. Their actions did not match their attitudes, and God knew it.

The proper attitude in worshipping God was also addressed by King David. After he had sinned against God by committing adultery with Bathsheba and having her husband killed, David confessed his sin to God. In Psalm 51, David described the connection between worshipping God with our actions and our hearts. God does not desire sacrifices that are offered with the wrong attitude. Only when a sacrifice was offered with a broken spirit and heart—recognizing the true nature of sin—was it pleasing to God (Psalm 51:16–19). The Jews had not heeded the wisdom of David and thus failed to please God with their actions because their hearts were in the wrong place.

Today, we don't offer burnt offerings, but we do

offer worship to God in many other ways. We offer Him the praise of our lips as a sacrifice (Hebrews 13:15). We offer Him our good deeds for others as a sacrifice (James 1:27). We offer our money and time to our local church and other ministries as a sacrifice (Philippians 4:18). But if any of these things are done without love, for selfish motives, as a religious practice, or to appear holy before others, they are not pleasing to God. We should seek to serve God out of a pure heart. Jesus's sacrifice as the unblemished Lamb has paid the penalty for sin and purified our hearts to serve God. As we seek to obey God, we can do it with a pure heart because of what Jesus has done on our behalf. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Because there are no clear references to kings (or other people) in Malachi's writing, assigning an exact date to his prophecies is difficult. He was surely writing at a time when Israel had forgotten about worshipping God properly and when the teachers had failed to fulfill their God-given role. There are a couple options, however, for the time of writing. One possibility is during the time that Nehemiah returned to Persia after re-establishing the Law with the help of Ezra and other teachers. This would date the book of Malachi around 442 BC during a period of backsliding before Nehemiah returned to govern the nation again. Malachi touches on several of the same problems Nehemiah sought to reform, so this is a reasonable conclusion.

The second option for a date of writing is after Nehemiah had died and the people had again turned from truly worshipping God. Malachi may have been reminding the people of the truths Ezra and Nehemiah had taught them, exhorting them to continue to follow the Law until Elijah would come to announce Messiah's arrival. This would place the date closer to 400 BC. In either case, the text clearly called the people to worship God as He had prescribed.

Many people today believe they can approach God in any way they want to. They fail to recognize that God demands to be worshipped in very specific ways. For the Israelites during the Old Testament period, that involved the Law and sacrificial system. But it is only those who approach God with a pure heart that can be accepted. The problem is that no one has a pure heart. Apart from Christ, even our good deeds are filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Only in Jesus can we rightly worship God. Those who reject this idea are working against Christ (1 John 4:1–6). As Christians, we must help people understand that they can only come to the Father through the Son (John 14:6). Apart from receiving Jesus by faith, no one will have eternal life (John 5:19–27). Even though the gospel is an unpopular message, it must be taught so that God can be worshipped as He desires. Let's not be like the priests of Malachi's day, but let us faithfully teach what God has revealed to us in His Word.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

God, you are holy and mighty. What a great privilege I have to come to you in prayer because Jesus redeemed me. Examine my heart now, O Lord. Have I been offering you pure worship? Have my sacrifices of praise, service, money, prayer, and study been offered with a heart that is humble and faithful to you? Convict me Lord. Show me if there is any offensive way in me. And by the power of your Holy Spirit, open the eyes and hearts of my students today to see that worship is only acceptable if presented with a repentant, humble heart and a right attitude. Move in their hearts that they will one day desire to worship you with the worship you are worthy of.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





COME ON IN

- Write on the board, “What does God expect from our worship?”
- Students will practice the memory verse by working on a crossword puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend.



Review

We have moved through the major historical books of the Bible, concluding with Nehemiah and the final stage of the restoration after the Babylonian Captivity. As we talked about last week, Nehemiah, in concert with Ezra, sought to restore the knowledge of God’s Law to the people of Israel. The Temple was rebuilt. The sacrifices were occurring. The people knew what God expected of them. The priests and leaders were fulfilling their roles.

But . . . the Israelites continued in their pattern of failure to consistently and diligently seek after God and follow His

commands. That will be our topic for today from the book of Malachi.

Malachi is one of the Minor Prophets and is placed at the very end of our Old Testament. Placing a date on Malachi’s proclamations is a bit tricky, but there are two basic choices: He is either on the scene at the same time as Nehemiah or at some point shortly after. Regardless of which decade he was speaking in, his message was a clear indictment of the sins of the Israelites and their worship of God.



► Write on the board, “What does God expect from our worship?”



Studying God’s Word

READ THE WORD

Let’s read Malachi 1:1–2:9 together to help us understand his indictment against the Jews. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? What is unique about the format of this passage of Scripture? *It is set up in the form of a dispute between the people of Israel and God in a question-answer format.*
- ? What attitude does God display toward Israel in verse 1:2? *He loves Israel, having chosen them out of all the nations.*
- ? How does Israel view God? *They doubt His love for them.*

- ? **What attitude is revealed in verse 1:6?** *The Israelites were not honoring or reverencing God as their Father and Master.*
- ? **To whom does the questioning turn in verse 1:6?** *The questions turn toward the priests, the leaders of Israel.*
- ? **What had the priests been doing that offended God?** *They were offering animals that were not fit for sacrifice. They offered the stolen, the lame, the blind, the sick, and the defiled animals rather than their best animals.*

The priests should have known that these sacrifices were not acceptable—the prohibitions are clearly recorded in Leviticus 22:18–25. Turn there and listen to how God identified what was acceptable to Him. *Read the passage after students turn there.*

Leviticus 22:18–25

- ? **Are God's instructions on what was an acceptable sacrifice clear?** *Yes.*
- ? **How does God use the governor of the people (Malachi 1:8) to make their wicked acts even more evident?** *God points out to them that they would never try to please their earthly governor by offering him blind, lame, or sick animals as presents or offerings. They were willing to offer less than their best to God; something they would not do to a mere man.*
- ? **In verse 1:10, what does God wish would happen?** *God wishes that someone would close the doors of the Temple so that no vain sacrifices would be offered.*
- ? **Who does God say will honor Him in verse 1:11?** *The gentile nations.*
- ? **What complaints did the priests have in verse 1:13?** *They believed the daily, continual sacrifices and other activities of the Temple service were wearisome.*
- ? **Who does verse 1:14 bring into the picture?** *The man who brings the sacrifice to the Temple is deceiving himself offering a blemished animal when he has better animals in his flock.*
- ? **What imagery is in view in talking of a male animal without blemish being offered as a sacrifice?** *Both the Passover lamb and the sacrifices for the Day of Atonement were supposed to be unblemished males. These both point forward to Jesus who was the sinless (unblemished) Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.*
- ? **Who does God address in chapter 2?** *The priests.*
- ? **According to verse 2:2, what was God seeking in the worship of His people?** *He wanted His name to be glorified by His people rather than used in contempt.*
- ? **What imagery in verse 2:3 helps us understand how serious God is about His judgment on the priests?** *He says that He will smear the refuse (dung) entrails from the sacrifices on their faces. The very waste and filth that was generated by the sacrifices was to be carried outside the camp, but God would rather smear it on their faces to show them His contempt for their attitudes.*
- ? **What is the meaning of the reference to Levi in verse 2:4?** *Levi was the first appointed priest, and it was the line of Levi that all priests were to come from. God uses Levi as a positive example to follow since he followed God's clear commands.*
- ? **What role did the priests fail to keep according to verse 2:7–9?** *The priests were to teach the people how to keep the Law as messengers of the Lord. The priests had failed*

to teach the people what God required of them and led them astray by allowing them to corrupt God's pure system of worship.

Discover the Truth

HOLY

God is holy. The Jews, including the priests, had forgotten or had denied that truth. But God would not stand for His name to be blasphemed among the nations. He rebuked the Jews with curses and refused to receive their sacrifices.

? **What do the actions of the people and the priests tell us about their hearts?** *Our actions come from our attitudes, so their hearts were darkened toward God. They did not fear God or see Him as the righteous and holy God that He is.*

Psalm 51:16–19

God desires for us to worship Him in truth, not just in actions. David made this very clear in Psalm 51. After repenting of his sin, David penned this psalm. Let's look at verses 16–19 to understand why God accepted his sacrifice. *Have someone read Psalm 51:16–19.*

God will not despise sacrifices that are offered to Him with a broken spirit and a contrite heart. Sin is a serious matter, and it should grieve our hearts when we sin against our God. The Jews had failed to humble themselves before God and were simply performing religious rituals that meant nothing to them. So jaded were their hearts toward their sinfulness that they even offered lame and sick animals.

MERCIFUL

God had shown His mercy in withholding His judgment for their sin, but His patience does not last forever. God cursed the Jews for their sinful attitudes through the words of Malachi, rebuking the teachers for failing to fill their vital role. If the teachers of the Law had corrupted themselves, it is no surprise that the people followed. That is why God holds those who are teachers to a higher standard (James 3:1).

The rest of Malachi chapter 2 deals with other violations of the people. They had married pagan wives and corrupted the seed of Israel. God desires marriage to be a permanent bond between a man and a woman and for that marriage to produce godly offspring. Godly children can't be raised in a household that is divided and serving pagan gods.

God desires that each of us worship Him with our heart, soul, mind, and strength—He wants all of us. We cannot be divided in our hearts or minds when it comes to offering worship to God.

Matthew 15:7–9

Jesus warned the religious leaders, those who appeared most holy on the outside, of the hypocrisy of their worship. Listen to these words of warning from Jesus. *Read Matthew 15:7–9, noting that this is a reference to Isaiah 29:13.*





Our Sacrifices

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

So how do we apply these ideas to our own lives? We don't offer animal sacrifices as part of our worship, so this text can't be directly applied to us. That means we need to look for the principles in the text and understand how they apply in our situation.

The sacrifices were a part of worship for the Jews, so we can relate these principles to our worship today. To get an idea of what our worship entails as New Testament believers, there is an activity in your Student Guides entitled *Our Sacrifices*. Take a few minutes to look at the passages there, and we will discuss your conclusions when you are finished. *Have the students work in groups to complete the activity.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

There is surely much more to our worship to God than what you found in these verses, but they give us at least a hint of what Scripture has to say about our sacrifices to God. *Discuss each passage and the questions.*

Romans 12:1–2 *We should present our bodies to God to serve Him in all that we do, having been made alive to God in Christ. This could be extended into many different concepts including our time, thoughts, actions, etc. as we offer our whole beings to God.*

Hebrews 13:15–16 *Praises to God should be offered continually through Jesus as well as thanksgiving. We should also offer good deeds and share what we have with others as a sacrifice to God.*

Philippians 4:14–19 *Supporting the work of those who are spreading the gospel is a sacrifice that is well-pleasing to God.*

Ephesians 5:2 *We should walk in love toward others, just as Jesus did when He offered Himself as a sacrifice.*

1 Peter 2:4–5 *As priests, all believers are to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.*

1. How does our heart attitude change the way God sees our acts of worship to Him?

God desires to be worshipped in spirit and truth, so we should seek to offer our worship to Him with the purest motives.

2. Are any of your acts of worship ever offered in true righteousness? Because our sin nature impacts our lives in dramatic ways, our motives and thoughts are rarely purely righteous.

3. How does Jesus play a role in the worship you offer to God? The passages point to our worship being offered in or through Jesus. As new creations in Christ, we can offer our worship and sacrifices to God knowing that we have been made righteous in Christ.

4. How does the Holy Spirit play a role in your sacrifices to God? By the Spirit we are stirred to offer praises in song, lift up prayers to God, give of our time or money to others, and many other things. As we walk in the Spirit, we offer worship to God in all of these ways.

God calls us to worship Him with our time, our money, our talents, our voices, our acts of service, and many other things. Because we have been given the righteousness of Christ, our sacrifices are acceptable to God. We must still seek to align our hearts in a proper attitude of worship, but even when we fail, we have a great High Priest who stands between us and the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous. We can know that our sacrifices are acceptable to God as we offer them through His Son, walking in His Spirit. We must take great care to allow God's words to inform us of how He is to be worshipped.



READ THE WORD

We are going to jump over the first part of chapter 3 and come back to it next week. In our final section, we are going to look at one more failure of the Jews described in Malachi 3:8–15. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

► As you teach this section, be aware of your church's position on tithing and giving.

- ? **What other law were the Israelites violating?** *They were not paying their tithes and giving offerings.*
- ? **What was the purpose of the tithes in the Old Testament?** *Tithes were given to provide for the Levites who served in the Temple since they had no land to provide for themselves. The people provided the financial and physical needs of the priests, Levites, and other Temple workers. All of these were stored in rooms at the Temple and used for those serving in the Temple. The money and goods were also used to support the other functions of the theocratic government. Refer to Leviticus 27:30–32 and Numbers 18:21–32 for description of the tithes and offerings. Overall, the tithes and offerings approached 30% of the income at various points in Israel's history. The common conception is that the tithe was a simple 10%, but the actual amount given is much more complex. There were also offerings for the poor and to support the national festivals.*
- ? **What had God done as a result of the people's disobedience?** *He had cursed them.*
- ? **What did God promise to do if the people would repent and bring the tithes and offerings?** *He promised to protect their crops and give them an abundance as a result of their obedience.*
- ? **What is revealed about the attitude of the people toward God in verses 13–15?** *They believed there was no benefit in following God, but only hardship and trouble.*
- ? **How does this relate to their failure to give tithes and offerings?** *They desired comfort above obedience, keeping the offerings that belonged to God to serve themselves.*

Discover the Truth

God had instructed the Israelites to give a portion of the produce He had provided for the service of the Temple. God gave them their crops, but they would not give any back to God. They saw no benefit in serving and obeying God. They desired to serve themselves with their possessions rather than serving God. They refused to worship God as He had prescribed.

As we mentioned earlier, giving is a form of sacrifice that we offer to God in worship. Under the Old Covenant, the Israelites were commanded to give a certain percentage of their income or produce to the service of God. While the New Testament has no clear command to offer a tithe, Paul teaches about giving to the service of the Lord in 2 Corinthians 9. Turn there. Will someone please read 2 Corinthians 9:5–15? *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

God loves a cheerful giver. God wants us to give to His work willingly, not grudgingly. As we give out of a heart seeking to see God's work progressing on earth, God also promises to lavish us with His grace. This does not necessarily imply physical or monetary blessings, but those are surely ways God could choose to bless, just as He promised to the Israelites at the preaching of Malachi. When you write that offering check or meet a need, you are offering worship to God. Just as in any other form, we want to seek to do it with our heart in the right place. We seek to offer that sacrifice to God with clean hands and a pure heart.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

God is the eternal, infinite, holy, wise, omnipotent, immutable, sovereign, merciful, faithful, glorious Creator of this universe—including us. We are His creatures. He provides every breath we take. He provides every calorie of energy that we consume. He holds every particle in the universe together by His powerful word. And we often reject Him—if not in our outward actions, then by the attitude of our heart.

Just as God called the Israelites to repent of their improper attitude in worship and their direct violations of what He had clearly communicated to them through Moses, we must examine our own heart attitudes as we offer sacrifices and worship to God. We don't get to choose how we worship—God has directed our worship and communicated to us in the Bible His expectations. We can offer lame and sick and blind worship to God, but He will not accept it.

As we have previously discussed, we are all teachers in some form. The priests at the time of Malachi had failed to communicate the truths of God's Law to the people, and this brought a curse on the people. Teachers have always been important in the communication of God's truth, and all of us should take great care to handle God's Word diligently, knowing that we will face stricter judgment if we teach falsely (James 3:1).

In all of these warnings, we cannot let ourselves forget God's mercy to us in Jesus Christ. Even when we fail to worship God with a pure heart, God is pleased to forgive us and to cleanse us from that unrighteousness because of what Jesus has done for us (1 John 1:7–10). This truth should offer us great freedom and cause us to rejoice in the gracious kindness of our God.

After discussing the application questions, close the lesson by reading Malachi 3:16–18, pointing to the hope of a remnant redeemed by God through Jesus.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? **Why is it important to understand the history of Israel in order to fully understand the passage we have been studying in our lesson today?** *To understand what God was upset about, we have to know that God had originally given them a clear set of instructions regarding worship. Understanding the whole counsel of God is important so that we can allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Understanding the timing of the events can also give us a deeper understanding of what is being taught.*
- ? **If you gave 10% of all of your income, off the gross even, would God be pleased with you?** *If we do not give willingly and joyfully, our offerings are not pleasing to God. Our deeds are not acceptable unless they are done in faith since it is impossible to please God apart from faith (Hebrews 11:6).*
- ? **What attitudes and activities do we face in our culture that keep us from worshiping God with pure hearts?** *There are many things that distract us from being devoted to worship including our materialistic attitudes, our individualistic outlook, our selfishness, our busyness, and many other factors.*
- ? **Many people in our culture talk about many paths that all lead to God. How does our lesson today help you provide an explanation for the one and only way to the Father—through Jesus Christ (John 14:6)?** *The exclamations of God against the errors of the priests and the people in failing to obey His clear commands regarding sacrifice and tithing seem fairly minor when we compare them to the various ways people believe they are worshipping God today. If all roads lead to God, why would God get so mad at the Jews worshipping as they saw fit? If a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Catholic, and a Scientologist are all seeking to worship God in ways that are not consistent with what Scripture has clearly revealed, God will reject their worship. We can only come to the Father through the Son (1 John 4:1–6).*
- ? **What areas do you need to understand better when it comes to offering God worship and sacrifice in the way that He desires?** *Discuss various answers.*



MEMORY VERSE

Nehemiah 9:6 You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for clearly revealing His commands to us in the Bible.
- Praise God for His kindness shown in providing a perfect sacrifice for sin.
- Ask God for a pure heart devoted to worship Him as He wishes.