

A Prediction, Further Rebukes, and Encouragement

Malachi 3

Malachi 3:1-6 - *“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts.*

² *“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire, and like launderers’ soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver. He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness. ⁴ “Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the Lord, as in the days of old, as in former years.*

⁵ *And I will come near you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien— because they do not fear Me,” says the Lord of hosts.*

⁶ *“For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.”*

Background Notes

When the Jews came back to Jerusalem from their 70-year captivity in Babylon, there was “good news and bad news.” The good news was that they rebuilt the altar of sacrifice, and then in 516BC they finished rebuilding the Temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar 70 years earlier. Finally, under the motivating leadership of Nehemiah, they rebuilt Jerusalem’s city walls in 445BC. The bad news was that the people were not fully committed to the Lord for much of this time. Most likely the backslidden state in Malachi’s day is the same state described in Nehemiah 13.

Using the question and answer method of approach, the prophet Malachi rebuked the people in a number of different areas in chapters 1 and 2. There are two more areas of rebuke in Malachi 3.

However, before the rebukes begin, there is a parenthesis – a prediction of the coming of John the Baptist (v1-6.) We know that John the Baptist is the “messenger” (v1) who preceded the coming of the Lord, because the Lord Jesus Himself quoted this passage in reference to John the Baptist. Matthew 11:10: *“For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.’*

Notice that the Lord did not continue the quote from Malachi 3. He didn’t quote the section that mentions His own coming in judgment as the “Messenger of the covenant.” Why didn’t the Lord continue His quotation with the verses about judgment? It was because His judgment has been postponed until His second coming. When He returns to earth He will

judge Israel like a refiner's fire that burns out the impurities (v2). He will judge Israel for its idolatry, immorality, and social injustice (v5). Then Israel's worship of the Lord will be done in righteousness, and it will be pleasing to the Lord (v3-4).

The reason that God will refine Israel and ultimately restore them is because of His covenant promises with the nation - and **God does not go back on His promises!** He does not change. God is immutable: *"For I am the Lord, I do not change. Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob" (v6).*

Aren't you glad that God doesn't change His mind about you? I am! Aren't you glad He doesn't change His mind about you, and take away your salvation when you sin? Our salvation is eternally secure because of His promises. Praise the Lord!

After the prophetic parenthesis in verses 1-6, Malachi returned to rebuking the people for their backslidden ways.

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers commit the sin of robbery when they give sparingly!

Malachi 3:7-12 - *"Yet from the days of your father you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of hosts. "But you said, 'In what way shall we return?'*

⁸ *"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings.*

⁹ *You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me - even this whole nation.*

¹⁰ *Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. Try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it!*

¹¹ *"And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," says the Lord of hosts. ¹² "And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land," says the Lord of hosts."*

Under the Old Testament Law, Jews were required to give a tithe from their substance to the Lord, to maintain the Lord's work at the Temple. But the people of Malachi's day were not tithing. This was another sign of backsliding: they were not giving to the Lord.

Notice: **from God's perspective**, not giving to the Lord appropriately was equivalent to **robbing God!** *"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings." (v8).*

Are you robbing God? Are you giving appropriately and proportionally to the Lord? Believers commit the sin of robbery when they give sparingly! But you may say, "Wait a minute! Tithing was required under the Old Testament Law. As Christians, we are no longer under the Law, so we're not required to tithe!"

Let's discuss this a little bit further. It's true that as Christians we are not commanded to give a tithe, or a tenth of our income, as God's people were commanded to do under the Old Testament Law. 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 are the great "giving" chapters in the New Testament, and "tithing" is **not** mentioned as a principle of giving. Those great chapters on giving to the Lord provide the principles of **voluntary** giving, and **sacrificial** giving, and **proportional** giving, and **systematic** giving, and **cheerful** giving - **but not tithing!**

However, **voluntary tithing is a biblical principle.** In Genesis 14, Abraham gave a voluntary tithe. In Genesis 28, Jacob gave a voluntary tithe. Both of these instances occurred **before** the command to tithe in the Law. So - when all is said and done - although as Christians we are not commanded to tithe, if our voluntary giving to the Lord is not **at least** 10% of our income, something is wrong. How can we call ourselves committed Christians if we are not **at least** tithing to the work of the Lord?

In verses 10-12, God told the people that if they would begin to bring their tithes again, He would bless them abundantly. *"And try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it!"*

We too will be blessed if we give unsparingly to the Lord. This is not a promise of guaranteed health and wealth, but it's a promise that we can claim for spiritual blessing as Christians.

Remember - believers commit the sin of robbery when they give sparingly!

2. Believers commit the sin of arrogance when they think selfishly.

Malachi 3:13-15 - *"Your words have been harsh against Me," says the Lord, "Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?' ¹⁴ You have said, 'It is useless to serve God. What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the Lord of hosts? ¹⁵ So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up. They even tempt God and go free."*

In Malachi's day, the backsliders had the nerve to say that it was useless and futile to serve God. In their arrogance, they said obedience and repentance did not pay off in benefits to themselves! They were so blind to their own arrogance and evil that they actually accused God of blessing others who they said were unworthy. Can you believe it?

Have you ever thought this way? Have you ever had a "what's in it for me" attitude when it comes to serving the Lord? Have you been so arrogant in your thinking that you thought God was unfair and unjust when He passed over you in favor of those you considered much more unworthy than yourself? What a self-righteous way of thinking!

Believers commit the sin of arrogance when they think selfishly.

Practical Application

Is your name written in the book of remembrance?

Malachi 3:16-18 - *“Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them. So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name. ¹⁷ “They shall be Mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”*

¹⁸ *Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.”*

Who are these people who “fear the Lord” (v16)? They are people who are known as “the godly remnant” - a small group of truly godly people. There was a “godly remnant” in Malachi’s day, and there will also be a godly remnant until the end times, as verses 17-18 indicate. God always has a “godly remnant.”

The word “*day*” in verse 17 is a reference to the “day of the Lord” – the day when the Lord will return in judgment of the wicked, and blessing of the righteous. Then, in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ here on this earth, it will be obvious who are the righteous people and who are the wicked people. The righteous will “sparkle like jewels as the Lord’s special treasure”! What a great day that will be!

Notice what is said about the godly remnant in verse 16: they were righteous people who got together and “*spoke to one another.*” They didn’t talk about the weather, or sports scores, or the stock market – they spoke together about **the Lord!** And the Lord was pleased, and He kept a record of them in His “*book of remembrance.*”

God does keep records! Is your name written in the “book of remembrance”? This is not the same “book” as “*the Lamb’s book of life*” (Revelation 21:27). That record refers to salvation - and I trust your name is written there.

But the book of remembrance is a record of godly people who fear the Lord (v16). It is a record of believers who get together for fellowship, for Bible study, and for prayer. They talk together about the Lord - and **the Lord listens!**

Is your name written in God’s “book of remembrance?”