

# Malachi Chapter Three (vv.6-12)

## Dispute Five: Denying God His Due [3.6-12]

### Divine Promise of Preservation [3.6]

**v.6:** This grand statement is best understood as forming a transition between the *fourth* and *fifth* disputes, looking backwards to conclude the preceding section, and forwards as a basis for the next. Looking **forwards**, (the word “for” can also be translated ‘indeed’ or ‘truly’) the *faithfulness* of the LORD is set in contrast to the *unfaithfulness* of His people (cf. v.7). Looking **backwards**, the word “for” suggests the reason why God has not yet judged the wicked (cf. 2.17). “I am the LORD, I change not” declares the *perfection* and *immutability* of God. He is still a God of *mercy*, giving opportunity for *repentance*. If He judged the people as they deserved, they would have been destroyed long ago. In fact, Israel’s existence was due only to His unswerving commitment to His covenant promises to Israel (cf. Romans 11.29). Consequently, the “sons of Jacob” (connecting their behaviour with the unreliable *deceitfulness* of the patriarch) are not “consumed” (finished or destroyed). Though individuals are judged, the Jewish people as a nation are indestructible.

The immutability of God (cf. 1 Samuel 15.29; Hebrews 13.8) may seem to contradict other Scriptures such as Genesis 6.6 or Jonah 3.9-10. But the statement in Malachi refers to the *essential character* of God – which never changes. He is **always** holy, loving, faithful, just and righteous. What appears to be a change of mind on God’s part, is actually a changing of *man’s* attitude or behaviour which alters their position before Him from one of judgment to mercy. God can and does respond when circumstances or individuals change. “*When the Bible says that God repented, the idea is that his feelings toward some person or group of persons changed in response to some change on the part of the objects of his action or some mediator who intervened*” (FF Bruce).

### Divine Plea for Repentance [3.7]

**v.7:** God does not change, but neither has there been any change in the people – they are consistently *unfaithful!* Mankind’s tendency to drift away from God makes His faithfulness even more comforting. This verse is a good summary of the history of Israel under law, “Ye are gone away”. The phrase compares their behaviour with turning aside from a known road (path). Ever since the times of their fathers (likely the wilderness generation, Psalm 95.9) they had failed to ‘keep’ (observe) the *laws* and *precepts* (regulations) of the Mosaic Law. Hence the LORD calls His people to “return” – change direction or orientation. Repentance is not merely feeling sorry for one’s disobedience, but a conscious decision to change and amend one’s ways. God, in grace, would then “return” to them by staying His hand of judgment and renewing His blessings. There is always a way back to full enjoyment of communion with God for the erring believer (James 4.8; 1 John 1.9). But sin had blinded the priests and people to their true spiritual condition. “Wherein shall we return?” probably has the sense of, “*How can we return when we have never gone away?*” (NLT). They had become so cold they did not realise their disobedience had caused distance from God.

### Divine Plea concerning Robbery [3.8-9]

**v.8:** The principal way in which they had disobeyed God was in “tithes and offerings”. The term “tithes” refers to a tenth part of one’s income, and “offerings” to those portions of the animal sacrifices designated for the priests (cf. Exodus 29.27-28). There were *three* specific tithes. **1.** Every year, one tenth of the firstfruits (all produce and livestock, or the financial equivalent) was given to the Levites (Numbers 18.21-24). From this tithe, the Levites paid a “tenth” to the priests (Numbers 18.26-28). **2.** Every year they were to pay tithes during the feast of Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 14.22-27). **3.** Every *third* year they were to pay one tenth to support the poor (Deuteronomy 14.28-29). Tithes under the Law were therefore not merely 10% of one’s income, but more in the region of 23%. These *legally* required tithes should not be confused with *voluntary* tithes such as those of Abraham (Genesis 14.20) and Jacob (Genesis 28.22).

By giving tithes, the people of Israel were acknowledging their lives, possessions and land all belonged to God. They were harvesting on a land they did not own (Leviticus 25.23). Any neglect of the tithe denied this truth and had *social* and *spiritual* implications. If the priests were deprived, they had to give up their ministry and begin farming. The poor and strangers suffered (cf. Nehemiah 13.10-11).

In failing to bring what was required by the Law, they had “robbed” (defrauded) God. The opening question of v.8 is *rhetorical*, “No one would ever dare think of robbing God!” Yet they had done so – and this was no isolated act, but an *ongoing* crime. What should have been given to God had been spent on themselves. In Haggai, their ancestors had done much the same thing when they stopped building the house of the Lord and started building houses for themselves (1.4). In both cases, the mindset was to give first place to their *own* things, and then any *surplus* to God. It is possible to

defraud God, not only in material things but also in the time, energy and devotion given to spiritual things. "One can rob God through lack of communion with Him in the secret place." Failing to bring the required tithes and offerings belied a greater problem – a lack of **faith**. They would give only *if* and *when* they had surplus. But v.10 will show that giving is an act of faith. We should give, believing that the LORD will provide. Then we would see the blessing of God.

**v.9:** The nation's ongoing 'robbing' of Jehovah brought them under the "curse" of a broken law. This was likely in the form of famine, drought or a plague of locusts (cf. v.11; Deuteronomy 28.18, 22-24, 38-40, 42). Since they would not give tithes of the increase of the land, God would *remove* any increase!

#### Divine Promise of Provision [3.10-12]

**v.10:** To *remove* the curse and *restore* blessing "all" the tithes must be brought into the "storehouse" – a room in the temple to store tithes as well as treasure (Nehemiah 7.70-71; 10.38-39; 12.44; 13.12). The word "all" suggests *some* tithes were being brought. There was *partial* but not *whole-hearted* obedience. How often do we give half-measures? In material terms, the Macedonians (2 Corinthians 8.1-3) and the poor widow (Mark 12.41-44) brought their **all**. Bringing *all* the tithes would ensure there was "meat" (food) in the temple and provide for the material needs of the priests and Levites to sustain the religious activities of the nation. This principle of **maintenance** is evident in the NT, with those who are taught in spiritual things having a responsibility to provide for the material needs of those who teach them (1 Corinthians 9.11; Galatians 6.6). "Prove me now herewith" offers the nation an opportunity to 'examine' (test) Jehovah. This is not a violation of Deuteronomy 6.16, where the wilderness generation tested God's *patience* through *arrogance* and *unbelief*. This was, rather, an invitation to act on the promises (word) of God and prove them to be true. God would respond to such faith by "opening the windows of heaven" and "pouring" out a blessing. The poetic language describes *torrential rainfall* (Genesis 7.11-12) and the resultant *abundant harvest* of which there would not "be room enough to receive". The blessing would be beyond their ability to contain it. Total sufficiency! Is the Lord blessing us? Is there evidence of His blessing in the assembly? If we bring to God everything we should, He will turn heaven upside-down to pour out blessing. If we fail to give God His due, we will be all the poorer. Like a chain reaction, the more we give to God, the more He gives us, the more we have to give.

**v.11:** In addition, Jehovah would "rebuke the devourer" referring to the removal from the land of any devouring pests such as locusts. God would stop them from ruining the fruit of the land (cf. Haggai 1.11). There would also be renewed productivity, as the "vines" would be prevented from prematurely losing their fruit before becoming ripe. If the people gave to God, they would enjoy the *fruit* of the land. If we want to enjoy the *fruit* of the Spirit, we must give God first place in our lives. **v.12:** The blessing (favour) of God would be so evident that even the Gentile nations would *recognise* and *proclaim* the same. Israel would become a "delightful" land, a place of satisfaction due to its rich produce. Again, the full extent of this promise will be realised in the millennial kingdom. Then Israel will be restored to prominence and become a blessing among the nations (Deuteronomy 28.13; Isaiah 61.9; 62.2-4; Amos 9.13-15).

#### Addendum: Principles of Giving in the New Testament [1 Corinthians 16.1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9]

- Believers are not obligated to *tithe*, whether 10% or 23%, but they *are* obligated to **give!** Note. Before the Law, Abraham and Jacob *voluntarily* chose to *tithe*, but there is no record of any divine instruction to do so.
- In keeping with the day of grace, the NT does not specify an amount to give to God. But surely there is **no** excuse for giving *less* under grace than was required of those under Law.
- How the Christian handles money is a true barometer of their spiritual life. Failure to do so properly can rob believers of spiritual growth, opportunities, and blessings (Luke 16.11).

*"In 1 Corinthians 16, Christians are taught to give **regularly** – 'the first day of the week' – week by week; **individually** – 'let every one' – each one whatever their age or status; **systematically** – 'lay by him in store' – setting aside God's portion to be used in keeping with His will; **proportionately** – 'as God hath prospered him' – the more God bestows the more the believer is enabled to give. In 2 Corinthians 8-9, the instruction is to give **spiritually** – 'first gave their own selves to the Lord' (8.5) – yielding one's self to the Lord and looking at things from His viewpoint; **willingly** – 'a willing mind' (8.12); **bountifully** – 'he which soweth bountifully' (9.6) – 'The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself' (Proverbs 11.25); **purposefully** – 'according as he purposeth in his heart' (9.7); and **cheerfully** – 'God loveth a cheerful giver' (9.7) – counting it a joy to give."*

Philip Harding (What the Bible Teaches: Malachi)