

# Malachi

## Return to a Just God

### Focal Verses: Malachi 3:1-10

#### Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: **ANALYZE** Malachi's prophecy about possessions, wealth, and hospitality in light of our faithfulness and justice; **CONFESS** personal unfaithfulness to God and **INSTITUTE** a personal charitable living plan.

#### In Focus

Robert couldn't believe what he was hearing from the pulpit. The pastor was talking about how the church was raising money to buy "backpacks of school supplies for the poor kids in the community. All he heard was another call for money. It seemed like that's all preachers wanted. He joined this church because his former church turned giving into a competition and a get-rich-quick scheme. Now I'm giving my tithe faithfully... well, sort of. So, I'm giving 7 percent instead of 10 percent. I mean, I can't quite give 10 percent because I have so much that I need to take care of. Why should I give to these poor kids whose parents probably didn't care about their education anyway? Next thing you know, they will ask us to pay for people's rent and groceries. There are government programs to help kids like this. Besides that's where all my taxes go. Why does God have to tax me because of other people's irresponsibility? It seemed to Robert as if God just wanted to rob him of his finances. He worked hard for his money. Did he have to give all of it to the church?

*Our commitment to justice is shown in how we give to the Lord and His work. In this week's lesson, we will learn how faithfulness to a just God can be shown in our giving."*

#### Keep In Mind

*Even from the days of your fathers, ye have gone away from Mine ordinances and have not kept them. Return unto Me, and I will return unto you," saith the Lord of hosts. "But ye said, 'In what manner shall we return? (Malachi 3:7)*

#### Lesson Text

**Malachi 3:1-10**

**1** Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in. Behold, He shall come,” saith the Lord of hosts.

**2** “But who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appeared? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap.

**3** And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

**4** Then shall the offering of Judah and of Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old and as in former years.

**5** “And I will come near to you in judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers, and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and those who turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not Me,” saith the Lord of hosts.

**6** “For I am the Lord, I change not. Therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

**7** “Even from the days of your fathers, ye have gone away from Mine ordinances and have not kept them. Return unto Me, and I will return unto you,” saith the Lord of hosts. “But ye said, ‘In what manner shall we return?’

**8** Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me! But ye say, ‘Wherein have we robbed Thee?’ In tithes and offerings.

**9** Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation.

**10** Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and put Me to the proof now herewith,” saith the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open to you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

### **The People, Places and Times**

**Refiner:** To separate the dross or impurities from the pure metal, a refiner would heat it until the dross burned off and the metal was purified or refined. Most mentions of refining in the Bible are for silver (*Proverbs 25:4; Zechariah 13:9; Isaiah 48:10*). Smelting lead sulfide ore and then blowing hot air over the surface of the melted metal usually did this. The refiner’s tools were a crucible or furnace and some

bellows or a blow pipe. He would usually sit and “carefully watch for the right time to let the melted metal run off (*Malachi 3:3*).”

**Fuller:** A fuller was someone who cleaned clothes. It literally means “to trample.” This referred to how fullers laundered clothes by beating or stepping on them. There were many cleaning agents in biblical times, including white clay, urine, and alkali powder from indigenous plants. Malachi 3:2 refers to alkali powder. The fuller would take soda powder from the ice plant, found in Mesopotamia, and wash clothes. Afterward he would stomp on them or beat them with sticks. This process would not only clean the clothes, but also make them dazzling white (*Mark 9:3*).”

**Hireling:** A hireling was a hired servant. This servant was different than a slave in that he was paid wages. A hireling was similar to a day laborer in that he would be hired out for different jobs at an hourly rate. Often the hired servant was a stranger or foreigner living in Israel or someone who was poor and in debt. Because a hireling had no land rights of their own, they were vulnerable to exploitation, so the Lord provided protection in the Law of Moses for them (*Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14*).

**Tithes and Offerings:** A tithe was a tenth of someone’s possessions that was offered to God. Tithing was practiced in patriarchal times and existed before the Law was given on Mount Sinai. Once the Law was established in Israel, tithes were required annually and every third year. These offerings would help provide for the Levites, poor, fatherless, widows, and foreigners in the land. Offerings were the obligatory sacrifices to God that were taken from “the flock or herd. The people of Israel were often complacent concerning both institutions during the time of Malachi.

### **Background**

Malachi was written during the post-exilic period. This was the time after the Jews returned from exile in Babylonia to rebuild their nation and the Temple of God. Malachi was a contemporary of Zechariah and Haggai. All three prophets were concerned with the people’s neglect and complacency concerning the worship of God, and the people’s repetition of the sins and injustice caused them to be scattered in the first place. Malachi spoke out against a corrupt priesthood. He also indicted the people of Judah for their lack of faith, which was shown in the neglect of worship, particularly in withholding tithes and sacrificial offerings. This meant the priests who officiated worship were not adequately provided for. It also meant worship was not continuous and therefore not a priority among the majority of the people. Malachi condemned this attitude and announced that God’s messenger would come to refine His people so they worship Him in righteousness.

## In Depth

**1. The Messenger of God (Malachi 3:1–4)** Malachi begins this oracle with an announcement concerning God’s messenger, who will prepare the way before Him. It is a prophecy concerning the time of the Messiah. The people needed to change their ways to receive the Messiah, so a messenger would be sent to prepare them for His coming. Although they long for a Messiah who will bring justice, they are not in a moral state to be ready for Him. Malachi’s announcement lets them know that a Messiah is coming, and they need to be ready for Him when He comes.

This Messiah or “messenger of the covenant” will come to the temple and will refine and purify His people. Malachi shows them that their cries for justice are hypocritical (Malachi 2:17) because they themselves will not be able to stand the refining fire of this coming Messiah. He will purify the sons of Levi so that their offerings to God will be pleasant to Him. The Lord wants to purify them like silver and gold, or the whitening soap of a launderer. He desires pure worship from a righteous people.”

**2. The Message of God (Malachi 3:5–7)** Malachi then takes the people into the heavenly law courts. The Lord is the chief witness testifying against them. He will not be hesitant but swift in His judgment of their unrighteousness. He has seen their adultery, oppression, sorcery, lying, and idolatry. They have no excuse for their behavior, and the Lord will see to it that they are judged accordingly. He then states, “For I am the LORD, I change not” (v. 6). He is not a wishy-washy God. His character is steadfast and faithful, therefore they “are not consumed” (v. 6).

Next, the Lord points out the irony of the situation. He has not changed, but they have changed by not being faithful to His ordinances. The laws and limits He has given them were part of the covenant He made with the nation. The Lord has not strayed from His covenant, but His people have. Their cries for justice are a moot point since they have been disloyal to God. He says if they return to Him, then He will return to them. The people of Judah want justice, but God wants them to repent. Now the question on the people’s lips is “Wherein shall we return?” (v. 7).

**3. The Maintenance of God’s House (Malachi 3: 8–10)** Malachi points out that they are the ones in the wrong. He pronounces them as cursed by the Lord. Although they demanded justice, they have robbed God by not giving the tithes of their crops and herds and by not giving the proper worship sacrifices or offerings (Malachi 1:6– 14). They give blind, diseased, and sometimes even stolen animals to the Temple. This is shameful and disrespectful in God’s eyes. They also have not given the tithe, which is designed to support the priests and others who have no land rights (*Deuteronomy 14:28–29, 26:12*).

Lastly, the Lord then issues them a challenge: He calls them to put Him to the test by giving their full tithe. By giving pure, whole animals from their flocks and herds and tithing the best of their crops, they

would be placing their trust in the Lord. Their tithe would be placed in the storehouse for the priests, and God's house would be properly maintained. The Lord says if they do this, then He would bless them beyond what they would ever need. Instead of being cursed, they would be blessed "so much they would not have room for the abundance that He would give them. This is the reward for their returning to Him."

### **Liberating Lesson**

Many people today cry out hypocritically for justice. The same people who demand justice are quick to dish out injustice. We fight with others and look down on those who are disadvantaged. We cheat and steal from others in order to claw our way to success. Then we complain to God when someone cheats and steals from us. We are quick to point the finger and pray to God to make things right. We only pray when we need something and neglect God in our everyday life. The lesson for us today is that making things right has to start with us. We cannot think that God will take care of our house when we do not take care of His house.

### **Application for Activation**

Oftentimes we want God to be there for us in our time of need, yet we don't ask how we can serve Him. This week in your prayer times, instead of asking the Lord for things that benefit you, ask Him how you can serve Him and be a blessing to those around you. If you are not being faithful in your financial giving to your local church, make a commitment to give. If you have been faithful, consider what charities or non-profits could be blessed by your financial giving. Ask your pastor or church leader whether there is a missionary you can help support through your financial contribution.

### **Closing Prayer**

**Week of 31March 24**

**Daily Bible Readings**

**RESURRECTION DAY IS COMING!**



**Monday** – Isaiah 9-12

**Tuesday** – Isaiah 13-17

**Wednesday** – Isaiah 18-22

**Thursday** – Isaiah 23-27

**Friday** – Isaiah 28-30

**Saturday** – Isaiah 31-35

**Sunday** – Isaiah 36-41