

Getting Ready for His Return

God exhorted the people of Israel to repent and prepare for God's other Messenger, who would be the bearer of a new covenant.



GOD'S STORY
THE TRANSFORMATION FOR ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Malachi 3:1-15

October 4, 2020

(Malachi 3:1-5) ¹ "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty. ² But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, ⁴ and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years. ⁵ "So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the Lord Almighty.

(Malachi 3:6-12) ⁶ "I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. ⁷ Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?' ⁸ "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. ¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. ¹¹ I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the Lord Almighty. ¹² "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the Lord Almighty.

(Malachi 3:13-15) ¹³ "You have spoken arrogantly against me," says the Lord. "Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?' ¹⁴ "You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty?' ¹⁵ But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it."

COMMUNITY – CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

- What are some things children do or say that leave their parents feeling weary?
- How does a wise parent respond to a child's wearisome behavior?
- If you are a parent, what motivates you to show patience to your child when you are weary?

At one time or another, all parents become weary of their child's requests, tantrums, attitudes, or overall behavior. A good deal of parenting involves molding a child into a mature and responsible adult. But developing maturity takes time and guidance. We often respond to God in the same manner a young child behaves toward his or her parents. We are prone to question God's goodness and faithfulness, we run from Him when we should run to Him, and we are sometimes guilty of withholding from God all that is due Him. Yet as a loving Father, God shows us a great deal of patience. He keeps His promises even when our behavior doesn't warrant His goodness, as evidenced through His promised Messiah.

CONTENT – EXPLORING GOD'S STORY

Have a volunteer read Malachi 3:1-5

- At the end of Malachi 2, the people questioned God's justice (2:17). What was God's reply to their charges of injustice? What situations today cause people to ask, "Where is the God of justice?"
- What did the Lord's people say His coming Messenger would do? How was this different from what the people were expecting?

- **How can we be sure God is aware of every injustice? Why can we be confident He will address and bring about a resolution to every injustice?**

The people had accused God of injustice for not coming to their aid and punishing people they considered evil. God's reply was to announce a coming messenger of "judgment" (3:5), which is the same Hebrew word used to communicate "justice," who would purge and purify God's people—including the priests. God's messenger, whom the New Testament interpreted as Elijah, was fulfilled conditionally by the John the Baptist (Mt 3:3, 11:14, 17:10-13). His mission would be to motivate the people to repent and prepare for the Messenger, Jesus Christ.

Have a volunteer read Malachi 3:6-7

- **According to verse 6, what did Israel deserve? Why did they receive mercy?**

Verse 6 provides us with the answer to the questions that were raised in verse 2: "Who can endure the day of His coming? And who will be able to stand when He appears?" God's people were not consumed and destroyed because God had not changed in His love: "Because of the Lord's faithful love we do not perish, for His mercies never end. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23).

- **God's love, mercy, and grace are astonishing. Can you recall a time when you deserved punishment but received grace instead? How did you feel?**
- **As recipients of God's grace, how should we allocate grace and mercy to others? What does God's unchanging love teach us about how we are to love other people?**

Even when we rebel against God, He still pursues a relationship with us. He promises that if we return to Him, then He will return to us. (3:7). Because of Christ's death and resurrection, if we repent we can be fully restored to relationship with God. God is faithful to forgive our sins and restore us. As recipients of God's incalculable grace, we too, should be the most gracious people on the planet.

Have a volunteer read Malachi 3:8-12

- **How were the people of Judah robbing God?**
- **Is God dependent on our financial offerings? If not, then why are we commanded to give?**
- **What does it take in terms of faith, commitment, and planning in order for believers today to tithe?**

The people of Judah wrongly believed they would be more prosperous if they withheld their tithes and offerings. But God withdrew His blessing on their crops due to their disobedience. He promised to bless them with abundance if they trusted Him with their finances. God can do more with our 90 percent than we can manage with 100 percent. Everything we possess belongs to Him. He doesn't need our finances, but we need to give. Giving our tithes and offerings to God demonstrates that everything we have comes from His hand, and that we trust His provision. This is not to be confused with the heretical "prosperity gospel" that wrongly promises health and wealth in exchange for our giving. The focus of these promises was directed at the community as a whole, rather than on the individual.

Have a volunteer read Malachi 3:8-12

- **What allegations did the people of Judah bring against God? Why did they think the wicked were getting away with their behavior?**

These verses repeat the thought first noted in Malachi 2:17, that there seemed to be no consequences for the wicked who chose to disobey the Lord. In addition, a new charge is added in this passage—there seemed to be no advantage for those who chose to fear the Lord and keep His commandments. Even those who mourned and fasted did not appear to be garnering the Lord's favor (Zech. 7:3-6).

- **How do you feel when those who disobey God seem to come out ahead?**

We sometimes forget that we are to "serve the Lord with gladness" because He is God (Ps. 100:2). We need to seek His face as often as we seek His hand. While it's true that God is our Provider and we are all dependent on His provision, our relationship with God should be based on our love and reverence for Him rather than what "we get" out of the relationship. We should serve God to experience God. When we serve God only to receive from Him, we show a great lack of reverence. While it is true God is our Provider, it's blatantly dishonoring to approach Him as if He were a divine vending machine.

COMMISSION – ENGAGING IN GOD'S STORY

- **Are there areas in your life you have strayed? Do you need to repent and return to God?**
- **In what ways can you increase your generosity in order to share the gospel with those who are lost?**
- **As we conclude our study of the Old Testament and move to the New Testament and the coming of Jesus, what themes have you seen? How have you seen Jesus foreshadowed in the characters, stories, and verses of the Old Testament?**
- **Israel was about to enter a time of 400 years of silence of hearing directly from God. God continued to move and guide His people during this time, but there were no more direct scriptures written to them until the coming of Jesus, the Living Word. How is this similar to us today? How is it different?**

PRAYER: Thank God that He is a God of mercy and forgiveness. Ask Him to show group members areas in their lives where they need to repent and return to Him. Pray that group members will be faithful to obey God in their giving so God's work can be done in your church and throughout the world.

CONTINUE TO JOURNEY THROUGH GOD'S STORY

Bible Reading Plan:

DAY 1 – Luke 1
 DAY 2 – Luke 2
 DAY 3 – Matthew 1-2
 DAY 4 – Mark 1
 DAY 5 – John 1

KEY VERSE: John 1:14

H.E.A.R. Method:

Highlight a verse or two.
 Explain what the text means.
 Apply the verse to your life.
 Respond to God.

Our team has put together Bible study resources to encourage and inspire you as you engage in God's Story. Visit chetscreek.com/gods-story for videos, study guides, and more.

OUR VISION

To be a church
 for the unchurched,
 here and around the world.

ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Gospel-centered communities that aim to KNOW
 GOD together and BE CHANGED by Him in a
 way that will CHANGE THE WORLD.

3:1-2. Who was the Messenger of the covenant? Malachi's name meant "My messenger," but if Malachi 3:1 referred to the fifth-century prophet, then it did so in only a partial way as one who foreshadowed a greater fulfillment to come. The Lord Himself did come to His temple in Jesus Christ (Luke 2:21-35; Matt. 21:12-16). Jesus identified for us the messenger who prepared the way for Him as John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-3; 11:7-14).

3:3-5. Malachi's hearers may have thought that if the Lord came in power, it would be a time of glee for them—God would judge, they would benefit, and the bad guys would get what was coming to them. But Malachi asked, "Who can endure the day of his coming?" For the grippers and accusers themselves, the Lord's coming would be like a refiner's fire and like cleansing lye. The refiner's fire burned impurities out of metals. Lye soap was the cleansing agent of launderers. Ancient launderers wetted stained garments, scrubbed them with strong soap, and worked them back and forth vigorously in the washing water until the stains loosened and came clean. Of course, the launderer took care not to ruin the garment. Likewise, the refiner and purifier of silver handled the precious metal with skill and care.

3:6. The Lord spoke through His prophet to tell the Israelites that they deserved total destruction. The word translated perished has the root meaning of end. Why had the end not come for them? Not because the Israelites had done anything to deserve God's mercy. On the contrary, they deserved to be destroyed for their failure to love and follow the Lord. They had been spared because they were the descendants of Jacob, and God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to bless all nations through their descendants.

3:7. The Lord consistently had been faithful to the people through whom He had chosen to send His Messiah into the world. Nevertheless, they habitually had turned away from His statutes (laws) generation after generation—since the days of your fathers. God entreated the people to return to Him. If they would repent of their stubborn rebellion, He promised to return to them. The unchanging God of their fathers had not changed in His love for His people. They had turned away from Him. He invited them to come back to the receptive arms of the One who loved them and would forgive them.

3:8. The Lord pointed to a particular way the people should return to Him. They needed to stop robbing Him. "In what way do we rob You?" Indeed, how can a human being rob God? Beware of taking lightly the Lord's answer. He declared the Israelites were robbing Him in the tenth.

3:9. Withholding tithes and offerings was not isolated to a few individuals but was characteristic of the whole nation. The people as a whole were suffering under a curse. In their case, those effects evidently were drought, crop failures, and famine (3:10-11) as God's disciplinary punishment for their sins. The Lord did not command tithing to harm or hinder His people. He loves us and always wants the best for us.

3:10. The Lord instructed the people what to give, where to give, and why they should give. They were not merely to bring a nominal offering but to bring the whole tenth. Tithing is the biblical standard for believers' giving. While believers may fall short of biblical standards, the biblical standards remain.

3:11. The Lord not only would ensure the growth of crops but also the harvest—I will rebuke the devourer for you, pests that would consume the crops before the harvest. In addition, the vine in the field will not be barren. No blight would ruin the harvest. The curse under which the people were living would be lifted and they would experience anew the blessings of God.

3:12. As God abundantly would meet the needs of the faithful Israelites, they would gain a reputation among all the nations as being fortunate. No longer would they be seen as a weak and pitiful remnant who had returned to huddle in their ruined and ravaged homeland. The entire world would see their nation as a delightful land. God's promised blessings were not only for His people's sake but also for the sake of other nations. He wants all peoples to know Him as the true Lord God Almighty.

3:13-15. The words we speak about God are important. According to Jesus, "on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak" (Matthew 12:36). We need to watch and examine what we

say so we will speak truly and reverently regarding God. The words Israel spoke against God were harsh. This charge put the Israelites in undesirable company. In Hezekiah's day, the pagan messengers of the Assyrian king Sennacherib "spoke against the God of Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 32:19). Similarly, God charged that the Edomites "spoke many words against Me" (Ezekiel 35:13). It was perhaps no surprise that pagans spoke against God. It was an outrage that His chosen people did. What were the harsh words? The Israelites said, "It is useless to serve God." Israel's implication was that serving God was pointless and any promises suggesting otherwise were empty and deceptive.

When Malachi's hearers spoke of serving God, what did they mean? They meant keeping His requirements for ritual practices in the temple. They also meant walking mournfully before the Lord as they fasted and prayed (Nehemiah 1:4; Esther 4:3). Malachi's hearers claimed that they were doing their temple duties. Sacrifices continued day by day in the temple. They believed that public prayers and fasting were proof that Israel looked to God for help in their hard times.

Malachi knew, however, that the unworthy temple sacrifices of these sinful people were insults to God (Malachi 1:6-12). He also knew that the people's mourning and fasting were unacceptable because genuine repentance was absent (Malachi 3:5-9; see Zechariah 7:1-6; Isaiah 58:3-8). In fact, an ironic truth was hidden in Israel's accusation—to serve God in ways that insult and displease Him is indeed useless (see also Malachi 1:10; Isaiah 1:13). If we feel that serving God is useless, one thing to do is ask God to show us any sin of our own that corrupts our service. Instead of examining themselves, Malachi's hearers enviously eyed others. They complained that those who commit wickedness prosper. Malachi alluded to this problem earlier also (Malachi 2:17).

God may judge ungodliness quickly, as He did the deception of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). On the other hand, judgment may be a long time coming. The wicked man who digs a pit may not soon fall into it. For a time it might appear that unjust people test God and escape, but in truth they will not escape God's judgment. God absolutely promises that when the "Day of the Lord" comes (2 Peter 3:10), it will be crystal clear that there is no gain in ungodliness.

But there is much gain in godliness. The gain generally includes God's gracious provision for His obedient people (Malachi 3:10). It includes "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). The gain culminates in the crown of life (James 1:12). Whatever people may say, however they may taunt or dissuade, serve God without wavering.