

THE BOOK OF MALACHI
Lesson 11, Chapter 3 Continued 2

The last time we met, we finished up the 4th burden (or oracle) that we find in Malachai. It called to mind a principle that is so obscured in modern Christendom, that even when I speak it, I'm not quite sure that it makes the impact that God surely intends that it does. We tend to think that God's judgment... past, present, and future... is intended mainly for, or only for, pagans. What Believers call "the world". And, therefore, that pagans equate to the wicked in the Bible. The reality is that God's warnings and admonishments are far more usually aimed at His worshippers... not pagans. Yeshua came NOT for the pagans, but rather for those who already believed in the God of Israel.

CJB Matthew 15:22-24 ***²² A woman from Kena'an who was living there came to him, pleading, "Sir, have pity on me. Son of David! My daughter is cruelly held under the power of demons!" ²³ But Yeshua did not say a word to her. Then his talmidim came to him and urged him, "Send her away, because she is following us and keeps pestering us with her crying." ²⁴ He said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Isra'el."***

Yeshua states unequivocally that He came to whom? The lost sheep of the House of Israel. Israel was the lost sheep. We won't find Yeshua venturing beyond the Holy Land because it was those Jews who He came to admonish and save. Thus, as with all the other Prophets, Malachai is sent to Israel... the Jews of Yehud including their priests... to admonish, instruct and warn. It is those Jews and priests who harbor among them the wicked and so, are in danger... not pagans. Therefore, fellow followers of Yeshua, all of these complaints, accusations, demands, and admonishments from God that we read of are aimed at us... God worshippers... not those who worship some other god or no god at all. This is why we concluded last time with this powerful... but forever overlooked and ignored... warning from Peter.

CJB 1 Peter 4:17 ***For the time has come for the judgment to begin. It begins with the household of God; and if it starts with us, what will the outcome be for those who are disobeying God's Good News?***

God's judgment will fall FIRST on us, not on the world of non-Believers. Our faith doesn't allow us to escape judgment; merely to survive it provided our faith is sincere. And therein is the major rub: sincerity. Not just sincerity in our faith, but truth in what it is we have faith in. If all who claim trust in Yeshua were sincere simply because one day, for one moment, they prayed for salvation, then there would be no need for warnings. If once-saved-always-saved were true, then why are we constantly given admonitions about how to test and measure ourselves to see if we are sincere? Those Jews and priests of Malachai's day would have argued just as vehemently as you or I would about our sincerity. Yet, as we see, God isn't buying it. He has laid down a standard for us to strive for and to do. He has given instruction on what is true and what is not true. Sincerely believing in what is not true is of no help. If would do not strive to follow that standard, then we are not sincere in His eyes. We may have faith, but faith in the wrong things. And that standard is set down in God's Word; it is not in the doctrines and faith pillars and stated beliefs of a denomination or religious institution.

Beginning in Malachai 3:6 is the 5th burden (or oracle). It is essentially God's call for His people (not the pagan world) to repent. Open your Bibles to Malachai chapter 3.

READ MALACHAI CHAPTER 3:6 – end

This 5th oracle is aimed at the general population of Yehud, which includes everyone... leaders and priests as well... even though specific segments are not named and called out. We will see that the gist of it is that God wants repentance more than tithing. Tithing, while certainly commanded, is but an outcropping, a symbol, of authentic worship of God's people. I dare say that I've never heard a pastor or Bible scholar claim that God is saying repentance is to replace tithing. And, yet, it is a common mantra within the Church that God says He no longer wants sacrifice when we read this statement:

CJB 1 Samuel 15:22 ²² *Sh'mu'el said, "Does Yehoveh take as much pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying what Yehoveh*

says? Surely obeying is better than sacrifice, and heeding orders than the fat of rams.

And later, Yeshua alludes to this same statement by paraphrase when He says:

CJB Matthew 9:13 ***As for you, go and learn what this means: 'I want compassion rather than animal-sacrifices.' For I didn't come to call the 'righteous,' but sinners!'***

In no way does this mean that God wants compassion instead of sacrifices. Rather if Israel obeyed God, and if Israel showed compassion, then there would be no need for sacrifices for sins. So, in Malachai, God is seeking for His people to repent so that they reclaim sincerity, so that their sacrifices will be accepted by God and their sins forgiven. Verse 6 of Malachai 3 says this:

CJB Malachi 3:6 ***"But because I, Yehoveh, do not change, you sons of Ya'akov will not be destroyed.***

The first word of this verse is, in Hebrew, ***ki***. In this instance it denotes cause and effect. That is, first comes the cause (I, Yehoveh do not change) that has the effect of (Jacob will not be destroyed). So, it is simply God's character that leads Him to not destroy Israel when they deserve to be destroyed. Or as Kiel and Delitzsch word it: **"Because Jehovah is unchangeable in His purposes, and Israel as the people of God is not to perish, therefore will God exterminate the wicked out of Israel by means of judgment, in order to refine it and shape it according to its true calling."** A bit softer way of speaking about this judging of God worshippers might be to use the term "pruning" the congregation.

It is quite telling that in the numerous ways God's name is taken to mean, as well as His Genesis assertion that "I am as I am", that essentially it all boils down to declaring His unchangeableness and eternity. We cannot call God unchangeable if He makes a covenant, and then revokes it and replaces it with another. We cannot call God unchangeable if He gives us a firm moral code and then later changes it. We cannot call God unchangeable if He replaces the

designation of His chosen people, the Hebrews, with the new chosen... the gentile Constantinian Church. I hope you can see this. He is the great "I am", not the great "I am becoming". Even so, we must (in this case in Malachai) understand the context of God being unchangeable is in the terms of His covenant relationship with the Hebrews. He doesn't change the terms, and He doesn't back out of them.

God promised Abraham, the progenitor of the Hebrews, that his descendants would become their own people and a blessing for the entire world. That they would have a land all their own. That God would maintain them against all other nations and peoples by blessing those who bless His people Israel, and cursing those who curse His people, Israel. Then later, He promised Moses and the Israelites that if they agreed to the terms of the Covenant at Sinai... another covenant that adds to the previous one... then He would be their God, and they would be His people. There wasn't an "out" for God; rather, there were punishments for Israel if/when they violated the covenant, but none of those punishments involved the covenant being cancelled and God releasing Himself from it. Why? Because "I am as I am". It is not His nature or character to abandon or destroy His own covenant people regardless of how some of them (even, perhaps, the majority) might behave. But he will judge them, and He will go so far as to identify and destroy the wicked Hebrews among them, as we have seen demonstrated on numerous occasions starting in the Torah.

Verse 7 is:

CJB Malachi 3:7 *Since the days of your forefathers you have turned from my laws and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot. "But you ask, 'In respect to what are we supposed to return?'*

In a kind of irony, we learn here that neither God nor Israel changes! God for good reasons, Israel for bad reasons. God is always faithful, and Israel never is. This speaks of Israel's forefathers turning from God's laws and commands... they didn't observe them. This is rather vague; does it mean the forefathers all the way back to Mt. Sinai, or does it mean only back so far as the Babylonian exile, when that catastrophe was precipitated by their immediate

forefathers who were unfaithful? I don't think it is meant to be specific, except to say that all their revered forefathers (from each generation) that had come and gone prior to Malachai's era turned away from God's commands, which can be none other than the commands contained in the Law of Moses.

There is only one remedy for Israel's rebellion: to return to God. To return to God *means* to turn aside from wickedness and evil. It *means* to turn away from following their own ways, and to return to God's ways as laid out in the Law of Moses. To return to God's ways is to turn from foolishness to wisdom. This is the first step towards a true repentance that God accepts as sincere repentance. People can pray, cry, raise their hands to the heavens and express their sorrow. But that is not repentance. Repentance is expressed ONLY by a change of behavior.

CJB Job 28:28 *And to human beings he said, 'Look, fear of Yehoveh is wisdom! Shunning evil is understanding!'*

CJB Proverbs 3:7 *Don't be conceited about your own wisdom; but fear Yehoveh, and turn from evil.*

In a typical biblical cause and effect manner, God says "return to Me, and I will return to you". How do we cause God to return to us when we have strayed from Him? First, we must return to Him. But, returning doesn't mean pleading with God in prayers accompanied with salty tears and heavy moaning, so that He'll feel sorry for us. It means a concrete change of behavior to go along with a determined change of mind. But even that change of behavior means behavior that meets a standard that God has already set down; not a new behavior that you and your friends find refreshing and enjoyable. I'll say it yet again: turning from God and His ways *means* turning away from His laws and commands. It's not an issue of emotions or becoming grouchy. The standard is obedience; being nicer or more polite or going to Church or Synagogue more does NOT mean a return to God.

We've discussed before that ALL covenants of God with the Hebrews are based on their reciprocal nature. Each party has duties and obligations. Covenants are also conditional for this same reason. If one party or the other doesn't

operate reciprocally, then the covenant is either abandoned, or it initiates the stated punishments depending upon the particular violation.

This indictment of Israel is based on the fact that they did not reciprocate. Instead, they have strayed far from God by turning from His covenant-based laws and commands and instead enjoying their own humanly devised rules. This kind of indictment is even more present in some of the major prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah than in the minor prophets. Ezekiel foretold of a time when a descendant of the royal family of David would reinstitute obedience to God's statutes and rules. This would happen at a time of a rescued and restored Israel.

CJB Ezekiel 37:21-24 ***²¹ Then say to them that Yehoveh ELOHIM says: 'I will take the people of Isra'el from among the nations where they have gone and gather them from every side and bring them back to their own land. ²² I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Isra'el; and one king will be king for all of them. They will no longer be two nations, and they will never again be divided into two kingdoms. ²³ "'They will never again defile themselves with their idols, their detestable things, or any of their transgressions; but I will save them from all the places where they have been living and sinning; and I will cleanse them, so that they will be my people, and I will be their God. ²⁴ My servant David will be king over them, and all of them will have one shepherd; they will live by my rulings and keep and observe my regulations.***

Christendom rightly identifies this person called "My servant David" as the Messiah of Israel... Yeshua. Yet, at the same time chooses to gloss over the part that says "they will live by My rulings and observe My regulations". These are Covenant of Moses vocabulary words. Not to mention that it is Yehoveh who is pronouncing this, and He is the "Me" and "My" of this passage. So, there can be no mistake that this is speaking about the Law. The prophecy is that Messiah (Yeshua) is going to someday re-instill the Law of Moses as the law of all Israel. Later passages in Ezekiel explain that the entire world will be subject to these laws and regulations, so the scope of their jurisdiction goes way beyond the land of Israel and becomes planet-wide.

The insolence and blindness of the wicked of Yehud is revealed in their thinking (in paraphrase): “in what thing have we done that we ought to have to repent?” The circumstance is this: despite disobeying God’s rules and laws, they still *think* themselves righteous. Why would they think that? Because, just like today, human-created religion and doctrines have come to override, and to misrepresent, God’s Word. This is because each generation of Judeo-Christianity builds upon the doctrines of the previous generation. And within 2 or 3 generations, people only think they know God’s Word... but in reality, they don’t. They have been told that their denomination’s doctrines ARE God’s Word, and believe it. They either don’t bother to check, or if they do and their doctrine and the Holy Scriptures don’t match, they choose doctrine. Or they rationalize that the new doctrine is for now, but the old Scripture was for then. So, when challenged if they are obeying God, they measure their behaviors according to doctrines and manmade rules and not the biblical instruction. This was the condition of the Jews in Malachai’s era as well, and they honestly believed they were righteous even when God’s Prophet is telling them they’re not. So, they have no intent on repenting.

Ever-patient Yehoveh responds to their foolish question, beginning in verse 8.

CJB Malachi 3:8 ***Can a person rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How have we robbed you?' In tenths and voluntary contributions.***

This may be the most quoted Old Testament verse in the Bible! It is always used on talks about giving and tithing. I find that a bit amusing, since Constantinian Christianity generally denies pretty much everything else in and about the Old Testament, but loves this passage.

Naturally the question “can a person rob God?” has only 1 possible answer: no. Thus, the question is purely rhetorical. God responds by giving one glaring example of their un-righteousness that amounts to robbing Him (in His eyes), something they are blind to: tithing and offerings. This is not to say that this was the only sin that was being committed or the worst one. But, it does demonstrate that these people were more than willing to virtually cheat God out of what was His. They refused to pay the whole tithe, and they refused to

use their best for animal sacrifices. In the realm of covenant, they were defrauding God, and then lying about it. None of this was accidental; it was all intentional. These Jews for the most part knew what they were supposed to do, whether priest or laymen, when it comes to sacrifices and tithing. It was super-basic to the Hebrew faith and to the covenant terms. Where their blind deceit came into play was that they didn't think such wanton behavior against God should merit His anger against them. They recognized that their bad economic circumstances... failed crops, low yields, etc... were a result of an action of God who was supposed to make sure they had plenty of rain and an abundance of harvest. Yet, they wouldn't associate this constant lack as due to their turning away from God's laws and towards evil. Instead, they blamed God, saying He was unjust, He was being unfaithful, and He was failing them with what they saw as His promises to them that had no reciprocal conditions. This was especially so since the more recent new covenant of Jeremiah that promised a restoration of abundance to Israel, but it had not come.

The grammar of the opening part of this verse about robbing God is much more emphatic than is typically translated over to English. The term to "rob" was meant to be much more akin to what is called in the USA, "armed or strong-armed robbery". That is, it is violent and full of force. To rob sounds more like taking something that isn't yours: simple theft. What is intended in this verse is something conscious, pre-meditated, and physically aggressive.

In the biblical Hebrew era, the idea of a tithe comes from the concept of one-tenth as found in the Law of Moses. It is part of Hebrew faith vocabulary that is a technical term for giving to the Temple (this is **not** about sacrifices). The reference originally was to the tenth-portion of the harvest. That is, the value of what the land produces, but not the land itself. Presenting a tithe was part of worship practice. It was not, and is not, optional. I'm not going to get into the different kinds and occasions of tithing, because the biblical system in the Temple era was more complex than merely one-tenth of all things on an annual basis. And so, the tithe, despite the literal meaning of one-tenth, came to stand for the portion of produce or herd that was ordered by God to be given by God's worshipers, which in some cases was more than one-tenth, to the Temple. As Israel evolved into a society that had fewer farmers and herdsman, and more craftsmen, then money more and more became the

medium of tithing. Eventually even the term “the harvest” began to be used more as metaphor to mean what your labor produces, not simply what your fields and orchards produce. And today, as the system of giving (tithing) that has been adopted by Judaism and Christianity, it nearly exclusively applies to earned money from wages, dividends, interest, money gained on investments, etc... since that’s how a modern economy works.

To be clear: the people of Yehud were not only taking tithes away from God by not paying the full amount due but also were presenting blemished and damaged animals for sacrificing. While it harmed the priesthood since it was from these offerings that they were provided for, it also deeply offended Yehoveh, who eventually pulled His hand of blessing from... His people. Verse 9 explains this.

CJB Malachi 3:9 ***A curse is on you, on your whole nation, because you rob me.***

The grammar explains that this is not something that is going to happen; rather it is already happening. The curse was already placed upon the Jewish people of Yehud. It’s as if the people asked, “why are our harvests so poor”, and God responds “because I put the curse on you”. They had committed a covenant crime, so they have received the appropriate covenant curse. Here, the Hebrew usually translated as “curse” is ***me’era***. It means divinely directly misfortune. As a result of the people being stingy with God, God was stingy with them. More for themselves actually became less for themselves in a way only God could make happen.

What is sad and laughable at the same time is, they have just finished mocking God for not being a God of justice.

CJB Malachai 2:17 ***¹⁷ You have wearied Yehoveh with your words. Yet you ask, "How have we wearied him?" By saying that anyone who does wrong is good from Yehoveh's perspective, and that he is delighted with them; or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"***

Well, God *is and has been* exacting justice on those same people, but they can't even see it. Remember what Peter said? Justice begins with the household of God. That wasn't some new revelation for Peter; it ties all the way back to the Covenant of Moses. Further, no doubt it was only some of the common Jews, and only some of the priests, who were wicked in their tithes and offerings. But, as happens with God, there is individual justice and there is communal justice. An entire nation of people can be cursed because a segment of their society... that inevitably begins with the leaders... becomes wicked. That same dynamic still plays out today and will throughout the Millennium reign of Yeshua.

CJB Malachi 3:10 ***Bring the whole tenth into the storehouse, so that there will be food in my house, and put me to the test," says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot. "See if I won't open for you the floodgates of heaven and pour out for you a blessing far beyond your needs.***

Cause and effect. Verse 10 says that IF Israel will bring the full amount of the tithes into the storehouse, THEN God will open the floodgates of heavenly blessing. The storehouse is God's Temple in Jerusalem. The food is needed not to feed God, it is to feed His servants, the priests. My house means the Temple. This promise even includes Yehoveh saying to test HIM on this to see if it is a truthful promise.

In this passage the Hebrew word used for test is ***bachan***. It is used specifically of people and means to prove or to try something in the sense of putting the divine promise on trial. Generally speaking, we are warned against "testing" God. But usually that means it in a rebellious way; to ignore His warnings and do wrong, only to find out that what He has threatened will happen and bring bad consequences. Here, however, it is positive thing. God is literally offering to Israel the opportunity to prove to themselves that God really is faithful to His Word. He is using this carrot to entice Israel to do what is right and then experience how their situation will change for the better. He is seeing His people, whom He loves, in a bad way and like a loving father, wants to see his kids stop harming themselves through their foolish behavior and rebellion against parental authority. The New Testament especially shows us that God doesn't usually throw barriers against us just to "test" us. As with

Job, indeed in rare circumstances that might happen. But nearly always, the supposed “test” from God is the result our own foolish actions providing painful results, and Him not rushing in to remedy it.

When Malachai writes to “bring the whole tenth into the storehouse”, it is a more complete answer to the question (or better, rebuttal) of the people about how is it they are actively robbing God. In verse 8 they said: “How have we robbed you?” Verse 9, therefore, gives kind of the 30,000-ft. view of what it is that the people of Yehud are suffering for daring to rob God. It says that the lack in all areas of their lives that they are experiencing is because God has cursed them. Now, verse 10 adds a bit more nuance to that reply. To remedy the situation, the Jews of Yehud need FIRST to return to bringing the entire tithe... all that is owed... into the storehouse (the Temple). The Temple literally did have storehouses running up and down each side of the sanctuary (outside of the sanctuary inner walls). Why? Because in Malachai’s day and earlier times, almost all the tithe was in the form of produce from harvests. And so, as these were brought in, in what should have been relatively small portions, but from every person, they would accumulate in order to be distributed to the priests as their source of food. But, if these small portions (merely 10%) were irregular or only half of it was given, then the storehouses were not filled and there was insufficient food for the priests.

The idea is simple enough: obedience to God brings blessing, while disobedience brings everything from God lifting His hand of protection and blessing over you, to actively cursing you. Here’s where the matter of obedience instantly creates offense when we dare to discuss it. Just as we see that as far as the Jews of Yehud were concerned, they WERE being obedient... but it was obedient not to God’s commands but instead to the rules of the religious establishment... so we find the same issue in both Judaism and Christianity.

Christianity has devised all sorts of rules and doctrines that takes obedience out of the realm of biblical instruction, and turns it into a dynamic, flexible and highly personalized set of things to be obedient to. In fact, even the term obedience has been watered down, because if it is meant too strictly, then it is called legalism and it is shunned entirely. While we haven’t time to cover all

the many nuances of the Christian doctrines about obedience, and to what are Christ Believers to be obedient to, the most predominant denominations have determined that the Holy Spirit will customize for each person what they may do and not do. A new proverb has arisen that is "what sin is for you is not necessarily sin for me". Or, the only biblical rule we have to follow is "to love". And whatever "love" means to you and your conscience, that is how you are to follow it.

I cannot state strongly enough that this well encapsulates the philosophical mindset of the wicked Jews and priests of Malachai's day. That is, what the Torah says they are to be obedient to is overridden by what the corrupted priests say the people are to be obedient to. And, we are reading about God's severe reaction to such a philosophy. This is what happened to the rather early Jesus movement when, in the 4th century A.D., Emperor Constantine and his Roman Bishops hijacked it, and then remade it into their own image, essentially inventing a brand-new religion that first and foremost abolished the covenants. Even the new covenant of Jeremiah was re-branded to make it not a covenant to Judah and Israel (as the Bible states it is) but rather to gentiles. This is why I urge you all to consider carefully which fellowship or congregation you are part of. Because unless it advocates for an obedience standard of following the precepts presented by the Law of Moses, then it is so far off track that no amount tinkering with its doctrines is going to solve the underlying issue. You are part of a group that is just what Malachai is dealing with here. And, if you live your life according to the doctrines of that group, you are testing God in a way you should not want to.

God says that in this pivotal act of tithing ALL that you owe (according to the biblical standard), and not just what you are comfortable with or feel like, then He will give you even more than you need for mere subsistence. Do not take this to mean "I'll make you wealthy". He means it will be a generous abundance all around. This is not about luxury. God is not calling His people to be so obedient in their tithes that they can now just live lives of leisure in return. The idea is this: with a pure heart and with a motivation of doing right in God's eyes, your lives will be better for it. But, if you do it with the motive of getting rich, or manipulating God to give you as much as you possibly can

get to satisfy your greed... that won't happen. In fact, such a motive is a sin in itself.

Our motive for obeying God ought to be one thing only: He is God. He is our Lord. Out of awe, respect, and reverence for Him we ought to want to do what He commands. If we do it in the greedy, self-centered way, it winds up with the morally bankrupt Prosperity Doctrine so popular among certain TV Evangelists. I can't say you might not see gain from going that way; but rest assured the gain was NOT coming from a divine hand.

Verse 11 explains how, at least partially, God will supernaturally influence the ability for Israel's fields to produce abundantly.

CJB Malachi 3:11 ***For your sakes I will forbid the devourer to destroy the yield from your soil; and your vine will not lose its fruit before harvest-time," says Yehoveh-Tzva'ot.***

Without doubt, the devourer is locusts. It is the locusts that wait for the fields to sprout and grow as they move towards being harvest ready, and then they swarm and attack. What was looking to be a very good harvest, is suddenly utterly destroyed and there is no ability to fight back. The same thing, of course, happens to grapevines and the grapes they produce. Think of it: if God can prevent the locusts from attacking the fields, He can also cause it. This is evident in the plagues He visited upon Egypt in times past, and in the curse that He has put upon the Jews of Yehud for NOT bringing the whole tithe to the Temple.

We'll pause here and continue with Malachai chapter 3, next time.