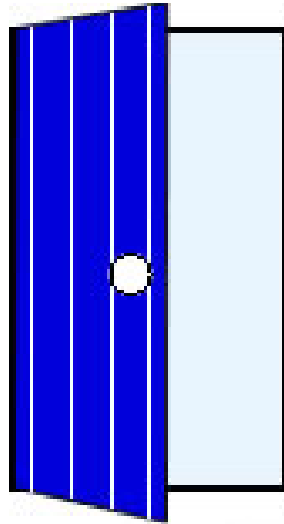


# **BIBLE STUDIES**



**Mill Lane Chapel**

**Malachi**

## (7) "Will a man rob God?"

### Read Chapter 3: 7-12

We have already noticed that Malachi 2: 17 - 3: 18 can be divided into three sections. **(1)** The coming of the Refiner, 2: 17 - 3: 6. "But who may abide the day of his coming.....for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap", V2. **(2)** The call to return, 3: 7-12. "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?", V7. **(3)** The conduct of the remnant, V13-18. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another", V16.

### 1) THE COMING OF THE REFINER, 2: 17 - 3: 6

We dealt with these verses in our last study. The section comprises a question and an answer. **(A) The question:** "Where is the God of judgement?", 2: 17. **(B) The answer:** "Behold, I *will* send my messenger before my face.....and the Lord whom ye seek, *shall* suddenly come to his temple.....behold, he *shall* come, saith the Lord of hosts", 3: 1.

### 2) THE CALL TO RETURN, 3: 7-12

The structure of this section is determined by two phrases in V7: "Ye are gone away.....return unto me." We can summarise this in two words. **(A) Departure:** this covers V8-9. **(B) Return:** this covers V10-12. In both cases, we have a 'cause and effect' situation. So far as Israel's departure is concerned, God says, **(i)** "Ye have robbed me"; that is the cause, and **(ii)** "Ye are cursed with a curse"; that is the effect. So far as Israel's return is concerned, God says, **(i)** "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse"; that is the cause, and **(ii)** "I will.....pour you out a blessing.....I will rebuke the devourer.....all nations shall call you blessed"; that is the effect.

The introduction to the section has important lessons for us: "Even from the days of your fathers ye are 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, Wherein shall we return?", V7. We should notice at least three things here:

**a) God's patience.** They had a long history of backsliding and rebellion. "Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them." They had utterly failed to learn from their mistakes. Compare Jeremiah 7: 25-26, "Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: yet they hearkened not unto me.....they did worse than their fathers." After all this, God *still* says "return unto me, and I will return unto you." We *all* have good reason to thank God for His longsuffering. Where would any of us be if He had "dealt with us after our sins" and "rewarded us according to our iniquities?", Psalm 103: 10.

**b) God's conditions.** "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts." M.C.Unger puts it like this: 'Return unto me - in penitence - and I will return unto you - in blessing - saith the Lord of hosts.' Compare Zechariah 1: 3, "Turn unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts", and James 4: 8, "Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh to you." See also 2 Chronicles 15: 2. God cannot bless us if we remain disobedient., but if we "return unto the Lord.....he will have mercy.....he will abundantly pardon", Isaiah 55: 7. Compare 2 Chronicles 7: 13-14: "If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." 1 John 1: 9 is relevant here.

Do notice something else here: God says, "ye are gone away from mine **ordinances**", and, "return unto **me**." In the first place, we must remember that we cannot distance ourselves from the word of God without distancing ourselves from God Himself. Compare Galatians 1: 6, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from **him** that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel." But perhaps there is another lesson here. It is possible to keep up external appearances without inward love for God. God therefore says, not 'return unto mine **ordinances**', but "return unto **me**."

**c) Israel's insensitivity.** "But ye said, Wherein shall we return?" They just didn't realise their estrangement from God! It is all too easy to slip away from God. Backsliding doesn't happen over night. It is an imperceptible process. Think about the following: "Strangers have devoured his (Ephraim's) strength, and he **knoweth it not**: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he **knoweth it not**", Hosea 7: 9. Samson "**wist not** that the Lord was departed from him", Judges 16: 20. "But they, **supposing** him to have been in the company, went a day's journey", Luke 2: 44. We mustn't assume too much, must we? This brings us to:

### **A) DEPARTURE, V8-9**

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." 'Treachery' (2: 11-16) is followed by 'robbery!' The question, "Wherein?" (V7 & V7) takes us back to the beginning of the book, and to the commencement of the decline. It all began with, "Wherein hast thou loved us?", 1: 2. Failure to remember God's love and our relationship with Him, can only prove disastrous. As we have noticed, the solemn teaching of these verses is set out by 'cause and effect.'

#### **i) Cause, V8**

"Ye have robbed me." They had robbed Him of "tithes and offerings." The word "offerings" here (*terumah*) is used to describe the "heave offering." See, for example, Exodus 29: 27-28; Leviticus 7: 14, 32; Numbers 15: 19-21. Whilst it is

tempting to look at the "heave offering" more closely, all we can say at this juncture is that it was part of the peace offering, and therefore a voluntary offering. So God had been robbed of both "tithes" and of voluntary offerings. The Israelite was commanded to render **three** tithes:

**a) For the support of the Levites.** See Numbers 18: 21-24. "And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.....but the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave-offering unto the Lord, I have given to the Levites to inherit." We must notice that the children of Israel did not render their tithes to the Levites, although the Levites received them and benefited from them: they rendered them **"unto the Lord."** "And all the tithes of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is **the Lord's**: it is holy unto **the Lord**", Leviticus 27: 30. The Levites themselves were required to give a tenth of their income to the Lord. See Numbers 18: 26-28. This is called "the tithes of tithes" (Nehemiah 10: 38-39). This has important lessons for us. We give, first of all, to the Lord Himself. This should focus our minds, hearts, purses and wallets! See Philippians 4: 18, "I have all and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to **God.**" Perhaps if we regarded 'the offering' or 'collection' more in this way, the Lord's servants would be better supported.

The relevance of Malachi's preaching on this subject is clear when we remember that a few years' before, Nehemiah had been obliged to deal with Israel's failure to pay the tithes. This meant that the Levites were obliged to support themselves, and the temple was neglected. "And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field. Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken?", Nehemiah 13: 10-11. Does the work of God suffer because **we** are withholding support for His servants? Remember, if this happens, we rob God. It is not only failure to support the Lord's work and the Lord's workers: it is a denial of God's rights. The words "rob" and "robbed" have 'the meaning of *hiding*.....and hence.....figuratively *to deceive, to defraud, any one*' (Gesenius). The word (*qaba*) is rendered "spoil.....spoiled" in Proverbs 22: 23.

**b) For personal enjoyment.** This is a tithe we don't hear much about! Israel was to "tithe all the increase of thy seed.....and thou shalt eat before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn.....that thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always.....and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thy household", Deuteronomy 14: 22-27. So the Israelite ate this tithe himself. He ate it in the presence of God (in "the place which he shall choose to place his name there"), and he ate it, obviously, with his brethren. There are some challenging lessons there!

**c) For the benefit of underprivileged local people.** This is another tithe we don't hear much about! "At the end of three years thou shalt bring all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: and the Levite.....and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied", Deuteronomy 14: 28-29. Notice what follows: "that the Lord may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest." See also Deuteronomy 26: 12-15, which emphasises the godliness of life and purity of motive with which these tithes were to be paid.

Before we think about the 'effect' of this (see V9), we must notice New Testament teaching in connection with our stewardship. In the Old Testament, God had a right to the firstborn. "And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine; because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel", Numbers 3: 12-13. The New Testament describes the church as "the church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven", Hebrews 12: 23, which means that every Christian belongs to God. This is why Paul wrote, "Ye are not your own.....ye are bought with a price", 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20. God therefore has every right to expect us to devote **(a)** ourselves, and **(b)** our resources, to Him.

**a) Ourselves.** "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (meaning 'worshipful service'). And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God", Romans 12: 1-2. The Christians in Macedonia did this. Before showing their "liberality", they "first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God", 2 Corinthians 8: 5. We must remember that the Lord Jesus "died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again", 2 Corinthians 5: 15.

**b) Our resources.** See, for example, 1 Corinthians 16: 2, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him....." This verse tells us four things about our stewardship. It is to be **regular.** "Upon the first day of the week." The day on which we remember the giving God. God gave His Son. The Lord Jesus gave Himself. The Holy Spirit gives gifts. It is to be **personal.** There is to be a sense of personal responsibility. It was to be shared by all. "Every one of you." It is to be **prepared.** "Let every one of you lay by him in store." JND, 'Let each one of you put by at home.' Compare 2 Corinthians 9: 7, "As he purposeth in his heart." The expression "lay by him" (Greek *'thesaurizo'*) occurs in Matthew 6: 19-20, James 5: 3. It is to be **proportionate.** "As God hath prospered him." RV, 'As he may prosper.' Notice 2 Corinthians 8: 12, "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." We are also to give **cheerfully.** See 2 Corinthians 9: 7, "Every man as he purposeth in his heart, so

let him give: not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God, loveth a cheerful (*hilaros*) giver." Notice, too, that giving is described as sowing. When seed is sown, it is certainly not lost! We should never regard the amount of money we give to the Lord as a reduction in our bank balance. We have 'sown' that money in expectation of a harvest! "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully", 2 Corinthians 9: 6. That does not mean to say that the quickest way to become rich is to give liberally! It is a question of 'laying up treasure in heaven' (Matthew 6: 19-20), and "fruit that may abound to your account" (Philippians 4: 17).

### **ii) Effect, V9**

"Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." The "curse" is defined in V11, "I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts." They were 'devoured' and 'disappointed.' Haggai 1: 6, 9-11, 2: 15-17 illustrate the effect of robbing, or defrauding, God. The result, in spiritual terms, can be expressed as 'leanness of soul', Psalm 106: 15. 'God cannot bless the individual, church, or nation that can spare Him nothing', J.G.Baldwin.

### **B) RETURN, V10-12**

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Once again, the teaching of these verses is set out by 'cause and effect.'

### **i) Cause, V10A**

The believers in Macedonia certainly brought "all the tithes into the storehouse." In fact, they did far more than that. "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit (JND, 'we make known to you') of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power (ability), I bear record, yea, and beyond their power (ability) they were willing of themselves", 2 Corinthians 8: 1-3. It's worth noticing, in passing, that the gift sent through Paul to the needy saints in Judaea was **(a)** the result of the grace of God and **(b)** the result of great sacrifice.

The poor widow certainly brought "all the tithes into the storehouse." Like the Macedonian assemblies, she did far more than pay the required tithes. "Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living", Mark 12: 41-44. (Compare the words "all her living" in Luke 8: 43, "his living" in Luke 15: 12, and "all the living



that she had" in Luke 21 4). She certainly exemplifies 2 Corinthians 8: 12. The Lord Jesus, Who "sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury", also observes **our** giving. He knows exactly how much **we** place in the bag! He also knows all about the level of **our** commitment to Him in worship and service. So, how well are **we** managing our time, our energy, and our resources - spiritual, mental and physical - for the Lord Jesus?

The words, "Bring ye all the tithes into the **storehouse**, that there may be **meat** in mine house", are most interesting, and yield further spiritual lessons. "Into the storehouse" is, literally, 'into the treasury.' See 1 Chronicles 9: 26, 28: 11 etc. "Meat in mine house" is literally, 'torn food' or 'prey', and refers to animals for food. What are **we** contributing to the treasury? It is from this "storehouse" that the needs of the "house" will be met. Our sacrifices of time and money, let alone our "spiritual sacrifices" (Hebrews 13: 15-16) will enrich the house of God which, today, is the local assembly. See 1 Corinthians 3: 16 and 1 Timothy 3: 15. Israel's animal sacrifices fed the priests and Levites, and our contributions in praise and worship will strengthen, encourage and refresh our brothers and sisters in Christ.

#### ***ii) Effect, V10B-12***

"Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts." (For other references to "the windows of heaven" see Genesis 7: 11, 8: 2, 2 Kings 7: 2, 19).

We cannot avoid the impression that God is just waiting to bless His people. He is longing to say, "From this day will I bless you", Haggai 2: 19. It has been said that 'if we want God to open His storehouse, we must first open our's.' The words, "pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it", strongly suggest that God's blessings are out of all proportion to our giving. See 2 Chronicles 31: 10, "Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat, and have plenty: for the Lord hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store." This confirms Proverbs 11: 24-25, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." Contrast the grabbing attitude, which wants to take all, and give nothing. It is this which "tendeth to poverty." But the people who were "cursed with a curse" because they had robbed God, would enjoy the richest of blessings if they brought "all the tithes into the store house." Perhaps God is saying to **us**, "Prove me now": 'Put Me to the test.'

Whilst we do not know how the people here responded to Malachi's ministry, we do know that some years before, the remonstrance of Nehemiah had the desired effect. "Then brought all Judah the tithes of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries", Nehemiah 13: 12. Are **we** prepared to do the same? God promised two results if His people responded:

**a) They** would enjoy "the fruit of the land." See Leviticus 25: 19 etc. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. (It has been suggested that the "devourer" is probably the locust. Amos 4: 9 confirms this probability. (The "palmerworm" is a type of locust: said to be a creeping locust, without wings). See also Joel 1. If we want to enjoy "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5: 22-23), then we must give God first place in our lives. See Proverbs 3: 9-10, "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

**b) Others** would recognise that they enjoyed God's blessings. "And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts." If we want other people to say about us, "The Lord hath done great things for them", then we must, again, give God first place in our lives.

Whilst the lessons of these two verses are applicable at any time, they will not be fulfilled until the restoration of Israel in the millennial reign of Christ. Then, "the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt", Amos 9: 13-15. Then, "the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory.....Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and the land shall be married", Isaiah 62: 1-4.

We should notice that whether it is a case of judgement or blessing, it is "the Lord of hosts" Who speaks. This underlines His ability to implement His word. His resources are infinite. They include "the stars in their courses" (Judges 5: 20), and "horses and chariots of fire" (2 Kings 6: 17).

16.02.2001