

MALACHI

MINOR PROPHETS SERIES

A Book of Remembrance 3:13-18

Throughout the book of Malachi Israel has been oblivious to their sin. In the first twelve verses of Malachi 3, God called Israel to return to him and promised restoration if they repented. Instead, Israel blindly replied that they had never left.

In the sixth and final disputation that God brings against the people in the book of Malachi Israel is charged with speaking against Yahweh. In true form Israel quickly and thoughtlessly denies that they had ever spoken against God.

Disputation # 6

Assertion: *"Your words have been hard against me."*

Objection by Israel: *"How have we spoken against you?"*

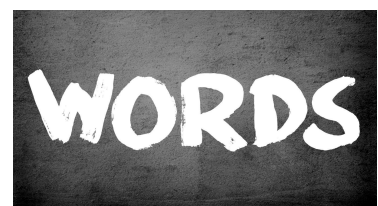
God's Response: You say it is vain to serve God. You have claimed that evildoers prosper and escape punishment.

Yahweh charges in 3:13, *"Your words have been hard against me."* The NASB translates this as: *"Your words have been arrogant against Me"* and in similar fashion the NIV reads, *"Your have spoken arrogantly against me."* The KJV says, *"Your words have been stout against me."* The word translated as hard, arrogant, or stout can also be rendered strong or harsh. The idea is that the people had not just disobeyed God, but they had verbally spoken against God in a strong and callous manner contradicting what he commanded and rebelling against what he said.

It is a strong message to Israel that they had spoken harshly against the Creator and the God of the covenant. Yet again we are stunned by the insensitivity and utter cluelessness of Israel. In their distorted minds they were unaware of having been critical of Yahweh.

1. How is it possible for a people to rebel against God and verbally assault him without being aware of their sin?

God answers the rebellious people in verse 14 reminding them that they had said, *"It is vain to serve God."* They had also concluded that there was no profit in keeping the Lord's commands. It is important to see that God hears the comments of man and even knows his thoughts. God has emotions and is saddened and angered by a people who speak harshly against him.



2. Why does the almighty God care what his people say about him?

The word translated as “vain” in verse 14 shows that Israel thought serving God was completely useless. The demands of keeping the covenant were too high and the rewards too low. The phrase “walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts” probably refers to “the entire range of mourning rituals, such as fasting or wearing sackcloth.”¹

The people apparently viewed the worship of God as boring, tedious, and joyless. They saw no value in worship and detested it; yet they had persisted in some pretext of worship. They had carried out sacrifice and offering, but without devotion, joy, or desire. They had not given their best and resented what God expected of them. They looked at God as distant and uncaring and saw no profit in their worship and obedience.



Judah made three statements in 3:15 which show their contempt with serving God.

1. They viewed the arrogant as blessed. They looked at those who refused to obey and follow God and believed they were blessed because they had not spent the time and effort to carry out all the demands of the covenant. They spoke against God, but yet seemed to reap blessings. The idea is that serving Yahweh was not worth the cost and effort.
2. They viewed the evildoers as prosperous. Those who broke the covenant and lived in defiance of God seemed to live more prosperously than those who gave offerings to God. Once again the idea is that serving Yahweh was not worth the cost and effort.
3. They viewed the wicked as escaping punishment. Just how the evildoers put God to the test is unknown, but as Judah looked on they concluded that the wicked got away with whatever they wanted because God did not punish. A third time the idea is reinforced that serving Yahweh was not worth the cost and effort.

3. Does serving God take effort? (Explain your answer)

4. What did Jeremiah ask God in Jeremiah 12:1?

5. What does the Psalmist lament in Psalm 73:3?



God’s people in all generations have observed those around them and wondered how the wicked can live for self and defiantly disobey God and yet seem to prosper. In these times it is important to view life through the lens of eternity. The wicked may face justice in this life, but if not they will in the final judgment.

It is foolhardy and short-sighted to view the prosperity of evildoers with any kind of envy. These have received their reward in the fleeting joy of sin, but will face an eternity of God’s wrath. The wicked will not escape punishment from the God who sees all. Throughout history many have

¹ Smith, James E. *Postexilic Prophets*. Lulu, 2007, p. 337.

foolishly concluded that God is distant, uncaring, or unaware of what is happening in the world when he has not acted in the ways and timeframes they thought appropriate.

6. Why can God's people be so short-sighted when it comes to God's judgment of the wicked?

Not everyone in Judah was evil and not all of God's people were violators of the covenant. Some tried to live according to what God expected and demanded. These faithful Jews assembled and encouraged one another.

In 3:16 those who feared God “spoke” with one another. The righteous must have met together, discussed their love of Yahweh, and urged each other to remain faithful to God. We cannot be certain of exactly what they discussed or if they tried to convince the unfaithful to repent, but we do know that God was pleased with them.

Malachi tells us that God “paid attention” and “heard” the words of those who feared him. Since God knows and hears everything we should understand this to mean that he viewed with great favour the words and actions of the righteous. Saints of all ages should realise that nothing escapes the attention of Yahweh and he will punish the wicked and reward the faithful in his own perfect timing.

7. In Malachi 3:16 the faithful spoke with one another about God, feared him, and esteemed his name. What steps can we take today to assure that we incorporate these activities into the life of the church?



Those who expressed their love and devotion to Yahweh spoke well of him, revered his name, and obeyed his commands. A “book of remembrance” was written to record the names of these righteous ones who feared God. This is the only Old Testament reference to a book of remembrance. This is reminiscent of the “book of life” mentioned numerous times in the book of Revelation. (See Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 20:12, 15; 17:8)

8. What does it mean to your life to understand that God knows your name and that if you are a Christian your name has been recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life?

The eternal God who knows all and remembers all does not need a ledger to recall who has been obedient to him. This book whether literal or metaphorical stands as a reminder to the righteous that God sees their deeds and will not forget their faithful lives. The wicked will not escape God's wrath, and the obedient will not miss his blessings.

Much of the book of Malachi addresses a people who went through the motions of sacrifice and obedience to God, but in reality did not love or reverence him. They constantly questioned the actions and intentions of the Creator, gave him the left-overs of life, disobeyed his precepts, and criticised his actions. These people would receive his wrath.

Those few who were faithful in the days of Malachi truly belonged to God. Malachi 3:17 says: “They shall be **mine**, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured **possession**, and I will

spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.” Not only are the faithful God’s possession, he also describes their relationship to him as faithful and beloved children.

9. How is the relationship between God and his people described in 1 Peter 2:9?

The day spoken about in 3:17 is that day when God will bring human activity on earth to a close and bring all of mankind into judgment. The day of the Lord will bring eternal punishment to the wicked and eternal deliverance to the righteous.

10. What is meant by the word “spare” in 3:17?

On the Day of the Lord a final distinction will be made between the righteous and the wicked and between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve him. While the sceptical in Judea spoke hard against Yahweh and claimed that there was no profit in serving him, God informed the righteous that their faith would be rewarded.

The oblivious Jews in 3:15 had claimed there was no profit in serving God because the wicked prospered and escaped God’s punishment. The lukewarm had forgotten God’s blessings, spoken against Yahweh, forsaken the covenant, become bored with worship, and distrusted God’s intentions. How sad and shortsighted their faith had become.

The few who were righteous in the days of Malachi show us that it is possible to love, obey, honour, and reverence God in the midst of a society that doesn’t believe in what he says. When God makes the final distinction between the righteous and the wicked those who have remained faithful will find joy unspeakable and they will be rewarded in a way that is wondrous and beyond imagining.

11. How can we remain faithful to God and encourage other Christians to righteous living in the midst of an unfaithful and unrighteous world?