

MALACHI

MINOR PROPHETS SERIES

A Dispute About Repentance 3:6-12

Malachi 3:6 is a transitional verse. It ties into the former verses to provide proof that God will do as he promised since he cannot change. This stands in stark contrast to Israel who does change. Israel had moved away from obedience to the covenant and in the following verses God will urge them to return to him.

Though God is a God of complete justice, and uncompromising holiness his love and grace has thus far kept him from “consuming” or destroying Jacob (Israel). Here God calls his people “*Jacob*” most likely because they like their forefather Jacob were deceivers. Though they have proven themselves unfaithful, God calls for repentance.

Disputation # 5

Assertion: The people had turned aside from God’s statutes and failed to keep them.

Objection by Israel: “*How shall we return?*”

God’s Response: They had strayed from him by robbing him.

Objection by Israel: “How have we robbed you.

God’s Response: By withholding tithes and offerings.

God brings his fifth dispute against the people beginning in verse 7. The statutes were the conditions and requirements of the covenant. With this disputation comes a promise: “*Return to me, and I will return to you.*”

The word translated “*return*” is the one most commonly used by the prophets to refer to repentance.¹ Israel must repent from their covenant violations and return to obedience to God. In the previous disputations God had accused his people of a lack of faith, dishonourable actions, violation of their marriage vows, and constant complaining. Still God is willing to forgive them and restore his blessings upon them if they repent.



Israel answers in the same way they have with each previous disputation. They are seemingly oblivious to the charge and respond, “*How shall we return?*” In their twisted minds they had never left. They didn’t recognise their own sinfulness and their covenant violations.

I. Why didn’t Israel recognise their covenant violations?

¹ Smith, James E. *Postexilic Prophets*. Lulu, 2007, p. 328.

2. What is repentance and why is the phrase “return to me” an essential part of repentance?

God replies to the detached and oblivious response of Israel explaining that they strayed by robbing him. Now Israel asks, “*How have we robbed you?*” Then God explains that they had withheld their tithes and contributions.

The tithes and offerings of the Old Testament included the giving of ten percent of the harvest each year to the Levites. The offerings were additional gifts that were to be set aside for the priests and for meeting other needs within the community. The Israelites had robbed God because they had withheld from his servants what the covenant commanded them to give. Even though the priests had acted unrighteously this did not excuse the failure of the people to keep the requirements of the covenant.

In the New Testament, Christians are not commanded to give a specific amount to the Lord, but 2 Corinthians 9 (among other passages) teaches that Christians are to give cheerfully. Paul teaches that the way one gives has a direct influence on how God will bless that person. Those who give to God must not give from a feeling of compulsion, but joyfully and generously because they love God and want to help others and expand the Lord’s kingdom.



3. What excuses might a Christian use for not being generous in his giving?

4. In 2 Cor. 9:8-11 what does God promise to Christians who give cheerfully to him?

5. What does 2 Cor. 9:12-13 say the generous gifts of Christians accomplishes for others?

6. What motivates Christians to give to God according to 2 Cor. 9:15?



In verse 9 God pronounces that he has cursed these people with a curse because they had robbed him. The curse probably brought drought or economic difficulty. This sin is described as a national sin. Though it may be that not every single Israelite withheld their offerings, the entire nation would suffer the effects of the curse.

Now in verse 10 God commands Israel what to do in response to his indictment. Earlier they were told to return or to repent and specifically there were to now bring the “*full tithe into the storehouse.*” The storehouse referred to that area where the offerings were kept. This instruction is not a suggestion, but a command to the people. They must bring their tithes which would be used to provide for the priests, those who served in the temple, the general operation of the temple, and food for the fatherless and widows.

Along with the specific command to give their tithes and offerings there is a challenge for the people to “test” or evaluate whether or not God provides for them if they give as they are commanded. God says he will “*open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*” The idea is that one cannot out give God.

If Israel will obey God, their nation will be blessed. Since the curse was probably drought it is easy to envision the opening of the windows of heaven to be sufficient rainfall. God promises not just sustaining blessings, but abundant blessings.

Verse 11 seems to refer to some sort of crop destroying insect or pest described as “*the devourer.*” As the pests are kept in control and plants develop to maturity, the crops would yield abundant fruit. If Israel would bring the offerings as God commanded then their fields bear great crops and the surrounding nations would view God’s people favourably and say that their land was blessed.

It can be easy to overlook what God *prevents* in comparison to what he *gives*. The prevention of pests or disease is essential to an abundant harvest, but may be overlooked in comparison to the coming of timely rain and favourable weather.

In addition to the immediate blessing of God’s provision, verse 12 also looks forward to the time when Israel would be a land of delight through the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the church. In this way all nations of the earth would be blessed through Israel.

7. What are some of the ways that God blesses his people today when they are faithful to his covenant and generous in their giving and service?

8. How can we be more thankful for what God may have prevented in our lives in addition to what he has given us?

9. Israel’s sins were national or sins of the community. How do churches experience God’s blessings and the withholding of blessings corporately?



10. Points to Ponder:

a. Consider if there are any areas in your life in which you may need to “return to God” (repent)?

b. Are there any ways in which you might be robbing God?