

Lesson 2
GIVING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT
Malachi 3:7-12

BACKGROUND

Malachi 3:7-12 deals with Israel's failure to pay tithes to God, and God's disappointment with that nation. The nation was in decline. There were hard economic times. People were struggling with finances. The nation reasoned they couldn't tithe because of the bad economic conditions, and God said the reason they had the situation was because they had not tithed and given free will offerings to God. God assured them if they would begin to meet their financial obligations to God, He would change the economic conditions and bless the nation once again.

A person may say, "What does this have to do with me? I am a Christian in the church and Malachi 3 has to do with nation of Israel?" This section is dealing with the nation of Israel, but the same spiritual principles of giving apply to the church that is spiritual Israel. Giving is part of the moral law of God in both the Old and New Testaments. This section was written for our benefit that we might know how to give faithfully and to receive God's blessing.

ADMONITION 3:7

"Even since the time of your forefathers you have turned from my decrees and have not kept them."

Israel as a nation had turned away from God with no desire or intention of keeping the commands of His law. They were a nation desperately in need of revival. Their religion was purely external with no heart for God. They were going through the motions but there was no commitment to God. They had a form of godliness but denied its power (2 Tim. 3:5).

We are told the reason Israel was not destroyed was because of God's immutability, for He does not change. ***I the LORD do not change (Mal. 3:6).*** God made promises to Israel and He would not fail His people even if the vast majority of them turned from Him. God, however, always had His elect and regenerate remnant in the nation to whom He fulfilled His promises. Yet, even His elect were sorely disciplined because they fail to keep God's law. The entire history of Israel is the record of ever recurring departing from and rebellion against God's unchanging law and regulations for His covenant people.

"Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty.

God should have destroyed these rebellious Jews, but He had covenanted with Israel and desired they should repent. God made a gracious invitation for them to return to Him, for He never desires to cast off His people. No matter how severe the sins of His people or how long their rebellion has been, God is always willing to receive them when they right their ways.

But you ask, "How are we to return?"

These super-pious Jews were so deluded by their own self-righteousness and hardened hearts they saw nothing in themselves that needed to be reformed or repented of. They were pure in their own eyes. This is the Pharisee spirit at its best.

EXTORTION 3:8

"Will a man rob (cheat, defraud) God? Yet you rob me."

This question is raised by God to counter their question in 3:7, ***"How are we to return?"*** This literally says, "Dare a man rob (cheat) God? Yet, me you rob!" God goes immediately to their material

way of life and shows they can return by paying God what they rightly owe Him because they were robbing God. Will a puny, impudent man try to rob an infinite God, and think he can get away with it? Such is the pure pride, arrogance and deceitfulness of man.

Robbing God is an awful sin and He can be robbed in many ways. Men may rob Him of honor, devotion, service, time and money, for men rightly owe Him all these things

But you ask, “How do we rob you? In tithes and offerings.

These “holier than thou” Jews did not have the slightest idea how they had robbed and cheated God. Sin always blinds a man to God’s law. God takes them right to the issue of their tithes and offerings.

A Jew was commanded to give about 20% of his income a year, for he actually gave two tithes. Every third year he gave another 10% to the poor. If averaged over a three-year period, the Jew gave about 23% of his income each year for God’s work. He gave corn, oil, wine, livestock and money. The first tithe was of all produce, flocks and cattle. This tithe was given to support the Levites and the priests (Lev. 27:30-33; Deut. 12:18). The second tithe, which was known as the “festival tithe,” was a tenth of the 9/10’s left (Deut. 12:5-7; 14:22-27). The third tithe was known as the “charity tithe” and was given every third year to help the poor, strangers, orphans and widows (Deut. 26:12; 14:28-29). The Jew gave from the best of the crop and herd and this was called “the first fruits,” so God’s tenth was the first and the best.

The “offerings” were voluntary love gifts given over and above the required tithe (Deut. 18:4). These Jews robbed God in that not only had they failed to give their offerings but had failed to give no tithes, or giving only a portion of the tithes, or giving only the second best. They gave as their excuse bad economic times in the nation.

If you are a good student of the Bible, you will know that tithing is never mentioned in the New Testament. Some Christians have concluded, therefore, the absence of tithing in the New Testament is proof that the church is not to tithe because the church is not under the Mosaic Law but under grace. They claim the pattern for giving in the church is found in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, and the basic principle is, “Each man should give as he has decided in his heart” (2 Cor. 9:7) and “as is keeping with his income” (1 Cor. 16:2). My objection to this kind of thinking is: 1) tithing was practiced by Abraham before the Mosaic Law ever came into existence (Gen. 14:20); 2) Jacob gave a tenth of his property to God (Gen. 28:22); 3) there is no mention of tithing in the New Testament because it was an assumed fact that was taken for granted and continues as part of the moral law of God for His people; 4) 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 deal with a special offering or collection that was being taken up by the Gentile churches for the needy saints in Jerusalem. This was over and above their tithe to the local church. It was an offering not a tithe. This is why it was such a sacrifice (2 Cor. 8:3); 5) while the New Testament assumes the tithe, the thrust of the teaching in the New Testament deals with attitudes and motives in giving.

There is a great blessing for those who are obedient to God in their giving (Prov. 3:9-10). We should never complain about giving a tenth of our monies to God. He could have required 9/10 of our monies and been just in doing so because all we have belongs to God. The questions for the Christian are not, “How much shall I give,” but, “How much shall I keep?”

CONDEMNATION 3:9

You are under a curse

For their rebellion against God in the tithe, God brought a curse on them - in their land, nation, religion, homes, families, businesses or whatever. Their excuse for not bringing a full tithe or any tithe at

all was probably hard economic times (inflation, recession or depression) had hit the nation. But, why these hard times? They had failed to obey God and this brought them their impoverished condition.

Low income or hard economic times are never excuses for failing to give God His due. God blessed the widow when she gave just two pennies.

The whole nation of you—because you are robbing me.

The entire nation was robbing God. Failing to give was not a sin against Israel, not against men, not against spiritual leaders but against God.

The most common excuse for not tithing is, “I must take care of my family first.” But God says, “Give to me, and I will take care of your family.” Perhaps the reason we are suffering financially is that we are not giving to God what is rightfully His.

EXHORTATION 3:10a

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.

The “storehouse” was the temple treasury where the food and monies were stored and distributed as needed. The Jews brought all their tithes to one place that the Jewish nation as a religious and political entity might continue to exist.

This brings up the whole question of “storehouse tithing” for the local church; that is, the first 10% is to go to the local church. While I do believe that all Christians are to give tithes and offerings to God, I cannot be dogmatic and say a Christian must give his entire tithe to the local church. However, this may not be a bad idea and wherever this is practiced, a local church is never hurting for finances. It is also good business to pool resources. I myself believe and practice storehouse tithing because I believe it is the biblical pattern. The whole idea of pooling resources is taught in the New Testament as well. The saints of Jerusalem pooled their money to meet the needs of people (Acts 4:34-35). The love offering from the Gentile churches was brought to the Elders and they distributed it as there was need (Acts 11:30). When giving is done to missionaries in the New Testament, it was done through the whole church (Phil. 4:14-16).

If you are not willing to accept the storehouse tithing concept for the local church, you should be willing to admit that the majority of your giving ought to go to where you and your family are being fed and growing in Christ and this most likely will be the local church.

DECLARATION 3:10b

“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 you will not have room enough for it.”

God put a challenge before these Jews to test Him to meet every financial need they had if they decided to start tithing and giving offerings to God. God would not only bring wonderful rains to water the crops, but this is figurative language to indicate He will lavish spiritual blessing on those who meet God’s requirements in giving. They would be flooded with blessing, so much so that there would be no room for it. Literally this says, “pour out blessing so there will be super-abundance.”

By faith, they were to put God to the test. God is debtor to His own promises. He promises great blessing to those who give tithes and offerings. We do not ask God to bring in more money that we may tithe. No, by faith we begin to tithe, believing God will bring in more money or teach us to use the money left over better. There will always be spiritual blessing for tithing and there will also be material blessing (2 Cor. 9:6).

PROTECTION 3:11

“I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,” says the LORD Almighty.

If Israel would tithe and give offerings, God promised them protection for their crops from disease, frost and insects.

The Christian who faithfully gives his monies will see God meet his needs and there will be blessing beyond the basic necessities. Shoes will last longer, clothes will not wear out and cars will break down less, things will be purchased cheaper, and money will come in from unknown sources. God protects His own who are obedient to keep His moral law. Are you ready to test Him and trust Him in the area of giving?

REPUTATION 3:12

“Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the LORD Almighty.

If Israel would tithe and give offerings, the surrounding unbelieving nations would be impressed with Israel. Through Israel’s good testimony, the pagans would know that the Lord Almighty was in their midst. Both God and man would find delight in Israel’s obedience.

Every need of a local church would be met if the members gave according to the biblical pattern in Malachi 3. It is a shame for Christian churches and organizations to be constantly begging for money, and this would be eliminated if we would learn to give God’s way.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

1. Every Christian is to be obedient to the command to give a tenth of his income. Let us try to tithe our gross pay and if that is too difficult, tithe our take home pay. If we have little money, give something.
2. Give of the first fruits of our tithe to the Lord before paying other bills. If we pay God’s bill first, then He will make our money stretch. It takes faith to believe God will bless us if we give a tenth of our income away, but only a life of faith pleases God (Heb. 11:6).
3. Take the first tenth of our giving and put it into the storehouse, which is the local church. If we will do this, there will be a super-abundance to do the work of the ministry in and through a local church and monies left over to give to the poor, the unfortunate, missions, etc.
4. We should not give emotionally but biblically out of obedience. There will be hundreds of requests for our monies and all of them are good but God’s primary place to accomplish His work is through the local church. When we give directly to some needy Christian or organization, it makes us feel good. It boosts our ego and makes us feel more personally involved but is that the biblical pattern? It is far more important to give biblically than emotionally.
5. Offerings are those gifts we give over and above our tenth to the local church. We may give our voluntary offerings to the church or anywhere we choose to put them. Someone has said that we have not really started giving until we have first met our obligation to tithe. *The tithe is rightfully God’s. The offerings are ours to do with as God leads.*
6. Giving should come out of obedience and from a heart of joy. We will experience joy in giving in direct proportion to the amount we choose to give as Christians.
7. Christians are free to make needs known and to pray, but we are never free to play on people’s emotions or put them on a guilt trip so as to manipulate them to give money. We are to teach about giving to Christians and leave it to God to work out the details with His people.

8. We must all learn to give liberally and in some cases sacrificially for God's work. Someone has said, "Don't give till it hurts: give a little more until it feels good!" All giving is really a matter of faith and a willing heart that loves God above every material thing in this world.