

### 3. The final warning

June 3, 2010

We all know what our parents used to tell us when we goofed up too much, "This is your final warning. Knock it off. And it is not a threat, it is a promise." Some of us finally got it, but some of us who had thick heads didn't.

We are at the last two chapters of the OT, we are going to see what the Lord told the Jews about their ungodly behaviors and the future events like no other Books in the OT.

#### A. GOD'S MESSENGER – JOHN THE BAPTIST

*Malachi 3:1-7 "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the Lord of hosts. 2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderer's soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness. 4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the Lord, As in the days of old, As in former years. 5 And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien-- Because they do not fear Me," Says the Lord of hosts. 6 "For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. 7 Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," Says the Lord of hosts. "But you said, 'In what way shall we return?'*

At the end of Malachi 2, Israel complained that God seemed to reward the wicked and did not extend His justice in the world. Are we not like them? We want God's justice on the wicked NOW, because we actually want to see them suffer.

It is a very good thing that the Lord doesn't dish out His justice every time a human commits a sin. There would not be one single human alive on the earth. He is full of mercy and abounding in love. But His holiness demands judgment and His patience knows its limit.

In an ancient royal procession the messenger went before the King to announce his arrival, to indicate the route, and to remove any obstacles in the road. John the Baptist fulfilled this exact ministry for Jesus. The same idea is indicated in Isaiah 40:3-5.

*Isaiah 40:3-5 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; 5 The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

The promise of God for His return is found in v1 "before Me". It is not merely a new and improved prophet, but the Lord Himself.

According to the law of Moses, the Lord provided three ways for people and things to be cleansed and made acceptable to God: water, fire and blood. Once the nation is cleansed, and the priests are purified, then they can become an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord and He will be pleased with them. But the priests in Malachi's time were offering sacrifices that were unacceptable as we learned in chapter 1:7-8.

The coming of this second messenger will be awesome and terrible, but with a purpose. Note one thing, please. The purpose of the launderer and the refiner is not to destroy, but to cleanse and refine.

The list of sinners in v5 gives us some idea of the kind of practices that were going on in Malachi's time and are happening now as the end times. The people who commit these kinds of sins do not have fear of the Lord. Somehow they thought He would close His eyes to their sins and not judge them for breaking His law. NOT!

*Psalm 50:21 These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes.*

Up to now, Malachi has proved that God is just, but now he will talk about the people's unjust sins toward the Lord.

## **B. ARE YOU ROBBING GOD?**

*Malachi 3:8-12 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. 10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it. 11 "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," Says the Lord of hosts; 12 "And all nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land," Says the Lord of hosts.*

How can a man rob God? It seems crazy to think that a puny human can rob the Almighty God who does not sleep and knows all things. But people do. The Jewish people did, and 90% of Christians throughout the centuries have done it and still are doing it. How? By withholding their tithes and offerings.

The word "tithe" comes from a Hebrew word "maaser" that means "ten." A tithe is 10 percent of one's grain, fruit, animals, or money. Some Christians even argue that it is the ten percent of what is left over after paying all the bills or net income. If you need to argue about tithing, I suggest you not give a tithe. Because it requires our willing hearts behind tithing, not grudging ones.

*2 Corinthians 9:7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Some would say, "It is a tithe out of net." If that is the case, find me one biblical reference for that. You will not. One time, I was asked by a Christian who already tithes from his net income regularly regarding this issue. I told him that it is out of our gross income, not net. He listened to me and said, "Pastor, I am going to do it. I am going to test God on this as He said." He started to tithe out of his gross and a week later, he received a sizeable check from someone that he did not expect. You never outgive God.

But many would hoard everything they get for so-called “rainy day” as I have said before. Even though they are hoarding for that rainy day, but when something they would like to buy or do pops up in a good deal, guess what they do? They spend money on what they want to do rather than giving it to the Lord. In most cases, they constantly struggle with lack of money.

*Haggai 1:6 “You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes.”*

Many people with financial problems fail to do the most important thing first: Obey and honor God with their resources. When we seek God and His kingdom first, He promises to meet our other needs as it is written in Matthew 6:33.

I think that I’ve heard just about every conceivable argument there is about the reasons why they cannot tithe. If they are honest, it would not be “can not”, rather it would be “will not”.

Listen, tithing is an act of worship – overcoming our feeble minds that have a tendency to depend on our checking accounts over God’s promises. If a person says that he or she is really into worshipping the Lord in spirit and truth, but he or she is not tithing, that person is lying.

Though the New Testament nowhere specifically commands tithing, but it certainly does speak of it in a positive light, if it is done with a right heart. Jesus never told us not to tithe. It is the principle of giving rather than hoarding.

*Acts 20:35b And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

To keep this portion of the Scripture in context of Malachi, we can conclude that not tithing is an act of offense toward God as the Israelites did.

### **C. SPEAKING AGAINST THE LORD**

*Malachi 3:13-15 “Your words have been harsh against Me,” Says the Lord, “Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’ 14 You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God; What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, And that we have walked as mourners Before the Lord of hosts? 15 So now we call the proud blessed, For those who do wickedness are raised up; They even tempt God and go free.’”*

The Jews saw the prosperity of the proud and those who did wickedness, and they felt that it was useless to serve God as long as those who didn’t serve Him seemed to have it so good. God would have blessed them if they had yielded themselves to Him, but they preferred to have their own way and then complain about what didn’t happen.

When a person does not have the fear of the Lord, nothing stops him from speaking against God. It’s a serious thing to serve the Lord, and we’re commanded to serve the Lord with gladness. It’s a sad thing when a servant of God is a drudge, merely doing a job because that’s what he or she has to do or for what they get out of it.

### **D. THE TRUE BELIEVERS**

*Malachi 3:16-18 Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, And the Lord listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written*

*before Him For those who fear the Lord And who meditate on His name. 17 "They shall be Mine," says the Lord of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him." 18 Then you shall again discern Between the righteous and the wicked, Between one who serves God And one who does not serve Him.*

I love that, especially v16. The Lord hears us and writes down how we trust Him and praise Him from our hearts.

Let's face it. Living in this carnal world is not easy, where every possible quick-fix for our ungodly desires is available at the fingertip. The problem with those quick-fixes have long lasting consequences which absolutely ain't worth for all the troubles we are going to go through if we choose to.

While we seek the Lord with all of our hearts, others would laugh at us. While Noah and his family were building the ark, others laughed at them. While Moses was faithfully following the Lord's commands, the mixed multitude laughed at him. While Joshua and the Israelites were marching around the wall of Jericho according to what the Lord told them, the people inside laughed at them. While the Son of God was dying on the cross, the Pharisees and the Roman soldiers laughed and jeered at Him. But the Lord remembers His faithful children.

I don't know what is ahead of us if the Lord chooses to tarry. The world will go from bad to worse; there will be more persecutions and attacks against us and other Christians around the world. But the Lord remembers His followers.

## **E. THE GREAT DAY OF THE LORD**

*Malachi 4:1-6 "For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the Lord of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves. 3 You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this," Says the Lord of hosts. 4 "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments. 5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."*

Once again, Malachi returns to the theme of the coming Day of the Lord when God will punish all evildoers. Sinners will be burned up the way fire eats up the stubble. But the true believers will see the dawning of a new day as the Sun of righteousness rises.

By the way, from the time of early Christians like Justin Martyr to today, Christians have regarded the Sun of Righteousness as a reference to Jesus.

Malachi has been faithful as God's messenger, and he closes his book by reminding the people of two other faithful prophets, Moses and Elijah. The law of Moses was still God's rule of life for the Jews, and if they obeyed, God would bless them. Of course, believers today aren't under the law, but they still practice the righteousness of the law through the power of the indwelling Spirit of God.

Who is this Elijah whom the Lord will send? The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' time asked John the Baptist about his identity in John 1. When they asked him if he was Elijah, John the Baptist answered, "No." He did come in the spirit and power of Elijah. While John the Baptist performed the work of Elijah in the people's lives and he prepared them to meet the Lord.

But in v5, the Lord promised us that He would send Elijah himself. When? I believe that he would come during the time of the Tribulation period that was mentioned in Revelation 11. I used to think that the other person was Enoch. I believe that I was wrong on that. I think it will be Moses.

After their ministry of the witness, the Lord will pour out His wrath upon the earth and the Day of the Lord will burst upon the world in its fury. When the Sun of righteousness arises, it will mean either burning or blessing – blessing to those who have trusted Him, burning to those who have rejected Him.

### **F. APPLICATIONS**

1) Whenever we rob God with our tithes and offerings, we always rob ourselves from spiritual blessings.

2) It is a very important thing to remember that our God is full of mercy and abounding in love. But His holiness demands judgment and His patience knows its limit.