

## **Stout Words and Special Treasure Malachi 3:13-18**

### **Introduction**

Throughout Malachi, there is a repeated pattern where the Lord accuses the people of something, and again and again the people demonstrate to God the hardness of their hearts in their impertinent responses. Here, we come to the last of these exchanges. In this passage, two groups of people are identified: those who, hearing what God has said, bring their own charges upon God, and those who do in fact return to God.

### **Summary of the Text**

The Lord accuses the people of speaking harsh words against Him, and they ask how so (v. 13). They have said that obeying God is fruitless (v. 14). They even see the proud and wicked blessed, who test God get away with it (v. 15). Instead of giving a response to this, Malachi notes that some feared the Lord and responded rightly to His rebukes (v. 16). The Lord declares that they shall be His and that He will make them His special treasure, sparing them like a father does his faithful son (v. 17). Finally, Malachi closes this section noting that the people—who had complained about the Lord’s discernment—will see the difference between the righteous and the wicked (v. 18).

### **Harsh Words**

The people have spoken “stout words” (KJV) against the Lord (v. 13). The Lord has repeatedly charged the people, led by the priests, of breaking God’s law. They break it with polluted sacrifices and manipulative worship (1:6-2:2), in not teaching the people (2:3-9), with idolatry (2:10-12), with adultery and divorce (2:13-16), and in withholding tithes and offerings (3:8-9). Yet, the people complain that their obedience is not resulting in the blessing they expect from God (3:14). They even went about mournfully, putting on a show of humility (cf. 2 Cor. 7:10). They bring a strong complaint against God because He has not rewarded their obedience when He has been accusing them of hypocrisy and outright rebellion. They go on to point out that the wicked, on the other hand, are doing quite well (3:15). They think God is blind to them, clinging to their doubt in His justice (2:17) and in His love (1:2). The irony is that these people are blind and self-deceived. They accuse “the proud,” but themselves have become proud, thinking higher of themselves than they ought. They are unable to see the ridiculousness of their own words.

This is a clear example of our fallen hearts. When we are confronted with our sin, we are masters of self-defense. We justify ourselves, pointing out all the good things we do. We quickly point the finger at God: why hasn’t He kept His side of the deal if I’ve done all these things? We point around at others, whom we deem to be beneath us. We accuse God of favoring them, excusing them, and allowing them to tempt Him and go free. In doing these things we deceive ourselves, puff ourselves up with pride, and then covet the success of others, all the while accusing God of not being fair.

### **The Fear of the Lord**

On the other hand, Malachi tells us of another group of people, those who feared the Lord (v. 16). Several times, the Lord has accused the people of not fearing Him (1:6; 2:5, 8; 3:5).



To fear the Lord means, among other things, to believe in Him, revere Him as God, and obey Him (e.g., Ex. 1:17, Job 1:1). In other words, these people heard God's rebukes and took them to heart (cf. 2:2). The Lord in turn gave heed to them and heard them. When God's people cry out to Him in repentance, He hears them and forgives them (Ps. 32:5, cf. 1 John 1:9). This is again a stark reversal of the beginning of the prophecy (1:6). The people give the Lord the honor and glory that is due His name, and He takes notice of it. The "book of remembrance" is likely an allusion to the records that ancient kings would keep, particularly of deeds of faithful service (cf. Est. 2:23, 6:1). Because they turn to Him in fear and honor His name, the Lord promises that they will be His special treasure (cf. Ex. 19:5-6, 1 Pet. 2:9). They are honoring Him as faithful sons, and He will have compassion on them as a faithful Father (v. 17). And He will do this ultimately by not sparing His own Son, which Paul says is proof of His generosity, care, and preservation of His saints (Rom. 8:32).

God is keenly aware of our circumstances, and keenly aware of our obedience in the midst of those circumstances. Malachi indicates that He keeps a record of this, not because we are justified by our obedience (cf. Rom. 4:2), but because He delights to tell the faithful servant, "Well done!" (Matt. 25:21). Again, God invites His children to test Him to see if He does not overwhelm them with blessings when they obey Him (v. 10). The unfaithful Jews in vs. 13-15 perhaps dabbled in obedience, but they did not obey Him with a holy fear, loving Him with heart, soul, mind, and strength. Thus, their obedience was short-lived. They gave up because they did not see the fruit of their obedience. The others, though, hear the promise, "They shall be Mine!" What can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:38-39)?

The passage concludes saying that the (unfaithful) people will "return and discern between the righteous and the wicked" (v. 18). The return here is likely not a reference to repentance, but it is perhaps given as a contrast to v. 7. God had called on the people to return to Him, but they railed against Him. In the end, though, they will return in the sense of changing their mind. They think that God is confused between the righteous and the wicked. Malachi says, however, that God's promises will play out so that they will see clearly the distinction between those who serve Him and those who do not. "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" (4:1).

## **Conclusion**

God invites us to test Him, with promises of blessing. In other words, God invites us to trust Him by walking in the works He has set before us (Eph. 2:10). Malachi shows us there are two responses to this invitation. One is to turn and accuse God of delivering not on time, or not at all, or not as much as He gave others—and then to give up. The other is to turn and fear God and cling to His promises and humbly obey all He has commanded, imitating the obedience of Jesus (Heb. 12:1-2). Have you humbled yourself before the Lord? Do you fear Him? God is not a perfectionist. He knows His children are mere dust (Ps. 103:13), and so He is tender and compassionate and slow to anger with those whose hearts are turned toward Him. He resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Obedience to God requires faith. So cling to His promises.