

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Malachi Chapter 3 — The Coming Messenger and the Day of Refining

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Malachi Chapter 3 answers the question that ended Chapter 2:

“Where is the God of justice?”

The people had accused God of failing to judge evil.

God's answer was startling.

He essentially says:

“I am coming.”

But before the Lord comes, a messenger will prepare the way.

The New Testament identifies this messenger as **John the Baptist**, who prepared Israel for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Then Malachi speaks of the Lord Himself suddenly coming to His temple.

The chapter therefore contains some of the clearest prophetic language in the Old Testament concerning:

- The forerunner of Christ.
- The coming of the Messiah.
- God's purification of His people.
- God's judgment upon sin.
- God's unchanging character.
- The call to repentance.
- Faithfulness in giving.
- God's remembrance of those who fear Him.
- The final distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

Malachi 3 presents God in several important ways.

He is:

The coming Lord.

The refining fire.

The righteous Judge.

The unchanging God.

The God who calls sinners to return.

The God who provides for His people.

The God who remembers the faithful.

The central message of this chapter is:

God is coming, and His coming will reveal, refine, judge, restore, and distinguish those who truly belong to Him.

I. THE MESSENGER WILL PREPARE THE WAY

Malachi 3:1 — “I Am Sending My Messenger”

“Behold, I am sending 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.

This is one of the most important Messianic prophecies in Malachi.

Two figures appear in this verse.

First:

“My messenger.”

This messenger prepares the way.

Second:

“The Lord whom you seek.”

He comes suddenly to His temple.

The New Testament clearly applies the first messenger to **John the Baptist**.

John's ministry was to prepare people for Jesus Christ.

Cross References

Matthew 11:10

Jesus said, “John is the one Scripture was speaking about when God said, ‘Look, I am sending My messenger ahead of You. He will prepare the way before You.’”

Mark 1:2

As it is written in the prophets: “Look, I am sending My messenger ahead of You, and he will prepare Your way.”

Luke 7:27

Jesus said, “John is the one about whom Scripture says, ‘I am sending My messenger ahead of You, and he will prepare the way before You.’”

John the Baptist did not come to draw attention to himself.

He came to point people toward Christ.

John 1:29

When John saw Jesus coming toward him, he declared:

“Look! Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Spiritual Principle

A faithful messenger prepares people to encounter Christ rather than drawing attention to himself.

John understood his role.

He said concerning Jesus:

“He must increase, but I must decrease.”

That remains an important principle for Christian ministry.

II. THE LORD WILL COME TO HIS TEMPLE

Malachi says:

“The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple.”

This points beyond John the Baptist to Christ.

Jesus entered the temple during His earthly ministry.

He also confronted corruption within it.

Matthew 21:12–13

Jesus entered the temple area and drove out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves. He told them, “Scripture says, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves.”

The Lord came to His temple.

But His coming was not merely comforting.

It was also confronting.

Key Truth

The presence of God comforts the faithful but exposes corruption.

The people asked for God's justice.

But they had not considered what would happen when the God of justice examined them.

III. WHO CAN STAND WHEN HE APPEARS?

Malachi 3:2 — The Refiner's Fire

“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 the launderer’s soap.”

The question is not:

Will He come?

The question is:

Who will be able to stand when He comes?

God's holiness exposes human sin.

Malachi uses two pictures.

A Refiner's Fire

A refiner used intense heat to separate impurities from precious metal.

Launderer's Soap

Strong cleansing agents were used to remove deep stains from clothing.

Both images communicate purification.

Cross References

Isaiah 40:3

A voice cries out, "Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness. Make a straight road in the desert for our God."

Joel 2:11

The Lord raises His voice before His army. His forces are very great, and those who carry out His command are powerful. The day of the Lord is great and terrible. Who can endure it?

Zechariah 13:9

I will bring this remaining group through the fire. I will refine them as silver is refined and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon My name, and I will answer them. I will say, "They are My people," and they will say, "The Lord is our God."

Spiritual Principle

God's holiness does not merely expose impurity; He also works to remove it.

God does not refine His people because He hates them.

He refines them because He is making them holy.

IV. THE REFINER SITS OVER THE SILVER

Malachi 3:3 — Purifying the Sons of Levi

"He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present offerings to the Lord in righteousness."

The priests had corrupted worship.

God promised purification.

Notice the picture:

"He will sit as a refiner."

The refining process is deliberate.

The refiner knows what he is doing.

The heat is not random.

The purpose is purification.

Cross References

Isaiah 48:10

Look, I have refined you, though not in the same way silver is refined. I have tested you in the furnace of suffering.

1 Peter 1:7

These trials test the genuineness of your faith. Your faith is more valuable than gold, which eventually perishes even though it is tested by fire. Genuine faith will result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Psalm 66:10

You have tested us, O God. You have refined us as silver is refined.

Spiritual Principle

God may use difficult circumstances as part of His refining work.

The purpose is not meaningless suffering.

God can use trials to expose:

- Pride.
- Self-reliance.
- Wrong priorities.
- Hidden sin.
- False motives.
- Weak faith.

And through those trials He can produce:

- Endurance.
- Humility.
- Dependence.
- Holiness.
- Spiritual maturity.

Key Truth

The Refiner controls the fire.

V. WORSHIP RESTORED

Malachi 3:4 — Offerings Pleasing to God

“Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in days of old and in former years.”

Earlier God rejected their offerings.

Why?

Because their hearts and lives were corrupt.

But purification changes worship.

Once the people are restored, their offerings become pleasing again.

Cross References

Isaiah 1:26

I will restore your judges as they were at first and your counselors as they were in the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness and the Faithful City.

Amos 5:24

Instead, let justice flow like a river and righteousness like a never-ending stream.

Jeremiah 33:11

Once again people will hear voices of joy and gladness, the voices of bridegroom and bride, and the voices of those bringing thanksgiving offerings into the house of the Lord and saying, “Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, because the Lord is good and His faithful love lasts forever.”

Spiritual Principle

God desires worship that comes from lives being transformed by Him.

True worship is not merely music, ceremony, or religious activity.

It comes from hearts being purified.

VI. GOD WILL DRAW NEAR FOR JUDGMENT

Malachi 3:5 — The Swift Witness

“Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers, against those who defraud workers of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, who deprive foreigners of justice, and those who do not fear Me,” says the Lord of hosts.

The people asked:

“Where is the God of justice?”

God answers:

“I will draw near to you for judgment.”

Notice the sins God identifies.

Sorcery

Turning toward occult practices instead of God.

Adultery

Breaking the marriage covenant.

Perjury

Speaking falsely under oath.

Defrauding Workers

Withholding wages from people who earned them.

Oppressing Widows and Orphans

Taking advantage of vulnerable people.

Denying Justice to Foreigners

Treating outsiders unfairly.

Failing to Fear God

At the root of these sins was a lack of reverence.

Cross References

Exodus 22:22

You must not mistreat a widow or an orphan.

Deuteronomy 24:14

You must not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that person is one of your fellow Israelites or a foreigner living in your land.

James 5:4

Look! The wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your fields are crying out against you. The cries of those workers have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

Spiritual Principle

God cares about both personal morality and social justice.

Biblical righteousness affects:

- Marriage.
- Business.
- Speech.
- Worship.
- Treatment of workers.
- Treatment of the vulnerable.
- Treatment of strangers.

True spirituality cannot be separated from righteous conduct.

VII. THE LORD DOES NOT CHANGE

Malachi 3:6 — The Unchanging God

“For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”

This is one of the great statements about God's immutability.

God does not change in His essential character.

He remains:

- Holy.
- Just.
- Loving.
- Faithful.
- True.
- Merciful.
- Righteous.

Cross References

Numbers 23:19

God is not a man who lies or a human being who changes His mind like sinful people do. When He speaks, He acts. When He promises something, He fulfills it.

James 1:17

Every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father who created the heavenly lights. He does not change like shifting shadows.

Lamentations 3:22

Because of the Lord's faithful love we are not destroyed, because His mercies never come to an end.

Why had Israel not been destroyed?

Because God remained faithful to His covenant promises.

Key Truth

Israel's survival depended more upon God's faithfulness than Israel's faithfulness.

They changed.

God did not.

They wandered.

God remained faithful.

They broke covenant responsibilities.

God remained true to His character.

VIII. RETURN TO GOD

Malachi 3:7 — “Return to Me”

“From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord of hosts. But you say, “How shall we return?”

God confronts their history of rebellion.

But judgment is not the only message.

God extends an invitation:

“Return to Me.”

This is the language of repentance.

Cross References

Zechariah 1:3

Tell the people, “This is what the Lord of hosts says: Return to Me, and I will return to you.”

James 4:8

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you who are divided in your loyalty.

Jeremiah 3:22

“Return, you unfaithful children, and I will heal your unfaithfulness.” The people reply, “Yes, we are coming to You because You are the Lord our God.”

Spiritual Principle

God's call to repentance is also an invitation to restoration.

God does not merely say:

“You have wandered.”

He says:

“Come back.”

IX. CAN A PERSON ROB GOD?

Malachi 3:8 — Tithes and Offerings

“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings.”

The people were shocked by the accusation.

“How have we robbed You?”

God answers plainly.

They had withheld what belonged to Him under the covenant.

Cross References

Leviticus 27:30

One tenth of everything produced by the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord. It is holy to the Lord.

Nehemiah 13:10

I also learned that the Levites had not been receiving the portions assigned to them. Because of this, the Levites and singers who were responsible for the worship had returned to their own fields to support themselves.

Deuteronomy 14:22

Each year you must set aside one tenth of everything your fields produce.

Under the Mosaic covenant, the tithe supported worship, the Levites, and the religious life of Israel. Their withholding revealed deeper spiritual disobedience.

Spiritual Principle

Our use of material resources reveals something about our spiritual priorities.

Giving is ultimately a matter of worship.

X. THE CONSEQUENCES OF WITHHOLDING

Malachi 3:9 — “You Are Cursed with a Curse”

“You are cursed with a curse, for you, the whole nation, are robbing Me.”

Israel was experiencing covenant consequences.

The whole nation had participated in withholding what God required.

Cross References

Haggai 1:6

You have planted much but harvested little. You eat but never seem satisfied. You drink but never have enough. You put on clothes but remain cold. You earn wages, but it is like putting money into a bag full of holes.

Deuteronomy 28:22

The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, fever, inflammation, scorching heat, drought, blight, and mildew. These troubles will pursue you until you perish.

Deuteronomy 28:38

You will plant much seed in your fields but harvest little because locusts will consume the crop.

Their economic problems were connected to covenant disobedience.

Important Context

Malachi was speaking specifically to Israel under the Mosaic covenant.

The passage should not be reduced to the idea that every financial hardship today is caused by insufficient giving.

Nor should it be turned into a guarantee that anyone who gives money will become wealthy.

The larger principle is:

God calls His people to trust Him and honor Him with what He has entrusted to them.

XI. BRING THE FULL TITHE

Malachi 3:10 — “Test Me in This”

“Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house. Test Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “and see if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such a blessing that there will not be room enough to contain it.”

This is one of the best-known verses in Malachi.

God challenges Israel to obey Him fully.

Not part of the tithe.

The **full tithe**.

The Storehouse

The storehouse was connected with the temple system and was used to hold provisions dedicated to God.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 9:6

Remember this: the person who plants only a little will harvest only a little, but the person who plants generously will also harvest generously.

Luke 6:38

Give, and it will be given to you. A generous measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. The standard you use in dealing with others will also be used in dealing with you.

Proverbs 3:9

Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first and best part of everything you produce.

Spiritual Principle

Giving is an expression of trust.

It says:

“God is my provider.”

Important New Testament Application

Christians should not treat Malachi 3:10 as a formula for getting rich.

New Testament giving emphasizes:

- Willingness.
- Generosity.
- Cheerfulness.
- Sacrifice.
- Faith.
- Stewardship.

2 Corinthians 9:7

Each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not unwillingly or because he feels forced, because God loves a cheerful giver.

XII. GOD PROMISES TO PROTECT THE HARVEST

Malachi 3:11 — Rebuking the Devourer

“I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruits of your soil, nor shall your vine cast its fruit in the field before its time,” says the Lord of hosts.

Agriculture was central to Israel's economy.

Crop failure could devastate families and communities.

God promised covenant protection when Israel returned to faithful obedience.

Cross References

Joel 2:25

“I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust have eaten—the great army I sent among you.”

Deuteronomy 28:4

Blessed will be the children born to you, the crops of your land, and the young produced by your livestock, including your cattle and flocks.

Habakkuk 3:17

Even if the fig tree does not blossom, there is no fruit on the vines, the olive crop fails, the fields produce no food, the sheep disappear from the pen, and there are no cattle in the stalls—

Habakkuk continues by declaring that he will still rejoice in God.

That provides an important balance.

Key Truth

Faith trusts God not merely because of what He gives, but because of who He is.

XIII. THE NATIONS WILL RECOGNIZE GOD'S BLESSING

Malachi 3:12 — “You Will Be a Delightful Land”

“And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land,” says the Lord of hosts.

Israel's restoration would become visible.

Other nations would recognize God's blessing.

Cross References

Isaiah 62:4

You will no longer be called Forsaken, and your land will no longer be called Desolate. Instead, you will be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land will be called Married, because the Lord delights in you.

Psalms 67:2

May Your way be known throughout the earth and Your saving power among all nations.

Zechariah 8:13

Just as you were once considered a curse among the nations, O people of Judah and Israel, so I will save you, and you will become a blessing. Do not be afraid. Let your hands be strong.

Spiritual Principle

God's blessing upon His people should ultimately display God's goodness rather than merely increase human comfort.

XIV. HARSH WORDS AGAINST GOD

Malachi 3:13 — “What Have We Spoken Against You?”

“Your words have been harsh against Me,” says the Lord. Yet you say, “What have we spoken against You?”

Again the people appear unaware of their spiritual condition.

Throughout Malachi they repeatedly ask:

“How?”

They could not see their own rebellion.

Cross References

Isaiah 29:13

The Lord says, “These people come near to Me with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from Me. Their worship is based only upon human rules they have learned.”

Jude 1:15

The Lord will execute judgment upon everyone and convict ungodly people for all the evil things they have done and for all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.

Psalm 12:3

May the Lord silence every flattering tongue and every mouth that speaks proudly.

Spiritual Principle

Our words reveal what is happening in our hearts.

Complaining against God's character is spiritually serious.

XV. “IT IS USELESS TO SERVE GOD”

Malachi 3:14 — The Cynicism of Unbelief

“You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What profit is it that we have kept His requirements, or that we have walked as mourners before the Lord of hosts?’”

Their relationship with God had become transactional.

They asked:

“What do we get out of serving God?”

This reveals a serious misunderstanding.

God is worthy of obedience whether or not obedience produces immediate earthly advantage.

Cross References

Job 21:15

The wicked ask, “Who is the Almighty that we should serve Him? What benefit would we gain by praying to Him?”

Psalm 73:13

I thought, “Surely I have kept my heart pure for nothing and washed my hands in innocence for no reason.”

Isaiah 58:3

The people ask, “Why have we fasted if You do not notice? Why have we humbled ourselves if You do not pay attention?” God answers, “On the very day of your fasting you continue seeking your own pleasure and mistreating your workers.”

Spiritual Principle

Serving God is not a business arrangement designed to guarantee immediate earthly profit.

We serve God because:

He is God.

He is worthy.

He redeemed us.

He loves us.

He is holy.

He is Lord.

XVI. WHY DO THE WICKED PROSPER?

Malachi 3:15 — The Prosperity of the Arrogant

“Now we call the arrogant blessed; evildoers prosper, and those who test God escape.”

The people looked around and saw wicked people apparently succeeding.

This created spiritual confusion.

The same question appears throughout Scripture.

Cross References

Psalms 73:3

I became jealous of arrogant people when I saw how the wicked seemed to prosper.

Jeremiah 12:1

Lord, You are always righteous when I bring my case before You. Still, I want to ask You about Your justice: Why does the way of wicked people prosper? Why do those who act treacherously live comfortably?

Job 21:7

Why do wicked people continue living, grow old, and become powerful?

Scripture does not pretend wicked people never prosper temporarily.

Sometimes they do.

The question is whether temporary prosperity equals final victory.

It does not.

Key Truth

Never judge eternity by a temporary snapshot.

Psalm 73 eventually concludes that the prosperity of the wicked is temporary.

God sees the end.

XVII. THE FAITHFUL SPEAK TO ONE ANOTHER

Malachi 3:16 — The Book of Remembrance

“Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another, and the Lord listened and heard them. A book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared the Lord and honored His name.”

This verse provides a beautiful contrast.

Some people spoke against God.

Others spoke **about God** in reverence.

God listened.

Notice Three Things

They Feared the Lord

They possessed genuine reverence.

They Spoke with One Another

Faithful believers encouraged one another.

God Heard Them

Their conversations mattered to God.

Cross References

Exodus 32:32

Moses said, “But now, please forgive their sin. If You will not forgive them, then erase my name from the book You have written.”

Revelation 20:12

I saw the dead, great and small, standing before God. Books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

Psalms 56:8

You keep track of all my wandering. You have collected my tears in Your bottle. Are they not recorded in Your book?

The phrase **“book of remembrance”** communicates that God does not forget His faithful people.

God does not literally need written notes in order to remember.

The image communicates divine recognition.

Spiritual Principle

Faithfulness that goes unnoticed by people never goes unnoticed by God.

XVIII. “THEY SHALL BE MINE”

Malachi 3:17 — God's Treasured Possession

“They shall be Mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “in the day when I make up My treasured possession. I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”

These are some of the most comforting words in Malachi.

God looks upon those who fear Him and declares:

“They shall be Mine.”

Cross References

Exodus 19:5

Now therefore, if you faithfully listen to My voice and keep My covenant, you will be My treasured possession among all peoples, because the whole earth belongs to Me.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people belonging especially to God, so that you may proclaim the greatness of the One who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.

Psalms 103:13

Just as a father has compassion upon his children, so the Lord has compassion upon those who fear Him.

Key Truth

The greatest blessing is not merely receiving something from God. It is belonging to God.

God says:

“They are Mine.”

XIX. GOD WILL MAKE THE DIFFERENCE CLEAR

Malachi 3:18 — The Righteous and the Wicked

“Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not.”

The people had complained that evil people seemed to prosper.

God says a day is coming when the difference will become unmistakable.

Cross References

Ezekiel 18:20

The person who sins is the one who will die. A son will not bear the guilt of his father, and a father will not bear the guilt of his son. The righteousness of the righteous person will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked person will fall upon him.

Psalms 1:6

The Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.

Matthew 13:49

Jesus said, “This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous.”

Spiritual Principle

There may not always appear to be a visible difference today, but God's final judgment will reveal the difference completely.

XX. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM MALACHI 3

1. God Keeps His Promises

God promised:

“I am sending My messenger.”

Centuries later, John the Baptist appeared preparing the way for Christ.

Principle:

God's promises may appear delayed, but they are never forgotten.

2. Christ Is Both Savior and Refiner

Many people desire a Messiah who comforts.

Malachi also presents a Messiah who purifies.

Principle:

Jesus did not come merely to make sinners comfortable. He came to save and transform them.

3. God's Refining Work Has a Purpose

The refiner's fire removes impurity.

Trials can become tools in God's hands.

Principle:

God can use what hurts us to produce holiness within us.

4. God Cares About Justice

Malachi 3:5 shows that God sees:

- Exploited workers.
- Oppressed widows.
- Vulnerable orphans.
- Mistreated foreigners.

- Broken marriages.
- Dishonest speech.
- Occult rebellion.

Principle:

Biblical holiness includes how we treat other people.

5. God Does Not Change

Malachi 3:6 is foundational.

“I, the Lord, do not change.”

Principle:

Our confidence rests upon the unchanging character of God.

Circumstances change.

Cultures change.

Governments change.

Feelings change.

People change.

God does not.

6. God Calls His People to Return

God's message is:

“Return to Me.”

Principle:

No amount of wandering changes the proper direction of repentance: back toward God.

7. God Remembers the Faithful

When others mocked faithfulness, those who feared God spoke together.

God heard them.

Principle:

Heaven notices what earth overlooks.

XXI. THE MESSENGER AND THE MESSIAH

Malachi 3:1 contains an important prophetic progression.

First Comes the Messenger

John the Baptist prepares the way.

His message was repentance.

Then Comes the Lord

Jesus Christ appears.

John points toward Him.

Then Comes Purification

The Messiah exposes sin and calls people to holiness.

Then Comes Judgment

Ultimately the Lord will judge evil completely.

This means Christ's coming cannot be reduced to only one dimension.

Jesus is:

Savior.

Lord.

King.

Refiner.

Judge.

XXII. THE REFINER'S FIRE

The image of refining deserves deeper consideration.

When precious metal was refined, heat brought impurities to the surface.

The impurities could then be removed.

God sometimes allows circumstances that expose things hidden within us.

Pressure may expose:

- Anger.
- Fear.
- Pride.
- Jealousy.
- Selfishness.
- Unbelief.
- Dependence upon possessions.
- Dependence upon people instead of God.

We may think the trial created those problems.

Often the trial merely revealed what was already present.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God sometimes uses the heat of circumstances to reveal impurities of the heart so that His transforming grace can remove them.

XXIII. “RETURN TO ME”

Perhaps the most gracious statement in the chapter is:

“Return to Me, and I will return to you.”

Israel had wandered for generations.

Yet God still called them back.

This reveals God's heart.

God's correction is not merely punitive.

It is restorative.

Repentance Involves Recognition

I have wandered.

Repentance Involves Confession

I have sinned.

Repentance Involves Turning

I am returning to God.

Repentance Involves Faith

God receives those who genuinely return to Him.

Key Truth

The distance created by rebellion can begin to close with one movement of repentance toward God.

XXIV. WHAT MALACHI 3 TEACHES ABOUT GIVING

Malachi 3:8–10 is frequently discussed in relation to tithing.

The immediate historical context concerns Israel under the Mosaic covenant.

God had commanded Israel to bring tithes into His storehouse.

They were withholding them.

God called this robbery.

For Christians today, New Testament giving emphasizes several important principles.

Giving Should Be Willing

2 Corinthians 9:7

Each person should give what he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or because of pressure.

Giving Should Be Cheerful

God loves a cheerful giver.

Giving Should Be Generous

2 Corinthians 9:6

Whoever plants generously will also harvest generously.

Giving Should Honor God

Proverbs 3:9

Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first and best portion of what you receive.

Giving Should Reflect Trust

The believer recognizes:

Everything ultimately belongs to God.

Important Truth

Biblical giving is not a scheme for purchasing God's blessings. It is an act of worship, stewardship, generosity, and trust.

XXV. WHEN SERVING GOD SEEMS USELESS

Malachi's people said:

“It is vain to serve God.”

Sometimes believers may feel similarly.

You pray.

Nothing seems to change.

You remain faithful.

Others appear to prosper through compromise.

You obey God.

Someone dishonest appears to get ahead.

You serve faithfully.

Nobody seems to notice.

Malachi 3 gives the answer.

God Sees

God Hears

God Remembers

God Knows Who Belongs to Him

God Will Ultimately Make the Difference Clear

Therefore:

Never measure the value of faithfulness only by immediate results.

Eternity changes the calculation.

XXVI. THE BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE

Malachi 3:16 gives us one of Scripture's most encouraging pictures.

Those who feared God spoke together.

God listened.

A book of remembrance was written.

The imagery communicates a profound truth:

God never overlooks genuine faithfulness.

People may forget your service.

God does not.

People may overlook your prayers.

God does not.

People may fail to appreciate your sacrifice.

God does not.

People may never recognize your obedience.

God does.

Hebrews 6:10

God is not unjust. He will not forget your work and the love you have shown toward His name by serving His people and continuing to serve them.

Spiritual Principle

You do not need human applause when you know heaven remembers.

XXVII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Who is the messenger in Malachi 3:1?

The New Testament identifies the messenger who prepares the way as **John the Baptist**.

Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, and Luke 7:27 apply the prophecy to John.

John's mission was to prepare Israel spiritually for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Question 2

Who is the “Messenger of the covenant”?

The passage points to the coming Lord, understood in Christian interpretation as Jesus Christ.

The first messenger prepares the way.

Then the Lord Himself comes.

This makes Malachi 3:1 an important Messianic prophecy.

Question 3

What does the refiner's fire symbolize?

It symbolizes purification.

Just as intense heat removes impurities from precious metal, God works to remove spiritual impurity from His people.

Trials, discipline, conviction, and God's Word can all function as instruments through which God exposes and corrects what is wrong.

Question 4

Why does Malachi ask, “Who can stand when He appears?”

Because God's holiness exposes human sin.

People may casually ask for divine judgment until they realize that the Judge examines everyone.

The proper response to God's holiness is humility and repentance.

Question 5

What sins does God condemn in Malachi 3:5?

God identifies:

- Sorcery.
- Adultery.
- Perjury.
- Withholding workers' wages.
- Oppressing widows.
- Oppressing orphans.
- Denying justice to foreigners.
- Refusing to fear God.

This demonstrates that God cares about both spiritual devotion and ethical conduct.

Question 6

What does Malachi 3:6 mean when God says, “I do not change”?

It means God's essential character remains constant.

God does not become less holy, less truthful, less faithful, or less righteous.

His unchanging nature provides stability for faith.

Israel had not been destroyed because God's covenant faithfulness remained.

Question 7

What does “Return to Me, and I will return to you” teach about repentance?

It demonstrates that God invites wandering people to return.

Repentance means turning away from rebellion and turning back toward God.

God does not merely expose sin.

He calls sinners toward restoration.

Question 8

Does Malachi 3:10 promise that everyone who gives money will become rich?

No.

The immediate promise was given to covenant Israel concerning obedience to the Mosaic system of tithes and agricultural blessings.

Christians should not interpret the verse as a guaranteed formula for becoming wealthy.

The broader biblical principle remains:

God's people should honor Him through faithful, generous, trusting stewardship.

Question 9

What does the book of remembrance mean?

It symbolizes God's perfect remembrance of those who fear Him and honor His name.

God does not literally need a book to prevent Himself from forgetting.

The picture emphasizes that faithful devotion is seen, valued, and remembered by God.

Question 10

Why did some people believe serving God was useless?

They compared themselves with arrogant and wicked people who appeared to prosper.

Because they focused only upon immediate circumstances, they concluded that righteousness produced no benefit.

Their mistake was evaluating God's justice before God's work was complete.

Question 11

What should believers do when wicked people appear to prosper?

They should remember that temporary prosperity is not the same as eternal blessing.

Psalm 73 demonstrates this principle.

The wicked may prosper for a season.

But God sees the end.

The believer should remain faithful rather than measuring righteousness by short-term results.

Question 12

What does Malachi 3:18 teach about final judgment?

God will ultimately reveal the difference between:

The righteous and the wicked.

Those who serve Him and those who do not.

Present circumstances may sometimes blur that distinction.

God's final judgment will make it perfectly clear.

XXVIII. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Malachi 3 asks us several important questions.

Am I Prepared to Meet the Lord?

John prepared people for Christ through a message of repentance.

Preparation begins with the heart.

What Is God Refining in Me?

Are difficulties exposing something God wants to change?

Do I Trust God's Unchanging Character?

When circumstances change, am I anchored in the God who does not?

Is There an Area Where I Need to Return?

God still calls:

“Return to Me.”

Does My Giving Reflect Trust?

Do I treat everything I possess as ultimately belonging to God?

Have I Become Discouraged Because Evil Appears to Prosper?

Remember:

The story is not finished.

Do I Encourage Other Believers?

Those who feared God:

“Spoke with one another.”

Faithful believers need faithful fellowship.

Am I Living for Human Recognition or God's Approval?

God remembers what people overlook.

XXIX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God May Seem Silent, but He Is Never Absent”

The people asked:

“Where is the God of justice?”

God responded:

“I am coming.”

Some said:

“It is useless to serve God.”

God responded by recording the names of those who feared Him.

Some said:

“The arrogant are blessed.”

God responded:

“You will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked.”

The lesson is powerful.

God's apparent silence should never be interpreted as God's absence.

He sees.

He hears.

He remembers.

He refines.

He judges.

He restores.

And at the proper time:

He acts.

XXX. FINAL APPLICATION

Malachi Chapter 3 begins with a coming messenger and ends with a coming distinction.

The messenger prepares the way.

The Lord comes.

The Refiner purifies.

The Judge exposes evil.

The unchanging God calls His people home.

The Provider challenges His people to trust Him.

The faithful speak together.

God listens.

God remembers.

God claims them as His treasured possession.

And finally, God reveals the difference between those who serve Him and those who do not.

This chapter therefore calls us to live with eternity in view.

Do not become discouraged because wickedness appears successful.

Do not assume that God has forgotten your faithfulness.

Do not believe God's silence means He is inactive.

Do not resist His refining work.

Do not refuse His invitation to return.

Do not worship material blessings instead of the God who provides them.

Do not seek merely to appear faithful before people.

Live before God.

Because the Lord who promised to come:

came.

And the Lord who promised final judgment:

will come again.

The great question of Malachi 3 therefore becomes personal:

Are you ready to stand before Him?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You that You are the God who keeps every promise.

Thank You for sending John the Baptist to prepare the way and for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Prepare our hearts to walk faithfully before You.

Refine us.

Remove the impurities that hinder our fellowship with You.

When trials expose pride, unbelief, selfishness, fear, or hidden sin, give us humility to surrender those things to You.

Teach us to trust the Refiner even when we do not understand the fire.

Thank You that You do not change.

When everything around us feels uncertain, remind us that Your character remains perfectly faithful.

When we wander, call us back.

Give us hearts willing to hear Your invitation:

“Return to Me.”

Teach us to honor You with everything You have placed in our hands.

Make us faithful stewards.

Keep us from loving money more than we love You.

Protect us from believing that material prosperity is the measure of spiritual blessing.

When wicked people appear to prosper, keep us from becoming discouraged.

Remind us that You see the end from the beginning.

Help us remain faithful even when faithfulness receives no earthly applause.

Thank You that You hear the conversations of those who fear You.

Thank You that You remember every act of genuine faithfulness.

Thank You for the beautiful promise:

“They shall be Mine.”

May we live as people who belong completely to You.

And prepare us for the day when You reveal the final distinction between those who serve You and those who do not.

May our lives honor Your name until Jesus Christ returns.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.” — Malachi 3:6

Central Truth

The unchanging God sends His Messiah, refines His people, judges evil, calls sinners to return, remembers the faithful, and will ultimately reveal the difference between those who serve Him and those who do not.

Malachi 3 in One Sentence

The coming Lord calls His people to repentance and faithful worship while assuring them that He sees, remembers, refines, provides, judges righteously, and will one day make His perfect justice visible to all.