

International Bible Lessons Commentary ***Malachi 3:1-12***

New Revised Standard Version

Sunday, August 30, 2015

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The **International Bible Lesson** (also known as the *International Sunday School Lessons* [ISSL] and the *Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, August 30, 2015**, is from **Malachi 3:1-12**. Please Note: some churches will only study **Malachi 3:1-10**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help teachers with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [*International Bible Lessons Commentary*](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study or give as a handout to students in the bulletin-sized edition. A podcast for this commentary is also available at the [*International Bible Lesson Forum*](#).

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Malachi 3:1-12

(Malachi 3:1) See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

Some parts of the Old Testament, especially the prophets, could not be understood until after the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. This verse applies best to John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, the Messiah that the Jews anticipated. If applied to any others before their coming, that information has been lost to history. Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament, and John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus the Messiah. The Lord Jesus did come suddenly to His temple. He taught at the temple and He cleansed the temple. He made the new covenant that Jeremiah promised He would make: “‘This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people’” (Jeremiah 31:33).

(Malachi 3:2) 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 fullers’ soap;

The political and religious leaders could not endure the day of the coming of the messenger, John the Baptist, or the Lord Jesus Christ. King Herod beheaded John the Baptist (see Mark 6). The Jewish leaders and the Romans crucified Jesus the Messiah. Both preached a strong message of repentance for sins, and John the

Baptist said Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (see Matthew 3:10-11). Refiner's fire purifies and brightens silver and soap cleans cloth: they do not destroy.

(Malachi 3:3) he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness.

The Levites were priests, who were descendants of Levi. The Bible tells us that some Levites went to hear John the Baptist preach (see John 1:19). Levites also heard the teaching of Jesus and witnessed many of His miracles. Some priests accepted Jesus as the Messiah, perhaps after hearing John or Jesus or some of the apostles preach. Everyone who accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior can make acceptable and righteous offerings to God, because Jesus has forgiven them and cleansed them from their sins. The sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed to the sacrificial death of God's only Son, Jesus Christ; therefore, His followers can "bring offerings in righteousness."

(Malachi 3:4) Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Acceptable offerings come from those who have pure hearts, love, and devotion for the Lord Jesus. They offer themselves and their gifts to God because they love God and want to express their love by obedience to God. Malachi did not predict that traditional ceremonial offerings and sacrifices for sin would be reinstated forever, because Jesus Christ is our one and only sacrifice for sins that the ceremonial offerings and sacrifices pointed to. In former years, the Hebrews truly loved the Lord and delighted to serve Him. After Jesus the Messiah came, God's people did so again.

(Malachi 3:5) Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

When Jesus came He offered salvation from sins to repentant sinners who believed in Him. The sins listed by Malachi were forbidden throughout the Old Testament, and some were mentioned specifically in the New Testament. All of the sins listed by Malachi involved some form of injustice toward others. Sorcerers communicated with demons, who sometimes impersonated departed spirits, so they represented those involved in spiritual abuse and the misleading of God's children. The New Testament teaches that everyone will appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, and those who have persisted in sinful rebellion against God will learn why they should have feared Him, believed in Him, and repented of their sins: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

(Malachi 3:6) For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished.

The Lord does not change His moral character. God is the God of steadfast love and mercy. God does not change His Law – what is morally wrong and morally right will remain wrong and right forever. God will not change His law of love: the law requiring love for God and others. Because God will not change what is wrong to right, the only reason people do not perish is because God’s character does not change. God remains the God of steadfast love who forgives and restores fellowship with repentant sinners who turn to Jesus Christ in faith.

(Malachi 3:7) Ever since the days of your ancestors 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 will not change His moral character; therefore, the only way to have a meaningful and everlasting relationship with God is by returning to God. A person who returns must begin by obeying God. From the Bible, we know that obeying God involves believing in Jesus Christ, believing Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, and doing what Jesus said. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commands” (John 14:15) and “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them” (John 14:21).

(Malachi 3:8) Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, “How are we robbing you?” In your tithes and offerings!

Previously in his book, Malachi accused the priests of offering the diseased and the worst animals to God in sacrifice instead of the types that God had commanded them to offer – animals without blemish, the best. In the Old Testament law, God required His people to bring 10% of their produce to the Levites as an offering, and the Levites would give their 10% to the ones serving as priests. Because people were not doing this, God declared they were robbing Him. God’s people need to trust in God and give because they love God and His people. Love will often motivate giving more than 10% to God and His people: more than 10% of a person’s time, talent, and treasure.

(Malachi 3:9) You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you!

In some sense, if someone is robbing God that is a sign they are under a curse or will be. A whole nation can be under a curse. When the whole nation becomes known for many of the sins Malachi listed, that may be a sign that whole nation is under a curse; of course, there should always be some obedient exceptions in every nation. When the kingdoms of Israel and Judah fell, after decades of “the whole nation” (with few exceptions) disobeying God, they suffered the just judgment of God.

(Malachi 3:10) Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for

you an overflowing blessing.

For the Jews in the days of Malachi and even later, the beginning of obedience and a visible sign that the nation and people were returning to God was their willingness to give to God what He required – the whole 10% of their income. When they obeyed God, the Levites and priests had enough food for themselves and enough food to share with widows, orphans, and others in need. God promised that He would bless their land, their produce, and their income. He would give them so much they would not have room to store it all, and presumably this meant they would have even more to share with those in need as well as with the priests and Levites. [See Jesus warning about building bigger barns instead of looking for ways to share God’s blessings with others: Luke 12:16-21].

(Malachi 3:11) I will rebuke the locust for you, so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not be barren, says the LORD of hosts.

As the Bible teaches, God does not change His moral standards or requirements. If locusts and drought are destroying a nation or area, perhaps it is time for people to evaluate the behavior of the whole nation or people group. The devastation of a land or nation by “natural causes” may have a “supernatural reason” and indicate that a whole people need to repent and return to obeying the true God as revealed in the Bible.

(Malachi 3:12) Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

From history and Bible study, we know of times and nations when a land and nation was truly blessed by God. The nations that surrounded them called them blessed; they said the land and people were delightful; the nation became a place where others wanted to live too. The reason for the prosperity of these nations for a time was the majority of the people and their leaders practiced justice, goodness, godliness, loyalty, and obedience to the true God. When these nations changed from a nation of obedience to disobedience, they came under a curse as Malachi described. Life became more and more difficult and increasingly unbearable – especially for those who lived loved God and wanted to remain loyal to God. No matter how troubled the times, God did not forsake those who truly loved Him and wanted to serve Him.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. In Malachi 3:1, who do you think the LORD referred to?
2. What did the Lord do when He suddenly came to the temple and what happened to Him?
3. Compare Malachi 3:2-3 and Matthew 3:1-12.

4. In general, what types of sins does Malachi describe in Malachi 3:1-10?
5. What might be the danger of believing in and acting on Malachi 3:10 while disregarding the teachings in Malachi 3:1-9?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.
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