



# The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V25 N42 October 22, 2023

## OPENHANDED

“Stewardship: It’s Not Mine”

Malachi 3:6-12

### THIS WEEK’S CORE COMPETENCY

#### Generosity

I gladly give my resources  
to fulfill God’s purposes.

*“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*  
**2 Corinthians 9:6-7**



How should I  
give and why?

Generosity is related to mission. Quoting the psalmist, Paul writes, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it” (1Co 10:26; cf., Ps 24:1), but the Lord is no hoarder. He shares his wealth. He commands us to give but not so that he might have what is rightfully his; he commands us to give, so that his mission in the world might be accomplished. This was true in Israel’s day and remains true today.

God gave Israel a mission. God chose Israel, as one writer puts it, “specifically for the fulfillment of an exalted spiritual task.” Israel was to be “a kingdom of priests” (Ex 19:4-6). His people were to “occupy among humanity the place filled by the priests within each nation” (U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 227). Israel had a mediatorial role to play among the nations. Israel was to bring the one true God to the nations and bring the nations to the one true God. Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles, a “display-people” intended to show the world how being in covenant with the one true God changes people (John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC, 263).

In order to accomplish their mission, God’s people had to follow the religious practices he commanded in the law, and in order for them to do that, they had to provide for the service of the temple, their worship center. This explains why rebuilding the temple was priority one for the Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon in 538 B.C., following seventy years in captivity in Babylon (Jer 25:11, 12). To make a long story short, they ultimately completed their task in 515 B.C., in spite of stiff, local opposition that halted construction for about fifteen years (Ezra 4). The rebuilding of the temple was paid for by the Persian government (Ezr 1:2). Construction and operating costs were fully funded out of the “royal treasury” (Ezr 6:4, 8; 7:20), but once it was completed, God’s people had to provide for the service of the temple out of their own pockets—something they regularly failed to do.

About seventy years after the temple was com-

pleted, Nehemiah returned from Babylon to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in 444 B.C. In the book that bears his name he tells us that the job was finished in just fifty-two days (6:15). Once the walls were restored, he set out to restore the spirituality of the community. Ezra was invited to read the law to the people who on hearing it confessed their sins and signed a binding agreement to carefully obey all the commands, regulations, and decrees of the Lord. In particular, they agreed to start giving for the service of the temple, which they had neglected to do (Ne 10:32-33, 37-39). They promised, “We will not neglect the house of our God” (v. 39).

However, they later did. For twelve years Nehemiah served as governor of Judah (Ne 5:14), but when the twelve years were up, he returned to Persia. While he was gone, for perhaps two years or so, among other things, the people stopped giving to the temple. When he returned to Jerusalem, he discovered that “all the Levites and singers responsible for the service had gone back to their fields” (Ne 13:10) because the people had stopped supporting them with their tithes and offerings. Since the Levites could no longer carry out their temple responsibilities—they had no animals to sacrifice, no bread for the table, no grain for the offerings—and could survive no longer without the people’s support, they did the only thing they could. They went to work in the fields, caring for livestock. Nehemiah corrected the problem.

The prophet Malachi was likely a contemporary of Nehemiah and confronted God’s people over the very sins that troubled the governor. One writer describes, in part, the situation Malachi faced: “Temple service had fallen into disrepute. The priests had grown careless in the discharge of their duties, and the people had become remiss in the payment of tithes and other dues” (A. Cohen, *The Twelve Prophets*, 335). Here is the point we must not lose sight of: Israel had a mission that required its people to give to the service of the temple. Practically speaking, the nation extinguished its light to the Gentiles by failing to do so.

# 1

## EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

### Read Malachi 3:6-12

6 "I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. 7 Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty.

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

8 "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

"But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'

"In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse – your whole nation – because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. 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 there will not be room enough to store it. 11 I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the LORD Almighty. 12 "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty

### Read in another translation

"Since, I, the LORD, do not go back on my promises, you, sons of Jacob, have not perished. 7 From the days of your ancestors you have ignored my commandments and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. "But you say, 'How should we return?' 8 Can a person rob God? You are indeed robbing me, but you say, 'How are we robbing you?' In tithes and contributions! 9 You are bound for judgment because you are robbing me – this whole nation is guilty.

10 "Bring the entire tithe into the storehouse so that there may be food in my temple. Test me in this matter," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, "to see if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out blessing for you until there is no room for it all. 11 Then I will stop the plague from ruining your crops, and the vine will not lose its fruit before harvest," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. 12 "All nations will call you blessed, for you indeed will live in a delightful land," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. (NET)

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Underline "do not change" in v. 6.
- Box "so" indicating *result* in v. 6.
- Circle "destroyed" in v. 6.
- Circle "decrees" in v. 7.
- Bracket the rhetorical questions indicating *denial* in vv. 7, 8.
- Box "yet" indicating *contrast* in v. 8.
- Circle "curse" in v. 9.
- Circle "tithe" in v. 10.
- Double underline "storehouse" and "house" in v. 10.
- Box "that" indicating *purpose/result* in v. 10.
- Next to v. 11 write, "Cf. Dt 28:38-40."
- Box "then" indicating *temporal connection* in v. 12.
- Circle "blessed" in v. 12.
- Highlight v. 6a

What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about \_\_\_\_\_."



## DIG DEEPER

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Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. What does the fact that *the LORD does not change* (cf. NET) have to do with the *result* that Israel is not destroyed?
  2. The LORD delivers two *accusations* against his people, Israel. *Summarize* the *first* one (v. 7a) – be sure to explain the meaning of “decrees.”
  3. *Summarize* the *second* accusation (v. 8a) – be sure to explain the meaning of “rob.”
  4. To each accusation the people respond with a *rhetorical* question (vv. 7b, 8b), which functions as a *denial*. How so?
  5. Explain the *contrast* introduced by “yet” in verse 8a.
  6. Contrast the *curse* the whole nation was under (v. 9) with the *blessing* that was promised (v. 11).
  7. *Quantity* or *quality* – describe the problem with Israel’s giving (cf., the problem with Israel’s sacrifices, 1:6-14).
  8. Explain the *purpose* for tithing mentioned in verse 10a. (See notes on v. 10 – *tithes* and *offerings*.)
  9. Compare Israel’s *purpose* for tithing with Christians’ *purpose* for giving generously.
  10. **Discussion:** Talk about whether Christians are obligated to bring a tenth of their earnings – gross or net – to the church-house and whether their obedience brings the guarantee of financial prosperity.
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### Commentary On The Text

The book of Malachi contains six prophetic oracles, or what one author calls “disputation speeches” (Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *The Minor Prophets*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey, 1247), which all follow a set pattern: assertion, objection, response, and implication. The fifth one in 3:6-12 is a bit different. The same author writes: “The basic structure of this disputation once again follows the four-part pattern of the others in the book. As in the second disputation (1:6-7), the assertion and objection part of the format is presented via two assertion—objection sequences rather than just one” (1361). The passage may be outlined as follows: verses 6-7a contain an accusation by the LORD. Verse 7b contains Israel’s denial in the form of a rhetorical question. Verse 8a contains a second accusation, and verse 8b a second denial, again in the form of a rhetorical question. Verses 9-12 contain the implication of returning to the LORD in obedience to his command regarding tithes and offerings.

The first accusation opens with an encouraging word from the LORD, explaining why he has not destroyed his people for turning away from him—past and present: “Since, I, the LORD, do not go back on my promises, you, sons of Jacob, have not perished” (v. 6, NET; cf., Dt 31:16-18; 32:19-20). One commentator explains: “What this verse does emphasize is the grace of God. Israel deserved destruction for its long history of breaking the covenant, but instead it had not been destroyed. Why? Because God hadn’t changed . . . The unchanging God is willing to forgive the changeable people who have broken his covenant if they will repent and return to him” (Stuart, 1363). The accusation follows in verse 7a. The LORD’s people have turned away from him, but if they return to him, he will return to them.

Verse 7b contains the people’s first objection. Their *rhetorical* question is no question at all; it’s a *denial*. They feigned ignorance of their waywardness, asking in effect, “How are we to return to you, since we haven’t turned away from you?” Another commentator writes: “This appeal to ignorance concerning their misbehavior characterizes the very nature of the people’s waywardness and reveals a lack of guilt consciousness. They had no sense of sin” (Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, NICOT, 302).

Verse 8a contains a second accusation, which comes in the form of a *contrast*. The implied answer to the question, “Will a mere mortal rob God?” is “Of course not.” “Yet” introduces the contrast, “Yet you rob me.” The unexpected has become a continuous reality in the life of God’s people. They are doing the

unthinkable, the unheard of—they are refusing God what belongs to him. Taking something and keeping it from its owner is robbery.

Verse 8b contains the people’s second denial, couched in another rhetorical question. Again they feigned ignorance, “How are we robbing you?”, revealing a shocking indifference to their transgressions. The LORD’s answer is specific and concrete: “In tithes and offerings.” The people were to give 10 percent of their income to the temple for support of priests, Levites, temple singers and servants, others who had no means of support, and for supplies and maintenance. On the matter of the amount, one commentator suggests: “The Levites constituted roughly one-twelfth of the population of the nation, and therefore required roughly 8.3 percent of the nation’s income if they were to be fully supported by tithes. Adding to this the cost of operating and maintaining the temple meant that approximately 10 percent of the nation’s wealth would be needed for a full worship system to prosper” (Stuart, 1370). In other words, 10 percent of the nation’s wealth would be needed for the nation to accomplish its mission. Perhaps, this is why Christians are encouraged to give generously—the cost of the church’s mission accomplishment cannot be calculated in any percentage amount. Christians must give whatever it takes to accomplish their mission.

Verses 9-12 contain the implication, namely, how God will bless them if they return to him by bringing their tithes and offering into the storehouse. He will lift the curse placed on the nation by restoring an abundant harvest of grain and grapes (v. 11), so ultimately, the nations will call Israel blessed. Under the old covenant *national* disobedience brought cursing and *national* obedience brought blessing (see Dt 28). God’s promise did not guarantee that every *individual* who tithed would prosper. The passage must be applied carefully to believers today, as one commentator says: “The Mosaic Covenant, with its promises of material blessing to Israel for her obedience, is no longer in force (Eph. 2:14-15; Rom. 10:4; Heb. 8:13). However, the New Testament speaks about generosity and giving. While not requiring a tithe of believers today, the New Testament does speak of God’s blessing on those who give generously to the needs of the church and especially to those who labor in the Word (Acts 4:31-35; 2 Cor. 9:6-12; Gal. 6:6; Phil 4:14-19)” (Craig A. Blaising, “Malachi,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1585).

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## Word Studies/Notes

v. 6 *do not change* Cf., “Since, I, the Lord, do not go back on my promises” (NET). “This refers to God’s ongoing commitment to his covenant promises to Israel” (*The NET Bible*, note 13tn on Mal 3:6). “The verse provides a general theological affirmation that the nation has not perished because YHWH Himself never changes. He always remains true to His covenant commitments . . . The changelessness of YHWH here has to do with covenant fidelity, as the ‘statutes’ (v. 7) and ‘the curse’ (v. 9) suggest. These two terms give His immutability a framework, for it is the very fickleness and faithlessness of the covenant people *vis à vis* the covenant that are at issue here, a changeableness of their part that must be contrast with the steadfastness of YHWH” (Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 377).

v. 7 *decrees* Cf., Dt 5:31-33; 6:1; 7:11; 26:16-19. “Decree” denotes something that is prescribed, i.e., a “rule” or “regulation” given by God or man. When it is given by God it is synonymous with “order” or “commandment” (see Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, NICOT, 301).

v. 7 *How are we to return?* “How should we return?” is not an earnest entreaty for information but a self-service declaration of innocence. The people, in effect, are saying, ‘What need do we have to return since we never turned away to begin with?’” (Merrill, 378).

v. 8 *Will a mere mortal rob God?* “The answer is obviously in the negative. Between God and man there is always an infinite distance; therefore it is unthinkable that a man could rob God . . . The accusation is direct and personal: *Yet you rob me*. What one would not have expected in general had become a reality in the life of the covenant people” (Verhoef, 302, 303).

v. 8 *How are we robbing you?* “For a man to rob God seems preposterous, and this is the effect of the rhetorical question of v. 8a. But it is not preposterous, for Israel has done it (and were doing it, as the participle emphasizes). Even the feeble rejoinder ‘How are we robbing you?’ is nothing but a last gasp effort to maintain a façade of nonculpability [*sic*]. This façade, too, is demolished by the unambiguous response of YHWH: ‘Tithes and contributions!’” (Merrill, 378).

v. 9 *curse* Cf., Dt 28:15-68. “The nature of the **curse** on the **nation** can be determined from verse 11: famine due to pests (locusts) eating the vegetation, and vines without grapes (cf. Deut. 28:38-40)” (Craig A. Blaising, “Malachi,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1585). “Van Hoonacker, in line with the Vg. takes the curse to be poverty. Because the people have defrauded YHWH, he has reduced them to penury (*Les Douze Petits Prophètes*, [Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1908], 734-35). This cannot be wide of the mark, as vv. 10-12 make clear” (Merrill, 379).

v. 10 *tithes* “‘Tithes’ refers primarily to the presentation of a tenth of one’s goods to YHWH as a tribute of thanks for His blessing (Gen 14:20; 28:22). It was used in the tabernacle and Temple administration to provide for the material welfare of the priests and Levites (Num. 18:21, 26) and, if enjoyed at all by the donor, it must be shared within the holy precincts (Deut. 14:26-27; 26:12). The tithe, then, had a social dimension in that it provided for those who had no other means of support” (Merrill, 378). “There were several kinds of tithes: (1) the tenth of the remainder after the first-fruits were taken, this amount going to Levites for their livelihood (Leviticus 27:30-33); (2) the tenth paid by Levites to the priests (Numbers 18:26-28); (3) the second tenth paid by the congregation for the needs of the Levites and their own families at the tabernacle (Deuteronomy 12:18); and (4) another tithe every third year for the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29)’ It may be that what Feinberg distinguished as the third and fourth tithes, above, were really one tithe” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Malachi,” 2019 ed., 53, [planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/malachi.pdf](http://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/malachi.pdf)).

v. 10 *offerings* “These are the same in material as the tithes and serve the same function, namely, to meet the needs of the disadvantaged and otherwise dependent (cf. Lev. 22:12; Num. 5:9), particularly the priests and Levites. The major differences between the two kinds of gifts was: (1) that the tithe was a mandatory tenth, where as [*sic*] the ‘contribution’ was voluntary, and (2) the ‘contribution’ seems to have been used exclusively to meet the needs of the clergy, where as [*sic*] the tithes served a broader social function” (Merrill, 378; see also Blaising, 1585; Verhoef, 303-305).

v. 10 *storehouse* Not “church-house.” “‘Storehouse’ refers to a special room or rooms in the temple for keeping tithed grain (cf. 1 Kings 7:51; Neh. 10:38; 13:12)” (Blaising, 1585).

v. 12 *blessed* “What does it mean for someone to call some else blessed? Janzen studied the issue of the Hebrew root ‘to bless’ and concluded that it means ‘to magnify or extol [another] person’s condition as a desirable one’ . . . for the nations for the world to call Israel blessed is for them to acknowledge that God has made Israel specially favored among them and to admit, implicitly, that they wish they could be as well off as Israel . . . it is an admission that Israel has become the nation to be envied. Why? Because God will have transformed Israel” (Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *The Minor Prophets*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey, 1372). The prophet’s words look beyond to Israel’s restoration in the kingdom age.

# 4

## APPLY THE TEXT

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### CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

While God's people under the old covenant were to give tithes and offerings in support of Israel's mission, his people under the new covenant are to give generously in support of the church's mission.

### CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



### 3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



## FAMILY TALK

My mom has a friend who offered her pool to my kids and their friends every summer. This sounds simple, but let me tell you what that really meant. She had a beautiful home on the lake with an awesome pool and diving board. Not only did she grant us use of her pool, but she laid out a snack spread fit for a king that included everything from Fruit by the Foot, Airheads, Cheetos, Doritos and my favorite, Cheez-Its. She filled her outdoor refrigerator with a ridiculous variety of drinks and even set out and filled a slushie machine when she knew we were coming. Every summer she and her husband would take time off work to host my kids and their friends for a day on the lake complete with tubing and jet skis. We always ended our very special outing with an amazing cookout and the most delicious homemade chocolate cake. When my kids got old enough, they asked why this family was so generous. The answer is simple: Jesus. They recognized the blessings God gave them and shared openly and abundantly. This family has always been a model of openhandedness for me. When I want to be tight-fisted or cling to things that I think are “mine,” I’m reminded of this family and the way they have so generously given to us. Everything we have is a gift from God; I’m praying for your family to be a model of openhanded generosity this week.

### What Does The Bible Say?

Read Malachi 3:6-12

1. How were the people robbing God?
2. How did God challenge the people?
3. What does God promise to give those who faithfully tithe?

### What Do You Think?

What does it mean to tithe and why is it important?

### What Do You Do?

Everything you have is a gift from God. This week, when you get dressed, eat, or play with one of your toys, stop and say, “Thank you, God for . . .”

## CORE COMPETENCY: Generosity

I give away my faith, life, money and time to help with God’s work.

## MEMORY VERSE: Joshua 1:9

*“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”*

## KidPIXCOUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: [kids@wearecentral.org](mailto:kids@wearecentral.org)

- I completed my Bible Study
- I memorized this week’s verse
- I brought my Bible to church
- I brought a friend



CHILD’S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

# OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

## CENTRAL BELIEFS

**Authority of the Bible** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)  
*I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.*

**Church** (Ephesians 4:15-16)

*I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.*

**Eternity** (John 14:1-4)

*I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.*

**The Holy Spirit** (Romans 8:9)

*I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.*

**Humanity** (John 3:16)

*I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.*

**Identity in Christ** (John 1:12)

*I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.*

**Jesus Christ** (Hebrews 1:1-4)

*I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.*

**Life Purpose** (Acts 20:24)

*I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.*

**Personal God** (Psalm 121:1-2)

*I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.*

**Salvation by Grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

*I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.*



## CENTRAL VIRTUES

**Love** (1 John 4:10-12)

*I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.*

**Joy** (John 15:11)

*I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.*

**Peace** (Philippians 4:6-7)

*I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.*

**Patience** (Proverbs 14:29)

*I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.*

**Kindness/Goodness** (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

*I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others*

**Faithfulness** (Proverbs 3:3-4)

*I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.*

**Gentleness** (Philippians 4:5)

*I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.*

**Self-Control** (Titus 2:11-13)

*I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.*

**Grace** (Colossians 3:13)

*I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.*

**Hope** (1 Peter 1:3-5)

*I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.*

**Humility** (Philippians 2:3-4)

*I choose to esteem others above myself.*



## CENTRAL PRACTICES

**Bible Study** (Hebrews 4:12)

*I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Biblical Community** (Acts 2:44-47)

*I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.*

**Compassion** (Psalm 82:3-4)

*I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.*

**Disciple-Making** (2 Timothy 2:2)

*I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.*

**Evangelism** (Acts 1:8)

*I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.*

**Generosity** (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

*I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.*

**Prayer** (Psalm 66:16-20)

*I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Single-Mindedness** (Matthew 6:33)

*I focus on God and His priorities for my life.*

**Spiritual Gifts** (Romans 12:4-6)

*I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.*

**Worship** (Psalm 95:1-7)

*I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.*

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