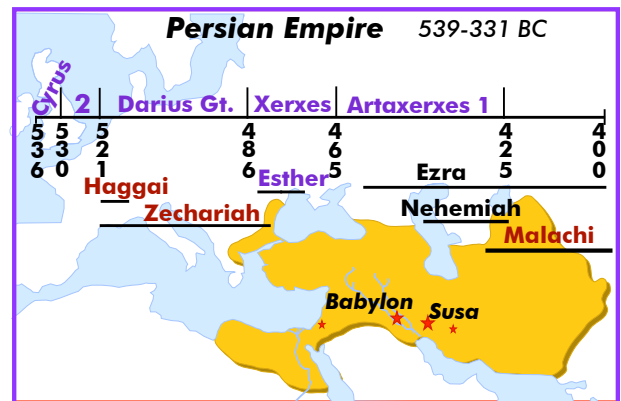


Before starting this lesson, read this book of **Malachi**. You may find it helpful to read the book, go thru the lesson and then read the book once again. Since it is a short book, it will not be difficult to do.

In the last few lessons, we have been studying the history of the Jews after they returned from Babylonian exile. Because they no longer have kings, God now provides their leadership thru governors, priests and prophets.

When they first returned in the 500's BC, God used Zerubbabel, their first governor and Joshua, the high priest to start the rebuilding of the temple. When the people disobeyed, God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to encourage and warn them. Under their ministry, the temple was finished.

One hundred years later, in the 400's, God worked thru Nehemiah, the governor and Ezra, the priest. Under their leadership the Jerusalem wall and the spiritual lives of the people were rebuilt. The people wanted to hear God's Word; they wanted to obey it. They signed an agreement of obedience.



After 12 years as governor, **Nehemiah** returned to Susa to again work for the king. In Nehemiah's book, we saw how during the 3-5 years that he was gone, the Jews became careless and ignored that agreement of obedience.

The high priest has allowed one enemy to store his grain in a storage room on the Temple grounds.

These rooms were only for the priests to use – it was sacred ground.

The grandson of the high priest married the daughter of Sanballat, the leader of the Samaritan enemies.

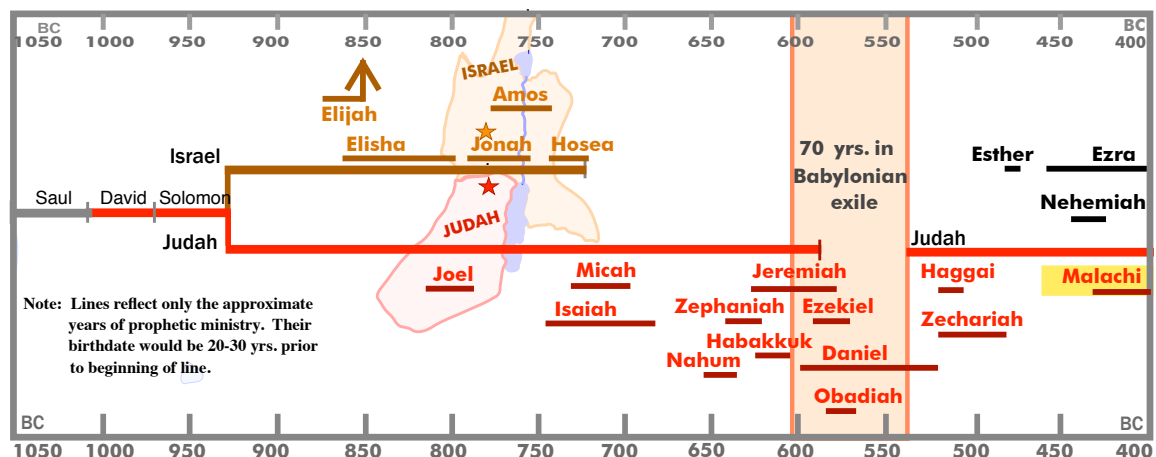
The business people are now doing business on the day God said they should rest.

They stopped bringing the first of their food and money to support their spiritual leaders.

Jewish men have married pagan women who still worship idols and are raising the children in their culture.

The people stopped going to Ezra to listen to God's Word.

It is because the people stop seeking God, that God goes to them thru the prophet Malachi. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets.



This now completes the chart of all the Old Testament prophets – their time and place of ministry and their relationship to one another.

**Malachi** is a prophet to the Jews in Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. His ministry is from c. 430 to 397 BC.

**Theme of book** - God's appeal, *Return to Me and I will return to you.*

## Outline of book

Disobedience of the spiritual **leaders** 1:1 - 2:9

They offer animal sacrifices that are unacceptable. 1:8

They hate their ministry and the whole system of sacrifices. 1:13

They give false teaching. 2:8

They show partiality in carrying out the law. 2:9

Disobedience of Jewish **men** 2:10 - 16

They have married pagan women so they can have more freedom

They are upset with God because He does not accept their offerings.

They have divorced their godly wives who want to worship God alone.

Disobedience of the **people** 2:17 - 4:6 (3:24)

They accuse God of not keeping His promises.

They do not keep their promise of giving their tithes/offerings.

They make a choice to not serve or follow God.

## Who he is writing to

He is writing to 3 groups of people – the spiritual leaders, the Jewish **men** and the Jewish people in general.

## Why he is writing them

They had been living in disobedience.

God sent a drought and crop failures to get their attention.

But instead of turning **to** God, they turn **against** Him with an accusation

We see this in the beginning dialog between God and the people. (Malachi is speaking for God)

God says to the three groups of people

*I have loved you.... 1:2*

But instead of gratitude, the people respond with anger and bitterness.

*How did You love us? When did You love us?*

God replies,

*Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.*

Various times in Scripture, God makes this statement - ***I loved Jacob but Esau I have hated.***

To our Western, Gentile mind, this sounds unfair because we take it literally. But it is not meant to be taken literally. It is a Hebrew idiom.

**Idiom** - a phrase which means something different than the literal words.

The words **love** and **hate** when used by themselves refer to literal emotions that people experience.

But when used together in a phrase, the words form an idiom that has nothing to do with emotions.

As an idiom ***love one and hate the other*** means ***to choose one, but not the other.***

If I have 2 pens and choose one, the Hebrew of the Bible would say *I loved one pen, but hated the other.*

But it had nothing to do with my emotions; I merely made a choice.

In the days of Malachi, God tells the Jews, *I chose Jacob; but I did not choose Esau.*

To us, this still sounds unfair, until we know God's choice was based on their choice. Esau and Jacob were twins - raised in the same family. They had exactly the same opportunities to know about God. They had the same opportunities to respond to God. With the information that **Jacob** had, even tho he was a liar and cheater, he chose to respond **to** God.

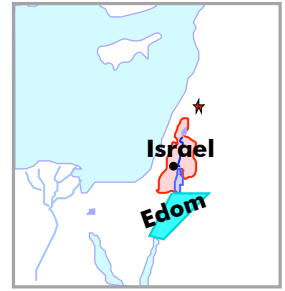
**Esau** had the same information, but chose not to. He wanted nothing to do with God. To prove it, he married pagan women and worshipped their gods. With Esau's rejection, God made his choice. He could not work thru Esau. How could He work thru a man who just rejected Him? On the other hand, Jacob chose to follow God; therefore God could work thru him. God describes this in the Hebrew idiom, *Jacob I loved; Esau I hated.*

Thru the centuries...

The descendants of Jacob became the nation of **ISRAEL**.

The descendants of Esau became the nation of **EDOM**.

Over a period of 1400 years, the Edomites continued to worship pagan gods.  
They wanted nothing to do with the God of the Jews.



Now in the days of Malachi, the Jews can see for themselves how God has worked

It is 430 BC, and the Edomites have been driven from their land.  
Their nation has been destroyed and taken off the map.

The Jews, who had been off the map, are now restored to their land.  
The Temple and wall have been rebuilt.  
They are back on the map.

What a contrast between the two nations

Edom had knowledge of Yahweh God and hundreds of years to choose to follow Him. But like Esau their ancestor, they rejected God completely.

Israel on the other hand, sometimes followed God and sometimes rebelled. When she rebelled, there were consequences. But there were also Jews who responded to God – people like Daniel, Haggai, Ezra and Nehemiah. They not only obeyed God; they also led the people to obey God.

In the days of Malachi, the evidence of God's love and choice is their existence in the land, after 70 years in exile. The drought the Jews have just experienced is not the fault of God. It is **their** fault, because of their disobedience.

But Malachi knows if he talks about disobedience in general, everyone will ask,  
*What disobedience? What have we done wrong?*

So he deals with 3 groups of people and mentions the specific disobedience of each group.

**1. Their spiritual leaders** - the priests and Levites are guilty in 4 areas.

- They are offering unacceptable sacrifices
- They hate their ministry
- They are giving false teaching
- They are showing favoritism when deciding legal matters.

Let's look at each of them.

First of all, they are **offering animal sacrifices that are unacceptable**.

God had said animals used in worship were to be perfect animals. According to 1:14, the priests set aside the perfect first-born of the animals as God commanded. But when the animals get to be a year old - the age when they are offered to God - the priests go out and sell them because they can get top dollar. In their place they give God the animals they have not been able to sell - the sick, lame and blind.

God says, *try offering them to your governor. See how **he** likes it*. This is during the time Nehemiah is gone, so he is not the governor. But they automatically know if their present governor were given a reject animal as a gift or payment, he would refuse it. And if their governor would not accept it, why do they think God would accept it in their worship of Him?

To **worship** God means to say He has worth and value. By using worthless animals they are saying **God** is worthless; He has no value. God tells the priests, *if that's what you think of Me, I wish the people would stay home and the temple would close down. If you do not mean it, I do not want it*. This is what verse 10 means, when God says,

*I wish I could find a priest who would close the door and refuse those kind of sacrifices.*

The priests are offering unacceptable sacrifices.

**The priests hate their ministry** and the whole system of sacrifices.

According to 1:13, they are saying their ministry is a burden and the sacrifices are a waste of time - a nuisance.

The priests are **giving false teaching**.

Chapter 2:6, describes a priest back in the days of Moses (Phineas, the grandson of Aaron, Num 25:10-13)

*True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and uprightness and turned many from sin.*

This priest was a role model for all the priests who followed him.

With this example, God now tells the spiritual leaders in Malachi's day what they **should** be doing.

*The lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge and from his mouth men should seek instruction - because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty. 2:7*

Ezra is their present example. But the people do not want to hear what he says.

God continues by describing what the majority of the spiritual leaders **are** doing.

*But you, the majority of the priests, have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; 2:8*

The priests are **showing partiality or favoritism**. 2:9

They are picking and choosing which laws to obey and apply in deciding legal matters. People with status or wealth or who are paying a bribe are being declared innocent in the courts. The poor are being found guilty.

These are the 4 areas of disobedience by the spiritual leaders.

But they are not the only ones who are guilty.

## 2. **The Jewish men** have also disobeyed. 2:10-16

**They have married pagan women** so they can have more freedom.

**They complain and are upset with God** because He does not accept their offerings.

**They have divorced their godly wives** who want to worship God alone.

This is one of those obscure parts of Scripture that regardless of the language, is difficult to understand. Scholars have various explanations, yet there is general agreement on the overall concept. To pull the ideas together, we need some background.

In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people made public agreements to obey God's rules.

One part of it was that Jewish men would not marry women who worshipped pagan gods.

When it came time to marry, the men married Jewish women who loved God and wanted to obey Him.

But then the men started watching the life-style of the pagan nations around them and found it appealing. There was a lot more excitement, freedom and fun. The Jewish men decide they want to do the same things. But their Jewish wives are saying no – they want no part in pagan activities that break God's laws.

As a result, the Jewish men divorce their Jewish wives so they are free to marry the pagan women and be able to indulge in the sexual practices. This naturally brings a response from God. He uses Malachi to express it.

Verses 10 -12 express the idea that God chose the Jews for a special relationship. When Jewish men marry women outside the faith – who worship other gods - they are breaking that unique relationship of Jewishness and God. Therefore God has every right to reject their animal offerings.

Verses 13-14

*Another thing you do: You flood the LORD'S altar with tears. You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, "Why?"*

The men, instead of admitting they are in the wrong, are blaming God and complaining. They ask "why", which in the context implies an attitude of "how dare He refuse our offering?"

Verses 14-15 God thru Malachi answers their “why”.

They have disobeyed by divorcing their Jewish wife. God wanted Jewish men to marry Jewish women who worshipped and obeyed God. They would have children born and raised in the Jewish faith. Each generation would continue the knowledge of God.

God wanted this, so the Jews could show the world what God was like and the world would then want Him in their lives. If the men marry pagan women, the children they have will learn pagan worship and the message of God will no longer be given to the world.

The Jewish women understand God’s plan. This is why they want to remain true to God.

God now urges the Jewish men to remain faithful to their Jewish, godly wives.

Verse 16 in many Bibles has God saying, “I hate divorce”. But the literal Hebrew is “**he** hates divorce / **he** covers himself with violence”. As a result, some of the newer translations have changed the verse considerably. The basic idea is that a man who hates or does not love his wife so he decides to divorce her, will be known as a man of injustice - (the context being when he wants to marry another for lustful purposes). Or he does an injustice to the one he should protect – his first wife.

We need to remember, it was God who first gave the law of divorce at the time of Moses. He gave it to protect people and society from those who were destructive, violent or refused to change their behavior. He gave the law because of people’s hardness of heart. Because of their sinful nature, they would refuse to change. But in Malachi’s day, the law He gave to be used for good, is being misused and abused. It is being used as an escape to have freedom to sin.

This is what God thru Malachi is speaking against. God will punish those who dare to use one of His laws to break His other laws. He grieves and will respond when the life of a godly spouse and children are devastated because they want to obey God.

These Jewish men who divorced their godly wives, have now married pagan women and brought them into the Jewish towns and communities. The men are worshipping their gods and at the same time coming to Jerusalem and going thru the motions of worshipping God. They then complain and ask why God is not accepting their animal offering?

Talk about insensitivity to sin!

**The spiritual leaders** have disobeyed

**The Jewish men** have disobeyed .

**3. The people in general** have disobeyed. 2:17 to end of book

**They accuse God of not keeping His promises**

They say,

*The prophets say He (God) is going to come and bring justice. Well, where is He? Look at all the injustice in the world. When is He going to come and do something about it? We can hardly wait until He comes because that is when He will destroy our enemies.*

God replies,

*See, I **will** send My messenger, who will prepare the way before Me.* That will be John the Baptist.

*Then suddenly the Lord you are **seeking will** come to His Temple – Referring to Jesus 3:1*

*The messenger of the covenant whom you desire, **will** come, says the Lord Almighty.* Referring to Jesus.

Verse 1 ends with the statement, *The Messenger whom you say you desire **WILL** come.*

Verse 2 begins with the word, **BUT. BUT**, *when He comes, who can stand before Him as innocent?*

When He comes, God is going to purify or bleach the people to cleanse them of their sin. According to verse 3, He is going to start with the Levites, the spiritual leaders. He is going to refine them as silver and gold.

Verse 5 describes what needs to be removed within the nation - *sorcery, adultery, lies and mistreatment of others. This includes mistreatment of employees, widows, orphans and migrant workers.* Malachi tells the people,

*You want God to come and deal with your enemies. But judgment begins with God’s people. If it were not for God’s infinite patience and mercy, you, the people of Judah, would be destroyed.*

Notice the complete and absolute spiritual blindness of the people. They accuse God of not keeping **His** promise. But they are the ones who have not kept **their** promise.

Three years earlier, when Nehemiah was still governor, they listened to Ezra as he read the warnings and promises of God from the book of Deuteronomy. They had then signed an agreement of obedience.

They said they would not marry people that worshipped idols.

But now, many of the men have divorced their godly wives so they can marry pagan women.

They promised they would bring the first of their crops, animals and money to the Levites.

This provided food and income for the spiritual leaders and well as support for the poor.

But now the people have quit.

One of the warnings in Deuteronomy was if the people disobeyed, God would send drought. The Jews have just gone thru a drought and are accusing God of failing them.

God tells the people, *I have not failed. The drought is because **you** have failed.*

3:9 *You are under a curse, because you are robbing Me.*

The word *curse* in the Bible means *judgment in this life*.

God had sent drought as judgment for their disobedience.

In 3:10, He tells them what they need to do.

*Bring the first of everything - the tithes to the Temple storehouse in Jerusalem that there may be food.*

*Test Me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*

To an agricultural society having just gone thru a drought, opening the floodgates of heaven meant God would send the rain at the right time and in the right amount. This would give them a harvest so abundant, their barns and silos would not be big enough to contain it. Obedience would bring an end to the drought and its results.

### **They fail in their promise to give the first of everything to God**

### **They disobey by choosing not to obey or serve God**

According to 3:14 the people have gotten together and said among themselves,

*There is no reason to serve God. We do not get anything out of it. In fact, to get ahead in life, it is better **not** to follow God.*

There is another, smaller group who is also talking with each other.

3:16 *Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored His name - meaning, honored Him by the things they were saying about Him.*

As the people spontaneously talked with each other about God, His greatness, how wonderful He was, about their love for Him and their desire to obey, God was listening and having it written down. These records are kept for the future. At the time when rewards are being given out, God will pull out the records.

There will be loss of rewards for disobedient believers. (3:14-15)

But there will be rewards for those who honor Him and love to get together with others to talk about Him. (4:1-3 or 3:19 – 21).

This applied to the Jews in the Old Testament and still applies to believers in Jesus today.

The last 2 verses in Malachi are about Elijah - the prophet who will prepare the way for the coming of Jesus.

In the New Testament, the spiritual leaders of that day asked John the Baptist if he was Elijah and he said *no*.

But later, Jesus explained to the apostles that John came *in the spirit and power of Elijah*.

He prepared the people to believe in Jesus at His first coming.

In the future, before Satan sets up his kingdom, God is going to send Elijah to prepare the way for the Jews. Thru his teaching:

Elijah will give Jewish fathers a desire to teach their children about their Messiah, Jesus and a desire to obey Him.

Elijah will give Jewish children the desire to learn and obey.

The result will be thousands upon thousands of Jews who believe in Jesus as their Messiah and grow in the faith.

They will be the ones giving God's message during the first half of Satan's kingdom.



Today orthodox and ultra-orthodox Jews do not believe that Jesus is their Messiah. They are still waiting for their Messiah to come. They believe Elijah will announce His coming. They also believe Elijah will come on Passover evening. So every year they prepare for him, just in case he comes.

During the Passover or Seder meal, there is an empty chair at the table - a chair for Elijah. There is a table setting for him, with wine poured into a goblet with Elijah's name on it. It is left untouched. During the Seder, a door is opened to welcome his arrival. This tradition is based on these last verses of Malachi.

Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament ends with a **promise** of Jesus' coming - the *Sun of Righteousness*.

The New Testament **begins with His first coming**.

It ends with the **promise of His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming**, *Yes, I am coming soon*.

God used Malachi in a special ministry from about 430 – 428 BC. to rebuke and warn His people.

He tells them their **disobedience** is the reason for national problems.

Their spiritual leaders, the Jewish men and the people are guilty of disobedience.

He gives them God's appeal *Return to Me and I will return to you. 3:7*

Did anyone respond? The answer is *yes*.

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem in 428 BC, the first thing he did was to deal with their disobedience. He took specific action against certain individuals and corrected situations that were wrong. Then he had all the people come together to listen to the reading of Deuteronomy. As the people listened, they responded immediately. It was the 2-3 years of Malachi's teaching that had prepared them. At this particular time, God used Malachi the prophet and Nehemiah the governor to restore the spiritual lives of God's people. As a result, the Jews as a nation started to again live as God intended.

Nehemiah's ministry as governor ended when king Artaxerxes died in 425 BC. However the ministry of Ezra the priest and Malachi the prophet continued for another 25 or more years. Malachi's complete ministry lasted from c. 430 – 397 BC.

The book of Malachi was God's message to His people in the 400's BC. It dealt with specific problems in their spiritual life as well as their family life. It is therefore surprising that 2 verses from this book are so frequently quoted as guidance for our lives.

One of the verses is Malachi 2:16 where some translations have God saying, *I hate divorce*. This verse is then used to teach that all divorce is wrong except when a spouse is guilty of adultery and even then it is going against God's will.

What we need to remember is that it is God Himself who wrote the Law of Divorce. He included it in the laws to Moses, as part of the 613 laws. God knew that from the time that sin began, down thru history, there would be cases where one spouse would refuse to deal with addictions, abuse or would want to rebel in every way. The spouse who wanted to follow God would need protection for his/her physical, mental and spiritual well-being. The Divorce Law was God's answer and provision. He wants His people to use it when it is necessary and wants other believers to be supportive.

He is against anyone who wants to use His law of protection as an excuse to commit adultery, immorality or to avoid making changes in their life. That is a sin because it is an act of rebellion.

The verse I really want to focus on is the one about bringing all the tithes into the storehouse.

*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. 3:10*

Based on this, there are those who say if a person does not tithe, he will be under God's judgment.

But to understand God's command about the tithe, we have to understand the Jewish **nation**.

It was a theocracy. This means God's work and government work were combined.

Or as we would say today, church and state are combined.

**The tithe** was 10% of their crops, animals and money that was given to the Levites and their families.



In return for this support, some of the Levites served in the temple as priests, musicians, choir members, guards and maintenance workers.

The majority of Levites, however, lived and worked in communities throughout the nation as teachers, librarians, historians, administrators or judges.

Some Levites were social workers who distributed food to the unemployed, the widows, orphans and migrant workers.

When the Jews were faithful and gave 10% of their crops, animals and money to the temple storehouse, the Levites throughout the nation had a regular income. They could then devote all their time to their work in the temple or in their communities.

When the people did not give their tithe, the Levites had no income. This forced them to leave their assigned work and work in the fields to support themselves and their families. This meant the temple was left without leaders, the schools without teachers, the courts without judges and the poor without food.

### **Old Testament tithes were a 10% flat-tax to run the nation.**

Because it was a theocracy, the things of God and government were combined.

Tithes and required offerings were part of Old Testament giving

There were also **Free-will offerings**. Notice the difference between the two.

**TITHES** and required offerings

a specific percent, compulsory and there was punishment if people did not pay them.

Their national life was dependent upon it. It paid for both God's work and government work.

### **FREE-WILL OFFERINGS**

whatever you wanted to give; they were not compulsory and there was no punishment for not giving.

They were a person's *thank you* to God.

**Old Testament - tithes were taxes to run a nation.**

**New Testament - God's tithing laws for a nation were not given to the Church.**

The Church is not a nation

God and government are separated, so in the New Testament ...

There is one set of commands for giving to government

There is another set of commands for giving to God.

**The command for giving to government**, in the book of Romans, says...

We are to pay our bills and pay our taxes. (Romans 13:6-8)

Our taxes are a fixed percentage bracket, they are required and if we do not pay, there is punishment.

In other words, the *tithes* of the Old Testament are our taxes today. They pay for the running of **government**.

**The command for giving to God** is found in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

*Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* The Greek word for *cheerful* gives us our English word *hilarious*. This verse literally says *God loves an person who finds it pure joy to give*.

Giving to God is what we want to give, not compulsory and no punishment is threatened.

It only says we will reap according to how we sow - sparingly or generously.

This has nothing to do with the actual amount.

It means sparingly or generously, based on what we have available.

Paul also said we are to give with joy.

*Free-will offerings* of the Old Testament are what we give today to say thank you to God and pay for **His** work.



Not teaching people to tithe sounds dangerous. How can God's work ever have enough?

The key is our relationship with God.

The more we learn about God – the more we get spiritual teaching and understand what He has done in our lives, the more we will want to give.

It becomes a pleasure and privilege.

We do not get out a calculator to see if it is exactly ten-percent and then argue whether it has to be ten percent before or after taxes. God says, *Put your calculator away. Keep it for the government. Give to Me because you want to.*

God's concern is not the percentage we give, but the attitude we have when we give.

A 2% amount given with joy because we believe He has worth and value is far better than 20% given in resentment and reluctance.

If we resent having to give to God, God says, *close your wallet and do not give Me anything.*

*If you think I am worthless, I do not want your money.*

When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, there will never be a problem with giving. It will always be the right amount, to the right places or people, at the right time.

***God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply.***

I want to mention one final thought from chapter 3. God says *He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. He will purify...and refine them like gold and silver.* 3:3 This is a beautiful picture of encouragement.

In those days, when metal was refined, it was put in a container and then placed over a fire. As the impurities rose to the top, the refiner skimmed off the dross. He would heat it up again and remove more impurities. He repeated this action until finally, when he could see a perfect reflection of his face in the molten metal, he knew it was pure.

God refines us, by turning on the heat of difficulties and sorrow. They act like a fire that causes wrong actions and wrong attitudes to surface. God wants them out in the open so we can know about them, admit they are wrong and let Him remove them from our lives. His goal is to remove the dross so that a reflection of Himself can be seen - a reflection of His goodness, His patience, kindness and self-control - a reflection of His beauty.

#### **EXTRA INFORMATION FOR THE STUDIOUS AND INQUISITIVE**

Divorce:

The 10 commandments and many of the other laws are based on the choice of the individual in relation to what they do. The law of divorce is based on the fact that in a marriage, 2 people are involved. The one individual cannot control the choices of the other. Therefore when one side, because of their sin nature (hardness of heart), refuses to change wrong behavior, there needs to be an escape or way out for the other side.