

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO MALACHI 3

This chapter begins with a prophecy of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ; and of the coming of Christ, and the effects and consequences of it, with respect both to the righteous and the wicked; and it contains accusations and charges of sin against the Jews, intermixed with exhortations to repentance. John the Baptist is promised to be sent, and is described by his office as a messenger, and by his work, to prepare the way of the Lord; and the Messiah is prophesied of, who is described by his characters; with respect to himself, the Lord and Messenger of the covenant; with respect to the truly godly among the Jews, as the object of their desire and delight; whose coming is spoken of as a certain thing, and which would be sudden; and the place is mentioned he should come into, (^{<3URB>}Malachi 3:1) and this his coming is represented as terrible to the wicked, and as trying and purifying to the righteous, expressed by the various similes of a refiner's fire, and fuller's soap; and the end answered by it, their offering a righteous offering to the Lord, (^{<3URB>}Malachi 3:2-4) but with respect to the wicked, he declares he should be a swift witness against them, whose characters are particularly given, and this assured from his immutability; the consequence of which to the saints is good, being their security from destruction, (^{<3URB>}Malachi 3:5,6) and next a charge is commenced against the wicked Jews, as that in general they had for a long time revolted from the Lord, and were guilty of sins of omission and commission, and are therefore exhorted to return to the Lord, with a promise that he will return to them, and yet they refuse, (^{<3URB>}Malachi 3:7) and, in particular, that they were guilty of sacrilege, and so accounted, even the whole nation, in withholding tithes and sacrifices, which they are exhorted to bring in; to which they are encouraged with promises of blessings of prosperity and protection, (^{<3URB>}Malachi 3:8-12) and that they had spoken impudent and blasphemous words against the Lord; which, though excepted to, is proved by producing their own words, (^{<3URB>}Malachi 3:13-15) and by the contrary behaviour of those that feared the Lord, who were taken notice of by him, and were dear unto him, (^{<3URB>}Malachi 3:16,17) wherefore it is suggested, that the time would come when there would be a

manifest difference made between the one and the other, (^{<3018>}Malachi 3:18).

Ver. 1. *Behold, I will send my messenger*, etc.] These are the words of Christ, in answer to the question put in the last verse of the preceding chapter (^{<3017>}Malachi 2:17), “Where [is] the God of judgment?” intimating that he would quickly appear, and previous to his coming send his messenger or angel; not the angel of death to destroy the wicked, as Jarchi thinks; nor an angel from heaven, as Kimchi; nor Messiah the son of Joseph; as Aben Ezra; nor the Prophet Malachi himself, as Abarbinel; but the same that is called Elijah the prophet, (^{<3015>}Malachi 4:5) and is no other than John the Baptist, as is clear from (^{<4010>}Matthew 11:10 ^{<4002>}Mark 1:2) called a “messenger” or “angel”, not by nature, but by office; and Christ’s messenger, because sent by him and on his errand; and which shows the power and authority of Christ in sending forth ministers; his superior excellency to John, and his existence before him, or he could not be sent by him, and so before his incarnation; for John was sent by him before he was in the flesh, and consequently this is a proof of the proper deity of Christ: and the word “behold” is prefixed to this, in order to raise the attention of those that put the above question, and all others; as well as to show that the message John was sent upon was of the greatest moment and importance; as that the Messiah was just ready to appear, his kingdom was at hand, and the Jews ought to believe in him; though it also respects the coming of the Messiah, spoken of in the latter part of the text:

and he shall prepare the way before me; by declaring to the Jews that he was born, and was in the midst of them; by pointing him out unto them; by preaching the doctrine of repentance, and exhorting them to believe in him; and by administering the ordinance of baptism in general to all proper subjects, and in particular to Christ, by which he was made manifest to Israel; (see Gill on “^{<4002>}Mark 1:2”) the allusion is to kings and great men sending persons before them when on a journey, to give notice of their coming, and provide for them:

and the Lord, whom ye seek; this is the person himself speaking, the Son of God, and promised Messiah, the Lord of all men, and particularly of his church and people, in right of marriage, by virtue of redemption, and by being their Head and King; so Kimchi and Ben Melech interpret it of him, and even Abarbinel^{f63} himself; the Messiah that had been so long spoken of and so much expected, and whom the Jews sought after, either in a

scoffing manner, expressed in the above question, or rather seriously; some as a temporal deliverer, to free them from the Roman yoke, and bring them into a state of liberty, prosperity, and grandeur; and others as a spiritual Saviour, to deliver from sin, law, hell, and death, and save them with an everlasting salvation:

shall suddenly come to his temple; meaning not his human nature, nor his church, sometimes so called; but the material temple at Jerusalem, the second temple, called “his”, because devoted to his service and worship, which proves him to be God, and because of his frequency in it; here he was brought and presented by his parents at the proper time, for the purification of his mother; here he was at twelve years of age disputing with the doctors; and here Simeon, Anna, and others, were waiting for him, (⁽⁴¹²⁾Luke 2:22,25,27,38,46) and we often read of his being here, and of his using his authority in it as the Lord and proprietor of it; and of the Hosannas given him here, (⁽⁴¹²⁾Matthew 21:12-15,23) the manner in which he should come, “suddenly”, may refer to the manifestation of it, quickly after John the Baptist had prepared his way by his doctrine and baptism:

even the messenger of the covenant; not of the covenant of works with Adam, of which there was no mediator and messenger; nor of the covenant of circumcision, at which, according to the Jews, Elias presides; nor of the covenant at Sinai, of which Moses was the mediator; but of the covenant of grace, of which Christ is not only the Surety and Mediator; but, as here, “the Messenger”; because it is revealed, made known, and exhibited in a more glorious manner by him under the Gospel dispensation, through the ministration of the word and ordinances. Deuteronomy Dieu observes, that the word in the Ethiopic language signifies a prince as well as a messenger, and so may be rendered, “the Prince of the covenant”, which is a way of speaking used in (⁽²¹¹²⁾Daniel 11:22):

whom ye delight in; either carnally, as they pleased themselves with the thoughts of a temporal prince, and of great honour and grandeur under him; and as they would have done, had he submitted to have been made a king by them in this sense; or rather spiritually, and so is to be understood of such who had a spiritual knowledge of him, and joy in him; who rejoiced and delighted in the contemplation of his person, offices, righteousness, and salvation:

he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts; this expresses the certainty of his coming, being said by himself, who is the Lord of hosts, the Lord of armies

in heaven and in earth, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. This passage is, in some Jewish writers^{f64}, interpreted of the world to come, or times of the Messiah.

Ver. 2. *But who may abide the day of his coming?* etc.] When he should be manifest in Israel, and come preaching the Gospel of the kingdom; who could bear the doctrines delivered by him, concerning his deity and equality with God the Father; concerning his character and mission as the Messiah, and his kingdom not being a temporal, but a spiritual one; concerning his giving his flesh for the life of the world, and eating that by faith; concerning distinguishing and efficacious grace; and all such that so severely struck at the wickedness of the Scribes and Pharisees, and their self-righteous principles; and especially since for judgment he came, that they might not see? nor could they bear the light of this glorious Sun of righteousness; and he came not to send peace and outward prosperity to the Jews, but a sword and division, (^{<408>}John 9:39 ^{<408>}Matthew 10:34 ^{<425>}Luke 12:51) very few indeed could bear his ministry, or the light of that day, it being so directly contrary to their principles and practices:

and who shall stand when he appeareth? in his kingdom and glory, to take vengeance on the Jews for their rejection of him and his Gospel; for this coming and appearance of his include all the time between his manifestation in the flesh and the destruction of Jerusalem; and so all those sorrows and distresses which went before it, or attended it, and were such as had never been from the creation of the world; and unless those times had been shortened, no flesh could have been saved; (see ^{<418>}Matthew 24:3-22 ^{<423>}Luke 21:36):

for he [is] like a refiner's fire; partly by the ministry of the word, compared to fire, (^{<423>}Jeremiah 23:29) separating pure doctrines from ones of dross; and partly by his fiery dispensations and judgments on the wicked Jews, when he distinguished and saved his own people from that untoward generation, and destroyed them:

and like fuller's soap; or "fuller's herb", as the Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions render it, and Jarchi interprets it: and so R. Jonah^{f65} interprets it of an herb which fullers use: and in the Misna^{f66} this is one of the seven things used to take out spots, namely, "borith", the word here used; and which Maimonides^{f67} says is a plant known by the name of "algasul" and "gazul" in the Arabic language: it signifies something by which filth is washed away; and so Bartenora^{f68} says it is a plant which

purifies and cleanses; and Jerom^{f69} relates that this herb grows in Palestine, in moist and green places, and has the same virtue as nitre to take away filth; agreeably to which some other versions render it “fuller’s weed”, or “soap weed”^{f70}. The Syriac version is,

“as sulphur that makes white;”

and fullers, with the Romans, were wont to make use of that along with chalk to take out spots; and so Pliny^{f71} speaks of a kind of sulphur which fullers make use of. A metaphor signifying the same thing as before, the removing of spotted doctrines or spotted persons, the one by the preaching of the Gospel, the other by awful judgments, as spots in garments are removed by the fuller’s herb or soap.

Ver. 3. *And he shall sit [as] a refiner, and purifier of silver,* etc.] Kimchi interprets this, as he does the latter part of the preceding verse (^{<3HB>}Malachi 3:2), of the day, and not of the Lord, which he compares to a judge that sits and separates the guilty from the innocent; (see ^{<HB>}1 Corinthians 3:13) but it is to be understood of the Lord himself, and expresses his diligence in sitting and separating good men and principles from bad ones, just as silver is purified and refined from dross. Maimonides^{f72} understands the passage of the Messiah; for he says,

“in the days of the King Messiah, when his kingdom is restored, and all Israel shall be gathered to him, all will have their genealogies set right by his mouth, through the Holy Spirit that rests upon him, as it is said, “he shall sit a refiner and purifier”:

as a refiner sits and observes his metal while it is melting, and waits the proper time to pour it out and separate the dross from it; so Christ is here represented as sitting, while his people are purifying and refining by the various ways and means he makes use of: it denotes the continued care of Christ over them; his eye is upon them, that nothing be lost but their dross and corruption; and his patience in waiting to be gracious to them, and do them good; and his diligent attention to the proper season of doing it; designing by all that he does, not their hurt and damage, but their real good, for he saves them, though it be by fire; and indeed every trial and affliction is for the purifying of their souls, and the brightening of their graces, and increasing their spiritual experience, light, and knowledge.

And he shall purify the sons of Levi; the priests, either literally understood, some of these were converted from their evil principles and practices, and

became obedient to the doctrines of the Gospel, (~~4017~~Acts 6:7) or figuratively, the apostles of Christ and ministers of the Gospel, who were made clean by him; or rather all the people of God, who are made priests as well as kings, and are a royal priesthood, and are purified by Christ, both by his blood, and the imputation of his righteousness, by which they become without spot and blemish, and as white as snow; and by the Spirit in sanctification, he sprinkling clean water upon them, and purifying their hearts by faith in the blood of Jesus; and also by afflictive dispensations of Providence sanctified unto them. Mention is made of the priests and Levites, because these were so very corrupt in the times of Christ, and as appears from the preceding chapters.

And purge them as gold and silver; are purged in the fire from their dross: this shows of what worth and value, and in what esteem the Lord's people are to him; he reckons of them as gold and silver, and as his peculiar treasure: and it suggests, that before conversion they are joined unto and mixed with wicked men, comparable to dross; and that they have in them the dross, corruption, and impurity of sin; which is original and natural to them, and inherent in them, and which can only be removed by the grace of God and blood of Christ.

That they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness; themselves, their bodies and souls; the sacrifices of prayer, praise, and alms deeds; to the offering up of which in righteousness, in sincerity and truth, in an upright way, it is necessary that a person should be purified by the blood of Christ, and sanctified by the grace of his Spirit.

Ver. 4. *Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord*, etc.] Or "sweet"¹⁷³; grateful and well pleasing to him, as all spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God through Christ, being offered up in the faith of his atoning sacrifice and righteousness, without which it is impossible to please God:

as in the days of old, and as in former years: under the first temple, and when the tabernacle was set up by Moses, and in the times of the patriarchs; and even before the flood, and as early as Abel, who offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, (~~3104~~Hebrews 11:4-6).

Ver. 5. *And I will come near to you to judgment*, etc.] And so will manifestly appear to be the God of judgment they asked after, (~~3107~~Malachi 2:17) this is not to be understood of Christ's coming to judgment at the

last day, but of his coming to judge and punish the wicked Jews at the time of Jerusalem's destruction; for the same is here meant, who is spoken of in the third person before, and who will not be afar off; there will be no need to inquire after him, when he will come he will be near enough, and too near for them:

and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers; not only a judge, but a witness; so that there will be no delay of judgment, or protracting or evading it, for want of witnesses of facts alleged; for the Judge himself, who is Christ, will be witness of them, he being the omniscient God, before whom all things are manifest. The Targum is,

“my Word shall be among you for a swift witness.”

Mention is made of “sorcerers”, because there were many that used the magic art, enchantments, and sorceries, in the age of Christ and his apostles, and before the destruction of Jerusalem, even many of their doctors and members of the sanhedrim; (see Gill on “~~4029~~Isaiah 8:19”):

and against the adulterers; with whom that age also abounded; hence our Lord calls it an adulterous generation, (~~4029~~Matthew 12:39 ~~4008~~John 8:3-9 ~~4022~~Romans 2:22):

and against false swearers; who were guilty of perjury, and of vain oaths; who swore by the creatures, and not by the Lord, and to things not true; (see ~~4053~~Matthew 5:33-37):

and against those that oppress the hireling in [his] wages, the widow, and the fatherless; defrauding of servants of their wages, devouring widows' houses, and distressing the fatherless, were sins the Jews were addicted to in those times, as appears from (~~3027~~James 1:27 5:4) who wrote to the twelve tribes; and from what our Lord charges them with, (~~4234~~Matthew 23:14):

and that turn aside the stranger [from his right]; and so Kimchi supplies it,

“that turn aside the judgment of the stranger;”

that do not do him justice in civil things; yea, persecuted those that became proselytes to the Christian religion:

and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts; which was the root and cause of all their sins; irreverence of Christ, disbelief of him, and contempt of his Gospel.

Ver. 6. *For I [am] the Lord,* etc.] Or Jehovah; a name peculiar to the most High, and so a proof of the deity of Christ, who here speaks; and is expressive of his being; of his self-existence; of his purity and simplicity; of his immensity and infinity; and of his eternity and sovereignty:

I change not; being the same today, yesterday, and forever; he changed not in his divine nature and personality by becoming man; he took that into union with him he had not before, but remained the same he ever was; nor did he change in his threatenings of destruction to the Jews, which came upon them according to his word; nor in his promises of his Spirit, and presence, and protection to his people; nor will he ever change in his love and affections to them; nor in the efficacy of his blood, sacrifice, and righteousness; wherefore, as this is introduced to assure the truth and certainty of what is said before, concerning his being a swift witness against the wicked, so also for the comfort of the saints, as follows. The Targum is,

“for I the Lord have not changed my covenant.”

Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed; such who were Israelites indeed, true believers in Christ; these were not consumed when the wicked Jews were, but were directed to leave the city before its destruction, and go to another place, as they did, whereby they were preserved; and so it was, that not one Christian perished in it; (see Gill on “⁴¹¹³Matthew 24:13”) and so it is owing to the unchangeable love, grace, and power of Christ, that none of his perish internally or eternally, but have everlasting life.

Ver. 7. *Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances,* etc.] Here begins an enumeration of the sins of the Jews, which were the cause of their ruin; and here is first a general charge of apostasy from the statutes and ordinances of the law, which they made void by the traditions of the fathers; and therefore this word is used as referring to this evil, as well as to express their early, long, and continued departure from the ways of God; which as it was an aggravation of their sin, that they should have so long ago forsook the ordinances of God,

and have not kept [them], but transgressed them by observing the traditions of men, (^{<418B>}Matthew 15:3) so it is an instance of the patience and forbearance of God, that they were not as yet consumed; and of his grace and goodness, that he should address them as follows:

Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts; this message was carried to them by John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, and by Christ himself, who both preached the doctrine of repentance to this people, (^{<418D>}Matthew 3:2 4:17). The Targum is,

“return to my worship, and I will look in my word to do well unto you, saith the Lord of hosts;”

and such who returned, and believed in Christ, and submitted to his ordinances, it was well with them.

But ye said, Wherein shall we return? what have we to turn from, or repent of? what evils have we done, or can be charged on us? what need have we of repentance or conversion, or of such an exhortation to it? do not we keep the law, and all the rituals of it? this is the true language of the Pharisees in Christ’s time, who, touching the righteousness of the law, were blameless in their own esteem, and were the ninety and nine just persons that needed not repentance, (^{<418E>}Luke 15:7).

Ver. 8. *Will a man rob God?* etc.] Or “the gods”; the false gods, the idols of the Gentiles; the Heathens will not do that, accounting sacrilege a great sin, and yet this the Jews were guilty of: or “the judges”^{f74}, as the Targum; civil magistrates; will any dare to defraud them of their due? (see ^{<300B>}Malachi 1:8).

Yet ye have robbed me; keeping back from the priests and Levites, his ministers, what was due to them; and which, being no other than a spoiling or robbing of them, might be interpreted a robbing of God:

But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? as not being conscious of any such evil; or, however, impudently standing in it, that they were not guilty: to which is returned the answer,

In tithes and offerings; that is, they robbed God in not giving the tithes, and not offering sacrifices, according as the law required: but it may be objected, that the Jews in Christ’s time did pay tithes, even of all things; yea, of more than the law required, (^{<4173>}Matthew 23:23 ^{<2182>}Luke 18:12) to

which it may be replied, that though they gave tithes, yet it was h[r̂y[b, “with an evil eye”, as Aben Ezra says; grudgingly, and not cheerfully, and with an evil intention; not to show their gratitude to God, and their acknowledgment of him as their Lord, from whom they had their all, but in order to merit at his hands; besides, our Lord suggests that they did not give to God the things that were God’s, (^{<4021>}Matthew 22:21) and the apostle charges them with being guilty of sacrilege, (^{<4022>}Romans 2:22) and, moreover, the priests might not give it to the Levites, as they ought; and which is what they are charged with in (^{<4630>}Nehemiah 13:10) and Grotius says that they were guilty of this before the destruction by Vespasian, as appears by Josephus.

Ver. 9. *Ye [are] cursed with a curse*, etc.] Or “with penury”, as the Vulgate Latin version; which, though not a proper rendering of the word, is the meaning of the curse they were cursed with; rain was withheld from them for their sins, and the earth did not bring forth its usual increase; wherefore there was want of food in all their land; their blessings were cursed, as in (^{<3902>}Malachi 2:2) for the following reason,

for ye have robbed me; because of this their iniquity, in not bringing their offerings to the Lord, and the tithes to the priests and Levites, their land was stricken with barrenness, and God gave them cleanness of teeth, and want of bread in all places: or, “but ye have robbed me”¹⁷⁵; notwithstanding they were thus chastised of the Lord, yet were not reformed, but went on in withholding from God and the priests, what belonged to them:

[even] this whole nation; the sin was become general, and therefore a general judgment was inflicted on them: Grotius thinks, that the people seeing the priests withhold the tithes from the Levites, they refused to pay them to them, and so the sin became universal. Kimchi observes, that in other sins charged upon the nation, the people were not all alike guilty, but in this which respected the tithes and offerings they were.

Ver. 10. *Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse*, etc.] Or “treasury”¹⁷⁶; for there were places in the temple where the tithe was put, and from thence distributed to the priests and Levites, for the support of their families, as they wanted. There were the tithe or tenth part of all eatable things paid to the Levites, and out of this another tithe was paid by the Levites to the priests; and there was another tithe, which some years the owners ate themselves at Jerusalem, and in others gave them to the poor;

and these were called the first tithe, the tithe out of the tithe, the second tithe, and the poor's tithe; though they are commonly reduced to three, and are called first, and second, and third, as they are by Maimonides; who says^{f77},

“after they have separated the first tithe every year, they separate the second tithe, as it is said “thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed”, etc. (^{<6142>}Deuteronomy 14:22,23) and in the third year, and in the sixth, they separate the poor's tithe, instead of the second tithe.”

So Tobit says; Tobit 1:7

“the first tithe I gave to the Levites, who stand before the Lord to minister to him, and to bless in his name the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the second tithe I sold (as he might, according to the law in (^{<6143>}Deuteronomy 14:24-26)), and took the money, and went up to Jerusalem, and bought with it what I pleased; and the third tithe I gave to the repair of the temple;”

so Fagius reads: but according to Munster's edition it is, the second and third tithes I gave to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow; (see ^{<6142>}Deuteronomy 26:12,13). It appears from hence that the sin of the people was, that they did not bring in “all” their tithes; they kept back a part of them: wherefore they are called upon to bring in the whole, and which they did in Nehemiah's time; (see ^{<6108>}Nehemiah 10:38 13:11,13) where mention is made of the treasuries for the tithe, which were certain chambers adjoining to the temple; and besides those that were built by Solomon, there were other chambers prepared by Hezekiah in his times, when the tithes were brought in, in such plenty, that there was not room enough for them, (^{<4811>}2 Chronicles 31:11,12) and besides those in the second temple, that were in the court of the priests, there were others in the court of the people, as L'Empereur thinks^{f78}, where what the others could not contain might be put; and into which court the priests might come; and there were also receptacles underground, as well as upper rooms, where much might be laid up; add to all this, that Dr. Lightfoot^{f79} suggests, that these tithes were treasured up in the chambers by the gates of the temple, and were at least a part of the treasuries of the house of God, which the porters at the gates had the care of, (^{<1305>}1 Chronicles 9:26 26:20) and particularly that the house of Asuppim, at which were four

porters, was a large piece of building, containing divers rooms for the treasuring up things for the use of the temple; in the Apocrypha:

“And are resolved to spend the firstfruits of the the tenths of wine and oil, which they had sanctified, and reserved for the priests that serve in Jerusalem before the face of our God; the which things it is not lawful for any of the people so much as to touch with their hands.” Judith 11:13

that there may be food in mine house; in the temple, for the sustenance of the priests and Levites: so the Targum,

“the prophet said, bring all the tithes into the treasury, that there may be food for them that minister in the house of my sanctuary:”

and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts; by bringing in all their tithes; when they would find, by making this experiment or trial, that the curse would be removed from them, and blessings be largely and liberally bestowed upon them by him, who is the Lord of hosts, and so able to perform any promise he makes; and here one is implied, and is as follows:

if I will not open you the windows of heaven; which had been shut and stopped up, and let down no rain upon their land, which brought a scarcity of provisions among them; but now, upon a change in their conduct it is suggested that these windows or floodgates should be opened, and rain let down plentifully upon them, which only could be done by the Lord himself; for the key of rain is one of the three keys, the Jews say^{f80}, which God has reserved for himself, and never puts into the hands of a minister:

and pour you out a blessing: give abundance of rain to make the earth fruitful, and bring forth its increase in great plenty, which is a blessing; and not destroy the earth, and the fruits of it, as in the times of Noah, when the windows of heaven were opened, and a curse was poured out upon the earth:

that [there shall] not [be room] enough [to receive it]; and so Kimchi says his father interpreted this clause, that there would not be a sufficiency of vessels^{f81} and storehouses. Some render the words, as Junius, “so that ye shall not be sufficient”; either to gather in the increase, or to consume it. The Targum is,

“until ye say it is enough;”

and so the Syriac version. The phrase, which is very concise in the original text, and may be literally rendered, “unto not enough”^{f82}, denotes great abundance and fulness of good things, so that there should be enough and to spare; and yet, as Gussetius observes, not enough to answer and express the abundance of mercy and goodness in the heart of God.

Ver. 11. *And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes*, etc.] Or “eater”^{f83}; the locust or caterpillar, or any such devouring creature, that eats up the herbage, corn, and fruits of trees; every such creature is under the restraint of Providence; and by a nod, a rebuke, they are easily prevented doing the mischief they otherwise would; these are the Lord’s great army, which he can send and call off as he pleases, (~~2000~~ Joel 1:4 2:25):

and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; as he has done, by eating all green things, as the locust, caterpillar, and canker worm do, grass, corn, and trees:

neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field; which some understand of the devourer or locust, that that should not cause the vine to be abortive, or cast its fruit before its time, or bereave it of it; but it seems best to interpret it of the vine itself not casting its fruit, as an untimely birth, by blighting and blasting winds:

saith the Lord of hosts; who holds the winds in his fists, and will not suffer them when he pleases, any more than the locusts, to hurt the trees of the earth, (~~600~~ Revelation 7:1,3 9:4).

Ver. 12. *And all nations shall call you blessed*, etc.] When they shall see the land freed from the devouring locust, and other hurtful creatures; the former and the latter rains given in their season, and the earth yielding a large increase:

for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts; or a desirable^{f84} one; not only pleasant to themselves, being fruitful, but wished for by others, by their neighbouring nations, who, seeing their prosperity, could not but desire to dwell with them; or delightsome to the Lord of hosts: thus Jarchi interprets it, the land that I delight in; and so Aben Ezra; to which agrees the Targum,

“and all nations shall praise you, because you dwell in the land of the house of my Shechinah or majesty, and do my will in it;”

and the Syriac version renders it, “the land of my delight”: (see ^{<2604>}Isaiah 62:4).

Ver. 13. *Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord,* etc.]

Hard and strong; they bore very hardly upon him, were exceeding impudent and insolent; murmuring at his providence; arraigning his justice and goodness; and despising his word, worship, and ordinances. Aben Ezra says, this is a prophecy concerning the time to come, that is, the times of the Messiah; and so it describes the Jews in his times.

Yet ye say, what have we spoken [so much] against thee? or “what have we spoken against thee?” as if they were not guilty in any respect, and as if nothing could be proved against them; and as though the Lord did not know what they had said in their hearts, seeing they had not spoken it with their mouths: though the supplement of our translators, “so much”, is confirmed by the Targum, which is,

“and if ye say, how (or in what) have we multiplied speech before thee?”

and so Kimchi observes, that the form in which the Hebrew word is denotes much and frequent speaking: and Abarbinel agrees with him, though he rather thinks it has this sense, “what are we spoken of to thee?” what calumny is this? what accusation do they bring against us to thee? what is it that is reported we say against thee? thus wiping their mouths, as if they were innocent and harmless.

Ver. 14. *Ye have said, it [is] vain to serve God,* etc.] This they said in their hearts, if not with their lips, that it was a vain thing for a man to serve God; he got nothing by it; he had no reward for it; it fared no better with him than the wicked; nay, the wicked fared better than he; and therefore who would be a worshipper of God? (see ^{<8215>}Job 21:15). Abarbinel understands this also with respect to God, who is worshipped; to whom worship, say these men, is no ways profitable, nor does he regard it; (see ^{<8807>}Job 35:7) and therefore it is in vain to serve him, since neither he, nor we, are the better for it:

and what profit [is it] that we have kept his ordinance; or “his observation”^{f85}; that is, have observed that which he commanded to be observed; this respects not any single and particular ordinance, but every ordinance of God: the Sadducees of those times seem designed, who

denied the resurrection of the dead, and a future state of rewards and punishments, and so might well conclude it in vain to serve God:

and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? or “in black”^{f86}; which is the habit of mourners; (see ^{f88b}Psalm 38:6) with an humble spirit, as Jarchi interprets it; or with humiliation (or contrition) of spirit, as the Targum, which paraphrases the whole verse thus,

“ye have said, he gains nothing who worships before the Lord; and what mammon (or riches) do we gain because we have kept the observation of his word, and because we have walked in contrition of spirit before the Lord of hosts?”

Aben Ezra and Abarbinel seem to understand this last clause of their being afflicted and suffering for the sake of religion, and which they endured in vain, seeing they were not respected and rewarded for it; but the other sense is best, which represents them as sincere penitents, and humble worshippers of God in their own account, and yet were not taken notice of by him: it seems to describe the Pharisees, who disfigured their faces, and affected down looks and sorrowful countenances^{f87}.

Ver. 15. *And now we call the proud happy*, etc.] Or “therefore now”^{f88}; since this is the case, that the worshippers of God are not regarded, and there is nothing got by serving him; they that are proud and haughty, that neither fear God nor regard men, are the happy persons; even presumptuous sinners, as the word^{f89} signifies, that stretch out their hands against God, and strengthen themselves against the Almighty; these enjoy all worldly happiness, while they that serve the Lord are mourning in sackcloth, and are in the utmost distress. The Targum explains it of the ungodly, and as it is explained in the following clause:

yea, they that work wickedness are set up: or “built up”^{f90}; or “seeing, because”, or “for they that work”^{f91}, etc.; they are increased with children, by which their houses or families are built up; they are in a well settled and established condition; they abound in riches and honours; they are set in high places, and are in great esteem among men, even such who make it their constant business to commit sin:

yea, [they that] tempt God; or “yea, they tempt God”^{f92}; by their wicked words and actions, and try whether he will cause his judgments to fall upon them, which he has threatened to such sinners; (see ^{f93}Isaiah 5:18,19):

are even delivered; or, “and are delivered”^{f93}; from the punishment threatened; they escape it, and go on with impunity; from which observations these persons reasoned that there was no God of judgment, or that judged in the earth; that there was no providence concerned about human affairs; and that there was nothing in religion; and these were the hard and stout words which they spoke against the Lord.

Ver. 16. *Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another*, etc.] Abarbinel thinks this is a continuation of the speech of the wicked; observing, that while they that work wickedness were set up, and they that tempted God escaped punishment, they that were religious, and feared God, “were destroyed one with another”, particularly by the plague; so he would have the word **wrbdn** rendered, which we translate, “spake often one to another”; in which sense he observes that root is used in (^{<3134>}Hosea 13:14 ^{<314B>}Psalms 47:3 ^{<210E>}2 Kings 11:1) but rather this is opposed unto what they said, by such, who, at the time referred to (which seems to be between the time of Christ’s coming, spoken of in the beginning of the chapter (^{<310E>}Malachi 3:1-6), and the destruction of Jerusalem after mentioned), feared the Lord, and served him; embraced the Messiah, and professed his name; for the fear of God takes in the whole of religious worship, both internal and external; and describes such, not that have a dread of the majesty of God, and of his judgments and wrath, or distrust his power, providence, grace, and goodness; but who have a filial and holy fear of God, a fiducial and fearless one, a reverential affection for him, and are true and sincere worshippers of him: these “spake often one to another”; of the unbelief, impiety, and profaneness of men, with great concern and lamentation; and of the great and good things they were led into the knowledge of; the everlasting love of the Father in the choice of them, and covenant with them in Christ; of redemption by the Son; of the glories of his person, and the fulness of his grace; of the work of the Spirit of God upon their souls; and of the various truths of the everlasting Gospel; and of the gracious experiences they were indulged with; and all this they said for the glory of God’s grace, and for the comforting and strengthening, and edifying, of each other’s souls: it follows,

and the Lord hearkened, and heard [it]; what they said one to another: this is spoken after the manner of men, and does not so much regard the omniscience of God, who hearkens and hears everything that is said by wicked men, as by good men; as his special regard unto, peculiar notice he

takes of, and the approbation he has of his people, and of their words and actions, and even of their thoughts, as is afterwards intimated:

and a book of remembrance was written before him; in allusion to kings that keep registers, records, annals, and chronicles, as memorials of matters of moment and importance: (see ^{<15015>}Ezra 4:15) (^{<17023>}Esther 2:23 6:1): otherwise there is no forgetfulness in God; he bears in his own eternal mind a remembrance of the persons, thoughts, words, and actions of his people, and which he will disclose and make mention of another day; even our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God over all, and who will let the churches and world know that he is the searcher of hearts, and trier of the reins of the children of men:

for them that feared the Lord, as before,

and that thought upon his name; either the name of the Father; not any particular name of his, by which he is known, but him himself; for, as Kimchi observes, his name is himself, and he himself is his name; and especially as he is in Christ, and proclaimed in him; and this is expressive of faith in him, love to him, and reverence of him: or the name of Christ; and not any particular name of his, unless it be Jesus the Saviour: but rather his person as the Son of God; his office as Mediator; and his blood, righteousness, and sacrifice: and it is not a bare thinking of him that is here intended, but such a thought of him as is accompanied with esteem and value for him, because of the dignity of his person, and the riches of his grace. The Septuagint and Arabic versions render it, “and that reverence his name”; and the Syriac version, “that praise his name”; and the Targum is, that think of the glory of his name.

Ver. 17. *And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts*, etc.] That is, such as fear the Lord, and think of him, hereby they are known to be his; and hereafter, in the time referred to, it will be manifest that they are his: they are Christ’s already by his Father’s gift of them to him; by his own purchase; by the conquests of his grace; and by the voluntary surrender of themselves: but, in the last day, they will be claimed and owned by Christ before his Father and his holy angels; and they will be known to be his, by themselves and others; and there will be no doubt about it, or questioning of it:

in that day when I make up my jewels; Christ has some, who are his jewels, or peculiar treasure, as the word^{f94} here used signifies; who are loved with

an everlasting love; chosen in him; redeemed by him; justified by his righteousness; have the graces of his Spirit in them: and will be glorified: they are a peculiar people, separate from all others, and preferred unto them; for whom Christ has the strongest affection, and takes special care of: and there is a time when he will make them up; the number of them is already complete in eternal election; and there was a gathering of them together in Christ at his death; at every conversion there is an addition to them, as his regenerated and sanctified ones; and at death they are received into heaven, into his presence and bosom; and at the last day there will be a collection of them all together. The words may be rendered, even “my jewels in the day that I shall make”^{f95}; or “the day I shall make peculiar”: distinct from all others; meaning either the famous Gospel day, made by him the sun of righteousness, in which so many of his jewels are picked up, and brought in; or the day of Jerusalem’s destruction, when Christ took care of his jewels, and by the preservation of them showed that they were his, even all that believed in him; so that not one perished that believed in him, when he took vengeance on his enemies, that disbelieved and rejected him. Kimchi refers this to the day of judgment.

And I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him; this is a favour not granted to the apostate angels; nor to the old world; nor to the Jewish nation; nor even to the Son of God; but is vouchsafed to his special people: the lives of these are spared, until they are called by grace; and though they are sometimes afflicted and chastised, it is very gently, and in love; their services are accepted, and the imperfections in them overlooked; their sins are pardoned, and they will find mercy at the great day of account; they are used in the most tender manner, not only as a son, an own son, but as an obedient one, for whom the greatest regard is had, and affection shown.

Ver. 18. *Then shall ye return,* etc.] Either the wicked, who will be “converted”^{f96}, as some render the word, and will have a different view of things, and change their minds and language; or they that feared the Lord, who at the time before spoken of will have a new turn of thought, and another and clear discerning of persons and things, and better judge of the dispensations of Providence: some that refer this to the resurrection of the dead, and the last judgment, understand it, as Abarbinel does, of the returning of souls to their bodies, when indeed the difference between persons after described will be very discernible; but it seems to refer to the time of Christ’s first coming, and Jerusalem’s destruction:

and discern between the righteous and the wicked; the difference between such who are really and truly righteous, who are here meant, even such who believe in Christ, and are justified by his righteousness; and those that are wicked, as all by nature are: though sometimes this character designs the more profane and abandoned, and even professors of religion; the difference between these is not always easily discerned; as for the righteous, they are not known and discerned by the world; and by reason of afflictions, temptations, and sins, they are apt to judge wrong of themselves; and sometimes are so left to fall into sin, that they look like others: and there are wicked men under the appearance of righteous men, as were the Scribes and Pharisees in Christ's time; but by the destruction that came upon them, and the preservation of such as believed in Christ, it was discernible who were wicked, and who were righteous; indeed, at the last day, this difference will be more visible; in the bodies of the righteous, which will be raised glorious, when those of the wicked will not; in their souls, having on the wedding garment, the robe of Christ's righteousness, and perfectly holy; and in their situation, being set at Christ's right hand, and the wicked at his left; and by the characters that will be given of them by the Judge, and the different sentences passed and executed on them:

between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not; that is, between such persons that serve the Lord, and him only, privately and publicly, in righteousness and true holiness, in spirit and in truth, with faith and fervency, with reverence and fear, heartily and willingly, seeking his glory, without any dependence on their services; and those that are ungodly, or only outwardly serve the Lord, for sinister ends, and with selfish views, and according to their own inventions, and the traditions of men, and not the will of God, as the Scribes and Pharisees; between whom, and Christ's sincere disciples and followers, the awful day, described in the next chapter (~~3001~~ Malachi 4:1-6), will make a manifest difference.