

10 Reasons [Malachi 3:8-12](#) Does **NOT** Mean God Will Always Bless Us Financially if We Tithe

Malachi 3:8-12 (NIV):

“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. ‘But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ ‘In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. 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.’ ‘I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit, says the Lord Almighty. ‘All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land,” says the LORD of hosts.”

Many prosperity preachers will tell you this verse means that as long as you tithe your money to God (typically via your donations to their particular “ministry”), then God will materially or financially “bless you back.” While this is a fun idea and we’d all like for this to be true, it is a misrepresentation of the meaning of this passage. These prosperity preachers are lying to you in order to get you to give them your money. Please don’t. We know they are manipulating this passage for at least ten reasons:

- 1) Just because God told these people in Malachi to “**Test me in this**” doesn’t mean we should always feel free to test God in this same way.**

This is the only place in Scripture where God commands His people to test him in the area of finances. In fact, God commands His people to test him only twice in the entire Bible - here and in [Isaiah 7:12](#), where Ahaz is encouraged to ask for a sign to confirm the prophet’s word. These facts alone should make us cautious to try to reproduce this same test at will today. Additionally, there are many other cases in Scripture where we are told it is wrong and dangerous to test God – especially if we are doing it in an attitude of complaining, rebellion, or unbelief ([Exodus 17:2–7](#); [Numbers 14:22](#); [Deuteronomy 6:14–18](#); [Psalm 78:17–19, 40-42, 56-58; 95:8–9; 106:6–29](#)).

While the idea of *God testing man* is rather common in the OT ([Genesis 22:1](#); [Psalm 11:5; 26:2; 66:10; 81:8, 81:7; 139:23; Proverbs 17:3](#)), the idea of *man testing God* is very rare. *When it happens in Scripture, it is always an unusual and special circumstance.* The example of Gideon is another unique situation ([Judges 6:36-40](#)) where a man is allowed to test God. This also was a unique occurrence, not one that we should all seek to replicate whenever we want.

Considering the rarity of testing God in Scripture, as well as the passages that speak about the danger of testing God, readers should view this test in [Malachi 3:8-12](#) as a unique act

on God's part. By no means is this an open-ended promise to bless in a material way anyone and everyone who tithes their possessions.

2) Just because God once told someone to do something in Scripture, that doesn't mean God wants all people forever to do that same thing.

While many of the commands of Scripture are applicable to all times and people, many of them are not. For example, in **Mark 6:8-9** when Jesus is sending the twelve disciples out on a journey, Jesus commands them, “**Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic.**” Why then, when Christians go out to share the Gospel, do we not also pick up our staffs, wear sandals, and make sure to leave any food, purses or money at home? *Because we know that this command to the disciples is not a command for everyone at all times.* Jesus was trying to teach His disciples to trust God and not themselves, so He asked them to do something special. For us to make this a rule for all people everywhere would be for us to take this command out of context and give it a meaning that is inappropriate. The same is true of **Malachi 3:8-12**. While God did give this command to His people in Malachi, God did not command all people at all times to do this same thing.

3) The “Floodgates of heaven” language in **Malachi 3:10 always refers to literal rain, not to general material prosperity.**

This same language referring to abundant rainfall occurs both in the context of a curse when God initiates the flood in **Genesis 7:11** by “**opening up the floodgates of heaven**” as well blessing, like in **Deuteronomy 28:12** which says, “**The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands...**” When this language is utilized, it refers to rain in a parched land. The same is true in **Malachi 3:8-12**. This promise is about rain, drought and famine, not about other material or financial blessings as **Malachi 3:11** makes clear, “**I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit, says the Lord Almighty.**” The blessing is explained right in the passage. If they pay their tithes, they will receive rain, the drought will end, and so will any famine. There is nothing of finances envisioned here, which is how the prosperity group reads this passage.

4) We can only view this verse as “a divine promise for receiving a blessing if we tithe” if we purposefully ignore the immediate context of this passage.

The commands in **Malachi 3:8-12** are specifically to West Semitic inhabitants of the Southern Levant. And specifically, to the priests and Levites in Judah who are living in sin, robbing God and experiencing drought and disease as a result. How are they robbing God?

Malachi Chapters 1-3 make this clear: We find out these religious leaders are giving God defiled sacrifices (1:7), they are teaching lies (2:7-8), they are arguing with one another (2:10) especially with their wives (2:14); they are profaning the Lord's sanctuary by marrying pagan idolaters (2:11); and they tolerate/practice sorcery, adultery, perjury, and economic exploitation of the defenseless (3:5). This saddens God. God tells them that while they are misbehaving, God nonetheless does not change (3:6). While God always keeps His promises, God's people often break theirs. God further indicts them in **Malachi 3:8** by telling them that they also rob God! How do they do this? By withholding tithes and offerings. Here we see withholding the tithes is *just one sin among many* that these leaders are committing and thus why the *whole nation* is "under a curse" (3:9).

In this context, the challenge to test God (3:10) by responding in obedience and bringing the required tithe was NOT a cause-and-effect formula for material blessing. It was a command to take the first step of obedience so the nation could get out from under the curse of all their sins! Malachi recognized that this robbery of God's tithe was merely a symptom of a more serious cancer. The stinginess of post-exilic Judah was rooted in apathy and unbelief. Only by returning to a posture of faith and reverence could the people experience God's presence and blessings.

Malachi understood that turning to God in spiritual renewal must begin somewhere, and he deemed the practical act of obedience to the Mosaic laws regulating the tithe to be an important first step in reasserting the community's fidelity in covenant relationship with Yahweh God. The leaders are cursed because of all the sins they are committing. To focus *only* on the tithe section is to ignore the broader message God is giving to His people throughout the entire book of Malachi.

5) The primary purpose of a tithe in Scripture is *never* simply for us to receive back a blessing. The primary purpose of a tithe is always to remind ourselves that Yahweh God is Lord and King!

This is true of the passage in Malachi, and it is true in the rest of Scripture. We know at the time of Malachi, it was a sin for the Israelites to withhold tithes because when God gave the Israelites the land of Canaan, He also wanted them to remember that it is God alone who supplies all their needs. This acknowledgment was to be expressed by the Israelites observing the Festivals, the Sabbath, and in their sacrifices, tithes and offerings (See the Books of **Numbers**, **Deuteronomy** and **Leviticus** for specifics). As **Deuteronomy 14:23** says, all of these commands are "**So that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always.**" *These commands were given not so that God's people could be enriched materially, but so that they would remember their*

strength is in God, not in anyone or anything else! If the land and its produce belonged to God as **Lev 25:23** declares, then all the more so did the tithe. Therefore, when the Israelites withheld the tithe, this action amounted to robbing not only the poor but also God (cf. **Ps 51:4; Matt 25:45**). It meant primarily that they were not trusting in God but were instead selfishly taking measures into their own hands. Tithing has always meant to remind us that God is in charge, it is NOT meant to be a way to get God to give us even more financial rewards.

6) Christians have a different relationship with the Old Testament tithe now that Christ has come.

Tithing was a very old custom in the ancient world. Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians and Canaanites all practiced tithing before Israel became a nation. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were commanded to give three primary types of tithes. One for the Levites, one for the Eucharistic meal, and one called the “tithe of the poor” (**Deuteronomy 14:28-29** and **26:12**) which was taken every three to five years of a seven-year cycle. All-together, Israelites were expected to give in between 22-27% of their income every year to the tithe. This is important historical context. Before we embrace **Malachi 3:8-12** as an exhortation for all people throughout all the ages, we should acknowledge what sort of commitment it would require of us if we were willing to follow that law again. We should determine if it’s even possible, let alone wise, to try and follow those same laws today in 21st century America.

Since tithing is a part of the Old Testament “gifts and offerings” system we should explore how our relationship to that system is now different. It is obvious to most that one cannot simply apply directly to new covenant believers all the laws, directives, warnings, and incentives given to Israel under the old covenant. D. Dorsey has argued, for example, that “the collection of 613 regulations comprising God’s covenant with ancient Israel is not intended to legally govern the Church forever.” So what does the New Testament command regarding the old system of laws, sacrifices, tithes and offerings?

As the New Testament makes clear, because of Jesus, the believer’s relationship to the old covenant law is now different. This is shown, for example, by the instruction the Apostle Peter receives from God to “**kill and eat**” and not to “**call anything impure that God has made clean**” (**Acts 10:13–15**). Also by the apostolic church’s rejection of the proposal that “**the Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses**” (**Acts 15:5**). Furthermore, Paul asserted that the Christian is “**not under law but under grace**” (**Romans 6:14**; also **Galatians 5:18; 1 Corinthians 9:20**), that he has “**died to the law**” and been “**released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code**” (**Romans 7:4, 6**; also **Galatians 2:19**). Christ has made peace and created “**one new man**” of Jew and Gentile

by, “destroying the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations” (Ephesians 2:14–16).

Furthermore, the New Testament church believed they were under a new covenant (1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6–11). They even changed their worship to be on the first rather than the last day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2). The author of Hebrews declared that Christ’s death on the cross instituted a new priestly order and that “when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law” (Hebrews 7:12). He also described the new covenant as “superior to the old one” and pointed out from Jeremiah 31:31–34 that “by calling this covenant ‘new,’ God has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear” (Hebrews 8:6, 13). The “gifts and offerings” under the old covenant “are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order” (Heb 9:9–10). The stipulations of the Old Testament ceremonial law are only a shadow of what was to come in Christ (Colossians 2:17 and Hebrews 10:1). As such they are not meant to be clung to for all time. Jesus came not to abolish the law, but to “fulfill it.” (Matthew 5:17).

As Hans Brandenburg rightly reminds us, the Old Testament law declares one day out of seven to be holy unto the Lord, while the Spirit in the New Testament sanctifies all seven of them. The law sets apart one tribe out of twelve to be priests, the Spirit declares that the whole congregation has to fulfill the priestly office (1 Pet. 2:9). The law demands a tenth part of his people’s possessions, the Spirit translates us to become God’s possession with all that we have. Because of Christ, everything of ours belongs to God. We are but stewards not of a tenth, but of all we possess. The Old Testament “Ten percent – tithe” rule is for the New Testament Christian like training wheels are to a bike. It guides us as we learn to give, but eventually, the training wheels can be taken off. Attention to redemptive history makes it clear that we are not to cling to the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament now that Christ has died, was buried, and rose from the dead.

7) The New Testament never commands people to tithe.

Only four Chapters in the New Testament mention the tithe – and none of them command God’s people to do it. Matthew 23:23 and its parallel, Luke 11:42, are the most important references. In these two passages, Jesus *chastises* the Pharisees who have given their tithe, but have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness (Compare with Micah 6:8). In Luke 18:12 the tithe is also brought up by Jesus in a parable. In this parable, the Pharisee thought he was special since he “fasted twice a week and gave a tenth of all he got.”

In contrast, the tax collector stands at a distance and simply begs God for mercy. Jesus concludes the parable by saying that it was the tax collector, not the Pharisee who will go home justified by God. *The central truth here is that humility is more pleasing to God than a haughty performance of religious duties such as fasting or giving a tithe.* The last passage to bring up a tithe in the New Testament is **Hebrews Chapter 7** where Abraham is described as giving Melchizedek a tithe (7:2). In this passage, the author is simply making the point that Jesus is a better priest than Aaron was because Jesus is in the line of Melchizedek. So, if we are never given a command to tithe in the New Testament, we should be hesitant before we assume the commandment in **Malachi 3:8-12** is for all believers.

8) The motivation for giving money to God in the New Testament is different than what prosperity preachers say our motivation should be.

Prosperity preachers use **Malachi 3:8-12** to tell us that we should give God our money so we can get more money back. But the New Testament never condones this attitude. Throughout the New Testament we see that our generosity is to be an expression of love from a regenerated and redeemed heart (See especially **2 Corinthians Chapters 8-9**). **2 Corinthians 9:7** has become the new updated standard for giving which says, “**So let each one of us give as we purpose in our hearts, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.**” Our motivation for giving should be our happiness for what Christ has done, not as an attempt to get God to give us more stuff.

9) Elsewhere in Scripture we are told NOT to put our hope in riches. So to take **Malachi 3:8-12 and attempt to use it to amass more wealth for ourselves is a direct disobedience to other passages of Scripture.**

Four Scripture passages should illustrate this point sufficiently:

- **Proverbs 30:8b-9:** “Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”
- **Philippians 4:11:** I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

- **Matthew 6:20:** But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.
- **Colossians 3:1-4:** Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

10) In Malachi 3:8-12 God wants people to have much more than material wealth

Malachi 3:12 concludes by showing WHY God is commanding His people to test Him and tithe in the first place. It says, "**Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,**' says the LORD Almighty." All of this testing and tithing is not only so His people would receive rain and protection from drought and plagues. There is more. These immediate blessings are simply a means to something better!

More important than all the promised blessings of rainfall and protection from drought and pestilence is this: If God's people would simply obey God's commands, then something amazing would happen: The peoples of other nations would see how good and beautiful it is to be God's people, and they would come and follow Yahweh God! *Giving a tithe in Malachi 3:8-12 was a form of mission! It was a way for the Israelites to expand God's Kingdom!*

The sad ending to Malachi is that God's people do not take the test. They ignore God, the nations do not see God through His people, and it takes 400 years of silence before Jesus comes to fulfill every law the Israelites disobeyed. It seems proper to end by reminding ourselves of the New Testament commandment to have the same mindset of Christ Jesus:

"...He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name..." (Philippians 2:7-9).

Instead of obeying **Malachi 3:8-12** in hopes for God to give us more stuff, let's humble ourselves, take up our cross, and follow the example of Jesus – no matter the cost!