

June 16, 2021

Stout Against God

This is the first in a series of meditations on **Malachi 3:13-18**. Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament. It is the final message to God's people before the four hundred silent years leading up to the birth of Christ. About one hundred years prior to the prophecy of Malachi, a remnant of Israelites returned from the Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel the master builder and Ezra the priest. Haggai and Zechariah the prophets encouraged the people in the work until the temple was completed. Later Nehemiah oversaw the rebuilding of the city walls and a subsequent spiritual reviving. The book of Malachi reveals the conditions in the nation of Israel to be essentially the same as they were in the days of Nehemiah whose work concluded about ten years earlier. At this time, the nation of Israel consisted of a remnant of all twelve tribes and is treated as a single nation, unlike the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah prior to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Following the rebuilding of the temple, Israel had returned to an outward form of worship, but inwardly they were still in spiritual darkness.

Beginning in verse 13, the Lord confronts the nation with their rebellious spirit and speech. He says, "Your words have been stout against me." The word stout means to fasten, seize, or be strong, to withstand. Keep in mind that words are a window to the heart. Matthew 12:34 says, "...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Our words are simply the outward expression of the heart. As men, we cannot see or know another man's heart, but we can hear their words and thus discern the condition of the heart. The nation denied the Lord's accusation, declaring "What have we spoken so much against thee?" How foolish to deny our sin when standing before the judge who knows our deepest thoughts, motives, and actions. Nothing is hidden from God. While we may try and hide or excuse our sin, God will reveal it for what it is, rebellion against God.

Consider our own nation today. In what ways is the message of our nation, stout against God? What are some common themes or messages being proclaimed in America today and what do these themes reveal about the spiritual condition of our nation? According to **Psalm 9:17**, what will happen to any nation that turns its back on God? According to **Isaiah 17:9-10**, why was Israel a desolation? Consider the following passages of Scripture, noting the consequences of forgetting God, **Jeremiah 2:32-37; 3:21-22; 13:24-26; 18:15-17** and **Ezekiel 22:12-13; 23:35**. The consequences for forgetting God or turning from God are very grave, not only for a nation, but also for the individual. In what ways are we as a nation guilty of forgetting God? In what ways have you as an individual forgotten God?