

June 23, 2021

Israel's Complaint

In Malachi 3:13, we saw that Israel's words were stout against God. Do you remember what the word stout means? In verse 14, we see three things that Israel was guilty of saying. Read **Malachi 3:13-15**. The Lord was reminding Israel of what they had said. Whether they spoke outwardly or in their heart only is of no importance. God knows the thoughts and intents of the heart. He knows when we murmur and complain inwardly as well as outwardly. What are some complaints you have thought this week at home, at work, or at school, but may not have expressed outwardly? Do you think God was pleased?

Israel's first complaint was, "It is vain to serve God." The word vain means empty or worthless. They considered their service to God to be a waste of time, money, resources, and effort. They failed to see any way in which they profited from serving God. What fallacies do you see in their thinking? We do not serve God out of duty or for a reward. Our service is to be an outward expression of our love for God. God is omnipotent. Job 21:15 says, "What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?" God does not need us to accomplish His purpose. It is a blessing that God has chosen to allow us to serve Him especially when we consider our own unworthiness as sinners to serve a holy God. If our service is not for our profit, why should we serve God? What is the point? According to **Malachi 1:6**, what had Israel failed to do? What were Israel's faults in **Malachi 2:17** and **Malachi 3:8**? In what ways are we as a nation guilty of the same faults?

Israel's second complaint was, "What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance?" An ordinance is a rule of law. In what way is it possible to obey a law without truly being obedient? Israel was following the letter of the law, but not the spirit of the law. As a result, God withheld His blessing. Sometimes when people go through a difficult trial, they will turn to God in hopes of gaining His favor, but when the trial is past or they don't get what they want, they return to their old ways. How did Paul deal with this attitude in the churches of Galatia, **Galatians 7-10**? God promises we will reap what we sow, but the seed sown takes time to mature into fruit to be harvested. When a person turns from a life of sin and worldliness to serve the Lord, it takes time before they begin to reap the blessing of spiritual fruit. Unfortunately, some turn away from God before reaping the benefits of serving God.

Israel's third complaint was, "What profit is it that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" The heart of the problem is one of impure motives. Outward repentance, mourning, or fasting means nothing if the heart is not sincere. God is not impressed with outward religion. According to **Psalms 34:18** and **Psalms 51:16-17**, what is God looking for? If a person's heart is right, what will their attitude be toward the Lord, **Malachi 3:16; 4:2**? Take time this week to meditate upon the fear of the Lord from these verses: **Psalms 111:10, Proverbs 1:7,29; 2:1-5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26-27; 15:16,33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; and 23:17**. Make a list of all the principles found in these verses that relate to fearing the Lord.