

Bible Studies

Malachi Chapter 1

Malachi means 'my angel' or 'my messenger'. It could be a real name or a pseudonym. Malachi wrote at the very end of the Old Testament period after the Israelites had returned from exile in Babylon. About the time of Nehemiah. Malachi's job is to tell the people some truths about themselves, truths they did not want to hear. You may not want to hear them either.



Read Malachi 1v1-5

"I have loved you," says the LORD. Malachi 1:2

Perhaps Malachi is thinking of Jeremiah's words:

The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness. Jeremiah 31:3

Why do you think the people needed to hear this at this time?

Do we need to be reminded of God's love?

How did the people respond?

What do you think this response shows?

Either they did not see God's love for them, or they did not like the way God showed them His love.

What response should we show to God's love for us?

What do you think stopped them from seeing God's love?

Just because they did not feel God's love, does not mean he did not love them, or that He was not demonstrating his love. Perhaps they thought the problems and difficulties they faced proved that God didn't love them. (God seemed to think the problems they faced were due to their disobedience.)



How does God show that He loves us?

Is God's discipline an expression of His love? Hebrews 12v6

What might stop us from receiving or accepting God's love?

Read 1 John 4v16, 1 John 3v1, Romans 5v8z

"If you really loved me you would..." Is this a good attitude to use with God?

God chooses some strange evidence of His love. *Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated.* Jacob and Esau were Isaac's two sons. Esau is described as worldly and godless.

Did God really hate Esau?

Does God hate people?

God is not noted for hate. Hate does not quite have the meaning here that we would normally ascribe to it. To understand the meaning compare Luke 14v26 with Matthew 10:37. Theses record the same words of Jesus.

How does Matthew explain what hate means here?

In this passage, to love means, to choose. God chose Jacob over Esau. (this does not mean that God hated Esau, after all He blessed him substantially.) Paul quotes this passage in Romans 9v10-15 and again applies it to God's act of choosing us.

The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you... Deut 7:7

How does this apply to us?

To complicate matters, God is not talking about Jacob and Esau, but their descendents Israel and Edom. Edom and Israel were natural enemies. The Edomites had gloated when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and exiled it's people. Psalm 137v7. This was an insult that festered. God is saying, *"you may have been destroyed, but look I have reestablished you. Edom is destroyed and however hard they may try they will not be restored."* God uses this as an illustration of His ongoing love for Israel.

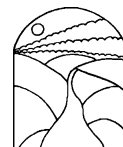
In a sense God is saying, *'it is the final outcome that will prove my love'*. This is true for us. However hard things might be now, however much we suffer, our destiny is God's eternal blessing in heaven.

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When we question God's love for us, we need to lift up our eyes and see the big picture. The first truth Malachi tells them is that their attitude to God is wrong



Malachi 1v6-14

**What is due to a father? What is due to a master? What is due to God?
What is God's complaint against His people?
Who has led the way in this?**

What was the people's response to this truth?

It is possible that they were so far from where they should be, that they did not even know what that they were doing was wrong. Or maybe they did not want to own up to any more than they had too! It's hard to believe that it was an honest question.

What is the difference between an honest question and an evasive question?

What were the people doing that showed their contempt for God?

Why was it wrong to bring defiled animals?

Firstly the regulations of sacrifice forbade people bringing inferior animals. But secondly it showed the people's attitude towards God. As if anything would do.



What attitude to God did these offerings show?

What response would the governor have?

Will such second rate offerings bring God's blessing?

Why did Malachi call for the temple to be closed?

Does this mean that God did not want sacrifices?

This theme comes up through out the, the sacrifice is only as good as the attitude of the person bringing it. God is not against their sacrifices, He commanded them to be brought, He is against their attitude.

How does all this apply to us?

Where do we give the Lord second best?

Through out this passage Malachi has examined the people's relationship with God by comparing it with human relationships, (father, master, governor.) The way we treat people shows our attitude towards them, how we value them. Yet we deny this in our relationship with God, we say we love God but the things we do paint another picture.

They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. Titus 1:16

What do your actions say about your attitude to God?

What do you think Malachi 1v11 predicts?

What are the 'incense' and 'pure offerings' it refers to?

"But you profane it by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled', and of its food, 'It is contemptible.' And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty. "When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD. Malachi 1:12-13

How has this attitude found its way into church?

Do I have to pray? Do I have to read my Bible? Do I have to go to Church? What a burden.

What attitude are you showing to the Lord when you say these things?



Paul accuses the Corinthians defiling God's table in the way they treat each other during communion. 1 Corinthians 11v17-23

If you have a job to do in Church, setting up, teaching Sunday School etc.

Is it a sacrifice or a privilege?

It is both, the question is which do you see it as being, a burden or a joy?

If your service for God is being done with the wrong attitude, what should you do?

God and the enemy have an answer to this question. The enemy says 'quit, if you are doing it with a wrong attitude you are better not to do it'. God's answer says "get your attitude right". This is also true in worship, "I do not feel like worshipping the Lord therefore my worship is defiled." Or "I don't feel like worshipping God but I will do so because I honour Him." I believe the latter attitude makes the worship, or the service all the more acceptable.



Will you give God your best, not your second best?

What will you do that shows you honour God?

Bible Studies

Malachi Chapter 2



Read Malachi 2v1-9

Malachi turns his attention to the priests. Who is he talking too? Obviously the priests of his time, but Israel was called to be a priestly nation for the world. Today, you could apply this to pastors, but the Scriptures teach that all believers are priests. 1 Peter 2v9, Rev 1v6. So it also applies to all of us.

What two things did the priests not do?

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How do we listen?

How do we set it in our hearts to honour God?

I suspect listening is more than trying to hear God's voice, I suspect it means obeying what God has commanded. It is not so much a question of seeking personal direction from God as it is studying His word and living by it.

Setting your heart to honour God, is an attitude of heart. It is a way to live, as much as a set of actions.

What should people see when they look at priests?

Devotion, dedication, a representative of God. Above all higher standards. People who act differently, people who live differently.



Read Ezekiel 36v22-23

Paul paraphrases this by saying *As it is written. "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" Romans 2:24.* **How might we do this?**

When the world looks at us and sees a reflection of itself, what good will it do?

When the world looks at us and sees a reflection of Jesus, what good will it do?

If we are priests how should we behave?

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:35

If we gossip, if we are half hearted, If we are sinful.

What will they know then?

What will the Lord do because of the way the priests are acting?

What would this mean in modern terms?

Why will He do this? V4

As always God's discipline is not to destroy but to correct, that the covenant might continue.

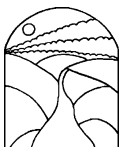
According to this passage what are the responsibilities of a Priest?

V1		
V2		
V5		
V6		
V7		

The messenger of the Lord v7, uses the same word from which the book takes it title. cf 3v1

Do you see two groups of things in this list.

Listening, reverence and honouring, all relate to God. Teaching and being an example all relate to man. Our priestly function towards men relies on our relationship to God, listening and honouring.



How do you get an instructed tongue? Isaiah 50v4

From early times it was the job of the Priest to teach the Law, in order that people would know what God required of them.

Is this still our job? How should we do it?

What happens when the Church teaches things that cause men to stumble? v8-9

An example of this would be when we lessen God's standards by telling people that what they are doing is OK, when the Bible says it is wrong.

We need to be a people that will listen to God, but we also need to be a people who will honour and revere Him.

What effect will honouring God have in our lives?

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Proverbs 9:10

If the fear of the Lord is not in our lives we will not function as priests.



Read Malachi 2v10-16

This section is about breaking faith.

Why does Malachi emphasis that we have one father and one creator?

He wants to emphasis our equality before God. That what we do to one another matters, because One God made us all, and we are equally important to Him.

Who has Judah broken faith with?

They have gone against God's commands and have married foreign wives. Deut 7v3. If you read Nehemiah you will find this was a major problem.

Historically what had been the result of marrying foreign wives?

The reason God forbade intermarriage was that it inevitably led the people into idol worship and unfaithfulness to God. The same problem still exists today. 2 Cor 6v14.

How did intermarriage desecrate the sanctuary?



Why were the people weeping at the altar?

Why was God not hearing them?

Is this still true today? 1 Peter 3:7

Obeying God is still more important that sacrifice.

It is possible that some people in Malachi's day, were separating from their wives, so that they could marry younger or richer foreign wives.

Why do you think God found this abhorrent?

How do you break faith with your marriage partner?

Obviously, this is referring to divorce. But I do not think it is only divorce. Adultery breaks faith, so do hard words and destructive actions. Anything that damages the trust between a couple.

At a marriage we always have witnesses, did you notice that God is a witness to the marriage covenant.



According to verse 15 what happens when you get married?

What are the Godly offspring God is looking for?

Why do you think God hates divorce?

Do you think God just hates divorce, or does He also hate the things we do that lead to it?

What does 'a man covering himself with violence upon his garment' mean?



Do you think your relationship with your wife or husband effects your relationship with God?

So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith. Malachi 2v16

How are you going to do this?

Why does it say guard yourself in spirit?

If you are going to act against your wife, it will be because you have first sinned in your spirit. The attitude you hold towards your marriage and towards your wife.



What attitude did these people have?

What attitude should we have?

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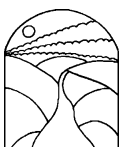
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What attitude should we have?

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Malachi Chapter 3

If you are looking for a title to the Book of Malachi, it would have to be honouring God.



Read Malachi 2v17- 3v5

This passages starts with the now familiar statement question formula.

What is Malachi's accusation against the people?

How do you weary God? God takes the art of patience to it's outer limits, wearying God is the spiritual equivalent of climbing Mt Everest or putting your elbow in your ear!

What do you think would weary God?

What were the people saying?



Effectively the people were saying 'God is pleased with people who do evil'. This is a serious accusation. It is understandable why God would get upset.

Is this accusation true?

Is it conceivable that the people would really accuse God of being evil?

At times of great emotional trauma people may make such an accusation. It seems more likely that the question they are addressing is one spoken in different voices and different words throughout the Bible and contemporary society.

If God is good why does He let evil people prosper? **Job 21v7, Habakkuk 1v2-4**

God's answers on this matter tend to be evasive and centre around; "Don't worry about them worry about yourself" For example Psalm 73v17-28 or Hab 2v4.

The New Testament gives us a lot more clues about why God sometimes lets the evil prosper.

What answer would you give to this question?

What answer does 2 Peter 3v9 give?

This is a Bible study in it's own right. For me, I learned it is foolish to question God's justice. The reason God was wearied, was not the question asked, as much as the people asking it.

From what we have learned so far what spiritual state were the people in?

It is one thing for the righteous to ask such a question, but these people were far from righteous.

If God judge the wicked, as the wicked, what was likely to happen to them?

It was the spiritual blindness and hypocrisy that wearied the Lord.

What was the Lord's answer to the people's complaint?

There are two jobs a prophet fulfils; he forthtells, he tells the people a message from God. And he foretells, he predicts the future. Malachi moves seamlessly from forthtelling to foretelling. See I will send my messenger. The word '*my messenger*' in Hebrew is Malachi.

Who is Malachi referring to here? Matthew 11v10

The messenger is John the Baptist, he will prepare the way before the Messenger of the Covenant,

Who is the messenger of the covenant? Hebrews 12v24, 9v15, 8v6

Who is speaking? Who is the Lord you seek? Whose temple does he enter?

God is speaking of the one who is to come, the Messiah, but the lines between the Messiah and the Lord Almighty are blurred. **How do you interpret this?**



The only credible way to explain this, is the belief in a triune God.

What does this passage tell us about when the Messiah would come?

The Messiah had to come while the temple was standing. It was destroyed 40 years after Jesus ascension.



What was the Messiah to do?

How did Jesus accomplish this? Read John 2v13-25

God's answer to man's wickedness was to send the messiah as an atoning sacrifice for their sins so that they too might be made righteous. He would come firstly to purify, but then to judge. The outcome would be the kind of sacrifices God wanted. These are in marked contrast to the sacrifices the people were bringing. 1v8-14. It is interesting that ever since the flood, God's actions have been to produce righteousness not to judge sin.

What two images are used to describe this purification?

How do they apply to us?

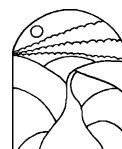
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Read Malachi 3v6-12

What was the only thing that kept God from destroying His people?

The issue was not who they were or what they had done, but who God is and what He has done. God's dealings with Israel are still characterised by this verse. God does not change He is eternal and immutable. It is this that causes Him to act in love and grace.

Read Romans 11v29, 2 Timothy 2v13



What will happen if the people return to God?

This again is a biblical principle, if we return to God he will return to us. God is not the problem, He does not change. It is not his lack of compassion or concern that causes Him to hide his face from people but their sin.

Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. Isaiah 59:1-2
Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. James 4v8

How were the people to return?

The issue Malachi addresses is that of tithing, but I think this is given only as an example. It is already clear that this was not the only issue the people had to deal with.

What other issues were there?

What is tithing? Leviticus 27v30 **What are offerings?**

So why did Malachi highlight tithes and offerings?

It is not enough for the people to return to God in words, their actions must show their commitment.



What attitude does bringing tithe show to God?

What did God say the people were doing by not tithing?

Why is not tithing robbing God?

By tithing the people were showing their respect for God, they were honouring Him, obeying Him, trusting Him, committing to Him and worshipping Him. They were robbing God because everything we have belongs to God anyway. But they were also robbing Him of the things I have listed above, honour, worship etc.

Which of these do we not need to do?

The tithe, supported the priest, the temple and provided for the poor.

Which of these do we not need to do?

People often say tithing is an OT principle that is not sustained by the NT. I agree and disagree! It is true that we are not under the Law and consequently not duty bound to tithe. But the reasons to tithe remain the same. In the New Testament, Jesus and Paul taught extensively about the need to give, both to the poor and to the work of the kingdom.



Read Luke 11v42

What were the Pharisees doing that was wrong?

What were they doing that Jesus said should be done?

This is interesting because the Law did not require such small things to be tithed. The Pharisees were going beyond what the law required and Jesus commended them for it.



What was the result of the people failing to tithe?

What will happen if the people tithe?

The people would be blessed abundantly if they honoured God in this way, He would 'open the gates of heaven'. The implication is that currently they were being *negatively blessed*, they were under a curse, their fields were not even producing what they normally would. God did not curse them, they cursed themselves by their disobedience.

Malachi says that blessing comes from obedience. **Is this still true?**

Do you think the blessing from tithing are just financial?

Is everything that goes wrong in our lives caused by disobedience?

No, sometimes stuff just happens. We go through trials and difficulties even though we are obedient. For examples of this, look at the life of Job, or even of Paul.

Can you expect God's blessing if you do not obey Him?

God is a God of grace and sometimes He blesses us anyway, but we cannot presume upon this.

Should we tithe in order to receive God's blessing or out of obedience to Him?

Should we tithe?

Does the Church have the right to demand our tithe or pressure us to tithe?

I believe we should tithe. But I also believe it is wrong to pressure people, to use guilt to manipulate them, or to treat people differently according to whether they tithe or not. When it comes down to it you stand before God, you must decide for yourself.

Bible Studies

Malachi Chapter 4



Read Malachi 3v13-18

What harsh thing had the people said against God?

The Bible tells us that God's word *'judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart'* Hebrews 4v12. I doubt the people were going around saying; *'It is futile to serve God,'* but it did reflect their unarticulated thoughts, attitude, and lifestyle. This is true of most of the other statements the people make in Malachi. The prophet is exercising the message of knowledge/wisdom in his prophecy, revealing the thoughts of men's hearts. 1 Cor 12v8,14v25.



Is it futile to serve God?

No, it is never futile to serve God, God is our creator and we are obligated to worship Him, we were created for this purpose and fulfilling it, is the most rewarding thing possible.

Why is it not futile to serve God?

Why might it seem futile to serve God?

Although it needs to be stated, this misses the point. The statement was harsh but it was also true! This was their experience, this was what they lived, this was all they knew of God. It may be true of your experience too.

How do you serve God in futility?

"You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners Malachi 3:14"

From what we know of the people so far, how well were they serving God?

It is never futile to serve God, even when on the outside it may appear so, but it is very easy to serve God in futility. I pity these people, but I also empathise with them. I think most Christians have spent time in their camp! They know that faith in God is supposed to bring happiness, blessing and contentment, they see it in others. But for them it seems like a distant joke, always there, but always out of reach. This is very sad but very real for so many. It is also unnecessary.



Lets look at the people's track record.

They thought God did not love them and had given up on them. They failed to honour or respect God. They treated the Lord's table as a burden and defiled it with bad sacrifices. The priests had gone astray. Family life was a mess. They accused God of being pleased with evil. Their worship was in form not in spirit. And they lived in self-imposed poverty because they would not put God first.

Why was it futile to serve God?

Their faith was a total mess – no wonder it was futile. Futile is all it could be! The reason it was futile to serve God was because they were not serving Him!

They saw serving God as a burden, The psalmist, faced with the same set of requirements said *'I delight in your decrees'* Psalm 119v16. He knew they bought life and happiness. They lived under the law and the law served as a wall to keep them from God. Jesus is the door. If you treat the Christian life as a series of things Christians are *not allowed to do*, and a series of things they *must do*, then your experience of God is likely to be futile.

What basic misconception about serving God is found in verse 14?

They were serving God for what they could gain. Not out of love or even duty. For them it was a straight business deal. We serve God, He blesses us. God was never going to play this game.

When there seems to be no reward for serving God, should we still serve Him? Why?

What makes our service futile?



A half hearted faith will be a futile faith.
A lukewarm, indecisive, fence sitting, Sunday faith is only going to be futile.



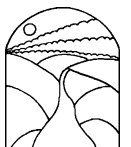
A short term faith is going to be a futile faith.
A coke machine, Santa Claus, faith is going to be futile.

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A sin riddled faith is going to be futile.
You will hit a 'glass ceiling' and you will not proceed until you deal with the sin.

4

A reluctant or cynical faith is going to be futile.
Serving God out of duty not love, God wants sons not slaves.

5

A faith exercised for gain will be futile.
God does not owe you anything, you owe Him everything.

6

A legalistic faith is going to be futile.
If I do this ... then God must do this... God is a God of grace not legalism.

7

A disobedient faith will be futile
If we will not obey Him how can our faith be rewarding?

8

An unfulfilled faith is going to be futile
One that is not put into practice – a 'low impact' faith.

What answer does God give to the peoples accusation?

What does 'those who feared the Lord spoke together' mean?

When will God spare them?

What distinction will God make?

It is interesting that God does not answer this accusation with a promise of blessing. Those who serve the Lord are going to go through hard times. But it is worth it for all that God has in store for us.



Read Malachi 4

This is a straight continuation of the above point.

What day is Malachi talking about?

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What distinction does God make between the righteous and the unrighteous?

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Who is the sun of righteousness?

Do you see the contrast, instead of going around like mourners they will leap like calves released from the stall.

If you refuse to serve the Lord now, what will the end result be?

What does Malachi 4v5 speak about?

It is fitting that the OT ends with a prediction of the opening of the NT. Like many of the Old Testament predictions, it contains elements of Jesus first and second coming.

How did Zechariah understand this passage? Luke 1v17

How did Jesus understand this passage? Matthew 17v10-13

It is as if Malachi identifies Jesus as the solution to the peoples futile faith and all their concerns about the wicked prospering. Jesus is God's provision of righteousness for His people. He is the instrument of God's grace and His judgment.

Do you think serving the Lord is futile?

In light of all this will you serve the Lord?

Bible Studies

Malachi Chapter 4



Read Malachi 3v13-18

What harsh thing had the people said against God?

The Bible tells us that God's word '*judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart*' Hebrews 4v12. I doubt the people were going around saying; '*It is futile to serve God,*' but it did reflect their unarticulated thoughts, attitude, and lifestyle. This is true of most of the other statements the people make in Malachi. The prophet is exercising the message of knowledge/wisdom in his prophecy, revealing the thoughts of men's hearts. 1 Cor 12v8,14v25.



Is it futile to serve God?

No, it is never futile to serve God, God is our creator and we are obligated to worship Him, we were created for this purpose and fulfilling it, is the most rewarding thing possible.

Why is it not futile to serve God?

Why might it seem futile to serve God?

Although it needs to be stated, this misses the point. The statement was harsh but it was also true! This was their experience, this was what they lived, this was all they knew of God. It may be true of your experience too.

How do you serve God in futility?

"You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners Malachi 3:14

From what we know of the people so far, how well were they serving God?

It is never futile to serve God, even when on the outside it may appear so, but it is very easy to serve God in futility. I pity these people, but I also empathise with them. I think most Christians have spent time in their camp! They know that faith in God is supposed to bring happiness, blessing and contentment, they see it in others. But for them it seems like a distant joke, always there, but always out of reach. This is very sad but very real for so many. It is also unnecessary.



Lets look at the people's track record.

They thought God did not love them and had given up on them. They failed to honour or respect God. They treated the Lord's table as a burden and defiled it with bad sacrifices. The priests had gone astray. Family life was a mess. They accused God of being pleased with evil. Their worship was in form not in spirit. And they lived in self-imposed poverty because they would not put God first.

Why was it futile to serve God?

Their faith was a total mess – no wonder it was futile. Futile is all it could be! The reason it was futile to serve God was because they were not serving Him!

They saw serving God as a burden, The psalmist, faced with the same set of requirements said '*I delight in your decrees*' Psalm 119v16. He knew they bought life and happiness. They lived under the law and the law served as a wall to keep them from God. Jesus is the door. If you treat the Christian life as a series of things Christians are *not allowed to do*, and a series of things they *must do*, then your experience of God is likely to be futile.

What basic misconception about serving God is found in verse 14?

They were serving God for what they could gain. Not out of love or even duty. For them it was a straight business deal. We serve God, He blesses us. God was never going to play this game.

When there seems to be no reward for serving God, should we still serve Him? Why?

What makes our service futile?



A half hearted faith will be a futile faith.

A lukewarm, indecisive, fence sitting, Sunday faith is only going to be futile.



A short term faith is going to be a futile faith.

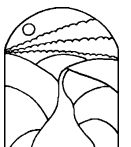
A coke machine, Santa Claus, faith is going to be futile.

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A sin riddled faith is going to be futile.
You will hit a 'glass ceiling' and you will not proceed until you deal with the sin.

4

A reluctant or cynical faith is going to be futile.
Serving God out of duty not love, God wants sons not slaves.

5

A faith exercised for gain will be futile.
God does not owe you anything, you owe Him everything.

6

A legalistic faith is going to be futile.
If I do this ... then God must do this... God is a God of grace not legalism.

7

A disobedient faith will be futile
If we will not obey Him how can our faith be rewarding?

8

An unfulfilled faith is going to be futile
One that is not put into practice – a 'low impact' faith.

What answer does God give to the peoples accusation?

What does 'those who feared the Lord spoke together' mean?

When will God spare them?

What distinction will God make?

It is interesting that God does not answer this accusation with a promise of blessing. Those who serve the Lord are going to go through hard times. But it is worth it for all that God has in store for us.



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