

Malachi 3:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?

Analysis

Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? After promising blessing for obedience (vv. 10-12), God confronts Israel's cynical speech. **Stout** (חֲזָקוּ, ḥazqu) means strong, harsh, or severe—from the verb חָזַק (ḥazaq) meaning to be strong or hard. Their words were harsh, defiant, even arrogant against God.

Once again the people respond with feigned innocence: **What have we spoken so much against thee?** (מָה־נִּדְבַּרְנוּ עֲלֶיךָ, mah-nidbarnu aleykha). The verb דָּבַר (davar) means to speak; the construction suggests ongoing conversation—they've been talking among themselves, questioning God's justice and fairness. This isn't a single outburst but habitual cynicism.

Their spiritual blindness continues the pattern from verses 7-8: "Wherein shall we return?" (v. 7), "Wherein have we robbed thee?" (v. 8), now "What have we spoken?" (v. 13). They're deaf to their own complaints and blind to their own sins. Verses 14-15 specify their grievances: they claim serving God is profitless and that the wicked prosper. This cynicism reveals hearts that view religion as transactional—serve God, get blessed; when blessing doesn't materialize (by their standards), they conclude God has failed. They don't recognize that their very complaints prove their hearts are far from Him.

Historical Context

The post-exilic community expected that returning from Babylon and rebuilding the temple would usher in messianic blessing and international glory (Haggai 2:6-9, Zechariah 8:20-23). When these expectations weren't immediately fulfilled, disillusionment set in. Economic hardship, delayed messianic hope, and surrounding nations' continued dominance led to cynical questioning of God's faithfulness and justice (Malachi 2:17, 3:14-15). They compared themselves to wicked neighbors who seemed to prosper without serving the LORD. This same temptation faces believers in every age—when obedience doesn't produce expected results, questioning God's goodness and justice. Asaph struggled with this (Psalm 73) until he entered God's sanctuary and understood the wicked's final destiny. The remedy for such cynicism is eternal perspective: recognizing that God's justice operates on His timeline, not ours, and that present suffering prepares future glory (Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 4:17).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does viewing faith transactionally ("I serve God, so He owes me blessing") corrupt genuine relationship with Him?
2. What cynical or complaining words about God might we speak without recognizing their spiritual danger?
3. How does eternal perspective (seeing beyond present circumstances to final judgment and glory) combat cynicism about God's justice?

Interlinear Text

וְהָיוּ have been stout H2388	עַל יְ H5921	דְּבָרֶיךָ Your words H1697	וְאָמַרְתֶּם Yet ye say H559	יְהוָה the LORD H3068	וְאָמַרְתֶּם Yet ye say H559	מֵה H4100
נִדְבַּר רָנוּ What have we spoken H1696	עֲלֵיךָ: H5921					

Additional Cross-References

Malachi 2:17 (Word): Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?

Isaiah 37:23 (Parallel theme): Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel.

Romans 9:20 (Parallel theme): Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

2 Thessalonians 2:4 (Parallel theme): Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.