

the rain in its season, and the land famished for lack of water; blight and famine were actually upon the land.

II. The Lord's Promise, 10-12.

Vs. 10-12. *Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse* (Rev. Ver.). Their "return", their "repentance", was to be a specific course of conduct, a "new obedience", as the Shorter Catechism (Ques. 87) puts it. "Whole" is emphatic: no part is to be kept back. *Into the storehouse*. The storehouse of the priests and Levites were chambers of the temple buildings, Neh. 10:39; 13:5, 6. *Meat* (food); provision for the priests and the sacrifices. *Prove me now herewith*; by faithfulness in the tithing. *Open you the windows of heaven*. Jehovah will send rain. He will remove the curse as soon as the people fulfil the condition of obedience to His law. *Not . . . room enough*. Until God's supply is exhausted, some take the meaning to be: that is, forever. *The devourer*. The locust is meant, next to drought the chief enemy of the Palestinian farmer (see Joel 1:4). *Neither . . . vine cast her fruit*; fail to ripen it. *Happy . . . a delightful land* (Rev. Ver.); prosperous because obedient to God.

III. The Lord's Challengers, 13-15.

Vs. 13-15. *Your words . . . stout*; violent and provoking. *Wherein . . . spoken . . . against thee* (Rev. Ver.)? The charge is boldly denied. These challengers of Jehovah now speak out their unbelief. *It is vain to serve God*; because, they allege, it is not true that those who serve Him enjoy the reward of prosperity. *Walked mournfully*; like men fasting, as a sign of their repentance for sin. *We call the proud happy*. It is those who live in haughty rebellion against God who seem to prosper, not those who humbly serve Him. *Work wickedness . . . built up* (Rev. Ver.). It is the evil-doers who succeed in life. *Tempt God . . . delivered*. Those who provoke and deserve God's judgment for their sin, say these bold challengers, nevertheless escape.

IV. The Lord's Servants, 16-18.

Vs. 16-18. *Then*; when they heard the words spoken against God. *They that feared the Lord*; the true worshipers of Jehovah, who looked to Him, not with the dread of slaves, but with a reverent love and trust like that of children. *Spake*, etc.; for God,

as others spake against Him. *Book of remembrance*; like the registers kept for Persian kings (see Esth. 6:1). *Mine*; God's own possession and the objects of His special care. *In the day that I do make* (Rev. Ver.); or "when I act" in judgment on the wicked. *Even a peculiar treasure* (Rev. Ver.); specially prized and guarded. *Spare them*, etc.; treat them with kindness, as true and loyal servants. *Then shall ye return*; spoken to the unbelievers: they will give up their unbelief when they see the Lord making a difference between the righteous and the wicked. (Compare Matt. 25:31-46.)

Ch. 4:1-3 describes in vivid language the day of testing and terror which is at hand for the wicked. But to the righteous, in that day the Sun of righteousness (the Messiah) will bring joy and peace.

Light from the East

TITHES—Giving a tenth of the annual increase of the field to the service of God was very ancient in all Semitic tribes. It has been thought that the first fruits (Lev. 23:10, 11) were the original form of this offering, but that at a later time it was changed to this definite proportion of the crop. In Numbers, the tithe is to be wholly given to the Levites, and they are to give a tenth of it to the priests. In Deuteronomy, it is to be taken to the central sanctuary and eaten by the offerer himself in the presence of Jehovah, although the Levite has a moral claim to share it. Every third year the tithe is kept at home and distributed in charity. In later Judaism the two tithes were exacted and also the tithe for charity every third year. After the Dispersion, all Jews over twenty years of age had to pay a tithe to support the temple. In every large city there was a receiving office for the sacred funds, and at fixed times Jews of noble birth were entrusted with the duty of carrying the money to Jerusalem. The result of this was the accumulation of an immense store of wealth at the central sanctuary. In the time of Pompey, after every expenditure had been lavishly met, there remained in the treasury two and a half millions of dollars in money and ten millions worth of precious vessels.