

tain age had been numbered, he commanded that the tribe of Levi should be numbered, and upon numbering them it was found that the firstborn of Israel outnumbered the Levites by two hundred and seventy-three, if I remember aright. The Lord had already stated that it was his intention to take the tribe of Levi instead of the firstborn of Israel, and when it was found that the firstborn outnumbered the Levites by two hundred and seventy-three he commanded that they should be redeemed, and that the redemption money should be handed over to the tribe of Levi.

These were very singular laws and ordinances, but God had a design in view in enforcing them. Everything he does is dictated by infinite wisdom, and when the people strictly complied with these laws and ordinances I have mentioned the Lord blessed them in all things, so much so that it became a proverb in the midst of Israel—"Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of thy increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses burst forth with new wine." When the people honored the Lord with their substance his blessings rested upon them and they were prospered. The palmer worm, blight, grasshopper and other evils which afflicted the land under some circumstances, were removed far from them. Their trees did not cast their fruit untimely, and they produced in abundance, and Israel prospered and waxed fat in the land. They spread abroad on the right hand and on the left, and the land teemed with fertility. There were times when Israel neglected this law, when they fell into idolatry, became careless and indifferent concerning the requirements of the Lord; when the tribe of Levi forsook the service of God and became idolaters; when the priests quit the service of

Jehovah, and the temples became desecrated and filled with rubbish. It was during one of these periods that Hezekiah came to the throne of his father Ahaz, who had allowed the ordinances of God to fall into disuse. He put aside the service of God and instituted in its stead idolatrous service. Tithing had been neglected, and when Hezekiah came to the throne, his heart being set in him to do right, he commenced to cleanse the temple, and to restore the ordinances of the house of God, and the ministers who had been set apart to this service he called back to its performance, and the people brought in their cattle, wine, oil, honey, and in fact a tithe of all their substance as well as freewill offerings unto the Lord; and when the king looked upon it, we are told, in the words which I have read, that he blessed the Lord and his people Israel, and upon inquiry of the chief priest he was told that, "since the people began to bring in the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty, for the Lord hath blessed his people." The Lord blessed them because they had complied with his requirements, and they were prospered. The land prospered under their cultivation, and it yielded its strength in abundance.

In connection with this I would like to read to you, my brethren and sisters, the remarks of Malachi. You are doubtless familiar with them, but they are words which can be read and pondered on time and time again, without any loss of interest in the subject. Says Malachi—

"Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept *them*. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?