

## Tithing Or Giving A Tenth

'Melchizedek king of Salem (Jerusalem) brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High. He blessed Abram and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all he had' (Genesis 14:18 to 20).

The Lord God appeared to Jacob in a dream, which caused Jacob to vow, "This stone I have set up for a pillar will be God's house. Of all You will give me I will surely give to God's house. Of all that You will give me I will surely give the tenth to You" (Genesis 28:22).

These two first references to tithing or giving a tenth were instigated willingly, first by Abraham then by his grandson Jacob who was later renamed Israel after whom the land of Israel and the nation of Israel were named. There was no request from God to give the tithe but from the time the Children of Israel set themselves up in the land that became Israel, they were obliged to give a tenth of their income to the Levitical priests. Tithing became incorporated into the laws of Moses. 'Melchizedek King of Salem, priest of God Most High who met Abraham ... and blessed him, to whom Abraham divided a tenth part of all he had (being the first to receive tithes). Consider how great this man was to whom even Abraham the Patriarch gave a tenth out of the best spoils. The sons of Levi who received the priest's office have a commandment to take tithes from the (Jewish) people according to the law (of Moses) ... Melchizedek accepted tithes from Abraham and has blessed Abraham who has the promises (of God) ... Here people who (naturally) die receive tithes but there is One Who receives tithes of Whom it is testified He lives (forever). We can say that through Abraham even Levi, who receives tithes, has paid tithes, for he was yet in the body of his forefather Abraham when Melchizedek met him' (Hebrews 7:1 to 10). The name Melchizedek means King of Righteousness and King of Peace (Hebrews 7:2).

The first 10% of our income is considered holy and already belongs to God. If we make a profit out of our tithe, we must give the Lord an extra 5%. 'All the tithe of the land whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees is God's. It is holy to God. If a man redeems anything of his tithe, he will add a fifth part to it. All the tithe of the herds or the flocks, the tenth will be holy to God' (Leviticus 27:30 to 32).

The Levites were the priests consecrated by the Lord for His service. The Levites did not inherit land nor did they have to grow grain or farm animals to gain their income because they worked full time for the Lord. Eleven tribes had to grow crops or farm animals to survive but for the Levites, God waved the responsibility of farming. He ordered the Levites be provided for from the tithes of the congregation. The Levitical priests then tithed from their income of tithes, which was called the 'wave offering'. 'To the children of Levi, behold I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance in return for their service, even the service of the Tent of Meeting' ... The tithe of the Children of Israel, which they offer as a wave offering to God, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance ... Among the children of Israel they will have no (land) inheritance. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, "Speak to the Levites and tell them, when they take from the Children of Israel, the tithe that I have given you from the Israelites for your inheritance, they will offer up a wave offering of it for the Lord, a tithe of the tithe. Their wave offering will be reckoned to them as though it were the grain of the threshing floor and as the fullness of the winepress. Thus they will offer a wave offering to God of all your tithes, which they receive from the Children of Israel and of it, they will give God's wave offering to Aaron the priest' (Numbers 18:21, 24 to 28).

The instructions regarding tithing were clear. They had to bring their tithes to the meeting place of God's choice and they were forbidden to eat some of their tithes before leaving their homes so the priests and the congregation enjoyed the entire provision of the tithes. 'You will bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the wave offering of your hand, your vows and your freewill offerings ... To the place the Lord your God will choose, to cause His name to dwell there, there you will bring all that I command you, your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the wave offering of your hand and all your choice vows which you vow to the Lord ... You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain, or of your new wine, or of your oil, or the firstborn of your herd or of your flock, nor any of your vows which you vow, nor your freewill offerings, nor the wave offering of your hand' (Deuteronomy 12:6, 11, 17).

As their income increased, so the people had to increase their tithes. They had to save their increase for three years before giving it to the priests. One verse here infers tithing brings with it the fear of the Lord, or a respectful awe of our Creator and Provider. 'You will surely tithe all the increase of your produce that comes forth from the field year by year. You will eat before the Lord your God in the place He will choose to cause His name to dwell there. The tithe of your grain, of your new wine, of your oil and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock so you may learn to fear the Lord your God always ... At the end of every three years you

will bring forth all the tithe of your increase in the same year and will lay it up within your gates' (Deuteronomy 14:22, 23 & 28).

The Lord expects people to tithe faithfully. Tithes are the first tenth, which already belong to the Lord. Offerings are what we give after our tithe is paid. Tithes are an obligation but offerings are a 'freewill' offering from the heart and are not part of the obligation as tithes are (Exodus 35:29). 'Hezekiah commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion to the priests and the Levites so they might obey the law of the Lord. As soon as the commandment came abroad, the Children of Israel gave in abundance the first fruits of grain, new wine, oil, honey, the increase of the field and the tithe of all things they brought in abundantly. The Children of Israel and Judah, who lived in the cities of Judah also brought in the tithe of cattle and sheep and the tithe of dedicated things which were consecrated to the Lord their God and laid them in heaps ... They brought in the tithes and offerings and the dedicated things faithfully' (2 Chronicles 31:4 to 6 & 12).

When the Children of Israel were building their second temple, the people gave their tithes and offerings willingly and without reservation. Musicians and singers were included with the priests as recipients of tithes. 'We should bring the first fruits of our dough, our wave offerings, the fruit of all manner of trees, the new wine and the oil to the priests to the rooms of the house of our God, and the tithes of our ground to the Levites for they, the Levites, take the tithes in all the cities from the tillage of our land. The priest will be with the Levites when the Levites take tithes and the Levites will bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, into the treasure house' (Nehemiah 10:37 & 38). 'On that day were men appointed over the rooms for the treasures, for the wave offerings, for the first fruits and for the tithes, to gather into the rooms, according to the fields of the cities, the portions appointed by the law for the priests and Levites' (Nehemiah 12:44). 'The priest had prepared a great room where before they laid the meal offerings, the frankincense, the vessels, the tithes of the grain, the new wine and the oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, the singers and the porters, and the wave offerings for the priests ... Judah brought all the tithe of the grain, the new wine and the oil to the treasuries' (Nehemiah 13:5 & 12). The great rooms were the storehouses where the various types of food was stored for the people like supermarkets are today. The following verses infer the people received their food when they gathered together in the house of God. If we refuse to tithe, God considers that to be stealing from Him because the first tenth is holy and is already His. If we refuse to tithe, we bring a financial curse down upon ourselves. "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob Me! You ask, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with the curse (of poverty and financial stress) because you rob Me ... Bring the whole tithe (the entire amount) into the storehouse so there may be food in My house and test Me now in this," says the Lord, "If I will not open to you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing so there will not be room enough for it all. I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes and he will not destroy the fruits of your ground neither will your vine cast its fruit before its time in the field," says Lord' (Malachi 3:8 to 11). When we tithe our entire correct tenth of our income, the Lord will rebuke the enemy that brings poverty and financial stress. The Lord will meet our financial needs but that does not necessarily mean we will become wealthy.

If we are on a fixed income like a pension for example, tithing will not make us wealthy. The Lord will provide our needs as He has promised but poor people will always struggle financially even if we do tithe. 'The poor will never cease out of the land, therefore I command you saying, "You will surely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and to your poor in your land" (Deuteronomy 15:11). Jesus reiterated this fact. "You will always have poor among you" (Matthew 26:11). People who are fit, healthy and young enough to be able to work and earn money can become wealthy but if we are aged, ill, unable to increase our meagre income, we will remain poor. Tithing does not change that fact. The story Jesus told confirms this. Lazarus was a desperately poor man who had to resort to begging for food. He was also very ill and thus could not work. He died and went to heaven. 'There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. A beggar named Lazarus was laid at the rich man's gate, full of sores. Lazarus desired to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Yes, even the dogs came and licked his sores. Lazarus died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades (or hell), he lifted up his eyes being in torment and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side' (Luke 16:19 to 23). This poor, sick man named Lazarus did not suddenly become wealthy. He died! The misleading, 'Prosperity Teaching' tells people if they are not wealthy, then there is something wrong with their walk with God. That teaching is so wrong. Poor Lazarus obviously had a correct walk with God and went to heaven. The prosperous man went to hell. Obviously the 'Prosperity Teaching' is giving out information that is the complete opposite of scripture.

When we give, we are not to give out of religious duty but with a sense of respect for the Lord. Jesus strongly rebuked the religious leaders for tithing with the wrong attitude. "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You tithe mint, dill and cumin, and have left undone the more important matters of the law like justice, mercy and faith. You ought to have done these things but not left the other things undone'

(Matthew 23:23). 'Jesus told this parable to certain people who were convinced of their own righteousness and who despised all others. "Two men went up into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed to himself like this, 'God I thank you I am not like the rest of men, extortioners, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far away would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his chest saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:9 to 14). Notice the self-righteous Pharisee was not praying to God, he was praying to himself.

After Jesus came and the Lord set up churches, tithing was established as God's way of paying priests and church ministers for their service and providing finance to increase the Kingdom of God. We can see by reading these above verses, tithing is God's only way of raising necessary funds to support people who work full time for the Lord. Church leaders in turn need to use the tithes and offerings to feed the poor and needy and not just provide large homes, expensive cars or private jets for themselves. When we give offerings, the Lord notices how much of our resources we have given. He does not look at the amount we give but rather He sees how much we have given in comparison with what we have. Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and saw how the multitude placed money into the treasury. Many who were rich gave a lot. A poor widow came and she gave two small coins. Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Surely I tell you, this poor widow gave more than all those who are giving into the treasury. They all gave out of their abundance but she, out of her poverty, gave all that she had to live on" (Mark 12:41 to 44). This poor woman gave all that she had but she did not suddenly become wealthy as the 'prosperity teachers' say.

The more we give, the more we receive. Even if we cannot donate money, we can offer other things to needy people like good used clothing, kitchenware we no longer use, time with people who need help, child care for over-stretched young mothers, we can offer to give someone a ride to church, we can help in the garden of an elderly person, we can buy a box of groceries for a needy family and there are all manner of various ways we can give. Whatever we give, we should give from the heart with a joyful attitude. 'Remember this, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. He who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Let each man give according as he has determined in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver' (2 Corinthians 9:6 & 7). We give tithes to the Lord for His purposes and we give offerings to each other in various ways. God does not mind what we give as long as we are not selfish with the abundance He has given to us.

We need to seek the Kingdom of God before anything else and when we do that, the Lord will provide us with what we need to survive. God has promised to meet our needs on earth and when we eventually go to heaven, all the things we have given on earth will be rewarded to us as eternal treasure in heaven. If our heart goes after material things, then God takes second place in our lives and we are not rich but are spiritually poor, but if God is our Lord, then material things are nothing more than items we use to make our lives comfortable. Jesus taught, "Those who lay up treasure for themselves are not rich toward God. I tell you, do not be anxious for your life, what you will eat nor for your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens. They do not sow, they do not reap, they have no warehouse or barn and God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than birds! Which of you by being anxious can add a centimetre to his height? If you are not able to do even the least things, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies and how they grow. They do not toil neither do they spin yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If this is how God clothes the grass in the field, which exists today and tomorrow is gone, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith? Do not seek what you will eat or drink, nor be anxious for the nations of the world (the unsaved) seek after all of these things but your Father knows you need these things. Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be given to you. Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. Sell what you have and give gifts to the needy. Make for yourselves purses that do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that do not fail, where no thief can steal nor can moth destroy, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also ... When you make a meal, do not call your friends or family nor rich neighbours, or perhaps they might return the favour and pay you back. When you make a feast, ask the poor, the maimed, the lame or the blind and you will be blessed because they do not have the resources to repay you. You will be repaid in the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 12:21 to 34; 14:12 to 14).

Amen and God bless you.

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