

Tithing

Is it for Christians?



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There is no question as to whether tithing was a law in ancient Israel, but what about today? Does God expect Christians in our day to tithe? If so, why? Just what is the purpose of tithing?



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Oddly, a number of television evangelists seem more than willing to ignore many Old Testament laws, such as the Fourth Commandment and laws regarding clean and unclean meats, but don't seem quite so eager to let go the law of *tithing*. You would think that anyone claiming the Old Testament law to have been done away would, for the sake of consistency, place the tithing law alongside dietary and holy day laws.

Some who preach tithing have no reservations about making great promises on God's behalf. Just pay tithes, they infer, and God will return to you several times the amount you give.

Interestingly, the blessings promised for keeping the seventh-day Sabbath are generally passed over, while the blessings associated with tithing are greatly emphasized.

On the other hand, some claim that tithing, like circumcision and animal sacrifices, is not incumbent upon Christians.

Just what does the Bible say about tithing? Is it a law for Christians? Should we pay tithes *in order* to get a blessing? Should tithing be viewed as a means of obtaining wealth, of solving all financial difficulties? Should Christians tithe to "put God to the test"?

Israel's Tithing Law

First, let's establish firmly that tithing definitely was a law in the time of ancient Israel. The basic instructions are found in Numbers 18, verses 21 and 24:

God said: "And, behold, I have given the children of Levi

all the tenth [or *tithe*, which means “tenth”] in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation...But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the Lord, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.”

Notice that God *gave* the tithe to the children of Levi. It was *His* tithe to begin with; He gave it to the Levites. Leviticus 27:30 reads, “And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, *is the Lord’s*: it is holy unto the Lord.”

Through the prophet Malachi, God says: “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In *tithes and offerings*” (Malachi 3:8). The people were withholding their tithes and offerings, thus “robbing” God. Obviously, God would not have charged them with *robbing* Him had He not had a prior claim on the tithe.

Clearly, the tithe was *God’s* tithe. In the time of ancient Israel, God gave His tithe to the Levites, the *ministry* of the Old Testament period, whose job was to perpetuate the worship of God through the services of the Tabernacle (later, Temple). In effect, the Levitical priests were *preaching the gospel* through officiating in the sacrificial rites and ceremonies associated with the Tabernacle (it is abundantly clear that the Tabernacle and its services picture Jesus Christ and His work of redemption).

The Levitical priesthood was a *type*, a *shadow*, of a much greater, *eternal* Priesthood, as we shall later see.

Pre-Mosaic Tithing

Now, let’s turn our attention to the patriarchal period—the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—and see if there is any real evidence of a tithing law in existence at that time.

Let’s pay particular attention to two pre-Mosaic examples of tithing. The first is found in Genesis 14, where we find Abraham returning from a battle with several warring kings who had taken Lot (Abraham’s nephew) captive, and had made off with the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah after having defeated those cities. Take up the account with Abraham’s

return from battle:

“And he [Abraham] brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother [his brother’s son] Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people. And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king’s dale. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram [Abraham] of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he [Abraham] gave him *tithes* of all” (verses 16-20).

Was Abraham *obeying* a tithing law? Or, was he, as some commentators infer, merely following some ancient custom of unknown origin? Some claim there is no proof that Abraham was actually obeying a law, no proof that a tithing law was in existence at that time. They say that, at best, Abraham was merely giving an offering of thanks.

Indeed, Abraham’s tithe *was* an offering of thanks. But don’t be hasty in concluding that a tithing law was not involved. Several facts deserve consideration:

1) The wording of the passage leaves the impression that the giving of “tithes of all” to Melchizedek was not a new experience for Abraham. It is evident that he knew Melchizedek was “priest of the most high God,” and that a standard of proportionate giving was in effect.

2) It is a well-known fact that the Law of Moses (which included laws of tithing, as we have seen) was the codification of many preexisting laws. The laws given to Moses for Israel were God’s *everlasting standards* of worship and behavior *as they applied* to the people of Israel in their time and under the circumstances unique to that period. God’s standards continue forever, but the administration of those standards may vary as circumstances and conditions change.

3) There was a *complete system of law* in the time of Abraham. Notice Genesis 26:4,5. God said to Jacob: “And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham

obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my *commandments*, my *statues*, and my *laws*.” The naming of all three—commandments, statues, laws—is powerful evidence that a complete *system of divine law* was in place. In view of this and preceding facts, is there any reason to believe that tithing was not a part of the existing system of law?

4) The book of Hebrews associates the Levitical tithe with Abraham’s tithe. “And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he [Melchizedek] whose descent is not counted from them, received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises...And here men that die receive tithes; but there [in the time of Abraham] he [Melchizedek] receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham” (Hebrews 7:5,6,8,9). May we assert that one is a law but the other is not? It would seem that if the Levitical tithe was commanded, then so was the tithe Abraham paid.

Hebrews 7 reveals clearly that the Levitical priesthood was an earthly *type* of the eternal, heavenly Priesthood. The chapter also shows that Melchizedek was the One who later became Jesus Christ, or, at the very least, was a *type* of Christ.

5) Abraham did not keep for himself the goods he had recovered, and he gave only a tenth of all to Melchizedek. Why a tenth? He could have given it all (see Genesis 14:21-24). Evidently, the tenth had special significance.

6) Tithing was practiced in the time of Abraham, probably long before. It is not believable that the custom originated with the heathen and was later (in the time of Moses) “copied” by God.

According to Lansdell: “The picture-writings of Egypt, the cuneiform tablets of Babylonia, and early writers of Greece and Rome inform us that before the Bible was written, and apart therefrom, it was an almost universal practice among civilized nations for people to pay tithes to their gods; but none tell us when, or where, the practice began, or who issued the law for its observance” (Henry Lansdell, *The Tithe in Scripture*, p. 7).

Many customs and beliefs of ancient civilizations were corruptions of earlier, divinely revealed truths. The almost universal practice of tithing among ancient civilized nations suggests that the law of the tithe was among those principles God revealed early in the history of humankind.

Let’s now examine the second example of pre-Mosaic tithing.

Jacob, after receiving divine promises of great material and familial blessings, “Vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on. So that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the *tenth* unto thee” (Genesis 28:20-22).

Some have erroneously inferred that the “if” in the above passage suggests that Jacob’s vow was conditional. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jacob was simply *vowing* before God by returning to Him the tenth, or tithe, of all He gave him.

And this brings us to an important truth: Tithing is more than just a commanded “payment.” *It is an act of worship.* In both the example of Abraham and of Jacob, tithing was an expression of gratitude, an acknowledgment of the *Source* of every blessing. Abraham acknowledged God as the Source of his victory (Genesis 14:20), and expressed his gratitude with the tithe. Jacob, after receiving promises of great blessings, vowed to “give the tenth” as an expression of appreciation toward the Provider of every good and perfect gift.

In Jacob’s example, as in Abraham’s, it is apparent that tithing was already a known, established practice. It is not likely that Abraham and Jacob fortuitously arrived at the same percentage to be given to God.

Evidently, God’s tithing standard was introduced early in man’s history—possibly during the time of Adam and Eve. It doesn’t seem unreasonable to speculate that Cain’s offering (Genesis 4:3-7) *may* have been rejected because of Cain’s failure to offer the appropriate *proportion* of his increase. According to Lansdell, the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) renders Genesis 4:6 as follows: “And

the Lord God said to Cain, Wherefore didst thou become vexed, and wherefore did thy countenance fall? If thou didst rightly offer, but didst not *rightly divide*, didst thou not sin? Hold thy peace” (Lansdell, *The Tithe in Scripture*, p. 9, emphasis mine).

The phrase “rightly divide” *may* suggest that Cain’s offering was disapproved because he had failed to bring a full tenth. Of course, this is purely speculative, but one thing is absolutely certain: God had *standards* for material offerings of worship even in the pre-flood world.

We see, then, that there were divinely-ordained *standards* for material offerings to God in the ancient world. Not only was tithing a law in the time of Moses, it was a law in the time of Abraham, and evidence indicates it was a law in the pre-flood world.

But what about the New Testament period? May we conclude that tithing was a divinely ordained and accepted standard of worship in the times of Abraham and Moses, but not in the Christian era?

Are Christians free to express their worship of God through material offerings? If so, are there *standards* for material offerings today?

The Christian Era

Is there a difference between God’s *basic standards* today and His basic standards in the pre-flood, patriarchal, and Mosaic periods?

If Christians today may express their adoration of God through material offerings, do the same standards regarding material offerings still exist? Or, has God now relaxed those standards?

Listen to the words of Jesus Christ: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law [God’s *standards*], or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law [God’s standards], till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of

heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19).

Again, if tithing was a standard for worshiping God with material offerings in the time of Abraham and in the time of Moses, isn’t it a standard for Christians today? With the above words of Jesus in view, how can we conclude otherwise?

Yes, tithing is for Christians today. It is an act of worship, a way of expressing gratitude toward the Provider of all things essential to human sustenance and well-being. Tithing should never be looked upon as merely an obligation; rather, it should be thought of as an *opportunity*, an expression of worship and gratitude, a token of love toward God, an act of faith.

Is Tithing a “Universal Law”?

If tithing were a universal law, some contend, then the apostle Paul would surely have *commanded* the gentile converts of Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Philippi, Colossae, and Ephesus to *pay tithes*, and would have *expected* them to tithe directly to him, the apostle to the gentiles.

The expression “universal law” appears in numerous anti-tithing documents. Actually, the phrase is misleading, for it portends that if examples can be found of righteous men and women not tithing, then non-tithing cannot be said to be a sin, or transgression of God’s law.

In one sense, tithing is *not* a universal law. For example, if one has no “increase,” and therefore has nothing on which to tithe, then he is not sinning by not tithing. If a person is receiving social security benefits, welfare, or workers’ compensation—sources of income derived from “increase” from which the tithe has already been extracted (ideally)—he is not sinning by not tithing.

There may be numerous circumstances where an “increase” of sorts exists, but tithing is not possible. There may be an instance when there is no priesthood, ministry, or “work” to which the tithe may be given—the proverbial case of the Christian on the desert island, for example.

Certainly, God does not expect us to give what we do not have; nor does He expect us to perform the impossible. So in one sense, it may be said that tithing is not a universal law.

But the fact remains, tithing is a law, a *standard*, set by Almighty God! Where tithing is possible, therefore, it should be practiced.

Some try to make the law of tithing impossible, or unlawful, by contending that since Israel's tithing laws only mention the tithe of agricultural produce and livestock, there is no scriptural authorization for the tithing of fish, money, or other things not specifically named in Scripture. If this argument is correct, then wage-earners today are not obligated to pay tithes.

It must be remembered, however, that ancient Israel was an agrarian society. Grain and vegetable produce, fruit, and livestock were the chief components of the nation's economy. The fact that God does not specifically mention money, mining, and fish by no means indicates that wage-earners, miners, and fishermen have no obligation to tithe.

Notice Deuteronomy 8:18: "But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth..."; and Proverbs 3:9: "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase." These scriptures dispel the argument that money is not tithable.

Now, what about the apostle Paul—did he neglect to tell the churches about tithing? Did he in any way discourage the practice of tithing, or indicate that tithing was no longer a law for Christians?

Paul wrote: "Have we not power to eat and to drink?" (I Corinthians 9:4). He was not speaking of the right everyone has to eat and drink; he was speaking of his right, as a minister of Jesus Christ, to eat and drink at the expense of the church.

Paul goes on: "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?" (verse 7).

His main point is summed up in verse 14: "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel."

When, and where, did the Lord ordain that "they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel"?

Notice the apostle's appeal to the *Law of Moses*:

"Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?" (verse 9). In other words, was it merely Paul's idea that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel, or does the Law authorize it?

Paul continues: "For it is written in the *law of Moses*, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith He it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (verses 9,10).

Here, objections are frequently raised: If Paul believed the law of tithing to be applicable to the Christians at Corinth, why didn't he simply quote the tithing law of Numbers 18? Instead, he quoted the law forbidding muzzling the mouth of an ox treading at the mill.

Those who raise this objection generally underemphasize the fact that Paul appeals to the authority of the *Law*, and they usually ignore verse 13, where Paul *does*, though indirectly, allude to tithing:

"Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?"

The tithe of Israel's increase was stored in the Temple "storehouse," so the "things of the Temple" certainly included the tithe.

It is true that the Bible records little specific instruction from the apostles on the practice of tithing. This is not to say, however, that no instructions were given. The New Testament was not intended to be a "systematic theology" or thorough exposition on the "cans" and "cannots" of Christianity. Probably, the subject of tithing did come up in the churches under Paul's supervision, but we have no access to any writings dealing with the subject.

Also, it should be understood that the lack of any example of *institutionalized* tithing does not mean that tithing as a *personal* act of worship was ever disapproved or deemed unnecessary. Even in ancient Israel, tithing was a *personal* matter; it was not "policed" in any way. The responsibility to tithe rested squarely on the shoulders of the individual.

And the same is true today. As we have seen, Jesus did not

come to do away with God's standards of worship and conduct; He came to *magnify* them, to bring out their fullest meaning and intent. If He didn't do away with God's standards on tithing, then the responsibility to tithe rests on each individual Christian—whether there are clear examples of tithing in the New Testament or not.

Tithing in the Early Church

Jesus said: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matter of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these [the "weightier matters"] ought ye to have done, and *not* to leave the other [meticulous tithing] undone" (Matthew 23:23).

Notice that Jesus, while decrying the scribes' and Pharisees' negligence of the "weightier matters of the law," said that *tithing should not be left undone*.

Some argue that Christ's advocacy of tithing applied only to people living under the Old Covenant. The Temple was still standing and the Levitical priesthood was still in place; therefore, the argument goes, Jesus never meant to suggest that tithing should be carried over into the New Covenant.

But this argument overlooks an important fact: Jesus spoke these words *in the presence of His disciples*. With this fact before us, we should ask, How did *they* interpret Christ's instruction to *not* leave tithing undone? Did they think He meant they should *stop* tithing? Could they have possibly thought that Christ was doing away with the law of tithing?

Of course not! They knew exactly what He meant.

Consider further: Is it at all likely that the apostles, once they were converted, went out telling the thousands of Jews which made up the early New Testament church that tithing was "done away"?

No, not at all!

Biblical scholars recognize that, at first, Christianity was viewed as just another Jewish sect. And no wonder, for there were several sects comprising first century Judaism, and the earliest converts of the rapidly growing Christian church were Jewish. They continued to worship in the Temple (Acts 2:46) alongside other Jews, and there is no evidence they dis-

continued the practices of ordinary Jewish worship, including circumcision and animal sacrifices.

In fact, it was not until some years later—after large numbers of gentiles had come into the church—that circumcision became an issue (Acts 15). Moreover, many biblical scholars feel that one of the purposes of the book of Hebrews (which was apparently written during the early 60s, A.D., less than a decade before the destruction of the Temple) was to prepare the Jewish Christians for the impending destruction of the Temple and dissolution of ordinary Jewish worship—for it is evident that religious activities associated with the Temple were still in progress when the book of Hebrews was written.

Notice: "And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, *have* [note the present tense] a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law..." (Hebrews 7:5). Also, verse 8: "And *here* [in the present] men that die [Levites] receive tithes; but there [in the time of Abraham] he [Melchizedek] receiveth them..."

The book of Hebrews was apparently written some thirty years after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and it is evident that Jewish Christians were still engaging in Levitical-Temple related customs and ceremonies, still offering animal sacrifices, and *still bringing their tithes to the Levites*.

When the apostle Paul arrived in Jerusalem, approximately A.D. 57, the disciples there pointed out, "Thou seest, brother, how many *thousands* of Jews there are which believe [in Christ]; and *they are all zealous of the law*" (Acts 21:20).

Undoubtedly, Jewish Christians were still paying tithes the same way they had paid them in their pre-conversion years.

What does this tell us? Simply this: Before the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, *tithing was not an issue*—at least, not among the thousands of Jews who continued in the customs associated with the Temple and its officiating body of Levites.

The writer of the book of Hebrews by no means declares the law of tithing annulled. On the contrary, his excellent treatise on the superiority of Christ's Priesthood provides good reason for redirecting tithes to Christ's New Covenant ministry, which supersedes the Temple ministry.

Who May Receive Tithes?

Since the Levitical priesthood was but a shadowy *type* of the vastly superior Priesthood of Jesus Christ—which is equated with the priesthood of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7)—no one would deny that Christ has authority to receive tithes.

“But wait!” someone will surely argue. “Christ is the *only* Melchizedek Priest today. Ministers are neither Levites nor Melchizedek priests; therefore, they cannot lawfully receive tithes!”

It is true that ministers of God’s church today are not “Melchizedek priests.” But they *are* part of the *ministry* of Jesus Christ!

When we give the tithe to His ministry, to do His Work, are we not giving to *Him*?

Please read Matthew 25:31-46, and see how we may give to Jesus Christ. For your convenience, a portion is quoted here:

“When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, *ye have done it unto me.*”

Christ commissioned His disciples to provide *spiritual* food for the spiritually famished. He said: “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord has made ruler over

his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing” (Matthew 24:45,46).

“I am the bread of life,” He declared; “he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

He commanded: “Go ye therefore, and teach [make disciples of] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19,20). Notice, *all* nations.

The Holy Spirit, promised to those who repent upon hearing the true gospel, is compared to refreshing, life-giving water: “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

The gospel of Jesus Christ brings relief to the spiritually sick (Mark 2:17), clothing to the spiritually naked (Revelation 3:18), and deliverance from the bondage of sin (Luke 4:18).

Jesus Christ commissioned His church to preach the gospel, to make disciples, to “feed the flock”—in other words, to provide (spiritually) good, wholesome food for the hungry; fresh pure water for the thirsty; clothing for the naked, and so on.

So, by giving the tithe to a work dedicated to preaching the gospel to the world and making disciples of all nations, *you are giving it to Jesus Christ.*

Read I Corinthians 9:1-18, and see clearly that the apostle Paul asserted his right to receive financial support from the church. He wrote: “Have we not power to eat and to drink [at the church’s expense]? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas [Peter]? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?” (verses 4-6).

It is clear that Peter and the other apostles were receiving support from the church. They knew Christ had commissioned them to *preach the gospel*, and that one of the duties

of the church was to support them financially. Paul clearly points out that he, too, had the “power,” or right, to receive support from the church.

Jesus Christ said that the preaching of the gospel, which began in the first century, would continue until the *end of the age* (Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 24:46-47). Are we to assume that the church today has no responsibility to support the gospel-preaching/disciple-making activities of the ministry, even though it is clear that the first century church did have such a responsibility?

Of course not!

And, again, are we to assume that God’s standard of *tithing* applied only to the patriarchal and Mosaic periods, but not to our time, when the gospel of Jesus Christ (who was foreseen and foreshadowed by Moses and the patriarchs) is being preached?

Abraham, the “father of the faithful,” paid tithes! Moses, who typified Christ, commanded the payment of tithes! May we conclude that true Christians, who follow the spiritual “Moses” (Christ), and who are called “Abraham’s seed” (Galatians 3:29), have no responsibility to tithe?

Tithing is clearly for Christians today. But it seems that some put too much emphasis on the material blessings associated with faithful tithing. They actually encourage giving more in order to get more.

Should We Give in Order to Get?

As stated in the beginning of this booklet, some seem more than willing to make great promises on God’s behalf. A few have even attempted to compute the amount of blessing one would receive for giving money to their “ministries.”

Indeed, God *does* bless the tithe-payer. Proverbs 3:9,10 states: “Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.” And God, through the prophet Malachi, says: “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of host” (Malachi 3:10,11).

Thousands who “couldn’t afford to tithe,” yet put their trust in God and payed the tithe anyway, have found through first-hand experience that God does indeed bestow material blessings upon the tithe-payer.

But, most tithe-payers never accumulate great wealth—and often, God’s blessings are neither immediate nor apparent. Unfortunately, too many ministers have (perhaps unintentionally, in some cases) given the impression that one should pay tithes *in order* to get a blessing. Some have claimed that tithing would bring an end to financial worries, and that people should “put God to the test” by paying tithes.

Just what should the tithe-payer expect from God? Should one give in order to get? Should God’s people “test” their Provider?

It should be noted that, while God does bless individuals for paying tithes, the promise of material blessings He gave through Malachi are *national* in scope. After calling on the people to faithfully tithe their increase, God says: “And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land...” (Malachi 3:12).

Further, it should be understood that God’s admonition to “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse” is much more than just a call to pay tithes. By calling for the payment of tithes, God is, in fact, calling for *national repentance*. He is calling for full restoration of true worship. Tithing, therefore, is representative of full obedience and reliance upon God.

A nation whose peoples pay tithes, yet continue in idolatry, adultery, blasphemy, Sabbath-breaking, and other sins, cannot expect the blessings promised in Malachi 3.

God says: “If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments [all of them, not just tithing], to do them; Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield her fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. And I will give

peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land” (Leviticus 26:3-6).

God requires that *all* His commandments be kept before He will pour out the great national blessings described in this and other scriptures. Tithing alone is not enough.

Of course, this is not to say that Malachi 3:10,11 has no application for Christians living in the twentieth century, but we should recognize that the passage is not a promise that *every* individual tithing-payer will gain great wealth through tithing.

The *spiritual* application of Proverbs 3:9,10 and Malachi 3:10,11 should also be considered. While there is certainly nothing wrong with desiring material blessings, the Christian should recognize that *spiritual* blessings are far more desirable. Jesus says: “Therefore take no thought [don’t be overly anxious], saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek *first* the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things [clothing, food, shelter, and so forth] shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:31-33).

Interestingly, Jesus doesn’t say that those who seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness will have great wealth bestowed upon them; He simply states that God will take care of those who put Him first. But even here, it’s important to understand that while Christ assures His disciples that God will provide for those who are faithful to Him, He also assures them that *trials* and *persecution* will follow them until the close of the age!

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake,” He says, “for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward *in heaven* [the reward is reserved in heaven until Christ’s return]: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:10-12).

Jesus further states: “Then shall they deliver you up to be

afflicted, and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake...But he that shall *endure* unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:9,13).

Does that sound like promises of great wealth—a huge mansion, a new Rolls Royce, a six-figure bank account?

Clearly, the health and wealth “gospel” proclaimed by certain “televangelists” is *not* the message Jesus Christ brought.

The story of the true Church of God is a story of bloodshed, persecution, destitution, and *martyrdom*.

Notice the apostle John’s vision of the “souls under the altar,” which symbolically portrays the legacy of persecution upon God’s true church through the centuries.

John wrote: “And when He [Christ] had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were *slain* for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be *killed* as they were, should be fulfilled” (Revelation 6:9-11).

And just what did Jesus say to those desiring to be His disciples? Did He tell them to expect huge monetary blessings? Did He tell them to take up their money bags and follow Him to the bank?

No! Notice what He did say: “And whosoever doth not *bear his cross*, and come after me, *cannot* be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and *counteth the cost*, whether he have sufficient to finish it?...whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27,28,33).

Jesus did not leave His disciples with the impression that they could expect abundant showers of monetary blessings. He said His true disciples could expect persecution, hatred, martyrdom.

But didn’t God clearly say, “*Prove me* now herewith...”? Aren’t we to “put God to the test” with tithes and offerings?

When the tempter challenged Jesus to prove His deity, He responded, “Thou shalt not tempt [test] the Lord thy God”

(Matthew 4:7). This scripture alone should lay to rest the notion that we should “test” God to see if He will shower us with blessings for paying tithes.

A person should never give for the express purpose of getting. He should not attempt to “test God”; nor should he expect huge monetary blessings as a result of faithful tithing.

An Act of Worship

In Romans 11:35, the apostle Paul asks: “Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?” This tells us that our giving to God can only take place *after* He has first given to us. He must be acknowledged as the Source of every good and perfect gift which comes our way. Our food, clothing, shelter, money, the very air we breathe, even life itself—everything we have had, now have, or ever will have—is from God.

He first gives to us; then we give to Him. The very purpose of tithing is to express our gratitude, our heartfelt thanks, to the One who has given so much to us.

Rather than giving in order to receive, the Christian should give as an expression of thanks for what he has *already* received. He should realize he already has his blessing in hand when he gives the tenth to God.

Some argue that tithing is “paying,” not “giving.” True, we *pay* tithes, but tithing should always be done in the *spirit of giving*, which is a spirit opposite of selfishness and greed.

The true spirit of giving is perfectly expressed in the words of Jesus Christ. He says: “And if ye lend [or give] to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, *hoping for nothing again*; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (Luke 6:34,35).

If Christians are to express such a spirit of giving even to their enemies, how much more should they express their love for God through giving to Him? The Bible tells us: “The earth is the Lord’s” (Exodus 9:29); and, “For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee” (I Chronicles 29:14). God doesn’t need anything from us; He

owns the universe.

But *we* need to give to God. Tithing, then, is for *our* benefit. It is a way of showing our gratitude to Him, a way of expressing our love, faith, and hope before our Creator—and it has His divine approval.

Indeed, the opportunity to give the tenth to God is itself a wonderful blessing—a blessing we can’t afford to pass up. □