



“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” (Malachi 3:10).

Should I Tithe?

Central Truth: Tithing is God’s plan for your giving.

L231. Date: January 1994. **Text:** Genesis 14:19, 20; 28:22; Leviticus 27:30; Malachi 3:8-10; II Corinthians 8:12; 9:6, 7. **Topic:** Stewardship: Of Money.

Should a Christian tithe? One person answers, “No; tithing was commanded under the Mosaic law and Christians are not under the law in Christ.” Another replies, “Yes; tithing was practiced before the law was given and the New Testament does not give any other method for financing the work of the kingdom today.”

The question should be considered in the light of these five facts. (1) Most Christians do not give a tithe (10 percent) of their income. (2) Those who do not tithe seek reasons to justify their failure to do so. (3) Many Christians do give a tithe, plus freewill offerings beyond the 10 percent. (4) Those who practice tithing recommend it. (5) Every Christian should give more under grace than the Jews gave under law. We believe tithing is God's plan.

The Origin of the Tithe

When did people first begin to give 10 percent to support their religious system and in worship of their God? We do not know. The practice of tithing is so ancient that it is lost in antiquity. There was never a time in recorded history when people did not tithe.

The giving of the tithe was practiced long before there was a nation of the Jews. Before the days of Abraham, tithing was common among the

Babylonians, Egyptians, Assyrians, and even the Canaanite tribes of Palestine. When Joseph was prime minister of Egypt, he required a tax of the double tithe (20 percent) to be gathered during the years of plenty to make up for the lack during the years of famine.

Theories abound as to the origin of the tithe. (1) It may be a primitive revelation from God. Just as He chose one day in seven for the Lord's portion of our time, so He chose one part in ten for the Lord's portion of our increase. (2) It may be based on the concept of a sacred number; one in ten, since we have ten fingers. (3) It may be a political tax which was brought over into religion. (4) It may be an act of thanksgiving (or sacred rent of the Lord's land) which was used to support the religious system. If I had to choose among those opinions expressed above, I would choose numbers 1 and 4.

The tithe was practiced by the patriarchs centuries before it became law. Genesis 14:19, 20 reports that Abram paid tithes to Melchizedek, who was priest of the Most High God. Where did Abraham get the idea to give 10 percent? We do not know. The amount was appropriate because God's priest took it without surprise at the gift or without rebuke at its amount.

Jacob met God at Bethel as he fled from home to his relatives in a distant land. God promised to go with him and bless him. Jacob responded, *"Of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee"* (Genesis 28:12). God went with Jacob as He had promised, and Jacob gave tithes to God as he had promised.

The significant thing about those occasions of tithe giving is that they occurred four or five centuries before tithing was placed as a command in the law of Moses. It is as much a mistake to say a Christian should not tithe because it is in the law as it would be to say he should not observe one day in seven because that is in the law. God established the tithe as His chosen way for us to give.

The Law of the Tithe

A command to tithe was placed in the law of Moses in words so clear that there can be no misunderstanding of it. It reads, *"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. . . . And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, . . . the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD"* (Leviticus 27:30-32). God demands a tithe.

The giving of the tithe plus freewill offerings continued as a guideline for ancient Israel (Deuteronomy 12:5-19; 14:22-29; 26:12-15). But the

Israelites went beyond giving a single tithe. They gave 10 percent for the support of the clergy. They gave a second 10 percent for benevolence and to support their meetings three times a year when they assembled to eat before the Lord and worship Him. Some scholars understand that the people even gave 30 percent of their income to the Lord every third year.

Tithing was practiced in times of revival and neglected in times of apostasy. (Read 2nd Chronicles 31:1-19 to see the historical report of that fact.) God had chosen the tribe of Levi to be His special ministers at the tabernacle/temple, and they were to be supported by the first tithe of the people. Failure to pay the tithes brought suffering to them and a neglect of the worship of God. But payment of the tithes provided for them, and the worship of God was celebrated.

The tithe had several sacred purposes. (1) It was a recognition of God's ownership of all, a kind of "sacred rent" if you please. (2) It supported the clergy so the worship of God could continue appropriately. (3) It supported public worship by providing the food the nation ate when it assembled before the Lord. (4) It provided for the benevolent needs of the nation. (5). It increased religious devotion as people gave to God. It still has many of those same functions through the church as Christians give.

The Promise of the Tithe (Malachi 3:7-12)

God has promised that judgment will come on those who neglect to give the tithe (Malachi 3:7-9). Notice two things involved in God's forewarned judgment on people for a failure to tithe.

First, God calls failure to tithe a sin. He rebuked the nation, saying, *"You are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them"* (Malachi 3:7). One of those ordinances is stated in Leviticus 27:30: *"All the tithe . . . is the LORD's: it is holy unto the LORD."* When God invites the people to *"return unto me, and I will return unto you"* (Malachi 3:7), He indicates that their failure to pay the tithe had led them away from God. It is evident, therefore, that for ancient Israel to refuse to pay their tithes was a sin against God.

Second, God announces a curse on the sin of the failure to tithe. Consider His solemn pronouncement, *"Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation"* (Malachi 3:9). The curse is described in agricultural terms: insects devouring the crops and fruit falling from the trees before it ripened for harvest (Malachi 3:11). The nation suffered the loss of much because she failed to honor God by giving His tithes. How much she lost!

Do you suppose God works by that same law today? I would not wish you to give out of a fear of the judgment of God. That is the poorest possible motive for giving. Give out of a grateful heart and joyful spirit, recognizing His grace upon you.

God rewards the faithful obedience of those who give the tithe.

Notice two things in His promise in Malachi 3:9-12. (1) God calls for obedience in tithing. There is no mistaking His meaning as you read, *“Bring ye all the tithes into the! storehouse, . . . and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts”* (Malachi 3:10). He calls for our most earnest and faithful response. Here is our obligation: *“This day the LORD thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and do with all thy heart, and with all thy soul”* (Deuteronomy 26:16). Your whole life is committed to obey. Remember the words of the prophet Samuel and apply them to this subject. *“Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry”* (1 Samuel 15:22, 23). Obedience is better than sacrifice because sacrifice atones for sin, and when we obey there is no sin for which to atone. Failure to obey the Lord is as serious as idolatry because it places self-will above the will of God, which is an idolatrous act. Disobedience is very serious.

(2) God gives rewards for faithfulness in tithing. There are three rewards mentioned in Malachi 3:10-12. How many can you recognize in your personal experience?

(a) God gives spiritual rewards for tithing. *“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”* (Malachi 3:10). Oh glory, what a promise from our Lord! The *“windows of heaven”* could be translated the *“floodgates of heaven,”* indicating superabundance. To *“pour you out a blessing,”* means to bestow *“a more than sufficient blessing”* or *“blessings in abundance.”* The expression *“there shall not be room enough to receive it”* means *“blessings so great you won't have room enough to take it in.”* That promise makes you want to shout with joy, doesn't it? Whatever those spiritual blessings are, they are wonderful.

(b) God gives material rewards (Malachi 3:11). Palestine was an agricultural economy, so the material blessings are expressed in terms of farm life. *“Your crops will be protected from the devouring locusts,”* God promised. An invasion of locusts made the day dark by their numbers and caused not one green leaf to be left.

“Your vines will produce a full harvest that your fields will not be barren,” God continues. Remember our Lord's promise that what you give is not lost (Luke 6:38). You will suffer no lack from what you give to Him.

(c) God gives social rewards. “*All nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts*” (Malachi 3:12). Other nations look on the nation blessed by the Lord and recognize her privileged estate. They call her blessed. The people of that nation will live in their land with delight. What a promise!

How would you like your country to be a land of delight so that other nations of the world would look with amazement upon her? If your nation is not experiencing that, it may be because of sin against God. Turn to II Chronicles 7:14 and follow the divine requirements that God set forth for healing the land. Your faithful stewardship to the Lord through your church might be a first step toward healing.

Should a Christian tithe? As you seek the answer, consider the surprises that await a tither. (1) He is surprised that he suffers no lack from what he gives to God. (2) He is surprised as to how he grows in grace by giving. (3) He is surprised that giving becomes a joy to him. (4) He is surprised that other Christians do not begin to tithe also. (5) He is surprised that he did not begin sooner. By what guideline do you give to God? Consider giving a percentage of your increase and let 10 percent be your guide.

Questions for discussion

1. What is a tithe?
2. What was the origin of tithing?
3. Why did Abraham give a tithe five hundred years before the Mosaic law?
4. How does the law state the tithe demand in Leviticus 27:30-33?
5. What is the sacred purpose of giving a tithe?
6. What warning did God give for neglecting the tithe?
7. What spiritual reward did He offer to tithers?
8. What material reward did He offer to tithers?
9. How can you give 10 percent and not suffer from what you have given?
10. By what standard will you gauge your giving after this study?