

What About Tithing?



By Philip E. Busby

Question #20 - *"I am a Jewish believer in Messiah Jesus. For years I've given tithes to the church(es) I was attending. I have left the church and withdrew my name on the membership list. Now, about tithing; I was told by another Jewish believer that it is not required in the New testament as it was in the old testament. Can you clarify this with scripture please?"*

In your question you use the word "required," and that word is really the key word in many discussions about tithing because that is the question most people struggle with. "Is there a requirement for me to tithe?" Now, just to be clear, asking this does not automatically put a person on the negative side of the subject, which is that people are always looking to do the minimum they can get away with. It's also about the positive side where people want to make sure they are doing at least what they should! Of course, because we are talking about requirements, this question is also very appropriately coupled with the second tithing question many people have, which is, where should I give my tithe?

In this answer, we will attempt to look primarily at the question of requirement; but in doing that, we will likely touch many times on the same information needed to discuss the, "Where should I tithe?" question. We will also look at requirement from the other key aspect pointed out in this question, which

is the issue of Old versus New Testament. In truth, that's a perfect way to look at the tithing issue; because to understand the subject of tithing from a true Biblical perspective, we must be fairly well acquainted with the Bible as a whole and the history it teaches us. Now, if we take the Bible as a whole, we should come to understand there is no real Old versus New Testament issues. I have written quite a bit on this subject in the series titled "The Bible As A Book." However, the short-hand answer comes directly from Jesus Himself in the New Testament. There are many arguments which people claim to be New versus Old Testament on the basis they feel there is a "New Testament Church." Claiming to be followers of Jesus, people will act in many of the same ways people act when they follow a cult leader. Instead of seeing Jesus' work as a continuance of what was going on in the Old Testament, they argue as if Jesus was starting something totally new and/or taking us down a path no one has ever walked before!

This is very disturbing and it has a lot to do with why, especially in the later centuries after Christ, a great many of God's chosen people did not and do not accept Jesus for Who He really is. Many who claim to believe in Jesus will make their theological arguments on the basis that when Jesus came He changed all kinds of things. This is the argument your friend is making in saying tithing is not required in the New Testament as it was in the Old. However, tithing is only one of many very important items people will use this argument for. The Sabbath is another big example, and there are many minor things all through the church which simply end up being misunderstood because of this kind of false teaching!

People who believe this way point to those times when Jesus talked about the things which were said of old, and then expounded upon them. Such as the time He told us that looking at a woman to lust after her is committing adultery in your heart, when the Law simply says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Exodus 20:14 People like to say these are examples of Jesus re-emphasizing certain things, even making them stronger and adding things at times, while at the same time leaving other things in the Law untouched altogether. On this basis, they teach that those things Jesus did not (at least in their minds) re-emphasize or touch on, should be seen as unimportant or no longer a commandment at all. This teaching is what leads people down the path of the thinking which says, there was the formation of a New Testament church, or at least new teaching in general, which took the place of

what God had done and given in the Old Testament. The extreme end of this thinking is the idea that the “church” somehow took the place of the Jewish people as God's chosen nation. All this is foolishness, and causes many to see the Bible in a very wrong way!

Unfortunately, people who want this thinking to be true will often scrutinize a great deal of things said in the New Testament, in an attempt to cloud the issue. However, if they really believe so simple a thing as the idea that just because Jesus did not specifically repeat a commandment means it no longer has force, they should easily accept that they are wrong in their thinking by simply looking at a couple of verses in one of the very chapters of the New Testament which they like to talk about. In Matthew chapter 5 we find Jesus talking about some of the issues where He says, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,...” However, in verses 17-20 Jesus tells us why He is going to talk about some of the commandments as He does, by making it clear from what perspective we should see what He is about to say! He says, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, 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. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

The first thing Jesus says here is very point-blank. He did not come to destroy the Law and/or the prophets! This means the idea of people believing Jesus, or the New Testament in general, wiped the slate clean in some way or ways, is a direct violation of Jesus' own words! Now, people will point to the next part of the verse where Jesus says He is come to “fulfill,” and argue that He did fulfill the Law and that is what wiped the slate clean. However, that is taking the second part of the sentence out of the context created by the very first part of the sentence. If you're going to fractionalize the things people say that badly, you can make an argument for just about anything you want. The truth is, sometimes it's hard to say something or talk about a subject in a way people will understand without them misconstruing what you're saying as just the opposite of what you intend to convey. The only

way to combat this is to start off with words which make certain facts clear and foundational to what you are about to say. This is what Jesus was doing. He is pointing out that the teaching He is about to give is specifically not intended to replace the Law, but to serve as examples of the kind of righteous living God's commandments have always attempted to lead us into!

If Jesus had said, “I am here to fulfill the Law,” you can see how someone might take it just the way some people want to interpret it. However, that is not what He said. He led the statement about His work being to fulfill the Law, by further emphasizing that His work was not intended to destroy the Law or the prophets! Jesus emphasizes the point that His work is not intended to destroy, dismantle, or change the Law and prophets, by going on to inform us not one small letter of the Law will pass until heaven and earth pass. This is a statement which confirms to us the written Law, just as we know it, will be with us as long as we are walking on this planet.

Some will say the end of this sentence tells us Jesus was saying no piece of the Law will pass as long as the earth remains and the entire Law is unfulfilled, meaning that either of these events will change everything. However, this is looking at it the way you want to, instead of for what is actually said. Again, Jesus was saying every part of the Law, no matter how small a piece, will remain in full force and unchanged until the time we are taken out of this world, and all humanity is gathered for the purpose of judgment and the desire of God to take all those who seek Him to a new place which Jesus said He was leaving this earth to prepare! (Rev. 20:11-21:5, John 14:1-3) The reason the sentence ends with the statement “...till all be fulfilled.” is because it will not be until this heaven and earth have passed away, and we are in that new heaven and new earth with a new Jerusalem, that all the Law will be fulfilled. You cannot have one without the other. That's the point of the statement!

In the next part of what Jesus said, He goes on to directly warn against not only breaking even what might be considered small commandments, but especially teaching others to do the same. Teaching others to break the commandments of God is exactly what is being done by those who tell you that the New Testament has done away with the Old, or at least part of the Old Testament, and/or the Law! This is why Jesus emphasizes the point here that He disapproves of the religious, non-heart-felt ways the Scribes and

Pharisees go about their so-called attempt to follow the laws of righteousness. Scribes and Pharisees were to be the teachers of others, but Jesus instructs that our attempt to live our lives right before God must exceed what the Scribes and Pharisees have accomplished through their practices. If we want to make it to heaven, we must understand it can't be done by following just what we call the letter of the Law, which is to religiously complete every ceremony, even if we do it down to the smallest arguable degree. If we are going to make it to heaven, it is going to take a real relationship with God which respects what the Law is trying to accomplish in our lives!

This point takes us directly to that New Testament scripture where Jesus does, in fact, tell us tithing is still in effect. In Matthew 23:23 Jesus says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." Anytime the word "Woe" is used, it is a very bad thing, because it basically means the trouble you're in is beyond the ability of words to do it justice. Jesus says the Scribes and Pharisees are in this kind of trouble, not because they pay tithe down to the increase of their herb gardens, but because even after becoming that religious in tithing practices, they don't care very much about things God cares more about than their herbs! Jesus does not say here that they shouldn't care about giving tithe from their smallest increase which many people may never think to do. What Jesus is pointing out is that by following God's Law, long before they ever came to those thoughts, they should have clearly learned to care greatly about things which have a greater impact on righteous living such as judgment, mercy, and faith!

In these words of Jesus, we see not just that tithing is still important through Jesus telling them they should not leave the tithing undone, but we also see that following the letter of the Law down to the smallest degree is not the way to be assured you are in the right. As we read the words of Jesus, we should not become confused into thinking Jesus was doing away with the Law by teaching things differently than the Scribes and Pharisees. What we should see is the contrast between how Jesus taught the Law compared to how the Scribes and Pharisees did it. In seeing this, we can correct our focus. The Scribes and Pharisees were talking to people about tithing out of their herb gardens, and getting onto people for wearing shoes on

the Sabbath or picking up their children, because it was doing work. Jesus' teachings on the Law did not focus on sweating the little things which most people would never see any practical benefit from following. Jesus was teaching things which had everyday application to why people fall into sin, such as the instruction that a man should not just refrain himself from doing the physical act of adultery, a man should also refrain from even looking at a woman for the purpose of lusting after her. This is because doing so is the same activity inside your mind, which is not only directly damaging to your walk with God, but it is the precursor to doing the physical act! Living in righteousness is about having a relationship with God and doing what you do because of your love and desire to be with God, which is the greatest commandment; and loving your neighbor, which is the second greatest. (Matt. 22:35-40) It is from this perspective that we should understand why the Law, and the nation God established to hold it, even exists!

Everyone who has even the most basic handle on the Bible's words, should know one of the very first facts we need in order to truly tackle the requirement issue of this question, and that is the fact: God did not set forth the Law of Moses at the time of creation. This fact is not one which many people would find any reason to argue with, considering the Law of Moses is called that because Moses is the man God directly gave the Law to. However, many people do argue that God did, in fact, put at least some of His Law upon men from creation or at least the time of Adam and Eve's fall into sin. This is where the question of what is required and what is not becomes a theological issue, and one which keeps us from seeing the forest for the trees, much like the Scribes and Pharisees!

A good story for discussion is that of Cain and his brother Abel. This, because it is a story which focuses on giving to God and which comes directly on the heels of the fall of man into sin. Many people will teach that Cain and Abel's situation had something to do with following a specific law which they knew even before the laws of sacrifice were given to Moses for the children of Israel. People will point out that sacrificing animals to God is a practice which is seen in the Bible far more than once or twice before the Law of Moses was given. This is true, but the problem arises in that people do not get the reason they see it. Many just don't understand the most basic element God wants from humans; and because of this, they often think on that negative side where people are always looking to do

the minimum they can get away with. Because they think this way, they extrapolate the idea that people before the written Law were already following many of the same instructions from God as the Law contains, but they just failed to officially write them down, or the writings were lost somewhere along the way. This is standing the truth on its head!

In the story of Cain and Abel, people see the bringing of offerings and even the sacrificing of animals. This raises a question. How did they know to do this? Because we ask the wrong question, we get the wrong answer. The answer to, "How did Cain and Abel know what to bring?" or "Why did they bring anything?" seems to come with an obvious answer when we are familiar with the Law. We say, Cain and Abel knew at least some of the Law which only later would be officially written down. Thus, we approach the rest of the story with that thought, and believe Abel knew what he needed to do to please God and so did Cain. From this perspective it looks like Cain chose to bring something to God which was not a blood sacrifice, and this put Cain in the wrong from the very beginning. However, that is just not the case!

In fact, the truth is just the opposite. Neither Cain nor Abel knew what they should and shouldn't bring to God. Neither had been told by God or other people what they needed to bring and/or what they should not bring. In fact, that very point is a key to understanding the story, and one which, if not understood, causes people to miss some of the main teachings contained in this story. We should not ask, "How did they know?"; we should understand that without the Law as yet, they were specifically not running on set guidelines. Because this is true, both Cain and Abel simply brought to God items which came out of the work of their hands. Abel brought a lamb, not because he knew or thought that was what God required, but simply because he was a keeper of sheep! Cain brought vegetables, not because he didn't care about God's instruction, but because he was a tiller of the ground! (Gen. 4:1-2) If we pay attention to the words, we realize God never says Cain was in the wrong for bringing what He brought. Believing God says this, is another extrapolation based on an already false assumption. What the story tells us is that God had "respect" for Abel and his offering and not for Cain's. Maybe it should be said that the words here lose something in the translation, but we should not interpret this as meaning Cain brought the wrong thing. The original language the word "respect" comes from

here does not carry the meaning of approval versus disapproval. The word at its core means, "to gaze upon or about." In truth, it means just the opposite of what people think about God having already laid out instructions for what man should do when it comes to sacrifice. Because this word conveys the idea of God taking time to consider Abel's offering, it means there was not a decision already set in stone! Cain didn't bring the wrong thing, Cain simply brought a different thing! The simple truth is, Abel's offering was a blood offering; and therefore, in the end, it received a direct reaction from God which Cain's offering, being a plant based offering, did not.

When it comes to the story of Cain and Abel, we mistakenly take the point in much the way Cain took it! We see this respect thing as being about Cain and what he did wrong; but the truth in the story at this juncture is not about Cain, it's about the way God would look upon different offerings brought to Him. The entire problem in the story was not that God was angry with Cain, but that God giving special attention to what Abel had brought, beyond the kind of attention any offering or time of communing with God had brought before, caused Cain to be jealous because it was not his offering which brought the attention! The fact this is true is why the story turns to Cain. Cain became upset by the fact his offering did not receive the same reaction as his brother's. This is where we see the evidence God is not angry with Cain. While Cain is off sulking and stewing over what had happened, God comes to him. If God was some angry pagan-like god, Cain's anger would have garnered more anger from God, not the father-like love we see next.

Now, because wrong thoughts are already in most people's minds, here again, people misinterpret the words of God as meaning Cain had, in fact, done something wrong; and if he had done what he should in the first place, everything would be fine. However, all this is looking at God as if He is some man invented deity which needs to be appeased. God did not, and does not need to be appeased! What God desires out of us is communion. Both Cain and Abel were communing with God in bringing their offerings. In this, God was very pleased! This is why God comes to Cain as a father might come to a beloved son and tries to have a reasonable conversation with Cain about the fact he should not be upset Abel's offering received the attention it did. If Cain had stopped to think about what was going on at that very moment, he should have done an about face. God Himself was specifically talking

and spending time with Cain. What more could you want! In talking to Cain, God also points out what should have been the obvious lesson from this incident. If receiving the same kind of attention to his offering that Abel's offering received is what was important to Cain, then all Cain needed to do was bring a blood offering. God would respect a blood offering from Cain in the same way He did Abel, but it was not wrong for Cain to bring what he did!

The whole reason we primarily see blood offerings being made in worship to God in later times is because of exactly what God told Cain. Men like Noah and Abraham knew - either because of this story and/or its truth was handed down by earlier generations, or because they found the truth just as Cain and Abel had - that blood offerings received more direct attention from God than other things did. They wanted that attention, and they also came to learn the reason why it happened. We see this in the words of Abraham as he takes his son Isaac to be sacrificed. When Isaac asks his father where the actual sacrifice is, Abraham tells Isaac God will provide the true sacrifice by sacrificing Himself! (Gen. 22:1-8)

In the Law, we see again the truth that blood sacrifices are treated differently than offerings which come from plants. At the same time, we see evidence that bringing plant offerings is not a wrong thing to do. In the Law, we read instructions that basically every blood sacrifice be accompanied by "meat offerings." Meat offerings are typically flour, which comes from plants, mingled with oil, which comes from olives or the like, not animal fat! Again, I come back to the point that the Law, in writing, as it was given to Moses in the wilderness, for the children of Israel, did not exist in Cain's day. However, God is not a changing God. (Heb. 13:5-9) Thus, the principles given in the Law of Moses are not made up just for the purpose of establishing a chosen nation. The truth we should all understand is that the Laws are based on the truths of righteousness, holiness, and God's interaction with man throughout the centuries leading up to their giving. Cain and Abel were not following a law in order to learn how to interact with God, they were learning how to interact with God, by interaction with God!

This all relates directly to our tithing question, because we should not forget the basis of the story we have been discussing is that Cain and Abel, without a law which told them to or required them to bring anything, brought offerings to The Lord. Just like the

Law's requirement of tithing, they brought those offerings out of the increase of their labor. As men, walking this earth, they made a choice to interact with God; and in doing so, not only did they set a precedent which would be carried throughout later generations, they revealed God's reaction to different offerings. These kinds of interactions by men who desired to come before God taught men the lessons God wanted us to learn. These lessons were eventually written as a law and required to be enacted by a specifically chosen people. We miss the point of the history the Bible is showing us if we do not realize which came first; and what it means is that whether Jew or non-Jew, whether there is a law requiring us or not, we should all be compelled to bring offerings to God out of the increase and substance of our lives!

Now, just as Cain and Abel had the chance to learn about blood versus non-blood sacrifices in bringing offerings to God out of their personal increase, there is another truth we learn by studying the Bible's history. In communing with God and interacting with God, long before the Law of Moses, man had the answer to the question of what constituted a reasonable amount to give God out of the increase He blesses us with. The Bible does not pinpoint to us exactly where this formula was found as it does the blood sacrifice, but God settles any doubt any person should have that it is in fact a truth, by putting it in the Law of Moses. In fact, that is another big point of having a law at all. There are many things which people not under the Law might argue or wonder about being truly right or wrong; but when we can see it in the Law God gave to His chosen nation, we know we are on the right track.

Somewhere along the line, man learns a good standard as to how much of our increase should be given to God and His work on a regular basis. That standard is a percentage which the word "tithe" tells us. We are to give a tenth. Before and outside the Laws of Moses and especially the later teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees we discussed earlier, this would have been a simple - shall we say - more organic kind of thing. It was a truth men learned by having faith, which is the opposite of what Cain wanted. Faith is a relationship with God where those who desire the things of God grow and learn. What people of God learned about being faithful to God, even in their physical life and work, was to bring a tenth of their increase. This is what we call tithing, and why we call it that. Bringing more than a tenth is truly an offering

which is going above and beyond that which would be standard.

Now, one may ask, why would there need to be a standard? Well, the first thing we should understand is that tithing is a very physical thing. It's about bringing actual physical items to God, out of the actual physical work we do! That being said, we should understand just by the fact we walk this world every day, there are a couple of sayings which sum up our physical situation of working by the sweat of our brow. In this universe, where man is given a free will, and especially because of our immature sinful nature, there are no free lunches, and it's pretty much a get what you pay for kind of place!

Now, we will come back to the concepts of tithing as a standard and why; but again, we want to do it by looking more directly at the requirement issue. Again, it is because the truth of tithing already existed that it shows up as a requirement in the Law of Moses, given to the children of Israel to follow. However, the true "requirement" would come because God would write down the precept of tithing and say this is what I expect of you. Once this Law was given directly to Israel, it made tithing for them, not just a, bring it if you want to because you care about the things of God, kind of thing. Tithing became a commandment! Why was it made a commandment and therefore a requirement for Israel? Because the nation of Israel is the largest example of what tithing is meant to support - and that is? God's work in this universe!

Simply put, God made tithing a requirement for Israel by making it a commandment in the Law. Therefore, in a way which is not as true for non-Jews (and I will attempt to come back to that thought), it is a direct violation of God's Law for people in God's chosen nation not to tithe into God's work. At first glance, this truth, which affects far more than just the issue of tithing, may seem like a bad thing God did to the Jews. However, Paul talks about this in Romans chapter 7. There Paul talks about the fact Jesus did the work He did to set us free from the laws of sin and death by making sin of no effect. This is another one of those arguments which some people use to say everything in "New Testament times" is different. However, sin and death were made no effect because Jesus' work shows us sin can be wiped away by death, and death can be overcome by God! This is a truth Abraham understood and why he told Isaac, "...God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering:..."

Genesis 22:8

Paul points out that even though this truth may make sin seem like something no one needs to care about, especially post the resurrection of Christ (Which some mistakenly and yet whole heartily believe gives them a ticket to live however they choose.), he says looking at the Law is what revived sin and killed him! (Rom. 7:9) He is talking here about the requirement issue. Look at the Law, then look at your life, and you will find what the prophet found, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." Isaiah 64:6 That being true, Paul goes on to point out the Law is holy and the commandments holy; thus, he asks if something holy could be so bad that it causes such trouble? The answer is no! It's not really the Law which is sin. The Law is just the revealer of the sin which already resides in our lives.

There is no way for us to escape death. Romans 3:23 simply tells us, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God:" However, this fact is why Ephesians 2:8 tells us it's not our righteousness which saves us anyway. Instead, it's the grace of God. This is a point many people readily take to heart and use as an excuse to ignore God's desire that we still strive to live in righteousness. They fail to read the rest of the verse, and/or they misinterpret faith as meaning something like, blind belief. We must understand that we are saved by grace, but it is grace which we find through having a relationship with God, which is what the word "faith" actually means. Because of God's grace, faith in God can be accounted to all those who have lived, both before and after the time of Jesus' first coming, in place of the righteousness and purity we all lack. (Rom. 4:1-10) This is why we can all be judged on Judgment Day for every wrong we have ever done, (Rev. 20:12, Rom. 14:11-12) and yet some will still be welcomed into the joy of God's Kingdom! (Matt. 25)

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." James 4:17 Knowledge of wrong reveals sin, which is why Paul talks about the Law killing him. However, without the knowledge we cannot grow in our faith; thus, the Law is a good thing! The knowledge of why and how we should come before God shows us how to fulfill the purpose we were created to fulfill. This is what Abel truly was seeking in bringing his offering to God; Cain, on the other hand, was not! Because our purpose is to

commune with God, there is great value in learning how and why God reacts in the way He does as we commune with Him. In learning God's reaction to things, we learn how to be righteous; and through this process of sanctification, we become more and more holy as God is Holy. (Matt. 5:48) In becoming holy, which is to be separated to and for a purpose which we know is God's purpose, we can draw closer and closer to God Himself!

This is the point Cain missed entirely! The prayer of a true believer should be, "I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies. It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law. Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way. PE Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them. The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments. Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts." Psalms 119:125-134

Before man's fall from innocence, coming before God was simple; but as we have fallen deeper and deeper into living lives filled with sin, it has become harder and harder to hear God's voice. Thus, all of us are not only in a learning phase, but a struggle to just regain what man has lost about how to come before God with greater access! One of the main overall messages of the Bible is that gaining greater access to God is only done by shedding the sinful practices which hinder us. God gives us instruction in order to show us how to shed those practices which are counter productive to drawing closer to Him. The downside of this is that while we may have been walking somewhat ignorantly in practices we did not know were hindering us, without a thought in our head about changing them, once God shows us the truth, we have a decision to make. We either have to struggle to end those practices in our lives, or we have to ignore God's instruction about them being wrong. If we choose to struggle with them, we will have to put forth the work to overcome whatever temptation brings forth the sin; and how hard that will be, as well as how long an individual may struggle with any particular issues will vary from person to person. However, just the

attempt should draw us closer to God. On the other side, if we simply choose to ignore what God has revealed to us, we find ourselves in direct rebellion to God's instructions for our lives, and this is sin in its purest form!

The truth about tithing is that it was not required by a written law for anyone until it was required of the children of Israel in the Law of Moses. At the same time, the Law is just a revealer of a practice which some people had already learned was the right thing to do. Jesus may not have made it an emphasis of His ministry to teach tithing, but what He did instruct us was simple. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15 Here Jesus is simply mirroring the words we find throughout the Old Testament, time and time again. Long before the Law was given, God tells Isaac in Genesis 26:4-5, "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 statutes, and my laws." As the written Law was being given to the children of Israel in the wilderness, God reveals His great desire for them, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!" Deuteronomy 5:29 And long after the Law was given and the nation of Israel had seen the great destruction sin can bring when we do not follow God's instructions, Nehemiah is given the answer to his plea that God, "Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there." Nehemiah 1:8-9

What this boils down to is the truth that the requirement of tithing is not really a New Testament versus Old Testament thing. It could be said it's more of a Jew versus non-Jew thing because only a law or commandment can create a true legal requirement. At the same time, it's very true that by looking at the actions of those who served God even before there ever was a law, we find tithing is really a believer versus a non-believer thing. This is why all those who claim to be believers in The One True God should be taught to

tithe, and follow it all their days!

This point is why it's in the New Testament that we find discussions such as the words of Paul who talks about Abraham receiving the covenant which promised God's chosen nation would come through him and the sign of that covenant which was/is circumcision; and Paul simply asks, did Abraham receive the promise being circumcised or uncircumcised? (Rom. 4:8-12) Of course, the answer is simply that Abraham had to make personal choices which showed he cared for the things of God before there was any reason to give him promises concerning the things of God. People like to ask, which came first the chicken or the egg? The Bible clearly answers that question. The chicken came first because God ordered the already existing creation to bring forth live animals. (Gen. 1:20-25) There would be no chicken eggs until there were chickens, and the whole intent of there being eggs is for there to be more chickens. There would be no circumcision until there was a promise to seal with the symbol of circumcision. However, there would be no promise unless there were men like Abraham who had already found God's ways without the promise.

That conversation brings us to the story which shows us, while he did not have the Law of Moses, Abraham clearly followed the specific practice of tithing. Abraham's example also brings us more into the discussion about where we should give our tithes. After Abraham had a great victory in defeating an army the area kings could not defend against, Abraham paid tithe to the king of Salem out of all the spoil. (Gen. 14) Why did he do this? Because Abraham had faith, which is the same reason Abraham was chosen to receive the promise. By having a relationship with God, Abraham knew there was a reason to support Melchizedek. Melchizedek was a priest who truly served God, and not just a man who was looking to gain the things of this world; thus, it would be to Melchizedek, even the father of God's chosen nation would give his tithe.

The understanding that God uses certain people full time to do His work in this world has specifically to do with why tithing was made a standard practice separate from just offerings. Deuteronomy 12:19 instructs, "Take heed to thyself that thou forsake not the Levite as long as thou livest upon the earth." Among Israel, the tribe of Levi was used by God for His service. This also had to do with giving to God what is His. All first-born of Israel should have

belonged to God, but the tribe of Levi was taken by God in their place. Thus, the tribe of Levi would be used for God's service! (Lev. 3:11-13) Now, God did not and does not need anything to be given to Him. In reality, God is the giver of all things. However, tithing has to do with a system among men which works out the physical needs of people who serve God full time, along with giving other people who believe in and serve God, the opportunity to recognize God as being first in their lives and the Giver of all which they have.

Israel was required by the Law to give tithe because being dedicated to the full-time work of God is exactly what God said the Levites' job would be. God said the tribe of Levi would not have an inheritance among Israel because God would be their inheritance. (Num. 18:20-21) This would mean they would not have the things the other tribes had in order to work and create an increase for themselves. Their work would be the work of the tabernacle/temple and all the things of God, which brings an increase, all of which belongs directly to God! The catch is, living in this manner does not provide for the physical needs of those doing the work. Thus, those who can and do live their lives working by the sweat of their brow to eat bread and generate whatever physical gains may be made in this universe, were commanded to follow the practice which had already been established by God and those who followed Him before there was a written Law. Those doing the secular work in Israel should give a portion of their increase to provide at least the basic physical needs of those who are in the service of The Lord. While it may not be a commandment outside of the nation of Israel, the truth the commandment is based on is the same!

Why a tenth? Well, for starters, a tenth makes for a very even and clean cut calculation. A tenth is also a reasonable portion to give for the purpose. It's a small enough amount that it doesn't take too big a chunk out of any given personal increase, yet a large enough amount that it respects God in that it's more than just a drop in the bucket - as the old saying goes. It's also a large enough amount that if only a small number of people give to a particular minister, (I use the term minister not to denote anything specific, but for lack of a more generic term.) that minister will have the same level of income as the average population which is supporting him. The simple example being that if ten people with the same level of income give to support one minister of God, he will have the exact income of all the others. If the ten have varying levels of income,

the minister will receive an average of those who support him. He, in turn, can generally afford to have the things those supporting him can afford, as well as dedicate a tenth of his income directly to the physical needs of the ministry itself - and believe me there are needs!

This is exactly why it's good that it only takes ten people tithing to support the minister himself. If there are many more than ten giving into the storehouse, there is an increasing amount of resources which can be used directly for the ministry work. It can pay for things such as the fact more than ten people, or especially ten family groups involved in a particular ministry, may warrant the need for more physical space than just what a particular minister or one of the people in the group may be able to give to the ministry's needs. If we can understand that the standard ministry many would call a traditional church, where there is a "pastor" at the head, is not a law of God and therefore not the only ministry with ministers doing the full-time work of God, we can see there are many other needs besides the idea of having and maintaining a place for meetings. Further, we should understand there is not a requirement that we give only to a traditional church. We can and should give our tithe to those who are called to full-time ministry, who are doing the true work of God. We should do this whether we attend a specific "church" or not!

This is really the intent behind tithing - without putting to fine a point on it. All ministries and/or ministers will not divide the income in exactly the same way. That being said, all ministers should learn to rightly divide the tithe based on the simple principles we have discussed, in order to accomplish God's work. (Num. 18:25-28) Unfortunately, some do not want to, and a negative example would be that some ministers believe all the tithe which comes into a ministry should go to the minister or ministers in that group, and they expect the people to give offerings for the physical work of the ministry to go forward. This is, at best, a misinterpretation of what tithing is all about; and at the worse end, it's the kind of greed shown by men such as the sons of Eli! (I Sam. 2:12-17)

These facts bring us back to what I was saying earlier when I said it's a get what you pay for world. The principle of tithing combined with the giving of offerings will dictate the ability of any particular ministry. If many people believe in a particular work and give to it, that work will thrive and have great

resources to work with. If very few people believe in the work and/or are willing to tithe and give offerings to it, there will be little to work with, right down to the simple fact that any particular minister may have to leave off the work of the ministry in order to work, at least a certain amount of his time, creating an increase of his own to live in this world. This means much ministry work is dictated by the choices of men, and whether a minister is or is not supported by the ministry work they do is not an essay on whether or not they are attempting to do a true work. Jesus warned us not to go off chasing after those who would claim to be what Jesus truly was, because there is a propensity for people to do such things. (Matt. 24:23-28) Paul tells Timothy to make full proof of his ministry, because Paul explains there is coming a time when people will heap to themselves teachers, having itchy ears! (II Tim. 4:1-5) As that happens more and more, less and less of the true ministry can find support, and more and more false teaching is what becomes supported and thus, predominant.

In a time period or in a place where people are more interested in hearing what makes them feel good instead of what is right, there can be any number of false ministers being supported beyond belief while those teaching the truth are working at the local grocery store stocking shelves instead of preaching The Word full time. All this is not to say that if God desires to place a minister in a particular place and time with the resources to do a tremendous, or at least ongoing work, without the support of those around them, God can do just that! However, it is only on specific occasions and for specific reasons God moves in this way. The fact God, in general, simply provides the opportunity and allows the desire of those on this earth to take or not take that opportunity is shown in many ways through both the Old and New Testaments!

In the time period covered by the Old Testament, we see times when even the temple of God was in both good repair and very poor repair due to the care or neglect of those who were to support and care for it. (II Kin. 12:4-12) Jesus speaks about the fact many of God's prophets and messengers have been killed in Jerusalem and throughout the land in general, instead of being accepted and supported. (Matt. 23:29-37) These happenings came about in no small part because the people were supporting and listening to false teachers and practicing downright false religions. In the New Testament itself as well as the history of the time periods following its direct words, we see this

kind of thing as well. Especially when it comes to the acceptance or non-acceptance of ministers God sent to preach the gospel. (Acts 7:54-60, 14:19-22, II Cor. 11:30-33, Rev. 1:9) In the book of Revelation, we are even given a visualization of an entire false church system which is not truly of God! "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon." Revelation 13:11

We can not afford to just give to whatever ministry seems to be having success. In the Old Testament, Abraham had someone he gave tithes to because the man was doing God's work, not because he was necessarily popular. When the Laws of Moses were written down, the children of Israel were required to tithe to a specific people and place through which God said He would do His work among Israel. (Mal. 3:10) In the New Testament, we are told when Jesus ascended He gave gifts among men. (Eph. 4:1-16) These gifts were/are ministers called by God, not just out of the Jewish nation, but out of all nations, who would be called to one of five different full-time ministry focuses! They are not forced upon men with the authority to tell us all what to do. They are not rulers of a new organization which should take the place of God's chosen nation and/or which all men must become a part of in order to see God. These full-time ministers are "gifts." People can choose to utilize and support them, or they can ignore them!

As a Jew, it's true that the Law tells you to tithe into the temple of God, and that Law has not ceased. However, this is much like the laws of sacrifice which many people teach the same false philosophy about God ending the practice with Jesus. The truth is, there are no sacrifices currently for the same reason there were no sacrifices after the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians long before the time of Christ. Because there is no temple to appropriately follow the Law, there is no ability to sacrifice according to the Law. Now, when it comes to the law of sacrifice, it should be easily understood that it's a ceremony meant to represent a truth. If a ceremony which has no real power to save you, but only to teach you, is not done properly, then it has no power or can even have a negative effect. Jesus did not remove the sacrifices, nor is He to be blamed for the unavailability of the temple. As He walked this earth, Jesus wept that the temple and Jerusalem in general would suffer destruction. He did so as He rode triumphantly to Jerusalem from that very mount He will return to someday in order to ultimately

defend Jerusalem and His chosen nation from utter destruction! (Luke 19:37-44) Part of His weeping was purely for the people and their suffering. However, part of His weeping was for the fact that because of the choices of men, the world would be without Israel on the land God had promised them. This would mean, for at least a time, there would no longer be a nation teaching the world through the precepts God had given them, in full operation. This would be a big blow to the work of God being carried out by the nation of Israel and thus, in this world!

Fortunately, tithing is not exactly like sacrificing which must be done at the temple in order to have the proper effect. Tithing is not a precept which can not be held rightly simply because it can not be done in the right place. While tithing for a Jew is ideally something you bind in your hand, and give at the temple in Jerusalem to those ordered in the Law to collect and appropriately distribute it, tithing can still serve the basic purpose it was always intended to serve, even during times when this ability was unavailable. If the temple existed in Jerusalem, I would instruct Jews to give their tithe there without question. To do otherwise would be teaching people to sin. As a part of God's chosen nation, the temple is where your tithe belongs, because when the temple and its service is running, there is no question that is what a Jew should be supporting. This, in reality, is an example of what a great blessing the Law can be in bringing simplicity to a Jewish life. This is a simplicity which those outside the nation of Israel have never had so clear cut. However, without a temple, Jews are left in the same place Abraham and all those before the Law were in, along with all those who have always been outside the Law's direct commandment. I suppose one could argue that without the temple, Jews are not "required" to tithe; but any true believer should have the faith to see tithing as a blessed opportunity to support the true work of God in the world! The direction as to where that means we should give our tithe will come down to the same thing which caused others of the past to make their choices. We must turn to our faith. Even if we currently do not know where to give, we must put our tithe aside, and with prayer, even fasting, we must seek The Lord as to where He wants it to go!

Tithing, as well as the giving of offerings, is an opportunity for us to cultivate God's work in this world; and one of the most telling incidences in the Bible which shows God is primarily working to provide opportunities which we must choose to take

advantage of is found in Matthew chapter 10. There Jesus sends His disciples out to preach and do miracles in His name. As Jesus sends them out, He instructs that in any place where they are not welcomed and cared for by at least someone, they are to shake off even the remnant of dirt left on their shoes from that place, for Sodom and Gomorrah will fair better in the judgment than that place will!

Of course, the greatest example of this concept is seen by looking at what Jesus Himself did. The Messiah had come to the earth to offer Himself to the world as the answer to all our problems! Jesus would be spared as a child from being killed by Herod. (Matt. 2:7-23) Jesus would be spared at other points as well. (John 10:22-40) However, when the time came for Jesus to do what He had come to do, He rode triumphantly into Jerusalem being hailed as just what the wise men had come to see so many years before! (John 12:12-16) Not many days after this, Jesus would be arrested as if He were a criminal. On the night Jesus was arrested, it was not because they tracked Him down in a city outside of Jerusalem. That night, Jesus stayed and prayed out in the open, in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matt. 26:36-39) Those who sought Him also knew where to find Him because one of His own disciples betrayed Him. (John 18:1-3) After Jesus was arrested and questioned by the religious authorities of the day, the secular authority was given a chance to choose what they would do with Him! (John 18:12-32) In the end, all these powers refused to support Jesus, or even protect an innocent man's life. When given a choice, the great crowds in Jerusalem that day democratically elected that Jesus be crucified! (Matt. 27:15-26) Even after so much love and miracle working power had been shown by Him, there was much anger able to be turned against Him. Thus, Jesus died on a cross, on a hill just outside the city of Jerusalem, and even the plaque which told the crime for which He was being crucified said it was because He was a king of and for those who were known to be the people of God!

No, this is not as some claim: a stain on the nation of Israel. It's a stain on sinful men everywhere across this world whether Jew or non-Jew! The world was given an opportunity like never before, and not only did they refuse to take it, they did what they could to destroy it. Yes, there were those who, if they had had their way, would have fought to the last man to see this not happen to Jesus! However, they were told that was not the way this was going to go down; (John 18:10-11)

and Jesus instructs us all to take up our cross to follow after Him. (Matt. 16:24-27) Jesus was not just here to offer Himself for those who would support Him, but to the entire world. What the world as a whole chose to do would be His fate because God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Jesus did exactly what Abraham so many centuries ago understood and told his son Isaac God would do. Jesus willingly gave His life as the ultimate offering and sacrifice which we cannot afford to give! (Isa. 53, Rom. 8:1-4)

As we each think about the question of what tithing and offering is, whether it is required of us or not, and where we should give it, we should keep in mind the simplest things. If you are blessed enough to be dealing with honest people, this world is, at best, a get what you pay for place; but in spite of the fact we did not deserve it, God was willing to give it all to show us there is a plan and a place where sin will never be able to touch us again! This is why the words we find in the New Testament about what we should understand when it comes to true giving are, once more, those of Paul, and we find them in Romans 12:1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

May we each seek to give of ourselves to those around us as God gives us the opportunity!

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