

The Tithe: Worship, Trust, and Partnership with God

Series: Roots, Law, and Covenant — The Tithe in the Old Testament (Week 1 of 2)

1. Introduction — Continuing the Journey

Ten Commandments: Relationship with God and Others

Tithes: Our trust in God as provider and God's means of caring for all

2. Roots, Law, and Covenant — Starting with Ownership

Worship, trust, partnership — not a genie in a bottle

“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1, NIV).

Everything belongs to God; we are stewards, not owners

“You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today” (Deuteronomy 8:17–18, NIV).

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17, NLT).

3. What Does 'Tithe' Mean?

Hebrew: ma’aser (מַעֲשֵׂר) — “a tenth part”

Greek: dekatē (δεκάτη) — “a tenth”

4. The Principle of First Fruits

Give God the first and the best — not the leftovers

“Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine” (Proverbs 3:9–10, NIV).

5. Before the Law — Abraham and Jacob

Abraham gives a tenth to Melchizedek

“And Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, brought Abram some bread and wine. Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing: ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who has defeated your enemies for you.’ Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered” (Genesis 14:17–20, NLT).

Jacob's vow at Bethel

"Then Jacob made 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 clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you'" (Genesis 28:20–22, ESV).

6. Tithing Under the Mosaic Law — Three Distinct Tithes

The tenth belongs to the Lord, holy

"One tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain from the fields or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord and must be set apart to him as holy" (Leviticus 27:30, NLT).

The Levitical Tithe — funds ministry

"As for the tribe of Levi, your relatives, I will compensate them for their service in the Tabernacle. Instead of an allotment of land, I will give them the tithes from the entire land of Israel" (Numbers 18:21, NLT).

"The Lord also told Moses, 'Give these instructions to the Levites: When you receive from the people of Israel the tithes I have assigned as your allotment, give a tenth of the tithes you receive — a tithe of the tithe — to the Lord as a sacred offering'" (Numbers 18:25–26, NLT).

The Festival Tithe — funds worship

"Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always" (Deuteronomy 14:22–23, NIV).

The Third-Year Welfare Tithe — funds justice

"At the end of every third year, bring the entire tithe of that year's harvest and store it in the nearest town. Give it to the Levites, who will receive no allotment of land among you, as well as to the foreigners living among you, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, so they can eat and be satisfied. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all your work" (Deuteronomy 14:28–29, NLT).

7. The Prophets — When Tithing Goes Wrong

Amos: religion without justice

"Go ahead and offer sacrifices to the idols at Bethel. Keep on disobeying at Gilgal. Offer sacrifices each morning, and bring your tithes every three days" (Amos 4:4, NLT).

Malachi: 'robbing God'

"I am God — yes, I Am. I haven't changed. And because I haven't changed, you, the descendants of Jacob, haven't been destroyed. You have a long history of ignoring my commands. You haven't done a thing I've told you. Return to me so I can return to you," says God-of-the-Angel-Armies. 'You ask, "But how do we return?" 'Begin by being honest. Do honest people rob God? But you rob me day after day. 'You ask, "How have we robbed you?" 'The tithe and the offering — that's how! And now you're under a curse — the whole lot of you — because you're robbing me. Bring your full tithe to the Temple treasury so there will be ample provisions in my Temple. Test me in this and see if I don't open up heaven itself to you and pour out blessings beyond your wildest dreams. For my part, I will defend you against marauders, protect your wheat fields and vegetable gardens against plunderers.' 'You'll be voted "Happiest Nation." You'll experience what it's like to be a country of grace.' God-of-the-Angel-Armies says so" (Malachi 3:6–12, MSG).

8. Tithing Reveals Where Our Trust Lies

Treasure and heart

"Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be" (Matthew 6:21, NLT).

God or mammon

"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money" (Matthew 6:24, NLT).

Greek: *mamōnas* (μαμωνᾶς) — "wealth, riches, money", especially as an object of trust

9. The Theological Core of Old Testament Tithing

Divine Ownership — everything belongs to YHWH

Covenant Responsibility — tithe and care for the poor and marginalised

Community Provision — fund the ministry and social welfare

Joyful Worship — the festival tithe: God's abundance shared in community

10. Reflection & Application

- What surprised you most about the three distinct tithes?
- What would the welfare tithe look like in a modern church's giving?
- Where does your spending reveal your trust to be?