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## Stewardship Part VIII

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### What is a Tithe? Part 2

Here are more key verses for your consideration: 2 Chronicles 31:5-12; Nehemiah 10:37-38; Amos 4:4; Malachi 3:8-10.

#### **The way it was:**

For the most part, it is difficult to give a precise reconstruction of a typical tithe from the OT, since over time the practice changed, from the desert wandering under Moses, to the period of the Judges, then the Kings, the captivities, the different localities of Judea vs. Israel, local governments, and invading governments. In addition, there was abuse by the Pharisees (they were not fair, you see) and other leaders in charge by over-taxing. However, from Scripture, we do know what was required.

**First**, every year, a Jewish household gave ten percent of all of their goods or produce; this was the "Levite's Tithe." The Levites did not have land as the rest of the twelve tribes did (Joseph's cut was split in two with Ephraim and Manasseh to make twelve). So, the rest of the tribes were called to support them. This was the *tax* to the government in order to run the office of the priesthood. Remember, Israel was a theocracy, a government run by the Church--or in their case, the priests, the Judges, and then the Kings, all of whom were under God. The countless thousands of priests were the teachers, rabbis/pastors, and government officials!

It would be like if today, the Mayor, Governor, Senate, and Congress did not represent the people by vote. Since (the rules are) all spelled out in the Law, they only sought the Will of God by examining the Scriptures. God told them what to do. So the *tithe* was also supporting the running of the government! We do not live in a theocracy today.

**Second**, the Jewish household would give another ten percent every year for the festivals and the religious sacrifices. (This is what the people were doing by dropping in coins, or bringing animals to the Temple when Jesus was there teaching. Because the leaders abused the system by selling what they were not supposed to, Jesus drove them out with a whip!) Thus, the running of the Temple/church, Sabbaths, holy days, and each one's personal offering to God accounted for ten percent (the percentage, exact amount, and how often this was practiced is a matter of debate).

**Third**, the Jewish household would pay another ten percent every third year to the poor and the widows locally (again the percentage, exact amount and how often this was practiced is a matter of debate). So, if you were an OT Jew, you definitely would pay ten percent of your income, in whatever form was required to the Levites and/or the local government, to support them and the operation of the priests, Temple, and government. Then you could pay, depending on where you were in history, another ten percent to provide for the Temple, festivals, and such, plus your personal sacrifice for atonement. Then, you might be required to pay another ten percent every third year for the needy.

What does this all mean? Well, if you claim a tithe is just ten percent, you would be wrong, because there were several *tithes* plus freewill offerings! Also, there was the shekel temple tax, and whatever tax was required if they were occupied by a foreign power (They were occupied by the Romans, but the government was not run by the Romans. This is why Jesus said, *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's*; in other words, pay the Romans what they ask for, and render to God the things that are required by God). In addition, if you were a farmer, you were required to leave about ten percent of your crop un-harvested, for the poor. Thus, you would have had a square field and only have harvested in a circle, leaving the corners for *gleaning* to the poor. The actual breakdown of the entire tithe load was around 23.3% per year, plus the atonement offerings, to which most Jewish scholars say the total could have been as high as thirty to forty percent plus, including foreign taxes. Again, scholars debate the exact percentage, amount, and how often this was practiced, but you get the picture. It was far in excess of a mere ten percent!

I find it fascinating that the base tax system in the United States is about twenty to thirty percent, and when you add income tax and the various sales taxes, we pay about twenty-five percent! But, this does not include the tithe to God, who says, *Let every man bring whatever he purposes in his heart; let him do it willingly, whatever he wants to give*. In the book of Acts, we find that they kept bringing so much in that they had to say, *Stop, don't bring anymore--that's enough*. So, if we did pay ten percent of our net salary to the church, we would be paying generally the same percentage as the Israelites were called to do. Remember that giving is always a *freewill* offering, coming from what is in our heart. It is an expression of our gratitude, worship, and love to our Lord! So, do whatever you want to do from this perspective. Exercise the good heart you have-- or are supposed to have. But, beware you do not allow your pride and greed to cloud your reasoning and call!

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4-7).*

## Questions

1. Do you have a better understanding of what a tithe is?
2. What do you think were God's motivations and desires for the Jewish people regarding tithing?
3. How can you have an attitude to *Rejoice in the Lord always* in your Tithing and giving?
4. How would you explain the Levite's Tithe? How does this help us today in the church?

5. How does understanding the history and biblical roots of a tithe help you manage your money and resources today?
6. How do you see wealth: with favor, with suspicion, or...? Do you believe it is good or bad? Or, is there a balanced view? Is wealth "the" sign of God's blessings? Why, or why not?
7. Why will the poor not be ignored by God? Do you hear their cries? They reach Him, and our responsibility to care for them must be heeded! What can you do to be a better steward of caring for the poor?
8. How can you have a better mindset to learn and grow from your experiences?
9. How can Stewardship become more of a regular, normal, and daily endeavor?
10. Jesus calls us to be radical in our service, and mature in our attitude and faith! What does this mean to you?
11. What do you think God wants you to do about tithing?
12. What is a biblical, good and responsible way your church can teach its people about Tithing?

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