

UNDERSTANDING TITHING (PART 1)

There are two regimes of tithe in the Bible. The first regime is the Abrahamic regime. The second regime is the regime of the Law. That's short code for the Law of Moses. It's also known as regime of the Ten Commandments - the body of legislation enacted to regulate the nascent nation of Israel.

It wasn't Moses who introduced tithe into human history. It was actually Abraham. Before Abraham there was no mention of tithe in scriptures. (Tithe simply means a tenth). Here's how we came across tithe in scriptures:

The story goes that Lot, Abraham's nephew, became collateral damage in the power play between the king of Elam and king of Sodom. Sodom, a vassal of Elam had suddenly declared independence and so Elam went to war against Sodom. Lot was living in Sodom. With his allies the king of Elam conquered Sodom and took prisoners of war. That was how Lot became a prisoner of war. Well, family is family. Abraham took his private army, along with his allies went after the king of Elam and his three allies, and defeated them. He rescued Lot and his family. We're told as he returned from the battle, he was met by a king named Melchizedek who also doubled as a priest of the Most High God. He brought communion. It was Melchizedek who gave us insight into how Abraham defeated the Gang of Four: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator and Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High who has given your enemies into your hand." (Genesis 14:19-20) It was a not so subtle reminder God did the conquest for Abraham, not Abraham's strength or brilliance. The conquest was a work of grace. Whereupon Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the treasure from that battle and that was the first tithe in the Bible.

Nobody compelled Abraham to tithe. It was voluntary. For this reason we shall call Abrahamic tithing elective tithing. He made money and elected to give a tenth of it to a priest of God. The subtext from the invocation of Melchizedek is that Abraham tithed in acknowledgement of the fact that all that he had, all that he owned, all that he had ever accomplished came by the hand of the Possessor of the heaven and the earth. To that extent Abram (as he was then known) tithed as an act of worship.

The second regime of tithe - tithing under the Law had a completely different hue. It was legislated by God as a political solution to the issue of state creation. You see, there were twelve tribes in Israel. When God was going to divide the Promised Land among the tribes, he excluded the Levites. Joseph's second son, Ephraim took the lot of the Levites. Joseph had double portion. (Genesis 48:5) The Levites were consecrated as priests to God instead. God declared he was their inheritance. (Numbers 18:20) But then how would the Levites feed and take care of their family?

How would they prosper? They could not undertake secular work. Their job was to serve in the temple. Well, God came up with a contributory scheme to take care of the Levites. Everyone would pay tithe to the Levites. (Numbers 18: 20-24) But the Levites too had to pay tithe, which in effect means the tithes were the income for the priests. (Nehemiah 10:38) It was theirs to do as they deemed fit.

But here's what many don't realise: there were three types of tithe under the Law of Moses. The first was sacred tithe, the second was vacation tithe and the third was social justice or social security tithe.

The sacred tithe as we discussed went to the Levites. It was their income.

The second tithe under the Law was the tithe of feasts or tithe of pilgrimage; it was some sort of vacation tithe. (Deuteronomy 14:22-27) The Israelites were supposed to make a pilgrimage to a designated place of worship every year. They were to set aside a tenth of their harvest and this was supposed to be eaten before God. Why? It was to inspire reverence for God. (Deuteronomy 14:22-23) If the place of worship was too far to transport the agricultural produce tithe, it was to be converted into money; which would then be spent on whatever their appetite craved, and that included alcohol. (Deuteronomy 14:26) So this was some sort of enjoyment or summer vacation tithe. God essentially mandated summer break. He cared for the welfare of the people. Because this tithe was convertible into money, it's not exactly true to say all tithe in the Old Testament was agricultural produce.

The third tithe under the Law was social justice tithe. It had a three year cycle – was paid every three years. This tithe went not only to the Levites, but also to immigrants, orphans and widows. (Deuteronomy 14:28) Those who have not taken time to read the ENTIRE legislation on tithing under the Law are quick to point to this as how to pay tithe – that the money should be distributed to the poor and not priests, but that's only true to the extent that this was the third tithe under the Law. There were three tithes.

The overall scheme of tithing under the Law can be called legislative tithing since it was mandated as law. It was a duty to the State - God. And as we can see, tithing under the Law is cumulatively higher than 10%. It was 30% on occasion. Many don't realise.

Now comes the challenge. A Christian CANNOT pay tithe under the terms of the Law. That is inviting trouble. We're not under the Law, we're under grace. (Romans 6:14) The moment you elect to submit yourself to the dictates of the Law, you commit to obeying ALL 613 commandments. If you fail in one, you're guilty of ALL.

(James 2:10) And so not meeting the requirement of tithing under the Law also meant you were guilty of murder, blasphemy, etc. You're guilty of ALL.

Paul tells us, "No one can be made right with God by trying to keep the Law." (Galatians 3:11) In fact, Paul says trying to please God according to the terms of the Law is sheer madness. He told the Galatians who were strenuously trying to fulfil the Law, "Are you going to continue in this craziness?" (Galatians 3:2-4 MSG) All those scriptures we spout for paying tithe under the terms of the Law are therefore void and of no effect. The moment you seek to pay tithe according to Deuteronomy or Malachi, you have to obey ALL the Law of Moses. And no one can be righteous obeying those laws.

To seek to pay tithe according to the terms of the Law is also to attract a curse unto yourself. Galatians 3:10 says, "But those who depend on the Law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God's Book of the Law." So the idea of giving your tithe to the poor as dictated under the Law is not exactly wise. You're setting up yourself for a curse.

We can therefore conclude that the idea of paying tithe according to the provisions of the Law is sheer madness, to use the expression of Paul. By that very token, that famous quotation about robbing God through non-payment of tithe cannot apply since it's a reference to the Law. (Malachi 3:8-12) We're not under the Law. But Malachi is still instructive since all scripture is profitable for training in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:16-17) At least you have an idea of how serious God takes some things.

We'll continue the discourse on Understanding Tithing (Part 2) next week Sunday. In that part, we'll learn the four conditions for tithing and examine FAQs and suppositions.

If you'll like to receive Jesus into your life please pray this prayer: "Father I acknowledge that I am a sinner, that Jesus died for me, that you raised him from the dead. Father please forgive me. I accept Jesus today as my Lord and my Saviour. Amen."

To read Understanding Tithing (Part 1), please visit <http://myilluminate.com/>

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