

The Destination of the Tithe

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THE DESTINATION OF THE TITHE
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***Special thanks to all my faithful partners
who have supported this ministry.***

***Every life that is changed by reading this
book, has been changed by you and
me working together.***

*And my God shall supply all your need according to
His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

*Now to our God and Father be glory forever and
ever. Amen.*

Philippians 4:19-20

Chapter 1

The Malachi Tithe

“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. And try Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts. “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”

Malachi 3:8-10

The popular preached understanding of this scripture in its historical context is that the common people, indeed the whole nation of Israel, were robbing God of His tithe by not bringing it into the Temple storehouse in Jerusalem. This was why the whole nation was cursed and the answer to fix it was to get everyone tithing so that uncontainable blessings would follow.

None of this is true.

The popular transposition of Malachi 3:8-10 into modern times is that believers should tithe exclusively to their local church and that whoever does so will overflow with blessings, moreover if everyone tithes to their local church then uncontainable blessings will follow in the whole nation, however any Christian that does not tithe is under a curse.

None of this is true either.

Let's look first of all at the historical context of tithing in the time in which Malachi was written. The Israelites addressed in Malachi lived under the Levitical Law of Moses. In practical

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terms this meant that the common people could tithe to the following recipients:

“When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase...and have given *it* to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled, then you shall say before the Lord your God: ‘I have removed the holy *tithe* from my house, and also have given them to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me..’ ”

Deuteronomy 26:12-13

According to these scriptures, the Old Testament believer had the responsibility of choosing where to place their tithe, within certain parameters. Their options were, in the order listed:

1. The Levite. Those from the tribe of Levi provided a huge range of religious and governmental administrative services for the nation of Israel. Levites were civil and religious judges and officers, civil and religious guards, Temple workers, singers, a variety of craftsmen, and soldiers.
2. The Stranger or Foreigner. Surprisingly the Israelite could also give his tithe to the needy unbeliever.
3. The Orphan. Someone without the financial protection of a family and parents.
4. The Widow. Someone, with or without children, who did not have the financial protection of a husband.

As the scriptures from Deuteronomy 26 above plainly read, the Israelites were to remove their tithe from their house and give it *straight* to any of these mentioned recipients. Deuteronomy 14:28-29 also commands the same thing.

You shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And

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the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the Lord your God may bless you...

Deuteronomy 14:28-29

Clearly the Old Testament believer could give their tithe to a remarkable number of locations. Numbers 18:24 also confirms that the tithes of any of the people could go to the Levites.

For the tithes of the children of Israel... I have given to the Levites as an inheritance.

Numbers 18:24

The only group of people that the Israelites did not tithe directly to were those ministering in religious service in the Tabernacle and later the Temple, these were the priests of Aaron. Whatever proportion of their tithe the common people gave to the Levites was to be tithed again by the Levites to these priests. The priests were a subdivision of Levites who were directly descended from Aaron. No other Levites or common people were ever called priests – only the direct descendants of Aaron were. This is very important.

The priests therefore effectively got *up to* **1%** of the common people's tithe through the ordinary Levites.

When you [the Levites] take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to the Lord, a tenth of the tithe [i.e. 1%]... Thus you shall also offer a heave offering to the Lord from all your tithes which you receive from the children of Israel, and you shall give the Lord's heave offering from it to Aaron the priest.

Numbers 18:26-28

Numbers 18:8 also explains that the tithe of the tithe, (also called heave offerings) given by the Levites, belonged to Aaron

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the priest and to his descendants.

And the Lord spoke to Aaron: "Here, I Myself have also given you charge of My heave offerings all the holy gifts of the children of Israel; I have given them as a portion to you and your sons..."

Numbers 18:8

The Aaronic priesthood themselves did not tithe but rather **received** the tithe *of the tithe* from the rest of the Levites. The priests used the tithe of the tithe they received for sacrifices and burnt offerings and also consumed it as food.

The common people throughout the land did not bring their tithes directly to the priests but rather to the Levites where they lived in their appointed cities, also known as cities of refuge. There were originally 48 cities of refuge recorded in Joshua 20 and 21, and 1 Chronicles 6.

...to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities...

Nehemiah 10:37

Therefore, instead of being commanded to bring the tithe to the Temple storehouse, the ordinary citizen was commanded to bring their tithes to the Levites in the cities among them. The Levites then gave their own tithe from the tithes of the people to the priests who also lived in 13 different cities among them (Joshua 21:19).

It is important to recognise that the ordinary Levites who received those tithes that the people chose to give them were not priests but rather operated in a variety of secular and religious roles, which blended together because Israel was a theocracy. Only the priests of Aaron ministered in the Temple before the Lord. Anyone else who tried that, including even other Levites, were either put to death or struck dead.

Also bring with you your brethren of the tribe

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of Levi... they shall attend to your needs and all the needs of the tabernacle; but they shall not come near the articles of the sanctuary and the altar, lest they die—they and you also.

Numbers 18:2-3

In a nutshell the common people of Israel tithed to any Levite, to the stranger or foreigner, the orphan and the widow but never directly to those in religious service, the priests. Those tithes that the Levites did receive were tithed again to the priests. Therefore the priests or full time ministers of Bible times got up to 1% of the people's tithe. The other 9%, of that proportion which was not given to the poor, fatherless, stranger and widow (remember the common people did not have to always give ALL of their tithe to the Levites), went to the Levites who administered the running of the nation.

The first question then is to whom are the admonitions about tithes in Malachi 3:8-10 addressed? Are they addressed to the common people, the Levites or the Aaronic priesthood?

To the priests who despise my name...

Malachi 1:6

God is speaking to the priests, the select group of Levites who came only from the family of Aaron. Malachi continues with a series of complaints by the Lord to the priests about their abysmal sacrificial offerings. Remember, only the priests could make sacrificial offerings. Chapter two twice identifies the priests as the recipients of the command being given:

And now of priests this commandment is for you...

Malachi 2:1

For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge

Malachi 2:7

Verse 8 says:

You have corrupted the covenant of Levi.

Malachi 2:8

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Aaronites were Levites but not all Levites were Aaronites. I think by now it is quite clear who God is speaking to. The priesthood! In Malachi 3 the recipients of the prophet's words are identified yet again and the topic becomes that of offerings – and since it is only the Levites who are priests who are being addressed it is clearly their offerings that are the point of contention.

He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord, an offering in righteousness.

Malachi 3:3

Only the priests were allowed to make offerings in the Temple, the subject continues as we approach our famous verse.

Will a man rob God, yet you have robbed me.

Malachi 3:8

Who has robbed God? The sons of Levi who were priests have robbed God. **NOT** the people and **NOT** even rest of the Levites. Verse 9 is a spectacular revelation of whose fault it is that the nation of Israel was in an impoverished state.

You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed me, *even* this whole nation.

Malachi 3:9

Who is *you*? Who has robbed God? The priests have robbed God AND the whole nation. The whole nation has not robbed God, the priests have robbed the whole nation. The word *even* is italicised to show that it has been added at the discretion of the translators, but with or without it the sentence still reads the same – the *priests* have robbed the whole nation! They had previously been commanded to bring all the tithes into the storehouse and warned not to misuse or profane any of them (Numbers 18:32). This is what Malachi 3:10 is referring to. The profane use of the tithe that had been received.

Well maybe the priests weren't still being addressed by Malachi 3:10, only before it. Really? Let's see now, we have three direct

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references to priests in Malachi 1:6, 2:1 and 2:7, and in Malachi 2:8 and 3:3 two references to Levites, of which tribe the Aaronic priests also were. That's five. Now let's read a mere four verses further on after Malachi 3:10.

You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the Lord of hosts?'

Malachi 3:14

Verse 14 of Malachi 3 again confirms that it was the priests who were not acting and living as they should, not the people. God says that this group have said that it is useless to *serve* God. Please note, the common people did not *serve* before the Lord, only the Levites who were Aaronic priests did. The Levites who worked in the Temple *assisted* the priests (Numbers 18:2-4), only the priests served in the sanctuary and at the altar (Numbers 18:5). The common people did not *keep*, literally in the Hebrew *protect, shamar* (Strong's 8104) *the ordinances*. The priests did. It was the priests who said, *why bother serving God*, it was the priests who did not properly appropriate the tithe given to them and robbed the whole nation and left it cursed, NOT THE PEOPLE.

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house.

Malachi 3:10

So who is guilty of not tithing? Well let's go through this methodically. God is speaking to the priests and telling them to bring the tithe into the storehouse. So what does this tell us about the tithe in Malachi?

It tells us that it had already been delivered to the priests. It tells us that the common people must have obeyed God and tithed to the Levites, otherwise the Levites would not have been able to have then tithed the tithe they had received and given it to the Aaronic priests. It tells us that the Aaronic priests had received the tithe but were not putting it into their storehouse like they were supposed to – this is why God said to

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them and not the common people, *bring all the tithes into the storehouse!* God did not say to the common people here in Malachi nor anywhere else in the entire Old Testament, "tithe to the Priesthood" or "tithe into the storehouse" nor would He have told them to bring *anything* into the priests storehouse since they did not have access to their storehouses.

The persons who were guilty of not bringing the tithes into the storehouse therefore cannot be the common people because there never were any previous commands to them to bring all their tithes into the Temple storehouse. Since there were no such commandments how could they be admonished for not doing something that they had never been commanded to do in the first place? The people of Israel did not bring their tithes directly to the storehouse. They were clearly told where to tithe to in Deuteronomy chapters 14, 18, 26 and Numbers 10 and 18 - that was to the poor, fatherless, widow, foreigner and of course the Levites in their Levitical cities. Oddly enough, despite these thorough and copious instructions of where Old Testament tithes went, modern tithe preachers totally ignore them and act like they don't exist.

So who is not tithing in Malachi? No one. No one is not tithing. The whole of the book of Malachi is nothing to do with tithing or not tithing. It's about senior leadership misusing the tithe. The curse in Malachi is on the priests for misappropriating the tithe they had received from the Levites.

"And now, O priests, this commandment is for you. If you will not hear..." says the Lord of hosts, "I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take it to heart."

Malachi 2:1-2

It gets worse. The priests were given the best of the tithed tithe by the Levites (Numbers 18). Despite this they managed to offer unacceptable quality sacrifices.

"You offer defiled food on My altar ...you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when

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you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?"

Malachi 1:7-8

At face value this make no sense. How can the priests who are being supplied with the best of tithes and offerings end up presenting blind and lame animals for sacrifice? Verse 13 has the shocking answer.

"And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" says the Lord.

Malachi 1:13

They were stolen! By whom and from whom? By those whom God accused: the priests! Not wanting to sacrifice the best of the tithes and offerings they had received, they kept them for themselves, perhaps even exchanging them for goods and money, and did not put them into the storehouse. Then, in order to perpetuate the sham of their devotion and love for God they stole more than their appointed portion, most probably from the Levites because their portions were often stored near the priest's, they then used them to make profane offerings.

So how were the priests robbing God and the whole nation? The cardinal sin that the priests of Malachi committed when they profaned the tithes and offerings was that they robbed the people of a righteousness consciousness. The sacrifices that were so very important were publicly treated with less respect than their own secular governor's offerings. The tithes and offerings that were supposed to be properly publicly sacrificed, to bring the good news of having a conscience free from guilt and condemnation, were embezzled by the priests and replaced with an assortment of stolen, lame and sick gimmicks.

The priests also robbed God by denying the people access to His gift of grace. God was denied that which meant more to Him than anything else – people being able to come to Him with a clear conscience and relate to Him freely as they had originally been created to. Now the way was blocked by religious leaders displaying nothing more than greed, contempt for God's grace and contempt for the people.

Chapter 2

Tithing Before The Law

Abraham

In Genesis 14 a group of kings makes war against the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah are defeated, spoils are taken and Abraham's nephew Lot is captured. Abraham hears about it and leaves where he lives in Mamre to rescue his nephew. Abraham catches up with Lot's captors about 40 miles away, rescues all the captives with him and recovers all the spoil. On the way back from Dan in the north of the country, Abraham passes through the valley of Shaveh near Salem where he is met by the surviving king of Sodom and a kingly priest called Melchizedek.

And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh ...then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High" and he [Abraham] gave him a tithe of all.

Genesis 14:17-24

The book of Hebrews also refers to this event in more detail.

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem...to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all... Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils.

Hebrews 7:1-4

Abraham gave a tenth of all of what? The spoils of the battle. The spoils were not his, they were captured goods. So does this mean that Abraham tithed or that he was a tither? Consider the following. There were some pretty bad riots in England recently

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around the time I am writing, transpose this "tithe" of Abraham into a real world situation: A group of rioting youth's smash up a local privately owned superstore, load up a lorry with piles of stolen goods and kidnap my nephew and some of the store owner's family workers too. I track them all the way to their home several miles away. I attack them by surprise at night, overcome them all (ok, now I am dreaming a bit here) and recover my nephew, the staff and all the goods, load them onto my lorry and start driving back to the superstore. On the way I first meet the owner of the store who tells me I can keep all the goods if I just return the family workers. Naturally I return the family members but I also turn down the request to keep the goods. Nevertheless I give a tenth to a preacher who has met me on my journey home and come out to publicly praise my exploits. Am I a tither? If you are not sure then ask yourself if you presented this scenario to your local pastor (who believes in "tithing") would he happily say that this is tithing 10% of your gross income regularly to a local church? Of course not!

Look at it again from another angle. If I have a cupboard full of an assortment of 102 tins food, maybe 12 tins of peas, 8 tins of potatoes, 15 tins of tuna, etc, etc. Included among the 102 assorted tins are my best tins, 10 tins of premium red salmon. If I give you one tin of red salmon, have I tithed? No. What I have done is given you a tenth of my red salmon. This is not the same as tithing a gross 10% of everything, and it is disingenuous to try and say that it is. Yet this is exactly what many preachers say Abraham did. They say that Abraham giving a tenth of captured spoils once, is the same as him giving a tenth of all his income all his life, to a local church.

Abraham gave a *tenth* of the *spoils*. They were not even his to start with. The king of Sodom met him returning *before* Melchizedek and told him he could keep them all (Genesis 14:17 and 21). Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils, NOT his own annual income at home. So Abraham, as an actual percentage of his annual income from his herds and flocks is recorded as giving what? Nothing! The Bible doesn't record that Abraham ever tithed any of his livelihood. Moreover Abraham was away from home when he met Melchizedek, at the very least a two day journey through the mountains from Mamre to

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Salem and the valley of Shaveh. Abraham's one off offering of a portion of the spoils of a battle to Melchizedek was in no way shape or form representative of regular tithing to a local priest.

According to scripture, Abraham is not recorded as ever having tithed or been a tither as we understand it today – he did however give a tribute of 10% of some (previously stolen) goods that he had recaptured in a battle. This was a pagan custom and is found recorded in secular history.

So just to make the point abundantly clear. According to the Bible there is no record of Abraham ever regularly tithing 10% of his own gross income to a local religious figure. He did however adhere to the pagan governmental rules of the day and give a regional king/priest ruler a tenth of the spoils of a battle conducted in their territory.

Some people assert that this event, long before the Law, establishes tithing as a biblical principle. But this term a *biblical principle* is meaningless in this context. Simply because Abraham is recorded as, on only one occasion, retrieving someone else's spoils lost in a battle, and then giving a tenth *of them only*, to the ruler of the territory in which the battle was conducted; it does not mean that we should tithe all of our own gross income, all of our lives, exclusively to a local church.

Jacob

What about Jacob, wasn't he a tither? Unfortunately not.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

Genesis 28:20-22

Jacob stole his brother Esau's birthright and blessing by

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subterfuge and flees to his Uncle Laban's in a place called Padan Aram. It's a stressful time for Jacob and he wonders how things will turn out. On the way Jacob has a dream and sees a portal between heaven and earth with angels descending and ascending, upon waking he declares that God is in that place and that it is the very gateway to heaven. Jacob then makes the above conditional promise that IF God blesses him he will give a tenth of what God blesses him with AFTER he returns to his father's house in peace. He also makes the remarkable statement that if he is blessed then the Lord will be his God.

Let's get the picture here. Jacob has been a deceiver and thief. He has got into trouble with his family and is fleeing for his life. On this tiring and stressful journey he has a dream and sees a portal to heaven, angels and even God Himself.

Interestingly, God speaks to Jacob in the dream and tells him who He is, whose the land is, what will happen to his descendants and that He will keep him and bring him back to the land of his father. At no time in this dream does God make any conditional promise to Jacob that if he tithes He will bless him or be more likely to bring these things to pass.

The next day, obviously still overflowing with emotion Jacob makes a promise to give a tenth of whatever God blesses him with if God brings him back. Jacob also promises to make God his God if He comes through. Clearly up until this point Jacob had no firm commitment to the Lord. Just like in Abraham's experience Jacob is saying that if God gives him the victory in the forthcoming battle for his survival he will give Him a tenth. How Jacob will give it is not mentioned at all. Moreover there is no mention that Jacob ever did give a tenth but nevertheless he was greatly blessed **without tithing for fourteen years** while working for his cheating Uncle Laban.

Tithing today is popularly defined as giving the first 10% of one's gross income. Some claim that tithing is a biblical principle running all through the Bible and existing long before the Law, but if Abraham and Jacob didn't tithe 10% of their income to a local priest where does this notion come from? Maybe we have to go back even earlier, right back to Eden?

Tithing in Eden: Genesis 1:1 – 3:24

Some people have said that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was Adam's tithe. Something that he was supposed to tend and yet not help himself to. There are a number of problems with this.

1. Adam was told not to eat **any** of its fruit, not just 10% of it.
2. If the tree itself was a tithe then there were only ten trees in total in the Garden of Eden, of which Adam and Eve and all the animals and birds could only eat from nine. This seems a bizarrely small garden by any standards. According to Genesis 2:10 a river came out of Eden to water the garden and from there it split into four river heads. That's a river so big that it divides into four more rivers – all to water 10 trees?
3. In Genesis 1-3 there are no direct or indirect references to tithes, tithing, tenths or offerings and gifts of any kind.

The book of Genesis does however indicate what began to go wrong in Eden before the fall. It has nothing to do with not tithing. Genesis 1:31 says that *God saw everything that He had made and it was very good*. In Genesis 2:18 He says that *it is not good that man should be alone* (please note Genesis 2:18 does not say, 'it is not good that man has stopped tithing'). God made both of these statements before Eve was formed, therefore they cannot relate to a lack of a mate otherwise God did not know what He was talking about in Genesis 1:31. Clearly the only person from whom Adam could have been alone was God. This must have been the result of developing choices on his part not any oversights God made in creating him. (see, *The Truth About Eve* by Martyn Shenstone). So we can see that tithing did not exist before the Fall. What about after the Fall and before the Law?

Tithing after the Fall and before the Law

There are two references to tithing in the Old Testament before the Law, those of Abraham and Jacob we have already covered. Nevertheless some people insist that Cain's sin was to not tithe.

In the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the first born of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

Genesis 4:3-6

The world's first children, Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord. Cain brought *an offering of the fruit of the ground*, Abel brought *an offering of the first born of his flock*. Some have claimed that Abel's offering of the first born of his flocks was his tithe even though it is not identified as such. But neither of them is recorded as tithing or not tithing. However one offering is described as being better than the other.

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts...

Hebrews 11:4

Abel's offering was brought in faith, that's why he was called righteous and his sacrifice *more excellent*. All throughout history there has never been a way to be righteous except by faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God, (Heb 11:6).

Some would say because Abel brought an offering of the *first born* of his flocks that this was therefore tithing. So does dedicating the first born to the Lord qualify as tithing? No. Nowhere in scripture are the first born referred to as tithes, although the first born are considered holy to the Lord. In fact tithing clearly did not mean giving the first of anything.

"And concerning the tithe of the herd or the

flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the Lord. He shall not inquire whether it is good or bad..." These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel.

Leviticus 27:32-34

Only every tenth animal under the rod was tithed. Not the first. What happened if you didn't have ten animals? Obviously you didn't tithe. You can't possibly tithe the tenth animal of nine animals and neither can you tithe fifteen animals and give 10% of them. Furthermore, although in the case of Cain and Abel bringing a better offering was commendable, this principle is not related to tithing. Leviticus 27:32 above says, *...he shall not enquire whether it is good or bad*. This was commanded by God in person to Moses on Mount Sinai... yes but, there are no yes buts, there are no authoritative statements from a pulpit that can overrule the Bible. You can't be more authoritative than God and you can't be more moral than God.

So while it was a good thing that Abel brought the first born of his flocks as an offering this is in no way associated with tithing. Just because the first born in the Bible is called holy to the Lord and so is the tithe it does not mean that they are both the same thing.

Cain's offering has no mention of first fruits attached to it either but even if it did what does this say about tithing? Again nothing at all. The first-fruits offering was a very small amount of the first crop harvest. It was small enough to fit into a hand-held basket (Deuteronomy 26:1-4, 10; Leviticus 23:17; Numbers 18:13-17; 2 Chronicles 31:5). You can't get 10% of a year's harvest of several sacks of flour, wheat and maize in a hand held basket! In many places in the Bible first fruits are mentioned in conjunction with tithes so they are obviously not the same thing. If I said 'bring the apples **and** the oranges' clearly they are not the same thing otherwise there wouldn't be an *and* between them.

...to bring the firstfruits of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, the

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new wine and oil... and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites... in all our farming communities.

Nehemiah 10:37

Cain's offering was rejected by God, 1 John 3:12 says that his works were evil and Jude 1:11 records that Cain's way was one of greed like Balaam. Cain murdered his brother and God said he was henceforth under a curse. At no point does Cain's remorse or God's curse mention tithing. God doesn't say, 'OK, next time make sure you tithe.' Cain doesn't say, 'hey I'm sorry, my tithes are over there in the bushes.' No, Genesis 4 has absolutely no mention of tithing in it.

Tithing Under the Law

Here are a few further points we haven't already mentioned.

Tithes were only of certain animals and crops, NOT money or the profit from commodities such as manufactured or traded goods. Leviticus 27:30,32 defines tithes as coming from fruits, seeds and herds. See also Numbers 18:27, Deuteronomy 12:17, 14:22, 2 Chronicles 31:5 and Nehemiah 10:37.

The poor did not tithe but rather received the tithe, Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 26:12-13.

The people's tithe was not literally 10% of the best animals but rather every tenth animal passing under the rod without checking whether it was good or bad, Leviticus 27:32,33.

Tithes went to multiple groups of people located all over Israel, Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 26:12-13, Nehemiah 10:37.

Tithes were often consumed before the Lord, by the very same people who gave them, Deuteronomy 14:23.

Read Numbers 18, it is the most definitive description of Law based tithing in the Bible. It bears little or no resemblance to what many modern day preachers claim tithing was and is, which is probably why they universally completely ignore it.

Chapter 3

Hezekiah's Heaps

In 2 Chronicles 30 king Hezekiah of Israel starts something of a revival, feasts are celebrated, healings take place and enthusiasm abounds. Hezekiah sets about restoring the proper system of priests and Levites. Moreover he gives some of his livestock for burnt offerings as stipulated in the Law. Hezekiah also commands the inhabitants of Jerusalem to support the Levites and priests. This they do but then in their enthusiasm errors are made. They do something not stipulated in the Law.

Moreover he commanded the people who dwelt in Jerusalem to contribute support for the priests and the Levites, that they might devote themselves to the Law of the Lord. As soon as the commandment was circulated, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of grain and wine, oil and honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything.

2 Chronicles 31:4-5

This whole revival is taking place in Jerusalem. The people who live there correctly bring their firstfruits to the priests at the Temple (Nehemiah 10:35-37) but they also bring all their tithes there too – something they should not have done. The people were supposed to tithe to the Levites in their Levitical cities (Joshua 20, 21, Numbers 35) where they lived throughout the land (Nehemiah 10:37). Jerusalem was not a Levitical or priestly city. The Levites who worked there and the priests who ministered there, did so in rotation (apparently two 1 week rotations per year 1 Chronicles 24-26; 28:13, 21; 2 Chronicles 8:14; 23:8; 31:2, 15-19; 35:4, 5, 10; Ezra 6:18; Nehemiah 11:19, 30; 12:24; 13:9, 10 and Luke 1:8). There were no Levites and priests permanently ministering in Jerusalem. The most well known example is of course John the Baptist's father,

Hezekiah's Heaps

Zachariah. Luke 1:8 says he was serving as a priest in the rotation of his division when his lot fell to burn incense in the Temple. After his vision Luke 1:23 says that when the days of Zachariah's service ended he went to his own house. According to Luke 1:39-40 when Mary visited a very short time later the house was in a city in Judah, clearly not Jerusalem, where Zachariah had previously been ministering in the Temple.

What's more in 2 Chronicles 31 not only did the people in Jerusalem wrongly bring their tithe to the priests at the Temple but all those who lived in the cities of Judah did too.

And the children of Israel and Judah, who dwelt in the cities of Judah, brought the tithe of oxen and sheep; also the tithe of holy things which were consecrated to the Lord their God they laid in heaps.

2 Chronicles 31:6

And so here we have every pastors idyllic dream. Everyone bringing their tithes all to one place. And what do we get? Heaps! Praise the Lord an abundance and fullness!

In the third month they began laying them in heaps, and they finished in the seventh month. And when Hezekiah and the leaders came and saw the heaps, they blessed the Lord and His people Israel.

2 Chronicles 31:7-8

But wait a minute. For some odd reason the heaps kept piling up, in fact 5 month's later they are still piling up, that means there were some pretty big heaps lying around. This didn't seem right so Hezekiah asked the recipients of the heaps, the priests, what was going on. Unsurprisingly they replied 'we are blessed! Hallelujah...'

Then Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. And Azariah the chief priest, from the house of Zadok, answered him and said, "Since the people

began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat and have plenty left, for the Lord has blessed His people; and what is left is this great abundance.”

2 Chronicles 31:9-10

Notice that Zadok said the Lord has blessed His people and we are living in great abundance. However according to the Law Zadok was wrong. He was right in saying God had blessed the people but the tithes and even some of the other offerings were being incorrectly all brought to one place. The result was that it looked as though God's mighty blessing was on that place, which it was in some ways because of the restoration and revival started by Hezekiah, but not because of the overflow of tithes there. In fact the overflow of goods there meant that the other Levites and priests and their families who lived throughout the land in the cities specially chosen for them by God were without their designated income.

Great piles of wealth in individual churches and ministries does not necessarily mean the blessing of God.

Consider carefully, we know that this action by the people was wrong because it contradicted the Law. The tithe of the common people, as we saw in the Chapter 1 of this book, was for the Levite, the poor, fatherless, widow and alien (Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 26:12-13, Numbers 18:24). The Levites lived all over Israel and Judah in 48 designated cities and received tithes where they lived (Nehemiah 10:37). The Levites tithed the tithe they received to the priests in their 13 priestly cities (Nehemiah 10:38). Since only the priests and a tiny percentage of Levites ministered in the Temple once or twice a year in weekly rotations, there is no way all the tithes, even just from the Levites, were normally sent to Jerusalem.

The Levitical Law was what God personally commanded to Moses. 2 Chronicles is a record of what the people actually did, the two are very different. Something was clearly wrong because there were not enough storehouses to contain the piles of tithes that were building up in the streets. So much so that Hezekiah had to ask what was going on. If this system was

Hezekiah's Heaps

indeed correct then surely at the height of the great and prosperous reign of King Solomon he would have had extra storehouses built in Jerusalem to accommodate all the tithes and offerings. So why didn't they fit? Maybe Hezekiah's revival created more wealth than Solomon reign? No it didn't.

Then God said to Solomon... "I will give you riches and wealth and honour, such as none of the kings have had who were before you, nor shall any after you have the like."

2 Chronicles 1:11-12

The reason the tithes brought by the common people and the tithes of the tithe brought by the Levites didn't fit into the existing storehouses in Jerusalem was because they weren't supposed to be there! The book of Nehemiah records what happens when tithes are incorrectly apportioned and don't reach their proper destination.

I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field.

Nehemiah 13:10

In Nehemiah 13 a corrupt priest called Eliashib had given a corrupt official called Tobiah a room in the Temple storehouse to live in. Instead of the tithes for the Levites and singers (yes singers got the tithe too) who ministered at the Temple being given them this Eliashib and Tobiah must have embezzled them. Nehemiah says none of the tithes reached the Levites so they went home and stopped working in the ministry. Nehemiah had to redress this with a special recovery tithe of grain, new wine and oil to make up for the loss (Nehemiah 13:12).

When Hezekiah realises that all the tithes were not supposed to be brought to Jerusalem, and that's why there are heaps everywhere, he doesn't agree with the priests that they are now living in fullness. Rather Hezekiah acts honourably and with a heart for the people. He builds storerooms for the misplaced abundance to stop it rotting and appoints faithful

servants to have it properly redistributed.

Now Hezekiah commanded them to prepare rooms in the house of the Lord Cononiah the Levite had charge of them, and Shimei his brother ... overseers ... at the commandment of Hezekiah the king ... to distribute allotments to their brethren by divisions, to the great as well as the small...

Besides those males from three years old and up who were written in the genealogy, they distributed to everyone ... and to the priests who were written in the genealogy ... and to the Levites from twenty years old and up ... their little ones and their wives, their sons and daughters...

Also for the sons of Aaron the priests, who were in the fields of the common-lands of their cities, in every single city, there were men who were designated by name to distribute portions to all the males among the priests and to all who were listed by genealogies among the Levites.

2 Chronicles 31:11-19

This is one serious list. Hezekiah really made sure those heaps were redistributed to every conceivable genuine recipient in the service of God who had missed out by the tithes being misplaced. They went to priests and Levites and *all their families*, even from the *age of three years old* and up (v16), all over the entire land. And what does the Bible have to say about Hezekiah when he realised that piling all the tithes up in one place was wrong, and so he had them redistributed properly?

Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and true before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the Law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered.

2 Chronicles 31:20-21

Chapter 4

New Testament Tithing

There are only three references to tithing in the entire New Testament, two refer to the Old Testament Levitical Law (and one of these is a repeat of the other), the third one refers to Abraham before the Law. Here are the first two.

Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

Matthew 23:23

But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

Luke 11:42

Tithing was a matter covered by the Law. In these two passages Jesus affirms that the Pharisees had tithed under the Law and that this was correct but that they had overlooked the weightier matters of justice and mercy. Some people assert that because Jesus is recorded as telling the Pharisees that they were right to have tithed in the New Testament that all Christians should too. This is quite bizarre and the same as saying that because Jesus is recorded as being circumcised as a child in the New Testament so should all males be circumcised today too – because it's in the New Testament. Obviously before Jesus died and rose again from the dead all the Levitical Law was still in operation. What was Jesus supposed to have said to the Pharisees, 'you should not have kept the Law?' The real question is does tithing still apply after the Levitical Law was fulfilled by Jesus?

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Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfil them.

Matthew 5:17

Jesus fulfilled all the Law and the Prophets. How? By fulfilling all the righteous requirements of the Law himself on our behalf and nailing to the cross everything that condemned us.

Christ...having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Colossians 2:14

Jesus then superseded the demands of the Levitical Law with the Law of Love which now by the power of the Holy Spirit operates in our hearts and is possible to keep.

Jesus said to him,“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Matthew 22:37-39

So where do tithes fit in? The book of Hebrews chapter 7 answers that question by sharply contrasting the differences between Melchizedek, the Priests of Aaron and Jesus.

For this Melchizedek... consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils...

Hebrews 7:1,4

The passage starts where we left off in chapter 2, Abraham gave a *tenth of the spoils of a battle* to Melchizedek, not a regular gross 10% of all his income. This was a pagan practice and in so doing Abraham was acknowledging the superiority of

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Melchizedek. Hebrews 7:4 makes that very same point – *consider how great this man [Melchizedek] was...*

And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the Law...

Hebrews 7:5

The sons of Levi who are descended from Aaron who receive the priesthood have a *command to receive tithes*. Stop and pause for a moment. Who are we talking about here? The priests of Aaron under the Law **NOT** New Testament pastors. None of this passage is about Christians and the five fold ministry – it's about Abraham, Melchizedek and Jesus!

But he [Melchizedek] whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better.

Hebrews 7:6-7

Now the Apostle Paul makes the point that the lesser is blessed by the better. In other words, Melchizedek had something that made him higher than Abraham and therefore higher than the Levitical priesthood of Aaron that was descended through Abraham. In the process of making this comparison Paul says, *here mortal men receive tithes*. Please stay with it and don't fall out the boat, this statement has nothing in the world to do with the New Testament five fold ministry receiving tithes – the subject was identified a mere 3 verses earlier, *the sons of Levi who had a commandment to receive tithes*.

Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Hebrews 7:8-10

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Paul makes the point that because Levi was descended from Abraham in a manner of speaking he also paid tithes to Melchizedek. Paul then goes on to make the master point. Since perfection could not be achieved through the Levitical priesthood – for which people paid tithes – then that's why another priest had to arise in the higher order of Melchizedek, namely Jesus.

Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the Law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron?

Hebrews 7:11

Please understand, the whole point of the tithes for the priesthood given by the ordinary Levites, (don't forget the common people of Israel did not tithe directly to the priesthood but only the Levites who tithed the tithe - 1%, did) was to pay for the priesthood and the sacrifices. But if the priesthood has gone and Jesus is our sacrifice then tithing has become invalid. The Law has been abolished and so the means of funding the Law, tithing, has been abolished too. The next verse reads:

For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the Law.

Hebrews 7:12

Blatantly, tithing has passed away because the sacrifices have passed away, because the priesthood has passed away, because the Law has passed away!

The Law has passed away so the system of funding it has passed away too. You can't pick and choose and keep bits of the Levitical Law and then fervently proclaim grace and faith at the same time. Either it's all gone or it's all still here. And remember, tithing to support a religious system only originated in the Law, not before it and if anyone disagrees and mentions Abraham tithing before the Law, ask them if they will accept a single one off tenth "tithe" from some stolen goods you

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recovered that were never yours in the first place.

Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come...not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Hebrews 9:11-14

The purpose of tithing in the Old Testament was to fund a system that provided the blood of bulls, goats and calf's and a priesthood that shed that blood to give people a relief in their conscience from the guilt of their sin. Now that Jesus has shed his blood we don't rigorously and exclusively tithe to a new system of priests who minister on our behalf before God because there isn't one. Now we are all kings and priests.

...the saints...sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll...And have redeemed us to God by Your blood...And have made us kings and priests to our God"

Revelation 5:8-10

Going back to any part of the Law is like having successfully journeyed to a destination with signposts along the way and then going back to the signposts to re-enact finding your destination. But in order to do this you have to leave the destination that you have already reached. If you are born again you have reached your destination, you are now led by the Spirit why would you go back to obeying the Levitical Law?

Yes, obviously, we still give today for many good reasons, especially to fund the preaching of the gospel but there is no scriptural basis for New Testament believers *tithing*. If there is please send me the Bible reference.

Chapter 5

What About The Local Church?

It is widely preached that *all tithes are only for the local church* but is there any scriptural basis for this? Some people have said that 2 Corinthians is an example of Christians giving a gross 10% of their income to a local church.

...they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God

2 Corinthians 8:5

In 2 Corinthians 8 the Apostle Paul talks about a special and apparently quite sizeable offering he received for his ministry from some churches in Macedonia. What is invented from this chapter is that the Macedonian believers made a generous offering to Paul's field ministry, but based on verse 8 quoted above, only after they had first tithed to their local churches.

To save time it is easier to write what some people think the passage says, so that you can clearly see what it doesn't say.

They first tithed to the local church and then gave us an offering by the will of God.

2 Assumptions 8:5

Well hopefully you can spot the difference between the real scripture and the dud, and notice, and I say this politely, the idolatrous and blasphemous conclusion that comes out of this interpretation is that the local church is synonymous with God. Which creates another problem. If giving yourself first to the Lord *is* tithing to the local church then how do you articulate, err, giving yourself first to the Lord?

Nevertheless some people still insist that we should tithe and that all tithes really are for the local church. I have shown in chapter 1 how supporting this from Malachi 3:10 is completely

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baseless from any perspective, how Abraham (including the mention of him in Hebrews 7) and Jacob didn't even tithe as we know it let alone to a local church, and how the mention of the Pharisees and tithing in Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42 is meaningless for Christians who are not under the Law. Furthermore there are absolutely no other verses in the whole New Testament that even mention tithing, let alone teach it for Christians. But are there any New Testament principles that support this notion? Perhaps logical or practical reasons as to why we should tithe and give it all exclusively to a local church?

Before we go any further let's make sure that we know exactly what we are talking about here. What is really meant by the term: *All tithes are for the local church*?

By *tithes* modern preachers mean 10% of every church attendees gross income. This kind of tithing has never existed in all Bible history. Biblically people gave every tenth (not the first) of certain animals and 10% of only certain crops. Material goods and money were never required to be, and in practice never were, tithed. Furthermore, the poor did not tithe.

The expression *the local church* is meaningless and only used to give credence by association to the false idea that the Temple storehouse in Jerusalem was the local tithing place for all of Israel. Saying *the local church* sounds closer to Malachi's storehouse than saying *the church you currently attend*. Which in many people's case is definitely not their most local church.

Moreover the local *church* is not really the true recipient of your tithe either, in reality the *leadership* gets control of your tithe, namely the *senior pastor*. So the tithe isn't really *for the local church* it is only for the senior pastor to *administrate* on your behalf and give to *anywhere in the world* that he believes is right, including awarding some of it to himself as a salary, the amount of which for some bizarre reason many pastors think is none of your business.

You see nobody says it like this because it sounds too carnal so it gets flowered up. Apparently, you as a New Testament believer with the Holy Spirit living inside of you cannot decide

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anything about what happens with your supposed tithe. Now when I say "decide" I don't mean that you should tell the leadership of the church what to do with any money that you do give, that's utterly impractical. If the leadership can't decide what happens to the money they receive then they may as well not be the leadership. What I mean is that you can't decide where to put it in the first place. Why not? Because *all tithes are for the local church* – but where is this in scripture!? It's not there, neither in the Old Testament nor in the New.

Perhaps pastors are the pre-eminent New Testament ministry gift and this is why tithes should be exclusively for the local church? The answer to this is also a flat no.

**And God has appointed these in the church:
first apostles, second prophets, third teachers,
after that miracles, then gifts of healings,
helps, administrations, varieties of tongues...**

1 Corinthians 12:28

Pastors are not even on the list! Surprisingly, the universal church mentioned here is not built on the foundation of pastors nor on a collection of local churches but on the foundation of apostles and prophets. What about elsewhere in scripture?

**And He Himself gave some to be apostles,
some prophets, some evangelists, and some
pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the
saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying
of the body of Christ, till we all come to the
unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the
Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of
the stature of the fullness of Christ**

Ephesians 4:11-13

Here we find pastors listed alongside other ministry gifts but with no mention of pre-eminence, nor a sub phrase about exclusively administering tithes. But surely tithes are for the local church because the local church is the backbone of the body of Christ? If the local church is the backbone of the body of Christ then pastors must be the backbone of all ministry

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gifts. But no scriptures support this. So why do pastors keep preaching tithing? The answer to this is because tithing works!

Many pastors insist that tithing really does work and results in great blessing in their lives. I want to heartily agree with them and explain to you how this is so.

A pastor tells a congregation that if they tithe they will be blessed, so they diligently tithe their money into his offering. The pastor also puts in a tithe of any income that he may have. Not too long after the pastor takes back out what he has put in along with some of what everyone else has put in. He pays himself a wholesome salary with this money and declares to the congregation that he is blessed; his new salary is the proof that tithing works. Who couldn't make this work?

Of course tithing works – for pastors, how could it not? The only way tithing doesn't work for pastors is if they totally mismanage the church finances. The only thing that works is that you give them money, and then they are showing it to you as proof that tithing works...

This “revelation” of tithing that so many pastors are keen for you to get also creates numerous other problems. The most obvious is that the more prosperous the pastor or a church looks the more it appears that tithing works. Therefore pastors are tempted to appear wealthy, even if they don't really want to be, in order to maintain a higher level of tithing from the congregation. The more money the congregation see displayed before them the more encouraged they are to persevere in tithing, because the proof that it works is apparently before their very eyes.

Desperate people in financial difficulties, seeing their pastor's “supernatural” provision, keep tithing to get their “breakthrough” hoping each time they tithe that this will be their breakthrough day. What is this elusive breakthrough that many who expectantly tithe seek? To be promoted into a position that they are not qualified for or don't have the talent to perform in? To receive a regular salary from thin air? Perhaps a few may receive a debt cancellation or an inheritance

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or a even a special gift from someone. But is this a breakthrough? Is this the turnaround in their whole life financially that pro tithers preach or just a one off miracle? The pastor *consistently* takes 10% of your gross income every week (or month) and from that pays himself a salary and claims expenses, yet you hear that someone had a hospital bill cancelled because they tithed? Stop and think carefully. These are two very different things. It's not so hard to find an apparent financial miracle here and there but oddly it's almost impossible to find a permanent breakthrough in the finances of someone that was struggling except for them getting a job or a better job – which appears to happen all over the world anyway completely regardless of tithing.

As the pastor receives yet more money into the church he often personally and corporately, enters into a new realm of prosperity. The church gets a nicer building, the pastor may get a nicer car, a nicer suit, a nicer house and people naively think that this is tithing working before their very eyes in their pastor's life - because he also boldly proclaims that the reason he is blessed is because he is a tither!

Modern tithe teachers teach you that if you tithe you are going to be overflowing with so much wealth that you are not going to be able to contain it (Malachi 3:10). And yet it's blatantly obvious that the vast majority of people who tithe are not overflowing with uncontainable blessings, not to mention those who don't tithe who *are* blessed because they work hard, have a good education and are employed by or own a decent company. If tithing was true as it is taught today, multitudes in the church would be very wealthy but they are not. Something is profoundly wrong.

Pastors also like to find trophy examples of people who tithed and prospered. Let's stop right here before we rejoice in tithing miracles and consider that the natural progression of the majority of people's careers, even in a recession, is to be promoted and earn more. This is normal, you don't earn less and get demoted the longer you work, this may happen but it is the exception not the rule. Therefore finding someone who supposedly had a revelation of tithing and then got promoted a

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month after starting tithing for the first time to a church is **absolutely meaningless**. Furthermore a careful examination of such promotions will invariably reveal that the reason the person was promoted was because they did a good job.

What about extremely wealthy people? Sometimes a very wealthy person is touted as an example of tithing working.

Some people will always be wealthy, some people are actually anointed and called to make large sums of money and to redistribute this into the preaching of the gospel. Some are not, some people are called to fly a search and rescue helicopter but if they go off to south east Asia to play the stock market and become a billionaire (which takes a lot of work and time) where is the anointed brave and fearless pilot who is going to fly the helicopter out to sea in the next blizzard? Where is the teacher, the doctor, the aid worker or infantry soldier? And as I mentioned before, if tithing really works as advertised, especially in the examples of the tiny handful of extremely wealthy titheers, why aren't there many more?

Tithing also appears to work in some people's lives because they believe that having tithed they should consequently prosper and this sets off a determination in them to work hard, pray, believe and pursue their rightful blessing. This is what we call a faith accident. These people did the right things to prosper, they made a concerted prayerful effort in their life to go beyond where they were, but any subsequent favourable results are then wrongly attributed to tithing.

The recent recession has caused widespread financial hardship in many believers homes who tithed and oddly enough also not in many believers homes who have never tithed! Another shocking problem with modern unscriptural tithe teaching is that it robs other non pastoral ministries and encourages a laissez faire attitude! How?

What happens when someone has "missed" a tithe to their local church and sees a need outside of it in another ministry? Their reasoning is that, since they have already robbed God by not tithing to their local church and owe Him the money personally,

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sending it somewhere else would only compound their indebtedness to God. Therefore they are greatly disinclined to give and if they do and mention it in church they are brazenly told that giving to other gospel works or even to the poor *before* the local church is wrong. Wrong enough to be cursed with a curse based on Malachi 3:10. Incredibly, by following this skewed logic, giving to an evangelist preaching the gospel can actually result in you being cursed!

It gets worse, I mentioned a laissez faire attitude, where does this come from? If a person who accepts what is popularly preached about tithing sees another believer or ministry of any kind in need – it would be entirely consistent of them based on modern tithe teaching to assume that there must be something wrong with the person or ministry in lack because **all they have to do to prosper is to tithe.**

In other words if Sheila doesn't have the money to buy a van for her orphanage all she has to do is be a faithful tither and she will have it. Therefore why would anyone give an offering to Sheila since she must be either, not tithing or tithing and have some hidden problem blocking this automatic blessing. Some may think the reason that they are not prospering is because they haven't tithed diligently enough (whatever that means), or because of the way they spoke to their spouse last week, or if they have tithed they assume that their breakthrough is just around the corner and so therefore Sheila's must be too.

Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me and in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

Matthew 15:6-9

Chapter 6

Opulence or Prosperity?

When God created the world he did not place a pot of gold in Eden to be shared by all mankind. What do I mean? There is no finite amount of wealth in the world. The potential wealth of the world is infinite because wealth is created.

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way that you should go."

Isaiah 48:17

God *teaches* us how to make a profit. Most people understand this principle. For example if you take some raw materials and develop an idea and manufacture them into something useful, the same previously low value raw materials can become very valuable. Therefore you have created wealth.

The point I want to make is that the amount of wealth potentially available to you is essentially infinite. This means that the next time you walk down a street and see somebody drive past in a £250,000 car you don't have to have a sense of loss about it. The fact that someone has an exceptionally nice car does not mean that they have a portion of your wealth and that you are therefore missing out in some way.

It is also clearly God's will for all believers to live a blessed life.

**Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments...
Wealth and riches will be in his house...**

Psalms 112:1-3

Moreover whatever wealth and riches you may have are to be quite legitimately enjoyed...

Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labour. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.

Ecclesiastes 2:24

What's more if we are visibly poor, no matter how much of the truth we may have, people will be disinclined to listen to us.

A wise man's words are heard nevertheless a poor man's words are despised.

Ecclesiastes 9:16

If a wise man rented some dilapidated wooden Scout Hut in your town and posted photocopied adverts through nearby letterboxes saying that he was coming to share his wisdom, only a handful would show up to hear him. Why? Because he appears to be poor. If some playboy tycoon advertised on local TV that he was coming to tell how he 'made it in life' in the local Sheraton Hotel, the place would be packed even if you had to pay to get in. The difference? Even if they are not motivated by greed, undiscerning naturally minded people tend to follow the outward appearance of success...

Now for sure, Jesus was not poor and neither was his ministry. If Jesus perfectly kept the Law he could not possibly have failed to be financially blessed because the Law promised prosperity.

Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you...

Deuteronomy 28:1-2

Reading on, the promise list is quite comprehensive and undeniably includes material things. Did Jesus diligently keep all the commandments? Yes of course, so Jesus must have been materially blessed too, until the time came when he gave

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it all up for us on the cross (2 Corinthians 8:9).

So why is it then when we look at Jesus' lifestyle during his time on the earth, that it doesn't materially reflect that of many wealthy preachers? Why is it that some preachers have several very expensive homes, several very expensive cars (far beyond just nice), extremely expensive clothing, enough bling to open a chain of jewellery stores and even boast about spending many hundreds at a time eating out in exclusive restaurants?

The stark revelation that these preachers need to get is that while the world generally has an infinite amount of wealth creating potential in it, the church has a massive problem. The amount of money available right now to preach the gospel is in fact finite and worse than that it has time limits on it. In other words, while some believers are living in opulence, the excess money that they are rolling in could have been used to reach people who are now dead and lost forever, because they didn't hear the gospel in time before they died.

Of course we can enjoy life, I am not living in a cardboard box or wearing rags to preach the gospel. This is a deception and counter productive. It's a bad testimony and creates pointless physical hardship. Jesus is our example. Before Jesus went into full time ministry he worked (Mark 6:3), he had a home (Mark 2:1) and he wore nice clothes (John 19:23-24). His ministry had money because he had a treasurer but as fast as money poured into Jesus' ministry he gave it back out again. Even in the middle of the most important meal of the year, the Passover, when Judas Iscariot left the room to betray Jesus, his disciples concluded that either something was missing from the meal or that Judas had gone to give to the poor (John 13:29).

For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

Matthew 18:11

Are there still people who are lost? Then all the focus of our lives should be in bringing them into the kingdom of God. Even if everyone in the world was saved except for one last person, should we take a break and enjoy excessive blessings because

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we have already achieved so much? Apparently not. Apparently we should forsake all and go after that last one.

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.

Matthew 18:12-13

When the Apostle Paul returned from his missionary journeys did the other Apostles bless him with a stallion and a chariot to ride around Jerusalem in to honour his great achievements? But aren't we supposed to have an abundance? Yes, of course!

"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work."

2 Corinthians 9:8

The abundance is *for every good work*. The abundance is not to live in opulence now, that kind of fullness can wait until heaven, you will wonder why you bothered with most of what you had on earth when you get there, it will seem so dull in comparison to this world's luxuries and especially to saved souls.

...believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of *your* souls.

1 Peter 1:8-9

By removing the italicised *your* at the end of verse 9, a word added solely at the discretion of the translators and not present in the original text, we can see what the end of our faith is. The Greek text of 1 Peter 1:8-9 literally reads *...receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of souls*. Absolutely nothing else will pass into eternity with you except the love that you have shown for people. The greatest love that we can show people is

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God's love for us by sending Jesus to provide complete atonement for us and salvation for our souls.

Somewhere down line we have misconstrued Old Testament wealth as a means of preaching the gospel today. Solomon was the wealthiest king of all the kings of Israel and his wealth was used to build the Temple. Is it right today to use the appearance of personal wealth as a means to preach the gospel? If that's true then why not go the whole hog. Build a palace and sit in it on a solid gold and ivory throne like Solomon did.

The pagan Romans complained that the early Christians gave so much that it made them ashamed. The last pagan Roman Emperor, Julian the Apostate (361-363 AD) said:

For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans [Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.

There is no record of the Romans being converted at the sight of rich bishops – eventually however many unbelieving Romans were attracted into the ministry as the church accumulated wealth and becoming a bishop became a lucrative career. The Apostle Paul had something to say about this kind of motivation long before rich bishops.

For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

2 Corinthians 2:17

Paul said, *for we are not as so many peddling (or selling) the word.* Shockingly the Greek word used here for *many* is *poulos* implying a majority or very sizeable proportion. In Paul's time, in some places, it was even a capital offence to be a Christian! Yet out of all the people preaching the gospel he said a sizeable proportion were not in it for the love of God and fellow man but rather for the money! Well, since Jesus said the love of money is the root of all evil this is less than mildly surprising. And it

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tells us one thing at least. Preaching the gospel is potentially very good money! Jesus summed it up pretty well:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves... Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Matthew 7:15,20

Ah yes but my favourite minister prayed for someone and they got healed. Sure they did. Jesus never said they wouldn't. If you think miracles only happen at the hands of perfect people you are greatly mistaken and there would never be any miracles because no one is perfect. Signs and wonders, assuming that they are actually happening and are not being contrived, follow the preaching of the word of God.

And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with *them* and confirming the word through the accompanying signs...

Mark 16:20

The word *them* in Mark 16:20 is italicized in many Bible versions to show you that it is added solely at the discretion of the translators. Take out this added word and what do you get? *The Lord working with and confirming the word!* God only confirms His word. From one perspective signs and wonders don't mean a thing about the person apparently performing them.

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

Matthew 20:25-26

Jesus explained in Matthew 20 that the role of leadership is one of servanthood, not lording it over people. One of the main ways leaders lord it over people is in the area of money. Pastors receive handsome salaries but *ask* people to work in their

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churches as volunteers and don't pay them and yet Jesus said:

The labourer is worthy of his wages.

Luke 10:7

Of course there is a place for volunteers in every church and in some ministries. Psalm 110:3 talks about God's people being willing volunteers in the day of His power. People may steward at special evangelistic crusades or help setting up and down church equipment at hired facilities. These are typical Sunday services or special one off events but this type of thing is not the same as people coming to work in offices and answering phones three days a week while the head of a ministry or church handsomely pay themselves but not their workers.

If you are not paid properly from your first day of work and your church or ministry leader pays themselves properly, then something is deeply and profoundly wrong. A church, ministry or charity is not solely validated by how many good works it outwardly does but also on how it treats those within it.

Churches and ministries with low governance costs may not always reflect efficiency and good stewardship. Sometimes they reflect well paid pastors and underpaid or even unpaid workers.

And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

1 John 3:23

How can you love someone, have them work for you and pay yourself but not pay them?

God does not have a plan for any church that includes well paid pastors and unpaid workers. It is almost laughable how many churches are in a constant struggle to find "volunteers" to complete essential core tasks which could almost all be solved if they simply paid people for doing them. But that money is for the outreach and missions. Do you think that the church will be more blessed or less blessed by paying its workers? So why is

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the pastor paid such a handsome salary and others nothing? Because he is the man of God. Really? And this concept is found where in the New Testament?

The German general Erwin Rommel fought the famous North Africa campaign during the second world war. He was successful against a series of British generals until he finally met his match in Bernard Montgomery, also known as Monty who was a committed Christian. The exacting conditions of the North African deserts were harsh on the soldiers. Rommel insisted on only eating the same rations as his men so he could identify with how much pressure they could take on the battlefield.

These days some leaders apparently need not just quiet and comfortable hotel rooms to be anointed when preaching away from home but expensive hotel suites costing several thousand per night. The Bible tells us that Jesus was anointed beyond measure (John 3:34) and yet strangely he often prayed all night in a desert and came out healing everyone in sight.

All the financial abuse in the church would end tomorrow if church leaders were transparent about money. Why hide a salary unless there is something to hide? We know the salaries of everyone our taxes pay for, so should it not be the same in the church? Shouldn't the church be more open and transparent than the world? And yet many pastors say that what they are paid is none of their congregation's business!

So what about generous giving? It may seem as though I have spent most of the last two chapters of this book knocking supporting local churches. Well I have and I haven't. I'm all for churches and supporting them and paying ALL their staff properly not just senior leadership. What I am particularly against is the repeated out of context quoting of Malachi 3:10 as though, in it's misappropriated state, it is the only verse in the Bible that has anything significant to say about finances and transcends all others.

For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how

shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?

Romans 10:13-15

Some people seem to think that if a call, a church or a ministry is from God it will be provided for regardless of other people supporting it and yet this is the **exact opposite** of what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 10. He says, *How can they go unless they are sent?!* Jesus' own ministry received support from many people. Luke 8:3 says, *many provided for him from their substance.* If Jesus' ministry on the earth was supported in this way then so should any other genuine ministry or church on the earth.

I can think of nothing more fantastic than being able to discover someone or some organisation with the genuine call of God on them to preach the gospel and to provide them with everything they may materially need to fulfil that call.

So *should* you give 10% of your income to your local church? No! *Can* you give 10% of your income to your local church? Yes of course - *if this is what you are led by the Holy Spirit to do!* You can also give 15%, 25% or nothing at all because the Holy Spirit requires your money for a Romanian orphanage or a modern Bible translation into Polish. Or even to the genuinely poor family down the street, who can't meet their mortgage payments, after the main earner in the household lost their job in the recession.

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

A prayer to come close to God and find His love:

Dear God in Heaven

I am sorry I have been so wrong about you. Now I see from the Bible that you never wanted me, or anyone else to ever be in lack or to shed even a single tear.

I have made many poor choices. Please forgive me.

Thank you that you sent Jesus your Son, to pay for all my sins and that you raised him from the dead to give me new life.

I have decided to believe in Jesus, I now say out loud –

Jesus is my Lord

Help me to always be real with you and myself. Thank you for giving me a new heart of love. Thank you that you have only good things in store for me.

Amen

If you have prayed this prayer, you are now a Christian!

God said in the Bible: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Jesus also said: "Whoever comes to me, I will never cast away." Whatever challenges you may face, always remember that God never rejects you, and that He is not responsible for the unfair things in your life. Rise above them.

Ask God to guide you everyday. Read the Bible and ask God to help you understand it. Check out: www.martynshenstone.com

Lots of Love in Jesus

Martyn Shenstone