

## **The Truth About Tithing**

by  
**Michael Rudolph**

Occasionally, every Messianic Jewish congregation should have its understanding refreshed about tithing. This is particularly so because tithing is the way that most of us contribute financially to the work of the Kingdom. Unfortunately, the tithe has been taught improperly with enough regularity, that many of us in congregational leadership are reluctant to address it head-on lest we be perceived to be self-serving.

In modern times, tithing one's income is commonly understood to mean giving one tenth of it to the Lord's work and, most often, to one's local congregation. Tithing does not, however, have its origins in modern times or even in Mosaic times. The first biblical mention of tithing is found in Genesis where Abram (later called Abraham) is seen giving a tithe to Mechizidek:

“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, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’ And he gave him a tithe of all (Genesis 14:18-20).

The tithe being ten percent is gleaned from a later incident in Genesis 28:20-22 where Jacob vowed a tenth of all to God, and it is also confirmed in Hebrews 7:4 below (see also Numbers 18:25-26).

Who is this mysterious Melchizedek to whom Abraham tithed, who was both king and priest of God? We get a clearer picture of him in Hebrews 6:19 to 7:17 which I will quote in part:

‘This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Yeshua, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace," without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually. Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. . . . . For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek."’

So Abraham tithed to the King of whose order Yeshua has become High Priest. Since we know from 1 Timothy 6:15 and elsewhere in Scripture that Yeshua is “King of kings,” it follows that Yeshua is High Priest of His own order, and it becomes almost a certainty (in my opinion) that Abraham tithed to pre-incarnate Yeshua.

While this background is interesting, it does not explain why we should be tithing today. The apostle Paul taught in Galatians 3:24 that “the Law was our tutor,” so let’s be tutored and see how God instructed His people Israel regarding the tithe during the time of Moses. In the *Torah* we read:

“And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's. It is holy to the LORD” (Leviticus 27:30).

"When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year -- the year of tithing -- 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; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten them'" (Deuteronomy 26:12-13).

Income back then was not money; for most Israelites it was what the land produced when it was cultivated, so the tithe was generally fruits, vegetables, grains, wine, and sometimes animals. There was a complex structure in Torah as to the distribution of the tithe, with most of it going to the Levites, the priestly tribe that had no land of its own. So, although perhaps over simplistic, it is fair to say that the Israelites tithed to God by giving to the priests. Perhaps the most clear and concise statement of God’s insistence that the Israelites tithe can be found in Malachi 3:8-10:

"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.'"

If the Mosaic Law is a tutor, then the above Scriptures teach me that, in the same way as the Israelites of the Mosaic Covenant tithed by giving to their priests (the Levites), so does God expect us of the New Covenant to tithe to our High Priest Yeshua. It is true that we have no Temple storehouse where to bring our tithes, but we do have congregational storehouses that use our tithes and offerings to support the priestly work of Yeshua. In our congregation, Ohev, that includes rabbis’ and other salaries, rent, library and activity expenses, and compassionate *tzadaka*.

The bottom line on tithing is that there is a clear history of it as an act of worship and priestly offering going all the way back to Abraham. Today’s tithe is as vital to God’s work as it has always been, and it has always been understood to be ten percent of one’s increase. Those who would criticize tithing in the twenty-first century as unauthorized because the New Testament contains no such commandment are missing the point that “Messiah is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). They are also missing the point of God saying through Jeremiah: “I will put My *Torah* in their minds, and write it on their hearts” (Jeremiah 31:33).

Finally, as distinct from other methods of giving, tithing is an act of faith and surrender to God because the person tithing has no control over its amount or the use to which it is put. Offerings are freewill and can be designated for specified purposes but the tithe cannot. So if you are already committed to a life of tithing, let this short article be a reminder of its foundations. If you have not yet committed to tithing, please pray and ask God to guide you in your decision; I am confident that He will.

September 2007