

# THE TITHE & THE CHRISTIAN

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*What do we believe and how should we give?*

## INTRODUCTION:

What do we know about tithing?

What do we believe about tithing?

What is commonly taught about tithing in churches?

## OBJECTIVES:

1. Understand the Old Testament tithe from within ancient culture and the Mosaic law
2. Identify why the tithe is not applicable to the believer in Christ
3. Describe the type of giving expected from the believer in Christ
4. Answer questions related to the tithe and the Christian life

## THE TITHE IN THE PRE-MOSAIC ERA

1. Evidence in Scripture:
  - a. Genesis 14:17-20 – Abram gives a tenth to Melchizedek
  - b. Genesis 28:18-22 – Jacob vows to give God a tenth
2. Characteristics of pre-Mosaic tithing:
  - a. Tithing was a commonly practiced custom among Ancient Near Eastern cultures
  - b. The tithe was voluntarily given to pay honor for services rendered

## THE TITHE IN THE MOSAIC ERA

1. Explanation: At the time of Christ, the passages of Scripture relating to tithing were interpreting as *three different tithes*.
2. Tithe 1 – The general tithe to support priests and Levites
  - a. Evidence in Scripture:
    - i. Leviticus 27:30-33
    - ii. Numbers 18:25-28
  - b. Characteristics:
    - i. The tithe belonged to the Lord – most likely means that it belongs to the priests, as the only other way of giving something to the Lord was to burn it
    - ii. The tithe is of livestock and produce – every tenth animal that passed under the shepherd's staff
    - iii. The tithe could be redeemed with interest – 20% increase of its value
    - iv. The Levites were expected to give a tithe of the money that they received
  - c. Purpose: *This regular tithe was given to support the work of the Levites and priests. It was given every year except the seventh (sabbatical) year and was the primary means for financially supporting the ministry of the temple and its servants.*
3. Tithe 2 – The festival tithe to celebrate in Jerusalem
  - a. Evidence in Scripture:
    - i. Deuteronomy 14:22-26
  - b. Characteristics:
    - i. The tithe was to be spent in “the place that he will choose” (i.e. Jerusalem)
    - ii. The tithe was to be consumed by the giver (“you shall eat...”)
    - iii. If the distance was too far to make with livestock and crops, then these things could be changed to money and then brought to Jerusalem to be spent in the same way
  - c. Purpose: *This tithe was used to support Jerusalem financially.*
4. Tithe 3 – The support tithe for Levites and impoverished
  - a. Evidence in Scripture:
    - i. Deuteronomy 14:27-29
    - ii. Deuteronomy 26:22
  - b. Characteristics:

- i. This tithe provided support for the Levites and their families as well as the impoverished living among the people of Israel *in their own place of residence* (as opposed to the general tithe, which supported priests and Levites at the place of service)
      - ii. This tithe was only paid once every third year
      - iii. The tithe was intended to care for the needy living among Israel (Levite, sojourner, fatherless, widow)
    - c. Purpose: *The purpose of this tithe was to extend support for the material needs of the dependents of Israel.*
5. Tithing in Old Testament history and prophets
- a. Nehemiah 10:37-39 – After the reconstruction of the Temple, the people commit themselves to obey God’s Law. The Temple could not function again without the faithfulness of the Jews in giving their tithes.
  - b. Amos 4:4-5 – Amos wrote before the fall of the Northern Kingdom. In this verse, Yahweh condemns sacrifices, tithes, and offerings while neglecting more important issues of repentance and godly living.
  - c. Malachi 3:6-10 – Malachi was written during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, after the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity. However, they were lazy in supporting the work of the Temple. If the Israelites were lazy in bringing their tithes, the worship of Yahweh suffered.

## THE TITHE IN THE CHRISTIAN ERA

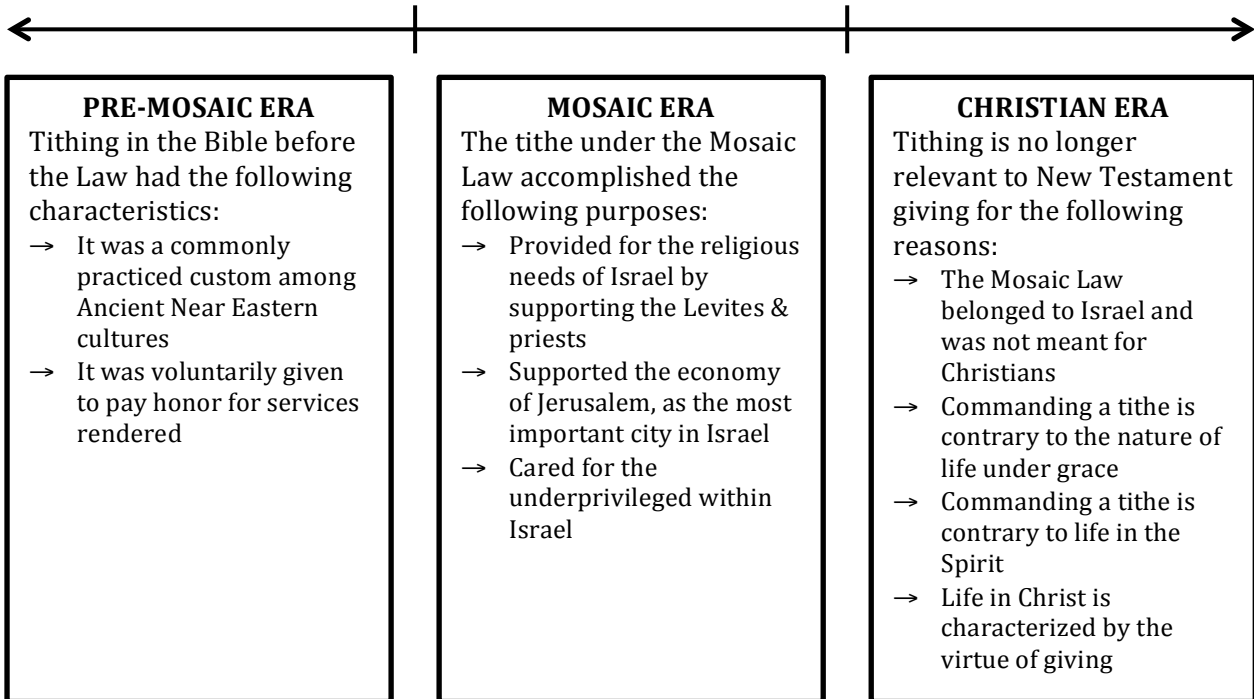
1. New Testament passages that mention tithing:
  - a. Matthew 23:23-24 – The Pharisees are criticized for their hypocrisy. They pay attention to the smallest tithe but ignore justice, mercy, and faithfulness.
  - b. Hebrews 7:1-10 – The purpose of these verses is to point to a superior priesthood separate from Aaron’s lineage and apart from the Mosaic Law – one that is fulfilled in Christ.
2. Three reasons why the law to tithe does not apply to Christians:
  - a. It was never meant for us: The tithe was an integral part of the Mosaic Law intended to sustain the economy of Israel. The Law, of which the tithe is a part, was never given to Gentiles, but only to Israel. (See Galatians 3:24-25.)
  - b. It is opposed to the character of grace: The tithe is opposed by its very character to grace as a rule of life. Obligation to tithe demands fulfillment of all the other Mosaic requirements. (See Romans 11:6, Galatians 5:3)
  - c. It is opposed to life in the Spirit: The Mosaic Law brought knowledge of sin and spiritual death (Romans 3:20). Only by the indwelling Spirit can we have the kind of life that God desires (Romans 8:1-12; Galatians 5:1-25).

## THE VIRTUE OF GRACE-MOTIVATED GIVING

*Eleven principles of Christian giving (2 Corinthians 8-9)*

Characteristic	Explanation
Joyful	The impulse for Christian giving is the overflow of joy (8:2)
Sacrificial	The desire of Christian giving is sacrificial – even among the afflicted and impoverished (8:2)
Godward	The focus of Christian giving is first toward God, then toward others (8:5)
Love-inspired	The motive for Christian giving genuine love, not commands and fear (8:8)
Christ-like	The model for Christian giving is Jesus himself (8:9)
Regular	The burden for Christian giving is ongoing, until the task is complete (8:10-11; cf. 1 Corinthians 16:2)
Proportionate	The level of Christian giving is commensurate with one’s abundance, ability, and readiness (8:12-15; cf. 1 Corinthians 16:2)
Generous	The extent of Christian giving is bountiful (9:6)
Thoughtful	The strategy for Christian giving is established in one’s heart between God and oneself (9:7)
Confident	The security of Christian giving is that God supplies seed to the sower (9:10)
God-glorifying	The outcome of Christian giving is thanksgiving and glory to God (9:12-13)

## THE TITHE IN SCRIPTURE



### QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TITHE

Questions adapted from Stedman, R. C. (1951). *Giving under grace. Bibliotheca Sacra, 108(430), 205-215.*

→ **Is there harm in tithing?**

Since tithing is a legal principle and the believer is to live by grace, the tither is by so much living below his privileges. To practice grace-giving is to learn grace-living: how to realize the full value of one's heaven-high calling, all of which the tither misses.

→ **If not ten per cent, how much of the income should be given?**

This the Word of God leaves entirely up to the believer to settle. If his heart is awakened to the love and blessings of God he will give every cent he can spare beyond that required for a moderate living for himself and family, and a reasonable savings.

→ **Isn't tithing our responsibility?**

If you are under the law, yes! But if you choose to put yourself under a legal obligation, you should be careful to obey the whole law

→ **Should our gifts all be given through the church?**

Not necessarily. According to 1 Corinthians 16:2, each believer is to "put something aside and store up" a determined amount each Lord's Day from which he may distribute freely his charities. Much of this could be well handled through the church, but some, at least, should be given out personally that he might not lose the blessing of personal giving.

→ **Isn't it true that the average tither usually gives more than the average non-tither?**

Yes, that is true, but only because so little instruction has been given in grace-giving.

→ **Is it not our duty, as Christians, to give?**

No, it is our privilege. If you give only from a sense of duty you may as well keep your money. God does not need it and does not want it.