

## Just 10%?

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*Malachi 3:8-12* is the most used passage for the church's teaching on tithing. Like a mantra it's hammered into believers that giving 10% of your income/increase to the church is a biblical principle set in stone. Follow it and you'll be blessed, otherwise you'll be cursed.

Like most believers I never scrutinized this teaching critically enough for many years and wasn't too clear about how to deal with it even in my book (*Finances - Who Is In Control?*), published in early 2006. But this has changed during the past four years. So today I'd like to offer you in brief the revelation I've received ever since and challenge you to check it out with the Lord and boldly act on whatever the Holy Spirit brings to light to you.

### The tithe in the Old Testament (OT)

- The first mention is in *Gen. 14* where Abram gives 10% of the booty (!) from his rescue operation of Lot to the Priest Melchizedek - a once off act never to be repeated again.
- Next mention is in *Gen. 28* where Jacob promises God 10% of all He blesses him with in return for God's favour/provision on his flight from Esau, the brother he betrayed, and his future plans. It's a conditional vow only to be adhered to if God fulfils man's terms!
- 430 years after Abram Moses establishes the tithe as a law for Israel (*Lev. 27, Num. 18, Deut. 12, 14 & 26*). However, its about three different tithes (own family, Priests/Levites, the poor/needy/disadvantaged) and not just one, which, if broken down to monthly payments, amount to 23.3% of the increase instead of just 10%!
- And then, of course, we have above mentioned classical *Malachi* passage that includes scary outcomes for failure to comply besides promised blessings for adherence.
- Based on all this believers are taught to bring 10% of their gross increase to the church. But it doesn't really add up. First, when claiming the tithe to be a principle that precedes Moses' time, the issues of war booty or man's condition put to God are usually quietly swept under the carpet. Second, referring to the Mosaic Law as basis for tithing, the 23.3% are never really brought into the picture either. Third, there is no mention that, contrary to today, spiritual authorities effectively ran the government in those days.

### The tithe in the New Testament (NT)

- The writer of *Hebrews* is the only one to mention the tithe outside the Gospels, but he does it in conjunction with Abraham, so clearly in an OT context.
- In the Gospels Jesus speaks to/about the Pharisees, the teachers of the OT law! Since Jesus had not died yet, His remarks on tithing (*Matt. 23, Luke 11 & 18*) were still in OT context, as the NT would only come into effect after His death and resurrection.
- Apart from those Scriptures there are no others to support any teaching on tithing.

### A practical problem

- A high-income earner can live comfortably after giving the tithe, while a low-income earner might struggle even more to make ends meet. The wealthy person is certainly in danger of neglecting God's command to look after the disadvantaged (*e.g. Matt. 19:21, Jam. 1:27*), because he believes he's already done his part to advance God's Kingdom.

### My understanding

*"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it."* (1 Cor. 10:26, NIV - Ex. 9:29, Psa. 24:1, Col. 1:15-19)

Its a strikingly clear word, isn't it? Everything, which includes the 100% of my increase, is therefore God's. If my deductions are correct, then every believer must accept this to be true, which effectively dispossesses us from what we assumed to be ours. 10% for God and

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90% for me is thus not a biblical NT concept at all! Its all the Lord's and I'm merely His steward! Therefore the question is rather how much of the 100% God gave me as an increase is reserved for me and my obligations and what He wants me to do with the rest?

For the sake of God's Kingdom, His plans and economics its certainly worthwhile to grapple with this issue anew. As believers who only know in part (*1 Cor. 13:9+12*), we ought to be humble enough to admit when misinterpreting Scriptures in the past and be bold enough to change our behaviour based on new revelation, even against heavy opposition!

*"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." (Gal. 5:1, NIV)*