

Tithing and the condition of God's people

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[0 : 00] Our reading is in the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 7, and there are verses 1 to 10. Hebrews 7, 1 to 10.

Verse 1. For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him.

And to him Abraham apportioned a tenth of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness. Then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.

He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor the end of days. But resembling the Son of God, he continues a priest forever.

See how great he is. Abraham the patriarch gave him a tithe of the spoils. And those descendants of Levi, who receive the priestly office, have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brethren, though these also are descended from Abraham.

[1 : 33] But this man, who has not their genealogy, received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.

Here tithes are received by mortal men, thereby one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who received tithes, paid tithes through Abraham.

For he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him. And then turning to the Old Testament, in the book of Numbers, chapter 18, at verse 21 to verse 24.

This is the commandment that the epistle to the Hebrews refers to. 18, verses 21 to 24.

To the Levites, I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they serve, their service in the tent of meeting.

[3 : 02] And henceforth the people of Israel shall not come near the tent of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. But the Levites shall do the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity.

It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, and among the people of Israel they shall have no inheritance. For the tithe of the people of Israel, which they present as an offering to the Lord, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance.

Therefore I have said of them that they shall have no inheritance among the people of Israel. May God bless to us these readings.

May the beat his praise. Before we consider God's word, we'll stand and sing again. Give thanks with a grateful heart. In Hebrews 7, verses 4 and 5, we have already read, See how great he is.

Abraham the patriarch gave him a tithe of the spoils. And those descendants of Levi, who received the priestly office, have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brethren, though these also are descended from Abraham.

[4 : 27] This epistle, written possibly somewhere about AD 67, and possibly written by Apollos or Barnabas, but certainly not by Paul, were written to a group of Christians who were resident in Rome.

So first of all, I want to consider this law. To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they serve, their service in the tent of meeting.

Now this is the law that the writer to the Hebrews is actually commenting on in the verses that I've just read. The descendants of Levi have in the law a commandment.

Now given that he's saying that, what is the point of him saying that in Hebrews 7, since the whole of this epistle, especially in chapter 7, is given over to talking about how Christ is totally superior to every personage and tradition that the Old Testament had.

And the whole purpose of the epistle is to show and prove the excellence of Christ as high priest forever and ever. Now why does he comment on this?

[5 : 58] He's actually taking one verse from the Old Testament, which is Psalm 110, verse 4. The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, you are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek. That's where this is coming from. And so the theme starts in chapter 5, verse 10. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

And then again, in chapter 7, the theme starts in verses 1 and 2. For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him.

And to him, Abraham apportioned a tenth of everything. This is a very complex argument which I'm about to simplify.

But the idea is to show the greatness not of the Levitical priesthood, but this priest Melchizedek, whom we only read of in Genesis 14.

[7 : 28] He comes to show that Abraham, the great father of the faithful, bowed the knee before this man and gave him a tenth of everything.

And so the argument proceeds simply like this. He first of all says that the Levites received tithes from the people and that is a right that only the Levites have.

But Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham and he wasn't a member of the tribe of Levi. The Levites secondly tithed their brother Israelites.

Melchizedek isn't a Levite. Yet he received tithes from Abraham, the founder of the nation. The third thing is that all of this, as far as the Levites are concerned, is based on Numbers 18, 21 to 24.

But Melchizedek had such personal greatness he needed no legal enactment to do this. The Levites receive the tithes as dying men but Melchizedek and the one he portrays lives forever.

[8 : 57] And the final thought is a rabbinic argument. Levi is a descendant of Abraham and it's already present in Abraham's body although he is yet unborn.

So that when Abraham pays these tithes, Levi is also there paying the tithes. So the whole argument is all about Melchizedek being superior to the Levitical priesthood.

Yet there's something else and it's this. Yes, there is a commandment. We read it in Numbers 18, 21 to 24.

But the practice of paying tithes predates the law because Genesis 14 is composed and written about history that took place before the law was given.

And in Genesis 14, you have the first occurrence of war. It doesn't happen before then but it certainly happened then and it certainly happened many times since.

[10 : 18] So we read in Genesis 14 verses 17 to 20 this. After his return, that's Abraham's return, from the defeat of Sheddur or Laomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Sheva and Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine.

He was priest of the most high God and he blessed Abraham and Abraham gave him a tenth. So, Melchizedek isn't of the stock that would later form the nation of Israel but Abraham is the father of the faithful.

To him God has made great promises. I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

He's a stranger. In this story in Genesis 14 he's the king of Salem which many years later would become the city of Jerusalem.

But although Abraham of Melchizedek was a stranger Abraham submitted to him. Why? Because the God that he worshipped was Abraham's God.

[11 : 54] And so Abraham says using Melchizedek's language I have sworn to the Lord God Most High maker of heaven and earth. Abraham's actions he's not doing this by any legal prescription.

He's doing this that is the giving of the tenth by faith and by grace. And consequently when we think of the giving of tithes or offerings we're not acting under a legal prescription.

We're acting out of grace. And what I want to say about this giving of tithes and offerings is this that we think of it as a mundane monetary thing.

But as far as God is concerned it's not. It's a spiritual thing because what it deals with is the attitude of your heart to give.

And God himself has given far more than any of us could ever give. he gave his son for you and for me.

[13:15] So we go to the character of this law. See how great he is. Abraham the patriarch gave him a tenth of the spoils.

And those descendants of Levi who received the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people that is from their brethren though these also are descended from Abraham.

So the sons of Levi have this commandment. And that law goes on to state this. We read it already. To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance in return for their service which they serve their service in the tent of meeting.

In other words it's their wages. Right at the end of that chapter which we read the tithe of the people of Israel which they present as an offering to the Lord I have given to the Levites for an inheritance therefore I have said of them that they shall have no inheritance among the people of Israel.

So the tithes are being used to sustain the Levites and as we'll see also the singers. That's what they're there for.

[14:43] They're there to make sure the worship of God continues. Now this actually did take place in ancient Israel and I want to show you this from the book of Nehemiah chapter 12 verse 44.

These are part of the reforms that Nehemiah installed in the city of Jerusalem when it was being restored. On that day men were appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits and the tithes to gather them into the portions required by the law for the priests and the Levites according to the fields of the towns.

It's showing there that this is being done to maintain the worship of God. And Paul comments on it in 1 Corinthians 9 13.

Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?

All of that's been done so the temple service can be maintained. And yet we find that in the book of Nehemiah that even after he had set up these chambers and made sure that the law was being carried out there was a day subsequent to him going back to the king of Persia and coming back to Jerusalem when this requirement had not been kept.

[16:29] chapter 13 verse 10 I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them so that the Levites and the singers who did the work had fled each one to his field.

Why had they gone? They'd gone because the commandment which was there to support them wasn't being fulfilled. And what's the result of this failure?

You get it in Nehemiah's words. I remonstrated with the officials and said why is the house of God forsaken?

There's a direct link between the giving of tithes and the state of the house of Israel. And what it shows us is that if God's people are lax in this area, that is the giving of tithes and offerings, they will also be lax in other areas as well.

And the first thing that we read is that the Levites and singers had departed each to his own field. what does that mean? It means the services in the temple were a somewhat boring construction.

[18:02] There was no music. The singers had gone. But it was worse than that. Because the Levites who were meant to prepare the sacrifices for the priests, they'd gone too.

And if you go to the Levitical legislation, you'll find that to the Levites was given the charge of instructing the people from the law.

So there was no ministry of the word either. But there are other implications. Because the next thing that happens and the next thing it's recorded is that the Sabbath law has been broken.

in those days I saw in Judah men trading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on asses and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day.

In other words, it's in flat contradiction of the fourth commandment. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

[19:18] Now from all of this there's a link. There's a link between the giving of tithes and offerings and the condition of God's house.

That's a very serious thing to say and I don't say it lightly but it's true from the proper understanding and preaching of God's word.

Let me think briefly about this fulfillment. This time from Malachi 3.10 quoted in the video we saw at the beginning of the service.

Bring the full tithes into the storehouse that there may be food in my house and thereby put me to the test says the Lord of hosts I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

Now Malachi he lived about 397 BC 400 years before Christ. When we read his prophecy we find that some of the issues that Nehemiah is complaining about especially in chapter 13 are identical with Malachi's day.

[20 : 45] The wrongs had been corrected. So in Nehemiah 13 verses 11 and 12 we read I remonstrated with the officials and said why is the house of God forsaken?

And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. Then all Judah brought the grain and oil into the storehouses.

So the actions of Nehemiah who lived 445 years BC some 50 odd years before Malachi they've now resurfaced in Judah once again.

And so God asks the question in Malachi 3 8 will man rob God yet you are robbing me.

But you say how are we robbing you? In your tithes and in your offerings. And so the challenge comes in the words already quoted bring the full tithes into the storehouse that there may be food in my house.

[22 : 06] A challenge already given by Nehemiah some years previous. And the only difference now is that there's a promise. Thereby put me to the test said the Lord of hosts and I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

The promise of unconditional blessing. It is in fact a word of restoration.

Malachi 3.11 I will rebuke the devourer for you so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil and your vine in the field shall not bear to bear says the Lord of hosts.

Now this devourer is interesting. it's the Hebrew verb akal which means to devour or eat up. And he says in 3.11 it will not destroy the fruit of your soil.

So what is it that's going to destroy the fruit of the soil? And the answer to the question is it's a locust.

[23 : 30] Now the work of the locusts is defined by an earlier prophecy in Joel 1 verse 4 using the same Hebrew verb.

What the cutting locust left the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left the hopping locust has eaten and what the hopping locust left the destroying locust has eaten. So this is a devastating word. The action of the locust. And you'll see it already in the plague of Egypt in Exodus 10.

The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees not a green thing remained neither tree nor planted the field through all the land of Egypt.

A devastating plague. But this is a word of promise. And you get it again in the prophecy of Joel chapter 2 verse 25.

[24 : 51] I will restore to you the years which the swarming ochre had eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you.

So when God speaks through Malachi, he does so with a challenge, but he also does so with a promise. bring the full tithes into the storehouse that there may be food in my house.

And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

So the question is, what happens if we respond to this word of prophecy, this challenge, this promise? And what happens, depending on which brand of toothpaste you use, you will see it every morning in the word Colgate.

William Colgate set up the Colgate Soap Company. But it's not him that's famous, it's the son, Samuel Colgate.

[26 : 19] He became converted, he became a well-known Baptist in North America. But what he's known for apart from anything else is the fact that he tithed the profits of the company.

and because he tithed the profits of the company, the following year, there were more profits in. And the following year, even more.

And his company has gone through many takeovers from this, that, and the other. But they're still in business. and he comes to us as an illustration of what the offerings of tithes and what the gifts of tithes and offerings do.

God blesses beyond our wildest dreams what he can do. Amen.