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■ ISRAEL

INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
P.O. Box 1093, Jerusalem,
Tel: (972) 2-624-5004,
Intl.office@bridgesforpeace.com

■ AUSTRALIA

P.O. Box 1006, Tewantin
Queensland 4566,
Tel: 07-5474-3626,
bfpaustr@optusnet.com.au

■ BRAZIL

Caixa Postal:1197,
Cep: 30.123-970 BH - MG,
Tel: 31-378-9350, bfpbr@aol.com

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P.O. Box 21001, RPO Charleswood,
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Taihei Sakura Bldg. 5F, 4-13-2
Taihei, Sumida-Ku, Tokyo 130 0012,
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bfp@isla.net

■ UNITED KINGDOM

Victoria House, Victoria Road,
Buckhurst Hill, Essex IG9 5EX,
Tel: 020-8559-2479,
info@bridgesforpeace.co.uk

■ United States

P.O. Box 33145, Tulsa, OK 74153-
1145, Tel: 800-566-1998,
postmaster@bfpusa.org

www.bridgesforpeace.com

Bridges for Peace

Israel

Teaching Letter

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TITHING

“TITHE” MEANT “TENTH” BOTH IN HEBREW AND GREEK AND WAS REFERENCED two thousand years before Yeshua was crucified. Abraham brought tithes to Melchizedek before there was a Temple (Gen. 14).

There were three major kinds of tithe known as *maaser* (מעשר), meaning a tenth of one's income set aside for a certain purpose. The first tithe, called *maaser rishon* (מעשר ראשון), was given to the Levite, who in turn tithed to the priest (Num. 18:24,26). The second tithe, called *maaser sheni* (מעשר שני), had to be consumed in Jerusalem in what was an elaborate feast around the Temple (Dt. 14:22,23). It was assumed by scholars that the second tithe was taken to Jerusalem during the three pilgrim festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The third tithe, *maaser ani* (מעשר עני), was called the poor tithe and was distributed to the three major groups of orphans, widows, and the poor (Dt. 14:28,29).



The total amount tithed by believers in Yeshua's day amounted to over twenty percent. Non-tithers were called by the term *am-ha-eretz* (עַם הָאֶרֶץ), and the non-tithed products were called *demai* (דַּמַּי) and were not allowed to be a part of the believer's society. The *demai* could not be used or sold. The entire Mishnah tractate, *Demai*, was dedicated to explaining how the doubtful tithe was treated. Strict believers called themselves *haverim* (חֲבֵרִים), meaning "companions of the faithful." The *haverim* concept was taken from Psalm 119:63: "I am a companion of them who fear the Lord and obey Your precepts."



A "good eye" or "single eye" referred to the liberal giver, while an "evil eye" was a term used to designate the stingy (Mt. 6:23). Since there was no specific injunction on what constituted the proper *terumah* (תרומה) or tithe, the rabbis determined: If an individual gives one-fortieth, he has a "good eye" and is considered a liberal giver. If the person gives only one-sixtieth, he is considered to have a "bad eye" and was designated as stingy.

Nehemiah stood guard so the people did not neglect to give their tithes to the priests and representatives of the Temple. In ancient times, certain priests were in charge of collecting the tithes, which were stored in the storehouse of the Temple and used to feed the priests (Neh. 10:38, 12:44, 13:10-13).

OFFERINGS

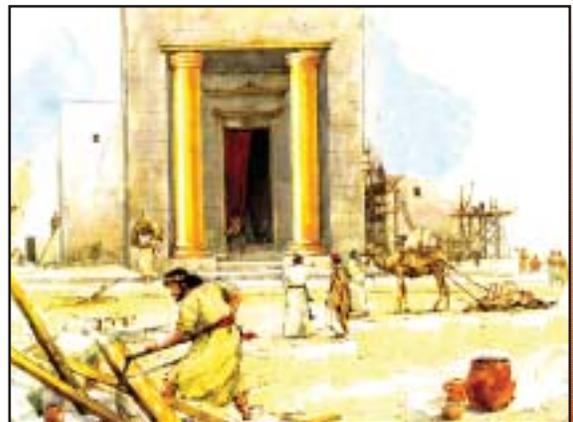
Guilt Offerings: *Asham* (אֲשָׁם)

Guilt offerings, known as *asham* (אֲשָׁם), were brought to the Lord on five major instances. Biblically, when something was brought to the Lord, it was actually consecrated or waved before the Lord and then given to the priests.

These five occasions were included: (1) lies or false dealing with believers (Lev. 6:6). In cases of sin, the guilt offering would be accompanied by a sin or trespass offering. (2) Sacrilege against the Lord's work required a guilt offering (Lev. 5:15). (3) Intercourse with someone not betrothed or married required a guilt offering (Lev. 19:20). (4) Nazarites who did not keep the prescribed obligations required a guilt offering (Num. 6:12). (5) A leper or healed person for the sick time they missed serving or coming to the Temple brought a guilt offering on the day of purification (Lev. 14:12). In addition to these offerings, called *vadday* (וַדָּאִי) or certain, because they were brought in cases of definite obligation, a further guilt offering, called *taluy* (תְּלוּי) or suspensive, was brought by one in doubt as to whether he had transgressed a biblical law. The guilt offering was also brought in the case of a person not feeling right about something. If the individual was certain it was a sin, they were required to bring a sin offering.

Freewill Offerings: *Nedavah* (נְדָבָה)

The freewill offerings were types of peace offerings, which were brought voluntarily and often as a vow. Sometimes the freewill offering was given because the person wanted to make a donation in regard to something like the Temple building project. This was given to the priests in the name of the Lord.



Thanksgiving Offerings: Todah (תודה)

Another type of peace offering was the thanksgiving offering. The thanksgiving offering was known as *todah* (תודה) and was given because the Lord was so good (Lev. 7:12-15). This was given to the priests in the name of the Lord. Ancient Jews believed that when Messiah established the eternal kingdom and there was no more sin, this offering would continue.

ORIGINS OF TITHING

Tithing was not something exclusive to the Bible. The concept of tithing is well-documented in nonbiblical literature from the ancient Middle East. The receiving of a tithe as a sacred temple tax was documented in neo-Babylonian (6th century BC), and in Syro-Palestine documents (14th century BC). Written Ugaritic records (Hittites in northern Syria, 1375-1340 BC) refer to the tithe as a royal tax, imposed by the king and used for upkeep of the court. It was a blending of these traditions of sacred and royal taxes that developed in the accounts of biblical Judaism.

As early as the patriarchs, we see Abraham giving tithes to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20). Since Melchizedek was a king and a priest of Salem (Jerusalem), whose name meant “my king is righteous,” there was a blending of two ancient traditions of the sacred and the royal. Some

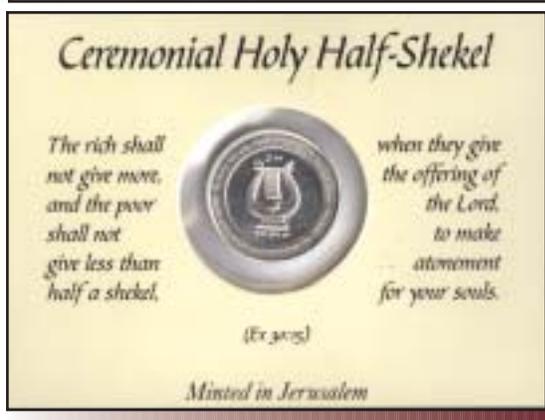
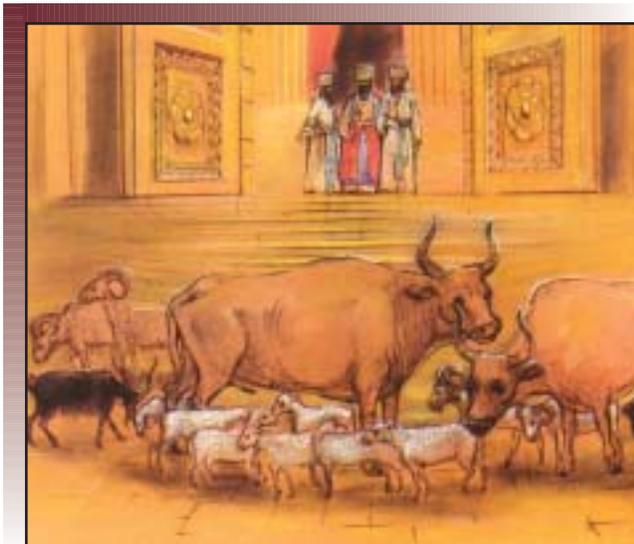
scholars trace the tithe back to Jacob in Bethel, known as the “royal chapel” of the northern kingdom, and to Abraham in the “royal sanctuary” of Jerusalem. The kings controlled the treasures of palace and Temple alike, since they were responsible for the maintenance of both sanctuary and court (1 Ki. 15:18; 2 Ki. 12:19, 18:15; Ezek. 45:17). Hezekiah organized and supervised the collection and storing of tithes and tribute (2 Chr. 31:4). Mesopotamian tithes were organized in a similar manner as were the tithes of the Carthaginians and the tribute sent to the temple of

Melqart (Diodorus 20:14).

The Levites were faithful officials of David whom he put in charge of sacred treasures (1 Chr. 26:20).

The general context of the tithe included all kinds of property, evidenced when Abraham gave a tenth of everything (Gen. 14:20). Tithe in Mesopotamia included agricultural produce, cattle, sheep, slaves, donkeys, wool, cloth, wood, silver, gold, and all metals. According to examples in and out of Israel, the priestly and Deuteronomic codes referred to





the most common objects in Israel as an illustration of all.

Illustrations of the tithe in Deuteronomy and the Second Temple writings portray it as obligatory; but some types were voluntary. Amos mentioned the tithe in the framework of voluntary offerings, while the law of the tithe in Leviticus related that the firstlings could not be dedicated, since they were already holy by virtue of birth (Amos 4:4,5; Lev. 27:26,27,32,33). The rabbis concluded that the main purpose of the tithe originally was for the maintenance of the Temple and its personnel, and that it was a voluntary donation. It was only in Deuteronomy that the purpose of the tithe was expanded to include obligatory gifts to the poor and destitute.

Tithing was not only done by Abraham, but by all his children and throughout the biblical text. Early in Jewish history, Jacob was seen giving his vows of the tenth (Gen. 28:22).

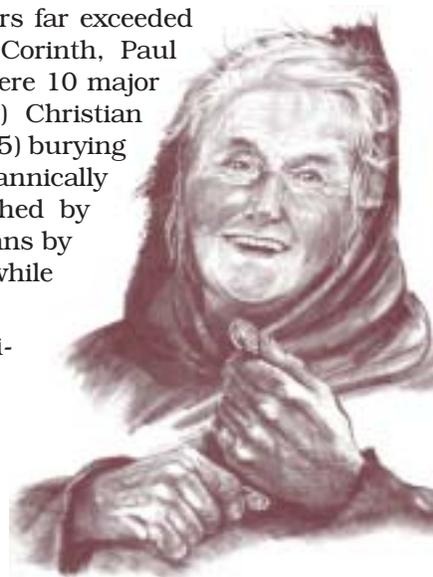
Some scholars mention that in ancient times, the tithe was not required outside the land of Israel. Historical records note that the tithe was observed in Syria, Babylon, Egypt and the lands of Moab and Ammon during the biblical period. After the destruction of the Temple (AD 70), the Jews continued to regard the tithe, along with prayer, as a substitute for the Temple sacrifice.

FELLOWSHIP AND GIVING

The use of the word “fellowship” or *koi-non-i-a* (ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ) in the New Testament was used also for the word “contribution” (Acts 2:42,45; Rom. 15:26; Ante-Nicen Fathers, Vol. 1, p. 86). In fact, the Greek word *koinonia* and the Hebrew word *tzedakah* (צדקה) were used in a similar manner to define ministering to the needs of others. The word *koinonia*, which we normally interpret as “fellowship,” actually carried the meaning of both “participation” and “impartment” by the act of contributing. Paul used the word *koinonia* to convey the word “collection” (Romans; 1 Corinthians).

Selden, in his Christian history, noted that early believers far exceeded what the tenth could have been in giving. In Galatia and Corinth, Paul ordained that they take weekly offerings (1 Cor. 16:2). There were 10 major areas to which early Church offerings were designated: (1) Christian worship, (2) maintenance of the clergy, (3) feeding, (4) clothing, (5) burying their poor brethren, (6) widows, (7) orphans, (8) persons tyrannically condemned to the mines, (9) prisons, (10) and those banished by deportation to Isles. It is thought by some that this was the means by which the Apostle John received his necessary sustenance while banished on the Isle of Patmos (Selden 1618, pp. 36,37).

As early as the second half of the 3rd century AD, ecclesiastical writers began to refer to the Hebrew pattern of the tithe as the example for the Church to follow in support of religious functionaries (65th Epistle of Cyprian). Cyprian (Sip-re-an), who was bishop of Carthage in AD 248, declared that clerics ought not have outside jobs involving themselves in worldly anxieties (Ante-Nicean Fathers, Vol. 5, p. 367).



According to Selden, the first example of a legal requirement of tithes to the Church in England was AD 786. Charlemagne was the first to give the confirmation of a civil statute to ecclesiastical injunctions (Hallam 1854, pp. 263,264). Charlemagne's order was called a "capitulary" and regulated the tithe of the Church into three parts: (1) for the bishop and his clergy, (2) for the poor, and (3) for the support of the Church.

Concerning the idea of prosperity, there were some apparent misunderstandings about the original meaning of several terms. There were eight primary Hebrew words used for prosperity, to prosper, and prosperous: (1) The basic word for prosperity was *halach* (הלך), meaning to walk or go. (2) *Kasher* (כשר), with the same root as kosher, meant to do what was right according to God's laws. (3) *Sakal* (שכל) meant to think or act wisely. (4) *Shalav* (שלו) meant to be at peace, rest, or ease. (5) *Shalvah* (שלוה) meant essentially the same as *shalav*, to be at ease. (6) *Shalom* (שלום) meant to possess peace, causing one to be complete or whole. (7) *Tov* (טוב) meant good. (8) *Tz-ale-ach* (צלח) meant to prosper or be successful. Basically, the Hebrew and later Greek words for biblical prosperity carry the idea "to advance" and "to go forward," rather than be idle.

- by Ron Moseley, Ph.D., D.Phil.

SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO US?

Editor's Note: As believers in God's Word, we need to align ourselves with God's Word whenever possible. Why? God is our Creator, and the precepts He gives us for living an abundant and prosperous life are there for our own good. They are not to be seen as hindrances or roadblocks to "the good life," but rather as road signs to keep us in His path of righteousness where we can expect and receive God's fullest measure of blessing. He wants us to be blessed.



Since I became a Christian, I have had a "tithe account" where I put a tithe of everything I receive and then ask the Lord where He wants to "invest" His money in His Kingdom. In fact, I give more than a tithe in the form of offerings, when the Lord tells me to do so. Since I have been earning a salary for about thirty years, that means that I have given away more than three years of my income into God's work. (Some denominations require all of your tithe to go to your local church, while others allow you to give generously to your local church and also bless other ministries of the Lord. Do what your local church requires of you.)

I am not telling you this to brag. However, I am telling you this to say that God has always blessed me richly. I live well; I have provided all the needs (and many wants) of my family, and I have not even once felt a lack in finances because God has always provided. This is an even more accurate statement since I began living "on faith" and serving the Lord in an overseas post. I sensed that God wanted to be my provider through faithful saints who have been part of my support team, giving through Bridges for Peace. Therefore, I have never known from pay period to pay period what would be in my next check. It was really up to God, and He always knew what was needed, even in months when there were some emergency expenses. I also thank faithful supporters who gave as God led them. It has been a wonderful experience, and I have never worried about money once.

God does prosper His children when we abide in His Word and do it His way. Then He can fulfill His promises. In Malachi 3:10, God says, "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and test Me now, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."

Recently, my daughter asked me about faith and how we can know that God's Word is true. After all, no one can see God. I told her that God is like the wind. No one has ever seen the wind, only the effects of the wind as it blows the leaves of the trees or whips the waves of the sea into a frenzy. Likewise, even if you can't see God, you can see the effects of the living God when you have faith to believe Him and act upon His Word. Then He will answer our prayers, bless us, comfort us, and give us the abundant life He promises to His children of faith.

So why not do what God asks us to do in Malachi 3? Test Him with the tithe of your income and see how He will pour out blessings upon you and your household. I know I have, and it works. God is a good and faithful God.

Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

Mal. 3:10

Ron Moseley has been my guest author this month. He has two master degrees, with one in Jewish Studies. He has earned a Ph.D. from Louisiana Baptist University in Second Temple history, and a D.Phil. from Oxford Graduate School in statistical analysis and the integration of society and religion. He is currently the president of the American Institute of Holy Land Studies in Little Rock, AR, USA.

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*Inquiries may be submitted to: American Institute of Holy Land Studies, 9700 Hwy. 107, Sherwood, AR 72120; Tel: 501-835-1453 or 800-617-6205; www.aihls.org
This expert was taken from the "What We Believe and Why" course taught by Dr. Moseley. It is also available on audiotape; total cost with shipping is US \$65.*

Many pastors, Bible teachers and lay people have written and asked if they can use these notes for preaching and teaching. The answer is a resounding, YES! That is why I am sending out this *Israel Teaching Letter*. It is my hope that the information contained herein will be disseminated over and over again, whether through the spoken word or by photocopying and redistributing these teachings. "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3).

