

# **Is Tithing In Force Under the New Testament?**

by Herbert W. Armstrong

Here is an eye-opening article on a much misunderstood subject. Some ask, "Wasn't tithing just for the Jews?" Others, "Wasn't tithing done away?" Or, "Was it a form of national taxation in ancient Israel?" Or, "Was it to supply material needs to the poor?" Here is the New Testament teaching. You'll find this article interesting, enlightening, plain!

How SHOULD God's work be financed? Does God have a definite system? Is "tithing" obligatory in New Testament times?

Or has God left us to our own devices to raise money?

Or did God perhaps leave it for each one to give what he feels like - if he feels like giving it?

Others ask, "Wasn't tithing just for Jews?" Or, "Wasn't tithing done away? Wasn't it just part of the ceremonial system introduced by the old covenant law of Moses?"

Others, today, are taught and believe tithing was merely a form of national taxation in the civil government of the one-time nation of Israel. Still others teach that the tithe supplied the material needs of the poor, and was never put into the ministry.

What confusion today! What ignorance of the revealed laws and commands of God!

## **God Working Out a Purpose**

Man was placed on earth for a purpose. And always, from the very beginning, God has had on earth a priesthood - a ministry representing him, making known his will to man, carrying out God's mission.

It does cost money to carry on Christ's ministry. And today with super-powered facilities of radio, television and printing press, of rapid transportation to every part of the world - facilities making it possible to reach vast masses over great distances in short time - the carrying forth of God's last warning message to a deceived world is a herculean task of gigantic proportions requiring large sums of money.

Did Christ intend his specially selected and called ministers to be directed and controlled

by boards of lay church members not called of Christ to the ministry? Or did Christ himself ordain a system providing for his work, leaving his true called ministers, like prophets of old, free to serve God alone?

Has not God, in his wisdom, provided for this financing? And in such manner that his true called ministers may be free to serve him alone, carrying his message boldly?

Is there a definite financing plan ordained in the New Testament?

If so, the plan will be revealed in God's Word.

But first, before looking to the New Testament teaching to see whether or not Christians must "tithe," let us make clear just what that word tithe means.

### **What is the "Tithe"?**

What does God mean by word tithe!

It is an old English word, commonly used in England three and four hundred years ago. Today it is seldom used, except in this scriptural connection. This old expression "tithe" has been preserved in the Authorized, or King James translation, of the Bible - translated in 1611. The word tithe means "tenth." A tithe of anything is the tenth part of it.

It is well known that the nation Israel, during Old Testament times, was required to tithe, that is, pay in one tenth of income. But the matter of to whom each Israelite paid this tenth, which tenth was paid, why and for what purpose, seems to confuse a great many today. And the New Testament teaching for Christians about tithing is understood only by a few.

### **Christ's Office, Now!**

It is well recognized that the people of Israel, during Old Testament times, were required to pay tithes. That is, one tenth of income - whether livestock, grain or money. But the New Testament teaching on tithing is not generally understood.

Yet the subject is mentioned many places in the New Testament. Since it is a priesthood subject - the financing of Christ's ministry - it's well to look first at the priesthood book - Hebrews.

You hear a great deal of a crucified Christ - much preaching about a dead Christ. But you hear almost nothing about the message he brought from God, and even less about the function of the resurrected living Christ of today!

The book of Hebrews reveals the Christ of the twentieth century - the work and office of our Christ today - Christ the High Priest of God! And it contains God's instruction for financing the ministry of Christ! The seventh chapter is the tithing chapter.

Speaking of the Christian hope of eternal life (which hope is Jesus Christ), we are told, beginning verse 19, -chapter 6, this hope (Christ) has entered "within the veil" - that is, the very throne of God in heaven - "whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (verse 20).

## **The New Testament Priesthood**

Jesus Christ is High Priest now. Let's understand it. Jesus of Nazareth came as a messenger, sent from God, bearing a message to man. His message is his gospel - the gospel of Jesus Christ - the good news of the kingdom of God.

After finishing his mission as messenger, Jesus took on himself the mission of Savior, paying in our stead the penalty of our sins by his death on the cross. But it requires a living Savior to impart to us the gift of eternal life! So God raised Jesus, by a resurrection.

And thereupon Jesus ascended to heaven, to the very throne of God, where he sat down and continues today as our everlasting High Priest. That is his office, now. Soon he shall assume still another office, returning to earth in all the power and glory of God, as King of kings - continuing his priesthood office as Lord of lords.

It is in his office as High Priest that Jesus sits as living Head of the Church of God, the true body of Christ in this age. He is High Priest for this and all succeeding ages.

And as High Priest he holds a definite rank - a rank that outranks every priestly office - "after the order of Melchisedec," or, in the plainer English of the Moffatt translation, "with the rank of Melchisedec."

And who is Melchisedec? This is one of the intriguing mysteries of the Bible! Suffice it to say here, Melchisedec was the High Priest of God during patriarchal times. And Christ occupies the same office now, holding the same rank.

But the Mosaic dispensation was a purely materialistic, fleshly dispensation. The gospel

was not preached in Israel, nor did their ministry carry it to other nations. Israelites formed a flesh-born congregation, not a Spirit-begotten church. The ministry consisted of rituals, carnal (fleshly) ordinances, substitute animal sacrifices and burnt offerings. This required of the priests much hard physical labor.

During those years a different priesthood of lower rank was in office - mere human rank, vastly inferior to the spiritual and divine rank of Melchisedec and of Christ. The priests were of the tribe of Levi. It was called the Levitical priesthood.

## **A Tithe-receiving Priesthood**

Yet this lower-level priesthood had to be financed. God's financing plan from dim antiquity, through the Melchisedec priesthood, was the tithing system. This system was continued through the years of the Levitical priesthood.

Now coming to the seventh chapter of Hebrews, God's financing plan is explained. Notice the comparison between the two tithe-receiving priesthoods.

First read the first five verses, Hebrews, chapter 7: "For this Melchisedec, 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... abideth a priest continually. Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law..."

Let's understand it. This vital passage of Scripture begins to compare the two priesthoods. Notice, back in patriarchal times, tithing was God's system for financing his ministry. Melchisedec was High Priest. The patriarch Abraham, it is written, knew and kept God's commandments, his statutes and laws (Genesis 26:5). And he paid tithes to the High Priest! Then the statement is made in this passage that, during that dispensation from Moses until Christ, the priests of that time, the Levites, took tithes from the people by law. It was a LAW, started in the beginning, continued through the Mosaic dispensation.

Tithing, then, did not start with Moses!

It is God's system for financing his ministry, which began from the beginning - from the dim antiquity of patriarchal times. It was a law. It did not start with Moses, it was merely continued on through the Mosaic period!

## **Tithing a Law from Dim Antiquity**

Many excuse themselves from tithing today on the false impression tithing pertained to the Mosaic period only. They think it was for Israel, alone. And that illusion has brought a curse on our nations!

The old covenant is gone - that's true. But its ending could not take away what it did not bring! Tithing was God's law hundreds of years before the old covenant started.

Tithing is revealed as God's system for financing his earthly ministry. Prior to the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic dispensation, the ministry was under Melchisedec. And we see that ministry, from the beginning, was financed by the tithing system.

Melchisedec, "having neither beginning of days, nor end of life... abideth a priest continually" (Hebrews 7:3). Yes, he was High Priest from the beginning! Even from Adam! And the ancient patriarchs from Adam down through Abraham, Jacob and on to Moses, financed this ministry of God on earth by the TITHING system!

## **Merely Continued in Israel**

Since tithing is God's permanent, continuous financing system, it had to continue through the Mosaic dispensation. During that period when the Levites were the ministers, their work and labors had to be financed. But when the priesthood was changed, God did not change his financing system. The Levites "had a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law."

And notice, the very subject of this seventh chapter of Hebrews is the tithing law!

Now continuing, the teaching concerns which of the two priesthoods - Melchisedec or Levitical - is superior, to determine which priesthood should receive tithes, now!

Christians of Paul's day did not need to be instructed that tithing is an obligatory and permanent law of God. But they did need much teaching to make clear to them that the old covenant was vanishing away - the Levitical priesthood changed and replaced by that of Jesus Christ - the Melchisedec priesthood restored! The only question was as to which priesthood tithes were to be paid.

To make this point plain, Paul proceeds to show the Melchisedec priesthood is superior - has precedence now.

Notice the scripture: "Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils... but he whose descent is not counted from them [the Levites] received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him [Abraham] that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less [Abraham] is blessed of the better [Melchisedec]... And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him" (verses 4, 6-7, 9-10).

The Melchisedec priesthood is greater - superior! It has precedence! And it is again in force as God's priesthood, under Christ! It, too, needs to be financed! Now notice the conclusion:

"For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity, a change also of the law" (verse 12).

It does not say the law was abolished. The change in priesthoods makes necessary a change in the law. What specific law? The very law this chapter is instructing New Testament Christians about - the TITHING LAW! "... the sons of Levi... have a commandment to take TITHES... according to the law ..." (verse 5).

So tithing, far from being abolished, is New Testament law! But, the priesthood being changed to that of Jesus Christ - the Melchisedec priesthood restored - that tithing law is also changed of necessity, so as to become God's system for financing the ministry of Jesus Christ! Actually, the law is merely restored as it was from the beginning!

How plain! Tithing is God's law - his system for financing his great work today; it's commanded, now!

## **Why God Retains the Tithe**

But why. does God retain for himself the ownership of that first tenth - that tithe - of your income?

Here again comes a truth man would never know, and could not find out, except by God's revelation to man! What is man, anyway? Why is he? Where is he going? God has a plan! God is working out a great purpose! He reveals it in his Word - his revelation - the Bible.

For the carrying out of his holy purpose in placing mankind upon this earth, God has always had a priesthood - a ministry, representing him, serving him, carrying out his

mission. Way back in the dim antiquity of patriarchal times, God's High Priest - his representative on earth - was Melchisedec.

During the national dispensation of Israel, under the old covenant, known as the Mosaic dispensation - those years from Moses until Christ - the tribe of Levi constituted the ministry of God, known as the Levitical priesthood. Then later, when Jesus Christ arose from the dead, he ascended to heaven as a living High Priest. Today he calls ministers as his true representatives in a darkened and Satan-deceived world, to carry on his plan. Today the Melchisedec priesthood is restored, in Christ.

Now it costs money to carry on the work of God. God's ministers who devote their entire time to God's holy and spiritual purpose are prevented from earning a living in the usual channels. Yet they work. If they are true ministers, they are men of ability who work hard, and long, observing no hours. Actually they earn a living - they have worked for their food, shelter and clothing and physical need - the same as the farmer, the laborer, the clerk or the merchant. And so God, in his wisdom, has provided for financing his work, and for his ministers' living. In God's program, these true ministers work for HIM, and HIM alone.

In God's great plan, he pays his ministers. It is he who "hires" them - he who calls them to their work for him.

So, in order to provide for the financing of his ministry, God has from the very beginning retained for himself the first tenth of the income of every human being on earth. The ownership of that first tenth of income is God's.

### **To Whom Tithes Are Paid**

But how can you pay God's tenth to him? God is on his throne in heaven. And "no man," said Jesus, "hath ascended to heaven." You can't go there. You can't see God, or hand your money to him personally. How, then, can you pay him his tithe?

Well, some large corporations, perhaps in a distant city, cannot be directly contacted by their many customers. And so they send around representatives, collectors, to collect for them what you owe the company. The collector comes in the name of the company. When you pay the money that really belongs to the company to the collector, you have paid the company.

God's system of collecting from you his tithe is just that simple. Since you cannot see God, or go to God's throne in heaven, God instructs you in his revealed Word to pay it to his representative, who, in receiving it, represents God just as a collector to whom you

pay a debt represents the company to whom you owe it.

And when you pay such a bill to a collector, you consider you paid the company - not that you made a personal donation of your own money to the man the company sent. You paid it as to the company. From there on it is the company's responsibility what happens to that money, not yours. And the company pays the collector his salary. He does not consider that you paid his salary - he receives his salary from the company.

This illustrates plainly God's true principle of tithing. When you pay tithes today you are instructed by God's directions to pay them to God's called and chosen representative - the true minister of Jesus Christ. But you pay it, not as a personal contribution of your own money to a minister - but as to God. The minister represents God - receives not your money but God's money from you for God.

Here again so many in this modern world have lost sight of God's clear directions. When they give the tithe to a minister they seem to feel it is a special entrusting of their own money, and they make it their duty to try to supervise how the minister handles it - even, in some cases today, down to the supervision of what the minister and his family may eat or wear or have in their personal private family life!

### **When Your Responsibility Ceases**

But God's revealed principle is quite different. That first tenth of your income is not yours - never was yours! It belongs to God. And the method God himself instituted for your payment of his money to him is to pay it to his called and true ministers.

When you have done that, your responsibility for that money ceases! You have no further concern, responsibility, or direction in the handling of it than you have in money you owe the electric power or the telephone companies that you pay to their collector. Once paid, you have done your part - you have acquitted yourself of your obligation.

Of course you are expected to be sure the collector is the company's approved representative - not a thieving imposter pretending to be the company collector. And you should be equally sure you are paying your tithe to a called and true minister of Jesus Christ. Satan has many more ministers today than Christ - and Satan's thieving imposters pose as ministers of Jesus Christ, put on sanctimonious airs, speak in pious and spiritual-sounding language! How are you to know? By their fruits, Jesus said, you shall know them! The fruits of God's Spirit and of Christ's true ministry cannot be counterfeited!

So when you pay tithes to God's true and accredited spiritual representative, you pay it as to God. It is not a charitable gift from you to the minister. It is not your money - but

rather it is God's way for you to pay to God that which belongs to God.

And from there on, the minister who receives it is accountable to God. And you may be sure that GOD'S justice is perfect - that GOD Almighty will hold every minister far more strictly accountable than you would be capable of doing!

## **What God Does with His Tithe**

Once paid, so far as you are concerned, you have paid God's tithe to God.

The question now is what does God do with it?

And the answer, which we will show by the scriptures inspired of God, is that God uses it for his ministry - for carrying on his work!

Now the nature of God's ministry on earth has changed with changing dispensations. Not much is revealed as to how God's ministry was carried on back in patriarchal times. We know Melchisedec was High Priest - that he held rank equal to that of Jesus Christ, actually one of the Godhead! The ministry, then, must have been of a spiritual nature. New Testament writings reveal that the gospel, God's spiritual message, was preached beforehand to Abraham. All we know of those days of the dim distant antiquity is that the tithes were paid to Melchisedec, a divine Being, for the service of God's ministry for that time.

But beginning with Moses, a new and different dispensation was ushered in. God formed Israel as a civil nation, and also as a church. (See Acts 7:38.) But between Moses and Christ under the old covenant, God's ministry was purely national, for Israel alone - and purely material, not spiritual.

As a church, or congregation, Israel was given a constant round of physical ceremonies and rituals - animal sacrifices, meat and drink offerings, carnal ordinances (see Hebrews 9:10) - which, note it! - means of a material, not a spiritual nature. Israel under the old covenant was not given God's Holy Spirit. They had no promise whatsoever of salvation, astonishing as that may seem! They were not commanded to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to other nations. On the contrary, they were forbidden to have anything to do with other nations!

Consequently, the church ministry in Israel was one of ministering to all Israelites, and to Israelites only. There was no spreading of the gospel. The ministry, rather, was largely a matter of physical labor - preparing, animal sacrifices, meat and drink offerings, administering the different washings and physical ordinances and rituals. For

this service, God himself selected his ministers - the people had no choice as to who their ministers were. For this service, God took one whole tribe of the twelve tribes of Israel - the tribe of Levi. Every man born a Levite was a priest or minister.

The Levites owned no land - had no secular source of income - devoted their entire time to the physical ministry of that dispensation. Yet, though a physical ministry, this service was sacred and holy to God. And during these years from Moses to Christ, God himself paid his Levitical priests by turning over to them all of his tithe.

Today, we are in the age of grace, the New Testament gospel dispensation. Today the Levitical priesthood is gone, and Jesus Christ is High Priest. Today all true ministers of Jesus Christ are called by special spiritual call from God through his Holy Spirit - not by flesh birth - not by self-desire to become a minister - not by selection, appointment or vote of the people. Jesus Christ came as God's messenger, bearing a spiritual message from God to man. That message of his gospel - the good news of the coming kingdom of God, a kingdom of immortals that human flesh and blood can never enter! One must be born again!

### **God Working Out a Purpose**

And today, Christ's commission to all his true ministers is "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel." "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations." And, for our day now: "... This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end [of the age] come" (Matthew 24:14).

Today the ministry is a spiritual ministry - a ministry of prophecy - a ministry of salvation - a ministry of warning! Today it is not physical and national, but spiritual and individual - it is not for everyone in a single nation, but for a witness unto all nations.

Today Christ's true ministry is a huge undertaking. It requires, not the mere financing of the personal needs of a few ministers, but the employing of tremendous available facilities for proclaiming the world-shaking warning - for preaching the gospel of the kingdom into all the world for a witness unto all nations!

### **Financed God's Way**

Today, God has provided for the financing of his powerful ministry by the same system he has used from the very beginning - his tithing system! Thus Almighty God has purposed that those whom he has specially fitted and called for this tremendous mission

in this chaotic and dying world may be free to proclaim his truth fearlessly, boldly and with GREAT POWER!

They cannot be subsidized, controlled, coerced by men or organizations of men. They are not hired by, nor obligated to, men or any organized group or denomination. They are called by God, guided, protected and empowered by God, financed by GOD'S own tithing system! - yes, by GOD'S OWN MONEY!

That is how The Plain Truth is published - without subscription price, free to all who request it.

That is how the true gospel message is going out in greater power around the world.

That is God's way, carrying out God's plan in his great purpose being worked out here below! We - and all our co-workers together - are happy to be privileged by the Eternal God to each have our small part in so glorious a work for him!

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