

The Jewish Roots of Tithing
Tu B-Shevat
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Leviticus 19:23-25

This passage is full of commands and full of opportunities with ways to obey Adonai, our Lord and master, our God. When our heart is bent towards God, when our heart is leaning in to be a worshiper, when we're looking for ways to obey the Lord, when we're not like those who are trying to find excuses for the Word, then we end up with this heart of a worshiper. That's the heart that David had.

Psalms 40:8 NKJV says, "I delight to do your will, oh my God, and Your law (Your Torah) is within my heart." In Acts, it says David had a heart after God. In Psalm 119:92 it says, "Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction." So, David found joy in the Torah – God's law. David found protection in the Torah. David found the Torah gave boundaries to his life. The law gave him boundaries in areas of his world. The enemy could not penetrate, could not attack him, and could not succeed against him. And in Leviticus 19, God told Israel, "I gave you this land, so I want you to protect this land that you're living in." So, we're going to take care of the trees, because the trees are so significant to the health of the land.

In Leviticus 19, verse 23 it says, "Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. In Leviticus 19:24, "In the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy." In Leviticus 19:25, "In the fifth year you may eat its fruit." Now that sounds great. But when is a tree three years old? What is the birthday of a tree? Now those are commands. And it's based on the age of a tree. I know my birthday and you know your birthday and the birthdays of our family members. But what is the birthday of a tree? And these are commandments. So, what was Israel to do? In the Talmud (a document explaining how to live out the law), they decided to set one day every year as the birthday of all trees. And that will be the birthday, no matter when the tree was planted, no matter what. So they picked a day in the spring, when the sap starts to come up, when the trees are just beginning to turn green. They picked the month of Shevat, on the 15th day of Shevat. "Tu B'Shevat" means the 15th day of the month of Shevat.

The passage in Leviticus tells us there are three kinds of fruit. There are uncircumcised fruits, there are first fruits and there are edible fruits. Three different kinds of fruit. For the first three years, the fruit was considered to be uncircumcised. Other translations say forbidden or inedible. But the word actually means uncircumcised. And circumcision is a big deal because it is the sign of Abraham's covenant with God. God says this is significant to the covenant between Me and to you, Israel. He gave land to Israel, and they are to take care of the land as part of His covenant. Taking care of the land was significant.

It is also covenantally significant because this is where our Messiah, Jeshua (Jesus), would sacrifice himself. In Galatians 3:13 TLV it says, "Messiah liberated us from Torah's curse, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree". That is just quoting the Torah, Deuteronomy 21:23. And so our new covenant was paid for on a tree. This is really significant. It took away all the curses of the Torah from us. Are there really curses in the Torah? Well, yes, there are curses. In fact, that's why the Jews went into exile, because they violated the Torah, as it says in Deuteronomy 28 and Exodus 26.

And in Leviticus 19:23, it says the fruit was to be uncircumcised, unfit for anything for three years.

The second kind of fruit is first fruits. In the fourth year, Leviticus 19:24, it says ALL its fruit shall be holy. In other words, the entire crop is holy. You couldn't eat any of it. Everything about that crop was given to God. You don't tithe off of it. You don't eat it. Everything goes to God in the fourth year.

The third kind of fruit is the edible fruit in the fifth year. In the fifth year, the fruit can be eaten. But if it's going to be eaten, it has to be tithed on. And so in Leviticus 27:30 TLV it says, "All the tithe of the land whether from the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the trees, belongs to Adonai, for it is holy to Adonai." So, when you start eating it, you have to start tithing off of it.

Based on Leviticus 19, there are three kinds of fruit. We can take some lessons from this. Some things are just not fit to be given to God. They're not good enough to be given to Him – first three years of the tree. Then there are some things that we should give the entire thing to God. It all goes to Him. And then sometimes, the only thing that God requires of us is that we tithe to Him. Throughout the Bible, God gives us guidelines on what we should bring to the Lord. Some things are just not good enough. We shouldn't give God that which is not our best. In Malachi 1:8 TLV, "When you bring a blind one as sacrifice, is it not wrong? Or when you bring a lame or sick one, is it not wrong? Offer them now to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Or will he acknowledge you favorably? Says Adonai-Tzva'ot." (Adonai, the Lord of the Armies of Heaven). Malachi was saying it is dishonoring to God to bring less than our best. Give God our best. Pastor Robert Morris says, "When you put God first, everything else seems to fall in place."

David says in 2 Samuel 24, "I will not offer to the Lord something that costs me nothing. We've got to give God our best. Sometimes we need to give all of it to God. We give our first fruits. We recognize something is a new source of blessing in our lives. This is not just about money. In Deuteronomy chapter 24 the scripture says when you have taken a wife, you are not to go off to war. You are to give that entire year to making your spouse happy. Now we should always do that. We should always give a priority. Pastor Jimmy Evans says, "If you don't make marriage the most important priority in your life, other than God, you're on a path to failure." It's got to be the most important thing we do in life other than our relationship with the Lord. And so, God said your first year of marriage, give that entire year, that "first fruit" special emphasis on it. Thus, first fruits can be about marriage. First fruits can be about school. When we are in school, the first book to open each day should be our Bible. Give God first fruits.

First fruits can be about a new source of income. In the first month you receive a new job or a pay raise, living this out would mean you give the entire first amount to the Lord. First Fruits. The second time you get the paycheck, that's when you give a tithe or give ten percent. You give the first fruit, the entire amount, and then you give the tithe. This helps you to recognize a new source of blessing that God has brought into your life. Don't you think God will notice that?

Tithing is different from first fruits. I want to share a true story of a man who stopped tithing in order to pay off some debts. After several months, he noticed one of his kids developed a serious health problem, a tumor on his head. It became extremely serious, and doctors gave a high probability of death. They did surgery and things went well, by the grace of God. In a God coincidence, the next morning in his devotions, this man opened his Bible in his "through the Bible in a year plan" to Malachi 3:10 KJV. It reads, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now (it doesn't say test). The King James version says "Prove me now, saith the Lord of

hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground." That word "devourer" just caught his attention. The devourer sounds like a person. And it says, "he", this person, shall not destroy the fruits of your ground. Who is this person? The Hebrew word for devour usually means to eat. The doctor had told him a tumor had eaten into his son's skull. The man quickly concluded that for him, when he had stopped tithing, he gave room to the devourer, to the enemy. In stopping his tithe, he granted Satan access to his son who planted a tumor in his son's head. He discovered that the primary issue with tithing is not financial. This is not to say there are not financial blessings associated with tithing.

The context of tithing is family. Word studies throughout Malachi emphasize family. For example, the first word is fruit. Fruit emphasizes birth. In Malachi 3:11 NKJV, "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sake, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground." That word fruit is the Hebrew word that is also the word for children. When we think of fruit, we think of apples and bananas. Genesis 30:2 NKJV says, "And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" This is the same Hebrew word in Malachi chapter 3. Deuteronomy 7:13 says, "And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land." This is the same word. Deuteronomy 29:4, NKJV, which is about the blessings and the curses says, "Blessed shall be the fruit of your body (the offspring of your body), the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds." This is the same word as in Malachi 3:11 where it says he will not destroy the fruit of your ground. Deuteronomy 28:11 NKJV says, "And the Lord will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground." And in Deuteronomy 28:18, we find the same word is used for the curse, "Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land." Malachi chapter 3, verses 10 and 11 is about tithing, but it is about family. "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house and try me in this now, says the Lord of hosts, and see if I will not for you, open the windows of heaven, and pour you out such a blessing that you will not have room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so he will not destroy the offspring of your ground.

So, Malachi chapter 3 is about birth. It's about children. It's about family. But it's also about miscarriage. It's about death. Malachi 3:11, NKJV "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field." The old King James version uses the word "cast" their fruit. The NIV says the vines in your fields will not "drop" their fruit. But the word for cast, the word for fail to bear, or the word for drop, is actually the word for miscarriage. Jacob tells his Uncle Laban in Genesis 31:38 NKJV, "These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young? That is the exact same word used in Malachi 3:11. When Jacob's ten sons want to take Benjamin down to Egypt, Jacob is afraid that he will lose his son Benjamin just as he has lost two of his other sons. First, he lost Joseph when the brothers sold him into slavery. Then he lost Simeon when the ten brothers went down to Egypt and they saw Joseph, but they didn't recognize him as their brother and Joseph put Simeon in prison until the brothers would bring Benjamin. Jacob then refuses to send his youngest son down to Egypt. In Genesis 42:36 NKJV, "And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me. That's the word for "cast forth" in Malachi 3. "Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin." And because they have no food, Jacob later agrees to let them take Benjamin. In Genesis 43:14 NKJV, he says "And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man (who was Joseph), that he may release your other brother (Simeon) and Benjamin. If I bereaved, I am bereaved!" That's the word for "cast forth fruit" or miscarry.

When the prophet Samuel is about to execute King Agag in 1 Samuel 15:33 NKJV, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women. And Samuel hacked Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal." So, this passage in Malachi chapter three is about birth. It's about death. It's about the family. And it's about the house in Malachi 3:10 NKJV, "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse." But this is not the word for the house where we live. This is the word for the house where we worship. The same word is found in Jeremiah 50:25 NKJV, "The Lord has opened an armory, and has brought out the weapons of His indignation (his wrath); for this is the work of the Lord God of hosts." The word "armory" is the same word for "storehouse". This is the room where Israel stores its weapons and shields for battle. And God calls himself here in Jeremiah 50:25, the Lord God of hosts. It literally means, the Lord of the Armies of Heaven, or the Lord of the battle or the Lord of the war or the Lord of the soldiers. This is God's warrior name in the scripture. So, in Malachi 3, verse 10, it is the Lord of the armies of heaven who is speaking. If you bring your tithes into the place where I store the weapons of my wrath, then I will bring out the weapons of my indignation to fight the devourer on your behalf and he, that stinking enemy, will not destroy your family. I declare it and I am the Lord of the armies of heaven. That is Malachi 3, verse 10.

Therefore, when we tithe, we would be afraid to forgo the covering that God offers. It's like, when we tithe, we can say, "God, I ask you to take my tithe and use it to rebuke Satan on my behalf." And THAT is spiritual warfare. If you ever doubt that giving is spiritual warfare, challenge yourself to increase your giving by one percent. Then you will very quickly realize that giving is spiritual warfare.

Not only the context of tithing family. The context of tithing is Jacob's family. Malachi 3:6 NKJV, "For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore, you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob." Why would God mention Jacob in Malachi 3, verse 6? Why does God call Israel the sons of Jacob? Remember, Jacob has an older brother, Esau. And in Genesis 27, Jacob deceives their father into giving him the blessing that should go to Esau as the elder brother. At the time that Jacob does this, Isaac is blind and very old. He is going to die soon. We know this because in Genesis 27:41 NKJV, the scripture says, "So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, the days of mourning for my father are at hand, then I will kill my brother Jacob." But Jacob and Esau's mother, Rebecca, hears this. And she says, "Jacob, you need to run for your life because he's going to kill you." So Jacob runs. In Genesis 28:20-22 NKJV as Jacob runs, he tested God. "Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace (in Shalom, in completeness), then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You." The word tithe simply means the tenth part. No one in the history of humanity has ever tithed nine percent. No one in the history of humanity has ever tithed eleven percent. In America we like to re-define words, but the tithe means "the tenth part". He says, "God, if you do this, I will give the tenth part to you."

Twenty years go by, and Jacob is now returning from exile. He finds that his father that was dying twenty years earlier is still alive. Jacob promised if the Lord would bring him back in complete wholeness, he would give him the tenth part. Jacob lives in exile twenty years and then he returns to his father's house. Genesis 35:27- NLT, "So Jacob returned to his father, Isaac, in Mamre. Isaac lived for 180 years. Then he breathed his last and died at a ripe old age, joining his ancestors in death." God kept his father alive for 20 years and right after he returns home and sees him, Isaac goes to be with the Lord. On top of that, when Jacob returns, he is accompanied by his twelve sons who formed the 12 tribes of Israel. He comes home to his father in complete wholeness with his twelve sons. In Malachi chapter 3, God tells Israel there is a reason, and it is so important we get this, there is a reason, God saying that I have not

destroyed you, Israel. And the reason is because “I do not change.” And Malachi, God is saying that 1,500 years ago, your forefather, Jacob tested me with the tithe. And that’s the reason that you have not been destroyed. That is exactly what he’s saying. And just before Jacob’s father dies, in Genesis 35, God tells Jacob to go back to Bethel. Go to that place where you vowed to tithe. Genesis 28:22, and this stone which I set up as a pillar, shall be God’s house. And of all that you give me, I will surely give a tenth to you. God told Jacob to go back to the place where you made that vow and build an altar. We see this in Genesis 35:1 NLT, “The God said to Jacob, “Get ready and move to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar (where you said this stone shall become a house, build that place of worship place of worship – we have the beginning of the place where we bring our tithes to the place of our worship, build an altar) there to the God who appeared to you when you when you fled from your brother, Esau.” Build a place of worship. In our context, build a church. And so, Jacob goes there. He builds this place of worship, and he settles there.

Remember, as Jacob returns, before he sees his father, he sees Esau. And he hopes to buy Esau’s favor by giving him hundreds of animals. Can you imagine how many animals he must have burned on that altar that he built for God? Thousands! There’s nothing else that ancient Israel did at an altar. They offered sacrifices. And that’s what he would have done. And it is there, at that altar, in that experience, that God confirms his name change, which means deceiver, to Israel, which means “friends with God.” In Genesis 35:10 NLT, “Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer. From now on your name will be Israel.” So, God renamed him Israel.” And in Genesis 35:27, Jacob returns to his father Isaac, he returns in peace, he returns in shalom, he returns as a prince with God and two verses later, Jacob’s father Isaac goes to be with the Lord.

God says, “I’m the Lord. I don’t change. Therefore, you sons of Jacob are not destroyed.” Test me in this, Israel. Your forefather Jacob tested me. Now it’s time for you to test me. And you will prove how faithful I am with this. You will see that I will put a covering over your life.

What is the Lord saying to you in this sermon and how will you answer him? The first person to tithe in the scripture was Abraham, the father of the Jews. The next person to tithe in scripture is Jacob, who is Israel. Two kinds of people should tithe. Those who call upon Abraham as their spiritual father and those who are Israel. And God says in Malachi 3:6, “I don’t change.” This is the time to say, “Thank You!” You take my tithe, and you fight the enemy of my family on behalf of my family. And that problem in your family could be anything. But you need to know, God loves your family. And he wants to fight battles on behalf of your family. He really wants to fight your battles. “I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”