

# What Does It Mean to Tithe?

In order to understand tithing, we have to go back to the beginning, when God presented the teaching to the Jewish nation. A good place to start is Leviticus 27:30. Several important truths are set forth in this one verse.

**1** The meaning of the word [tithe] in Hebrew is [tenth part.] Sometimes people talk about tithing to their church, when they are giving only three or four percent. All giving is not tithing. It may be moving toward tithing, but it is not a tithe until it equals ten percent of what we have. We may *give* or *donate* to God, but we haven't tithed until we bring a tenth.

**2** The tithe [belongs to the Lord,] not to people or institutions. Once we bring it to the Lord, *through the church*, it may be used in many ways, to benefit many people, but in the beginning it belongs to Him.

**3** It is *holy*. Holy means it is set *apart*, to be paid to God, not used for any other purpose. In the Old Testament the people brought their tithes to God's ministers (the priests) and they used the tithes to do God's work. If ten percent of what I have is *holy* and *belongs to God*, then I cannot take it and use it as I choose. Later, in Malachi 3:10, God warned the people that they would be stealing from Him if they used the tithe for their own good.

Part of God's teaching to the Jews was the concept of [Firstfruits] The first of everything belonged to God. Giving to God first reminded the people that God owned everything. (See Proverbs 3:9; Exodus 23:15; Leviticus 19:23-25; 23:16; 34:22; Deuteronomy 18:4; Numbers 15:20-21; 2 Chronicles 31:5). Jewish people never fell into the trap, [if I have anything left I will give it to God.] *They put God first.*



**4** The tithe applied to everything, corn, wheat, fruit, olive oil, sheep, goats, and everything else. There was never a question of [net] or gross for the Jews. If they had it, they gave ten percent of it. Do we bring ten percent before or after Uncle Sam gets his? Was it yours before or after the government got its share?

**5** Actually, there was not just one tithe for the Jews, but three. One tithe supported the priests and Levites. (Numbers 18:21,24) a second tithe provided for a yearly sacred festival (Deuteronomy 12:17-18; 14:23) and a third tithe supported the orphans, widows, and the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:12-13). To give ten percent means we give considerably less than people in the Old Testament.

**6** I suspect this is why the New Testament has little to say about the tithe. The standard moves to [give as God has prepared you] (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:2-5,8; 9:6-14).

---

Rev. John Edward Chandler attended the University of Alabama, Asbury College, and Asbury Theological Seminary. In the years after graduating from Seminary, he completed further graduate study in Personal and Family Counseling, Marriage Counseling, Alcohol Problems, Suicide Prevention, Sexual Dysfunction, Sexual Abuse, Problems of Sexual Orientation, and Career Changes. Rev. Chandler has 50 years of service in the United Methodist Church. From 1983 to 1998, he was the Senior Pastor at Niceville United Methodist Church. He was also a counselor during this time. Since 1998, he has been on the church staff as a counselor. For more than 25 years, Rev. Chandler has also taught stewardship seminars in churches across the country. He is a speaker for retreats and conferences both for his depth of understanding of scripture as a Bible scholar, and for his ability to communicate practical solutions for daily living.