

# Tithes & the Levites

by Gareth Evans

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*Gareth Evans' sermon emphasizes the biblical foundations of tithing and its critical role in supporting ministry and community needs.*

**Scripture:** Numbers 3:11, Numbers 18:21, Deuteronomy 26:12, Malachi 3:10, Matthew 23:23

**Topics:** "Stewardship Of Wealth", "Supporting Ministry"

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## Description

Gareth Evans preaches on the significance of the Levites as ministers of the tabernacle, chosen by God for various responsibilities such as judging the people, teaching the law, offering sacrifices, leading worship, and even engaging in warfare. The Levites were supported by the tithes of the other tribes, a practice that continued into the New Testament. Evans challenges the faithful to consider if their tithes are being used for the purposes God intended, emphasizing the importance of supporting all who labor in the service of the Lord, not just for salaries but for the advancement of God's kingdom and meeting the needs of the marginalized in society.

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## Transcript

### Ministers of the Covenant

Levi was the third of the twelve son of Jacob, patriarch and namesake of Israel. It was his descendant Moses, whom God used to lead His people out of their bondage in Egypt. During the forty years of their wanderings in the wilderness, God gave them the ten commandments and various other laws regarding the tabernacle, its structure and services.

The tribe of Levi was chosen out for the special ministry of the tabernacle, God's "dwelling place". The ground of their choosing was that the first-born son of every family, spared when the avenging angel passed through Egypt, God claimed as His own. However, rather than take young men from each family, unknown to one another, He choose one family to represent them all.[i] The male descendants of Levi at that time were found in three main families and numbered twenty two thousand, whereas the eldest sons found throughout all the families of Israel were two hundred and seventy three more. For these the tribes had to give money to the family of Levi [ii]

The three major families were the Gershonites, Kohathites and Merarites, each of which was given a particular responsibility for the transporting, setting up and ministry of the tabernacle.[iii] While other tribes might be engaged in providing for the needs of their families, foraging for food in excess of the manna God

provided, gathering kindling to light fires, setting up tents in the various oases encountered, the Levites were to put their hands only to the work of the tabernacle, its feasts and sacrifices, its transport and maintenance.

Before they entered Caanan, the 'promised land', Moses was given fresh instruction regarding the Levites. They were to be given 48 cities, and their suburbs, throughout the land, unlike the other tribes who were each allocated separate areas within the land. Six of these cities were to be known as cities of refuge to which the accidental manslayer could flee, to save his life from the avenger.[iv]

They would now be the judges of the people[v]; the teachers of the law and righteousness[vi]; the priests offering incense and sacrifices[vii]; the worship leaders and singers[viii]; the advance parties in warfare[ix]. They were also to take their turn in coming to Jerusalem to tend to all the needs of the tabernacle. In other words, they were the 'full-time' ministers of the Judaic religion.

They were not instructed to charge for their services but would rely entirely on the obedience of their fellow Israelites, for the Lord declared that their 'support' came from the tithes of the other tribes.

Tithes were first recorded as being paid by Abraham to Melchizedek[x] and pledged by Jacob as an offering to God.[xi] However, during the forty years in the wilderness, God laid down particular laws concerning the tithe.

It belonged to the Lord and was to be given to the Levites - for their services[xii]. The tribes were told to bring the tithes to the storehouse when they came to Caanan and to take care of the Levites[xiii]. This was to be their inheritance because they had no other inheritance in the land. Others who might receive from the tithe were the fatherless, the stranger and the widow[xiv].

The final mention of a tithe in the OT is found in the book of Malachi.

Here God speaks against the pollution of His altar by the sacrifices that are being made there. Unless the priests repent and make a right offering, God will bring a curse upon them. "I have sent this commandment to you so that my covenant with Levi will hold, says the Lord." [xv]

God is going to send the messenger of the covenant - "He is like a refiner's fire and He will purify the sons of Levi like gold and silver, until they present right offerings to the Lord." [xvi] "You are oppressing the fatherless, the sojourner and the widow [xvii] and robbing me - in your tithes and offerings" [xviii]

Now note the promise: "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse ... 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 on you an overflowing blessing." [xix]

Why is that so many who tithe faithfully cannot give testimony of an "overflowing blessing"? Is it possible that the Lord didn't mean this promise or has the tithe been presented to a 'polluted' altar and has not been used for the purposes for which God intended it?

The tithe continued into the New Testament and there is no doubt that Jesus and his disciples were faithful in the giving of their tithes. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for wrongful use of the tithe as though that bought them righteousness. They neglected the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faith "These you ought to have done without neglecting the others" (tithing mint, dill and cummin)[xx]

The tithe is meant to support all who labour in the service of the Lord. This would include pastors, evangelists, teachers, counselors, youth workers, care givers, - indeed ALL who are in what we today call "full-time" ministry. Sadly, we must admit that, usually, it is only used to pay staff salaries and other church 'expenses', sometimes even 'building funds'! (Maybe this is one reason why Seminary or Bible College graduates nearly always become "pastors" as this is the only position recognized for a salary, whereas the Bible clearly states that the Holy Spirit calls some to be pastors, others teachers, etc. No wonder we see such little anointing in many churches! Why should the Lord anoint the ministry of one who is outside his calling, and His appointing, simply because that is the only way to receive a salary in ministry?)

Surely the tithes of God's people are to be brought into the local storehouse so they can be distributed to all the local ministries of the church. Surely this also means all the ministries of the city, not just "in-house". We are to be "kingdom Christians" reaching into our community to meet its needs - especially among the "fatherless, the stranger and the widow" (surely those on the fringes of society today.)

I prayerfully ask that, we who seek the transforming power of the Lord to impact our city, would consider whether it is possible that we fall under the same judgment as the Israelites during Malachi's days. We have Levites ministering in our city. Why should they have to seek support from the world or individuals, when He has blessed so many believers with more than enough in tithes to meet their needs? These should be funded, a priori, from the tithes given to the local churches, not have to seek financial aid elsewhere.

If we would seek the Lord's blessing upon our city, then maybe we need to be obedient in using the Lord's money for the ministries of this city - not only our own little church and its programs. Maybe we should encourage our people to give their tithes to the local ministry they would like to support.

[i] Numbers 3:11-13

[ii] Numbers 3:39-51

[iii] Numbers 3:21-38

[iv] Numbers 35 & Joshua 21

[v] Deuteronomy 21:5

[vi] Deuteronomy 3:10

[vii] Deuteronomy 3:10

[viii] 2 Chronicles 30:21,22

[ix] Joshua 3

[x] Genesis 14:20; Hebrews 7:2-6

[xi] Genesis 28:22

[xii] Numbers 18:21-26

[xiii] Deuteronomy 12:12-19; 14:22-29

[xiv] Deuteronomy 26:12-15

[xv] Malachi 2:4-7

[xvi] Malachi 3:3

[xvii] Malachi 3:5

[xviii] Malachi 3:8

[xix] Malachi 3:10

[xx] Matthew 23:23

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