

A Giver Under the Old Covenant

Text

Deut. 16:16-17 ¹⁶ “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed. ¹⁷ Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.”

Memory Verse

Deut. 16:16 “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed.”

Introduction

Before Israel became a nation, God had already shown patterns of giving, through creation and through His dealings with Abraham, Isaac, and

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Jacob. The first biblical mention of tithing, by Abraham, is in Gen. 14:20.

How did giving work under national Israel, during the time of Moses's law?

As we will see below, God commanded that material gifts must be brought when coming before Him.

“Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year ... none shall appear before Me empty.”
(Ex. 23:14-15)

His command applied to Israelite men aged 20 and above who had received land as inheritance. Women, children, slaves, the handicapped, and foreigners were exempt. The expectation was that gifts should be given by men who had land and ability.

Objective

To appreciate that all giving under the Old Covenant was a welfare program for the poor - orphans, widows, strangers, the handicapped, priests - and that it was compulsory.

Presentation

1. All Forms of Giving Were Welfare Programs

Tithes were for the Levites who had no land (Num. 18:21-24).

The Levites then gave a tenth of that to the priests (Num. 18:25-29).

Tithes were also for orphans, widows, and strangers every third year (Deut. 14:22-29; 26:12-15).

Other offerings had the same purpose of mercy and relief:

- * Fellowship offerings (Lev. 3:1-17; 19:5).
- * Guilt offerings (Lev. 5:1-6:7).
- * Grain offerings (Lev. 2).
- * Drink offerings (Num. 15:5, 10).
- * Wave offerings (Lev. 23:10-11, 15-17).

Only burnt and sin offerings were for atonement (Lev. 1:3-9; 4:1-12). The rest were practical care for people.

2. Law Controlled Giving, Not Grace

Under the law, it was a must: “Three times a year all your males shall appear... and they shall not

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appear before the Lord empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.” (Deut. 16:16-17)

Only men aged 20 and above who were numbered were required to bring a gift. (Num. 14:29; Ex. 12:37).

Nowhere else in Scripture is material giving made a condition for coming before God (Acts 17:24-25; Micah 6:6-8). God knew that He had given these men land. If they were not lazy, they could produce something to help the needy. The offering was not for God’s need, He does not need anything (Acts 17:25). It was for people.

3. Some Giving, Like Tithing, Was Regulated

Tithe means “one out of ten”. Giving more or less was a violation under the law. Today, giving under grace is not driven by law or threat.

Mal. 3:8-10 ⁸ “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings.⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. ¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in

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this,” Says the Lord of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”

The above words, taken from Malachi 3, were spoken to Israel under the law. Under Christ, giving is need-oriented and flexible:

- * Firstfruit and harvest were seasonal, but Gal. 4:9-11 shows that binding yourself to seasons is not the way under grace.
- * Tithing belongs to the law, fixed at 10%.
- * Giving under grace is for welfare, to meet real needs (Gal. 6:2, 9-10).

All giving was meant to be God’s welfare system (Deut. 15:4, 11). The approach just changed:

- * Moses would say: If you have ten shirts, give one (Mal. 3:10-11).
- * John the Baptist would say: If you have two shirts, give one (Luke 3:10-11).
- * Paul would say: As you have opportunity, do good to all (Gal. 6:10).

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If your brother needs \$5,000 and you have \$20,000, grace says help him. Under the law, you would need \$50,000 before you would give \$5,000 as a tithe.

Grace looks for problems to solve. The law looks for faults to punish.

Hebrews 7 uses Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek to show that Christ's priesthood is superior to Levi's. The point is superiority, not tithing (Heb. 7:4, 7, 9-10). Jesus told people to keep the law while it was still in force (Matt. 23:23; Mark 1:44). But He came to inaugurate a new covenant (Heb. 7:12; 8:6-8, 13; Matt. 26:28).

The law of Moses is good and spiritual when used to benefit people (Rom. 7). But practising the law today is living under the law of sin and death (Rom. 7; Gal. 4:21-26). Living under the law of Christ is living under the law of the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2).

His mission is to help and pray for others, even enemies (Gal. 6:2). We hope for the heavenly land to come, not just the earthly one (Heb. 2:5; 2 Cor. 4:16-18). All Scripture is inspired for our good (2 Tim. 3:16), but the part that secures our eternal

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welfare is the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:1-4; John 17:13-21).

Conclusion

Giving under the old covenant was law, regulated, and tied to land and season. Giving under grace is free, need-driven, and aimed at love. The goal never changed: care for people. The method did.

Evaluation Questions & Answers

1. Between proportionate giving and regulated giving, which one has Jesus's endorsement?
 - * Proportionate, need-oriented giving. Jesus praised the widow who gave all she had (Luke 21:1-4), and He taught love and mercy over fixed rules (Matt. 12:7). Regulated giving belongs to the law. Under grace, giving responds to need (Gal. 6:10).
2. If God was still using the first covenant to govern His people's spiritual life, would our text apply to everybody? Why?
 - * No. Deut. 16:16-17 applied only to Israelite men aged 20 and above with land. Women, children, slaves, foreigners, and the

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handicapped were exempt. The law had specific boundaries.

3. Reading Lev. 24:19-20 next to Matt. 5:38-42, would you still say that Jesus fulfilled the law of Moses for us so that we keep practising it?
 - * No. Jesus fulfilled the law so that we would not have to live under it. Lev. 24:19-20 says “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”; Jesus says “do not resist an evil person ... turn the other cheek” (Matt. 5:38-42). He ended the old system and brought a new one of grace and love (Heb. 8:13; Rom. 10:4).

Prayer

Father, thank You for showing us the difference between law and grace. Give us grace to follow Jesus’s teaching as handed down by the apostles. Help us to give freely, to meet real needs, and to worship You in Spirit and truth. Amen.