

New Covenant Theology



Questions Raised by New Covenant Theology

What about Tithing?

- What does the Bible say about tithing?
- Are New Covenant Christians required to give 10% (or more) of their gross income to their church?

Tithing in the Old Testament

- Does the Bible record any instances of tithing ***prior*** to the Law of Moses?
 - On one occasion, Abraham paid a tithe of the spoils of war to Melchizedek. (Genesis 14:17-20)
 - Jacob vowed that if God would provide for him, he would (voluntarily) give back ten percent of what God gave him. (Genesis 28:20-22)
- Tithing ***under*** the Law of Moses:
 - Where did the Israelite tithes come ***from***?
 - Where did the Israelite tithes go ***to***?
 - What was the actual percentage that Israelites ended up giving through their “tithes”, according to most Bible scholars?

Tithing in the New Testament

- Jesus statements concerning tithing:
 - Did Jesus affirm the giving of tithes during his earthly ministry?
 - Does Jesus' affirmation necessarily have any bearing on whether New Covenant believers are required to tithe? Why or why not?
- Are there any passages in the NT (besides Jesus' comments during his earthly ministry) that command New Covenant believers to tithe?
- What is the standard given in the NT for giving?

*William Barclay's Arguments for NT Tithing

- Barclay begins his article by summarizing his own argument.
- Barclay argues that the requirement to tithe:
 - Preceded the Mosaic law
 - Was codified in the Mosaic law with ceremonial aspects added
 - Was affirmed by Jesus as binding on his followers.

Barclay Argument #1:

Requirement to Tithe Preceded Mosaic Law

- As we have already seen, the Bible does record ***two*** examples of tithing that took place before the Mosaic law was given (Abraham and Jacob).
- But was there a ***requirement*** for men to tithe prior to the Mosaic law as Barclay claims?
- Let's look at the two passages that record where tithing took place prior to the Law of Moses and see if there is anything in those texts that tells us that the tithes given were ***required***.

Barclay Argument #1:

Requirement to Tithe Preceded Mosaic Law

- Abraham gives a tithe:
 - *After [Abram's] return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him... ¹⁸ Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) ¹⁹ And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰ and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" **And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.** (Gen 14:17-20)*
- Does this passage say that Abram was **required** to give a tithe to Melchizedek?
- Does this passage tell us **why** Abram gave a tithe to Melchizedek?
- Does this passage tell us that Abram tithed on a regular basis?

Barclay Argument #1:

Requirement to Tithe Preceded Mosaic Law

- Jacob paid a tithe:
 - *Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹ so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, ²² and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you."* (Gen 28:20-22)
- Does this passage tell that Jacob was **required** to give God a tithe of everything God gave him (prior to making a vow to do so)?
- Does this passage tell us **why** Jacob made a vow to tithe all that God gave him?

Barclay Argument #1:

Requirement to Tithe Preceded Mosaic Law

- But Barclay contends that Abraham and Jacob **were** commanded by God to give tithes:
 - *But where did the idea to tithe come from? Many argue Abraham and Jacob were simply following the customs of the surrounding nations. But Scripture points in a different direction. In Genesis 26:5, God says, “Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.” This language is almost identical to later instructions regarding the Mosaic law. This passage implies that God gave his people laws in addition to those written in Genesis.*
- We know from the book of Genesis that God gave many commands to Abraham. And it’s likely that God gave **other** commands to Abraham besides the ones recorded in Genesis.
- The passage Barclay cites, Genesis 26:5, tells us that Abraham was (generally) faithful to obey God’s commands.
- But how does that **prove** (or “point in a direction”) that God **commanded** Abraham to give a tithe to Melchizedek (or anybody else)?
- Is it not just as likely that Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek because it was a common practice in his day – especially since we know that many nations in the ancient world did, in fact, practice tithing? (cf. 1 Maccabees 11:35)

Barclay Argument #1:

Requirement to Tithe Preceded Mosaic Law

- In order to show that tithing was required before the Law of Moses, Barclay has to do more than show that two men gave tithes.
- He has to make the case that ***all*** men were required to tithe to God prior to the Law of Moses.
- In order to make this case, Barclay tries to make an argument from Genesis 4 (the account of Cain and Abel offering sacrifices to God).

Barclay Argument #1:

Requirement to Tithe Preceded Mosaic Law

- Barclay argues:
 - *It's clear from Genesis 4 that the first family knew they had a responsibility to give back to God a portion of what God had given them. They were even held responsible for the kind of offering they gave. God accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's. In addition, since the Old Testament later links the offering of the "firstborn" and "firstfruits" to the tithe, it's possible Abel's offering was accepted precisely because it was a tithe. The Old Testament is clear God's people were to give back to him—and that he'd given instructions about what that entailed.*
- Notice that he says a number of things that are true but then strategically suggests things about tithing that are **not** in the text in order to get you to "see" tithing in this text.
- Let's take a look at Genesis 4 and see what the text **actually** says.

Barclay Argument #1:

Requirement to Tithe Preceded Mosaic Law

- Genesis 4 reads:
 - *Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. ³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. (Gen 4:2b-5)*
- The NT writers make the following comment about the sacrifices offered by Cain and Abel:
 - *By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. (Heb. 11:4)*
 - *We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. (1John 3:12)*
- Is there anything in Genesis 4 (or the NT passages that reference this event) that imply that Cain and Abel were to sacrifice a tenth of what they produced or that “Abel’s offering was accepted precisely because it was a tithe”?

Questions?

