

**AN EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF MALACHI 3:8-12 AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO TITHING**

By

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any institution for a degree.

J I van der Merwe

Seattle, January 2010

Dedication

To my parents, Bill and Lorraine, for their constant love and encouragement, and for the example of their lives, lived in service to the Lord. Thank you, Dad and Mom.

To Jill and Lynne, for giving your friendship, and for providing the means for me to further my studies. It means a whole lot to me, thank you.

Abstract

This thesis discusses the implications of Malachi 3:8-12 in relation to its bearing on New Testament giving in general, and on Christian tithing in particular. Old Testament texts that deal with the subject were examined in order to ascertain what the historical and theological function of the tithe was, and in order to paint a broad background for a closer study of the Malachi text. An exegetical study of Malachi 3:8-12 was conducted to provide a basis of comparison with New Testament texts on giving.

An exegetical study of selected New Testament texts related to giving was undertaken, and the results were presented by suggesting some broad principles extracted from the selected texts.

In order to synthesize the results of the study, the relationship between Christians and the Law was briefly discussed. Finally, applications were suggested in terms of a New Testament theology of giving, incorporating any implications about giving resulting from the study of Old Testament tithing texts, and of Malachi 3:8-12 specifically.

The study found that Malachi 3:8-12 does not apply to believers in so far as it required a tithe to be paid for the support of the temple personnel. The findings suggested that the New Testament's teaching on the subject of giving provides a better model for Christians. This model emphasizes voluntary, proportional, generous and joyful giving as demonstrative of a believer's attitude toward possessions.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background and Motivation

Tithing is the predominant teaching about giving in some Christian denominations (e.g., Assemblies of God USA; United Church of God), and Malachi 3:8-12 is arguably the most popular text used in support of the ongoing applicability of tithing for Christians. While somewhat subjective, the latter statement is attested to by others who have approached the subject of Christian giving (e.g., Carlé 2000; Kelly 2000; Cumming 2007). Congregations are urged to fulfil their responsibilities by giving God “his tithe”, and warned of the dire consequences of failing to do so. Research by Barna (2008) shows that approximately nine percent of all born again adults claim to tithe, with evangelicals tithing at a higher percentage rate (twenty four) than other groups. Empty Tomb Inc. (2007) reports that Protestant giving has not kept pace with the increase in individual income; only two and a half percent of income was given to the church in 2007. These trends indicate that for the majority of Christians, giving to churches typically does not reach anywhere near ten percent, even in congregations where tithing is the predominant teaching.

In light of the New Testament, a demand that everyone give ten percent seemed to me to be inconsistent with the Christian life of freedom and grace, even as we’re under the “law of Christ”. The central question for me became whether there was a better, and more biblically sound, way to educate Christians about giving. Is the most popular text on tithing, Malachi 3:8-12, relevant to the subject of Christian giving? Is tithing a directive from the Lord that is still in effect and applicable to believers today?

The subject of giving can often be a sensitive issue for believers; depending on the particular approach of an individual church or pastor, some congregants may feel

coerced and manipulated into giving, while others may feel they are upholding one of God's requirements by faithfully tithing, and have thereby fulfilled their responsibility. I feel that there is some confusion on the subject and that further study may be able to provide a clearer picture of how the Malachi 3 passage should be applied. I believe that a better understanding of the biblical texts that deal with the issue of tithing, and of giving in general, would help Christians towards a balanced approach that embraces generosity and is not motivated by obligation, duty, or guilt, but by God's grace and the needs of others.

1.2 Extant Literature

The current literature on the subject of tithing shows that there is still disagreement among some scholars as to whether tithing is the mandated form of giving for believers today. One of the main areas of disagreement centres on the problem of how the Old Testament fits into the life of the believer, and into the context of the New Testament revelation. One source, Pink (2006), argues that tithing falls under moral and not ceremonial law, and therefore is still binding on the believer. Others, like Alcorn (2003) and Kendall (1982), see tithing as being a principle that transcends the Old Testament Law, having been practiced before the Law of Moses, and therefore is a practice that believers should continue to observe. Malachi 3:8-12 is seen in the light of this transcendence of the principle of tithing, and as a reinforcement of a law that God has not rescinded. This position is strengthened by what some, like Kendall, view as Jesus' endorsement of tithing in Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:14. Those who hold to a pre-Mosaic tithe position also point to Hebrews 7:1-10 as further evidence that tithing is a New Testament practice.

Many of those who do not see tithing as mandatory for believers point to New Testament teachings on the broader subject of giving as evidence that the tithing laws have been superseded. These include Tate (1973), Carson (1999) and Kelly (2000). In light of the New Testament, the Malachi 3 passage is viewed in the context of its being written to a people still living under obligation to the Mosaic Law, and applying to a particular people at a particular time, not as a universal instruction. Kelly is one of the few sources who deal in some depth with the background and context of Malachi 3. Of the literature I have surveyed many, like Blomberg (1999),

suggest 2 Corinthians 8-9 as the main text that should be used to support giving that does not include a mandatory ten percent for all.

1.3 Weaknesses of the Literature

In a preliminary survey of the literature in support of tithing for Christians, I found that there was a lack of depth in dealing with the context and background of the supporting texts. In some cases the arguments presented primarily comprised of statements with little exegetical or theological support. I believe that one of the major weaknesses of the literature is the lack of exegesis of the passages that are used to support a position, as well as bias in the particular theological approach to the subject. Another weakness is the unclear presentation of how a Christian is to relate to and apply the Old Testament's teachings in general, and in particular with regard to tithing. The literature in support of voluntary giving only for Christians is more extensive than the opposing view, making it challenging to interact with credible sources for the opposing view.

Much of the literature on the subject of tithing is to be found within individual commentaries or studies on a particular book of the Bible, or in resources such as biblical and theological dictionaries. This presents a problem of accessibility for those who want to gain a thorough overview of the subject. However, the "tithing debate" is becoming more prominent, with websites and online articles devoted to the topic, providing additional tools for those interested in the issue. Application is another area of weakness in some of the literature on tithing. The implications of the historical function of the tithe can be overlooked, with applications made that do not necessarily flow out of the context and background of the texts.

1.4 Addressing the Weaknesses

By applying the principles of exegesis and hermeneutics to a particular passage related to the tithing debate (i.e., Mal. 3:8-12) I hope to address in part one of the main weaknesses in the literature I have surveyed thus far. An in-depth study of this passage will place it in its historical and canonical context, and out of this context a better understanding of its application will emerge. As a side result the overarching

issue of how the Old Testament relates to the believer today will also be addressed. The study will also cover, in brief, some of the relevant New Testament texts on giving. The side-by-side examination of both Old and New Testament texts will result in a more accessible resource, and allow for easy reference to the texts most relevant to the topic. In suggesting applications of the study I will endeavour to allow the texts to drive the practical implementation of any principles extracted. This will result in applications that are both hermeneutically sound and relevant to the modern context.

1.5 Main Research Problem

The main research problem to be addressed in this thesis is: What are the implications of Malachi 3:8-12 for Christians with reference to tithing?

To address the main problem, the study will seek to answer these key questions:

- What is the historical and theological background of tithing in the Old Testament?
- What is the historical context and meaning of Malachi 3:8-12?
- What do the selected texts reveal about New Testament giving principles?
- What is the relationship of the Christian to the Old Testament, and to the Mosaic Law in particular?
- What are the practical implications of Malachi 3:8-12, and the study as a whole, for believers today?

The main objectives will be to ascertain whether Malachi 3:8-12 contains a directive applicable to Christians, and whether, based on this text, tithing should be the primary method of giving. Secondary objectives include uncovering the background of the practice of tithing, ascertaining whether tithing is supported by the New Testament and providing an overview of the New Testament's teaching on giving in general.

1.6 Hypothesis

I expect the research to show that Malachi 3:8-12 has no direct implications for the believer in terms of an obligation to give ten percent to his local church, and should

be applied only in the context of a broader New Testament theology of giving, and in terms of a biblical response of generosity towards the needs of others and the extension of Christ's Kingdom. While Malachi 3:8-12 may have other applications, apart from its reference to tithing, these fall outside the scope of this study.

1.7 Value

The study will be of value in the preliminary development of a broader theology of giving that embraces the continuity of both Old and New Testaments, while recognizing the discontinuity in function and fulfilment. The subject has gained interest outside of the church in recent years; a newspaper article on the topic demonstrates that there is confusion and disagreement among individuals and denominations, "Tithing ranges from a requirement to a suggestion, depending on the denomination and the church. Resistance to tithing has been increasing steadily in recent years." (Sataline 2007) Finances can be a sensitive issue for individual members as well as church administrators and pastors. This study will address some of the concerns surrounding the topic, helping to clarify the issues and provide a biblical overview for those who may be confused about the contradictory positions that are advanced. On a personal level, the study will be of benefit to me as an exercise to improve my skills in the area of biblical exegesis as well as research methodology.

1.8 Methodology

1.8.1 Overview

In order to conduct a thorough examination of the main text (Mal. 3:8-12) it is essential to understand the wider context of the passage being studied. In this instance the wider context includes the system of tithing and its history, leading up to the passage under review. To this end the study will begin, in chapter two, with an overview of tithing in the Old Testament as a whole. With this background established an in-depth examination of Malachi 3:8-12 can then be undertaken. Chapter three will deal with the more immediate context of the selected passage, its meaning, and how it may have been understood and applied at the time. These two

chapters will be key in answering the main research question, by providing a thorough working knowledge of the selected text and its background.

In chapter four I will undertake a brief overview of selected New Testament texts, with the goal of establishing an understanding of the New Testament teaching on giving. This chapter will be the stepping stone needed to answer the “implications” aspect of the main research question. Armed with the dual concepts of what the Old Testament as a whole and Malachi 3 in particular teaches about tithing, and the pursuant New Testament teaching on giving, it will be possible to answer the final component of the main research question, that of application. Chapter five will combine the research results of chapters two through four, resulting in some proposals as to the applicability of Malachi 3:8-12 to Christians.

1.8.2 Specifics

This study falls under the category of qualitative, textual data analysis. Both inductive and deductive reasoning will be employed (Mouton 2001:167). The study will require the use of a variety of exegetical tools and resources. The basic exegetical process will be based on the principles discussed in Zuck (1991), that is, *Bridging the Cultural Gap*, *Bridging the Grammatical Gap*, *Bridging the Literary Gap* and *Applying God’s Word Today*. The model articulated in Smith (2008:185-195) will form the basis for the organization of the thesis, in particular the process outlined under the heading *Steps in Evangelical Theology*. For chapters two and three it will be necessary to consult English translations of the Hebrew texts, Hebrew lexicons and grammars, general commentaries and historical background commentaries. Grammatical resources will include Mounce (2006), Gilbrant (1990, 1991) and Kohlenberger (1987). Commentaries to be consulted will include both general commentaries such as Jamieson, Fausset and Brown (1871) as well as book-specific studies and volumes from series such as WBC (Smith 1984) and NICOT (Verhoef 1987). In addition, works such as Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000) will be utilized to complete the historical picture. Chapters four and five require the use of a Greek Interlinear, word studies and other grammatical resources, including Rienecker (1980) and Verbrugge (2000). Other resources will include commentaries and theological dictionaries.

The specific texts to be examined include the following: (1) Chapter two: Genesis 4:1-8; 14:18-20; 28:10-22, Leviticus 27:30-33, Numbers 18:21-24, Deuteronomy 12:5-19; 14:22-29; 26:12-15, 2 Chronicles 31:4-19, Nehemiah 10:37-39; 12:44-47; 13:5,10, 12; Amos 4:4. (2) Chapter three: Malachi 3:8-12. (3) Chapter four: Matthew 23:23; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Hebrews 7:1-10. Additional texts will be referenced as they pertain to the specific argument being made.

1.9 Structure and Review of Argument

1.9.1 Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction

- *Overview of the background and research problem*

Chapter 2: Theological Backdrop

- *A brief study of tithing in the Old Testament from selected texts*

Chapter 3: Malachi 3:8-12

- *An exegesis of the selected text*

Chapter 4: Pursuant New Testament Theology

- *A brief study of selected texts related to giving*

Chapter 5: Implications

- *Suggested applications of the results of the study*

Chapter 6: Conclusion

- *A summary of the results and relevance of the study*

1.9.2 Chapter Detail

Chapter two will consist of an overview of the history, development and function of the tithe in the Old Testament. The goal is to provide a framework for understanding the significance and role of the tithe in Israel. The chapter will begin with texts that record instances of Pre-Mosaic tithing. Arguments concerning the origin of the tithe will be discussed briefly, including the issue of whether Pre-Mosaic tithing texts are

evidence that tithing is an eternal principle and a command given by God before the Law. My argument will be that these Pre-Mosaic texts depict a common practice of Ancient Near East cultures, and that all of the instances are voluntary and spontaneous, not the result of a specific command. Leviticus and Numbers are seen as containing instructions related to the general, or basic tithe, which was designated for the Levites. As such, the two texts are important in understanding the fundamental purpose of the tithe in Israel, that of providing for the cult personnel.

Questions surrounding the number of tithes and their use will also be discussed. The tithing texts of Deuteronomy raise the possibility that there were three separate tithes, each one being put to a different use. Opposing views include the argument that there was one general tithe that was put to different uses in different years, in a seven year cycle. These different viewpoints have an impact on the application of tithing to Christians, in that the “three-tithe” scenario creates difficulties of application for tithing proponents. 2 Chronicles, Nehemiah and Amos are texts that reflect the post-exilic problems and challenges of God’s people. The first two texts deal with the failure of the people to support the Levites, by neglecting to bring their tithes as prescribed. The result is a general neglect of the temple and its function as a centre of worship. The third text contains an admonishment to the people for their outward religious zeal (illustrated by their enthusiastic tithe giving); while at the same time they abuse and disenfranchise their fellow citizens. This chapter will show that the tithe system was vital to the overall worship of Israel, since its primary function was its support of the temple workers. Neglect of the tithe equalled neglect of proper worship.

Chapter three will comprise of an in-depth study and exegesis of Malachi 3:8-12. I will begin with an examination of the historical background of the text, answering such questions as pertains to authorship, date, reason for writing and prevailing circumstances of the day. From this platform an exegetical study can be undertaken, with special attention being given to any major differences in translation and interpretation of the text. Significant issues in the study include the author’s use of Deuteronomic language, particularly in the employment of the curse and blessing formula. Terms such as “offerings”, “storehouse”, “whole tithe” and “food”, that are

central to the understanding of the text, will be examined in order to establish their meaning in context.

Chapter four will deal with the New Testament teaching on giving, with particular focus on 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8-9. The aim of this chapter is to conduct an exegetical study of the selected texts that will lead to a suggested New Testament theology of giving, and will influence the application of the Malachi 3 text to the Christian. At the outset, two texts will be examined in order to evaluate their relevance to the subject of tithing. Matthew 23:23 and Hebrews 7:1-10 both contain mentions of the practice, and therefore have been employed in arguing for New Testament tithing. I will argue that both texts have as their main emphasis something other than tithing, and that the mere mention of the practice is not sufficient to warrant the conclusion that they teach the concept. Among other problems, the Matthew reference comes in the context of Jesus' earthly ministry, placing it before the inauguration of the New Covenant with its supersession of the Mosaic Law. The basic argument I will make in this chapter is that the New Testament contains general principles for giving that can be translated into practical applications, without the need to resort to enforcing Old Testament statutes that were limited functionally and eschatologically. Furthermore, exegesis of the texts will show that the New Testament requirement for giving is that it be carried out willingly, voluntarily, purposefully and generously. The New Testament places a premium on one's attitude in giving, while de-emphasizing the size or amount of the gift. At the same time, the portion that is set aside is expected to bear some relation to the giver's resources. This is in contrast to the tithe system, which places an equal burden on all, regardless of ability. The exegetical results of this chapter will inform the suggested applications of Malachi 3:8-12.

Finally, in chapter five I will synthesize the conclusions of chapters 2 through 4 and make some suggestions as to how Malachi 3:8-12 should be applied to individual Christians. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the relationship between the New Testament and the Law. The central thesis of the section is that the Law has reached its fulfilment in Christ, and has thus completed its eschatological function. Individual elements of the Mosaic legislation can no longer be applied to Christians, particularly those elements that pertained to the sacrificial system and its operation.

The section will present a brief summary of the main theological systems that inform the different approaches to the subject. The emphasis of the section will be on the continuity/discontinuity paradigm and its usefulness in understanding the correspondence of the two Testaments.

The following sections will be divided into headings that relate to the applications of the study. Under “Motives for Giving” I will argue that the proprietorship and character of God are dual concepts that form the basis of our giving. These concepts are consistent with the Old Testament’s view of our role as stewards and recipients of God’s benefits. The “Object of Giving” section will discuss the intended beneficiaries of our giving, taking into account the various ways in which the tithe was utilized in the Old Testament (i.e., support of the Levites, widows, orphans and aliens). I will argue that there is once again consistency in this area; broad principles rather than individual ordinances should be applied. “Methods of Giving” will focus primarily on principles apprehended from the New Testament texts examined in chapter four. In this area there is little direct correlation between tithing and New Testament giving, the methods are dictated by the context. Finally, as to the specific amount an individual should give, I propose that the New Testament contains no directive as to any minimum requirement. The amount must be decided upon by the individual, without coercion, and should be in proportion to that person’s resources. At the same time, generosity is praised and encouraged, with the example of Christ as the ultimate sacrificial giver.

Chapter Two

Theological Backdrop: A Brief Study of Tithing in the Old Testament from Selected Texts

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will form a broad background to the more in-depth study of Malachi 3:8-12. To this end the chapter will cover the history of tithing in three main sections; the first section will cover passages related to pre-Mosaic tithing, the second section will deal with tithing under the Law and the third section with tithing in the post-Mosaic era. It is necessary to discuss pre-Mosaic tithing in order to evaluate its relevance to the broader topic of tithing and to the Malachi passage in particular. The main goal of this chapter is to provide historical and theological context, as well as to establish relevance. Under the pre-Mosaic tithe category three specific texts will be discussed: Genesis 4:1-8, Genesis 14:17-24 and Genesis 28:10-22. For section two several texts will be covered: Leviticus 27, Numbers 18 and Deuteronomy 12, 14 and 26. Section three will deal with 2 Chronicles 31, Nehemiah 10, 12, 13 and Amos 4:4.

At the conclusion of this chapter I hope to have provided a good outline and understanding of the tithe in the Old Testament, including its origin, development and use. Guthrie (1962:654) has stated that it is “impossible to reconstruct any clear-cut picture of the practice of tithing in Israel”, and he concludes that tithes, along with other kinds of offerings are “of common origin”. This is attested to by various authors, including Carpenter (1988, s.v. *tithe*) and Snoeberger (2000:71). Cultures including Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian are listed as having had some form of tithe system in place, although Carpenter (p. 862) notes that the biblical tithe “issued from theological rather than merely political, humanitarian, or economic motives”. It is sufficient for this study to note the fact that tithing was a practice not peculiar to

Israel, but was an element of other Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Regarding date and authorship for the Pentateuch, my assumption is that of an early date and Mosaic authorship, however, other views will be referenced where relevant.

2.2 Pre-Mosaic Era

2.2.1 Cain and Abel: Genesis 4:1-8

At first glance this passage from the Cain and Abel narrative may seem out of place in a discussion on tithing. The word “tithe” or “tenth”, *masēr* (Mounce 2006:980), is not used in the text, and there are no obvious parallels in the story that would connect it to other tithing texts from the Law. However, Lansdell’s (1955:¶1) work *The Sacred Tenth* includes an argument for tithing, based on this passage and centred upon a textual variant in the LXX reading of Genesis 4:7. Lansdell’s interpretation of this verse, based on the variant, leads him to conclude that Cain’s offering was not accepted because he did not present to the Lord a sufficient *quantity* (a tenth) and not because of the quality of the offering. Lansdell points to this earliest text as corroborating evidence that tithing was a practice established by God before the Law, and is therefore to be considered an enduring divine principle. In view of the above it is necessary to begin with this passage, and to examine and evaluate the relevance of the text to the subject of tithing. I will begin with an examination of verse 7, since it is on this verse that the central argument for tithing in Genesis 4 is based. A brief discussion of other issues arising from the rest of the passage will follow.

A reading of the English text of Genesis 4:1-8 seems to contain no internal evidence that would support the idea that Cain and Abel were tithing when they brought their offerings to God. It has already been noted that the word for “tithe” or “tenth” is not used in this passage; there is also no obvious reference here to any specific amount or percentage. The story begins with Cain and Abel, “in the course of time” (Gen.

4:3)¹, each bringing something from their respective occupations as an offering to the Lord. The phrase used to introduce this story may refer either to an unspecified period of time or to a year (Wenham 1987:103). In this instance Wenham believes that it would be reasonable, and consistent with the story, to infer that the offerings were brought during the course of an agricultural year. The text does not reveal any clues as to the frequency of these offerings, whether they were a requirement every year or if they were brought spontaneously on this occasion. Thus the lack of specifics regarding the nature of and motivation for the offerings makes it difficult to form definite conclusions as to their possible connection with tithing.

As previously noted, the strongest argument for tithing from the Genesis 4 passage is derived from a translation of verse 7 that suggests Cain's offering was rejected due to its being insufficient in quantity. The argument is based upon a textual variant in the translation of the phrases "if you do well" and "if you do not do well". The LXX reading renders these phrases as "if you have offered correctly but not cut correctly" (Matthews 2001); however, Matthews calls this rendering an "imaginative reworking". Landsell (1955:¶2) translates the LXX reading as "if thou didst rightly offer but didst not rightly divide", and therefore his conclusion as to the rejection of Cain's offering is that it was not "rightly divided", meaning that it was not the tenth that God had ordained as his due. Both Brenton's (1986) translation and NETS (2007) render this verse similarly; "If you offer correctly but do not divide correctly, have you not sinned?" (NETS) and "Hast thou not sinned if thou hast brought it rightly, but not rightly divided it?" (Brenton) Snoeberger (2000:73) discusses this alternate LXX reading of verse 7 and concludes that "the difficulty of this reading and the high degree of accuracy of the MT at this point have led most modern commentators to reject this reading out of hand, and with it the implied reference to proportional tithing by Abel." Kostenberger and Croteau (2006:55) agree, stating that "most scholars rightly opt in favour of the MT over against the LXX at this juncture." In this instance it is the interpretation that is problematic, not necessarily the translation, since in

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

both the LXX and MT translations a good argument can be made to support the conclusion that this passage is not dealing with tithes.

Those commentators who deal with the textual difficulties in verse 7 (e.g., Speiser 1982; Hartley 2000; Towner 2001; Arnold 2009) focus primarily on the correct translation and meaning of other phrases in the verse (i.e., the demon/sin crouching at the door). Rather than an emphasis on the difficulty of establishing the meaning of the phrase “do what is right”, these scholars assume the general meaning of the verse to be that Cain must respond positively to the correction of the Lord if he is to avoid being mastered by his sinful desires. Thus Towner (2001:61) sums up the verse, “The Lord’s remark to Cain in verse 7 thus proves to be a general principle about the opportunity for moral growth that temptation offers.” In commenting on the LXX rendering, Stedman (1992:118-119) points out that there is no explanation offered as to what “divided rightly” might mean in this context; he goes on to state that “Scripture attaches no blame to Cain for the offering he brought”, and concludes that it was the “condition of his heart” that was the reason behind God’s rejection of Cain’s offering. A recent Hebrew text, Reader’s Hebrew Bible (2008), does not contain the terms “rightly divide”, and the English translation of verse 7 from the above text renders the phrase as “do well/do not do well”. Concerning this difficulty in translating verse 7 the general consensus is (even if the LXX were the more reliable text) that the LXX translation of “rightly divide” simply refers to the fact that for an unspecified reason Cain had not “done right”, or correctly, in the way his offering was brought before God. Whether this was because of the quality of the offering or Cain’s attitude is not stated.

The issue of the quantity, proportion or division of Cain’s offering is not clearly addressed in Genesis 4:4 and the reader is left to fill in the gaps with speculation as to the reason for the rejection of Cain’s offering. However, Hebrews 11:4 does give us some insight into the reason by stating that it was “by faith” that Abel offered a “better” or “greater” (*pleiōna*) sacrifice. Although there is some question as to the interpretation of “better” in this passage, Landsell (1955) translates this word as “more abundant” and posits a parallel between this verse and the LXX’s “rightly divide” to conclude that Cain’s offering was not the correct amount. However, it is apparent that the emphasis in Hebrews 11:4 rests on the issue of faith and not on

the content of the offering. The only biblical reason given for God's rejection of Cain's offering was that it was not offered in faith, not that it was an incorrect amount, or any other reason.

Snoeberger (2000:74-75) argues further that the lack of any background information surrounding these events leaves little room for drawing firm conclusions about their relation to the practice of tithing. The fact that the brothers brought offerings merely shows that these ancient workers understood that their success depended on the providence of God, and this they acknowledged by bringing a token of thanksgiving from their respective occupations. This is the position of Arnold (2009:78), who goes on to state that, "It is too early to have specific prescriptions about the nature of sacrifice, so we are unable to discern whether Cain's was less appropriately offered." Von Rad (1972:104) agrees that the sparse details given in the passage do not answer the questions as to why the brothers brought offerings or what kind of offerings they were. This conclusion is echoed by Towner (2001:58-59), who sums up by observing that, "We have no choice but to stay within the terms of the story itself and take Cain's reaction to the rejection of his offering as a test of his ability to handle provocation and jealousy." The lack of explanation and detail within the text gives reason to believe that the offerings themselves are not in fact the central focus of the story.

The terms used in the passage lead Snoeberger (2000:75) to suggest that the offering was "roughly, though not exactly, equivalent to Israel's firstfruits or meal offerings, not to their regular sin offerings or tithes." This is consistent with the description of the brothers' offering in Genesis 4:3-4, especially that of Abel, since the text expands on his offering by stating that Abel brought "of the firstlings...and of their fat portions." There is no indication here of a percentage; if anything the description of Abel's offering raises the possibility that the emphasis is on the quality of the offering, that is, the first and best. Snoeberger concludes that the Cain and Abel narrative simply shows that those who feared God also brought offerings to him, but that there is no evidence to suggest that an amount or percentage was specified for these offerings. The passage describes what the brothers presented to the Lord simply as "offerings"; in Cain's case the offering was "of the fruit of the ground" and in Abel's case it was "of the firstborn of his flock" and "of their fat

portions". The word "offering" that is used several times in Genesis 4:3-5 is the Hebrew word *minhâ* (Mounce 2006, s.v. *offering*). This word is translated variously as gift, tribute and present; however, Mounce notes that one of the more frequent later uses of the word is as it refers to the meal or grain offering. Wenham (1987:103) agrees that the word is used as a general term for a gift, or more specifically when referring to the cereal offering, as in Leviticus 2:1-7 and Numbers 15:1-16. It is not the same word that is generally used when referring to something that is slaughtered or sacrificed, it is also not the term used of the regular tithes in the Mosaic Law.

A closer look at exactly what the brothers brought reveals that Cain's offering consisted of the produce from his agricultural endeavours; there is no mention made of the quality or, more pertinent to this study, the quantity of produce he brought. The NIV renders the phrase "*some of the fruits*" (italics mine); the Holman Christian Standard Bible also uses the word "some" in translating the phrase. Neither Cain's "fruit of the ground" nor Abel's "firstlings of his flock" indicate the actual amount that was brought, which leaves the reader with only the option of speculation as to whether one brother presented a tenth and the other less. In the case of Abel's offering the term "firstlings", *bekōr* (Mounce 2006, s.v. *firstborn*) is used. Mounce affirms that this term simply means firstborn of animal or human offspring. Again there is no indication as to how many "firstlings" Abel brought; a tithe would require that Abel present one of every ten animals he had, since according to the Mosaic Law every tenth animal belonged to God regardless of its order of birth or condition. In the Mosaic Law, firstfruits and firstlings are treated as something separate from tithes, although both were given to the priests and Levites as part of their entitlement. Because of the difference between firstlings/firstfruits and tithes a direct parallel cannot be drawn from Abel's offerings to the Mosaic tithe.

In discussing the term "offering" used in 4:3, commentators such as Wenham (1987); Matthews (2001); Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000) all agree on the idea that the offerings depicted in the passage are associated with the common term used for a gift or tribute, and that the term is also associated with the meal or grain offering in Leviticus 2. There is no mention in these sources as to a possible connection between these offerings and tithing. I believe the discussion of the terms used to

describe the offerings that Cain and Abel presented to the Lord shows that it would be speculative at best to conclude that this passage is the earliest biblical account of God's people tithing.

The central issues here relate to what is meant when Cain is admonished to "do what is right", and to discovering in what regard Cain did not do right on this occasion. In order to compose as full a picture as possible of the events of Genesis 4 and their meaning it is necessary to refer to the New Testament passages that deal with Cain and Abel and their offering. 1 John 3:12 states that Cain's deeds (or works) were evil, but that Abel's deeds were righteous. Hebrews 11:4 emphasises that Abel's offering was acceptable because it was offered by faith, "God commending him by accepting his gifts." (ESV) In the Hebrews passage it is the person who is accepted first, because of faith, and the offering then becomes acceptable because of the righteousness of the one who offers it. This scenario negates the idea of acceptance that is based on the quantity of the offering, but supports the idea that a righteous person is motivated to offer the best offering he is able to present. Based on this understanding Waltke (2001:97) comments that "Cain's sin is tokenism", a failure to thoughtfully offer the best that he could. The consensus among scholars such as Walton et al. (2000); Reyburn and Fry (1997) and Wenham (1987) is that the verse refers to Cain's attitude in the way he presented his offering; Cain did not offer rightly or correctly in how he approached God, not in how much he brought.

From the evidence discussed thus far it seems likely that the offerings that Cain and Abel brought cannot decisively be linked to a tithe. The language used points to a general offering, and there is no clear reference as to the exact amount of either gift. In addition, the New Testament references concerning this narrative lean more toward a reason other than the amount of the offering for the rejection of Cain's presentation. The only significant objections to this conclusion are based on arguments from silence or on alternate interpretations of the LXX text; in this instance the MT appears to be the more accurate. If this is the case then this passage has no real relevance to the practice of tithing, and therefore to the exegesis of Malachi 3.

2.2.2 Abram and Melchizedek: Genesis 14:17-24

In contrast to the previous section, the passage now under consideration is much more widely referenced in support of the “pre-Mosaic” argument for tithing. In this section I will discuss the possible interpretation and application of this passage, and examine its background and context for any relevance to the subject of tithing for Christians. This incident features prominently in some authors’ arguments in favour of tithing for Christians today (e.g., Kendall 1982; Taylor 1991), an argument based primarily on the fact that it presents a record of someone tithing prior to the establishment of the Law. From this the conclusion drawn is that the practice of tithing transcends the Law. Once again, a plain reading of the text does not reveal much detail about what was given, why it was given, or whether it was a regular practice of Abram’s. The central elements of the narrative that relate to the tithe that was paid will be examined in order to establish its context and bearing on the subject of tithing.

The first issue that must be discussed concerning this passage is whether Abram’s tithe came out of all of his possessions or only out of the plunder from his defeat of the kings. The text is not entirely clear, it merely reads “He gave him a tenth of all” (Gen. 14:20), leaving us to decipher what the “all” refers to. The context would suggest that the tithe came out of the goods that Abram had brought back from his victory; both preceding and following verses refer to these goods (vv. 16, 21). The passage specifically mentions the spoils of war, including the fact that Abram refused to keep any of it for himself, while no mention is made of any other possessions or goods that Abram may have had with him. In addition it seems unlikely that Abram would have had all of his possessions with him at the time since, as Wenham (1987) points out, Abram was on his way home at that point. However, the most compelling support for the view that it was the spoils of war that were tithed comes out of the Hebrews 7 account of this incident. While verse 2 is not specific, repeating only that Abram gave “a tenth part of all”, verse 4 of that chapter specifically identifies the tithe as having been paid from the “choicest spoils”, *akrothinion* (Mounce 2006:1076). The Hebrews 7 account also clarifies the question of who paid whom, since it may not be immediately apparent from Genesis 14:20; verses 2, 4 and 9 of Hebrews 7 make it clear that it was Abram who gave a tenth to Melchizedek.

The text identifies Melchizedek as both a king and a priest. Paying tribute to a person in either role would have been appropriate, so it does not seem unusual that Abram would offer a tenth to him. In addition, there were other cultures of the time that practiced tithing; “Israel was merely one among many ancient Near Eastern peoples who tithed their property, produce, or currency” (Harris 1980, s.v. *masē*). There is no mention before or after this incident that Abram was in the habit of tithing or why he chose that percentage to offer. An investigation into the extra-biblical origins of tithing reveals that a tenth was a portion that was regularly used in ancient times. Both religious and secular entities were beneficiaries of these kinds of offerings. “Giving a portion of one’s profit or the spoils of war was known in the ancient world from Greece to China. Donation of a tenth portion, or tithe, was common apparently because most people counted in tens.” (Morley 1996:779) Canaanite culture included the practice of paying a portion to the king for the support of his government, “In the ancient Near East there was little difference between tithes and taxes. Both were extracted from villages as payment to the government and usually stored in temple complexes” (Walton et al. 2000:184). Since the practice seems to have been relatively widespread in the ancient world, and since it cannot be reliably determined if this figure (a tenth) was revealed to man by God (before the Law) as his ordained portion for giving, any conclusion in this regard remains speculative at best. Harris (1980, s.v. *masē*) does affirm that in the case of the Israelites, tithing had a theological motivation; the tithes were an acknowledgement of God’s provision and blessing.

The lack of detail in this passage about the nature of the tithe that Abram paid contrasts significantly to the details provided in the Law, where the amount, types of goods, frequency and uses of the tithe are given. The question arises that if our tithing is to be based on this pre-Law passage, how are we to determine to whom it should be paid, how often it should be offered, and to what use it should be put? In discussing the Genesis 14 account Kelly (2000:14) from the outset highlights the fact that this is a narrative passage and that it must be interpreted accordingly (i.e., it cannot be interpreted prescriptively). Kelly goes on to reject any correlation between this passage and tithing for Christians, by arguing that the tithe paid was a “spoils of war” tithe only and was not paid out of Abram’s other possessions. In addition he asserts that Abram’s actions followed a familiar custom of the day of paying tribute to

a local ruler. Another objection is raised by VanDruff (2006:§1) who points to the inconsistency of wanting to keep the practice of tithing (based on its pre-Mosaic references) while rejecting other pre-Mosaic practices such as animal sacrifice and circumcision as being still in effect for today's Christians. Once again the text itself is extremely limited in the information provided, making it difficult to draw too many absolutes from it. In his article on tithing Morley (1996:¶2) sums up his brief mention of pre-Mosaic tithing by concluding that "these tithes were spontaneous and no details were given."

In discussing another Old Testament tithing reference Walton et al. (2000:769) refers to Abram's tithe as a "noncompulsory tithe". On this point the Encyclopaedia Judaica (1971:1157) agrees, stating that "Abraham gives the tithe to Melchizedek of his own free will". The voluntary nature of Abram's tithe counteracts arguments that would link his tithe to any form of compulsory giving. There is no indication in the passage itself that this gesture of Abram's was anything but a voluntary act in response to the person of Melchizedek, the victory he had won and the blessing he had just received. In his essay on the topic of tithing Pink (2006:¶3) acknowledges the lack of detail in this text, even as he affirms the notion that the pre-Mosaic tithe is indicative of a command from God. Thus Pink states "from what is recorded we are *compelled to assume* that there must have been such a commandment given" (italics mine).

In a section of his article entitled The Origin of the Tithe, Sessions (2006:¶2) lists four areas to note in connection with Genesis 14:17-20, these being the voluntary nature of Abram's tithe, the fact that it was paid on property seized from defeated enemies, that it is the only recorded instance of Abram tithing, and finally that the Hebrews 7 account of the incident directs the focus to the superiority of Christ's priesthood and not on the tithe that was involved. This presents a good summary of the main elements of the narrative. Unlike the tithe system established under Moses, it is evident that Abram gave voluntarily and spontaneously. His tithe was given out of goods he had retrieved after defeating his enemies in battle, not out of his own property. In addition, there are questions surrounding the person who received Abram's tithe, and therefore questions as to how this incident would be properly applied in today's context. Although Abram's tithe has theological

significance, as indicated by the Hebrews 7 text, its practical application for today is in doubt.

The passage to be considered in the following section comes with many of the same problems as have been discussed above. The nature of, motivation for and use of Jacob's tithe does not fit easily into the later scenario of the tithing system under the Law. Genesis 28 contains the last recorded instance of someone tithing (or rather, promising to tithe) before the Mosaic Law.

2.2.3 Jacob: Genesis 28:10-22

In this incident Jacob has a vivid and powerful encounter with God, in which God affirms the promises that had been made to Abraham, and assures Jacob of his blessing and presence. In response to this encounter Jacob marks and names the place (Bethel), in addition he makes a three part vow which includes the promise to pay back to the Lord a tithe of everything that he receives from the Lord. By their very nature, vows are conditional. Hartley (2000:257) notes the difference between an oath and a vow; a vow is only fulfilled when the other party has carried out whatever conditions the vow is based upon. Walton et al. (2000:61) affirms this, describing vows as "promises with conditions attached". In addition, Wenham (1998:§3) notes that it is typical for Old Testament vows to be made when the one making the vow is in trouble of some kind, which would certainly describe Jacob's circumstances. Jacob's vow to give a tithe was conditional; "if" God does these things, "then" Jacob will give him a tithe. With regard to the grammar of verse 20, Snoeberger (2000:90) argues that the use of the word "if" is appropriate, rather than the word "since", commenting, "Some suggest the conditional particle, ('if') used here precludes a genuine contingency, instead meaning 'since'...However, the grammar of this passage suggest otherwise." He concludes that the vow is in fact conditional, and that Jacob demonstrates a lack of faith by striking this "bargain" with God.

What stands out in this particular vow is that the Lord had already given his promise to do the things stipulated in Jacob's vow. However, Hartley (2000:258) sees Jacob's response as an indication of his commitment to serve God, and not as an "insurance policy" to ensure that God would keep his word. Wenham (1998:§4) argues that the correlation between God's promises and the elements of Jacob's

vow show an appropriate, worshipful and prayerful response rather than a lack of trust in God. Whether Jacob was demonstrating a lack of faith or not cannot be determined from this narrative, however what does seem clear from the text is that his vow was voluntarily made, and that it was contingent upon the promises being fulfilled. It is these two aspects of the vow that have immediate bearing upon the subject of tithing in general.

In addition to the two aspects mentioned above it is also of relevance to the tithing debate to discuss how Jacob's vow to tithe was fulfilled, since there was no established religious cult at the time. Genesis 35 relates the story of Jacob's return to Bethel, a fulfilment of God's promise to bring him back to the promised land. Verse 7 recounts that Jacob built an altar at Bethel, which was to become a centre of worship for the later Northern Kingdom (Tate 1973:154). It is here at Bethel, on his return, that Jacob would most likely have fulfilled his vow and tithed, perhaps in the form of sacrifices (Walton et al. 2000:61). The promise by Jacob to give a tithe "may suggest endowment to ensure the continuation of the shrine" (Breuggemann 1982:247), referring to Bethel. "The care of the sanctuary" is also the reason suggested by Fretheim (1994:542) for how Jacob's tithe was paid and used. Von Rad (1972:286) echoes this, stating that those who came after participated in the giving of tithes at Bethel, based upon Jacob's precedent. The passage itself gives no indication as to when and where Jacob may have fulfilled his vow to give a tithe, nor does it state how the gift was to be used. The instructions contained in the Law are more specific concerning the recipients of the tithe and its use.

The conditional nature of Jacob's tithe is completely foreign to the tithing practiced under the Law, as well as to the New Testament teaching on giving. Furthermore, the text reveals that Jacob's vow was actually redundant, since God had already promised to do all the things that Jacob listed in his "bargain" with God. It is possible that the Hebrew word translated "if" in this passage could alternately be rendered "since". In that instance Jacob would simply be acknowledging what God had promised him, and in return vowing to pay tribute to God by giving him a tithe. This is the position of Jamieson, Fauset and Brown (1871), maintaining "Let 'if' be changed into 'since', and the language will appear as proper expression of Jacob's faith." Either instance would still provide a poor scenario on which to base the

teaching of tithing for Christians, since they are both conditional clauses and depend upon God doing or promising to do something for us.

There is no further mention in scripture of this vow to indicate whether Jacob actually followed through on his promise or not. There is also no evidence in the text to suggest that Jacob regularly tithed, or to whom his tithe would have been given. This parallels the obstacles found in applying the Genesis 14 passage to Christian tithing; it does not reveal to whom tithes should be given or what they should be used for. This holds true for the tithe of Abraham as well; we would have to determine who Melchizadek's equivalent is in today's context and any tithe would only be paid from "spoils". On the other hand, the Mosaic Law is more specific on these details, and rather than being an assumed revelation from God, it was very clearly a God-given directive to his people. Based on this fact, as well as the hermeneutical principle of progressive revelation, we would be more "biblical" were we to adopt in its entirety the Mosaic tithing laws, rather than trying to fill in the blanks so evident in any pre-Mosaic tithing practices. The problems with that approach will be discussed in the next section when dealing with the Mosaic Law.

Using Genesis 28:10-22 to support tithing for Christians is problematic because of Jacob's flawed character and methods, the voluntary nature of his promise and the lack of detail concerning how the promise to tithe was fulfilled. The most likely scenario is that Jacob paid his tithe upon his return to Bethel, possibly to be used to support a newly established sanctuary there. While this conclusion would parallel in some small way one of the uses for the tithe under the Law (that of support for the temple and its personnel), the spontaneous and voluntary nature of Jacob's tithe presents difficulties in mandating a tithe for Christians based upon this instance. In the context of this study, the conclusion must be that Jacob's tithe has no relevance to Malachi 3 or to the question of whether tithing is required of Christians today.

2.3 The Mosaic Tithe

It has already been mentioned that tithing was not unknown to the cultures of the ancient Near East. However, under Moses the practice for the Israelites was codified, with more specific instructions as to its giving and usage. Rooker (2001:¶6)

notes that “what we have in Leviticus 27 is a systemization of an earlier practice.” In discussing Leviticus 27:29 Peter-Contesse and Ellington (1992) consider this passage to contain the “first clear reference to a tithe” in the Old Testament. Each main tithe text will be examined in order to present as clear a picture as possible of the system of tithing that was in place under the Law.

2.3.1 Leviticus 27:30-34

Leviticus 27 is the first mention of the tithe, in connection with the Mosaic Law, in the Old Testament. Much of the book of Leviticus covers details concerning the life of the nation as it relates to their worship, and therefore the themes of holiness and purity are prominent. Historically, the laws and instructions given in Leviticus came during the time of Israel’s sojourn at Mt. Sinai, before their departure to Kadesh Barnea (Harris 1994:126). The Tabernacle had been made ready, and now specific ordinances are laid out pertaining to its service. Edersheim (1995:225) refers to Leviticus as “the statute-book of Israel’s spiritual life”. Some sources (e.g., Balentine 2002; Encyclopaedia Judaica 1971) suggest that the changing circumstances of Israel as they moved from wandering, to temporary settlement, to the promised land is one reason for the differences in instructions given about the tithe and its use in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Focusing now on the passage itself reveals that it affirms the tithe as being a special portion that belongs to the Lord and is therefore holy (v. 30). It is worth noting here that in Leviticus there are other things, besides the tithe, that are considered holy to the Lord (e.g., the guilt offering in 7:1 and the fourth year fruit in 19:24). Tithes, according to Leviticus 27, are to be paid out of the produce of the land (v. 30) as well as from livestock (v. 32). The text also suggests that the tithe is something that is separate from firstfruits, since the instruction is that every tenth animal be given as tithe regardless of its quality or order of birth (vv. 32, 33), whereas Mare (1996, s.v. *firstfruits*) notes that the “first and best” of the produce of the land and of animal sacrifices belongs to God as an offering of firstfruits. The brief mention of tithes in Leviticus 27 relates to the overall context of vows, and of redeeming what has been set aside as the Lord’s. Therefore, the passage states that goods that have been tithed can only be redeemed by adding one fifth to the total value of the goods, and

giving that total to the sanctuary (v. 31). Things that are identified here as being eligible for tithing are the “seed of the land...the fruit of the tree” as well as “every tenth part of herd or flock”. The passage emphasizes that every tenth animal must be given, regardless of its physical condition. Concerning these animals that are to be tithed, redemption by adding a fifth to the value does not apply to them (v. 33). If a person tries to substitute one of these animals for another both become “holy” and must be given to the sanctuary.

In summary, the Leviticus 27 text designates a tithe of the land and of certain animals as being set apart unto the Lord. There are no specific instructions given concerning the use of the tithe or to whom it should be given. However, Gerstenberger (1996:447) sees the purpose of the tithe in this passage as being “unequivocal”, stating simply that it was “for Yahweh, that is, for the temple and priests.” As previously mentioned, Leviticus 27 stipulates a certain formula to be applied when redeeming or substituting tithe from the produce of the land. There is no corresponding provision made for exchanging, redeeming or substituting a tithed animal, this parallels the instructions in 27:9-10 concerning vowed animals that are “holy” to the Lord. There are no detailed instructions given here concerning the collection of the tithe or its usage, the focus is simply on the “rules” for redeeming what has been dedicated to the Lord, with tithes being one of a list of things that would typically be set aside unto the Lord.

2.3.2 Numbers 18:21-32

The next mention of tithing occurs in Numbers 18:21*f*; it is in this passage that the Levites are first specifically named as the main recipients of the tithe. Considering the point made in the previous section regarding Israel’s changing circumstances, the book of Numbers relates the story of Israel’s approximately thirty-eight year journey from Mt. Sinai to the borders of the Promised Land (Spender 1996, s.v. *Numbers, theology of*). In pointing out the differences between Numbers 18 and other tithing passages such as Deuteronomy 14, the authors of one commentary series state that, “The laws in the Old Testament concerning tithes indicate that the instructions underwent changes in the course of Israel’s history.” (Balentine 2002:211) The instructions given in Numbers 18 came at the time when the

Israelites were on the verge of exchanging their status as wanderers for a more settled life in Canaan. Since the Levites were not going to be receiving any land inheritance upon entering the new territory, provision is made for them by way of the tithe. Therefore, according to this passage, there is a two-fold rationale for allotting Israel's tithes to the Levites; firstly because of their lack of land inheritance and secondly as "wages" in exchange for their special services in the tabernacle (vv. 21, 24, 31). Wenham (1981:144) has stated that this allocation of the tithe to the Levites is "something new" and that the law has in view "the settlement in Canaan when tithing would become possible."

Whereas Leviticus 27 contains sparse details about the tithe, Numbers 18 gives a little more information concerning the reason for the tithe, and includes additional instructions in relation to the responsibility of the Levites to make an offering to the Lord out of the tithes they receive. This tithe of the tithe is specified as the Lord's portion, to be given to Aaron the priest, and was to be the "best...the sacred part" (v. 29) out of what the Levites received. This is in contrast to the tithe designated in Leviticus 27 from the herd and flock, which was without regard to its quality. Numbers 18:21 emphasizes that the Lord has given "all the tithe in Israel" to the Levites. Kelly (2000:32) identifies Numbers 18 as being the central treatise or "ordinance" on tithing which "governed the religious life of Israel." Because of this Kelly concludes that tithing is limited to the nation of Israel under the Law of Moses, and that it cannot be viewed as an eternal moral principle. The portion of the tithe that is left after the priest's portion has been given is viewed as if it came directly from the produce of the land, as it would have if the Levites had their own land to cultivate (v. 30).

One additional detail is given, that the Levites and their households are permitted to consume their tithe portion anywhere they choose (v. 31). In discussing verse 31 both Budd (1984:206) and Ashley (1993:360) state that once the Levites had given the tithe of the tithe to the priest the remainder was not considered holy and could therefore be consumed in any place. As to exactly what is to be tithed this particular passage does not say. Earlier in the chapter there are specific items listed as being offerings that are due to Aaron and the priesthood, but no such list for the tithe.

Verse 27 states that the portion of the tithe given to the priest by the Levites is as “grain from the threshing floor or the full produce from the wine vat.”

Thus far in the examination of tithing texts from the Mosaic era we have a picture of a special portion that belongs to the Lord (Lev. 27:30) and that in turn has been designated for the Levites in lieu of inheritance as well as in exchange for their work related to the tent of meeting (Num. 18:21). Out of this portion the Levites are to separate out a tenth of the tithe, making sure it is the best part of what they have received (18:30), this portion belongs to the priest. As each text is considered one aspect that will be highlighted is the various ways in which the tithes were to be used. Up to this point the tithing texts are consistent, or at least non-contradictory, in describing the tithe as something that belongs to the Lord and that he has in turn designated for the Levites. Therefore, among those who assert that there were at least two if not three tithes required in Israel, Leviticus 27 and Numbers 18 are seen as speaking of the first or “Levitical” tithe. The next set of passages brings new information into the mix, and it is at this point that more discussion is required concerning the number of tithes and their respective uses.

2.3.3 Deuteronomy 12, 14, 26

As to the historical setting of the book of Deuteronomy, it finds the people of Israel poised to enter the land of Canaan. Chapter 1 locates the people in the land of Moab, with Moses revisiting their history up to this point, and reminding the people of their special relationship and covenant with their God. The Encyclopaedia Judaica (1971:1157) views the book of Deuteronomy as being more than a mere repetition of the history and laws of Israel, but in addition as a book of “cultic reform”. In this vein it is stated that, “It is only Deuteronomy which stripped the tithe of its original purpose and turned it into an obligatory gift to the destitute and the poor.” In this way the differences between what is said about tithing in Deuteronomy and what is said elsewhere (i.e., Num. 18) are explained. Kalland (1994:236) sees the book of Deuteronomy as serving to renew the covenant, and to give the Israelites a kind of guidebook showing how they are to conduct their lives once settled in the Promised Land.

At first glance Deuteronomy 12, 14 and 26 seem to contain conflicting instructions about the tithe, its collection and use. These new instructions are also seemingly at odds with information about the tithe found in Leviticus 27 and Numbers 18. Deuteronomy 12:6-19 instructs the Israelites to bring their tithe to “the place in which the Lord your God will choose for His name to dwell” (v. 11). At this specially designated place the Israelites are to eat a celebratory meal, acknowledging and rejoicing in the Lord’s provision and blessing. Regarding the differences between tithing in Deuteronomy and tithing in Leviticus and Numbers, Nelson (2002:146) suggests centralization of the sanctuary as being key to understanding the changing instructions. Tate (1973:155) also cites centralization as a major factor, stating “it should be noted that Deuteronomy in its present form is designed to support the cult in Jerusalem.” Affirming the assumption made at the beginning (that of an early date for the Pentateuch and of Mosaic authorship), it is not unreasonable to view these innovations concerning the tithe as being due to the changing circumstances of the nation of Israel, and not as attempts by later writers to influence the people according to their own agendas. Deuteronomy 12:10-11 refers to these coming changes, “But when you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit...the place in which the Lord your God will choose...there you shall bring all that I command you”. It is clear that once Israel is settled in the new land there is to be a different set of regulations that will govern their lives. A different lifestyle requires a different system.

Although Deuteronomy 12 introduces the concept of the worshiper taking the tithe to a special place designated by the Lord and consuming it before him there, it is worth noting that the Levite is still considered an important beneficiary of the tithe (vv. 12, 18, 19). The verses emphasize that the Levites are to be included in the celebration, that they do not have a “portion” like the rest of Israel, and that they are never to be forgotten or neglected. In this way the use of the tithe from Numbers 18 is not altogether abandoned but is still in effect, although perhaps with additions and in a modified form. Verse 17 lists the products that are to be tithed: grain, new wine and oil. Animal products are not mentioned here as eligible for tithing, instead they are listed as being what is due with regard to the firstborn of herd and flock.

Regarding the relationship between tithes and firstfruits, Nelson (2002:185) suggests that both here and in chapter 14 the mention of firstlings is “an illustrative example of a related offering also taken to the central sanctuary”, rather than as being part of the tithe. As an example of some of the ways that firstfruits differ from tithes, Nelson points out that firstfruits are set aside exclusively for the priests, and that tithes and firstfruits are taken at different times of the harvest and are by nature different amounts. One other detail to note from chapter 12 is the admonition in verse 17 that the Israelites are not to eat this tithe within their own towns. This directive should be interpreted in light of the main focus of the chapter, which is the contrast between how the Canaanites worship and how Israel is to worship. The emphasis is on the fact that in Canaan there will be only one central place of worship for Israel, the people are not to “offer your burnt offerings in every *cultic* place you see” (v. 13). Hamilton (1982:420) views this chapter as being a “series of contrasts”, in which where and how God’s people are to worship is contrasted with the false worship of the surrounding pagan nations. In the “two-or-more-tithes” scenario, MacArthur (2000) views Deuteronomy 12 and 14 as depicting the second, or “festival” tithe.

When approaching the verses dealing with tithes in Deuteronomy 14 we are presented with some difficulties and differences regarding their frequency and use. Some (e.g., Kelly 2000; McIntosh 2002) see the differences in the latter part of chapter 14 when compared to chapter 12 (and also when compared to Lev. 27 and Num. 18) as evidence that there were two or more different tithes in the course of a year. Verse 23 of chapter 14 continues the theme of chapter 12 in that there is a reiteration of the instruction to “eat in the presence of the Lord...at the place where He chooses”. More details are then provided about how the tithes are to be transported to this special place. Those Israelites who live some distance from the designated place may exchange their tithed goods for money, if the distance is such that it would prevent them from transporting these goods. Hamilton (1982:424) refers to verses 24-26 as depicting a “travelling allowance”, and maintains that verses 22-27 deal with the annual tithe while verses 28-29, along with 26:12-15, deal with the triennial tithe. On arriving at the designated place the people may purchase everything they need for the celebration, “whatever your heart desires” (v. 26). Once again the Levite is mentioned, with a reminder that he is not to be neglected and is to be a participant in the celebration. As in chapter 12, the items that are to be tithed

are grain, new wine and oil, with verse 22 including “all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year.” However, when the worshiper arrives at the central sanctuary with the money he has exchanged he is then free to purchase oxen, sheep, wine, or “strong drink” (v. 26).

Verses 28-29 take a sudden departure from all that has been said thus far about the tithe. The element being introduced is the previously mentioned triennial tithe, one that occurs “at the end of every third year” (v. 28); this tithe is to be kept in the individual Israelite towns and used to provide for the Levite, alien, orphan and widow. Deuteronomy 14:28-29 and 26:12-13 are often referred to as dealing with the third or “poor” tithe. Chapter 26 refers to this as “the year of tithing” (v. 12), and includes an oath that the worshiper must take affirming that he has done everything regarding this tithe in accordance with what the Lord has commanded. The questions that arise from all this are whether this third-year tithe is in addition to the Levitical tithe and the festival tithe, if it is simply a different use for the second, festival tithe in that particular year, or if it is an additional use for the one annual tithe. As previously mentioned, there are some sources that view the differences in the various texts about tithing not as indications that there were different or multiple tithes, but rather as indications that Israel’s circumstances had changed, and therefore the laws about tithing had changed along with them. Within this view there are those who argue for a late date for the Pentateuch, and therefore assert that discrepancies in the tithing laws relate to the differing agendas of the various editors. Christensen (2001:305) calls the multiple tithes position an “erroneous interpretation”, caused by a desire to correspond what is said here with the other references involving tithe laws. Walton et al. (2000:195) agrees, stating that, “Thus the tithe from the third year (not an additional tithe in that year) is to be set aside and used to support the vulnerable of society.” Craigie (1976:233) views the tithe system in light of a seven-year cycle, so that in years three and six the tithe is stored in the individual towns as provision for the four groups mentioned previously, while in years one, two, four and five it is taken to the central sanctuary.

In pointing out the possibility of three separate tithes, Keathley (2006:§12) cites Leviticus 27 and Numbers 18 as being texts that both deal with the first tithe, a tithe set aside specifically for the Levites and for the services of the temple. As

mentioned, it is because of these different references that some have concluded that there were two or three different tithes that the Israelites paid, each one being put to a different use. McIntosh (2002:185) posits this three tithe scenario, with the Levites being the recipients of the first tithe “as Israel’s worship specialists”, the second tithe being used for the various journeys to the celebrations at the sanctuary, and the third tithe for the local Levite as well as the alien, orphan, and widow. Nelson (2002) suggests that the result of this three tithe system would mean that the Israelites were contributing an estimated twenty two percent of their annual produce.

In Kelly’s (2000) argument the “multiple tithes” position is important because those who support tithing for Christians must make a strong case for the opposite idea (that there was only one main tithe) in order to justify the teaching that Christians should pay ten percent of their income. A multiple tithe scenario creates inconsistencies for tithing proponents, because in teaching Christians that they must give ten percent only a select part of the tithing laws are being applied. Keathley (2006:§12) states that “there is good evidence that the Old Testament saint was required to give at least two tithes and possibly even three tithes per year.” Kostenberger and Croteau (2006:63) note that any conclusion that there was only one tithe in Israel gives rise to many more difficulties than it solves. Their conclusion is that, “Difficulties exist among those who have calculated the percentages. Regardless of the total, it should be clear that the Israelites gave more than ten percent.”

One of these difficulties, that of how the Levites were to be supported in the year that the tithes were to be consumed by the tither, is addressed by Kalland (1994:255), who resolves the issue by suggesting that a tenth of all the year’s production could not possibly be consumed in such a short time, therefore what was left after the celebration could still be used to support the regular recipients. Walton et al. (2000:185) concurs with this, stating that, “It is unlikely that the one who is tithing is expected to eat the entire tithe. That would frustrate its purpose of providing for the priestly community and serving as a reserve for the destitute.” Others (e.g., Driver 2006:170-173) have also concluded that there was indeed just one annual tithe that was used in different ways at different times. Christensen (2002:303-305) supports the view that there was one tithe, given annually, within the context of a seven year

cycle. Under this system the third year tithe was designated specifically for the support of the needy, identified as widows, orphans and aliens, as well as for the regular recipients, the Levites.

I believe it is valid to suggest that the differences between chapter 12 and chapter 14 have to do with the variety of uses for which the tithe was designated, as well as being a refining of the specifics as to how the tithe was to be dealt with. The Israelite calendar was one that consisted of cycles, depicted in the various feasts and festivals that they celebrated. The overall instruction is that the tithe is the Lord's and that it is to be used to support those who do not have other means of earning a living. Exactly how that is to be accomplished is then laid out in more detail, including the provision for special celebrations of thanksgiving where all of Israel participates. A one-tithe-with-different-uses scenario is consistent with the information contained in the various tithing texts. In its instructions on consuming the tithe "before the Lord", Deuteronomy 12 includes the Levite as being part of that celebratory meal. This confirms the idea that tithing was an annual occurrence that had a variety of applications, but primarily the support of the Levites.

The importance of either conclusion is debatable as it relates to requiring Christians to tithe. Both the multiple- and the single-tithe scenarios give rise to problems in applying them to Christians today. Two of the main problems in either case have to do with who should receive the tithe and how it should be used. It is not difficult to identify "widows, orphans, aliens and poor", but finding correspondence between Old Testament Levites and the situation today is problematic. We cannot simply replace the Levite with a pastor or minister in today's context, as the Levites formed one part of an entire religious and national system that does not easily transfer to the Christian church. This aspect will be discussed in more depth in chapter four when dealing with the New Testament texts relating to giving and tithing.

To summarize the information discussed in this section, Deuteronomy 14 emphasizes that money received from exchanging tithed goods should be spent on "whatever your heart desires" as the Israelites celebrated before the Lord. Chapters 12 and 14 both speak of a tithe that is used as part of a celebration that includes all of Israel and that does not neglect the Levite. Chapter 26 speaks of a tithe that is to be deposited in the towns where the Israelites live, and ultimately given to the

Levites as well as providing for the alien the orphan and the widow. Taken as a whole, the texts indicate that tithes were to be given every year from various agricultural resources; these tithes were for the most part reserved for the Levites but were also used to provide a celebratory meal for the giver when bringing the tithes to the central sanctuary. In addition to other provisions for the needy (e.g., gleanings from the fields), every third year the tithes were to be stored within the local towns and used to support the ones who, like the Levites, did not have inheritance or other means of receiving income. From the above references it is clear that apart from honouring the Lord, tithing had a very practical purpose. Concern for those who were poor, destitute or unable to earn a living is very evident, and it is worth keeping this in mind in any application of the law of tithing to a modern context.

2.4 Post-Mosaic Era

2.4.1 2 Chronicles 31:4-19

There are three more sets of references that allude to the practice of tithing. 2 Chronicles 31:4-12 is the first of these and deals with the restoration of the temple as a place of worship and sacrament, as well as the consecration of the priests and Levites, all under the direction and leadership of King Hezekiah. Assyria had been attacking Israel and many towns in Judah had been overtaken; only Jerusalem remained, with King Hezekiah defiant against the invaders. In the midst of all the turmoil, Israel had once again neglected the temple and the worship of God. King Hezekiah resolves to remedy this situation and gives orders to those living in Jerusalem to begin bringing the “portion due to the priests and the Levites” (v. 4). Both Hooker (2001) and Payne (1994) date the book as being from the Persian period. The bulk of chapter 31 is exclusive to the book of Chronicles and is not paralleled in Kings.

Verses 4 and 5 indicate that the offerings the people were to bring included the tithe due the Levites, as well as the portions (such as firstfruits) that were due to the priests. As to what was brought, according to 2 Chronicles 31:5-6 the Israelites brought in “the tithe of all”; those who lived in the other cities of Judah brought “the

tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of sacred gifts”. Apart from the oxen and sheep mentioned in verse 6 the tithed items could have included grain, new wine, olive oil and fruit, as specified in the tithing passages already discussed. All this was placed “in heaps”, collected over a five month period. There is some question as to who the “sons of Israel” (vv. 5, 6) are in this context. Selman (1994:504) suggests that this could be either a general term used to describe “anyone who belonged to the covenant people”, or a way of indicating that people from both north and south participated in the bringing of the tithes and firstfruits. In any event it is clear that the response of the people to Hezekiah’s command was wide-spread and generous. The 2 Chronicles passage parallels the work of Nehemiah, who was also involved in restoring the proper system of worship and in bringing the ministering Levites and priests back to their God-given duties.

Concerning how Hezekiah went about this restoration of support for the temple ministers, it is Kelly’s (2000, chap. 11) opinion that he was not correct in ordering all the tithes to be brought to Jerusalem, and that this indicates that the Law had not been closely studied before sending out this order. To support this Kelly cites the fact that there were no existing storerooms in the temple; Hezekiah had to have them built in order to store all the produce that had been brought. In addition, Kelly observes that the priests and Levites had previously been organized into twenty four “courses”, with each company serving at the temple in one week shifts. Because of this it would not have been necessary to bring all the tithes to the temple, only that portion needed to sustain the current rotation of ministers. The rest of the tithe was to be sent to the Levites residing in their designated Levitical cities. However, Hooker (2001:259) sees in verse 15 an indication that storage was also set up in the other towns and cities where priestly families resided. Selman (1994:505) refers to the collection, storage and distribution of the gifts as being a process involving various stages; “They were placed first in the temple *storerooms*...then distributed, first to those *priests* living in outlying *towns*...Three further groups of people whose names were listed in *genealogical records* then received gifts.”

It is of interest to note that in verse 11, as pointed out by Johnstone (1997:210), the word for “rooms“ refers to “halls” rather than “treasuries”. Johnstone sees this usage as an indication that the focus is on how the gifts were to be utilized, rather than on

their storage. Whatever the method, it is clear that provision was made to distribute fairly among all the priests and Levites, whether serving in Jerusalem or residing in their towns, all the gifts that were brought. The importance of following exactly the Law concerning tithes may not have been as significant as ensuring that its essential elements were preserved (e.g., that support for the Levites be restored). Thus Selman (2000:191) notes that, “The Chronicler is unafraid to adapt the law himself, for example with respect to the roles of the Levites at the Passover. Even more significantly, David is portrayed as having authority to change Moses’ commands, and being able to introduce new arrangements for the priests and the Levites.”

The text does not give any indication as to which tithe is being reinstated here (assuming that there was more than one tithe), whether it was the annual, festival or triennial (“poor”) tithe. It is possible that what we are told about this reinstatement may be representative of a restoration of the entire tithe system, rather than a reference to a particular kind of tithe. If 2 Chronicles 31 is referring to only one of the three tithes, then from the other references discussed thus far the tithe being spoken of here resembles the first, “Levitical” tithe, since that is the tithe which was specifically set aside for the Levites. It does appear that the main focus of the reinstatement of the tithe in this instance is the support of the priests and Levites, the “portion due” to them is specifically mentioned, and in verse 10 the chief priest assures the king that “we have had enough to eat with plenty left over”. It is apparent that the tithe in 2 Chronicles 31 is considered a vital part of the overall effort to restore the worship of God in Israel. The priests and Levites were an essential part of the sacrificial system and of worship, and in order to fulfil their duties they had to be properly supported. 2 Chronicles 31 does not add much more detail to the picture of the tithing system that has emerged thus far. Along with the Nehemiah passages discussed below, 2 Chronicles deals with the various efforts to restore proper worship among the Israelites after a time of captivity and drifting.

2.4.2 Nehemiah 10:37-39, 12:44-47, 13:5, 10, 12

These passages deal with further attempts at restoration of the tithe, under Nehemiah’s leadership, as part of a wider effort to bring the people back to the proper worship and service of God. The giving of tithes for the support of temple

personnel has been previously discussed in the examination of such passages as Leviticus 27 and Numbers 18. Nehemiah thus sets out to reinstate a contribution which had been previously set aside (among other uses) for the purpose of support for the Levites. The chronology of the events recorded in Nehemiah has been open to some debate, however the central focus in the passages under examination is on the tithe as a means of support that enables the Levites to return to their various duties at the temple, and therefore to maintain the apparatus for the proper worship of God. As Brown (1998:234) points out, the Levites relied on the tithe contributions for their sustenance, whereas the priests' allocation of certain portions from the various sacrifices meant that they had at least some other means of support. The book of Nehemiah forms part of the background and context of Malachi; the connection between the passages to be discussed here and Malachi 3 will be covered in chapter three.

Chapter 10 lays out the elements of a pledge that the people took in response to the reading of the Law, this pledge included such things as a ban on intermarriage and on trading on the Sabbath. It should be noted that this pledge, according to v. 29, involved the people "taking on themselves a curse and an oath" to obey all of the commands that had been given through Moses. The relevancy of the curse mentioned in Nehemiah 10 will be discussed in more detail as it pertains to the curse mentioned in Malachi 3. As part of the people's pledge, verses 37-39 deal with issues related to firstfruits, tithes and the tenth of the tithe for the priests. The people agree to bring their tithes to the Levites "who receive the tithes in all the rural towns." (v. 37) Williamson (1985:339) proposes that the seeming discrepancy between the people "bringing" and the Levites "collecting" the tithes can be easily resolved by a system whereby the Levites "collect" at the local "storecenters" what the farmers "bring" to them. In turn the Levites bring to the temple storerooms that portion of the tithe that belongs to the priests, as legislated in Numbers 18. It is unclear whether all the tithes collected are to be deposited in the temple storerooms, or just the priestly portion. The passage lists dough, the fruit of every tree, new wine and oil, and the "tithe of our ground" (v. 37) as the various products that are to be contributed. Some of these items relate to firstfruits, while the items eligible for the tithe itself are not specified.

Chapter 12 details the appointment of those who were to oversee the storage rooms of the temple where the various contributions were kept. Verse 44 depicts these contributions as being gathered in from the surrounding fields and cities, and reiterates that these portions are those that have been mandated by the Law. Levites, priests, singers and gatekeepers are all provided for by the contributions that “all Israel” make (v. 47), so that the temple is fully staffed and functioning. Once again the specific items to be tithed are not mentioned, apart from the fact that it is gathered from the fields (v. 44). According to Keil and Delitzsch (2002:178) these verses summarize the various reforms that Nehemiah had put in place during his first term in Jerusalem. In agreement with this, Williamson (2002:382) places these events during the time of Nehemiah’s first stint in Jerusalem, while noting the alternate view of Kellermann and Mowinckel with regard to the chronology of events. If the view of Williamson is accepted, then some of the reforms Nehemiah had worked for, and that the people had pledged themselves to, were not maintained during his absence at the Persian court, with the result that Nehemiah’s leadership was needed once again to correct course. Fensham (1982:258) views 12:44-47 as a summary, showing that the systems that had been put in place in chapter 10 are working well.

The events related in chapter 13 centre on the people’s failure to maintain their agreement to support the Levites with their tithes, and on the misappropriation of a room in the temple storehouse complex by Tobiah. The room Tobiah claimed for himself had previously been used for the storage of offerings, including “the tithes of grain, wine and oil” (v. 5). It is at this point that the fact is revealed that Nehemiah was not present in Jerusalem while this neglect and abuse occurred. Goldingay (2003:736) comments, “The effect of the arrangement in the book is to put the emphasis on the pledge-making of the people...though also to imply that the people’s commitment is short-lived.” The length of Nehemiah’s absence from Jerusalem is not stated; however Williamson (2002:382) suggests a date of no later than 424 B. C. The arguments regarding the chronology of events are peripheral to the main focus of these passages; for this study the relevant details concern the importance of the tithe as it related to the support of the Levites, and to a lesser degree the specific items that were tithed.

Once Nehemiah had evicted Tobiah and cleansed the rooms, he sees to it that the “officials” are returned to their duties, and the people begin to bring their tithes to the storehouse once again. The tithe in this passage is referred to as that which has been “prescribed for the Levites” (v. 5), an indication that this particular use of the tithe was still considered to be its central purpose. In addition to Tobiah’s misuse of a temple facility Nehemiah learns that “the portions of the Levites” (v. 10) have not been distributed to them. Since these portions had not been given to their rightful recipients, the ministering Levites had returned to their own towns in order to tend to their own land and make a living. This was in opposition to what the Lord had commanded; that the Levites were to receive tithes in exchange for their work of ministry in the temple and because of their lack of land inheritance. Once the Levites’ rightful inheritance begins to flow back into the storehouse rooms, Nehemiah appoints four reliable men to take charge of the stores and to ensure that they are properly distributed among the temple personnel (v. 13).

In all three chapters, the point is emphasized that the requirements being implemented are “as it is written in the law” (10:36), “required by the law” (12:44) or in response to the hearing of the Law (13:3). The significance of this will be discussed in later chapters, but as Fensham (1982:268) observes regarding the closing chapter of Nehemiah, “He had disciplined his people to serve the Lord according to the prescriptions of the law. A new era of Jewish worship has started, worship according to the prescribed legal principles.” Concerning the various regulations that were put in place by Nehemiah, including the tithe law, Goldingay (2003:737-739) notes that the regulations did not necessarily correspond exactly to the Mosaic Law. His conclusion is that the leaders were free to apply the intent of the Law to a current situation, modifying it in such a way as to “identify Yhwh’s expectations of them in different contexts over the centuries.” (p. 739) Whether modified or enacted exactly as written, the tithe system was clearly a vital part of the entire temple worship structure, enabling its ministers to serve without encumbrance.

From Nehemiah 10:37-38 it seems that the Levites actually went to the towns of Judah and collected the tithes, bringing a tenth of the tithes (the priest’s portion) back to Jerusalem to be stored. In 12:44 certain men were appointed to oversee the storerooms and to collect the tithes from the surrounding cities. Nehemiah 13:12

indicates that tithes were also brought to the storerooms by the people of Judah themselves. From these verses it seems that a united effort was made, both to collect the tithe and to bring it to Jerusalem. The system includes placing responsible men in charge to ensure that the system is managed effectively. As in 2 Chronicles 31 the newly reinstated tithes were to be stored in special rooms at the temple and used primarily for the support of the priests and Levites.

2.4.3 Amos 4:4

This last reference to tithing (apart from Malachi 3) contains an indictment against the people of Israel for their rebellion against God, even while being fervent in their outward religious acts. The book of Amos is set during the reign of Jereboam II, probably around 760 B.C. (McComiskey 1994:1439). Amos has been sent to the northern tribes to warn them of the consequences of their rebellion and neglect of the true worship of God.

The two places mentioned in Amos 4:4, Bethel and Gilgal, were both historically significant in Israel's history. An altar had been erected at Gilgal and sacrifices offered there (1 Sam. 11), at Bethel Jacob had encountered the Lord and marked the place with a memorial stone (Gen. 28), returning to the place on a later occasion to build an altar (Gen. 35). The people of the northern kingdom worshipped at various locations as an alternative to Jerusalem, Bethel had been especially set aside as a place of worship (1 Ki. 12). McComiskey (1994:1444) states that the worship conducted there became a mixture of Canaanite ritual as well as aspects of covenant religious practice.

By going continuously to these places of false worship and expecting God to be appeased the Israelites were only compounding their sin (Amos 4:4a). Concerning the tithe, Amos in effect declares that no amount of tithing will mitigate their sinful acts (4:4b). Keil and Delitzsch (2002:182) identify the tithe referred to in this passage as "the Mosaic law of the second tithe, which was to be brought every three years". Amos' words here do not necessarily imply that the people were actually bringing tithes every three days, but rather that no amount or frequency of offering would make up for their wrong motives and attitude. Keil and Delitzsch further note that, "It is also evident from the whole account, that the worship in the kingdom of the

ten tribes was conducted generally according to the precepts of the Mosaic law.” (p. 183) In commenting on these verses Williamson (2002:88) observes similarly, that the wrongdoing stemmed not from the offerings themselves, which were all “prescribed sacrifices”, but in over-emphasizing the offerings in comparison to their relationship with God.

The NIV translates the word in verse 4 as “years” instead of “days”, which would correspond to the law concerning the second tithe. However, in this instance the literal “days” may be an intended exaggeration to illustrate the prophet’s point. This passage gives no indication as to what specific items were brought as tithe, neither does it state how the tithed goods were put to use, nor to whom they were given. 1 Kings 12:31-33 reveals that priests had been appointed who were not legitimate (i.e., not of the tribe of Levi), these priests served at the temple in Bethel. In addition, special feasts had been instituted that did not correspond to the ones the Lord had appointed for the nation of Israel. Therefore, when the people brought their tithes to alternate worship centres such as Bethel the offerings were not given to the rightful recipients, those identified by the Law as being eligible. Because the tithing depicted in Amos 4:4 is wrongfully motivated, does not conform to the laws governing the tithe in other Old Testament scriptures, and is criticized by the biblical writer, it’s value to this study is limited.

What can be gleaned from this text is simply that tithing in some form was still being practiced in the northern kingdom during this time frame, and that the people seemed to view the offering of it as sufficient to grant them favour with God. However, Amos makes it clear that ritual must be combined with correct motive and directed towards God alone in order to be acceptable. The issue of correct attitude and motive is important; the theme is paralleled in the New Testament texts dealing with the subject of giving, and will be discussed further in chapter 4. The following chapter shifts focus to a detailed study of the central text of this thesis, Malachi 3:8-12. Some of what has been studied thus far regarding the history of the tithe will have a bearing on the study to follow, especially in terms of providing context.

Chapter Three

Malachi 3: 8-12: An Examination of the Background, Context and Meaning

3.1 Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to provide a thorough understanding of the selected text by examining the historical context of Malachi 3: 8-12 and drawing conclusions as to its significance and meaning in that context. Any significant textual issues will be discussed, including Hebrew terms and grammar.

3.2 Author/Date

Concerning the author of the book of Malachi there are two main theories. The primary difference between the two views centres on whether the literal meaning of the name Malachi indicates an unknown author, or whether it is a proper name and refers to a specific person. On the one hand the translation of the name Malachi (“my messenger”) could indicate that it is a title rather than a name. Added to this is the fact that the biblical record reveals very little about the prophet; there are no details given about his background or call. On the other side is the opinion that Malachi was indeed a proper name, albeit a unique one in the biblical record. In his discussion of the two views Hill (1998:15*f*) discounts arguments based on the uniqueness of the name, and cites other biblical names (such as Jonah) that are also unique in scripture. Hill also affirms the accuracy of the MT at this point, which retains the first person pronoun, “*my messenger*”, rather than the LXX rendering “*his messenger*”. It is not of vital importance to this study to support one view or the other, since it is the message itself that is the focus.

As to the date of the events recorded in the book of Malachi there is some consensus as to the general timeframe, although opinions differ regarding the exact chronology (before, during, or after Nehemiah's governorships). Both Craigie (1985:225) and Stuart (1998:1252) propose an approximate date of 460 B.C., placing Malachi in the time immediately preceding Ezra and Nehemiah. Craigie (1985:225) suggests that Malachi's ministry not only preceded but also laid the essential groundwork for the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. Partly because the issues that Malachi addressed reflect neglect in the area of proper worship (among other things), Miller (2004:324) eliminates the possibility that Malachi prophesied during either of Nehemiah's two terms, since Nehemiah would not have tolerated such lapses. Accordingly, the most likely scenario in his view is that Malachi confronted the people with their wrongs during Nehemiah's absence at the Persian court, and upon his return Nehemiah acted to correct the various errors. The precise timing notwithstanding, the book of Malachi can be viewed against the general backdrop of the post-exilic period, and within the context of the situation encountered by Ezra and Nehemiah.

3.3 Background

It has already been noted that Malachi deals with some of the same issues addressed by Ezra and Nehemiah, including the tithe. Added to this parallel is the account in 2 Chronicles 31 concerning the reinstatement of the tithe. Verhoef (1987:161) suggests Nehemiah 13 as the particular setting against which Malachi's prophecy should be read. The context shows a repeated pattern consisting of the people promising to uphold their part of the covenant, and then failing to do as they promised. A variety of reasons may have contributed to the people's failure to live according to covenant stipulations; Hill (1998:75) cites a bad economy brought about by natural disaster, high taxes and corrupt officials as factors that have contributed to the difficult situation. Living in less than ideal conditions contributed to the people's neglect of their covenant responsibilities. The promise of a new era with abundant blessings had not yet materialized and the people had become discouraged. All in all, circumstances for the returning exiles were difficult and committed leaders were essential to guide and correct the people towards making their relationship with God

a priority. As Hill (p. 302) comments, “Yahweh’s covenant still entailed a relationship between a people and their God – not a people and the land or temple liturgy.”

The covenant relationship is a central theme of the book of Malachi; Stuart (1998:1258) sees strong connections between Malachi and the Pentateuch, evidenced by curse and blessing formats, the prominence of the Mosaic covenant and references to specific texts. Smith (1984:300) considers Malachi to have been significantly influenced by Deuteronomic ideas. Craigie (1985:226) lists some other concerns that pervade the tone of the book, including the returnees’ doubts about God’s love and commitment to them as his people, as well as issues of justice and the integrity of the priestly office. Since the Levites were essential to the proper functioning of the entire temple system of worship it would have been of particular importance to ensure that they were provided for, and able to perform their various duties.

3.4 Malachi 3:8-12

3.4.1 Immediate Context

While the central focus of this chapter concerns verses 8-10, some brief discussion of the preceding and following verses is necessary in order to provide the proper setting for the selected verses. The various themes covered in Malachi 3 include the Lord’s messenger (v. 1f), judgment against wrongdoers (v. 5), the immutability of God (v. 6) and a call for the people to repent and return (v. 7). In light of the subject of tithing which is about to be addressed in verse 8 it is interesting to note the group mentioned in verse 5 as being oppressed: widows, orphans and aliens, listed in the Law as being beneficiaries of the tithe along with the Levites. There is some difference of opinion with regard to the verses that should be included in the pericope; the debate centres on whether verse 6 should be seen as a conclusion to the previous pericope, whether it is a kind of bridging sentence, or whether it is the beginning of a new pericope. Clendenen (2004) views verse 6 as the conclusion to the previous section, while Alden (1985) sees verses 6-7 as forming a “transition” between the previous section and the one that is to follow. Both Smith (1984) and Verhoef (1987) agree that verse 6 is the beginning of a new pericope, while at the

same time acknowledging that it connects what has gone before by hinting at a reason for the people's current struggles. In its division of verses in chapter 3 the NIV includes verses 6-13 as one section; the ESV is similar in designating verses 6-12 as the "fifth disputation"; the NKJV begins a new section at verse 8, placing verses 6-7 in the previous section. I agree with Clendenen (2004:399f) in suggesting verse 7 as the beginning of the new section. Clendenen cites the other mentions of Jacob (in 1:2 and 2:12) as one of the reasons for placing verse 6 in the preceding paragraph, commenting that it "unifies the first two divisions and also the second division itself" (p. 400). The inclusion or exclusion of verse 6 does not have any significant impact on the study as a whole; however it does provide context and insight into the correlation between the people's various complaints, their current adverse circumstances, and God's attitude towards his unfaithful people.

In summary, verse 6 shows that God, in his goodness, justice, faithfulness and commitment to his people, has not changed; this is the reason why his people have not been destroyed. At the same time, in their rebellion and disobedience the people have also not changed.

Verse 7 continues this theme by stating that the people have persisted "from the days of your fathers" in their neglect of the "statutes" of the Lord. Hill (1998:299) equates the use of the term "statutes" with a general term used to indicate the Law of Moses, stating that it is referring to "no specific cultic violation, but holding postexilic Yehud in contempt of covenant legislation in its totality." (cf. Mounce 2006, s.v. *statute*) In paraphrasing verse 7, Achtemeier (1986:187) refers to the people as being guilty of breaking "covenant law". Liedke (1997:470) notes that the term basically refers to "the boundary line that the ruler draws for his subordinates", and that the various terms used in the Old Testament (e.g., *hōq* and *tôrâ*), "had become fully synonymous designations of Yahweh's law." While tithing is the specific problem addressed in later verses, the overriding issue is that of the people's turning away from God and from following his commandments. It is Clendenen's (2004:429) opinion that apostasy is the real problem; the people of God are acting idolatrously by putting themselves first with regard to the tithe, and the solution is for them to repent and return wholeheartedly. However, although intermarriage is one of the problems addressed by the prophet, there is no specific mention of idolatry or

apostasy per se. The response of the people is to question how and in what way they are to repent (v. 7b); they seem surprised that their problems have anything to do with their own actions. With their question ringing, the prophet proceeds to give the people an example of an area in which they have failed and where repentance is needed.

3.4.2 Verses 8-9

The question posed by the people in verse 7b is not directly answered; instead a question is posed to them in return, “Will a man rob God?” (v. 8a). There are two main viewpoints as to the translation of the term “rob” in verse 8a. The first of these depends on the LXX rendering of the verb, linking it to the name “Jacob” (assuming that the root meaning of the name is to cheat or deceive), and to the reference in Malachi 1:2 (and 3:6 in the immediate context). Deutsch (1987:105) supports the LXX rendering and suggests that transposition of the letters may have occurred (from *qb*’ to *’qb*) with the original reading “Will a man *cheat* God?” Deutsch implies that the only other occurrence of the term “rob”, in Proverbs 22:23, is a better fit in that context than it is in Malachi 3:8. The second view retains the MT rendering, with the meaning to rob or plunder (Mounce 2006:1030). Both Sweeney (2001:742) and Baldwin (1972:245) accept the MT in this instance, with the latter citing the strength and directness conveyed by the term “rob” as a reason to retain it in this context. The NET Bible also favours retaining the MT “rob”, noting that the possible intent of the LXX was to “soften” the charge levelled against the people. The general tone of Malachi 3:8-12 and the reliability of the MT in this instance provide good reason to accept “rob” as the intended term in verse 8. The discrepancy between the two views is not so great as to obscure the basic meaning of the question; there is a ring of incredulity; “is it possible that a mere human would steal from God?” In answer to this seemingly impossible question, verse 8a goes on to state that yes, indeed, these people *are* robbing God. Hill (1998:305) explains that the phrase refers to “an ongoing state of affairs in present time”; the people have been and even now continue to rob God. Hearing this accusation, and in the rhetorical question style of the pericope, the people’s response once again is to enquire as to exactly how they are doing this, in what specific way are they guilty?

The answer to this question is simple and direct, “In tithes and offerings.” (v. 8b) Verhoef (1987) notes that the definite article is present for both words, rendering it “*the* tithes and *the* offerings”. In this verse the word tithe is the Hebrew word “tenth”, found in many other passages dealing with the tenth portion that is to be set aside unto the Lord. The question here is what specific tithe is being referred to in verse 8b? Sweeney (2001:743) considers this verse to be referring to the tithe that is designated for the support of the Levites, and lists Leviticus 27:30-33, Numbers 18:21-32 and Deuteronomy 14:22-29 as being representative of this tithe. Petersen (1995:215) refers to this tithe simply as the “general tithe”, collected in local storehouses and designated for the Levites. On the other hand, Wretling (2006:22) supports the view that the tithe in Malachi 3:8 encompasses the entire tithe system of the Mosaic Law. If Malachi 3 is viewed against the background of Nehemiah 13 it is reasonable to suggest that the Levites are in view here as the main beneficiaries of the tithe, and in that sense the “Levitical tithe” would be the subject of 3:8. However, as previously mentioned, Malachi 3:5 points out other traditional recipients of the tithe as being denied justice, which could imply that they too were being deprived of provisions because of the people’s neglect in paying tithes. In this instance I propose that the Levites are considered to be the main recipients of the tithe, but that this does not mean that the other uses are excluded.

In addition to the tithes, verse 8 states that the people are robbing God of the offerings. It is not immediately clear what kinds of offerings are being referred to in this passage. The term employed in verse 8b is *terûmâ* (Mounce 2006:480f), which has a variety of applications in the Old Testament, from use as a general term to more specifically applied to offerings set aside for the priests. Once again opinion is divided; some suggest Numbers 18:8-24 as the background, with the offerings in view in Malachi 3:8 referring to the portions (such as the guilt offering and the wave offering) reserved for the priests (so Clendenen 2004; Redditt 1995). Feinberg (1990:263) is more specific in equating the offerings in this passage with firstfruits, while Petersen (1995:216) equates them with the “tithe tax” or tithe of the tithe given to support the temple. Taking all the evidence into account, Clendenen’s (2004:418) explanation makes good sense, “The tithes, then, were considered a particular type of *teruma*. If so, then God’s explanation to the people in Malachi probably meant that they were holding back the offerings that belonged to him, especially the tithes,

and that were supposed to be given to the temple personnel as their livelihood.” It is worth emphasizing that in Malachi 3:8 both tithes and offerings are seen as rightfully belonging to God (they are both compulsory contributions); and that the withholding of *both* is considered robbery. The central focus then is on restoring support for the temple and all its personnel.

3.4.3 Verses 9-10

Verse 9 sets forth the consequences that the people are experiencing as a result of their failure to return to the Lord and follow his commands; “You are cursed with a curse...the whole nation of you!” In terms of what this curse entailed it is necessary to refer to Malachi 3:11, as well as to the general historical context of the book. It has already been established that the returning exiles encountered difficulties in terms of a depressed economy brought about by a variety of factors, including agricultural failure, poverty and years of conflict. Sweeney (2001:744) is representative of a general consensus among scholars that the curse in Malachi 3:9 points back to Deuteronomy 28 as its basis. The elements of this curse include a decimated and unproductive land. In addition to Deuteronomy 28, Clendenen (2004:432) cites Leviticus 26 with its litany of consequences that will befall the nation if they do not observe the statutes and commands of the Lord. By singling out the “fruits of the ground” and the “vine in the field” as areas in which the Lord would bring restoration, Malachi 3:11 indicates that agricultural failure is the main consequence that the people are dealing with.

Verhoef (1987) points out that the grammatical construction in verse 9 signifies that the curse is already in effect; the people have been experiencing it and even now continue to experience it. Mounce (2006:151) notes that the term “curse” in verse 9 has a narrower meaning than *qālal*, and that its most frequent use is in the Pentateuch, particularly Deuteronomy. The influence of Deuteronomy on the book of Malachi has been noted in the “Background” section. In particular, the theme of covenant is recurrent, the MT records the term six times in the book of Malachi (Kohlenberger 1987). With these factors in mind it seems clear that verse 9 is linked to the Law and the Covenant of Moses, and that the people would have understood it in this way. One further observation should be made concerning the curse in

Malachi 3:9 and that is its relation to Nehemiah 10, where the people take upon themselves an oath and a curse, vowing to obey the “commands, ordinances and statutes” of God. Whether Malachi preceded or followed Nehemiah is subject to debate, however the Nehemiah text does reinforce the fact that the people of Judah still considered themselves to be under the Law, and therefore obligated to obey its stipulations, with the tithe being an integral part of that Law.

That the entire nation is complicit in the matter of robbing God is pointed out in the latter part of verse 9. “The whole nation of you!” is guilty. While the majority of scholars affirm that the nation of Israel (those who have returned from exile) is indicated in this passage (so Clendenen 2004; Stuart 1998; Craigie 1985), Kelly (2000, chap. 13) considers the passage to be addressed to the priests and not the people in general. This conclusion is based primarily on Kelly’s position that in no other text are the people instructed to bring all the tithes to the central storehouse, and that it is the priests who have been misappropriating the portions set aside for the provision of those temple personnel on duty in their rotations. Kelly also takes the view that there is no clear indication that the address made to the priests in Malachi 2 has ended, and therefore he considers chapter 3 to be a continuation of the indictment against them. I do not consider these arguments to be compelling, and side with the majority opinion in understanding Malachi 3:9 to be addressing the nation as a whole. The people’s failure to support the temple and staff with the tithe amounts to stealing what is rightfully God’s, for this reason the nation has incurred the penalty of a curse on their land and productivity. The next verse provides a solution to the problem; if they accept it they will experience the favour of God once again.

It is important to reiterate that, while the emphasis in Malachi 3:8-12 is on the tithe, the overall issue being addressed is that of returning to the Lord. Neglect of the tithe was not the sole reason for the nation’s difficulty; Stuart (1998:1369) comments, “There can be no doubt that he demands that his entire covenant be kept, and does not consider tithing the sum total of the law.”

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house” (v. 10a). The first issue to address in this verse is the meaning of the term the “whole tithe”. Is this an indication that the people were only bringing part of the tithe and

withholding the rest? Or is the term referring to a particular kind of tithe (as discussed in section 3.4.2)? Hill (1998:309) suggests that it is the former scenario that is in play in verse 10. As an example of a similar instance, in which the people were only partially fulfilling their obligations, Hill cites the offering of animals unfit for sacrifice, addressed in Malachi 1. The emphasis in this verse is on the term “whole” (Keil and Delitzsch 2002:660); the word signifies completeness, “all” or “every” (Mounce 2006:12). The wording brings to mind the tithing references in Leviticus 27:30 (“all the tithe of the land”) and Numbers 18:21 (“all the tithe in Israel”). Because of this similarity, it is suggested that Malachi was alluding to the tithe system of the Priestly Code, where all tithes are brought to the central sanctuary (so Mason 1977; Driver 2006). Once again Kelly (2000, chap. 13) has a slightly different view, proposing that the “whole” tithe in verse 10 means only that portion which is needed to provide for the staff on current rotation in the temple. He states that these portions are the only tithes that were ever stored at the temple; the Levites received the tithes in their own cities, the festival tithe was consumed by all and the poor tithe was kept within the individual towns for distribution to the needy. The similarity in terminology to Leviticus 27 and Numbers 18 leads me to conclude that the most likely scenario is that the people were not giving tithes at all, and therefore the instruction is a reminder that the “whole tithe” belongs to God.

Since the entire tithe system seems to have been neglected by the returning exiles, as evidenced by the efforts of both Malachi and Nehemiah to restore it, it may be that in this context the prophet is merely trying to “get things started”, with the provision for the temple and the Levites a priority because of their vital role in worship and sacrifice. As previously suggested, it does not necessarily follow that other uses of the tithe have been done away with. The central point is that, even in adverse circumstances, the people must commit themselves to fulfilling their obligations in terms of the tithe, without holding anything back.

The text continues by specifying that the people must bring the tithes to the “storehouse”, and supplies the reason for this as “that there may be food in My house” (v. 10a). Verhoef (1987:305) gives the literal Hebrew meaning as “house of supplies”. Hezekiah (2 Chron. 31:11) ordered rooms to be prepared for the storing of tithes and offerings that flowed into the temple after his order went out to the

people. Nehemiah (10:38; 13:12) also makes reference to the storehouse, or the chambers of the storehouse, where supplies of grain, wine and oil are kept. Hill (1998:310) understands these rooms to be additional halls that were located around the main temple. Petersen (1995:216) differentiates between “storehouses” and “chambers”. The storehouses were local facilities used for the “general” tithe, whereas the chambers were rooms within the temple complex used to store the “tithe tax” brought to Jerusalem by the Levitical priests. Nehemiah 13:13 suggests that all the tithes were stored in the temple storehouse, and from there they were distributed as appropriate. The issue goes back once again to which tithe is being referred to in Malachi 3:10. However, I do not believe that it is possible to settle this argument. The focus of the verse is on the purpose of bringing the tithe to the storehouse, and that is, food. The tithes were not merely a religious obligation; they served a very practical function in literally feeding the temple workers as well as other specified recipients. This is the meaning of the term “food” in 3:10, “torn food”, “meat” (Young 1984, s.v. *meat*) or “fresh food” (Petersen 1995:217). The Lord is concerned with making sure there is sufficient supply in his temple to enable his workers to fulfil their function. This would have been particularly important in the midst of agricultural failure and poverty. However, as the second half of the verse attests, they will not continue in lack if they will take the Lord at his word.

The people have a challenge from the Lord to accept, “test Me now in this”; he will “open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing” (v. 10b) if they will trust him. The idea of “testing” God is unusual and has a negative connotation in some passages (e.g., Ex. 17:2; Num. 14:22). In the majority of instances the term is used to denote God testing man (Clendenen 2004:422). The term can also be rendered “try” or “prove”, and has the sense of something being shown to be genuine, “especially in the context of a covenant relationship.” (Mounce 2006:718) By following through on their covenant obligations, the people will see that God is trustworthy and will honour his promises. The outcome of the test is certain; God will do as he has said. Wiersbe (2002:486) affirms the idea that the promises of verse 10f are inseparable from the covenant made between God and Israel, the breakdown occurs when the people refuse to participate. Abundant blessings await the nation when they return to the Lord; and it is the nation as a whole that will benefit. Stuart (1998:1369) emphasizes this point, stating that, “The promise is,

however, corporate, not individual, as are virtually all Old Covenant promises of abundance.” This point is worth keeping in mind when seeking to apply this text in a modern context.

The concept of the “windows of heaven” (v. 10b) is generally accepted as a reference to rain (so Stuart 1998; Sweeney 2001; Petersen 1995). An example of this usage occurs in Genesis 7:11; in addition, Verhoef (1987:306) cites Deuteronomy 11:14, Joel 2:23-24 and Zechariah 10:1 as passages that link the idea of rain and blessing. The similarity between Malachi 3:10 and Deuteronomy 28:12 suggests an even clearer connection, not only between rain and blessing, but in general between Malachi and the ancient covenant, “The Lord will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand”. Certainly the land had need of rain in order for the crops to produce, lack of rain was apparently one aspect of the agricultural failure being experienced in Judah and in Malachi 3:10 the Lord is promising to pour it out in abundance.

3.4.4 Verses 11-12

The promised response to the people’s obedience continues in verses 11 and 12, as does the focus of the promises, the land and its health and productivity. In verse 11 the Lord promises to “rebuke the devourer” and prevent it from destroying fruit and vine. While the literal meaning of the term “devour” is “eat” or “consume” (Young 1984, s.v. *devourer*), Mounce (2006:206) notes that its metaphorical meaning alludes to things like plague and famine that devour. This devourer in Malachi 3:11 is probably a reference to locusts (so Keil and Delitzsch 2002:660), which would devastate any crops, leaving barren land in their wake. The term “rebuke” in verse 11 can also be rendered “reprimand” or “prevent”, with specific reference to insects (Mounce 2006:916). Apart from the literal, locusts in the biblical literature can refer to anything that destroys, such as the armies in Joel 1 and 2. Verhoef (1987:307) also points out the eschatological significance of “locusts” and “vines”. In discussing the meaning of the term “rebuke” in Malachi 3:11, Clendenen (2004:426) comments, “Although the verb is one of speech rather than action, when God is the one speaking the two concepts are equivalent.” God will act decisively to put a stop to

the thing (whether locust or some other invader) that is causing the land to yield so little. Complete restoration of the produce of the land is in view, a blessing that was sorely needed in order for the recovering community to thrive.

The last element of God's promised blessings, "all the nations will call you blessed" (v. 12) once again is reminiscent of covenant language, especially as in Genesis 12:2-3. Stuart (1998:1370) sees the blessings promised in Malachi 3 as pointing to a future time. God's favour upon the nation will be abundantly evident to all; they will no longer be the subject of scorn and derision. Deutsch (1987:106) suggests the phrase "call you blessed" could also be translated "will *congratulate* you". Not only will other nations recognize God's blessing upon them, but they will be a "delightful land" (v. 12). This delight will be two-fold, as Clendenen (2004:428) notes, "Here the Lord's blessing of his chosen and promised land would cause it to become a source of delight to its inhabitants but also to the God who had created, bestowed, and beautified it." The Lord cannot take delight in his people if they refuse to turn to him and obey his commands; once Judah heeds God's call to repentance and puts it into practice by fulfilling their obligations, especially in regard to the tithe, they will then experience the promised covenant blessings poured out on them by their unchanging God.

3.5 Conclusion

Malachi 3:8-12 is a snapshot of a covenant people who have become arrogant and defiant in the face of their hardship, accusing God of abandonment and failure to provide. The prophet shows them that it is they who have reneged on their vows, and their hardship is a result of their own choices. As an example of their broken promises the prophet points to their neglect of the required tithes. The temple worship system was reliant upon these contributions, and the failure to offer them had a direct impact on the ability of the cult personnel to perform their duties. Other needy groups would also have been deprived of sustenance because of this. The people were focused on their own problems, "Because of My house which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house." (Hag. 1:9), instead of trusting God first. The consequences are severe; the curses of the covenant are still in effect and are being felt even as the people continue in disobedience. However, there is

still hope, God has not forgotten his people, and there is a blessed future for them if they will return.

Chapter 4

Pursuant New Testament Theology: A Brief Study of Selected Texts

4.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter will be on providing an overview of the New Testament's teaching about giving by extracting principles from selected texts. The scope of this thesis does not allow for verse depth exegesis of all the selected texts. However, the study will be thorough enough to form some basic conclusions about giving in the New Testament. The main texts to be considered will be 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8-9. Other texts will be referenced in order to flesh out the study, these include: Acts 4:32-35; 5:4, Romans 15:26-27 and 1 Timothy 6:17-19. Before examining the above texts it is necessary to discuss the relevance of two passages that are sometimes cited as evidence of the New Testament's advocacy of tithing. These two passages are Matthew 23:23-24 (paralleled in Lk. 11:42) and Hebrews 7:1-10. The goal of the discussion of these two passages is to evaluate their relevance to the subject of New Testament giving.

4.2 Matthew 23:23-24

In the New Testament there are few passages that refer specifically to the practice of tithing; the term (or its derivatives) is used in this particular sense only ten times (Mounce 2006:1091, 1117). The majority of these occur in Hebrews 7:1-10. Matthew 23:23, Luke 11:42 and Hebrews 7:1-10 are three passages that are sometimes cited as evidence that the New Testament teaches tithing for Christians (so Kendall 1982; Mizell 2001). As is the case in the Old Testament references, tithe in the New Testament literally means "a tenth"; one cannot give less or more than a

tithe, since the definition refers to a specific, set percentage. In Matthew 23 Jesus begins by addressing his disciples and the gathered crowd, warning them about the Pharisees and their hypocrisy in a variety of areas. Verse 13 begins a series of “woes” addressed to the Pharisees, indictments against their show of righteousness while in reality they are “full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (v. 28) Among the ways they are obscuring the true intent of the Law is in their meticulous attention to paying tithes on everything, right down to “mint and dill and cumin” (v. 23), while leaving the fundamentals of justice, mercy and faithfulness undone. The three items that the Pharisees are said to tithe on are small herbs, used primarily for seasoning or medicinal purposes (Unger 1983, s.v. *vegetable kingdom*). As far as the relevance of this text to the issue of New Testament giving is concerned, the key phrase is, “but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.” (v. 23) The question is whether Jesus’ comment about not neglecting the other things (tithing) means that he is teaching that Christians should tithe.

There are several points to note in answering this question. Carson (1984:481) suggests that this text is not a commentary on what will be required under the yet-to-be-inaugurated New Covenant, but rather on the “relative importance of material within the OT.” In other words, Jesus is dealing with the Pharisees on the basis of the Law that they, as observant Jewish leaders, were required to follow; the New Covenant had not yet been instituted. This issue raises the wider problem of how the Old and New Covenants relate to one another, especially in terms of Jesus’ fulfilment of the Law; the question is, “In what sense did he fulfil it”? The issue of Christ’s fulfilment of the Law will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 5. However, as it pertains to the issue at hand, Kostenberger and Croteau’s (2006) discussion and explanation of the “eschatological continuity” view is a helpful resource. In this view the sense in which the Old Testament is binding on the Christian is different because of Jesus’ life and teaching, and ultimately his death and resurrection. In terms of the tithing laws, Kostenberger and Croteau observe, “one would need to look at what the tithe was, how it functioned in the Mosaic Law, and if any fulfillment occurred that changed how tithing was to be practiced.”

The tithe system was inseparable from the sacrificial system as a whole. The priests and Levites could not have performed their religious function without this support.

Because of this relationship, Jesus' sacrifice has an impact not only on the sacrificial system, but also on the continuation of the related laws. What remains are principles, which do not contradict Old Testament laws, but which are put into practice in different ways. Rabbinowitz (2003:446) supports this view, although he arrives at his conclusion from a different angle, stating that, "Jesus did not mean for his disciples to literally do 'all' that the Pharisees taught. He meant rather that they were to obey their teachings regarding the Torah and *halakhah in principle*."

Apart from the points raised above, it should also be noted that the main thrust of Matthew 23:23-34 is not tithing, but the "weightier" aspects of the Law. To focus on the Pharisees' scrupulous tithing is to miss the larger issue, which is just what the Pharisees themselves were doing. Another point to consider is that the Pharisees were rigid when it came to the Law, and often went further in their practice than what was explicitly commanded. Commenting on the tithing of the items mentioned in Matthew 23:23, Keener (1999:549) notes that it is "debatable whether they were covered under the Old Testament agrarian tithe". Verbrugge (2000, s.v. *dekatos*) agrees that the Pharisees had gone beyond the Law in including these items in their tithing. If we are to take this passage as Jesus' endorsement of tithing, then the implementation of the law becomes problematic. How strict should we be in our tithing? How are we to determine what items are subject to the tithe?

To suggest that Jesus endorses a certain practice by virtue of the fact that he does not specifically *reject* it presents an inconsistency in logic. As examples of this van Rensburg (2002:87) points to Matthew 8:4, Luke 17:14 and Matthew 17:24-27. In each of these instances, by his own actions or by instructing someone else to do something, Jesus upholds the Law of Moses. Based on these passages, and following the same logic some have applied to the practice of tithing, van Rensburg asks, "Should Christians now show themselves to the 'priest' when they are cured of a skin ailment or pay...an annual tax to the temple (church?) or give attention to the Levitical law?" In light of the questions raised thus far, I believe that if we are to develop a New Testament model for giving we need to look elsewhere; the points discussed above strongly suggest that Matthew 23:23-24 cannot be used to teach tithing for Christians.

4.3 Hebrews 7:1-10

This chapter is a retelling of the story of Abram's encounter with Melchizedek after Abram's defeat of the kings, recorded in Genesis 14. As with the Matthew 23 passage, Hebrews 7:1-10 is sometimes cited as evidence that tithing is a New Testament practice, an obligation that still applies to believers today. Pink (2006:§8) is representative of this view, proposing that Abram is a type, in the same way as Melchizedek is a type. Pink suggests that if Abram, the "father of the faithful", paid tithes, then his "children" (i.e., believers) should follow his example. The difference between paying tithes as Christians, Pink states, and the paying of tithes in the Old Testament, is that now we are directly obligated to Christ and not to some intermediary. Taylor (1991:74-76) echoes this perspective, and concludes that, "The law of Moses did not originate tithing and does not have the power to end it."

In contrast to the views presented above, there is a large body of work that deals with the Christian's relationship to the Law and the applicability of Old Testament practices and principles. One aspect of this wider subject concerns the issue of practices before the Law of Moses. With regard to tithing it should be noted that in the instances where the practice is mentioned prior to the Law being given, it is depicted as voluntary and spontaneous. The tithe of Abram and Jacob has been discussed in chapter two, and it is sufficient to note here that in both instances there is no mention of a prior command or of an obligation to tithe. If these examples of tithing prior to the Law are to be applied today it would be consistent with the texts to teach only voluntary tithing. Hagner (1990:105) suggests that Abram's tithe on the occasion related in Genesis 14 can be likened to a "thanksgiving offering", and notes its difference from the tithe commanded for Israel in terms of what was tithed. The latter is a point worth emphasizing, Abram's tithe was from the spoils of war; his own property is not mentioned. Wretling (2006:33) concurs, noting that, "Abraham's tithe was not legally required but dictated by custom."

There is also the problem of how the tithe is to be used; Melchizedek is a unique figure in scripture and there is no indication as to how Abram's paying of a tithe to him may be translated into today's context. In the case of Jacob the scripture is again silent as to who received this tithe and how it was used. These points are echoed by Verbrugge (2000, s.v. *dekatos*) in discussing the history of the tithe. The

assertion that tithing cannot come to an end along with the rest of the Mosaic Law because of its pre-Law origin is simply not supported by scripture. Circumcision is one of several practices that have an origin outside of the Mosaic legislation, and yet it is no longer a requirement under the New Covenant.

The second area that has a bearing on the application of Hebrews 7 is that of the relationship of the Christian to the Law. The subject has been discussed briefly in the previous section, and the same points apply here. Hagner (1990:107) notes that the writer of Hebrews is surprisingly pointed in his depiction of the break with the Old Covenant Law, and suggests that the word “change” used in verse 12 is a term that “means more than a slight modification”. In discussing the continuity/discontinuity between the new and old systems, Marshall (2004:¶25) sees faith as being the main point of continuity, with all the outward elements, including the various sacrifices and offerings, as being superseded by the new. The “foundation” of the system, the priestly order, is being replaced, and with the foundation removed all the attending elements are removed along with it. Joslin (2008:144) sums up by commenting that in this new system there is still priesthood and there is still law, but not as it was in the old system. In order to discover what this new system entails in terms of specific practices it is necessary to examine New Testament examples of people living under the new system and what that looked like.

Two more points need to be highlighted regarding the relevance of Hebrews 7 for Christians and tithing. The first of these is the issue of what the writer of Hebrews is actually trying to convey in this passage. Just as the central message of Matthew 23:23-24 can be obscured by focusing too much on the matter of tithing, so the central theme of Hebrew 7 can be missed. The Genesis 14 account is not transmitted in detail, as Attridge (1989:188) notes, but is used selectively to prove the writer’s main argument. It is Christ and his eligibility, and ultimate superiority, as our great high priest that is the crux of Hebrews 7. Wretlind (2006:34) comments that the illustration used in Hebrews 7 is restricted to this one point; there is no broader argument being made concerning tithing. Abram’s tithe to Melchizedek is only a bridge to get to the main point, and even then the point cannot be stretched too far. As Attridge (1989) and Long (1997) both note, Jesus’ genealogy can be traced back to Abram just as Levi’s can; thus the argument that Levi paid tithes

through Abram could also be applied to Jesus. This illustrates both the limitation and the focus of the Hebrews author's argument. He is not concerned with who should be paying tithes today, only with who paid tithes then and what that says about the lesser and the greater. The use of the Genesis 14 narrative is narrowly aimed; it is not a discourse on the merits of tithing or its applicability to Christians.

The previous point leads into one final aspect worth noting regarding Hebrews 7. The original Genesis 14 account is a narrative passage, and as such cannot be applied prescriptively. The writer of Hebrews does not apply it prescriptively, extracting only a wider principle about the recognition of a superior priestly line. Kaiser (1981:¶10) includes a valuable discussion on the subject of correctly handling narrative passages in scripture. His analysis concludes with four steps that he deems indispensable in the exegesis and application of this type of biblical literature. While all four steps apply to the Genesis 14 account, step four is particularly relevant to what has been discussed thus far; Kaiser refers to "timeless principles" that are extracted from the author's "single truth-intention". This is how the Hebrews 7 text deals with Genesis 14, and it is a limitation that we should in turn observe. It is my conclusion, based on all the points discussed thus far, that Hebrews 7 does not have any relevance to the subject of New Testament giving. I believe that the remaining texts to be studied will prove more valuable in forming a working model of how Christians can be faithful stewards of our God-given resources.

4.4 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

4.4.1 Introduction

The following section will focus primarily on the text listed above. Where relevant, other passages will be discussed as they pertain to the main text. The goal of this segment is to extract from the text any principles that may be applicable to the subject of Christian giving. Whereas the texts discussed earlier in this chapter (Matt. 23:23-34 and Heb. 7:1-10) did not have giving as their central theme, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8-9 clearly depict a Christian community handling the giving, collecting and sending of funds. This examination will include detailed

exegesis of specific verses, the highlighting of key phrases and words and discussion of any textual issues crucial to the main subject.

4.4.2 Background and Context

It has been suggested that the collection referred to in 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8-9 originated with Paul, in conference with the leaders of the Jerusalem church, on the occasion of Paul's report to the council (so Witherington 1995; Garland 2003). Galatians 2:10 is the basis for this supposition, where James, Peter and John are recorded as asking Paul and Barnabas to "remember the poor". There is another reference, Romans 15:26, that alludes to a gift collected for the "poor among the saints in Jerusalem." This contribution apparently came from believers in Macedonia and Achaia; Witherington (1995:314) states that these texts are all referring to the same collection. This conclusion seems likely; Paul mentions the Macedonians in 2 Corinthians 8:1 and 9:2, 4, as well as the fact that Achaia (the province in which Corinth was located) has known about the collection for a year. Taken together these references indicate that this collection was a central part of Paul's missionary work.

Scott (1998:190) suggests that the collection had eschatological implications; Paul was mindful of the prophecy concerning the wealth of the nations being brought to Jerusalem (cf. Is. 60:11; 66:18-21). The gesture may also have been a way to show that the believers, whether Jew or Gentile, and regardless of their separate locations, were nevertheless united. All of these factors may have come into play in Paul's eagerness to complete this work, but the result was that the collection involved many "congregations" of believers, in different regions, over a period of time, with the one goal of sending relief to fellow believers who were suffering.

There are several factors that may have contributed to the poverty being experienced in Jerusalem, and among the believers in particular. Famine is one of the possible reasons for the hardship; in Acts 11:28 the prophet Agabus speaks of famine, prompting the believers in Antioch to send a contribution to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Saul. Persecution following the death of Stephen (cf. Acts 8; 11:19) may also have caused financial difficulties, as well as the large number of converts being added to the church (cf. Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14). Harris (2005:87) lists six

contributing factors, two of these have been mentioned above, the other four include the high cost of living in Jerusalem, heavy taxation, the influx of teachers and other Christian visitors who would need to be supported by the local fellowships, and the practice of sharing their goods among one another. With regard to the latter, Harris submits that the sharing of goods was not the direct cause of poverty, but rather that it was a response to a problem that already existed. Lenski (1963:757) agrees that this sharing together was not the reason for the problem, noting that it only occurred “as the need arose” and that “the congregation at Jerusalem was never a communistic colony.” However, Thiselton (2000:1320) supports the view that this sharing rendered small businesses and enterprises incapable of being self-supporting and thereby unable to sustain the community economically. In the texts that refer to this sharing (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35), there is no indication that it was seen in a negative light or that adverse consequences were anticipated. Generosity is nowhere discouraged in scripture, and the other factors that have been discussed as possible causes of the need in Jerusalem would be sufficient to explain the circumstances. Whatever the cause or causes of the situation, Paul is motivated to send relief to these fellow believers by enlisting the help of other communities; it is a joint effort that will bring blessing to the recipients as well as the givers.

4.4.3 The Collection for the Saints

With the background sketched in a closer examination of the specifics of the collection can now be undertaken. One point to keep in mind throughout the study is that this collection was a specific undertaking for a specific purpose; therefore, any general principles or applications must take this into account. From verse 1 it is evident that the Corinthian Christians already knew about the proposed collection, and that they may have inquired in a previous correspondence with Paul about how to go about completing it. It is not clear how they came to hear of Paul’s planned collection, whether he had communicated it to them on some previous occasion or whether they had heard of it some other way. Witherington (1995:313) cites the reference to a previous letter in 7:1 and the corresponding use of *peri de* in 16:1 and 12 as possible evidence that the Corinthians had written to Paul asking about the collection.

The term “collection” employed in verse 1 (and again in verse 2) is found nowhere else in the New Testament. Verbrugge (2000, s.v. *logeia*) notes that the term means a collection of money. Thiselton (2000:1381) points out that the term is to be differentiated from regular taxes and refers instead to “irregular local contributions”. He comments that this indicates Paul’s careful selection of the term so as to avoid its being viewed as any kind of tax or repeated contribution. Fee (1987:812) specifies that the term refers to the act of “taking up” of the collection rather than the collection itself, and that this meaning corresponds to the instructions Paul gives about how to go about the collecting.

“The saints” of verse 1 refers to the community of believers in Jerusalem (cf. Rom. 15:26); verse 3 confirms that these are the intended recipients of the gift. In the latter part of verse 1 Paul tells the Corinthians that he has given the Galatian churches instructions about how to collect the contributions, and that the Corinthians should follow these instructions as well. In an article on 1 Corinthians, Deffinbaugh (2009:§4) asserts that Paul is here commanding the Corinthians to take up this collection, just as he has commanded the Galatian churches. He notes the use of the term *diatassō*, and its authoritative, military connotation, stating that, “This matter of giving to the poor brethren in Jerusalem was not an option, but a duty.” Collins (1999:588) agrees with this assessment, commenting that Paul’s instruction to “do you also” (v. 1), “suggests the mandatory nature of his appeal.” I disagree with this conclusion; nowhere does Paul suggest that the collection is mandatory for any of the churches. In fact, quite the opposite is indicated by 2 Corinthians 8:3-4, 8. The Macedonians had to “beg” to be allowed to participate in the giving, and Paul specifically tells the Corinthians in 8:8, “I am not speaking this as a command”. I suggest that the “command” Paul issues here refers to his suggested method of collecting the contributions, rather than the giving itself.

Garland (2003:753) agrees that the collection was not an obligation, and that Paul was merely “making arrangements that will help the process.” The NASB rendering of the term as “directed” is supported by Fee (1987:812), who notes the possible range of meaning of the term from “command” to “arrange”, and does not support “command” in this context. Under Paul’s leadership a collection of funds for the relief of struggling Christians in Jerusalem is underway, with several churches

participating. To clarify how this collection should be managed, Paul gives some instructions to the Corinthian church, expressing that it is the same procedure he has conveyed to the Galatian community.

Paul now lays out the details of the procedure the church should follow in collecting the contributions (v. 2). The verse contains several ideas that require closer examination. The designation “the first day of every week” most likely refers to Sunday; Lenski (1963:759) suggests a translation of “Sunday by Sunday”. That Sunday had become the customary day for believers to meet and share the Lord’s Supper is attested by Lenski (1963), Hodge (1980) and Witherington (1995). Acts 20:7 is the basis for this conclusion, as well as the importance the believers placed on the resurrection. Slane (2009, s.v. *Sabbath*) cites other references in Acts that suggest the traditional Jewish Sabbath continued to be observed by Christians, but adds that the Acts 20:7 passage “reflects an emerging Christian consensus” on the merits of meeting on the first day of the week. Keener (2005:136) raises the possibility that putting this portion aside on the first day of the week may have signified the priority of the “Lord’s offering” before anything else. The point is not of vital significance to the study, except as it pertains to the next phrase and the question of whether the contribution was to be stored up at home or brought to the gathering.

The phrase “each one of you” (v. 2) has caused some debate as to its meaning. The literal rendering “each of you by himself” (Marshall 1976) leads Fee (1987:813) to conclude that the believers were to keep their contributions at home. One objection Fee raises to the notion of bringing the gifts to the communal gathering is that the level of organization required in terms of church officials, regular offerings and buildings cannot be assumed. Lenski (1963:759) supports the idea of keeping the offering at home, and echoes Fee’s objection regarding the level of organization that would have been required for individuals to deposit their gifts at a gathering. On the other hand, Osborne (1999:244) cites Paul’s specifying of Sunday (the day when believers were meeting together) as a reason to conclude that the offerings were to be brought to the weekly meeting. Fitzmyer (2008:614) points out that there is no clear indication as to where the gifts should be stored up, but that the grammar of the phrase is most likely aimed at emphasizing the participation of each individual. To

this debate I would add that the offering is for a specific purpose, not a general fund for the church to use, so there would not necessarily be any need to deposit it in a central fund until it was ready to be sent. Additionally, if the instruction is to have each person bring his contribution each week, does this mean he is to bring it to the private home where most believers gathered (cf. Witherington 1995:30), or to the general assembly of all the believers? The Greek text itself does not specify where the offering is to be kept; I agree with Fitzmyer (2008:614) that the emphasis in this phrase is simply on the fact that each person, privately, is to set aside an amount. This method, of putting aside an amount each week, would ensure that the total contribution would be significant, as opposed to a once-off offering taken up at one time. Setting aside smaller amounts on a regular basis would also be less of a hardship for an individual than trying to give a large amount all at once. Since the main objectives are to have each person or family participate, and to collect a worthwhile amount, the issue of where the week-by-week contributions should be kept is not a key concern.

The last phrase of significance in verse 2 is “put aside and save, as he may prosper”. Each person is to set aside a certain sum regularly each week and save it up so that there will be no need to take up a collection when the apostle arrives in Corinth. To “save” or “store up” translates a word meaning “treasure”; Mounce (2006, s.v. *treasure*) notes that “treasure becomes stored up in heaven when disciples use God’s wealth to advance his purposes.” In this sense, the Corinthians will be storing up treasure in heaven by the act of storing up treasure to give away on earth. While the idea in 1 Corinthians 16:2 is simply that the Corinthians should save up their weekly contributions, the terms used to refer to the collecting of the contributions (e.g., “gift of grace”), in 2 Corinthians 8-9, and the allusion to “righteousness” in 9:10, may include the concept of spiritual treasure.

The term “prosper” literally means “to lead along a good road” (Verbrugge 2000, s.v. *hodos* d), with the figurative meaning of “to prosper, succeed”. Garland (2003:754) comments that the original meaning, of a prosperous journey, eventually took on a generalized association with success. Garland advocates retaining the passive voice, with the intimation that it is God who provides the success. The gift is to be given out of their “surplus”; therefore Garland does not support the NIV rendering of

“income”. Although in his second letter to the Corinthians Paul commends the Macedonians for giving “beyond their ability” (8:3), here he seems to ask simply that they give according to whatever measure of success they have experienced. The amount to be set aside should correspond in some way to this measure of success, but no specific amount, percentage, or proportion is indicated.

Verses 3 and 4 complete Paul’s instructions about the gift; when Paul arrives in Corinth he will “send with letters” (v. 3) whomever the Corinthians have appointed to the task of delivering the contribution to Jerusalem. Paul also leaves open the option of accompanying these men to Jerusalem himself. Although the impetus for the collection came from Paul, the final responsibility of guarding and delivering the funds is left to the church members. Witherington (1995:315) sees this as a two-fold strategy; unifying the church in that they are all involved in choosing the representatives and avoiding any accusation that Paul has solicited the funds for himself. Lenski (1963:761) adds that Paul is also interested in bringing these Gentile Christians into contact with their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, thereby cementing their relationship and enduing a sense of unity. One last point to note in connection with this collection is the use of the term “gift” in verse 3. As will be seen in the study of 2 Corinthians 8-9, this is one of several terms Paul uses to describe the contribution. The basic meaning is “gift” or “grace”, or “a gift of grace” (Vine 1984, s.v. *gift, giving* 6). Verbrugge (2000, s.v. *charis* 4c) observes that it is “the technical term for the gift of gratitude and love Paul was collecting for the Jerusalem community.” The collection is not to be seen as a mere charitable act; it is a demonstration of God’s grace working through the believers in a practical way to impact those sorely in need of a “gift of grace”.

4.4.4 Conclusion

Bearing in mind the limitations of this passage in terms of its depiction of a specific offering for a specific purpose, there are nevertheless some broad examples that can be extracted. It shows a concern for those who are in need, even though they may belong to a different church community. The “poor” are still considered to be legitimate recipients of such assistance, as was the case under the old tithe system. It shows a deliberate, planned setting aside of an amount on a regular basis, by each

individual member of the community. The only caution here is that this particular text does not address the question of whether this was a method followed for other kinds of giving. There is no mention here of general offerings taken up for the local community. What each person decides to set aside is contingent upon the extent to which he has prospered; he shares his success with others by apportioning some part of it as a gift. No set amount is stipulated, it will be different for every individual. Although each individual decides on the amount to be set aside, the end result is a communal endeavour; the gift is sent by a delegation representing the entire group. The funds are responsibly managed by appointing a “committee” to take charge of its delivery. Finally, the gift is to be seen in a broader sense than just a relief fund; it has perhaps unseen implications for both the givers and the recipients.

4.5 2 Corinthians 8-9

4.5.1 Introduction

Having addressed the matter of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem in his previous letter, Paul now brings the issue up again. It would seem that the Corinthians, after their initial willingness to participate, had not completed what they had begun (8:10-11). In encouraging them to finish the work, Paul holds up the example of another community, the Macedonians, who demonstrate their eagerness and generosity by giving beyond what was expected, considering their circumstances. As Paul addresses the issue, he covers more than just this one specific collection, speaking about the wider theological significance of giving and receiving, citing the ultimate example of Christ and his selfless nature. As to the scope of this section, rather than studying every verse, I will examine select verses that are of particular importance to the subject of Christian giving. Verses that incorporate similar thoughts or principles will be grouped together rather than examined sequentially.

4.5.2 Terms Employed

Since Paul uses a variety of terms to refer to the collection and the giving of it, it would be useful to look briefly at these various terms so that the full range of

meaning can be appreciated at the outset. Of the terms used, “grace” is by far the most common, Matera (2003:184) notes that the term *charis* is used ten times in chapters 8 and 9, although it is not translated as “grace” in every instance. The overarching significance of this term is tied to the grace and favour of God, given freely and without respect to merit (so Mounce 2006; Verbrugge 2000; Gilbrant 1991). Paul indicates in 8:1 that it is the grace of God that has enabled the Macedonians to go beyond their means and to give so generously. Giving begins with God.

Another term used to describe the community’s participation in the collection is “fellowship”. Gilbrant (1991, s.v. *koinonia*) lists the various ideas incorporated in this term as: sharing, partnership, communion and unity. It is used both of our relationship with Christ, and of believers’ relationships to one another. The Macedonians asked to be included in the collection so that they too could share and be in fellowship with the other churches in meeting the need of the Jerusalem saints. In addition to fellowship, other terms used to indicate the giving and collecting of the contributions include ministry, blessing and service. “Ministry” denotes service in a general sense, but in the New Testament can also refer to help, support, provision, or relief supplied to others (Gilbrant 1990, s.v. *diakonos*). Christians are called to be servants and to serve one another; the giving of material support to needy brethren is a way of fulfilling this calling. Paul recognized the collection as an act of service on the part of the churches, an opportunity to demonstrate “obedience to your confession of the gospel” (9:13).

“Blessing” in 9:5 is translated “bounty” in the NASB, “gift” in the ESV and “generous gift” in the NIV. The word has as its general meaning the idea of “speaking well”, but can include the sense of “the benefit of a blessing received” (Mounce, 2006, s.v. *blessing*). Once again the collection is viewed as more than just a gesture of kindness, it is an activity inspired by grace, putting into practice towards others the blessings that have been given by God, with the results being blessing of others and thanksgiving to God. This last thought, of thanksgiving to God, is brought into focus in 9:12, where the term “service” is used to describe the collecting of the funds. Gilbrant (1990, s.v. *leitourgia*) notes the term’s ties to the temple and cultic service of the Old Testament, commenting that in the Septuagint usage the term “is invariably

directed to God himself via the tabernacle/temple cultus.” In supporting their fellow believers, the churches are actually serving God; when the gift is received the thanksgiving is rightfully directed to God.

4.5.3 Voluntary Giving: 2 Corinthians 8:3, 8, 10; 9:7

The example that Paul upholds to the Corinthians is the Macedonians and the “liberality” with which they gave, despite being a poverty stricken community themselves. They had pleaded to be able to take part in the collection, and that eagerness is demonstrated in their giving. All of this happened not under duress, but by the grace of God and “of their own accord” (v. 3). The theme of voluntary giving is repeated in the “not as a command” of verse 8, the “opinion” of Paul in verse 10 and the “purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion” of 9:7. The term used in 8:3 is composed of the Greek words for “self” and “to choose” (Vine 1984, s.v. *accord* B 1); it is the same term used in verse 17 of Titus’ willingness to go to Corinth. The term is largely self explanatory; the churches in Macedonia chose to participate in the collection of their own free will. In 8:7-8 Paul encourages the Corinthians to “abound” not only in spiritual attributes like faith and love, but also in this grace of giving. At the same time, he takes care to tell them that this is not a “command”. Instead of using what authority he has as an apostle, Paul’s strategy is to appeal to them on the basis of the genuine evidence of their faith. Vine (2000, s.v. *commandment* 4) notes that the term employed in 8:8 “stresses the authoritativeness of the command”. Because the giving must be “cheerful” in order to be acceptable to God, Paul wants to avoid any hint of coercion.

That this is not a command is emphasized in verse 10; Paul states that he is giving his opinion in the matter of the Corinthians completing what they had begun. Even though they had committed to participating in the collection, the motivation to finish it must also be by their own choice. Mounce (2006, s.v. *gnōmē*) lists “suggested advice” as one of the meanings of this term. Lenski (1963:1140) comments that this advice is not mere opinion but a “well-considered judgment”. Paul is advising them as to what course of action would be the most beneficial to them; it will prove that their love is sincere, avoid any embarrassment when the time comes to collect the contributions, and it will ultimately be a blessing to those who will receive it.

In 2 Corinthians 9:7, the people are reminded once again that the decision about what to give is theirs; each person gives according to what “he has purposed in his heart”. The idea of choice is the same in this verse as in the verses discussed above. To this idea Paul adds a contrasting idea, that of how *not* to give. No one should give “grudgingly” or “under compulsion”. The term “grudgingly” translates a Greek word with the basic meaning of “grief”, or something that causes physical or emotional pain (Verbrugge 2000, s.v. *lypeō*). The individual should not be distressed by the giving; it should instead be a joyful service. Matera (2003:205) points out an interesting parallel in Deuteronomy 15:10. Amidst instructions concerning the remission of debts in the seventh year, verse 10 enjoins the people, “You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him”. The same idea is being conveyed in both the Corinthians and the Deuteronomy passages; be glad in giving to those who are in need, without regret. Lastly, the giving should not be done out of obligation or duty. Mounce (2006, s.v. *necessary*) comments that in this verse “constraint is contrasted with the Christian acting freely.” An interesting comment is made by Peter in Acts 5:4, with regard to the actions of Ananias and Sapphira. Peter declares that the property they had was theirs alone before it was sold, and after it was sold the proceeds were still “under your control.” The decision to sell or not, and what to do with the profits, was entirely up to them; they were under no obligation to give anything away. Lenski (1963:1171) sums up this freedom in giving by stating that Paul’s teaching here “sets forth *voluntariness* as being the only true motive and principle of Christian giving. It actuated the apostolic church; it has ever distinguished true Christian giving.”

4.5.4 The Example of Christ: 2 Corinthians 8:5, 9, 12; 9:6

The group of verses to be examined in this section cover two general subjects, the example of Christ as a motive for giving and God’s activity in supplying the means with which to be generous givers. In 1 Timothy 6:17-18 Paul instructs those who have material wealth to be generous in sharing their blessings with others. Although the giving is always voluntary, generosity is always commended. Speaking of the unexpected generosity of the Macedonians, Paul says that “they gave themselves first to the Lord” (8:5). Their priorities were rightly aligned; the grace to desire to be generous is given by the Lord, and it is to him that they first turn. Barnett (1997:398)

adds that this means they had “given themselves once more”. This is a renewed dedication and devotion of themselves to the Lord; not surprising then that they were able to exceed the expectation of the apostle.

As the ultimate inspiration for voluntary and liberal giving, Paul now turns to the example of Christ; “for your sake he became poor” (8:9). Matera (2003:191) comments that this concept is most often viewed in connection with Christ’s incarnation and pre-existence, in that he was “rich” in every way but became “poor” in taking on human likeness. At the same time Matera points out that the primary purpose for the use of this example is to exhort the Corinthians to see their giving in light of the greatest gift of all. Human generosity pales in comparison to the “wideness of God’s mercy”. In the context of Paul’s argument it is unnecessary to specify in what exact sense Christ was “rich”, and in what sense he became “poor”. Kruse (1987:154) observes that the poverty of Jesus can be overstated, and that it is not primarily his material lack that is in view in Paul’s example. Nevertheless, the example accomplishes what is intended by presenting a picture of Christ’s sacrificial giving, in contrast to the seeming reluctance of the Corinthians to complete what they had originally set out to do.

Following on this example is Paul’s assurance that the Corinthians will not be judged according to the amount they contribute; they are not expected to outdo the Macedonians, or to match the example of Christ, but “if the readiness is present, it is acceptable” (8:12). It is their “readiness” that Paul is concerned with, not necessarily the amount. Harris (2005:634) suggests two general criteria that render a gift acceptable; “an eager desire to give that is translated into actual giving” and “the size of the gift should accord with one’s resources, however meagre or substantial they may be.” Marshall (1976) renders the phrase thus, “for if the eagerness is *already there*...it is acceptable” (italics mine). The acceptability in view in this context refers to God’s acceptance; if the Corinthians will rekindle their eagerness to complete the collection, then whatever they offer will be “well-pleasing” to God. The kind of giving Paul is advocating “takes account of the giver’s situation, and does not expect a response which is *according to what he has not*.” (Kruse 1987:157) Lenski (1963:1143) elaborates on this by stating that in the case of a person who does not have anything to give, that person’s willingness alone is a substitute for the actual

giving, and is acceptable. There is a balance here; a person may have only a small amount to give, and yet it can equal “bountiful” sowing because it is generous in proportion to the person’s resources.

The connection between 8:12 and 9:6 is that grace is operative in the initial eagerness to give, grace must be operative in following through on that eagerness, and grace supplies the means to follow through with “liberality”. There should not be greed, or “grasping for more at the expense of others” (Rienecker 1980:483). Instead of an attitude that results in sowing and reaping sparingly, the Corinthians should imitate the attitude of Christ, who gave himself freely. There are parallel thoughts in 9:5-7, greedily/sparingly/grudgingly, contrasted with blessing/bountiful/cheerful. The agricultural metaphor used in 9:6 is a simple one that would perhaps have been known to the Corinthians (cf. Gal. 6:7; Prov. 11:24). Barnett (1997:436) comments that although metropolitan, Corinth was nevertheless an “agricultural environment”. Just as a farmer does not keep back seed, knowing that his harvest will be meagre if he does not sow what he has, so it would be foolish to withhold a gift when the resultant harvest of blessing will be great. And as the next verses will show, the grace of God is evident in this too, since he supplies “seed to the sower” (9:10).

4.5.5 God’s Supply: 2 Corinthians 9:8, 10

Verses 8 and 10 of chapter 9 focus on the activity of God in the grace of giving. The central message is that “he is able”. The tense of the term “able” indicates the continuous ability of God (Reinecke 1980:483) to cause “all grace”, “all sufficiency” and “abundance”. This provision is for the purpose of being able to sow more seed; it is not for their own self-sufficiency but for the benefit of others (“for every good deed” and to produce a “harvest of righteousness”). Witherington (1995:427) suggests that this self-sufficiency is in material things, so that the givers are able to help others without worrying about meeting their own needs. This may be part of the provision, but in the case of the Macedonians the provision was the grace to be generous even when they were poverty stricken. The provision is all encompassing, “all grace”, “always”, “all sufficiency”, “in everything”, “abundance”, “every good deed”. The term “all” in its various inflections is used five times in verse 8 (Marshall

1976). Whatever is holding the Corinthians back from completing the work they had started will be overshadowed by the grace of God in all things.

Verse 10 continues the theme of the provision of God; the same one who gives the seed will also give bread for food, more seed for sowing, and an increase in the “harvest of your righteousness”. Verbrugge (2000, s.v. *artos*) notes that bread was often synonymous with food in the New Testament. The idea is strengthened by adding that this bread is “for food”, or an even better rendering, “food for eating”. Verbrugge emphasizes that it is the actual “act of eating” that is being conveyed by the use of the term in this verse. Giving will not result in the giver being unable to sustain himself, a concern Paul addresses in 8:13-15. The key in this verse is the use of the present participle for the verb, the “one sowing”. Those who are engaged in the activity of sowing, repeatedly or continuously, will be the recipients of help and provision from God, who will give even more seed to be dispersed. It is not clear what the last item in verse 10, the “harvest of righteousness”, refers to. Matera (2003:208) suggests either the blessings or benefits of righteousness, or righteousness itself. Rienecker (1980:483) notes that the term “harvest” in this verse typically refers to produce, yield, or in particular the fruit or juice of the vine. Vine (1984, s.v. *fruit* 2) notes its metaphorical meaning, and suggests “material ministrations to the needy” as its sense in 2 Corinthians 9:10. The context of verse 10 and of chapters 8 and 9 in general, point to the latter meaning as the intended one in this instance. Perhaps the meaning is twofold; increased seed for sowing will result in increased “good deeds” (righteousness in action), as well an increased harvest in those who are the beneficiaries. Giving is something that is done in partnership with God; the Corinthians will receive grace for every step.

4.5.6 Equality and the Poor: 2 Corinthians 8:13-14, 9:1, 12

The above verses speak to the reason for giving; equality among the churches and meeting the needs of others. When all have enough for their basic needs, there is equality. Acts 4:34 states that “there was not a needy person among them”; the believers’ sharing of their resources resulted in this kind of equality. There should not be suffering among some while others have too much. Paul assures the Corinthians that in this equality the intention is not to make everyone poor; but at the

“present time” they had an “abundance” (v. 14) that enabled them to supply the lack among their fellow believers in Jerusalem. MacArthur (2007:65) suggests that the term “equality” could also be rendered “balance” or “equilibrium”. Blomberg (1999:194) suggests that a better rendering would be “equitable” or “fair”, and emphasizes that this is a *relative* equality - it is the “extremes of wealth and poverty” that should be affected by this kind of giving. The example Paul uses in 8:15, drawn from Exodus 16:17-18, illustrates this balance clearly. Each person, whether he initially gathered little or much, ended up with the right amount to provide for his needs. The intent is not to “redistribute” wealth, but to ensure that everyone has a sufficiency commensurate with their needs. Witherington’s (2010:146) comment on this idea of equality is a good summary of the principle, “giving is done on the principle of each giving according to their means and each receiving according to their needs.”

There are several possible interpretations of verse 14 regarding the “role reversal” of the Corinthian and Judean churches. Of these, Blomberg (1999:194f) finds it improbable that the two communities would see their economic circumstances so changed that the Corinthians would need financial aid from Jerusalem. In light of Romans 15:27, Harris (1995) advances the possibility that the Jerusalem church’s help would be in the form of spiritual support. The final scenario is that the verse reflects an eschatological view, where the Gentiles will share in the fulfilment of the blessings and promises of Israel (so Scott 1998). The issue is not central in connection with Christian giving; the overall principle is that Christians should be concerned about those who are in need, and that they should be interested in addressing blatant economic inequality among their brethren.

As was the case in the tithe system of the Mosaic Law, where the poor are one of the groups of people singled out for special support, the collection Paul is organizing is for the purpose of helping those in material need. It is not necessary to discuss this purpose in detail, merely to highlight the fact that the reason for this effort on Paul’s part was to solicit aid for the poor. Among other mentions, both in 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8-9, chapter 9 refers to this purpose. Verse 1 calls it a “ministry to the saints”; verse 12 specifies that it is “supplying the needs of the saints”. The Gospels depict Jesus’ concern for the poor and for his followers to be

mindful of them (Matt. 25:35f; Lk. 14:12-14). The book of Acts depicts a community of believers who were concerned for one another's physical needs. James 2:15-16 teaches that faith is translated into works when believers see to the physical as well as spiritual needs of others. Although not mentioned specifically in the New Testament texts examined thus far, the general category "the poor" could include the widows, orphans and aliens singled out in some of the Old Testament tithing texts. These three groups of people would be considered disadvantaged and therefore requiring material support and help. Acts 6:1 refers to widows who received a "daily serving of food." What is clear is that the New Testament upholds the principle of giving to the poor as a legitimate use of Christian resources.

4.6 Conclusion

In summary, the key principles extracted from the examination of 2 Corinthians 8-9 can be listed as follows: (1) Giving is first of all a grace; it has spiritual value for the giver. Christians can "excel" in this grace just as they seek to excel in other spiritual attributes such as faith and love. God is the source of this grace. (2) Giving should be voluntary and un-coerced, each person deciding for themselves what to set aside. The willingness or "readiness" to give must be present; giving that is forced or "grudging" is not acceptable. (3) The portion to be given should have some relation to the individual's resources. This relation may differ from person to person. No particular amount, percentage, or proportion is stipulated, only that it is to be "as he may prosper". (4) Generosity is encouraged. The generosity of others is held up as an example of people desiring to give even when they have little; the desire to give is matched by God's provision. Christ's example is the ultimate model for giving; willing, unsparing, sacrificial and joyful. (5) God is the one who supplies the means for generous giving. As Christians demonstrate a desire to give, and begin to act on that desire, God provides the "seed" for increased sowing. (6) The poor are legitimate recipients of our giving. They are a group singled out in the Old Testament tithe system as beneficiaries, and in this there is continuity between Old and New. This group may also include other "needy" persons such as widows. Christian workers in the ministry are also singled out in the New Testament as being rightful beneficiaries of support. This aspect is covered by such passages as Luke 10:7, 1 Corinthians 9 and 1 Timothy 5:18. (7). This last point is not so much a

principle as an observation. Although Paul had been a “Pharisee of Pharisees” and consequently would have been a scrupulous tither, there is no mention of tithing in any of his writings to the churches.

With an overview of the history of the tithe in the Old Testament, and observations regarding the New Testament’s treatment of the subject of giving, specific applications can now be made. The following chapter will focus on the application of Malachi 3:8-12 to the Christian. However, all of the texts studied in chapters 2 through 4, and the principles they suggest, will be brought to bear, thereby synthesizing the results of the study as a whole. Areas of continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments, pertaining to giving, will be noted. The aim of this chapter is to suggest an alternative to the tithe as the model for Christian giving. We are not left with a vacuum on the subject of giving when we come to the New Testament. While the giving of a set percentage, applied to everyone, may not be sufficiently supported in the New Testament texts, giving still constitutes a vital part of the Christian life.

Chapter 5

Implications and Applications of Malachi 3:8-12 for Christians

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will consist of a brief discussion of the Christian's relationship to the Old Testament Law, in order to provide a framework for a more detailed discussion and suggestions concerning the application of Malachi 3:8-12. In addition to Malachi 3, the suggested applications will incorporate principles and examples extracted from some of the other texts covered in the thesis (e.g., the various uses of the tithe found in texts such as Deut. 12 and 14, as well as the elements of New Testament teaching on giving covered in chapter 4). Together, these texts will inform the theology behind the suggested applications.

5.2 Christians and the Law

When applying the Old Testament to the Christian context it is important to look at overall themes and principles; what elements can be carried over? As has been highlighted elsewhere in this study, theological as well as practical problems arise when attempting to apply the Old Testament in a prescriptive way. This is especially evident when dealing with the Law of Moses and its various regulations. Since Malachi 3 deals with an issue (tithing) that is part of that Law, answering the question of how to apply Malachi 3 must include a discussion on the relationship of the Law to Christians. At issue is whether specific commands related to the Old Covenant apply to Christians. Can these laws be applied "as is", or is some level of modification in application appropriate? Rayburn (1984:278) describes the New Covenant as being "the fulfillment of the promises of the old covenant", and as

“better by degrees” than the Old Covenant. Hebrews 8:6 affirms this superiority; it is a “better covenant” with “better promises”. Apart from its comparative sense, Mounce (2004, s.v. *better*) adds that the term “better” can carry the connotation of something being “more useful or advantageous.” The institution of a new and better Covenant implies that the previous one was flawed in some way, requiring a replacement. Bruce (1990:190) comments that the flaw consisted of the human element, and not the Law itself; the inability of anyone to fully obey and keep the Law was its weakness. Kittel and Friedrich (1985:653) describe the weakness of the Law in slightly different terms, commenting that it is ineffective “not because humans do *not* do it, but because *humans* do it.” I believe that the two concepts are both true; humans do not keep the Law, and they are unable to do so because of their humanness. A central component of the New Covenant, therefore, would be provision for an inner change; a new nature and a new heart, empowered to live in right relationship with God by the Spirit. With the inauguration of this new way, what then becomes of the Old Covenant and its regulations?

Scholars have dealt with the question of the Christian’s relationship to the Law in different ways, depending on their particular theological school of thought. There are three main approaches to the subject: Covenant theology, Dispensational theology and New Covenant theology. Briefly, Covenant theology views the Law as being divided into three areas: moral, civil and ceremonial. As Clark (2010:§9) explains, the civil and ceremonial aspects of the Law have been fulfilled in such a way that they are no longer applicable to the Christian life, furthermore, the civil law “was never intended to serve as norm for any other state than Mosaic-Davidic theocracy.” However, as far as the moral law is concerned, Clark states that it is a reflection of God’s “moral will” and therefore continues to be binding on all. Kostenberger and Croteau (2006:242) add that a typical approach of Covenant theology is to assume that individual laws that fall under the banner of “moral law” are still in effect, unless they have been specifically rescinded in the New Testament.

Ryrie (1984, s.v. *Dispensation, dispensationalism*) points to a literal approach to the interpretation of scripture as being an essential characteristic of Dispensational theology. As an example of the implications of this approach, Zuck (1991:240) notes that dispensationalism understands there to be a clear distinction between Israel and

the Church, and a distinction in the way God deals with each one. In this system there is also a clear difference between the Law and grace, the two being mutually exclusive. With regard to the dispensational view of the Law, Bahnsen (1996:142) notes that one characteristic of this theological system is the assertion that laws are no longer in force for Christians unless they have been repeated in the New Testament; the assumption is that Old Covenant commandments have been revoked.

According to Zaspel (2010), New Covenant theology seeks to find middle ground between the two main theological streams, Covenant theology and Dispensational theology. New Covenant theology embraces a “promise-fulfilment” approach to scripture, viewing the Old Covenant as a foreshadowing of what would become reality in the New Testament church. Zaspel (2010:§4) describes New Covenant theology’s stance towards the Mosaic Law as asserting that the entire Law has been “taken up” in Christ. Therefore, the idea that the Mosaic Law can be divided into distinct categories is necessarily rejected. In this aspect New Covenant theology can be similarly compared to Dispensational theology; the Mosaic Law is seen as having been abolished and superseded by the New Covenant. In *What does John Piper believe* (2010), the authors comment that, in the view of New Covenant theology, the Mosaic Law is “no longer our direct and immediate source of guidance. The Mosaic Law, as a law, is no longer binding on the believer.”

As Kostenberger and Croteau (2006:244) have noted, any conclusions concerning the applicability of tithing for Christians will be determined by an individual’s particular theological approach, rather than by exegesis alone. For this thesis, I propose an approach that incorporates elements of each theological system, but is closer to New Covenant and Dispensational theology in defining the Christian’s relation to the Mosaic Law. Hermeneutically, Dispensational theology’s literal, grammatical interpretation of scripture is the approach I believe to be the most sound. New Covenant theology’s stress on the temporary, foreshadowing nature of the Old Covenant, and its fulfilment in Christ, is consistent with the overall teaching of the New Testament.

Concerning the hermeneutical distinctive of New Covenant theology, Zaspel (2010:§3) explains that the New Testament is “the apex of God’s self-revelation to

date.” Zaspel remarks that other theological approaches, particularly Covenant theology, have failed to fully appreciate this point, and that New Covenant theology uniquely emphasises “fulfillment” in the New Testament and the “newness” of the New Covenant (among other emphases). Concerning the hermeneutical approach of Covenant theology, I believe that the nonliteral, figurative interpretation of scripture (especially prophecy) that underlies this system is flawed and prone to faulty application. The division of the Law into three areas is also problematic, in as much as these divisions are not explicitly delineated in scripture. Because of the difficulty in assigning individual laws to one area or another, decisions concerning which of the three areas a certain law relates to can become a matter of opinion. For example, Pink (2006) assigns tithing to the moral law, and therefore considers it to be a commandment that still applies today. I believe that the solution lies not in dividing the Law and consigning some aspects to a past era while enforcing others, but in understanding the function of the whole Law, then and now, and viewing it all through the lens of the New Testament’s teaching concerning its fulfilment. A balanced approach should include recognition of the role of the Law in revealing sin (Rom. 3:20, 5:20), for “training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16), in pointing us toward Christ as its ultimate aim (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:24), as well as a full realization of the fulfilment of the Law in Christ, which incorporates the teaching of Paul regarding the “change of law” (Heb. 7:12) that has taken place.

A continuity/discontinuity paradigm is useful in evaluating the relevance of the Mosaic Law for Christians. This concept is advanced by many scholars, for example, Thielman (1994); Moo (2004, s.v. *Law*); Kostenberger and Croteau (2006). The concept encompasses discussion on the meaning of Christ’s fulfilment of the Law, especially his teaching in Matthew 5:17*f*. At issue is the meaning of the term *plēroō* in Matthew 5:17. Among the points raised in their article regarding the contrast between “abolish” and “fulfil” that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 5:17-20, Kostenberger and Croteau (p. 239) suggest that “fulfil” in that context contains the general idea of completion. Furthermore, based on Jesus’ discussion in Matthew 5:21*f*, the authors suggest that fulfilment may also include bringing out the true meaning, or underlying principles of a particular law (p. 240). Goppelt (1982:226) views the term’s use in Matthew as a “technical term for the eschatological realization of prophecy.” Among the variety of connotations imbedded in the term,

Gilbrant (1991, s.v. *plēroō*) suggests fill, make full, supply fully, complete, accomplish, bring about and bring to completion. The term includes a quantitative element; as much as the Law carried out its purpose, there yet remained a gap in the full picture. In this regard, Goldsworthy (2000:88) comments that “the OT is incomplete with respect to the working out of God’s purposes and this cannot be fully understood apart from its fulfilment in the NT.” The term used in Colossians 1:24 to describe Paul’s activity in “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” is a compound word that includes the root *plēroō*. A closer examination of the use of the term in Colossians 1:24 may give some insight into its meaning in Matthew. Christ’s sacrifice was complete, and yet there are still ongoing implications of that suffering for Paul. Kittel and Friedrich (1985, s.v. *plēroō*) propose that Christ’s fulfilment of the Law cannot be viewed simply as a tension between validating and abolishing, but should be viewed as an actualization of all the promises and demands of the Law. In the same vein, the teaching of Romans 13:8 and Galatians 5:14 is that Christians who love have fulfilled the Law, for the “whole Law” is summed up in the directive to love one another.

Christ’s fulfilment of the Law does not make it invalid; rather, it demonstrates continuity in God’s standards of holiness and in his redemptive purpose. One example of this continuity is Jesus’ definition of the “weightier provisions of the law” in Matthew 23:23. Justice, mercy and faithfulness are singled out in the Matthew passage, these attributes are consistent with the Lord’s stated requirements in Micah 6:8, “to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly”. The teaching of Jesus is consistent with the “spirit” of the Law, and brings the Law “to its intended eschatological climax.” (Moo 2004:682). Thielman (1994:103) notes that in the New Testament, while some of the Law (e.g., circumcision) has been made void, other parts are reinterpreted in ways that were not hinted at in the original ordinance. This does not leave the Christian adrift with respect to moral responsibility, for as Matera (1996:170) notes (in connection with Gal. 5:13-15), “justification by faith does not result in moral laxity. To be sure, the justified no longer need to do the ‘works of the law’...But by enslaving themselves to each other through love, the Galatians will fulfill all that the law requires of them.” Continuity, then, exists in the righteous principles, or “weightier provisions” of the Law, while discontinuity exists in the strict adherence to the “letter” of the Law.

For Christians, the implications of Christ's fulfilment of the Law, in conjunction with Paul's body of work on the subject, are that the Law as it was practiced in the Old Testament has come to an end. We are now under the authority of a new system, the New Covenant. Its requirements for a relationship with God are not primarily external, but are dependent on the mediation of Christ. His introduction as the perfect high priest of a New Covenant has, of necessity, brought about a change in Law (cf. Heb. 7:12; 8:13). The following sections will deal with specifics relating to this change in Law and its impact on one particular aspect of that Law, tithing, particularly as commanded in Malachi 3:8-12.

5.3 Malachi, the Law and Christians

In his letter to the Galatians Paul argues that those who cling to the Law are obligated to keep it in its entirety, and fall under a curse when they cannot do this (cf. Gal. 3:10-14). It is noteworthy that in speaking of the Law, and of the covenant with Abraham that preceded it, the teaching of scripture is that the promises that accompanied the covenants are the inheritance of those who are "of faith" (Rom. 4:16), yet nothing is said about the curses that the Law warned would be the result of disobedience. For "as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes" (2 Cor. 1:20). The curse and blessing formula that is prominent throughout Malachi parallels Deuteronomy, forming a connection between what is said about tithing in Malachi 3 and the stipulations of the Old Covenant. Malachi 3 cannot be interpreted independently from the general context in which it is found, it is addressed to a people who are still under the Mosaic Law.

In order to ascertain how tithing applies in the New Covenant it is necessary to take into account the original function of the tithe, as well as any changes that have occurred that would have an impact on how it is to be practiced. The various functions of the tithe have been covered in the preceding chapters. As to changes that have taken place, tithing's connection to the temple and the sacrificial system means that the replacement of that system (through and in Christ) has a significant impact on its practice. The bottom line is that while the same principles may apply, they are applied through different practices. In referring to the applicability of Malachi 3 to Christians, Verhoef (1987:311) sums up by stating, "The continuity

consists in the principle of giving, in the continued obligation to be worthy stewards of our possessions, but the discontinuity in the manner in which we fulfill our obligations.” Wretling (2006, chap. 3) expresses much the same idea, speaking of a “unified theology” encompassing both Testaments, while maintaining that specific details of Israel’s religion need not be carried over to the New Testament.

Modification in practice already occurs even among those who advocate tithing for Christians. Referring to the legislation of the Old Testament, Alcorn (2003:181) admits that “the specific regulations don’t all apply, the principles certainly do”. This statement is made even while the author supports the view that tithing is still a requirement for Christians (by “tithing” the author refers only to one tithe of ten percent). From the examination of the history of the tithe in Israel in chapter 2 it is clear that there is strong evidence that the people were required to give much more than ten percent, possibly in three separate tithes. This is a major obstacle, since simply giving ten percent would not constitute fulfillment of the requirement. This issue is relevant to the application of Malachi 3, in that it demands the question of which tithe the prophet is instructing the people to bring. If the text is referring to the tithe system as a whole, then Christians should be giving closer to twenty two percent. The issue of how the tithe is to be used also raises questions, putting it into practice for today requires modification of the law, since the Old Testament tithing legislation specified only certain groups as recipients. Although widows, orphans and aliens could still be identified today, the main recipients of the tithe, the Levites, are no longer a part of Christian life (although one could argue that Christian preachers and teachers fulfil this role today). The problem is in the law’s *limitation* of the use of the tithe to these groups. If we were to apply the letter of the Law in this instance, it would follow that tithes should not be used for anything other than what was originally specified.

Another area where modification of the tithe law has been made is in what the tithe consists of. In the Old Testament the tithe was given out of agricultural goods and livestock. The only instance in which money is involved occurs in Deuteronomy 14, where the people are instructed to exchange their tithed goods for money in the event that the distance to the place of worship is too far for them to carry the tithed goods with them. These issues reaffirm the point made earlier regarding principle

and practice; passages like Malachi 3 that contain directives based on the Law cannot simply be applied “as is” (cf. Clendenen 2004:429-432). The survey of Old Testament tithe texts conducted in chapter two reveals that there are differences in how the tithe is presented. Leviticus does not specify how the people’s tithes are to be used; Numbers lists only the Levites as beneficiaries, while Deuteronomy lists three different ways in which tithes are to be used, including the individual consuming his tithe at a special celebration. In connection with Nehemiah’s efforts to restore the tithe (among other regulations), Goldingay (2003:739-740) comments that leaders freely applied the laws to fit the prevailing situation, preserving the intent of the laws while modifying the application.

It is clear that there are obstacles to overcome in proposing that Christians should continue to practice tithing. The difficulties are theological as well as practical. Theological in that there is a sound case to be made against placing Christians under obligation to the Mosaic Law, particularly those laws linked to the sacrificial system. Practical in that the tithe was restricted to agricultural produce, there were limitations as to its beneficiaries, and there is evidence of a changing legislation with respect to its implementation. These issues limit the ways in which the texts can be applied to a modern Christian context. In the following sections I will discuss various ways in which the underlying principles arising from the texts covered in the study may be appropriately applied to Christians.

5.4 Motivations for Giving

5.4.1 The Proprietorship of God

Malachi 3:8 accuses the people of Judah of robbery; withholding the tithes and offerings prescribed by the Law amounted to keeping for themselves what rightfully belonged to God. The designation of a certain percentage to be dedicated to the Lord signified his ultimate ownership of all that they possessed, as well as his provision in giving them the land to cultivate. Lack of fruitfulness in the produce of the land was a direct result of the people’s failure to give the required tithes. God’s ownership is demonstrated in his giving of the land of Canaan to the people of Israel (cf. Gen. 12:7), in his authority to allocate a tithe in Israel to the Levites (cf. Num.

18:21) and in his power to bless or to curse the yield of the land (Mal. 3:10-11). Hill (1998:305) understands the giving of tithes in this way, as an “act of worship acknowledging him as the Lord of the earth and the provider of Israel”. As Christians under the New Covenant, we have not been given a direct command as to a certain percentage to set aside unto the Lord, however, recognition of God’s ownership of all should still influence our giving.

Giving is one way we acknowledge that it is God who provides all that we have. Having an attitude towards possessions that includes this understanding of God’s ultimate proprietorship over all things is essential. The principle is demonstrated in the disposition of the believers in Acts, “not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own” (4:32) and in the assertion of 2 Corinthians 9:10 that God is the one who supplies the means out of which we give. We give out of gratitude, knowing that everything we have has been given to us by God. We also have a duty as “stewards” of the things God has entrusted to us. This stewardship includes serving one another by sharing with them the good gifts God has given (1 Pt. 4:10; Js. 1:17). Fisher (1984:1055) emphasises that a Christian’s stewardship includes “the use of his whole life as well as his money.” Malachi 3:8-12 serves as a warning to us of the consequences of bitterness and arrogance towards God, as well as an encouragement to continue to be a generous people even in the midst of adversity.

5.4.2 The Generosity of God

In addition to recognizing God’s ownership, we also have as an example the generosity of God, demonstrated primarily in his sacrificing and giving himself for us. God rebuked the people in Malachi’s day for their disdainful attitude towards him; they rebelled against him, accusing him of forsaking them, while failing to recognize all that he had done for them. If the people would return to him and do the things that were required of them, then they would see that he was ready to pour out abundant blessings on them. The theme of generosity is seen in Jesus’ instructions to his disciples in Matthew 10:8, “Freely you received, freely give.” It is Jesus’ example of selfless giving that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 8:9 to encourage the believers to “abound” in giving. Marshall (2004:287) refers to this example of Jesus

as the “fundamental basis” for the theology of giving set out in 2 Corinthians 8-9. In the same context, Paul finds it unnecessary to “command” the people to give; his expectation is that they will be generous in response to the liberality and grace of God, without coercion.

Kostenberger and Croteau (2006:250, 260) note that the fundamental component among the principles of giving they outline is that of a relationship with God, demonstrated by a willingness to do whatever he may ask. The foundation of this relationship is love; God’s love for us in giving himself, and our response of love in following his example. Kostenberger and Croteau sum up by commenting, “Generous and willing giving occurs when the motive is love.” (p. 250) The focus is on others, and not on self. Neglect of the Lord’s house and of those he appointed to minister in it was a recurring problem in post-exilic times; their struggles in re-establishing themselves in the land after years of captivity dampened their enthusiasm for the Lord’s house. The prophets had to draw the people’s focus back to their covenant obligations and remind them that support of the temple, the Levites and the priests was their responsibility. Giving is an act that demonstrates an outward focus, showing concern for others rather than being anxious about our own welfare.

5.4.3 The Faithfulness of God

One of the overall themes of Malachi 3:8-12 is the faithfulness of God, in contrast to the unfaithfulness of his people. This is a theme that has relevance for Christians as well. For Judah, their rebellion manifested itself in their neglect of the tithe (among other violations). This neglect had serious consequences for the nation; since the temple worship system was dependant upon these contributions to support those who ministered (the theme of support for religious workers will be discussed in the following section). Clendenen (2004:415) suggests that the various festivals, offerings and other religious observances in Israel served as “reminders that God had been faithful to his promises.” Therefore, neglect in any of these areas signified, among other things, a lack of trust in the Lord to do as he had said. For Christians, the application is simply that of remaining faithful and continuing to trust in the Lord, being confident in his character as an unchanging and faithful God who fulfils his

word. Where repentance is needed, the Christian response should be one of humility and obedience, rather than questioning and bitterness towards the correction of the Lord. As Wolf (1996:504) points out, one of the central issues being dealt with in Malachi is the people's doubt and questioning of the character of God, this despite his having revealed himself to them as a God of faithfulness and justice. Judah's failure to correct their waywardness when confronted by the prophets resulted in disaster for the nation.

The corporate nature of the indictment against God's people in Malachi 3 is a reason for caution in applying the text. The people as a nation are being addressed, their national rebellion is what has caused the problem, and the land as a whole suffers. It is inconsistent to apply one aspect of the text without change, while adapting another to fit the modern situation. If Christians are to be taught that tithing is required, based on Malachi 3, they should also be taught that the land and the nation will suffer if they neglect to do so. Stuart (1998:1369) emphasises this point, noting that Old Covenant promises were predominantly corporate and not individual. "Return to me" is the Lord's central message to Judah, and it is this message that has abiding significance for the people of God today.

5.5 The Object of Giving

5.5.1 Maintenance of the Lord's Workers

2 Chronicles 31, Nehemiah and Malachi 3 each deal with the restoration of the required tithe. The focus, as has been discussed in chapter 2, is on restoring support for the Levites and priests. I would suggest, based on the history of the tithe examined in chapter 2, that this support of religious personnel was the primary use of the tithe in Israel. When the tithe was neglected, the temple workers abandoned their duties and had to find other means of providing for their needs. It is evident that the people's failure to provide the required tithe for the Levites was viewed in a serious light, and that it had severe consequences for the nation and the land. Since the temple worship system was central to the religious practice of Israel, it is not surprising that anything that threatened that system had to be dealt with quickly. In the New Covenant era we are not tied to a central temple with its personnel and

ritual. However, we do still have those who labour among us as workers for the gospel, who need the support of the Christian community to carry out their duties.

Ellingworth (2000:700) notes that the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D brought an end to a functioning Levitical priesthood. It follows that the role of the tithe in providing a livelihood for the Levites would need to be applied in a different way. While there is no direct parallel drawn between the Levites and Christian workers in the New Testament, there is sufficient textual evidence to argue that Christian workers have a legitimate claim to receive financial support, just as the Levites received tithes as “compensation” for their work and for their lack of land inheritance. Malachi 3:10 stipulates that the tithe was literally for “food” for the temple personnel. While there is a temptation to spiritualize this “food” when applying the text, the primary application should retain the original intent of the text. The tithe had a fundamentally practical application that should be kept in mind in our Christian giving practices. Christian workers should be one of the main beneficiaries of our giving. Luke 8:3 indicates that Jesus and his disciples received support from various individuals “out of their private means.” Jesus’ instructions to those he sent out to preach the gospel (Lk. 10:7) suggests that their work deserved support in the same way that a labourer earned “wages”. In his argument concerning the right of gospel workers to receive support, Paul uses as an example those who “perform sacred services” and who “attend regularly to the altar” (1 Cor. 9:13). There may be an implied link here to the Levites and their work in the temple. Paul also tells the Corinthians that “the Lord directed” that those who share the gospel should “get their living” from the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14). Lenski (1963:367) notes that the sense of the verse is that support for “those engaged in proclaiming” is an “undeniable fact”. It is clear from these references that there is continuity between the two covenants in this respect; the New Testament upholds and teaches the principle of supporting Christian workers, especially teachers and preachers (cf. 1 Tim 5:17).

In the context of support for Christian workers it is worth noting that there is no parallel drawn in the New Testament between the temple storehouse and the local church. The instruction of Malachi 3:10 to bring the tithe into the storehouse does not mean that Christians should give all their tithes to their local congregation. Cooper (1970) argues that the historical context of Malachi, the traditional function of

the Old Testament temple storehouses and the distinction of the church as a community of believers, prevents any identification of the storehouse of Malachi 3:10 with the church today. Storerooms, or chambers, were part of the temple complex and were used to store agricultural produce. The temple was the central place of worship for God's people, and the central place from which to distribute food, a situation that is no longer the case today. The produce stored was used to supply food for the temple workers, most likely when they ministered in their rotations. In the Deuteronomic texts on tithing it is evident that not all tithes were stored in the temple storehouses. Some of it was consumed by the people at their festivals; some of it was stored in the local towns for distribution to the poor and other needy groups. If, as seems most likely, Malachi 3 is referring primarily to the Levitical tithe (cf. Num. 18), then it would follow that this tithe should be brought to the temple. Kaiser (1984:91) advises caution in using Malachi 3:10 to insist on "storehouse tithing", stating that "fairness to the text" does not allow such an application. Some (e.g., Hill 1998) have suggested that the "whole tithe" referred to in Malachi 3:10 may have been that portion of the tithe that the Levites presented to the priests, the "tithe of the tithe". This portion would have been stored at the temple for the use of the priests. The term is also used in Leviticus 27:30 and Numbers 18:21, where it refers to the fact that the whole tithe has been designated for the Levites.

The New Testament has no instruction as to where people should bring their contributions, only what they should be used for. From a practical point of view it makes sense to give to a local church, so that the contributions can be properly administered and applied to the various needs. In addition, it is consistent with New Testament teaching for a local congregation to provide financial support to its ministers, and to others in the community who are in need. However, this does not preclude individuals from giving to causes outside of their own congregations. Decisions concerning the causes or individuals to support with our financial resources should take into account examples of giving in the New Testament. The emphasis in passages such as Romans 12:13 and Galatians 6:10 seems to be on sharing with our fellow believers. At the same time, however, Galatians 6:10 encourages believers to "do good to all people". Lenski (1961:310-311) suggests that the "good" in this context refers to spiritual as well as material things. This sharing of the "good" with others must be done as the opportunity arises; Osborne

(1994:211) comments that “the timing for doing good is always right.” Our first responsibility is to the household of faith, but there is no limitation placed with regard to who can benefit from our good deeds. The context of Malachi 3, and the New Testament’s encouragement to do good as the opportunity arises, does not allow for a direct application to Christians of the instruction to bring all tithes to the “storehouse”.

5.5.2 The Poor

The Old Testament tithe laws made provision for those within the community who were disadvantaged in some way. In the context of the people of Israel these included widows, orphans and resident aliens. Each of these segments of the community, for various reasons, was unable to provide for themselves adequately. Gowan (1987:347) observes that the common denominator in the list is that each group represented people of “precarious social status”. Deuteronomy 14:28-29 and 26:12 indicate that special provision was made for these groups; the third-year “poor” tithe was designated for this purpose. Malachi 3:5 warns of judgment against those who oppress (or defraud) the widow, orphan and alien. In discussing the use of the tithe, Clendenen (2004:416) comments that, “The tithe, like the Sabbath year, was to benefit the poor and the landless, thereby showing love to both God and neighbour.”

This concern for the poor is carried over into the New Testament; it was the reason for the collection of 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8-9, and the “pillars” of the Jerusalem church made a point of appealing to Paul to “remember the poor” (Gal. 2:10). The poor mentioned in the latter passage refers particularly to the poor among the believers in Jerusalem (so Lenski 1961; Osborne 1994; Martyn 1997). Elsewhere, giving to the poor is depicted as one characteristic of believers who understand the priority of the kingdom over earthly possessions (cf. Lk. 11:41; 12:33, 1 Tim. 6:18). Barnett (1988:152) points to the parable of the good Samaritan as an example of our responsibility towards anyone who is in need. The believers in Jerusalem showed their concern for one another by sharing their possessions and ensuring that none of their number was in need (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35). The apostles appointed men to see that there was equitable distribution of food for the widows in the new Christian community (Acts 6). The above references show a

variety of methods being employed to address the needs of the poor, but one overall principle. Providing material support to those in need is a valid, important and scriptural use of our resources as Christians.

5.5.3 Personal Benefit

Malachi assured the people of Judah that they would receive material blessings, manifested in the restoration of the land to abundant productivity, if they would be faithful in giving the required tithes and offerings. Once again, the context of Malachi 3, and the plain meaning of the text, must be borne in mind. Blessing in that instance meant an end to the plagues of drought and pestilence that were rendering the land agriculturally barren. The reward is corporate, tied to the people as a nation and their covenant relationship with God.

While material reward may accompany obedience in giving, Paul emphasises the spiritual aspect by the various terms he uses to describe the collection for the saints in 2 Corinthians 8-9. He refers to giving as a “grace”, and urges the Corinthians to excel in this grace, even as they seek to excel in other spiritual graces (2 Cor. 8:7). When giving is seen in this way, as an activity that provokes spiritual growth, it takes on significance that goes beyond the material. In the same context, Paul indicates that willingness and readiness in giving is “proof” of their love, that it is sincere. In that sense, giving is a demonstration of faith and works; the external flows out of the internal. When Paul speaks of material blessings related to giving, he stresses that they are for the purpose of *more giving* (2 Cor. 9:8-11). The Macedonians “first gave themselves to the Lord” (2 Cor. 8:5); their generosity began with their dedication to the Lord, a spiritual matter. Matera (1996:83-85) refers to the teaching of Jesus regarding possessions, and suggests that treasure in heaven will be the result for followers of Christ who are willing to share their wealth.

Paul encourages the Corinthians to complete the collection because it will be to their “advantage” to do so (2 Cor. 8:10). In Barnett’s (1997:409) view, Paul here equates “what is helpful” with that which builds up the church, citing the use of the verb in 1 Corinthians 10:23 and 2 Corinthians 12:1. Lenski (1963:1140) interprets this advantage as being a “bestowal of a new measure of grace” for the Corinthians; the completion of the collection will benefit the givers as well as the receivers. It is

evident that in some sense other than a material one, the willing and eager giving of this gift brings a blessing to the givers. But perhaps the most significant benefit to result from giving is the thanksgiving and glory to God that is expressed by the recipients of the gift (2 Cor. 9:11-13). Giving is ultimately a spiritual exercise, with spiritual results. The thanksgiving and glory to God bring us full circle, back to the motives for giving, which are founded upon God's character and his activity on our behalf.

5.6 Methods of Giving

Malachi 3:8-12 has no direct bearing on the issue of how Christians should give. The concept of "storehouse tithing" has been discussed briefly in section 5.4.1, and the conclusion drawn that the storing of tithes in the temple chambers cannot be applied to a local Christian church. In addition to the chambers of the central sanctuary, local storehouses were also employed to gather tithed goods and to facilitate distribution. This system was practical for the particular circumstances of Israel at the time, and reflected the administration of an entire system that does not correlate to the situation today. It is necessary to look to the New Testament in order to discover any clues as to how Christians should give.

Once again, when applying the guidelines set out in 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8-9 it is necessary to keep in mind that the context is of a specific collection for a specific need. Witherington (2010:149) comments that Paul's silence on the issue of a regular collection for the local congregation indicates that, "He just assumes they know that since they are brothers and sisters in Christ, they take care of their own". Nevertheless, the texts discussed in chapter 4 do contain some general principles pertaining to the collection of a gift for those in need, and I believe that these principles are transferable. The first guideline is that there was some regularity in the giving. Paul singles out the "first day of every week" (1 Cor. 16:2) for the putting aside of each person's contribution. Another way of putting it would be "week by week". The reason for Paul's instruction about this was so that the contributions would be ready when he came and that no "last minute" collecting would be needed. Garland (2003:753) comments that "regularly setting a portion aside each week makes it easier to give a larger amount." It also implies some

thoughtfulness on the part of the donor, in considering what to give and in carefully setting it aside on a regular basis. Thiselton (2006:294) observes that the regular and considered setting aside of a portion ensures that we will always be in a position to give as the need arises. Giving does not need to be spontaneous in order to be true giving, and in fact the apostle indicates that it is better for the giving to be “completed” in advance.

The second component involves the administration of the collection. 1 Corinthians 16:3 and 2 Corinthians 8:18-24 show the apostle’s care in ensuring that the contribution would be handled in such a way that there would be no question of fraud. The local congregation would select their own representatives to be sent to Jerusalem with the gift, and Paul takes pains to set forth the qualifications of the men he will send to the Corinthians to make final preparations. The goal is to ensure that the gift is applied to the purpose for which it was given, and to have the entire process be above reproach. Nehemiah 13:12-13 demonstrates the same principle, in that Nehemiah appointed “reliable” men to oversee the storehouse and to facilitate proper distribution of the tithes. With regard to the men Paul commended to the Corinthians, Harris (2005:595-596) lists three areas in which they were qualified for the task: (1) Personal, in that Paul refers to them as “partners” and “brothers”. (2) Ecclesial, in that they were well respected among the Macedonian churches. (3) Christological, in that they were men who’s “character and conduct” brought honour to Christ. The above qualifications would be useful guidelines when appointing those who are to administer church funds. Those responsible for administering what is given should be trustworthy and approved by others to represent the givers, distributing the gifts according to the purpose for which they have been given.

5.7 The Amount to Give

The amount that a person should give is the crux of the matter when dealing with the application of Malachi 3:8-12 and other Old Testament tithing texts. Is Malachi 3:8-12 a command to Christians to give ten percent of their income to the church? I have attempted to show that the legislation surrounding the tithe in the Old Testament is no longer binding on Christians since the inauguration of the New Covenant, and that tithing falls under the umbrella of the entire sacrificial system

because of its central purpose of supporting the Levites. Some (e.g., Burkett 1991; Alcorn 2003) have proposed that Christians should give, at the very least, a minimum of ten percent. It is suggested that ten percent was the minimum that the Israelites were required to give; therefore Christians should not do any less. However, it is likely that one offering of ten percent was not all that the Israelites were required to give (cf. Deut. 14; 26) and that the total possibly could have been as much as twenty two percent (estimates differ as to what the total percent would have been, assuming there were three tithes). If this was the case, then giving ten percent would not be a proper fulfilment of the tithe laws. In addition, Malachi 3:8 includes the withholding of “offerings” in its indictment against the people. As has been discussed in chapter 3, these offerings were not voluntary, but part of the entire range of contributions that the people were required to give.

The accusation has been made that those who do not support tithing for Christians are attempting to excuse themselves from any kind of giving (so Taylor 1991; Kendall 1982). In examining New Testament texts for guidelines to govern Christian giving it becomes clear that this accusation is unfounded, since the New Testament embraces generous, even sacrificial giving, which may go far beyond ten percent. My motivation in rejecting tithing as the standard for Christians is to replace it with a theologically sound, New Testament centred model for Christian giving that avoids the pitfalls of forcing legal requirements that were temporary in nature onto the Christian life.

If ten percent is no longer a requirement for Christians, then what amount should we give? The question is answered by returning to the results of the study conducted in chapter 4. The principles extracted from that study include the following guides to help determine what amount is appropriate for us to give: (1). “As he may prosper” (1 Cor. 16:2). (2). “According to their ability, and beyond their ability” (2 Cor. 8:3). (3). “According to what a person has, not according to what he does not have” (2 Cor. 8:12). MacArthur (2000:77) interprets Paul’s guidelines in 2 Corinthians 8-9 as meaning that the Corinthians had “complete discretion to give as God prospers them.” While there is no specific amount indicated in these verses, the overall message is that a person should give in accordance with the measure of prosperity he enjoys, and more as the Lord enables. The amount will be different from person

to person. An insistence on ten percent for everyone means that some give generously (in proportion to their income), while to others ten percent is a paltry portion that does not come close to being generous. The specific amount to be given is for each individual to decide, privately (2 Cor. 9:7). In a sense, prescribing a set percentage is easier; it requires little thought on the part of the giver and allows an individual to suppose that they have fulfilled their responsibility in the area of giving. Lenski (1963:760) is emphatic on this point, stating, “The New Testament knows only the spirit of voluntary giving, and its only directive as to the amount is Paul’s evangelical rule which is devoid of even the appearance of legalism: ‘as he may prosper.’”

5.8 Conclusion

In light of the relationship of the Old and New Covenants that has been discussed, I do not find support for the employment of Malachi 3:8-12 in teaching Christian tithing. Some modification must take place in order to properly apply the text to a modern context. To do otherwise creates problems of inconsistency and is not hermeneutically sound. The modification must take into account the canonical context of the specific text, as well as any New Testament teaching related to the subject. This approach necessarily prevents a straightforward and prescriptive application of Malachi 3:8-12 to the Christian. However, it allows for the fundamental and underlying principles to be applied in a way that is consistent and faithful to the text.

Since the New Testament does not contain any explicit teaching on tithing for believers, it is necessary to include principles and directives from the broader New Testament teaching related to the subject of giving. Malachi 3 is not irrelevant; it is a reminder that rebellion against God has negative and severe consequences, that he remains faithful when his people are not, that he is a “rewarder of those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6) and that he is concerned about and has made provision for those who do his work, as well as those who are in need. The New Testament is not silent on the subject of giving, and its teaching must be the primary source of our theology in this, as it is in other aspects of Christian life and practice.

Chapter 6

Summary and Conclusion

6.1 Objectives and Methodology

This study has sought to answer several questions regarding the applicability to Christians of the practice of tithing. The main research question was, “What are the implications of Malachi 3:8-12 for Christians with reference to tithing?” The first step in answering the main problem was to undertake an examination of key Old Testament texts that relate to tithing. The objective was to discover what the biblical history of the tithe revealed about its origins, development, theological significance and function. These findings would provide a backdrop to the Malachi 3 text. Step two was to determine what is the historical context and meaning of Malachi 3:8-12. This was done by conducting an exegetical study of the text, highlighting significant terms or phrases, and discussing any pertinent textual variants. Exegesis of the text would provide a solid basis for application. Step three was to conduct a study of selected New Testament texts in order to extract some general principles about giving. Two main passages of scripture were selected, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8-9. The question of what the texts reveal about New Testament giving was answered by an exegesis of selected verses, as well as referencing other relevant New Testament passages. The final step consisted of two phases; answering the question of what is the Christian’s relation to the Law, and suggesting what the implications of Malachi 3:8-12 might be, including any practical applications of the study as a whole.

The methodology adopted was based on Mouton (2001) and Smith (2008). The study comprised of qualitative textual data analysis and included both deductive and inductive reasoning. Much of the study involved biblical exegesis, utilizing established tools and principle of hermeneutics.

6.2 Summary of Research

6.2.1 Chapter 2

Chapter two consisted of an overview of selected Old Testament texts relevant to the subject of tithing. The chapter was divided into three main sections: (1) Pre-Mosaic tithing. (2) Mosaic tithe laws. (3) Post-Mosaic tithe texts. The first section sought to establish the relevance of the Pre-Mosaic tithe to the wider topic of tithing, and to discover how tithing was practiced before the Mosaic Law. The second section dealt with the history of the tithe in the Mosaic era, paying particular attention to the number of tithes and the use of the tithe. Differences in scholarly opinion were noted in connection with the number of tithes required by the Law. The third section focused on texts related to the neglect of the tithe and the various attempts to restore the practice in post-exilic Israel. The final text provided insight into the situation in the northern kingdom with its moral decline, even as external worship was zealously pursued.

6.2.2 Chapter 3

Chapter three was devoted to a study of Malachi 3:8-12. The historical setting of the book was described, including its place in relation to the book of Nehemiah. The immediate context was established by referring to the preceding verses, with brief discussion and comments related to their bearing on the content of verses 8-12. Terms of particular interest, especially as they relate to the use of Malachi 3:8-12 for teaching Christian tithing, were examined and discussed in more detail. These terms included “statute”, “rob”, “offerings”, “whole tithe”, “storehouse”, “food” and “windows of heaven”. Malachi’s use of Deuteronomic language, particularly the curse/blessing formula, was highlighted. The function of the tithe in providing support for the Levites (and therefore support of the temple worship system) was suggested as the central reason for the urgency in seeking its restoration.

6.2.3 Chapter 4

Chapter four marked a shift in focus from Old to New Testament. The initial task was to ascertain whether Matthew 23:23 and Hebrews 7:1-10 should be included or excluded from the discussion, based on the extent to which they contained principles applicable to Christian giving. After examining their context and central message, both texts were subsequently excluded. The remainder of the chapter consisted of exegesis of two main texts, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8-9. The texts gave insight into the planning and carrying out of a specific giving project among several early Christian communities. In connection with 2 Corinthians 8-9, the various terms used to describe the offering and its collection were highlighted, these terms provided a basis for conclusions concerning the theological significance of the gift and the impact on the givers. While the main elements of the texts related to the collecting of contributions for the poor among the believers in Jerusalem, general principles and concepts were also evident. Additional and supplementary texts having a bearing on the subject of giving were employed to add breadth to the study. These texts contained either related principles or gave insight into actual practices of the New Testament church. The chapter concluded with a numbered list of general principles extracted from the study of the selected texts.

6.2.4 Chapter 5

Chapter five began with a treatise on the relationship of Christians to the Law. The section provided a bridge between the study presented in chapters two and three, and the findings of chapter four. It was noted that a Christian's theological orientation is the determining factor in how the Old Testament is applied. After briefly summarizing the main elements of three theological systems, I presented my particular theological framework as being a combination of elements from Dispensational and New Covenant theology. The remainder of the chapter was divided into four main segments dealing with motives for giving, the object of giving, methods of giving and the amount to give. Each section contained recommended applications of the study, correlating to general principles suggested by the results of the study.

6.3 Summary of Findings

6.3.1 What is the historical and theological background of tithing in the Old Testament?

To answer this question I set out to survey the Old Testament texts that refer specifically to tithing. With reference to the history of tithing in Israel, Guthrie (1962) has commented that it is impossible to accurately reconstruct the history of the tithe. One fact that was established is that tithing was not unique to the Israelites, but was practiced by other Ancient Near Eastern cultures. From Genesis to Malachi the picture that emerges is that of a practice of uncertain origin, codified in small measure by the Mosaic Law, subject to changing circumstances, at times neglected by the people of Israel and reinstated in ways that did not necessarily correspond to the original legislation in every detail. There is no mention of tithing before the Genesis 14 account of Abram and Melchizedek. The lack of textual data prior to this narrative makes it impossible to state conclusively whether tithing was mandated by God before the Mosaic Law was given. From the two narrative passages in Genesis I concluded that tithing was not a compulsory practice, but a spontaneous and voluntary response prompted by gratitude or worship. Abram's tithe was given out of goods he had captured after a military defeat, whereas the later legislation specified personal property in the form of agricultural goods and livestock as being subject to the tithe. Jacob promised to give a tithe out of "all that You give me" (Gen. 28:22). There is no further mention of Jacob's tithe, therefore no indication as to how he fulfilled his promise.

The Mosaic tithe functioned primarily as support for the Levites, in lieu of wages and land inheritance. This function ensured the continuation of the temple worship system, providing its personnel with a living so that they could devote themselves to the service of the Lord's house. Beyond this function, Deuteronomy requires that the tithe be used for the support of widows, orphans and aliens, a group representative of the potentially vulnerable of society. One additional function of the tithe in Deuteronomy was to make provision for each person to come to the central sanctuary to celebrate the annual religious festivals. In this instance the tither actually consumed his tithe (or at least part of it) at the celebration. After

Deuteronomy there is no further mention of tithing as a regular practice in Israel until 2 Chronicles 31.

Two of the three remaining texts deal with attempted restorations of the tithe after periods of neglect. In 2 Chronicles 31 and Nehemiah 10, 12 and 13 the tithe is linked exclusively to the Levites, with the main motivation for its reinstatement being to provide a means for the temple personnel to return to their religious duties. In these texts additional elements are added to the process of collecting tithes, for example, in Nehemiah 13 men are appointed to take charge of the storehouses and to oversee distribution of the tithes. Amos 4 is an indictment against the northern tribes and does not add significantly to information about the history of the tithe. The text confirms that tithing was practiced in the northern kingdom, but it is not clear from the passage whether the practice conformed to the Mosaic legislation. In relation to the Old Testament as a whole, tithing receives fairly little attention. The standout features of its history are its role as a support for religious workers and for those who are economically and socially disadvantaged.

6.3.2 What is the historical context and meaning of Malachi 3:8-12?

This question was addressed by conducting an exegetical study of the text. This study revealed that the wider historical context of Malachi is that of post-exilic Judah, facing the challenges of re-establishing themselves in the land. The period was marked by a general drifting away from God resulting in abandonment of their covenant responsibilities. This neglect included failure to pay tithes to support the Levites. The book of Nehemiah is closely associated with the events depicted in Malachi, although the precise chronology is open to debate.

The meaning of the text is relatively straightforward; the prophet is warning the people that they must return to the Lord. One particular element of their return is highlighted, that of the payment of tithes. Withholding of the tithes was considered to be robbing from God. The text indicates that the people were suffering the consequences of their rebellion, probably in relation to agricultural failure brought about by drought and pestilence. These consequences are most likely linked to covenant curses (cf. Deut. 28, Neh. 10). In order to turn the situation around, and receive the blessings promised, the people must once again bring the “whole tithe”

into the “storehouse”. The meaning of the “whole tithe” in this context is not certain. The term could mean that the people were withholding part of the tithe, or it could be a reference to Leviticus and Numbers, where the instruction is that “all the tithe” is designated for the Levites. Some scholars view this as referring to the portion of the tithe that was given to the priests, the “tithe of the tithe”. Based on the connection with Leviticus and Numbers, my conclusion was that the term is simply referring to the fact that all tithes belong to God and should be given as directed. It was determined that the “storehouse” was part of the temple complex, used to store agricultural produce. These stores were then distributed to the Levites and other temple personnel as they fulfilled their duties. The focus of the text is two-fold; return to the Lord, and provide the required tithe for the temple personnel.

6.3.3 What do the selected texts reveal about New Testament giving principles?

Exegesis of the two main texts, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 and 2 Corinthians 8-9, along with reference to selected supplementary texts, revealed several general characteristics of New Testament giving. These are: (1) It is viewed as a “grace”, something in which a believer can “excel”, just as he does in spiritual attributes like faith. (2) It is voluntary; each individual deciding what amount to give. (3) The amount given is proportionate to the individual’s resources. (4) Generosity is exemplified and encouraged. (5) God is the one who provides the means to give. (6) The recipients include teachers and preachers of the gospel, as well as the poor (specifically the poor among fellow believers). Other vulnerable groups are possibly included, such as widows. The characteristics of New Testament giving were found to correspond to the tithe system in some respects, such as its beneficiaries. In other respects the New Testament example is a departure from the tithe system, particularly in its voluntary nature and its silence as to specific amounts.

6.3.4 What is the relationship of the Christian to the Old Testament, and to the Mosaic Law in particular?

This discussion provided a bridge between chapters 2 through 4, and the applications suggested in chapter 5. A brief survey of the theological issues that

surround the question revealed that there were three main theological perspectives in approaching the subject of the believer and the Law. These are Covenant, Dispensational and New Covenant theology. The latter two systems were found to be more hermeneutically sound and more consistent with the overall teaching of the New Testament with regard to the role of the Law.

Specific findings included the following: (1) The Old Covenant was flawed, in that it revealed sin but was unable to deal with sin. It was also incomplete, requiring fulfilment. (2) It has been replaced by a “new and better” covenant. (3) Christ fulfilled the Law, bringing closure to its role in the purposes of God. Believers fulfil the Law by obeying Christ’s command to love one another. (4) The New Testament describes the role of the Law (and in fact of scripture in general) as training and pointing to Christ. As mentioned above, the Law also served to reveal sin. (5) Continuity exists between the covenants in the areas of purpose and intent. The direction of scripture is progressive, pointing ultimately to Christ. The “spirit” of the Law is preserved in Jesus’ teaching and in the New Testament in general. (6) Discontinuity exists in the application of the Law and in adherence to the “letter” of the Law.

6.3.5 What are the practical implications of Malachi 3:8-12, and the study as a whole, for believers today?

In light of the findings regarding the relation between believers and the Law, I concluded that Malachi 3:8-12 could not be applied to believers, in so far as it commands a tithe. The passage cannot be applied prescriptively, since it relates to a practice that is based on the Mosaic Law, which has been superseded by a new system. The problems that arise in attempting to apply dogmatically Malachi’s instructions on tithing are significant, and include issues such as how the tithe is to be used, the items that should be tithed and the Levites as the main beneficiaries.

I concluded that the study of Malachi 3:8-12 in conjunction with the selected New Testament texts on giving suggested the following principles as being transferable and applicable to believers: (1) All resources belong to God; it is his expectation that we steward them appropriately. (2) God’s character is unchanging; our response to this is trust and faithfulness. (3) In broad terms, our giving should benefit Christian

workers and the poor. This use of our resources is consistent with the way the tithe functioned in Israel; in Malachi 3 tithes literally represented “food” for the temple workers. (4) Giving is rewarded, but not always in material blessings. The emphasis in Malachi 3 is blessing for the nation as whole, and the land. 2 Corinthians 8-9 indicates that material blessings that result from generous giving are for the express purpose of stimulating more giving. The New Testament also envisages spiritual blessings accruing to those who willingly share their resources. (5) The “storehouse” of Malachi 3 does not correspond to individual churches; believers are not compelled to direct all their giving to their local congregation. However, practical concerns warrant that members give to their own church communities, and the New Testament’s instruction to “share with those who labour among you” indicates that it is appropriate for believers to support their pastors and teachers with financial contributions. (6) Although giving should be primarily directed to fellow believers, the New Testament encourages believers to “do good to all”. (7) The requirement that each person give at least ten percent is not supported by the New Testament. In this regard Malachi 3 is not applicable to Christians. The “each one of you” of 1 Corinthians 16:2 and the “each one” of 2 Corinthians 9:7, indicate that all were expected to participate in the gift. However, no fixed amount is specified, only that it be “as he may prosper” (1 Cor. 16:2) and “as he has purposed in his heart” (2 Cor. 9:7). The application is that giving should be practiced by all believers, and that the amount should correspond to each one’s ability in terms of resources.

I believe that the results of the study have confirmed my hypothesis, that Malachi 3:8-12 cannot be applied to Christians with regard to its command to pay the required tithes. Comparing Malachi 3:8-12 with the findings of the study as a whole revealed one possible implication for believers, that is, that the role of the tithe in providing support for the Levites echoes the New Testament’s teaching on providing financial support for Christian preachers and teachers. However, Christians would be better served by studying and applying the New Testament’s handling of the broader subject of giving, rather than looking to the practice of tithing for guidance in this area. Rather than excusing believers from giving, the New Testament promotes generosity, fulfilling and furthering the intent of the tithing laws in singling out support for Christian preachers and teachers and the poor as appropriate uses of our gifts. As believers, having the privilege of being in a relationship with God that is based

upon the “new covenant in My blood” (Lk. 22:20), in response to his love, let us practice giving that is generous, joyful and above all to the praise of his glory.

7.1 Further Research

Individual aspects of this study have been relatively well researched. The main area of weakness is in the practical application of the resulting principles. I believe the subject would benefit from field study, comparing the approach of different churches and the resulting response of the members, to ascertain whether there is any significant disparity in giving levels between “tithe-teaching” congregations and “grace-giving” congregations. An additional experiment could involve “test driving” the two approaches in two similar settings and comparing the results. The work of van Rensburg (2002) in this area is one example of the kind of study I feel would be of value. van Rensburg’s study compared the giving practices of the target group to the teaching of their denominations, as well as to “Biblical injunctions.” There are several organizations devoted to assisting churches in the area of finances and stewardship (e.g., Crown Financial Ministries). In a brief (and admittedly rudimentary) survey of a few of these organizations, I found that they lacked a thoroughly developed theology of giving, grounded in the New Testament. I feel that the area of Christian giving would benefit from a comprehensive curriculum that could be utilized by pastors and other Christian leaders to educate believers and clear up confusion about tithing and giving.

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