

## God's Generous People, Part 1

### Some thoughts from the Old Testament

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## God's Generous People

"You shall not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbour. <sup>8</sup>Rather, open your hand generously to them.... <sup>10</sup>Give generously to them and do so without a hard heart; then because of this Yahweh your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. <sup>11</sup>There will never cease to be needy people in the land. Therefore I command you to open your hand generously to your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land" (Deut 15:7-8, 10-11, my translation).

## God's Generous People

1. God's covenant people were chosen to reflect Yahweh to the nations (Exod 19:4-6).
2. The land belongs to God and we are stewards (Ps 24:1-2; Lev 25:23; Deut 8:11-18).
3. Blessed to be a blessing (Gen 12:2-3).

## God's Generous People

Their generosity included tithes, offerings, as well as other practices to support the poor and disadvantaged.



## The Tithe(s)

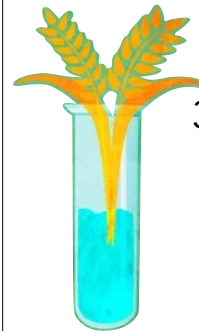
Tithe = simply means "tenth" (*ma'ser* מעשר).

- Used to refer to religious and secular taxes.
- In the OT was to support the Levites (and priests), who did not receive a tribal land inheritance.
- Considered "holy to Yahweh."

## The Tithe(s)

1. The Levitical Tithe – an obligatory tithe to support the Levites and Priests (Num 18:21-32; Lev 27:30-33).
2. The Festival Tithe – portions of your tithe eaten together with temple personnel as part of annual festival days such as Passover, Pentecost, and Booths (Deut 14:22-27; 12:5-19).

## The Tithe(s)



3. The Social Welfare Tithe – a triennial tithe made available to the Levites as well as the poor and disadvantaged (Deut 14:28-29).

## The Tithe(s)

Depending on how you understand these passages, the annual tithe was anywhere between 10% and 23% of an extended family's income.

Only those with land tithed.

The tithe applied primarily to crops and livestock.

Understanding of the tithe changed over time.

## The Tithe(s)

"The truth is that when it comes to our time, talents, and treasures, it is not 10 percent that belongs to God, but 100 percent. And because of the cross of Christ, we again fully belong to him; thus, as we image Jesus, we offer him everything (Rom 12:1-2). In other words, such giving cannot be easily calculated on one's tax returns" (Kelly Kapic, *God So Loved, He Gave*, 153).

## Offerings & Contributions

There were also a whole collection of different voluntary offerings that could be given in different circumstances (cf. Deut 12).

- Votive offerings when a vow is made (Lev 27).
- Freewill offerings (Exod 35:10-29; Lev 7).
- Special gifts and donations.

## Social Welfare Laws

Generous laws concerning agricultural practices:

- Sabbath Year – leaving land fallow every 7th year to alleviate the needs of the poor (Exod 23:10-11; Lev 25:1-7, 18-22).
- Gleaning – leaving part of your crops unharvested so the poor can collect (Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut 24:19-22; cf. Ruth).

## Social Welfare Laws



- Scrumpling – allowing people to eat from one’s vineyard or field to satisfy hunger (Deut 23:24-25).

## Social Welfare Laws

Generous laws concerning lending practices:

- Generous Loans – prohibition of charging interest to community members (Exod 22:25; Lev 25:35-38; Deut 23:19-20; cf. Ps 15:5).

## Social Welfare Laws

- Generous Lending Practices – limits on what sort of pledge may be taken for a loan (Exod 22:26-27; Deut 24:6, 10-13, 17).
- Debt Relief – remission of debts in the seventh year, similar to the Sabbath principle (Deut 15:1-3; cf. Jubilee year in Lev 25).

## Conclusions

All of these diverse practices underscore the ancient Israel, God’s covenant people, were called to be generous towards each other and especially the poor and disadvantaged.

## Conclusions

Our context is very different than that of the Old Testament and so it is unlikely that practices can (or should) be easily transferred.

That being said, there are some principles and ideals that we can learn from and try to build into our own lives and our life together.

## Conclusions

“Tight fists or open hands? Are property and land to be grasped and exploited to maximize profit, or enjoyed as the gift of God and shared with others? Are marginal people to be utilized or ignored, depending on their economic potential, or embraced as fellow-members of the community and enabled to live their lives to the full? Are justice and generosity the guiding principles of our economic activity, or greed and jealousy? ...

## Conclusions

... The Old Testament laws on wealth and poverty leave us in no doubt about their vision for the life of the people of God. The Old Testament historians and prophets give us some idea of how far ancient Israel realized—and failed to realize—this vision. It remains for us to consider whether we are willing and able to make the vision a reality in the twenty-first century” (David Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands*, 315).

## Conclusions

The Gift of the Holy Spirit  
and the Spirit of Generosity

