

Lesson Seven: Stewardship of Our Wealth/Money

Objective: To understand the teachings of the Old Testament regarding stewardship of our possessions, specifically about money.

Read: Leviticus 27:30; Deuteronomy 14:22–29

Introduction

One afternoon, Grandpa strode into his house, pockets bulging with treats for his grandchildren. As he settled into his creaking rocking chair, the children clamored around him with expectant faces, each pushing and shoving to be the first to see what Grandpa had brought them.

The grey-haired man dug deep into his pockets and pulled out a fistful of candies, handing each child a favorite treat. When he finished, he leaned back in his chair with a smile of contentment to watch them tear at the wrappings.

On his left, two jealous brothers argued over whose flavor of bonbons tasted better. Another child sat at his feet munching a bar of chocolate. Suddenly, a tiny red-haired toddler patted her grandpa on the arm. Concern furrowed her brow. "Would you like some of my M&Ms, Grandpa?" she asked. She continued, "I want you to have the first one." "Why, thank you, I think I will," he smiled, and carefully removed a couple of M&Ms and popped them into his mouth. Then he wrapped his arms tightly around her, engulfing her happy face.

This story is by no means a perfect illustration but perhaps it helps us to understand the stewardship of our money—giving back to God the first part of what He has given us. Offering our money to God accomplishes the following:

- Acknowledges God as the source and owner of all that we possess.
- Is a voluntary act of worship.
- Teaches us to put God first.
- Is a practical guideline for systematic giving.
- Provides spiritual release and blessing.

The Old Testament contains many references to money and possessions. The concept of stewardship was an integral part of their history. Tithing—giving one tenth of one's wealth to God—was a way of life for the Hebrews. The Old Testament also contains instructions for giving a portion of the first-fruits of each harvest to God and making additional contributions through such practices as the cancellation of debt in sabbatical years (i.e., every seventh year); and even more extravagant measures to banish poverty and hardship in Jubilee years (i.e., every fiftieth year).

Bible Study

- What was the first act of worship recorded in the Scriptures (Genesis 4:3-7)?

- Why was one sacrifice rejected and the other accepted?

- What did Noah do as soon as he left the ark (Genesis 8:20-21)? What was God's response to Noah's actions?

- The first example of tithing is recorded Abram returned from his victory over the kings of the east (Genesis 14:17-20). Of what did Abram tithe? Why would Abram give a tithe to Melchizedek?
- What did God command those under the Law of Moses to do (Leviticus 27:30-33; Deuteronomy 12:5-6, 11)?

In addition to the tithes, Israelites were commanded to give the first-fruits of their crops and livestock (Proverbs 3:9). The first-fruits of a harvest are usually the biggest and best. The Hebrews were expected to give their best to God—the cream off the top. Also, every fiftieth year was to be the year of Jubilee in which everything returned to the original owners and all debts were cancelled. This kept the people of Israel from becoming impoverished and prevented the development of two social classes—the "haves" and the "have nots."

- What was included in the commandment to give God the first-fruits of everything (Exodus 34:20)?
- How does the Law of Jubilee compare to American "capitalism" (Leviticus 25)?

Personal Reflection

Israelites were also expected to give "free-will" offerings to the Lord (Deuteronomy 16:10-11). The nature and amount of the free-will offering was left to the liberality and gratefulness of the giver. Free-will offerings were made when Israel built the Tabernacle. In fact, so much was given that Moses had to restrain the people from giving (Exodus 36:6-7).

- What is your understanding about tithing?

As believers in Christ, we are under grace, rather than the Old Testament Law. Whereas the Law in itself did not provide eternal life for those who attempted to keep it (Galatians 2:16), we have received life by the favor of God though we do not deserve it and could not possibly earn it.

- Based on what Christ has done for us and the divine favor shown to us, do we have a **higher** or **lower** motivation and standard for stewardship of our money than those under the Law?

