

**AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF
MALACHI 3:6-12
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TITHING**

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Abstract

This research maintains that tithing is a biblical principle, which God instructed man to fulfil and that it has to be executed with joy and gratitude. Many ancient cultures practiced tithing. It was based, as far as the Old Testament is concerned, mainly on theological perspectives rather than political, humanitarian or economic motives, although it might be difficult to separate the theological perspectives from the other perspectives.

The principles regarding sacrifices and tithes were intended to encourage inward and outward actions (Lev 27:33). Israel, by giving the tithe, solemnly declares that they hand a portion back to the One who has made them prosperous (Deut 26:10-15). By giving the tithe they recognised and acknowledged the right of the priests and Levites to receive support for their spiritual service they performed on behalf of the people. Tithing was an integral part of the social system that was established in the Mosaic laws. The New Testament emphasises love as the basis for giving.

The early New Testament church existed in a different social context, and thus the principle regarding tithing or giving was adapted to the new setting and the new theological realities. Tithes were still given.

The study showed that the nation was obliged to tithe as a response to God's demand of repentance. Tithe is rooted firmly in the healthy relationship between a person and his God.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie het bevind dat die gee van tiendes 'n Bybelse beginsel is wat God die mens beveel het om te doen en dat dit uitgevoer moet word in blydskap en met vrymoedigheid. Baie antieke kulture het die beginsel van tiendes geken. Sover dit die Ou Testament aanbetref was dit meer gebaseer op teologiese perspektiewe as politiese, humanitêre of ekonomiese motiewe, alhoewel dit moeilik is om hierdie motiewe te skei van die teologiese perspektiewe.

Die doel met die beginsels in verband met die offers en tiendes was om innerlike en uiterlike aksies te motiveer (Lev 27:33). Deur tiendes te gee, het Israel eerbiedig bevestig dat hulle 'n deel terug gee aan die Een wat hulle voorspoedig gemaak het (Deut 26:10-15). Deur tiendes te gee was hulle bewus van en het hulle erkenning gegee aan die reg van die priesters en Leviëte ondersteuning te kry vir hulle geestelike diens wat hulle namens die volk verrig het. Tiendes was 'n intergrale deel van die sosiale sisteem wat deur die Mosaïse wette bevestig is. Die Nuwe Testament beklemtoon liefde as die basis om te gee.

Die vroeë Nuwe-Testamentiese kerk het in 'n ander sosiale konteks bestaan, en daarom ook die beginsels in verband met die gee van tiendes aangepas by die nuwe konteks en die nuwe teologiese realiteite. Tiendes is steeds gegee in die Nuwe Testament.

Die studie wys dat die volk verplig was om tiendes te gee as 'n antwoord op God se eis tot bekering. Tiendes is diep bevestig in 'n gesonde verhouding tussens die mens en sy God.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Formulating the problem

1.1.1 Background

This study is prompted by the practical circumstances in the Black Reformed Churches in South Africa. Generally speaking most of if not all the Reformed Churches in Synod Midlands suffer a great deal of financial hardship due to the fact of total dependency. Ten percent of one's income is not and was not a principle for how members have to contribute or give.

A flat rate system which is still applicable even up to this day has been the principle mostly in use or in others, people, even leaders, despite the fact that they have income, do not give at all. Adams (1975:317) argues "In 1 Timothy 3:1-5, proven managerial ability is set forth prominently as a crucial qualification for discharging the ministerial duties enjoyed by God... (2) that management is a necessary part of such duties ... and (3) that the church suffers when such management fails to be forthcoming."

Lekalakala (2002:13) argues "A great number of churchgoers ... have hardened their hearts, and are disobeying the command of God. Very sadly and unfortunately, most dominees are content with the situation to such an extent that they have developed a 'ticket style'. This allows members to pay (that is not giving) R2 * 12= R24 and the dominee trying to lead by example, will pay R20 * 12= R240." This has not positively contributed to our churches throughout its history.

Schutte (1974:28-29) argues," Dit was opvallend hoe relatief afhanklik die Bantoegemeente was. Sonder finansiële hulp van die blanke gemeente was die oprigting van die kerkgebou nie op daardie stadium moontlik nie en kon die traktament van die predikant ook nie bygebring word nie. Hierdie verhouding, wat tot 'n geringe mate ook op ander vlakke deurwerk, veroorsaak verleentheid en spanning in die Bantoegemeente wat in die beginsel selfstandig behoort te wees." These churches have never realized self-support or self-sufficiency. It is not wrong at all to offer help where it is needed. Dyers (1999:51) would argue, "Hulpverlening as bestaansnorm word deur die beginsel van Christus, 'om te gee maak 'n mens gelukkiger as om te ontvang' (Hand.20:35), in die eksegetiese verstaan daarvan, krities aangespreek."

It may be argued that this is because when missionaries started their mission of spreading the Gospel (Good News) to the disadvantaged communities, they did not overlook their situations and they gave them food, clothes etc. People responded quickly as to receive help rather than to accept the Gospel in totality first. Thus the gospel was received with the expectation of always being at the receiving end rather than to give.

Etuk (1985:214) argues that missionary efforts for the past century and a half were aimed at Christianizing, what was then, the "Dark continent". This led to the neglect of the responsibility of every individual believer before God. Blacks were trained as ministers to minister to their communities but even so they were totally dependent under the care and responsibility of white churches or missionaries for their "traktement" etc.

However, because of drastic changes in South Africa since 1994 and due to socio-economic circumstances, most of the white sister (helping) churches are also financially burdened, they are no longer in a position to help black churches. Some of these churches today are no longer growing and are losing members as well. This leads to financial depreciation. To black churches who have been

totally dependent on them, this lead to a more problematic situation. Self-reliance is the answer in these circumstances. Dyers (1999: iv) argues that a change in the existing structures and relations is fundamental to the proposed guidelines for the self-reliant development of the Reformed Churches in disadvantaged communities. It is a fact that churches are being faced with challenges, thus they have to develop strategies that would enable them to use available resources. These strategies will help churches to meet their everyday needs, but these have to be done within the biblical guidelines or principles.

The financial problems experienced by churches are always attributed to factors such as drought, inflation, and so forth. Dependency also has played a mayor role in the Black Reformed Churches in Synod Midlands. Richards (1985:306) would argue, 'Do Christians owe a tenth of all income to the local church? How are believers to gauge their giving?' Both the Old Testament and New Testament help us resolve the confusion many feel about giving. The presence or absence and knowledge among parishioners/ members play a major or important role. Mostert (1990: preface) would argue, '...the financial dilemma ..., should not be attributed solely to unavoidable external factors: it is deterministically related to disobedience towards and ignorance of the Biblical principle and requirements regarding stewardship.'

It is in fact true that most of our people (members) do not carry out the responsibility of giving at all. They are churchgoers only. Whatever happens does not concern them. They simply play ignorant.

Therefore this quantitative expression is the one that leads the author to launch an exegetical study of Malachi 3:6-12, with special reference to the tithe within the context of chapter 3 and the book as whole within the canon of the Old Testament.

1.1.2 Problem statement

Bromiley (1988:862) argues that Hebrew **מעשר**, occurs thirty-two times in the Old Testament: seventeen times in the Pentateuch, five times in the Prophets, and ten times in the Writings (cf. Kohlenberger 111, 1998:1000). It is clear that tithing is referred too in several texts of the Old Testament. The major texts describing the Lord's commands regarding tithing are Lev 27:30-33; Num 18:21-32; Deut 12:1-18; 14:1-4; 26:12-15. These texts in the final form of the Old Testament canon are placed in a logical and theological sequence, and they occur early, in the formative years of Israel's history.

To share some light on the problem of tithe, this study will concentrate on the last book of the Old Testament where tithe is also mentioned. It is therefore the task of this research to provide an exegetical study of Malachi 3:6-12, in particular 'tithe' mentioned in verses 8 and 10. This is an attempt to shed some light on the problems churches find themselves in today i.e. serious financial hardships/problems that are unbearable and have a negative factor towards the ministry of the word.

The problems related to the interpretation of this passage include the relationship between tithing here and in the laws in the Pentateuch, and the purpose of the tithes in Malachi in relation to the restored cult (cf. Verhoef 1987:303-306). "What is meant by tithing in Malachi 3:8-10 and what is its relevance for today?"

According to the background given, the statement of the problem can be portrayed as follows: **"Is tithing as stated in Malachi a biblical principle for all ages?"** This problem will be addressed as follows:

1. What is the Old Testament background of tithing?
2. What are the problems related to tithing in Malachi?
3. What is meant by tithe in the Old Testament and in particular in Malachi 3:8-10
4. What was the message of Malachi on tithing to his audience?

5. Is tithing as stated in Malachi relevant for us today in the South African context or Christians in the world?

1.1.3 Purpose of study

This study aims to determine whether the tithe as prescribed in Malachi has any relevance for today's situation e.g. we are faced with serious socio-economic circumstances. It is also an attempt to create re-awakening in the Synod Midlands Reformed Church in developing a strategy of self-reliance in applying the word of God.

1.1.4 Objectives

In order to reach the aims of this study, the following specific objectives have to be fulfilled:

1. To study and evaluate the Old Testament background on tithing given by biblical scholars.
2. Analyze the problems related to tithing in Malachi as identified by biblical scholars.
3. To provide the meaning of tithing in Malachi.
4. To study and evaluate the message of Malachi to his audience.
5. To demonstrate/ determine whether tithing as described in Malachi is relevant for churches today and also for our South African context.

1.2 Central theoretical argument

This study holds that underlying the idea of the tithe, is a biblical principle that God instructed man to give money or kind for use in the service of the Lord and this has to be executed with joy and thanksgiving. The question is how this principle was applied in the case of Malachi and how it should be applied today.

1.3 Method

The research methodology that will be employed in accomplishing the objectives of this research paper includes:

- 1.3.1 The literature study
- 1.3.2 Word study according to Silva M. (1994)
- 1.3.3 Grammatico-historical method (Kaiser & Silva, 1994 & Kaiser 1981)
- 1.3.4 Textual criticism (Wurthwein, M., 1979)

1.4 Chapter division

- 1.4.1 The first chapter gives the introduction which entails the statement of the problem, purpose/ aim of study, the objectives, Central theoretical argument, and method employed (methodology) and the division of chapters.
- 1.4.2 The second chapter will deal with the Biblical (Old and New Testaments) background and the Early Church on tithing.
- 1.4.3 Chapter three concentrates on the meaning of tithing in Malachi.
- 1.4.4 Chapter four will concentrate on the exegetical study of Malachi 3:6-12 and its message on tithing to his audience.
- 1.4.5 Chapter five will pay attention to the relevancy of tithing in our situation today in South African context in particular.
- 1.4.6 The final chapter (i.e. chp 6) will be the conclusion of the exegetical study.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND ON TITHING

This chapter will entail a brief overview of the tithe in the Ancient world but will highly concentrate on the history of the tithe during the Old Testament times. Then a brief New Testament view will be provided. This will also provide a brief overview of the Early Church dealing with tithing. It is not the intention here to give or show all the various forms of giving required, thus concentration will be on tithing.

Tate (2001:153) argues that tithing refers to the giving or taking of a tenth of a property, produce, or money for some institution or purpose. The Hebrew מעשר, literally “tenth part” or “tithe” is a cognate of the verb עשר “take the tenth part” (cf. Bromiley, 1988:861)

Jackson (1953:453) argues that tithe as a secular tax is mentioned in the Bible (Gen 7:24), a double tenth for Pharaoh, 1 Samuel 8:15,17, and Amos7:1 imply a tax on the first-fruits; but that it was levied originally for the king and only later for the deity is opposed by Genesis 28:22. Tithe imposed by the Maccabees was rather a sacred tax in virtue of their high priesthood. The sacred tithe was common to many Semitic people, and may have combined the ideas of tribute, gift, upkeep of the cult, thank-offering, or consecration-offering (Lev 27:30; Num18:24)

2.1 In the Ancient Near East

Many ancient cultures practiced tithing in some form. Bromiley (1953:861) argues that Israel was merely one among many ancient Near Eastern people who tithed their property, produce, or currency. Egyptians practiced tithing, as did Syrians, Lydians and Assyrians. The tithe was known in Ugarit. VanGemeren (1997:1035)

argues that in the Akkadian texts from Ugarit the same secular use of *esretu* occurs in reference to the tithe (among other taxes and gifts) for which a certain village was responsible. He further argues that at Ugarit there was also an Akkadian term *ma'saru* tithe, which is of course closer in form to Hebrew מעשר and probably reflects the Northwest Semitic Linguistic milieu of Ugarit as opposed to the East Semitic World of standard Akkadian.

Deuteronomy clearly subsumes the purpose of Israel's tithe under the שמע (6:4-9) and love for one's fellow Israelites (14:28f.) Genesis 14:18-20 indicates, however, that before Israel was ever a nation, Abram and the high priest Melchizedek were well aware of the practice of tithing. Jacob also promised to give God a tenth of his wealth (Gen 28:22). Bromiley (1988:861) argues that these biblical narratives indicate that tithing generally issued from theological rather than political, humanitarian, or economic motives, although in Israel, as in another Ancient Near Eastern countries, these motives could not really be separated.

2.1.1 Goods subject to the tithe

In the Ancient Near East tithe was taken from a broad range of property, produce or even currency, but particulars varied from culture to culture. In Israel the following were tithed: grain, new wine (Heb. תרש), olive oil, fruit, cattle and sheep (Deut 14:23; Lev 27:32: etc.), but other items were probably tithed as well (cf. Bromiley, 1988:861).

Abram tithed spoils of battle (Gen 14:20), and Jacob vowed to tithe all that God gave him (Gen 28:22). Bromiley (1988:861) argues that throughout the Ancient Near East all kinds of objects have been found designated as subject to the tithe: wool, cloth, wood, weapons, gold, silver, donkeys, etc. In general, the Israelites were to tithe all the wealth of the land that Yahweh gave to them (cf. Deut 8:18).

2.1.2 The Old Testament perspective

As early as the time of the patriarchs the Jews began to vow tithes (מעשר; e.g. Gen 28:22). Jackson (1953:453) argues that the tithe as a secular tax is mentioned in the Bible (Gen 47:24, a double tenth for Pharaoh; 1 Samuel 8:15,17, and Amos 7:1 imply a tax on first-fruits), but that it was levied originally for the king and only later for the deity is opposed in Genesis 28:22.

Genesis 1 indicates that God is the Creator of all the earth's wealth (verses 11f, 16-18, 20f, 24f, 29-31). As owner of all the land of Canaan, God could give it to whomever He desired (Deut 2:5, 10-12; 20-23, 31). He gave Canaan to Israel (4:1), and Israel was expected to give back to Yahweh a pars pro toto of the produce and wealth of the land, in some cases this involved the first-fruits of the land and in others it involved a tithe of many different items (26:1-15), (cf. Bromiley, 1988:862).

Hebrew מעשר occurs thirty-two times in the Old Testament: seventeen times in the Pentateuch, five times in the Prophets, and ten times in the Writings. Of the thirty-two times, twenty-nine times refer to the tithe that the sons of Israel were to give to the Levites, and the levitical tithe to the priests. It refers once to Abram's tithe to Melchizedek (Gen 14:20), (cf. VanGemeren, 1997:1036). In Ezekiel 45:11 and 14 it refers twice to the regulation of the size of a bath volume measurement as a "tenth of homer", and "the prescribed portion of oil... a tenth of a bath from each cor" for the offering to make atonement of Israel (cf. VanGemeren, 1997:1035). Ezekiel 45 is the only passage where מעשר is used simply as a measure, not in reference to tithes. The major texts describing the Lord's commands regarding tithing are: Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:21-32; Deuteronomy 12:1-18 (esp. verses 6f, 11f, 17-19); 14:22-29; 18:1-4; 26:12-15.

De Vaux (1961:141) states that a final stage of contribution of tithes was reached when theocracy was actually set up after the return from exile. The people solemnly undertook to pay into the Temple a third of a shekel annually, the first-fruits of the earth and the flocks, a tithe on the soil and certain offerings of wood (Neh 10:33-40). Trustworthy men were charged with collecting, storing and distributing these revenues (Neh 12:44-47; 13:10-13). Kings paid the normal expenses of the public worship and the cost of repairs to the building.

2.1.2.1 Tithe (מעשר) in the Pentateuch

According to VanGemeren (1997:1038) the difference (some would call them contradictions) between the tithe laws in D (i.e. The Deuteronomist; Deut 12:6, 11, 17; especially 14:22-29; 26:12-15) as opposed to those in the P (i.e., the priestly writer, Lev 27:30-33; Num 18:21-22) appear, at least on the surface, to be substantial. For example, the so-called P source grants the tithe directly to the Levites (with a tithe of the tithe going to the priests), but D has it consumed by worshipers in a feast to the Lord, except in the third and the sixth year of sabbatical cycle, when it was granted to the Levites and the poor of the land. The tithe passages in the Pentateuch are not contradictory but complementary. In general, Numbers 18 views the matter from the point of view of the Levites and the Priests (their due from the people), but Deuteronomy 14 views it from the perspective of the nation as a whole, the common people (i.e., their responsibility to the Levites). The tithe is holy to the Lord.

2.1.2.2 Pre-Mosaic

The word "tithe" occurs for the first time in Genesis 14:17-20, in a context that is both joyful and solemn. This was when Abram, returning from his victory over the invading Mesopotamian kings, gave Melchizedek, king-priest of Salem, a tenth of all (Gen 14:17-20) - that is of the spoils of the battle (Gen14:20). Bromiley (1988:862) would argue that Abram's giving of the tithe seems to have been

theologically motivated: it was a recognition that it was God Most High who had given him the victory (Gen 14:20). In accordance with the custom of the country from which Abram had been called this tithe should be paid, and on this occasion he followed the custom. Tenney (1977:756) argues that Jacob, fleeing from Esau, promised this amount (i.e. to tithe all of the increase that God would give him) to God in the event God prospered him (Gen 28:22). This was predicted upon the supposition that God would care for him and prosper his way, the Lord would be Jacob's God, and he would give a tenth to confirm that fact. The tithe given went to support "God's house", is symbolized by the pillar (Gen 28:22). This proleptically demonstrated a major purpose of the tithe in later Israel, namely, the care of God's house.

2.1.2.3 Tithe during Mosaic time

2.1.2.3.1 Leviticus

It was in Mosaic time that tithing had its greatest emphasis (Tenney, 1977:756). After God had appeared to Jacob at Bethel, Jacob made a vow saying, "If God will be with me ...of all that Thou givest me I will give the tenth to Thee," (Gen 28:20-22). This indicates that tithes are a kind of a vow. Wenham (1979:341) argues that Leviticus 27, therefore, allows the rules governing ordinary vows to apply to tithes as well (cf. verses 9-13 with 30-33). Under the law of the Moses a tithe of the produce of the ground and of the cattle was obligatory (Lev 27:30 and 32). More importantly Leviticus 27:30-33 gives a theological basis for bringing the Lord's tithe: it belongs to the Lord and is holy to Him. Implied is the fact that it is the Lord who produces, owns, and distributes the wealth of the land (cf. Deut 8:17f).

Budd (1996:389) argues that the main concern is to indicate the cost of redeeming. Anyone who desired to, could redeem his tithe of the land, but he had to pay its fair price plus a fifth to the Levites. Achtemeier (1985:1078) argues

that if one lived far from the temple so that transporting the actual tithe was impractical, it could be consumed at the Temple, but the requirement to eat the tithe in the Temple still stood. The tithing principle is explicitly applied on herd and flock (cf. 2 Chr 31:6). The tithe of the herds or flocks could not be redeemed (Lev 27:32f). The reference to animals that which pass under the shepherd's staff (verse 32) indicates the customary method of counting them (cf. Jer 33:13). This method of counting provides the means by which the tithed animal is determined, and such animal is "holy to Yahweh". This procedure intends to provide an objective means of selection, which would avert disputes between priest and people. Whether the tenth animal is deemed good or bad is holy to God. No matter what, the tenth animal must not be changed. The penalty for such attempt is that both animals will be deemed holy and therefore lost to the owner, with the further penalty that no redemption is permitted, and it cannot be redeemed (cf. Keil, 1874:485). It is clear that ten percent of everything the land produced was to be set aside, to be used as God commanded.

Many of the principles regarding sacrifices and tithes were intended to encourage inward attitude and outward actions (verse 33). If a person gives grudgingly, he shows that he has a stingy heart. God wants us to be cheerful givers (2 Cor 9:7) who give with grateful eyes turned on Him, the Object of our giving. Leviticus 27:30-33 provides the first tithe, which Israel was required to give. Israel was commanded by God to give a "tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees". This tithe belongs to the Lord and is holy to Him (cf. Bromiley, 1988:862). In addition, every tenth animal "that passes under the shepherd's rod", will be holy to God.

2.1.2.3.2 Numbers

Numbers 18:21-32 instructs that tithes were to maintain the Levites. The Levites was a tribe set apart to serve God, and its members were not given a district when Israel possessed the Promised Land. When the Levites received tithe from

the Israelites, that which God gave them as their “inheritance”, or wages for their work at the Tent of Meeting, they, in turn, had to tithe (to present a tenth of that tithe) part of their tithe to the house of the Lord, specifically to the priests as represented by Aaron (verse 28f). Van Rensburg (2002:77) argues that in this way they also presented an offering to the God from all the tithes they received from the Israelites. God’s portion was given to Aaron the priest. Budd (1984:207) argues that the priests lack access to private means of support, they are to receive the *תרומה* contributions (the holy thing) from the community at large. The Levites after giving their tithe were then free to eat the nine-tenths remaining wherever they wished. These tithes were not to be treated lightly, for Israel was to be holy people, exclusively following their God’s instruction. Here the tithe of the flock and herds is not mentioned but may be presupposed.

Van Rensburg (2002:77) further argues that it was this tithe to which Proverbs 3:9-10 referred to when it taught the Jews to honour the Lord with their wealth and with the first-fruits of all their crops. This would result in their barns being filled to overflowing, and their vats brimming over with new wine. In verses 25-26, it shows that even the Levites, who were ministers, had to tithe to support the work of the Tabernacle. No one was exempt from returning to God a portion of what was received from Him. Though the Levites owned no land and operated no great enterprises, they were to treat their income the same as everyone else did by giving a portion to care for the needs of the other Levites and of the Tabernacle. The principle of giving a tenth part of all to God was carried out consistently throughout the whole of his people (verse 26). In verse 32, we are taught to treat all gifts dedicated to God with respect.

2.1.2.3.3 Deuteronomy

VanGemenen (1997:1038) argues that the differences between the tithe laws in D (i.e., the Deuteronomist; Deut 12:6, 11, 17; esp. 14:22-29; 26:12-15) as opposed to those in P (i.e., the Priestly writer; Lev 27:30-33; esp. Num 18:12-15) appear,

at least on the surface, to be substantial. For example, the so-called P source grants the tithe directly to the Levites (with a tithe of the tithe going to the priests), but D has it consumed by worshippers in a feast to the Lord, except in the third and sixth years of the sabbatical cycle, when it was granted to the Levites and the poor of the land. These differences have caused a great deal of debate concerning the tithe.

Deuteronomy 12:10-11, 17-18 refer to a second annual tithe that Israel had to give: The Israelites, while making their way to Israel, were told by God that once they had crossed Jordan and settled in the land God would give them as an inheritance, they were to bring Him everything He commanded them, namely their burnt offerings and sacrifices, tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions they had vowed to Him, to the place that God would choose "as a dwelling for his Name". Deuteronomy 12:5-19 delineates several things about the tithe: (1) It was to be taken to the place where the Lord would cause His name to dwell – in the central sanctuary later established in Jerusalem (verses 5f, 11, 18); (2) There, and now here else (verse 17), it was to be eaten, with rejoicing, by the household of the one bringing the Levites (verses 7,12,18); (3) It was to be shared with the Levites. In these verses the place where tithe is to be brought to/at is of major concern than it was in Levites and Numbers, it is a predominant theological concern in these verses because of the need for unity and purity.

This tithe was to be eaten by the very people who gave it! It was done in God's presence and the people were to "rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you" (verse 7). This was not to happen in the people's home- towns, but at the Temple.

Spence (1950:237) argues that in Deuteronomy 14:22-29, a tithing of each year's produce of the cultivated ground was to be made, and this tithe was to be brought to the place which the Lord should choose, as also the firstling of the herds and flocks; and there a sacrificial meal was to be partaken of, that Israel

might learn to fear Jehovah their God always, reverencing Him as their Ruler and rejoicing in Him as the Giver of all good. Deuteronomy 14:22-29 provides information about the tithe not mentioned in Leviticus and Numbers.

Deuteronomy 14:22 requires a tithing of agricultural products and of the products of the pastoral life, to be devoted to a communal meal at the central sanctuary. Jackson (1953:453) argues that the purpose of the tithe in this case was not the support of the services at the Temple, but a joyous meal of the agriculturalist and his establishment with the Levites of his locality, the latter being included because they had no landed possessions. It did not go to the priests or temple officers. Deuteronomy 14:27-29 and 26:12-15 introduce a third tithe. At the end of every three years, the Israelites were required to bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in their towns, so that the Levites and the aliens, the fatherless and widows, who lived in their towns, might come and eat and be satisfied, and so that God might bless them in all their work.

These tithes were not viewed as a burden. They were to express both love and trust for God, as the Lord promised to bless the works of his people's hands (Deut 14:29). Giving showed confidence that God would make the produce. The tithe in Deuteronomy is an offering that acknowledges God's ownership of the soil and its fruits, a means of support for the Levites, and an offering for the sake of charity. This third tithe was known as the welfare tithe, or poor tithe, and was used to help the stranger, the fatherless and the widowed. VanGemeren (1997: 1041) would argue that the Old Testament evidence itself that these were originally one and the same tithe and that they were only interpreted to be different multiple tithes by the later community of faith. It is henceforth important to note that the tithe passages in the Pentateuch are not contradictory but complementary.

2.1.2.4 *The tithe (מעשר) in the Writings*

The ten references to the tithe in these scripture occur in 2 Chronicles 31:4-12; Nehemiah 10:36-39 (Math 37-40); 12:44; 13:5, 12. During the reformation under king Hezekiah, he tried to restore Israel's dedication to the "law of the Lord" (cf. 2 Chron 31:4-12, 21). He specifically required that the tithes due to the Priests and the Levites, which had been allowed to lapse be brought in (verses 4-6). Nehemiah after exile tried again to restore the covenant obligations as written in the law (10:36), including giving tithe to the priest.

Bromiley (1988:862) states that the ten references to the tithe in these scriptures occur in 2 Chronicles 31:4-12; Nehemiah 10:36-39 (Matthew 37-40); 12:44; 13:5, 12. 2 Chronicles 31:4-12 describes the reformation under king Hezekiah, who attempted to restore Israel's dedication to the "law of the Lord" (verse 4, 21). He specifically required the tithes due to the priests and Levites, which had been allowed to lapse, to be brought in (verses 4-6, 12). Hezekiah reinstated the practice of tithing - giving a tenth of one's income to the priests and the Levites so they could be free to serve and to minister to the people. The people responded immediately and generously. God's work needs the support of God's people.

Bromiley (1988:862) argues that Nehemiah tried to restore the covenant obligations as written in the law (10:36) after the exile, including rendering the tithe of the tithe to the house of God in Jerusalem (verse 37f). The other nine-tenths of the tithe, was taken in the various towns where the Levites lived. To prevent the recurrence abuses he had found, Nehemiah then made the community undertake a number of the solemn promises, in which the income due to the clergy was not forgotten: the first-fruits of the land and of fruit-trees, the first-born, the best of the wheat flour, of the fruits, of new wine and of oil were to be given to the priest, and the tithe were to be given to the Levites (Neh 10:36-38a; 13:10-14).

In Nehemiah 10:38 it is explicit that the Levites were charged with the responsibility to collect the tithes in the presence of the priest. This was to ensure the peaceful delivery of tithes and to prevent the commission of any wrong in the transaction, by the people deceiving the Levites, or the Levites defrauding the priests. This was done because people had neglected their personal responsibility and accountability. Even here, after the Levites have received a tenth of all the land produce, they were required to give a tenth of this to the priests. Jamieson (1989:625) argues that the Levites were charged with the additional obligation to carry the tithes when received, and deposit them in the temple stores, for the use of the Priests.

2.1.2.5 *The tithe (מעשר) in the Prophets*

Relevant references to tithing in the Prophets are found in Amos 4:4 and Malachi 3:8 and 10 (cf. Bromley, 1988:862). Amos 4:4 points out the hollowness of Israel's continuing to present tithes to the Lord when the people showed no concern for justice and righteousness. This way of giving mocked the true motive of giving the tithe. In Amos' days, people gave tithe, but without joy, love and sincerity that were to have marked the giving of the tithe. After exile Malachi (3:6-12) attempted to motivate people to bring the tithe for the right reasons, only then they would receive the Lord's blessings (cf. Deut 14:29). Malachi 3:8-10 stresses the lack of blessings because of not bringing the tithe, while Amos 4:4 emphasises the lack of blessings because of presenting tithes with the wrong motives.

Bromley (1988:862) argues that the relevant references to tithe in the Prophets are found in Amos 4:4 and Malachi 3:8, 10. On the one hand Amos 4:4 points the hollowness of Israel's continuing to present tithes to the Lord when the people showed no concern for justice and righteousness (cf. 5:6f, 10-15, 21-24). Deuteronomy 14:23, 26, 28 and the following, makes it especially clear that the giving of tithe was to be motivated by heart-felt love for God and one's brethren.

In his days Israel's tithe still came in, but without joy, love and sincerity that were to have motivated the giving of the tithe. Tithe in this time was still given but in a more obligatory/ forced manner rather than in honour and thanksgiving to God. This was done with no commitment whatsoever.

Bromiley (1988:862) states that the Israelites were tithing and thanking God for the wealth they had achieved by oppressing the poor. It is good to thank God for prosperity, but it is equally important that God must also be involved in the process leading to prosperity. It emphasizes the lack of blessing because of presenting tithes with wrong motives. After the exile, on the other hand, Malachi 3:8-10 attempted to motivate the people to bring the tithe for the right reasons, only then would they receive the Lord's blessing (cf. Deut 14:29). Malachi 3:8-10 stresses the lack of blessing because of not bringing the tithe.

2.1.2.6 The theological implications

By giving the tithe the Israelites were declaring solemnly that they were giving a portion back to the One who had prospered them (cf. Deut 26:10-15). By giving the tithe they also recognized the validity of the priest's and Levites' role as God's representatives and acknowledged their right to receive support for the spiritual service they performed on the people's behalf. This afforded them an opportunity to remember Yahweh's blessings as He had remembered them, and to imitate their God's care for slaves, the poor, orphans and widows (cf. Bromiley, 1988:863).

The tithe demanded that the Israelites serve their God at a significant cost of themselves. In this amazing system of tithing, Israel's economics became a channel for expressing love to God and love to neighbours, the heart of the Torah (Deut 6:4-9; Lev 19:18), (Bromiley, 1988:863).

Deuteronomy 14:16 makes paramount the joy and fellowship of presenting the tithe in a family context. The reforms under Hezekiah (2 Chr 31:4) and Nehemiah (Neh 10:37; 13:10-14) emphasized the seriousness of neglecting the support of the Levites, God's appointed ministers (cf. Bromiley, 1988:863). Finally, tithing helped to set Israel apart as Yahweh's people and His alone, a people holy to Him (Deut 14:22-29). The blessing was to reinforce Israel's reverence to Yahweh and sense of belonging to Him (verse 29).

2.2 New Testament perspectives

Richards (1985:308) would argue that although the principle of tithe predates the law (Gen 14:20; 28:22), no instruction in Acts or in the Epistles suggests that tithing is to be practised by Christians. He is of the view that new set of principles be set that reflect new theological and social realities.

Several New Testament passages refer to tithing, and 2 Corinthians 9:7-13 alludes to the practise, although it does not specifically mention it. In Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42; 18:12 the giving of tithes is cast in a negative light because of the way that it was often practised with no regard for justice, the love for God, mercy and faith. It is also mentioned or referred to in Hebrews 7:1-10. VanGemeren (1997:1054) argues that tithing is conspicuous for its absence in the New Testament instruction, regarding giving in the New Testament church (Rom 15:25-28; 1Cor 9:6-18; 16:1-3; 2 Cor 8-9; Eph 4:28; etc.; cf. Hawthorne, 854).

The New Testament faith community has no national identity as it is a fact with the Old Testament community. Tenney (1977:758) argues that in the time of the New Testament, changes had taken place (Lk 11:42; 18:12). Several New Testament texts refer to tithing, and 2 Corinthians 9:7-13 alludes to the practice although it does not specifically mention it. Bromiley (1988:863) argues that in Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42; 18:2 the giving of tithing is cast in a negative light

because of the way that it was often practiced with no regard for justice, the love of God, mercy and faith i.e. contradiction of Deuteronomy especially Deuteronomy 14:22-29. Paul's exhortation to give with a cheerful heart (2 Cor.9:7), reflects Deuteronomy's instruction about tithing, which emphasizes the importance of rejoicing (e.g. Deut 12:7, 11f, 17f; 14:26). *Koinonia* expresses the idea of sharing and fellowship. It affirms the reality of a bond created with faith in Christ- a bonding to God and to those who belong to God.

Richards (1985:309) argues that giving is portrayed in the New Testament as way to provide support for those who give their full time to ministry (Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17-18). It is also a way to meet the needs of local people who have no family to help them when they cannot care for themselves (1 Tim 5:16). But the major New Testament emphasis is given to world-wide concern: Christians are to share with others who, because of natural disasters, are not to survive without help. It presents tithe as systematic giving. Instead of suggesting tithe as a measure, Paul (2 Cor 8 & 9) provides several principles for our guidance:

- a. **Giving is an expression of love. It is to be prompted by inner concern for others that cannot be commanded but must be a free and spontaneous act (8:8).**
- b. **Giving is to be a balanced response, measuring what a person has against current needs of others (8:12-15).**
- c. **Giving is an act of faith. It shows trust in God, who is "able to make all grace about to you" (9:8). As we give generously, God will supply our needs and enable us to "be generous on every occasion" (9:11).**
- d. **Giving has many benefits. It meets the needs our brothers and sisters and stimulates praise to the Lord. It also stimulates prayer both for the giver and the receiver (9:11-14).**
- e. **Giving follows the example of Jesus. "Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through his poverty might become**

rich” (8:9). Giving is an appropriate way to express our appreciation to God for his own indescribable gift (9:15).

Bromiley (1988:863) argues that the author of Hebrews (chapter 7) uses the account of Abram’s paying a tithe to the priest-king Melchizedek (Gen 14:18-20) to show the superiority of Christ’s priesthood, which is “after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 7:7, 17). One may therefore conclude that this process require / calls for the most responsible of behaviour from people. New Testament put emphasis on giving rather than on tithing.

Freedman (1992:579) states that tithes receive very little mention in the New Testament. Although this is the case, the law of tithing was never abolished in the New Testament. Jesus never abolished it, but in fact validated it. Coetzee (1992:26) argues that “Ons lees nerens dat Jesus en sy dissipels die bring van tiendes opsy geskuiwe het nie”. In Mark 12: 41 we read, “Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury”. With regard to giving, what Christ said about the widow’s gift, is more reflective of God’s spirit than those who had more to give. He said that her small gift was greater than their larger tithes. In addition, He said that because she gave her money without reservation but with a willing heart and did not want to be noticed, God would more likely look upon her favourably. In Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42 Christ criticized the Pharisees that they were giving their tithes, but had no love. He then says: You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former (the giving of tithes). The tithes were for the temple services.

In Hebrews 7, we are told that in Abraham the whole people of God gave tithes to Melchizedek because he was in fact representing Christ. So the principle that we should honour Christ as our Priest and King by giving tithes is maintained. Anon (1956:130) argues, “Hieruit kan afgelei word dat die gee van tiendes ouer is as die skaduwees en dus nie daarmee verval het nie”. These are the places

were tithing is clearly mentioned, and it is connected with the temple services. In the New Testament emphasis is on the gratitude of the giver who gives from the heart and gives freely and willingly. It is an individual responsibility to give in proportion with regard to God's blessings to him or her (cf. Deut 16:17 and 1 Cor 16:2).

It is clear in the New Testament that our giving should also - as it was in the Old Testament - be a response to God's love. The issue of giving is presented as a test of how well we understand and believe and accept the message of God's grace in Christ. This is a very simple test. The question that confronts one is this: 'Do you really sacrificially give money for the work of God?' Everything that we possess is a gift from God to us. God expects us to show gratitude to Him. Christians in Corinth gave themselves first up to the Lord. We should entirely serve God, not only by giving ourselves to Him but also our belongings, time, talents, education, etc.. As stewards God awaits our portion. Fourie (1996:20) argues that "Om nie te wil teruggee van dit wat God aan my gee vir my lewensonderhoud en optrede in hierdie wêreld nie, is growwe ondankbaarheid".

In 1 Corinthians 8:7-9, it is spoken about giving and God the Holy Spirit says through Paul: ...see to it that you excel in this grace of giving. Verse 9 means that our Lord Jesus Christ became very poor when He came to this world to make us very rich. He saved us from the poverty of our sins before God. We were very poor before God because of our sinful human beings or nature. We had lost all the rights to can receive God's blessings. In fact we were like convicted criminals who had to pay a huge fine to clear our record. We had nothing to pay with. In reality, because of our sinful nature we increase our sins every day. God loved us very much, so much that He saved us from the state of condemnation, poverty and lost-ness when He sent Jesus Christ to this world to become poor, to suffer and die on our behalf.

In 2 Corinthians 8:9, Paul is now actually asking us: Do you really understand what Christ did for you on that cross? Do you really believe that you once were lost, but now found? Are you really thankful for the fact that Christ suffered so horribly for you, to cancel all your debts before God? In Psalm 116:12, the psalmist who realizes that he has been saved from death and hell, asks: How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me? In verse 17, he speaks of giving and then says: I will sacrifice a thank offering to you... Your love will be seen in your thank offering.

2.2.1 Other scriptural references

2.2.1.1 Temple tax (Matthew 17:4-27)

Three important aspects are found here:

- (1) Jesus and his disciples are free from the temple services.
- (2) They went forward to tithe or give towards the temple service
- (3) They do this without pressure or pressuring anyone.

Refer to Almanak, (1956:130).

2.2.1.2 The first fruits

The first are the ones that should be given to God, according to the writer of Proverbs 3:9. Honouring God with the best we have is what the writer of Proverbs has in mind. In fact the first fruits of all produce should be given to God's work (Num 28:26ff). Grissen (1992:33) argues that the Bible tells us we should give our first fruits back to God. Romans 11:16 reads, "If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches". The reference of Romans 11:16a is to Numbers 15:17-21. The part of the dough was to be offered up to God as a symbol that the entire lump belonged to Him. The same idea was involved in the feast of first fruits. In

Leviticus 23:9-14, when the priest offered a sheaf to the Lord as a token symbolized that the entire harvest belonged to Him. These verses as well are speaking of firstlings or first fruits of various things: Exodus 13:2; 23:10ff; 23:6; 15:18-21.

2.2.1.3 The offerings

In Malachi 3:8 we read, "Will a man rob God? Yet you robbed me. But you say, 'when have we robbed thee?' In **tithes** and **offerings**. From this it is clear that offerings are necessary. According to Sprague (2002:17) that whereas, tithing is 10% given to your local church, an offering is any gift above the 10% of your income given to any ministry to which the Lord directs you. Sin offering has been fulfilled in Christ (cf. John 1:20; Matthew 26:28; Rom 3:25; Heb 9 especially 26). Our lives have to be a thanksgiving sacrifice (cf. Rom 12:1). How much must I then give? Makwakwa (1997:12) argues that offering is determined by individuals on how much they want to give to God.

Anon (1956:131) states that "die kerklike bydrae in die Nuwe Testament 'sluit aan....' by die Ou Testament se offergedagte. Dit is die vervulling van die dankoffer". The New Testament emphasizes people giving as they are able to than tithing.

Is your giving really a thank offering to God? The value of one's gift, demonstrates the greatness of that person's love. God loved us so much that He sacrificed his only Son for us. As David says in 2 Samuel 24:24, our love for Him must also be costly love. How do I sacrifice by giving to God for the work of his church?

Tithing was a way of life, this is clear from the Old Testament. Johnson (1984:36) argues: 'Evidently the tithe was assumed by Jesus as legitimate as any other law. He did not mention the tithe as a requirement, but his teachings did not

undercut any existing religious law'. It is significant to know that Christ was not trying to replace the law with something new, He was asking people to look beyond it to see what the words meant, not what they said (cf. Matthew 5:17-19). The New Testament speaks of giving as people are able, not about a law which requires everyone to give a tenth or a tithe to support a group of priests. Johnson (1984:22) argues that the tithe, when based on the spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament, is not legalism. The tithe of the Old Testament is a testimony to the interconnectedness of people and God. Tithing is still valid in the New Testament although the emphasis is on the attitude.

2.2.2 Summary of tithing in the New Testament

The tithe is connected to the idea of offering in the Old Testament that is, the thanksgiving sacrifice or offering (cf. Rom 12:1). Giving is to be done with the attitude of the spirit of gratitude. God wants selfless giving or sacrifices from us (cf. 2 Cor 8:2-5). Giving to God needs the total being to be involved. Tithe or to give must be based on the biblical principle. The New Testament place more emphasis on the attitudes of the giver's heart. Christ warns us not to let our pride take over and make a display of our giving (Matthew 6:3).

2.2.3 Conclusion

The Old Testament contains laws pertaining to tithing, sacrifices and offerings, as well as everyday living. The Old Testament pattern of giving was an integral part of the social system that was established in the Mosaic Law. In Numbers 18, tithe is viewed from the Levites and priests (their dues from the people), but Deuteronomy 14 views it from the perspective of the nation as a whole, the common people (i.e., their responsibility to the Levites). It provided for specific needs of persons within the nation Israel - needs for a central worship center, for a large company of persons set aside for religious purpose or service, and for the poor who were not fully cared for by other social mechanisms. It is indeed true

that tithe played a major role in Israel's life in taking care of others who were in need. Israel was expected to keep the covenant relationship with God at all times.

The early New Testament church existed in a different social context, and thus principles regarding giving were suited to the new setting and new theological realities. But it would be proper or accurate to argue that Jews in the New Testament, who were still under the law, were still bound by the prescriptions of the law - it would be erroneous to conclude that members of the New Testament church were similarly bound (cf. Van Rensburg, 2002:93). No set amount was required for giving, but individuals were taught to be aware of the principles that should guide their giving and to be sensitive to others with needs. Today's set up is different, there are church buildings and houses, and as citizens are bound to contribute to the needs of the poor through government taxes. Yet the basic principles of giving must still be applied, for each person is responsible to use material possessions in ways that honour God. Tithe is required from us.

2.3 *A brief overview of tithing in the life of the church*

Here the intention is to find whether the church in its early stages practiced tithe or if there are any traces of tithe.

Tenney (1977:758) would argue that for several centuries in the Early Church there was no support of the clergy by a systematic giving of the tithe. In the Early Church tithe was generalised (cf. Freedman, 1992:580). Another widespread tendency in this era was the identification of the Old Testament Levites, the principal beneficiaries of the tithes, with Christian priests. Freedman (1992:580) further argues that very early in the history of Christianity tithes are extended to include money. This occurs for the first time in Didache 13:7 (late first or early second century C.E.), then in all subsequent Christian writing on tithes.

Offerings, gifts of love and deaconal help/ work are traced. Gifts to the poor by the giver were treated as a gift from God Himself. On the other hand, the poor

accepted the gift as though it was from God directly. From these gifts the poor would give their part to God. Christians loved one another. Giving was motivated by love. Latourette (1953:247) argues that the motive that was stressed was also new: it was love in grateful response to the love of Christ, who, though He was rich, yet for the sake of those who were to follow Him, became poor that they through His poverty might become rich.

This is also found in the apostolic fathers:

Let the rich minister aid to the poor; and let the poor give thanks to God, because He has given him one through whom his wants may be supplied.

...Seeing therefore that we have all these things from Him, we ought in all things to give thanks to Him, to Him be the glory for ever and ever (Clemens Ep. 1, par. 38).

Thou shalt not hesitate to give neither shalt thou murmur when giving; for thou shalt know who is the good paymaster of thy reward. Thou shalt not turn away from him that is in want, but shalt make thy brother a partaker in all things, and shalt not say that anything is thine own (Didache par.4).

Thou shalt make thy neighbour partake in all things, and shalt not say that anything is thine own. For you are fellow-partakers in that which are perishable (Barnabas par.19) (Lightfoot 1970:29, 125, and 154).

One is obliged to give freely i.e. to tithe willingly. Whoever gives/tithes has to give from the heart. It is significant that one tithes with the understanding that whatever one receives comes from God the Creator and the Giver of all things. Everything belongs to God. Tithing of one tenth is the acknowledgement that all comes from God. The giver of tithe must show love and sympathy to a fellow human being. The giver of tithe has to share with the others that which he or she received from God.

The Christian community stressed the support of its widows, orphans, sick, and disabled, and of those who because of their faith were thrown out of employment or were imprisoned. It is interesting to note that Christian love and service were not restricted to members of the church. They were also extended to non-Christians. The command to love one's neighbour was not forgotten, nor the parable by which Jesus had illustrated that command of care for a nameless stranger upon whom misfortune had fallen. Christian giving was personalized. Freedman (2000:1315) argues that most biblical texts indicate that the believer was obliged to tithe, though the manner in which this was practiced seems to vary from era to era.

Mostert (1990:24) argues that "terwyl die collegia met straf gevorder word, is die bydrae in die Christelike kerk 'n vrywillige een waarin elkeen self besluit hoeveel hy gee. Later word hierdie maandelikse bydrae 'n weeklikse een". The early church depended on offerings. Preece (1971:31) states that the Christian church depended first on voluntary gifts from its members, often in kind, from which the local bishop paid the clergy, maintained the church buildings, and relieved the poor. Whalen (1967:174) argues that the Early Church had no tithing system. But as the church expanded and its material needs grew more, numerous and complex, it became necessary to adopt a definite rule to which people could be held either by a sense of moral obligation or by a precept of a positive law.

The Old Testament law provided this model and this began to be taught. Cross (1957:1626) argues that in the 4th century payment of the tenth part of all the produce of land began to be taught as a Christian duty and in the following centuries, this gradually became established. By the 6th century many Christians were setting aside a tenth of their income and paying it to the church. Tithe was not regarded as a gift to the church but as God's property. Tithe required from the person's income was paid to the church for the maintenance of its institutions, the support of its ministers, the promotion of its works, and the relief of the poor. Once received, tithes were subject to canonical division into four

parts between the bishop, the clergy, the fabric of the church, and the relief of the poor (cf. Cross, 1957:1626).

The giving of the tithe began to be regarded as necessary and important. Preece (1971:31) argues that the first church council to mention tithes is that of Toars (567), which exhorted their payment. Whalen (1967:174) argues that the council of Macon in 585 ordered payment of tithes and threatened excommunication to those who refused. It is clear that tithes were indeed obligatory, and this spread all over then. He further argues that the council of Trent declared that the payment of tithes was due to God and that those who refuse to pay them were to be excommunicated and they were not to be absolved until full restitution had been made (cf. Whalen, 1967:175). The first synod of Baltimore considered those who failed to contribute to be unworthy of the sacraments. This shows or explains how seriously the principle of tithe was regarded.

Mostert (1990:30) states that "In die Middeleeue is daar diakonale bediening soos in die vroeg-Christelike kerk (nie) gevind (is) ... nie". There were no central church funds, the church's resources consisted of the total of the tithes of all the parishes. It was in the later Middle Ages, that hospitals and Oxford and Cambridge colleges became possessors of tithe (cf. Preece, 1971:31). At the Reformation the imposition of the tithes continued, but for the benefit of the Reformed Churches. Luther himself approved in general, of paying them to the temporal sovereign. Mostert (1990:38) argues that "Luther het die betaal van tiendes goedgekeur en dit as die voordeligste vorm van fondsinsameling deur die kerk beskou". Mostert (1990:39) further argues that "Calvyn het hom nie direk uitgespreek met betrekking tot tiende as offergawe van die Christen nie. Hy lê wel sterk klem op die verpligting van die lidmaat ten opsigte van die versorging van die armes en die instandhouding van die kerk. Hy lê klem op die finansiële onderhoud van die kerklike dienswerk, sonder om uit te bou hoe dit in die praktyk tot sy reg moet kom".

During the Reformation it was emphasised that man is justified before God through or by faith alone, by accepting God's forgiveness in faith, not by forcing God to forgive sins on account of good works. Along the way the emphasis on the tithe diminished. We do find that the principle of tithe was applied in the Early Church, in the Middle Age and during Reformation, although during Reformation there were criticisms and tithing was not emphasised. The Early Church rather emphasised freedom in Christian giving.

2.4 *Summary*

Tithing one's property or produce to support religious institutions or the priesthood had been practiced for a long time. It is an ancient practice. In the Old Testament several kinds of offerings and sacrifices were made and tithing was prescribed. The commandments in the Old Testament emphasise the quality (one-tenth) of the gift. In this is the belief that God is entitled to share directly in the grain, wine, and oil that humans are permitted to produce. Flocks and herds were to be tithed as well.

In the New Testament Church the giving/ tithing was not based on a prescriptive formula, such as tithing in the Old Testament, but rather on the individual believer's response to the grace of God in Christ which he or she had experienced in salvation. In the New Testament there are few references to tithing (Matthew 23:23 cf. Luke 11:42; Luke 18:12; Heb 7:6, 8-9). Practicing of fellowship of the saints was viewed as giving, particularly when done to those in need.

Tenney (1977:758) would argue that for several centuries in the Early Church there was no support of the clergy by a systematic giving of a tithe. As time went by, after the pattern in the Jewish Synagogue, tithe came to be generally regarded. The practice of tithe then was supported by an appeal to biblical passage like Matthew 10:10; Luke 10:7, 1 Corinthians 9:7ff. Tenney (1977:758)

further argues that leaders in the church like Irenaeus and Epiphanius showed the arguments drawn from these texts were not valid. In the Early Church, freedom in giving was emphasized rather than to tithe. The Early Church prescribed tithe for its members. Believers were encouraged to give generously.

Giving of one-tenth has been practiced. One significant factor with giving is that it was done in proportion with what one had. Our Lord's total self-giving alone constitutes the basis for Christian Giving: "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).

It is clear in this chapter that the Old Testament contains laws pertaining to tithe, sacrifices and offering. Throughout the Old Testament tithe was being practiced, we find its traces in the Pre- mosaic era, the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and in the Writings. In conclusion, with the above in mind, the modern church, especially churches in Synod Midlands need to give serious attention to its practice in this regard. Tithing in the New Testament is not as formal as it is in the Old Testament. The New Testament stresses giving in response to God's love.

CHAPTER 3

THE BOOK MALACHI

This chapter will concentrate on a general study of Malachi. Floyd (2000:575) would argue that Malachi is designed to show how torah can be interpreted prophetically so as to guide the community through difficult times, turning its tendency to cynicism back toward hope. Verhoef (1987:153) argues that the book belongs to the Minor Prophets, so-called not because they are of less importance than Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, but as Augustine expressed it, 'because their message is comparatively short.' In this collection of the Minor Prophets Malachi has always been placed last, again not because it was considered the least important of the Twelve, but because according to tradition it concluded the series of prophetic books. This chapter will do a literature study of the title and author of the book, date, historical background, style, text, and the message of the book itself. An evaluation will be provided as there are differences of opinion on specific issues by scholars e.g., is Malachi a proper name or just a title for the book? This chapter will serve as the background study for the following chapter.

3.1 The title and author

Each book of the Old Testament has its problems with matters of introduction. The book of Malachi also has its problems. Verhoef (1987:154) argues that the most obvious problem with Malachi is undoubtedly the question whether the name Malachi should be regarded as a proper name or as a title. Redditt (1995:151) argues that the superscription to the book (1:1) attributed it (authorship) to someone called Malachi. Malachi signifies or means "my messenger or my angel". Baldwin (1972:212) argues that though the name Malachi occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament, similar names do occur with

an 'i' ending, such as Ethni 'my gift' (1 Chr 6:41), ברי 'my well' (Gen 26:34; Hos 1:1).

3.1.1 Main arguments against assumptions that Malachi is to be regarded as a proper name

The fact that it is not found elsewhere in the Old Testament;

The absence of any precise description of him such as 'son of ...', or 'the prophet' (but the same is true of Obadiah);

The fact that Zechariah 9:1, 12:1 'oracle of the word of the Lord' has been commonly interpreted as a mark of anonymity. The similarity in the titles of Zechariah 9:1; 12:1; and Malachi 1:1 points to a secondary origin, and to the fact that these prophecies were originally handed down anonymously.

The name was supposedly taken from 3:1 and has been introduced in the superscription as a Stichwort, indicating the author of the book.

The translation of both the LXX and the Targum suggests the idea that Malachi was not regarded as a proper name. The Targum added to the words "by Malachi" the note: 'whose name is called Ezra the scribe.' The LXX translated the same phrase 'by the hand of his angel or messenger.'

A number of church fathers regarded the term Malachi as a mere appellative or title adopted by the prophet, (cf. Baldwin, 1972:212; Verhoef, 1987:154; Barker, 1985:1423; Verhoef, 1972:9-19).

Arguments against Malachi being a proper name indeed are legitimate but not conclusive. Deutsch (1987:67) argues that the name Malachi may be the real name of a person. Hailey (1972:401) argues that since no other prophet spoke or wrote anonymously, it is highly reasonable to conclude that this is the name of Yahweh's last literary prophet who is his final messenger to the people. Pusey (1950:401) argues also that there is, however, no ground to think that it was not his name. Deutsch (1972:67) further argues that it is more likely that Malachi is not a personal name but a title, 'my messenger', (i.e. 'prophet'). For this is what the word clearly means in 2:7 and 3:1.

3.1.2 Reasons to regard Malachi as the proper name

The analogy of the titles of other prophetic books in which reference is made to the author.

The fact that when the expression מַלְאכִי is used to indicate the human instrument of God's revelation it is normally followed by a proper name. The tradition of the word as a proper name is really very old, as is evident from the rendering of the Peshitta, Theodotion, Symmachus, and the Vulgate (cf. Verhoef, 1987:155).

Smith (1984:298) also is of the same opinion but many recent scholars have supported the view that Malachi is a proper name (cf. Childs, 493-94; Rudolph, 247-48). It is logical to accept the prophet was called Malachi even though we have to admit that nothing more about his person or personal circumstances are known than his book reveals. What is of most importance is not whether Malachi was the name or the title of this prophet, but whether or not the prophet was the messenger Yahweh was going to send to prepare the way for his coming (3:1). 'Malachi' is represented to us in terms of the meaning of his name as 'a messenger of the Lord.' And in that we are reminded that the message is more important than the identity and circumstances of the messenger (cf. John 3:30).

3.2 *The date of writing*

The book of Malachi furnishes no statement regarding the time of origin.

Smith (1984:156) argues that we can only estimate the date of Malachi's ministry. No kings are named in the superscription or in the book that might give us a clue to the date. No historical incident such as a battle or earthquake is mentioned to give us an historical context (cf. Smith, 1984:298; Mitchell, 1937:5). Verhoef (1987:156) argues that although we do not have any direct indication of Malachi's date, neither in Scripture nor tradition, we may deduce from indirect evidence the approximate date of the prophecy.

Scholars are agreed that the prophet could not have been living in the pre-exilic times/era, in the time of the Exile, or outside of Palestine. There is quite a consensus of opinion that he prophesied in the postexilic era. Thus scholars have reached a general consensus about the date of the book Malachi. Deutsch (1987:68) argues that one further clue to the dating of our book is the occurrence of the term Mesopotamian - origin for "governor" in Malachi 1:8. In most biblical instances this term מִשְׁלָּט refers to Persian Administrators abroad, its use helps us to place the book in the period when Palestine was part of the Persian Empire (cf., e.g. Hag 1:1,14; Ezra 8:36; Neh 2:7; Est 3:12; 8:9). The use of the Persian term מִשְׁלָּט (governor) in 1:8 gives us the knowledge that the time was post-exilic. Keck (1996:847) argues that there is a general consensus that the book comes from the time after the Babylonian exile; the references to a governor (not a king) in 1:8 and to the destruction of the kingdom of Edom (1:2-5) as well as certain linguistic features, all pointing to the period of the Persian Empire (539-332 BCE).

Smith (1984:298) argues that Nehemiah's first return to Jerusalem from Babylon can be definitely dated in 444 B.C. Therefore Malachi should be dated in the first half of the fifth century B.C. Hailey (1972:401) states that in as much as the content of the prophecy fits well into the conditions described by Nehemiah, the most acceptable date for the prophecy is the period 445-432 B.C. One thing that is clear about the date issue is that even though there is a general consensus, scholars do not give the exact date. Verhoef (1987:160) argues that without being dogmatic about the precise date of Malachi he favours the period between Nehemiah's two visits, that is, shortly after 433 B.C. Achtemeier (1986:171) argues that there is broad consensus about the dates from the first half of the fifth century, shortly before the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. In conclusion, the book Malachi was written in the time after the exile.

3.3 *The background of person Malachi*

Scholars have a general consensus that Malachi prophesied in the post- exilic era. Verhoef (1987:160) argues that this century may be defined as a “dark age”. The political history of the Jews at this time was inseparably bound up with the Persian Empire. Thus this section will give a background study of the literature available on the post-exilic community. Deutsch (1987:68) argues that two important sources of information on this community are the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. From these two books we learn how strong and self-conscious these Jews who had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon were. In their opinion, the true ‘Israel’ was the community peopled by those who had gone through the Babylonian experience (cf. e.g. Ezra 3:8; 6:16; 10:7-8; Neh 8:17; 10:28-31).

Hailey (1972:402) would argue that the first contingent of exiles had returned during 536 B.C., under the leadership of Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest. Encouraged by the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the people rebuilt the Temple between 520-516 B.C. Ezra had returned with a second group of exile in 458 B.C., and it is thought that Zechariah had encouraged the remnant with the message of Zechariah 9-14 sometime between these two dates. For a full picture of the conditions in Judea during this period one should read Ezra 7-10 and complete the book of Nehemiah. The conditions of the people as revealed in Nehemiah and the bold and courageous attack of Malachi against the problems of which the latter sets forth in his book point clearly to the contemporary dates of the two.

Redditt (1995:149) argues that the existence of a functioning Temple (1:6-2:9; 2:11; 3:1, 4, 10) precludes a date during the exile or before the completion of Zerubbabel’s Temple in 515 B.C. The conditions of divorce and remarriage addressed in 2:13-16 resemble the state of affairs addressed and corrected by the reforms of Ezra (9:14; 10:1-15) and Nehemiah (13:23-31). The book of Malachi fits the situation amid which Nehemiah worked as snugly as a bone fits

its socket. Political power would have been held in Persia, which granted Samaria general oversight for Judah; hence Samaria's continued interest in the affairs of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:6-23). The governor (Mal 1:8) would have exercised local control, perhaps arbitrarily. When the returnees came back the population of Judah increased.

It is significant to note that the majority of those who made up the post-exilic Jewish community in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas were persons who had never been away from their homeland. Deutsch (1987:67) argues that this fact must have caused numerous problems because the returnees claimed the right to leadership in the renewed community (cf. e.g. Isa 57:3-13; 65:1-9; Ezra 6:19-21; 7:1-14; 25-26; Neh 8:1-8; 10:28-39).

The Temple at Jerusalem served as the focus of religious life of the province. The returnees brought back the Torah with them. Keck (1996:847) argues that it is simplistic, however, to conclude that his depiction of laxity, corruption, unfaithfulness, and indifference reflects the total reality of life under the Persian Empire. Verhoef (1987:160) further argues that the circumstances in which the approximately 50, 000 returned exiles found themselves in the small province of Judah were critical in many respects. In a certain sense the coming of Ezra coincide with the disturbances caused by the war between the Persians and Egyptians. This war could be regarded as one of the causes of the ultimate failure of Ezra's initial reform.

Thus when Nehemiah appeared on the scene years later, the colony was in a state of deep decline. The walls of Jerusalem were still further destroyed (Neh 2). After the preliminary work had been completed under the leadership of Nehemiah, the covenant was renewed; the nation agreed to keep the Law of Moses, to provide means for support of the temple and its service. In Nehemiah 12:44-47; 13:6, we learn that after 12 years in which he performed a comprehensive reform, he returned to Persia. On his second visit to Palestine

Nehemiah found that many of the abuses which he had abolished during his first visit were again being practiced by the people (Neh 13:6-31). In this general context Malachi was called to fulfill his prophetic ministry. It is therefore recommended that the prophecy of Malachi be read against the background of Nehemiah 13, which is also fully understood in the light of Nehemiah 10 (cf. Verhoef, 1987:161).

Deutsch (1996:70) states: " The problems which induced the messenger to speak up make it appear that in this community the influence of the 'returnees' was still relatively weak. Although 'teaching' and consequently obedience to the demands of the Torah are prominent, the position taken by the 'messenger' is not as radical as, e.g., in the books Ezra and Nehemiah".

The messenger's words were intended to reprimand the people and the leaders of the community for the lack of sincerity in their worship and their lives. In his times the Torah was already the most important guideline for the worship and the life of the Jewish community. The Torah was based on a sincere commitment to God. Its urgent demands concern the vital inter-human relationships as much as matters related to the temple. In conclusion, Malachi's background is clearly understood in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

3.4 *Style of the book*

The style of Malachi is clear and simple. It is direct and forceful. Scholars differ in trying to define the method of Malachi. Verhoef (1987:166) argues that the German scholars have attempted to translate Malachi as poetry in their belief that the original oracles were in poetic form. Hailely (1972:402) argues that in Malachi we meet a new style of address known as the didactic-dialectic method of speaking. In this type of teaching an assertion or charge is made, a fancied objection is raised by the hearers, and refutation to the objection is presented by the speaker. Earlier prophets had usually followed the rhetorical development of

ideas, but no doubt the prophet of this book found the didactic-dialectic method better salted for the conditions and needs of his day. Verhoef (1987:164) argues that the characteristic feature of Malachi's style is that each main section is structured in accordance to the scheme statement-question-motivation.

Another characteristic of Malachi is his appeal to Yahweh as the source of his message (1:2). Mitchell (1937:4) argues that in distinction from most prophetic books, Malachi must be classified as prose. Verhoef (1987:166) argues the book of Malachi, however, is written in prose, with a few traces of a rhythmical pattern. He further argues that neither in spirit, thought, nor form, has it the characteristics of poetry. Verhoef (1987:168) argues that finally, it is important to note that the language of Malachi on the whole is pure Hebrew. Keck (1996:850) argues that it is certain, that a new style of prophetic discourse is in the process of development, a style both more dialogical and more argumentative than in the earlier prophets. Finally, it is important to note that the language of Malachi is on the whole pure Hebrew.

3.5 Text

Verhoef (1987:168) argues that with a few minor exceptions the Hebrew text (MT) makes good sense and appears to be well preserved. The MT is generally supported by the ancient versions. Keck (1996:848) argues that the Hebrew text presents few minor problems that seriously affect the meaning. The focus here is on the final form in which the book now exists. This short book gives little evidence of having undergone as lengthy and complex a process of development as is often postulated for other prophetic books. Verhoef (1987:170) argues that in conclusion we may say that the MT is preferable to the ancient versions and has unduly been emended by the editors of both BHK and BHS.

3.6 *The message of Malachi*

Although the Jews had been allowed to return from the exile and rebuild the temple, several discouraging factors brought about a general religious malaise: (1) Their land remained but a small province in the backwaters of the Persian empire, (2) the glorious future announced by the prophets (including other postexilic prophets, Haggai and Zechariah) had not (yet) been realized, and (3) their God had not (yet) come to his temple (3:1) with majesty and power (as celebrated in Ps 68) to exalt his kingdom in the sight of the nations (Barker, 1985:1423). Doubting God's covenant love (1:2) and no longer trusting his justice (2:17; 3:14-15), the Jews of the restored community began to lose hope. So their worship degenerated into listless perpetuation of mere forms, and they no longer took the law seriously.

Mitchell (1937:11) argues that the task of this unknown prophet was to rekindle the fires of faith in the hearts of a discouraged people. Fundamental to Malachi's teaching is the concept of covenant. Achtemeier (1986:172) argues that the book is primarily concerned with the fulfillment of the duties of the covenant relationship, and initially the Lord is the defendant in the case, with the Israelites bringing two charges against Him (cf. 1:2 and 2:17). Hailey (1972:403) argues that Malachi was to admonish/ warn people to live by God's terms. The prophet sought to assure the restored community in Jerusalem that God still maintained covenant love for them (cf. Hill, 1998:42).

Dorsey (1999:321) argues that the Book of Malachi is arranged in a way that effectively addresses this new situation. The arrangement helps highlight the book's main points: (1) condemnation of the negligence at the temple, (2) the key leadership role of the priests and Levites in restoring rightful worship of Yahweh, and (3) the truth that Yahweh does indeed reward those who serve him and punishes the wicked. Smith (1984:301) argues that the prophet's task was to

assure his people that Yahweh still loved them and was keeping the covenant with them (1:2-5).

He rebuked their doubt of God's love and the faithlessness of both priests (1:6-2:9) and people (2:10-16). He assures his people that Yahweh knows those who fear him and those who do not. Yahweh calls for his people to repent and return to Him (3:7). His teaching, both negative and positive, strikes at the heart of nominal, easy-going Christianity just as it did at that of Judaism. In conclusion, the message of Malachi is confined to Israel as the covenant people. Malachi's message comprises a number of ultimates in the history of Old Testament revelation.

3.7 Conclusion

Malachi is a proper name of a person and he is the author of this book, although much is not known of him. He prophesied in the post-exilic era. Malachi and his contemporaries were living in an eventful waiting period, when God seemed to have forgotten His people enduring poverty and foreign domination in the little province of Judah. Malachi's prophecy is particularly relevant in human history and in the lives of individuals. He enables us to see the strains and temptation of such times, the imperceptible abrasion of faith that ends in cynicism because it has lost touch with the living God (cf. Baldwin, 1972:211).

Prose is the style that Malachi employed in his writing or prophecy. Importantly he shows us the back to a genuine, enduring faith in the God who does not change (Mal 3:6), who invites men to return to Him (3:7), and never forgets those who respond (3:16). Malachi reminded his people to remember the Law of Moses in daily life, and look forward to the coming Day of Yahweh, when God would reward the faithful and punish the sinful.

Chapter 4

EXEGETICAL DISCUSSION OF THE CONTENTS OF MALACHI 3:6-12

4.1 Introduction

The main thrust of the contents of Malachi 3 is that God is just and thus Israel is given the opportunity to repent. According to Baldwin (1972:245), there is a close connection between Malachi 3:6-12 and what has gone before. This section forms a parenthesis between two sermons concerning God's justice, the sequence of thought being that Israel has the opportunity to question His justice only because He is unchanging in His patient provision of opportunity for repentance. The action that the author has in mind of people proving themselves will so touch their pockets, that their repentance be costly and therefore genuine. In return God will richly bless them materially.

Concentration in this chapter will be based on the exegesis of Malachi 3:6-12, its message on tithe and offerings. The structural analysis of the book Malachi will be provided first so as to be able to fit Malachi 3:6-12 in the context of the whole book. The study will not provide an own translation, but will study the text critical notes and provide an analysis of the pericope. This will be followed by the conclusion.

4.2 Structural analysis of Malachi

4.2.1 Thematic Outline

Dorsey (1999:321) argues that Malachi lived many years after the temple had been rebuilt by the postexilic Jewish community. A new problem arose. The priests and people were lapsing into practices that dishonoured God, particularly bringing Him inferior offerings as if it really did not matter. The book of Malachi is

arranged in a way that effectively addresses this situation. The arrangement helps highlight the book's main points: (1) Condemnation of the negligence at the temple, (2) the key leadership role of the priests and Levites in restoring rightful worship of Yahweh, and (3) the truth that Yahweh does indeed reward those who serve Him and punishes the wicked (cf. Dorsey, 1999:321).

Petersen (1995:29) argues that many scholars have assessed the literary characteristics of Malachi from a form-critical perspective. He further argues that since the influential article of Egon Pfeiffer, there has been a strong consensus that Malachi comprises of six primary units or speeches. Pfeiffer argued that these six speeches shared a common structure, which would be classified as a disputation. Smith (1984:299) argues that the book Malachi is made up of a superscription (1:1), six disputations between Malachi / Yahweh and two addressees, and appendices.

Dorsey (1999:321) argues that most scholars analyse the book as composed of six units plus an appendix. According to Baldwin (1972:213) there can be little doubt about the essential unity of this book, for it is marked by distinctive traits which are present throughout, most notable at which is the disputation method, reflected at the beginning of each main section. Hill (1998:26) states that whether one labels Malachi's oracle as discussion, dialogue, or disputation, there is a wide-spread agreement as to the structure of the speech form: a prophetic declaration followed by the hypothetical audience rebuttal and concluding with the prophet's refutation.

These six units are defined as follows:

A disputation about God's love (1:2-5)

A disputation about God's honour and fear (1:6-2:9)

Condemnation of the people for being faithless (2:10-16)

A dispute about God's justice (2:17-3:5)

A dispute about repentance (3:6-12)

A dispute about speaking against God (3:13-21, Eng. 13-4:3)

Refer to Buttrick (1956:1120), Smith (1984:299) as well.

According to Dorsey (1999:322) if 1:6-14 and 2:1-9 are indeed separate units, then Malachi contains, not six, but seven main units plus an appendix. He follows a literary approach. Further, these seven units appear to exhibit a symmetric arrangement. He symmetrically represents this as follows:

a. Yahweh is just: He ``loves`` (the faithful remnant of) Israel but will utterly destroy wicked Edom (1:2-5)

Judgment upon the wicked (רשע) country: Yahweh has destroyed Edom and ``though they rebuild, I will tear down``

b. priests and people have cheated Yahweh in their offerings (1:6-14)

Unacceptable and inferior offerings have been brought

Curse upon those who have cheated Yahweh in their offerings

Yahweh wishes someone would shut the doors of his temple so that no more unacceptable offerings could be brought in (1:10)

Five-part introduction, followed by exhortation and promise

c. in the past Levi served in righteousness, but Levites have turned from Yahweh (2:1-9)

Levi kept Yahweh's covenant (ברת)

The priest is the messenger (מלך) of Yahweh

Priests have turned aside from the way (דרך)

Look back upon a time of Levi's past righteousness (2:5-6)

d. CENTER: stop being faithless! (2:10-16)

c' in the future Yahweh's messenger will come and Levites will be purified (2:17-3:6)

He will be the 'messenger of the covenant' (ברת)

He will be the messenger (מלך) of Yahweh

He will 'prepare the way (דרך) before Yahweh'

Look back upon a time of past righteousness (3:4)

b' people have robbed Yahweh in tithes and offerings; but if they change, God will bless them (3:7-12)

- **Unacceptable tithes and offerings** have been brought

'you are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me' (3:9)

Yahweh exhorts the people to bring acceptable offerings for his temple, with the promise that He will open the windows of heaven (3:10)

Five-part introduction, followed by exhortation and promise

a' Yahweh is just: he will reward the righteous but will utterly destroy the wicked (3:13-4:3 [3:13-21])

Judgment upon the wicked (רשע): Yahweh will bring them to an end, leaving them 'neither root nor branch'

Conclusion: Day of Yahweh (4:4-6[3:22-24])

Most scholars agree that Malachi consists of six units. Hill (1998:26) argues that a majority of interpreters discern six oracles in Malachi's prophecy, following Pfeiffer's analysis: 1:2-5; 1:6-2:9; 2:10-16; 2:17-3:5; 3:6-12; 3:13-21 [4:3]. He further argues that the earliest attempts at outlining structure in the book of Malachi are the paragraph markings found in the later manuscripts traditions of the Hebrew Bible. The Masoretes carefully transmitted textual divisions or paragraph breaks by means of the Hebrew letters ׀ (*samek*) and (peh) פ (cf. Hill, 1998:26). The ׀ at the end of a verse (leaving an open space between verses within the line) denotes the separation of small literary units, while the פ marks larger pericopes (indicated by leaving an entire line blank between textual divisions). The MT textual divisions confirm the importance of the phrase YHWH Sebaot as a marker that concludes a distinct literary unit (cf. 1:13; 2:12; and 3:12).

Unit 1:6-2:9 is sometimes divided into two parts. In this study it is kept as a unit. Redditt (1995:153) argues that the structure was redactional, and the disputes themselves at times included different types of literature and showed other signs of being composite. The main dispute with the priests (1:6-2:9) exhibited this

composite nature. He further argues that it seems better to see the passage as a composite in view of (1) its relative length in comparison with others in the book, and (2) the fact that the question-and-answer format gives way in 2:1-9 to a warning and a prophecy of disaster. It seems to have been constructed from three, perhaps originally separate, sayings of the prophet (1:6-10, 1:11-14; 2:1-9) around the general theme of the "name of the Lord".

Smith (1984:298) would argue that, but God expected them to honour and fear Him as a suzerain party to a covenant that is feared and honoured (1:6-2:9). According to Freedman (1992:482) the second disputation (1:6-2:9) consists of two sections: (1:6-14) and ((2:1-9). Both censure the levitical priesthood, the first (1:6-14) for their insolence on discharging the duties associated with the cultus, and the second (2:1-9) for the double standard in their teaching and their lack of moral leadership (cf. Num 20:12; Deut 18:1-8; 33:8-11).

The book of Malachi is made therefore up of a superscription, six disputations between Malachi/ Yahweh and the addressees and two appendices (3:22, Eng. 4:4; 3:23-24, Eng. 4:5-6).

Superscription (1:1)

God's love for Israel proved by the fate of Edom (1:2-5)

The sins of the ministry (1:6-2:9)

The degradation of marriage (2:10-16)

Where is the God of justice (2:7-3:5)

The sins of the common people (3:6-12)

What is the good of serving God (3:13-4:3)

Conclusion to the Book of the twelve (4:4-6)

The book's central unit (3:6-12) features the book's call to repentance. Here Malachi appeals to the people to stop being faithless. The faithlessness of the people is seen in the social relations, their spiritual obligations and their marital relations.

4.2.2 Structure of Malachi 3: 6-12

Hill (1998:291) argues that the literary form of prophetic disputation persist throughout the book of Malachi. This disputation speech is more complex than the previous disputations in that the oracle begins with a compound declaration ("I have not changed..." and "Return to me...") and includes a first and second round of refutation ("how shall we return?" // "How are we robbing you?") and rebuttal ("But you are robbing me in ..." // "Bring the full tithe ..."). Redditt (1995:154) argues that the dispute in 3:6-12 shows signs of revision also. The central motif in this pericope is the broken relationship between God and his people. Its basic subject was tithing, and it asked (verse 8) if anyone would rob God. This pericope is related to the previous one and to the one that follows (cf. Smith, 1984:330). VanGemeren (1997:204) considers Malachi 3:6-12 (i.e., the judgment of unfaithfulness to God) as the chiasmic complement of 2:10-16 (i.e., the judgment of unfaithfulness in marriage), both pivoting on the fulcrum disputation of the book promising the day of Yahweh's wrath (2:17-3:5). The word יָ (with which verse 6 opened, usually functioned as a transition word within a thought rather than as an opening word.

The messenger formula (Yahweh of Hosts has said) marks three distinct subunits in the disputation: the summons to repentance (verse 7ab), the indictment and challenge (verses 7c-11), and the aftermath (verse 12). Malachi 3:6-12 is directed to the restoration of the community at large, leaders, priests, and the people (especially the evildoers). Its essential message is repentance. The theme of faithless Israel connects the third and the fifth disputations, suggesting that violation of marriage covenant are also among the indictments Yahweh has charged against his people (3:5). This call to repentance is directly related to the thesis of the opening disputation (1:2-5), because Yahweh's invitation to sinful Israel to return to him in repentance comes from his great love and compassion for his people.

This disputation/ pericope is a unit. According to Hill (1998:294), Wendland¹ (p.118, whose article could not be found) has even identified a concentric/ chiastic pattern unifying the entire disputation:

- A. Introduction: divine promise, verse 6
- B. appeal to repent, verse 7
- C. Indictment- robbing God, verse 8
- D. verdict- curse, verse 9a
- C' indictment- robbing God, verse 9b
- B' promise of blessing, verses 10-11
- A' conclusion: vision of restoration, verse 12

This pericope fits well in the structure of the Book Malachi. The purpose of this pericope is to offer hope to postexilic Jews by emphasising Yahweh's immutability, countering the community's charge of capriciousness on God's part. Yahweh in judging of sin and in rewarding and restoring the covenant blessings to them, has been just and ever consistent with his holy nature.

4.2.2.1 Detailed structural analysis of the pericope

Verhoef (1987:171) argues that a modest structural analysis of the book Malachi concerns the book's division into pericopes, the analysis of sentences (prose), stichoi (poetry), and discourses, and a consideration of various literary devices. This pericope has a poetic structure. The central thought of this pericope is the broken relationship between God and his people. Achtemeier (1986:187) would argue that the expression of the love of the covenant Lord for his people continues in this brief passage, which is one of the most theologically rich in the Book Malachi.

Here the syntactic analysis method of Van Rooy will be followed as studied by Kruger. Van Rooy's (1984:102-123) method is based on sentence and pericope

¹ Unfortunately I was unable to get Wendland's study in South Africa. Because the view is important, I have used this secondary reference in this instance.

analysis. This method leads to the study of Hebrew syntax of the Old Testament and concentrates on both indicating the syntactic relationship between words, as well as the relations between types of sentences the Hebrew uses. Kruger (1984:55) would argue: 'Die basis van hierdie metode berus op die aanduiding van verbande tussen woorde deur middel van pyltjies wat sodanige verbande aantoon'. It is not the aim here to discuss the sentence analysis as this would entail too much detail. This section is poetry and in accordance with the method used for the structure of poetic passages, poetic lines will be the unit used for the analysis of the structure of the pericope (cf. 4.2.2.1.2).

4.2.2.1.1 Sentence analysis

In analysing the sentence, various phrases or terminology are studied e.g. nominal sentences (copula-predicate), verbal sentences (subject, object, predicate, indirect object), nominal as well as verbal sentences (subject, vocative, adverbial clause, adjectival clause, prepositional phrases), method of work or plan of action, (cf. Van Rooy, 1984:102-105; Kruger, 1984:55-58). As indicated above, this is not necessary for the interpretation of this poetic passage.

4.2.2.1.2 Pericope analysis

Kruger (1984:69) states: 'Van Rooy (1984:117-123) handles how to analyse the whole pericope'. Here he shows that sentences are not isolated but occurs in a certain relation (cf. Kruger, 1984:69). Since there exists a difference between prose and poetry, Van Rooy (1984:119 and 122) provides example in this regard (cf. Kruger, 1984:70 and 72). Kruger (1984:69) states: 'die belangrikste verskille by die ontleding van die twee tipes stof is daarin geleë dat by prosa die sin as uitgangspunt geneem word, en by poësie die versreel (cf. Van Rooy, 1984:117).

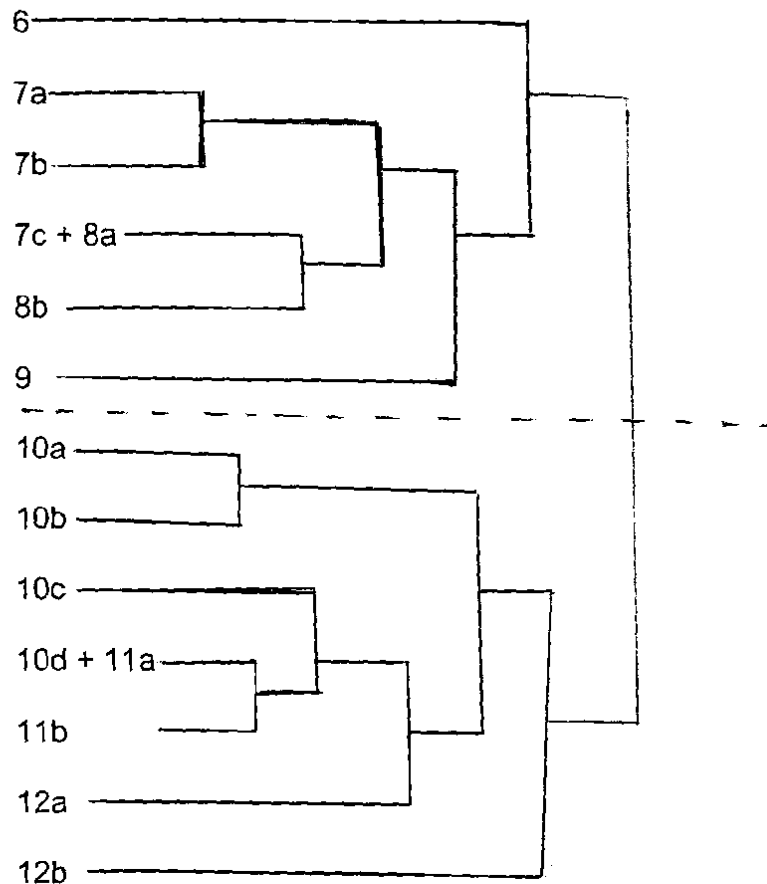
This is the Hebrew passage as outlined in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

- 6 כי אני יהוה לא שניתי ואַתֶּם בְּנֵי־יַעֲקֹב לֹא כִלִיתֶם:
- 7 לְמִיָּמַי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם סָרְתֶּם מִחֻקִּי וְלֹא שָׁמַרְתֶּם שׁוּבוּ אֵלַי
וְאָשׁוּבָה אֲלֵיכֶם אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת וְאָמַרְתֶּם בְּמָה נָשׁוּב׃
- 8 הִיָּקַבַּע אָדָם אֱלֹהִים כִּי אַתֶּם קִבְעִים אֹתִי וְאָמַרְתֶּם בְּמָה
קִבְעֶנּוּךְ הַמַּעֲשֶׂה וְהַתְרוּמָה׃
- 9 בַּמָּאֲרָה אַתֶּם נֹאֲרִים וְאֹתִי אַתֶּם קִבְעִים הַגּוֹי כָּלוּ׃
- 10 הֵבִיאוּ אֶת־כָּל־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה אֶל־בֵּית הָאוֹצֵר וִיְהִי טָרֶף בְּבֵיתִי
וּבְחֲנוּנַי נָא בְּזֹאת אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֲסֹלָא אֶפְתַּח לָכֶם
אֶת אַרְבוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהִרִיקֹתִי לָכֶם בְּרֵכָה עַד־בְּלִי־דִי׃
- 11 וְגִעַרְתִּי לָכֶם בְּאֹכַל וּלֹא־יִשְׁחַת לָכֶם אֶת־פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה
וּלֹא־תִשְׁכַּל לָכֶם הַגֶּפֶן בְּשֹׁדָה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת׃
- 12 וְאֲשֶׁרוּ אֶתְכֶם כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם כִּי־תִהְיוּ אַתֶּם אֶרֶץ חֶפֶץ אָמַר
יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת׃ ס

Here analysis will be given according to the NIV as compared to the Hebrew text as outlined above.

6. 'I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.
7a. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from
my decrees and have not kept them.
7b. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty.
7c. "But you ask, How are we to return?
8a. 'Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.
8b. 'But you ask, How do we rob you? In tithes and offerings.
9. You are under a curse - the whole nation of you - because you are
robbing me.
10a. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.
10b. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty.
10c. And see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven

- 10d. And pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.
 11a. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops
 11b. And the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit, says the Lord Almighty.
 12a. Then all the nations will call you blessed.
 12b. For yours will be a delightful land, says the Lord Almighty.



According to this analysis, this pericope is divided into two main units. These units will be discussed separately to show their relationship. These consists of verses 6, 7a, 7b, 7c + 8a, 8b, 9; and 10a, 10b, 10c, 10d + 11a, 11b, 12a, 12b respectively. Verses 6-7b defines the situation as follows: (a) God has not changed. The evidence is the very existence of the people (verse 6); (b) the people, however, have continually disregarded God's decrees (verse 7a and b). Verhoef (1987:177) argues that this theme of God versus people permeates the entire pericope.

As Verhoef (1987:177) puts it, verse 7c provides the key to the relationship between God and people. Verses 7c-9 are structured according to Malachi's disputation method: (a) statement (line 7c: Return to me, and I will return to you), (b) question (line 6): How do we return?, and (c) answer (lines 7-12), this answer being structured according to the same three-pattern: (1) statement (lines 7-8, verse 8a, b), (2) question (verse 8c i.e. line 9), and (3) answer (lines 10-12, verse 8d-9). The structural analysis above divides verse 8 into two lines only thus differing with Verhoef (1987:177). The key words in this unit are 'return (verse 7, line 7b and 7c)' and 'rob (verse 8a and 8b)'. Hill (1988:293) argues that the prophet's summons to penitence (3:7) is in keeping with the oracular pattern of indictment, judgment, and call to repentance, with a return to God as the only logical response to the preceding threat of divine judgment (2:17-3:5).

In the second unit (verses 10a-12b), the renewal of the relationship between God and the people is explained in concrete details. Hill (1998:311) would argue: 'By means of the divine invitation to test God, the prophet extends to the restoration community the opportunity to 'prove' the faithfulness of God in keeping his covenantal relationship (and covenant promises) with Israel by demonstrating their own faithfulness in obedience to the covenant stipulations regarding the tithe. The sign of repentance expected from people in returning to God was to bring the whole tithe in the storehouse (verse 10a), and God will again turn to his people by restoring to them material blessings (verses 10b-12). Verhoef (1987:177) would argue that the material obligations and promises are highlighted in the context of the relationship between God and his people.

According to this analysis, these two units are unified by repentance and restoration. God's call to Israel to return to Him in repentance issues from his great love and compassion for his people. The renewal of the relationship between God and people in 7c is expounded in a concrete manner (cf. Verhoef, 1987:177). The people must return to the Lord by bringing the whole tithe into his storehouse, and God will again turn to his people by restoring to them material

blessings (verses 10b-12). Tithe is required as a sign of obedience to God's ordinances. In analysing this pericope, the conclusion is that the obligations and the promises are highlighted in the context of the relationship between God and his people. People are obliged to bring the whole tithe in returning to God.

This pericope's purpose (Mal 3:6-12) is to offer hope to the postexilic people, emphasising God's immutability, countering the community's charge of capriciousness on God's part (cf. Hill, 1998:294). In this pericope God judges the sin of unrepentant Israel (3:6-7), while in verses 11-12, He restores the covenant blessings by rewarding the penitent. God is just and ever consistent with his holy nature. The pattern that is very clear in this pericope is as follows:

- (a) Problem is stated (verse 6-7 and 8)
- (b) The curse (verse 9)
- (c) Solution (verse 10) and
- (d) The blessings (verses 11-12)

4.2.2.2 Textual criticism

The aim here is to try and analyse the text critical notes as they appear in the BHS. This will illustrate the principles used in the practice of Old Testament textual criticism through examination of textual problems in Malachi 3:6-12 as they are indicated critical apparatus of BHS.

4.2.2.2.1 Malachi 3:7

Footnote 7a refers to שמרתם 'you are not destroyed'. In this footnote the BHS suggests that one could perhaps insert משמרתי after שמרתם. In support of this suggestion they refer to verse 14, where this combination occurs.

In favour of this suggestion is the fact that this addition would provide a better parallel structure for the line, as the added word would be parallel to חקי in the first half of the line. This parallel is in any case implied, so that the addition is not really necessary. The proposal does not have any textual support and the addition is not accepted in this study.

Footnote 7b-b has a question about a possible addition in the text. There is no textual support in this case. Verse 7c is a half line, with no parallel part. The same occurs in verse 12b, supporting the retention of verse 7c.

4.2.2.2.2 Malachi 3:8

Footnote 8a suggests that one should read היעקב instead of היקבע. This is supported by the reading of the LXX, which translated the verb עקב while the MT has the verb קבע. These verbs have the same consonants but in different positions and have more or less the same meaning. The LXX probably reflects a different Hebrew *Vortage*, but it does not affect the meaning. The MT can be retained.

Footnotes 8b and 8c are in agreement with 8a, with the same different root implied. The same is true as far as the evaluation of the footnotes is concerned. The same is again the case with footnote 9a.

In the footnote 8d-d, the BHS suggest that perhaps it should read במעשר ובתרומה. This suggestion has convincing support for the addition of the

preposition. The reference to footnote 9b-b is related to a proposal by the editor of BHS. The LXX agrees with the MT and the MT can be retained.

In the footnote 8e, the LXX adds μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰσε. As only the LXX has this addition, the MT can be retained.

4.2.2.2.3 Malachi 3:9

Footnote 9b-b asks a question about an addition and proposes to read **הגם כלו**, and then move the phrase to the end of verse 8. The addition and transposition have no textual support. Thus the MT should be retained.

4.2.3 The book's contents

Boice (1986:253) argues that according to the prophet, the people were guilty of many serious sins. The priests were offering blemished animals in a formal but insincere religious ritualism. Many were divorcing their wives to marry unbelieving women. Most had been disobeying God's law by withholding tithes of their harvests. And they were all accusing God of loving them only half-heartedly and of being unjust in His dealings with them, because He had not prospered them adequately. The answer to this is that God had not changed. Boice (1986:254) argues that in theology this doctrine is called immutability. It means that, being perfect, God cannot and does not change. In turn, it is the people who had changed, falling away from true love for him and from the truly righteous their forefathers once had (Mal 3:4).

4.4 Discussion of central concepts

Here the concepts to be discussed are: "to return, expressed by the verb **שׁוּב**", "tithe (**מעשר**)" and "offering (**תרומה**)". These concepts are from the pericope Malachi 3:6-12.

4.4.1 Return שׁוּב

VanGemeren (1997:56) states that the root שׁוּב occurs in various forms in the Old Testament with relative frequency. The nominative and the adjective occur infrequently. According to Jenni (1997:1312) in the Old Testament שׁוּב occurs chiefly in the qal "to return", hiphil "to bring back", rarely in the polel "to bring back" and hophal "to be brought back". The verb in its various forms is marked by a combination of characteristics - a high frequency, a rich variety of meanings, some ambiguity about direction. שׁוּב in the religious sense is the most common term for both turning decisively to God (or idols) or turning away from Him (them).

שׁוּב is basically a verb of motion, with the meaning return, turn back, go back, come back, often in reference to physical motion of returning to a point of departure (e.g. person, Gen15:16, God, 18:10, etc.). A common use of שׁוּב occurs in the context of moral and spiritual lapses, departure (turning away) from Yahweh or turning to God. God through his prophet appeals wayward ones to return to Him. VanGemeren (1997:57) argues that the imperatives are numerous, sometimes by way of warning, and at other times by way of appeal (e.g. 2 Kings 17:13, etc.). The appeal to turn from idols is amplified by Joel's appeal to people to turn (שׁוּב) to Yahweh "your God" (Joel 2:12-13).

The word שׁוּב is the central word for the concept repent. Hence Jenni (1997:1315) argues that the theological use of the figurative meaning of שׁוּב encompasses to a lesser degree apostasy from God (שׁוּב מֵרָחָק e.g. Num14:43) and turning away from evil (שׁוּב מֵרָע e.g. 1 kings 8:35), as well as primarily, repentance and return to God (שׁוּב אֵל, etc. Deut 30:2). Not only do persons turn (שׁוּב), God also turns (שׁוּב). That action whereby God receives to Himself the repentant person is also described by the word שׁוּב. God is the subject. He promises to turn (שׁוּב) to the one seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. His response to someone's plea for restoration is to turn (שׁוּב) away his anger (Hos 14:4[5]).

In this pericope (Mal 3:6-12), שׁוּב is used in the sense of returning to God. It means to repent. The usage in Malachi 3:7 is in reference to people repenting from their sins and returning to God. The people addressed by Malachi were the Israelites, the covenant people not gentiles. The Priests, Levites and people were cheating God by not giving Him the offerings and tithes that were rightly due to Him, and by not living according to his teaching. It is significant to note that in this specific context שׁוּב means that people have to repent from not tithing what is rightly due to God. Buttrick (1995:1139) argues that while repentance must of course involve a basic change of attitude, yet to the Hebrew mind such a change must necessarily manifest itself in action.

4.4.2 Tithes (מעשר)

Akkadian has the same root word with שׁ rather than the Hebrew ש, meaning basically ten, and eshru as a singular only in the late Neo-Babylonian period meaning tithe, or tenth. Both are used in secular as well as sacred contexts. In secular world it is used for taxes levied by the local king, or it could be used to share in a business, although the Hebrew nominative מעשר, tithe is not used in this way in the Old Testament (cf. VanGemen, 1997:1035). Baumgarten (1984:245) argues that it is in our opinion, possible to demonstrate that the use of מעשר, not only in its literal sense of a ten percent impost but also as a general term for any tax payable to the Temple or the clergy was characteristic of both Hebrew and Greek sources stemming from the period of the second Temple. VanGemen (1997:1035) argues that there are three points of special interest in the Ugaritic material: (a) The tithe was viewed from the perspective of a whole village as a unit. Hence Anderson (1987:79) argues that there is never a mention of an individual villager paying a tithe. (b) In the documentation that we have, "the tithe is most often a secular impost due to the king or one of his servants. (c) There are few texts in which priests are recipients of the tithe, but even in those instances the priests are treated like any other specialist to whom tithes are due.

Like the Hebrew nominative, the 'piel' form of the denominative verb is used not only of secular but also of sacred tithes: (Gen 28:22, Deut 14:22), to give a tithe, and Nehemiah 10:37[38], to receive a tithe. Anderson (1997:81) argues that the sacred or secular quality of the tithe must be understood in terms by which it was collected and distributed. VanGemeren (1997:1036) states that the Hebrew term *מעשר* (tithe), occurs 32 times in the Old Testament, 29 times referring to the tithe that the sons of Israel were to give to the Levites, and the levitical tithe to the Priests, once referring to Abram's tithe to Melchizedek (Gen 14:20), and twice in Ezekiel 45:11 and 14 for the regulation of the size of a bath volume measurement as a "tenth of a homer" (verse 11), and 'the prescribed portion of oil ... a tenth of a bath from each cor' (verse 14) for the offering to make atonement for Israel (verse 15). Ezekiel 45 is the only passage where *מעשר* is used simply as a measure, not in reference to tithes.

This practice of giving a tenth part of one's possessions for the maintenance of religious purpose, cult or government is ancient and widespread. In the Old Testament the first occurrence of this custom is found in connection with the history of Abraham (Gen14:20) and Jacob (Gen 28:22), in both these verses it is presented as a common practice. Abram's giving of the tithe to Melchizedek both the king and the priest was the recognition of God Most High whom both served. Verhoef (1987:303) argues that in the Mosaic laws it was given the status of a compulsory contribution. In Leviticus 27:30 it was decreed that a tenth of all produce was "holy to the Lord", and was intended for the priesthood (viz. the Levites and the Priests [Num 18:21-31]) i.e. to Yahweh, and apparently implies that it should all be brought to the temple. According to Mitchell (1937:71) in the days of Nehemiah, the people pledged themselves to pay the tithes exactly as Malachi here proposes they should (Neh10: 38ff); but the pledge was quickly forgotten and the tithe allowed to go by default as in the following text: (Neh 13:10ff).

4.4.3 Offering (תרמה)

Jenni (1997:1223) states that תרמה may have originally referred to a particular kind of sacral presentation of gifts in which a portion was consecrated and symbolically transferred – not burned but placed at the priests' disposal - through תרמה elevation, i.e. being lifted high before the altar of Yahweh. Teruma, means "elevation, contribution" also often referred "wave (offering)", which occurs about one-third of the time in conjunction with Yahweh. The close connection between tithes and תרמה (offering) is evident from Numbers 18:24, "I give to the Levites as their inheritance the tithe that the Israelites present as an offering to the Lord".

Verhoef (1987:304) argues that these were contributions, which were set aside from a larger quantity for a holy purpose. It (תרמה) has both specific and general application as a specific term e.g. (cf. Exod 25; 1-7; 29:27-28). General includes all offerings and contributions required for the sanctuary e.g. firstlings, holy offerings etc. (cf. Lev 22;2-3,12,15; Num 5:9;15:17-21; 18:8-20). Offerings were contributed for the erection and maintenance of the tabernacle (Exod 25:1-7) and later also for the second temple (Ezra 8:25), but its purpose was mainly to provide for the need of the priests (Exod 29:27-28; Lev 7:32, 34; 10:14; 22:12, etc.). It was partly voluntary and partly a compulsory contribution. Verhoef (1987:305) argues that the תרמה was not taken from the cereal offering, or from the sin offerings, these being most sacred, but from the peace offerings and other sacred gifts, in the form of the breast of the wave offering, the thigh of the ram of ordination (Exod 29:27-28 etc.), cakes of leavened bread , etc. (Lev 7:14).

Baldwin (1972:246) would argue that one of Nehemiah's tasks was to ensure that the supplies intended for support of the temple ministry did not fail as they had done during his absence (Neh 13:10-13). When no gifts were brought the Levites had no option but to give up their ministry and earn their own living by farming. *Israel's robbing of God coincide with the conditions alluded to in 2 Chronicles 31 and Nehemiah 13:10.*

4.5 Detailed discussion of different parts of Malachi 3:6-12

4.5.1 Discussion of the section according to the structure analysed in 4.2.2.1.2

According to the analysis, the section consists of two units i.e. verses 6-9 and verses 10-12 respectively. These two units will be discussed according to their sub-units respectively, their relationship and to what unifies them into a single pericope.

4.5.1.1 Verses 6-9

This first unit deals with the problem that the people did not obey the Lord. The fact that they did not give their tithes can be seen as the proof of this problem. This Hebrew section is of a poetic nature and thus in this regard poetic lines can be used as the basic unit in analysing the contents of this unit.

Since the whole nation has sinned the threat of judgment is explained in verse 6 in the double clause: that the Lord does not change, and the sons of Israel do not perish. The two halves in verse 6 balance each other. The Hebrew reads, 'For I the Lord do not change, and you sons of Jacob, are not consumed or destroyed'. Because Lord is unchangeable in His purposes, and Israel as the people of God is not to perish, therefore will God exterminate the wicked out of Israel by means of judgment, in order to refine it and shape it according to its true calling.

Verse 6 begins with the connecting particle וְ : Some of the ancient versions (LXX, Pershitta, Targum) and modern interpreters render it with for, because, with the assumption that verse 6 is an explanation of the pronounced judgment of 2:17-3:5 (cf. Verhoef, 1987:299). The moral character of Yahweh remains unchanged, sinners must undergo the punishment they so richly deserve. What makes this, especially the last part, more difficult is the word *kelitem*. Verhoef (1987:300) argues that two possible translations in this context have been suggested. The one is "to cease", "to come to an end", and the other "to be destroyed", "to be consumed". In connection with the first translation the meaning

of the sentence may be interpreted in two ways. First, the Israelites have not ceased to be sons of Jacob, that is, they are unchangeable in their sinfulness. Second, the sons of Jacob have not yet come to the end of their sins, or, according to the LXX, "have not departed from the unrighteousness both of the Lord and of the descendants of Jacob.

Baldwin (1972:245) argues that the fact is that neither God nor Israel had changed. There is utter consistency in God's dealings with men. He who once loved Jacob (1:2) did not cease to love his sons, though they continued to take after their father and were cheats and supplanters (Gen 27:36; cf. Mal 3:5). The other translation, which seems preferable, stresses the fact of God's unchangeableness as the reason for Israel's continued existence. Because the Lord had not changed in his love for his people (1:2-5), the descendants of Jacob are not destroyed (cf. Jer 30:11). This is Malachi's opening statement. Israel's continuous existence is due to God's unchangeable love.

Spence (1950:40) argues that this is to show that God performs his promises, that He puts no difference between the evil and the good. Boice (1986:254) argues that it would be a valid exposition of this to list every-one of God's attributes and show how God does not change in any attribute like sovereignty, wisdom, holiness, self-existence, self-sufficiency, knowledge and justice. But the relevant attributes here are His love, mercy, grace and faithfulness. The prophet here, in Malachi 3:6 says that the people have not been destroyed. It is significant to note that here the emphasis is on God's grace and mercy rather than on justice. God came to save His people but not to judge them. God is unchanging in his faithfulness which is why the people have not been destroyed for their transgressions. God is gracious, although people accused Him of unfaithfulness, which is why these very people had not been cast off.

The perfects are used to express established truths. The unchangeableness of God is implied in the name Yahweh, "who is that He is," the absolutely

independent and absolutely existing One (see at Gen 2:4). For the fact itself compare Numbers 23:19, 1 Samuel 15:29, James 1:17. Yahweh is in apposition to אֲנִי (ani, 'I'), and not a predicate in the sense of "I am Yahweh" ; this is evident from the parallel וְאַתֶּם בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב (and ye, the sons of Jacob), where no one thinks of taking בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב (sons of Jacob) as a predicate (Keil and Delitzsch, 2002). *Kâlâh*, to come to an end, to be destroyed, as the parallel passage, Jeremiah 30:11, which floated before the prophet's mind, clearly shows. The name "sons of Jacob" (poetical for sons of Israel) is used emphatically, denoting the true members of the people of God, who rightly bear the name of Israel. These do not perish, because their existence rests upon the promise of the unchangeable God (cf. Rom 11:28, 29), refer to (Keil and Delitzsch, 2002). The sons of Jacob are the people of God. This is the very reason why Israel is still in existence.

The Lord having announced the coming judgment for the long-continued transgressions of the people, adds a gracious promise as in Zechariah 1:3, "Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord, and I will return unto you". But will this judgment bring about the end of Israel? Will the people be consumed by the refiner's fire? No, for as other prophets had predicted, Malachi stated that Israel will be delivered in the day of the LORD. The descendants of Jacob will not be destroyed. This is because of God's covenant promise. A promise is only as good as the person who makes it. God will keep His promise to the nation of Israel — it will not change — because His Word, like Himself, is immutable. This is the basis for Israel's hope (cf. Deut 4:31; Ezek 36:22-32). Significantly the Apostle Paul gives the same reason for expecting a future for national Israel (Rom 3:3-4; 9:6; 11:1-5, 25-29).

Verhoef (1987:215) would argue that instead of honoring the name of the Lord, they (people of Israel) have despised it by offering defiled, polluted food on his altar. Here in verse 7, the people's reproach that the God of justice approves of evildoers (2:17) is flatly denied. He does not change, especially not in his

awareness of sin. Spence (1950:40) argues that disobedience was no new offence, they had always from early days been persistent in wickedness, and if the performance of God's sure promise was delayed, this was because they had not fulfilled the conditions on which rested its accompaniment. The call to repent is worded in Zechariah's phraseology (Zech 1:3), but it meets no response because there is no awareness of any shortcomings. Verhoef (1987:301) argues that the point of reference is that Israel's waywardness was a pervasive theme through their entire history hence the term "your forefathers or your fathers". The priests were habitually and continually offering polluted food from and on behalf of the people at the altar. It is due to sin that the people have turned their back to God.

It is essential for the covenant relationship that God and people should again turn to one another. This is a keynote of verse 7c: Return to me, and I will return to you. According to Holladay (1988:362) the Hebrew verb may have the opposite meaning of "to repent" and "to become apostate". Here it is the former, because the act of turning is to me. Verhoef (1987:301) states that H. W. Wolff pointed out that the call to repentance in the prophecies is usually accompanied by a *Heiswort*, a word of salvation. This applies as well in this text. The call to repent is followed by a promise (cf. Zech 1:3, 2 Chron 30:6, Verhoef, 1987:301). If people return to God, then surely He will return to them. The transgressions of the people were the cause of God's turning away from them, this is the reason why He was no longer pleased with them (1:8, 10; 2:13). If they repent He is eager to confirm by his own turning to them that He still loves them and that He has not changed in his covenant relationship to them (verse 6). "How shall we return?" This question reveals that these people claim that they are not aware of any shortcoming on their side. Mitchell (1937:69) states that repentance and conversion will forestall the destructive punishment threatened in verse 6.

Verse 7 explains the situation, God's command and the motivation thereof. The Lord does not approve of Israel's sin. Taylor (2004:411) argues that the Lord

condemned Israel through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 7:25-26) in terms similar to those of Malachi. 7a states that the people did not obey the Lord through the generations from the time of their forefathers. This Malachi's fifth oracle begins with a blanket condemnation of Israel's disobedience to God's decrees throughout her history. (This contrasts with the positive note of God's unchanging faithfulness which concluded the preceding oracle, verse 6). This calls to mind God's comments about Israel's stubbornness at Sinai (Exod 32:7-9), which Moses repeated before the nation entered Canaan (Deut 9:6-8, 13, 23-24; 31:27-29). Certainly the history of Israel from that day to Malachi's substantiated the prophet's charge. According to Ogden (1987:104) both the accusation and the demand are often found in several books of earlier prophets, especially in Jeremiah (2:5-8; 7:25-26; see also 3:12, 14; 4:1). Malachi then voiced the Lord's appeal and a promise. If Israel would return to Him (in faith and obedience), then He would respond and would return to her. This promise was based on the covenant God made with Israel (cf. Deut 4:30-31; 30:1-10).

7b. According to Smith (1984:293) the prophet's summons to penitence (3:7) is in keeping with the oracular pattern of indictment, judgment, and call to repentance, with a return to God as the only logical response to the preceding threat of divine judgment (2:17-3:5). Again Malachi placed Israel in the rhetorical role of questioning God's charge: How are we to return? Only one who is aware of the path he has taken can retrace his steps. But Israel pretended to be ignorant of her waywardness. Israel wants to claim that God is not just.

Therefore they have to repent (7b) before they can expect the Lord to return to them. Israel's return to God, as a sign of obedience to his commands, is to be marked by the bringing of the tithe they have been withholding (verse 8b). The response to the Lord's calling to repentance will be costly (cf. Baldwin 1972:245). The first unit (6-9) states a command through the imperative verb "return" in verse 7b. The imperative "bring" at the beginning of the second section in verse

10a (Taylor, 2004:410) links up with this. The second command elaborates the first.

In verse 8, God brings to Israel's attention another area as an example in which their rebellion against God was manifesting itself - the withholding of tithes. Verse 8a charges them of robbing the Lord and 8b states that their withholding of the tithe demonstrates this. In verse 8a, according to Verhoef (1987:302) first a general truth is propounded by way of a rhetorical question: will a man rob God? Bluntly stated, Israel was accused of being a thief. Thievery against people was bad enough, but only a fool would try to rob God (cf. Walvoord, 1985). Yet this was the charge against Israel. Israel was not honest and trustworthy. With regard to verse 8b, Walvoord (1985) would argue that the fifth oracle is parallel to the second, having two questions, 'How are we to return?' (Verse 7b) and How do we rob You? (Verse 8). This literary device helped represent the general and the specific natures of the charge. Despite their inadequacies the people have survived. This is because God had not changed towards his people. Again the nation's problem had to do with offerings. The second oracle (1:6-2:9) dealt with the attitude of disrespect (1:6) which led to a profaning of the offerings (1:7-14). There the quality of the sacrifices was in question. Here the quantity was the issue (cf. 'the whole tithe', 3:10).

The nation, God answered, was robbing God by not bringing tithes and offerings. The tithe was literally a 10th of all produce and livestock which the people possessed (Lev 27:30, 32). A tithe was to be given to the Levites who in turn were to give a tithe of the tithe to the priests (Num 18:21-32). The Israelites were also to bring a tithe of their produce and animals and eat it with the Levites before the Lord in Jerusalem as an act of festal worship (Deut 12:5-18; 14:22-26). Also every third year a tithe was to be stored up in the towns for Levites, strangers, widows, and orphans (Deut 14:27-29). While the word, 'offerings' may refer to offerings in general, it seems to refer here (Mal 3:8c) to those portions of the offerings (as well as those portions of the tithes) designated for the priests. If

the Levites and priests would not receive the tithes and offerings, they would have to turn to other means of supporting themselves. As a result, the temple ministry would suffer.

Israel's attitude towards and use of their possessions was one indication of the health of their relationship with God. Man is God's steward on the land (cf. Lev 25:23, Deut 6:10-12). Israel was instructed to tithe. Verse 9 amplifies the charge that Israel was robbing God. The whole nation is accused of defrauding God of what is due to Him. According to Taylor (2004:18), verse 9 amplifies the charge that Judah was robbing God by pointing out two additional facts: the first is that they were doing this even though, like the Levites in 2:2, God had already begun to discipline them with curses He had warned them about thousand years before (see also Deut 28:15-68). The second additional fact added by verse 9 to the accusation of verse 8 is that the entire nation was guilty.

Since the temple was God's house (verse 10), failure to support its ministry was considered equal to robbing God Himself. The nature of the curse on the nation can be determined from verse 11: famine due to pests (locusts) eating the vegetation, and vines without grapes (cf. Deut 28:38-40).

Mitchell (1937:71) would argue that because of Israel's sins, the land and people lie under the curse of Yahweh, which frustrates all their efforts and brings to naught all their hopes (cf. 2:2). It is evident that the curse consists in the failure of crops (Hag 1:4-11), which in turn again was the result of drought and locusts. Because of sin people were spiritually unable to recognize the religious significance of this judgment. According to Verhoef (1987:305) the seriousness of the collective transgression of the whole nation is evident from the fact that they persist in robbing God despite the curse, which rested upon them. Instead of repenting, the people found an additional excuse in the economic conditions not to give the Lord what was rightfully his. In Hebrew the emphasis is on 'me'. By neglecting the compulsory contributions, they were in fact robbing God. This

habitual and continual robbing of God was done by the whole nation. It is evident in this verse as well that God does not leave any sin to go unpunished, hence the call (verse 7) that people return to Him as He is gracious and merciful.

In these verses (7-9), God made his intentions known to his people before He takes any further steps. He does this because of his love and giving his people an opportunity to repent before He acts. After the Lord has announced to the murmuring people that He will suddenly draw near to judgment upon the wicked, He proceeds to explain the reason why He has hitherto withheld His blessing and His salvation.

The reason why Israel waits in vain for the judgment and the salvation dawning with it, is not to be found in God, but in the people, in the fact, that from time immemorial they have transgressed the commandments of God (cf. Isa 43:27; Ezek 2:3; Hos 10:9). And yet they regard themselves as righteous. They reply to the call to repentance by saying, **בַּמָּה נָשׁוּב**, wherein, i.e., in what particular, shall we turn? The prophet thereupon shows them their sin: they do what no man should presume to attempt—they try to defraud God in the tithe and heave-offering, namely, by either not paying them at all, or not paying them as they should into the house of God. **קִבַּעַ**, which only occurs here and at Proverbs 22:23, signifies to defraud, to overreach.

According to Buttrick (1956:1139) the prophet replies that they have been disregarding the statutes which ordered the giving of the tithe and the other specified offerings for the support of the Temple. **הַמַּעֲשֵׂר וְהַנֶּתֶר** is either an accusative of free subordination, or else we must supply the preposition **בַּ** from the question itself. On the tithe see Leviticus 27:30ff, Numbers 18:20ff, and Deuteronomy 14:22ff. And on the heave-offering (*terūmah*), the portion of his income lifted off from the rest, for the purposes of divine worship. And this they do, notwithstanding the fact that God has already visited them with severe

punishment, viz., with the curse of barrenness and of the failure of the harvest. We may see from verses 10–12, that the curse with which they were smitten consisted in this. וְאַתָּה is adversative: yet ye defraud me, and indeed the whole nation, and not merely certain individuals (cf. Keil and Delitzch, 2002).

With the above in mind, it clear in this unit that Israel is accused by God of not giving Him his dues, exemplified by the way in which they were defrauding Him of the tithe.

4.5.1.2 Verses 10a-12b

This section is marked as a command by the imperative “bring” in the opening section of verse 10a. This section deals with the proof for doing the right thing which is tithing as a sign of obedience to God’s command. This imperative in 10a where God demands the bringing of the whole tithe to be brought into his storehouse, elaborates the imperative at the opening of verse 7c. The result of adhering to this command and meeting its demands is that there be food in God’s house. Specifying the whole tithe suggests that many were either withholding part of the tithe or were bringing nothing. Deuteronomy 14:29 states the purpose of this tithe, this clearly give the background for twin purpose of “food” in Malachi 3:10a and divine blessing in verses 10b-12 (Taylor, 2004:420).

In verse 10a the emphasis lies upon לֵל the *whole* of the tithe they are to bring, and not merely a portion of it, and so defraud the Lord; for the tithe was paid to Jehovah for His servants the Levites (Num 18:24). Smith (1984:24) argues that Malachi’s call to “bring the full tithe” constitutes a more pointed answer to the question posed by his audience in verse 8 (“how have we robbed you”), countered by the prophet’s cryptic response (“the tithe, the offering!”) in verse 9.

Verse 10b also starts with an imperative, demanding the nation to test God by bringing the whole tithe into his storehouse. The Lord invites the people to test Him. This imperative “test me (וּבְחִנּוּנִי)” further explains the imperative “return” in

verse 7. The NIV translates this verb as 'test Me in this' which is literal and commands Israel to give God an opportunity to prove his faithfulness in response to their faith. Here if the people will repent and turn to Him, He will again turn to them. The purpose of this test is to introduce what the Lord will do to them if they return to Him. The return requires them to faithfully bring the tithe to the Lord, who will show his faithfulness by richly blessing them. With this command to test God, He wants the people to discover that He is faithful. The testing of God is an aspect of their return to Him (Verhoef, 1987:307).

Verhoef (1987:306) states that the people must return to the Lord by bringing the compulsory contributions to the storehouse (verse 10a), and then God will return to them by providing them with material blessings (verses 10b-12). The people are not allowed to treat the compulsory tithe as they fit. Mitchell (1937:72) argues that this may have been due to the fact that the people as a whole had each kept back part of his tithe, deeming that he needed it worse than the priests did, or to the fact that large numbers of them had ceased tithing altogether, while the faithful pious were denying themselves in order that they might meet their religious obligations in full.

The supposition is either that a part of the tithes were kept back, or that not all the people have fulfilled their obligation in this respect. According to Verhoef (1987:306) the first alternative is preferable, because in verse 9 the whole nation was accused of robbing the Lord. Through the prophet the Lord demands the whole tenth from the people. The testing of God is the return of the people to Him. The Lord in verse 7 anticipated His return to the repented people, hence this statement; 'Return to Me, and I will return to you'. Thus here, in anticipation of the people's obedience, the Lord will open the windows of heaven for you and pour out for you an overflowing blessing. Israel should not, as before keep back a part of the tithes, but should pay the whole tithe without defrauding the Lord, that there might be food for the priests and Levites.

In verses 10c and 10d, this thought (the anticipation of the return of the people) is thoroughly explained. Anticipating the people's obedience in this regard, the Lord will throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that they will not have enough room for it. Verhoef (1987:308) argues that the promised blessing is evidently a figurative indication of rain. The blessing is not only for the present but for the future as well. In this verses 10c-10d, emphatically is referred to the flood of blessings that would answer Israel's obedience of faith.

In verse 11 (i.e. 11a and 11b) the blessing concerns the fruits of the soil. Here it is clear that God in his turning to the people will do two things concerning the harvests, namely: preventing pests from destroying the crops and will also prevent crop failure in the case of the vines. Here God promises to destroy or rebuke the devourer of their crops, in protecting their produce from ruin as well as their vines from barrenness (cf. Joel 2:19, 23-25; Zech 8:13-15; Mal 4:2). Two results of God's rebuking the devourer are achieved here namely: (1) 'and it will not ruin for you the fruit of the ground' and (2) 'and the vine in the field will not fail to bear for you'. For Israel refused to turn to God in obedience He had punished them. Here He had again ruined their crops, but again He is prepared to turn to the curse to blessing if they would repent and be obedient to Him (cf. Amos 9:14, also Deut. 30:6:10; Jer 31:5). God will surely bless his people.

This final verse (verse 12a and 12b) contains the result of "God opening the floodgates of heaven" in verse 10c. Because of God's blessings all nations will call Israel blessed. Malachi assures that repentance would restore their joy and would turn their shame to glory. Nations will respect and honour them again as the people of God. Israel will once again take up her central and unique position as favoured people of God. God will bless the people as they truly repent from their sins.

Indeed, verses 10a-12b, attest that if the people return to God and truly obey his ordinances, He will sure return to them. God will bless them as sign of his

unchangeableness. These two units (verses 6-9 and 10-12) are marked by the imperatives 'return' (verse 7) and 'bring' (verse 10a), whereby the latter explains the former. In verses 6-9, repentance is required while verse 10-12, express what is necessary to be done, the bringing of the whole tithe and the blessings that will come as a result of obedience. These units cannot be understood apart from each other. Thus they form a pericope.

In summary I agree with Verhoef (1987:310) that in this pericope the continuous waywardness of the people (verse 7a) is more specifically defined as a general and sinful neglect of the compulsory contributions of the temple staff (verses 8-9). The call to repentance also includes the obligation to bring the whole tithe to the storehouse (verse 10a). When in obedience, they will risk it with God (verse 10b), He will return to them in his favour and pour out rich blessings upon them (verses 10b-11b) as a confirmation of his unchangeableness (verse 6). Then they will be called blessed by all nations as a country of divine and human delight (verse 12).

4.5.3 Summary of Malachi 3:6-12

The disputation begins once again with a statement from God containing criticism of the people: "You have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them." But the criticism, despite its accompanying call for repentance, is not very specific, and so the people ask, "How shall we return?" In the second part of the divine declaration, the charge is stated more precisely: "You are robbing me". But still the audience protests and requires further clarification: "How are we robbing you?" And then there follows an elaboration of one particular area in the community's life in which their actions were tantamount to the robbery of God.

According to Verhoef (1987:302) the people's reaction obliged the prophet to explain the content of "return" in connection with both the people (verse 8-10a) and (verse 10b -12). The robbery took place in the area of tithes and offerings.

An ancient part of both law and tradition required of the Hebrews that they return a portion of what was given to them to God the Giver. The tithe represented a return of one tenth of all provision. But the failure to give was not merely a lapse in religious duty, but amounted to a form of robbery: what rightfully belonged to someone else was being taken by another. The consequence of the nation's robbery was the experience of the divine curse: if they knew not how to give, they would receive less and less. The prophet then enjoins the people to bring the full measure of their offering to the temple; such action would result not only in there being "food in my house" (verse 10, for the feeding of the temple's support staff), but would also test God with respect to his ability to provide more abundantly.

There is a promise attached to this message, which is concurrently a challenge and a call to repentance. Smith (1984:293) argues that this call to repentance is directly related to the thesis of the opening disputation (1:2-5), because Yahweh's invitation to recalcitrant Israel to return to Him in repentance issues from his great love and compassion for his people. If the people would give, they would discover God's bounty; He would control the pests that destroyed the crops, and the vineyards would bear an abundant harvest. The blessing on the land would be of such a kind that all surrounding nations would observe it and comment on the happy estate of the chosen people. The prophet's message brings out some fundamental perspectives with respect to the matter of giving.

(i) Attitudes to property. The prophet, employing a rare Hebrew verb, describes the actions of the people as a form of robbery. In keeping their tithes and offerings to themselves, they acted as if they owned all that they had. Their attitude towards property was not one of stewardship, according to which their possessions were held as a sacred trust from God, but one of ownership. What they had belonged to them; it was up to them to decide whether any portion of it should be given to God. According to Achtemeier (1986:188) the Lord here charges the Judeans with stinginess, with cheating, by failing to bring the whole tithe and the required offerings to the Temple (cf. 1:14). Considering the

accusations against the priests in 2:1-9, they may also have been withholding the best portions of the tithes from God. In Nehemiah's time this selfish act was in existence still (cf. Neh 13:10-13). And there is an irony in the situation: they actually had much less than they might have had, in part because their selfish and tight-fisted attitudes towards property had reduced their capacity for growth.

The prophet urged them to consider how they should use God's property, while the people wondered what they would do with their own property. In this, their thinking was fundamentally flawed, and the flaw in turn undermined their relationship with God. Their selfishness ruined their relationship with God. Due to sin God departed from them and they were alone. To think that property and wealth belong entirely to oneself is to presuppose that we, by our own efforts, earn all that we have. This view, because it is partly true, is easy to accept, but it is essentially a deception. We work to earn what we have, and we may be rewarded for our labour; but the health and strength to work, and indeed the opportunity to work, are all a part of God's gift to us in life. Thus, however hard we work, and however rightfully we reap our rewards, there is a distinct sense in which none of it would be possible without God. Our attitude towards property and wealth should therefore always involve an acknowledgment of God's role in its acquisition, and this acknowledgment in turn will relax the tightness of our hold on that which we possess. The totally self-centred view of wealth, and the egotistical pride that may arise in its accumulation, are a recipe for stinginess. Generosity arises from a proper attitude towards wealth and property, in which we recognize the blessing and provision of God in its receipt.

(ii) Attitudes to God. Buttrick (1962:231) argues that His (God) attitude towards his people does not suddenly change without cause. It changes because they have failed to keep his laws. The person who is stingy with wealth, refusing to give to God or to other persons, betrays a deep-seated lack of belief. Such persons do not really believe that God, has had any hand in making and giving them what they are and what they have. The proud and confident self-made

person has at bottom little faith. And having little faith, such a person sees no need to give generously to the temple and to the support of God's larger work in the world.

Small giving and small faith go together hand in hand, and indeed the former may be a symptom of the latter. But the prophet makes something else clear: small giving and small faith lay the foundation for small receiving. Persons who do not give generously are ill-equipped to be the recipients of generosity. Walvoord (1985) argues that the positive point which the prophet makes is a delicate one, prone to misunderstanding. It is that the one who gives generously to God may receive bountifully from God. It cannot be reduced, as sometimes happens, to a formula for success in business: if you give such and such, you can be sure that your profits will rise phenomenally year after year! The principle is rooted more in the health of the relationship a person has with God. It is in the nature of rich relationships that the partners want to give to each other from what they have. But when one partner is stingy, that meanness inevitably affects the quality of the relationship and affects the capacity of the other partner to give. The generous giving to God from a full heart naturally results in the rich blessing of the One with whom we have a relationship. The blessing may be in physical or spiritual form, but is none the less real in either kind.

(iii) Attitudes to others.

According to Walvoord (1985) a nation that does not give to God reveals not only its spiritual temper, but also its social attitudes. The meanness reflected in the faith inevitably becomes a characteristic of the citizens' attitudes towards one another. And it is a social truth, as well as a theological one, that a nation marked by meanness is unlikely to prosper. Generosity, in turn, may affect the entire temper of a nation. The joy and practice of giving freely, towards both God and the needs of fellow citizens, create health in the human community and the more even distribution of wealth.

Malachi addressed a community stingy at heart, and its failure to give to God and temple became a blight on the nation's personality as a whole. It is unfortunate that some would argue that but sadly the prophet did not address a rare or unique social situation. Malachi's message suited its social context. The Church, through many generations, has recreated in its life the conditions of Malachi's time, making his message ever timely. It is God's instructions that we love, take care and protect one another. We are God's stewards and are the keepers of stewardship.

These verses show clearly that in Malachi's days people ignored God's ordinances. It is also clear that between God and man there is always an infinite distance, therefore it is unthinkable that a man could rob God. 'Yet you rob me', the acquisition is direct and personal in the highest degree, viz, "you" and "me". According to Verhoef (1987:303), this demands for a reason or motivation is apparently not meant as sheer rhetoric, but suggest a frame of mind which reveals a shocking unawareness of the transgressions. The background of this 'ignorance' is apparently the failure of the priests to give true instruction in the law (2:6, 8), and therefore the people are destroyed from lack of knowledge (Hos 4:6). The Lord's answer is specific and concrete: In tithes and offerings. Both terms in Hebrew have the definite article, which emphasizes the fact that the people's robbing concerns the specific tithes and offerings, which were prescribed by the law. These were compulsory contributions with people either withholding or not contributing at all. God admonishes the people on account of their neglect.

In these we find that the people in Malachi's day, ignored to give their income to his temple. They may have feared losing what they had worked so hard to get, but in this they misjudged God (cf. Barton, 1988:1632). 'Give, and it will be given to you,' He says (Luke 6:38). As people were not giving the Levites went to work to earn a living, thereby neglecting their God-given responsibilities to care for the temple and for the service of worship. Everything we have is from God, so when

we refuse to return to Him a part of what He has given, we rob Him. Do you selfishly want to keep 100% of what God gives, or are you willing to return at least 10% for helping to advance God's kingdom? Israel was not keeping God's ordinances and one of the ways was by withholding their tithes and offerings. It says they were robbing God. This means that not giving is stealing. They are then called to repent and return to God before He can restore them. Return to God involves obedience (cf. Barton, 1988:1542).

The promise (Verse 10-12) was a reaffirmation of the obedience-blessing relationship specified in the Mosaic Law (Deut 28:1-14). What the people were experiencing was the disobedience-curse arrangement also given in that covenant (Deut 28:15-68). This covenant was a gracious provision for Israel. No other nation had such promises from God. Since the Word of God is sure, God's part of the covenant arrangement would definitely be carried out. Israel could attest to this because she was experiencing certain curses in return for her disobedience to God's Law about the tithe. The Lord then appealed to His covenant promises in challenging Israel to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse so there would be adequate food for the priests. 'Storehouse' refers to a special room or rooms in the temple for keeping tithed grain (cf. 1 Kings 7:51; Neh 10:38; 13:12). By doing this, the people would see that God would open heaven's floodgates and pour out . . . blessing on them. These blessings would include agricultural prosperity — good crops not destroyed by pests, and undamaged vines (Mal 3:11) — and a good reputation among all the nations (verse 12). These blessings simply awaited their obedience.

4.6 Conclusion

The principle of the tithe is more rooted in the healthy relationship between a person and his God. All that we possess are gifts from God the Giver and the Keeper. God seeks repentance. Tithe is to be given from obedient heart. The tithe belongs to God. The giving of a tithe or tithing does not determine man's righteousness. The people are obliged to return to God. The bringing of the whole tithe to the storehouse of the Lord was a sign of doing the right thing. The prophet makes it clear that if the people return to God, He will return to them and will greatly bless them. God does not change and He thus awaits sincere gifts from the obedient heart.

CHAPTER 5

THE RELEVANCY OF TITHING TODAY

5.1 *Introduction*

At the outset we must understand clearly that when the Bible speaks about obligation to give for the work of God as his stewards, it does not only talk about tithing (cf. Mal 3:8). It is obvious from this verse that tithing is required. God expects his people according to this verse that they should tithe. The New Testament place emphasis on heartfelt love and gratitude to God for his great salvation that motivates God's children to give liberally from all their income and possessions to support the ministry of God's Word and the coming of his kingdom rather than tithe. Are we then still supposed to tithe?

According to Bromiley (1988:861) the Hebrew *מעשר*, literally "tenth part" or "tithe", is a cognate of the verb *עשר*, "take the tenth part". The corresponding Greek noun is a cognate of the verb *δεκατω*, which means to "collect tithe" in the active (Heb 7:6) and "pay tithes" in the passive (verse 9). The compound *'αποδεκατω* can either mean "collect tithes" or "pay tithes". This verbs shows that tithe was either collected or paid. Although tithe is emphasized in the Old Testament, it is not the case in the New Testament but the principle remains. As it is the case in the Old Testament, the New Testament teaches that man as God's steward has to give or tithe with gratitude to the Lord. Johnson (1984:31) argues that the New Testament brings to the laws of the Old Testament a new interpretation and an infusion of a new spirit through Jesus. The New Testament did not abolish tithe (cf. Matthew 5:17-20). Tithe is needed.

This chapter aims at addressing the necessity of tithing in our context today, in South Africa (cf. socio-economic problems, unemployment, poverty, etc.). The Levites and Priests are no longer amongst the poor today; do I still have to tithe

or give? Is tithing strictly an Old Testament thing or matter? These are some of the questions to which answers will be provided. To address the above, this chapter will focus on the exegetical outcome of this pericope (Mal 3:6-12), other scriptural references, the principles or guidelines and finally on practical problems i.e. questions. It will conclude with the view for today, which will be followed by a summary.

5.2 *Exegetical out-come of Malachi 3:6-12*

The pericope is divided into two units, verses 6-9 and 10-12 respectively. The first unit (verses 6-9) deals the problem of people not obeying God. Their act of not tithing can be perceived here as their problem. The whole nation has sinned and as the result judgment follows. The nation is cursed for not tithing and offering God's dues. These were compulsory contributions which Israel neglected. Repentance is sought in this regard.

In the second unit (verses 10-12), God anticipate the people's obedience in this regard (verse 7) and thus promises the blessings to the whole nation. The solution to the problem in the first unit is that the whole tithe be brought into the storehouse, so that there must be food in God's house. God demands the bringing of the whole tithe from the entire nation. In obedience to this command, God as a sign of his return to the nation (verse 7), He will them bless with rain and agricultural products. Israel will have more than enough and lack nothing. God will richly bless her. As a result of God's blessings, Israel called blessed by other nations.

5.3 *The principles*

5.3.1 We and everything that we own belongs to the Lord our God

Psalm 24:1 reads: “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it”. Giving of tithe or the first fruit or of offerings on the ground of thankfulness is actually acknowledging the owner through our stewardship. We should give and honour God with our tithes or giving. As the New Testament church, we are the living body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-13), we have to thank God always. Christ is our Lord and we belong to Him.

5.3.2 Tithing is a command from God

The biblical basis for giving begins with God’s giving people care of creation. God gave Christ over to die for us. To give starts with God. Tithe is a biblical principle. God demands repentance from us. He expects us to give to Him from what He has blessed us with. The basic truth that we should give or tithe, is to bring gratitude to God for all his blessings in Christ to us (read, 2 Cor 9:12-13; Prov 3:9-10). God asks for giving which is based on commitment. It is a thanksgiving sacrifice. True gratitude does not end, therefore one has to give regularly just as one’s income. It is significant that we obey God in this regard as well.

5.3.3 Not giving or tithing is theft

Being not faithful in our giving is robbing God. It is a sin not to give to God just a part of the whole He gave you. We have to change our attitude and conduct. No one of us can steal from God. It is God who blesses us with abundance, and it is God who asks us to manage it for Him. Remember that the most valuable thing in life – your relationship with God – is free. According to Sprague (2002:16) Christians who do not tithe/ give are deceived by the devil and deprived of heaven’s very best blessing by not continually planting first fruit seed back into the Kingdom of God.

5.3.4 It is the members' responsibility to contribute to the ministry of the Word and the running of the church affairs

It was through the giving of tithes that the Levites and the Priests were able to conduct the temple services. If tithes and offerings were not given it was difficult. The scripture is clear that it is the members' responsibility that the services of the church are held without any hindrances. It is well the responsibility of the members that the ministry of the word be conducted and that the church building be cared for as well and other demands in and around the church.

5.3.5 Our tithes or giving is part of our gratitude

Our tithes or giving is a thanksgiving and must be generous (2 Cor 9:5). We are always to tithe with a willing and cheerful heart. Our giving is not that we should receive from God but we give because we have received already. We are God's workmanship (Eph 2:10). Good works come from true faith in the Lord. We earn our righteousness through grace of God in Christ Jesus not through our good works (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24). When the tree bears fruits, the fruits, determines the life that is in the roots of the tree.

5.3.6 God is unchangeable

Despite Israel's sins, she lived because God's love changes not. The moral character of God remains unchanged, sinners must undergo the punishment they so richly deserve. God's dealings with man are constant. Even if man is unfaithful God's love is enough reason that he must repent. The continued Israel's existence is due to God's unchangeable love. As a living Church of Christ we exist because of God's love. Our lives are in his hands and all that we have. God does not change. Be faithful in your dealings with God through his church.

5.4 *What it means to tithe or give*

Gifts are symbolic. Giving reveals one's priorities and expresses relationships. Atkinson (1995:409) argues that the Apostolic collection from the Gentiles offered to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30, Rom 15:26-27) was highly symbolic in that it provided famine relief, but also expressed a radically new solidarity in Christ, a Christological basis for future giving (2 Cor 8:9; 9:15), so that generosity and mutuality became recognized as authentic marks of the church.

Gifts must be from the heart and be given with love. We are God's stewards and He expects us to give from all that He blessed us with. God gave us creation as a trust, and He expects us to manage it for Him. The biblical basis for giving begins with God. He expects responsibility and accountability from us.

5.5 *Problems encountered*

There are reasons that people will always give for not giving or supporting the church financially. Whatever reason the person may have, is valid for him or her even if it is just an excuse. People who are not prepared to part with money will give reasons as to why are they not giving. These are some of the reasons I had to deal with in my first years of my ministry as given below:

- We were not taught to give, let alone to bear the church's financial affairs' responsibility.
- I cannot afford. What I have is not enough.
- My neighbour and other church members are not tithing.
- I have other financial responsibilities e.g. have to pay rent, electricity, bond, education, instalments, medical bills, etc.
- I am the breadwinner. Either my wife or husband is not working. The household responsibility is mine alone. Have no one to help me financially.
- *I cannot give or tithe because the minister or the church council has done*

this and that.

- I am old or a pensioner therefore I must not give (the church must free me from giving or contributing towards the church). I am taking care of my nephews.
- The government must support the church financially.
- What does the church need money for?
- The socio-economic and socio-political problems.

Duvenage (2001:11) states that: 'Mense sê: "die kerk het genoeg geld. Ek hoef nie 'n tiende by te dra nie"'. But what does this thinking contribute? There are number of reason: There are many churches that are vacant but cannot afford to call a minister, as a result candidates (proponente) will stay for a year or so without receiving a call. In our Black Reformed churches, some ministers resort to tent-making ministry, for the churches cannot take good care of them. This does not mean that others are well cared for. I had to rely on taxis as mode of transport from 1999 until today for the church does not have enough to afford a car but things are really shaping for the better. These are some of the things that happen when the church is not financially in a sound position.

Giving can have social and political dimensions. Churches, especially the early churches, owned land and people benefited through them. Atkinson (1995:409) argues that by expressing justice and advancing the "common good" today, governments make fiscal provision for disadvantaged section of society, and give economic aid to disadvantaged nations.

5.5.1 I cannot afford to give/tithe

From time to time one also has to deal with the following attitude: what I have is not enough or I cannot afford to tithe. The question is: what is enough? This comes from the greediness in man's hearts. People of this nature only want to receive rather than to give. The church wants too much from me? Everything that

we have belongs to the Lord, we are just stewards. God is sovereign. Grissen (1992:19) argues that God has never transferred ownership of the creation to people, but has rather appointed us as managers. That means that although everything belongs to God, we are the distributors. Because God is the Owner, He is also the master. Only by grace does God allow us to temporarily “posses” and enjoy earth’s treasures. It’s important to keep reminding ourselves that wisely managing and sharing our wealth are not options, for all that we own and all that we are able to own is a gift from God. The little or small that one has, is a gift from God. We have to learn to thank Him for everything, no matter how small that it is.

5.5.2 My neighbour and fellow Christians are not tithing

How can I tithe while my neighbour and fellow members are not tithing at all? I am at least better than them for at least I gave once. I stopped giving for it does not help while others are not giving or tithing, it is better also to keep what I have. The question is to whom am I responsible and answerable? Contribution made is not towards a fellow member but it is towards God. The tither has first to commit himself or herself to God. Giving is a matter of having a right relationship with God. A commitment and devotion must be an example to other fellow Christians, who keep to themselves everything that God blessed them with.

Others will every time make promises to pledge but not fulfilling. In our churches, it is true that you even find church leaders who do not lead by example. To most it is only a bunch of words without action or not putting their money where their mouth is.

5.5.3 Have other financial responsibilities

Living cost is too high and I cannot afford to give anything. Here you find people who say they have a very fixed financial budget. Their budgets cannot take other

things for they have important things to take care of. The problem with most of our Black Reformed Church members is that church dues are not part of our budgets at all. All other things are budgeted for but not the church. In this regard when there is money left over is when something will be given to the church, if nothing then the church will receive nothing. To me this is the problem, which leads to the bad financial state of our churches. For even if a person stays, a month, two, six, or even a year or more without any contribution to the church it does not matter.

With our members, one thing is sure - no matter how fixed his or her budget is, burial schemes (societies) and stokvels will be taken care off. These are amongst the most important things i.e. number one priorities but not the church. Even the person, who cannot afford to give anything towards the church, maintains the above. To most the church is always the last or not even considered at all. De Wet (1939:53) argues that one will say, I cannot give, my finances are tight these months, I am paying to be debt free, therefore I cannot give anything to the church.

One will say, I am a pensioner taking care of my nephews. The question is who is the provider of even that very little that we have? Do we think of Him? It is important that we have our priorities right i.e. we should be able to discern what comes first in our lives. Some think it is the government's responsibility to take care of the church and its ministers. This thinking is there because our people were never responsible for at least financing their churches and its affairs. For even when they were not giving it was not a problem. Thus one will say we were never taught to give or to take responsibility in taking care of our churches.

5.5.4 Because of the minister or the church council's mistake I cannot give

Due to the fact that the minister or the council did this and that I cannot give them my money. Does your money belong to the minister or the church council? This

on the one hand shows lack of knowledge, why do I give and to whom does my contribution belong.

5.5.5 Socio-economic and socio-political problem

Here one gets questions like: how can I give when I am poor? When a member of my family died the church did not contribute financially, why must I always give? The economy is not looking good, the inflation rate is high, food is expensive, etc. We used to benefit from the church, e.g. received clothes, food and so on, why must we give hence we are not receiving such items anymore. Are we still to tithe?

5.6 *A Christian as a steward*

According to Johnson (1984:23) a steward is someone who manages or administers or cares for the property or affairs of someone else as an agent. The spiritual message of the Old Testament is that humankind act as stewards of God. In Genesis 1:26-30, God gives man dominion over all things which He has created. This is the biblical basis of giving. The fact is that the Old Testament begins with God's giving, as a trust and creation to be in the charge of humans. God chose us to manage the property on His behalf. Harrell (1953:7) would argue that the teaching that life is a trust from God for each of us, runs the ever-recurring theme through a symphony.

Being stewards, it means that people are responsible for how creation is used. Being a steward means accountability. It is expected of us to be obedient to God's instructions. It is of importance to note that all of the creation is being managed for God. Paul makes it clear that a steward is held accountable for what is left as a trust in his care (Rom 14:12; 1Cor 4:2). According to Johnson (1984:39) a steward in the New Testament is considered to be a co-worker with

God. In Malachi 3:10 'Bring all the tithes into the storehouse', the prophet lets the people know that they should be giving (cf. Bartlett, 1974:43).

Church leaders are to lead with example in this regard (cf. 1Timothy 4:12). A non tither is not supposed to be in the church board and not even count money (cf. Makwakwa, 1997:15). How possible it is that someone who is not giving can encourage others to give? As stewards we are always to be humble towards God's Word. We must become stewards of possessions. Giving even in affluent society or hard circumstance requires this. As stewards we are users of God's creation rather than possessors of it. We are required to give an accounting of how well we use those possessions, but not how many we acquired. As Christians our responsibility is how well we used the possessions in Jesus' name and for what purpose. We need to be committed to God and practice humility.

5.7 Is tithing for today?

All the above brings the question: is tithing for today? The social and economic set-up differs a lot. Miller (1999:94) argues that the tithe is clearly taught in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament it seems to be down-played. Are those who give ten percent of their income doing something not required?

It is a fact that one must be careful in applying these promises to believers today. The Mosaic Covenant, with its promises of material blessings to Israel for her obedience, is no longer in force (Eph 2:14-15; Rom 10:4; Heb 8:13). However, the New Testament speaks about generosity and giving. While not requiring a tithe of believers today, the New Testament does speak of God's blessing on those who give generously to the needs of the church and especially to those who labour in the Word (Acts 4:31-35; 2 Cor 9:6-12; Gal 6:6; Phil 4:14-19).

In Leviticus 27:30-33, the Mosaic laws mandated the tithe, of which part was to support the ministry of the Levites (Num 18:21-24). The people started to neglect this mandate, hence Malachi's question: "Will a man rob God?" Malachi goes on to say, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse" (Mal 3:8, 10). Those who are against tithing, would argue that tithing is strictly an Old Testament matter. Such arguments, brings to mind the aspect of continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. Van Rensburg (2002:93) would argue that whilst it would be accurate to argue that the Jews in the New Testament, who were still under the law, were still bound by the prescriptions of the law, it would be erroneous to conclude that members of the New Testament church were similarly bound. According to Barlett (1974:85), Seymour Selfish may say that the usage of tithing is limited to conditions under the law. Now, under grace, he says we have no reason to concern ourselves with tithing.

Israel was to be generous with her giving so that the poor of the land were supported. Israel was obliged to pay tithes and offerings. Tithe is not isolated from the broader demands of generosity and social justice. It is still expected of us today that we should be generous and be able to help the needy. According to Sprague (2002:13) the usual reason Christian non-tithers give is a "belief" that this practice was part of the law and as such, was done away with at the death of Christ and His fulfilment of the law. Such argument is not convincing for in Genesis 14, tithing was instituted by Abram many years before the law. The author of the book of Hebrews, many years after the death of Christ discusses tithing as an ongoing practice.

Tithing did not end in the old dispensation but it continues in the new dispensation. It is our individual responsibility as Christians to support the ministry of the Word financially as well. We have the responsibility to make the church to be in position to address the everyday needs. Tithe or giving is a biblical practice. Sprague (2002:13) argues that tithing is an institution of heaven, initiated by Abram and the priest, Melchizedek, and meant to prosper the giver.

Abram's commitment to the tithe (Gen 14:22-23) declares his total dependence upon God and upon heaven's riches to himself and his covenant children, both Jews and Gentiles (cf. Prov 3:9-10).

In Matthew 23:23, Christ's primary point of concern is that tithing or giving must not be done at the expense of fundamental issues of justice, integrity and mercy. It is significant that one must have a strong and healthy relationship with God. Remember, our good works do not determine our redemption. Tithing or Giving does not exempt one to carry out all God's given responsibilities. As Christians, we are at all times expected to be faithful to our calling as stewards. Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it". Commitment to proper management of this world and its resource is expected from us and to be devoted to the Lord God. God gives us the right to property or to own/hold even money but expects us to give something in return. From the whole that God gives us, He wants us to give part of it to Him.

According to the Lord, tithing "ought to be done" (Matthew 23:23). Sprague (2002:16) argues that what is more important is that there was no prophetic utterance in the Old Testament about when tithing would be abolished, nor is there any doctrine in the New Testament about what should replace it for the support of the church! He further argues that even though many Christians try to "prove" that tithing is not a New Testament doctrine, the preponderance of Biblical evidence is not with them. Christians do not really give or tithe because of: "They have not had a proper teaching regarding tithing". Not giving or tithing is a sin. Malachi 3:8 says that both tithing and offerings are necessary to be offered.

The Bible instructs man to tithe. God gives purpose to wealth (cf. Deut 8:18). The fundraising methods are just a once off solution to the church's financial problem. Fundraising is not something that you can do weekly or monthly, it is done at certain specified time only. At the same time church needs will not be at hold. It is

of much significance that the local Church employs God given ways to sustain itself, i.e. tithing/giving and offering. The local Church is the economic foundation of the government of God on earth. Tithing/ giving according to scripture and offerings are the long-term solutions to the church's financial problems. It is a pity that in Black Reformed Churches in Midlands Synods these are the weak points of most if not all churches. Due to weak financial churches locally, this is the same disease in the classis thus the Synod is financially poor. The synods receives financial sustenance from the churches through "ramings" and most are unable to pay them, therefore the synod stays in financial deficit (badlock) always. The problem starts at grassroots, hence the synod's failure to convene since 1997 due to financial crisis. If proper giving is done locally then there will be no problem to carry the classis or synod's financial burdens. Biblical principles with regard to tithing, is the solution to the problem. Indeed tithing is for today as well.

5.8 *Are Christians then required to tithe?*

After Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, the New Testament provides no passages as explicit as Matthew 23:23. Miller (1999:94) argues, "Does the tithe continue as a divine mandate because it has not been explicitly abrogated? Or is it part of the 'old order' that is passing away?" The New Testament is explicitly clear that Christians be a giving, generous people (1 Tim 6:18). The New Testament never abolished the law of tithing. Jesus validated tithing but never abolished it. In Matthew 23:23, Christ criticized the Pharisees that they were giving their tithe but without love. With regard to this verse (Matthew 23:23), Tate (200:159) would argue: 'This verse is often cited as a proof that Jesus approved of tithing and indirectly taught Christians to tithe. Such a conclusion is based on "dubious exegesis which violates the context and misses the point of the verse." The saying is directed to the Pharisees and scribes-not Christians- and seeks to emphasise the relative insignificance of careful tithing when compared with the

deeper requirements of the Torah.' Christ did not oppose the commandment of the tithe. According to Barlett (1974:88) we cannot imagine Jesus stopping the tithe. It is significant to note that the New Testament stresses the manner/ attitude in which we have to give like it is done in the Old Testament. Tithing appears to become an internal moral obligation (cf. Matthew 23:23).

Christ never stopped Christians from tithing. In Hebrews 7, we are told the Levites and the Priest received one tenth of all the income of Israel. But then it is made clear that Abram and the whole people of God gave tithes to Melchizedek because he was in fact representing Christ. So the principle that we should honour Christ as our high priest and king is maintained. Tithing is a Biblical principle, therefore as Christians living today we are obliged to give/ tithe. God is not only the Creator but He is also the Giver of all things. It is our bounded duty to give, because we are guilty if we do not give.

It is of great importance to know that we do not give because we want to receive, but we give because we have received (this is how to understand Malachi 3:10). In no way, does our giving earn our salvation, our 'accountability' has been taken care of by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But we are still responsible for the lives we live on earth (cf. 1 Cor 3:12-15). Grissen (1992:29) argues that it's important to keep reminding ourselves that wisely managing and sharing our wealth are not options - that all we own and all we are able to own is a gift from God (cf. Deut 8:17-20).

God in Christ has given man His all. He expects man's relationship to Him to be a relationship of gratitude, thanksgiving and love. Our giving must be a response of God's love to us. We need to be cheerful givers. We should not give reluctantly. It is required from us to give a portion from that which we received. Remember that it is God who blesses us with abundance and all that we own. Tithing is a spiritual experience based on a living relationship. As stewards managing the master's money we are to give, but it is important to note that

Christian stewardship is founded on much broader base than tithing and its scope is much greater.

5.9 *Important issues*

Much can be said of tithing in the life of the church today. It does provide a definite plan for giving in the church and also fosters discipline in the affairs of the tither. It is a constant reminder that the church is due the highest priority to the tither. The tither is made aware that the ministry and ministers of Christ deserve more than the haphazard and slothful giving which has characterise so much Christian stewardship (cf. Tate, 200:161). The church must have a definite and proper plan for giving. It is important that leaders must be of good example and be able to encourage his or her fellow Christians to dedicate and use their belongings in the service of the Lord (1 Pet 5:3).

The giver must give with hope and faith that God has provided. The question that still remains is how much is one-tenth? Do I give tenth from my basic or net income? One has to give from what one has received. Tenth of one's net income is thus required. It is important that one starts by giving himself or herself first totally over to the Lord. Finally, one has to give with joy and a willing heart.

5.10 *Conclusion*

Tithing is a biblical concept. The biblical concept of giving starts with God when He entrusted man with the responsibility to look after creation. God sacrificially gave His Son Jesus Christ to die for the world. The tithe in the New Testament receives little mention. Christ did not abolish the tithe (Matthew 5:17-19). The New Testament emphasises the attitude of the giver's heart. Giving has to be offered in the spirit of gratitude. Giving is to be in response to God's love. God is sovereign and we are his stewards. Even today we still have to give to God. God still blesses us in abundance. We are guilty if we do not give. We do not own what we have, but we are just managers of possessions.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I will summarise the main thrust of this study, relate it to the aims and objectives of this study which will then be followed by the relevant conclusion. This chapter will also provide some suggestions of what can be done to alleviate the Black Reformed Churches in synod Midlands from the situations they find themselves in i.e. the financial problems.

6.1 Summary of the exegetical study

In the first chapter of this study the author indicated (in his central theoretical argument) that he shall maintain or hold that tithe is a biblical principle, which God instructed man to fulfil and that it has to be executed with joy and gratitude. Man has a covenantal relationship with God and is obliged to execute all the mandates from God.

In the second chapter, the author provided a background study of tithe in the Ancient Near East, Old Testament perspective, its theological implication and the New Testament view. In this chapter it (tithe) is mentioned as a secular tax in the Bible (Gen 7:26). Many Ancient cultures practiced tithing. It was based, as far as the Old Testament is concerned, mainly on the theological perspective rather than the political, humanitarian, economic motives, although it is difficult to separate them. This chapter further shows that the following were subject to tithe: property, produce (land produce), or even currency (cf. Deut. 26:1-15).

It is also shown that as early as the time of the patriarchs, the Jews began to vow tithes (e.g. Gen 28:22). The principles regarding sacrifices and tithes were intended to encourage inward and outward actions (Lev 27:33). Israel by giving tithe, declared solemnly that they gave a portion back to the one who had

prospered them (Deut 26:10-15). By giving of the tithe they recognized the validity of the priests' and Levites' role as God's representatives and acknowledged their right to receive support for the spiritual service they performed on behalf of the people.

This chapter also shows that the Old Testament contains laws pertaining to tithing, sacrifices and offerings. Giving was the integral part of the social system that was established in the Mosaic laws. The New Testament places the emphasis on love. The early New Testament Church existed in a different social context, and thus the principles regarding tithe or giving were (suited) adapted to the new settings and new theological realities. This chapter has shown that the tithe is needed. Historically tithing was practiced.

Chapter three concentrated on the general study of Malachi, which served as the background study of the following chapter. The authorship is credited to Malachi. The book of Malachi was written in the time after exile. Malachi's words were to reprimand the people and the leaders of the community for the lack of sincerity in their worship and their lives. This chapter shows that Malachi's background is clearly understood in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The exegetical discussion on the content of Malachi 3:6-12 in the fourth chapter started with a structural analysis of Malachi, the book's contents then compared to other views. Discussion of concepts like to return (repentance), tithe and the offering were also dealt with in this chapter. Tithe is more rooted in the healthy relationship between a person and his God. God is sovereign and demands pure worship.

Chapter five of the study addressed the question of the relevancy of tithing in our situation today in South African context. It is clear in this chapter that in the New Testament our giving should also - as it was in the Old Testament - be a response to God's love. Christ never stopped us from tithing.

6.1.1 Concluding remarks

The tithe was practiced in the Old Testament. The first-fruits of all and the tenth part of everything were given to God. The biblical basis for giving begins with God's giving people caring for the creation. Humankind is God's stewards. As steward, God expects that man be responsible and accountable. Tithe was practiced even before the pre-Mosaic era (cf. Gen 14:20, Gen 28:22). In both the cases (concerning Abram (Gen 14:20) and Jacob (Gen 28:22) tithe is presented as a common practice. In the Mosaic Law it was given the status of a compulsory contribution. The giving of the first-fruits and the tenth part were always expected by God.

The study of tithing or giving in the Old Testament reveals that from the beginning, the attitude of the giver was of paramount importance to God. Israel was expected to give from a repented heart. Selfishness destroys the relationship between man and God. It is clear from the Old Testament that tithe was not to be regarded as a burden. Tithes were to be brought to the temple and the Levites were also obliged to give a tithe of a tithe. The tithe was used to support the priests, generally the Levites. Their tasks were to fulfil the religious needs of the people as well as to uphold the law as recorded in the scriptures.

The word used מַשְׁעָר (TITHE) refers to a tenth or tenth part. This was given to honour and in recognition that God the Most High is the provider and owner of everything that one possess (cf. Psalm 24:1). The principle of the tithe is more rooted in the healthy relationship between a person and his God.

The tithe is clearly taught in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament it is downplayed. Although this is the case, the law of tithing was never abolished in the New Testament. Jesus did not abolish it but validated it. It is also clear that our giving should also - as it was in the Old Testament time - be a response to God's love. The New Testament is explicitly clear that Christians be a giving,

generous people (1 Tim 6:18). The New Testament stresses the manner in which we have to give more explicitly than it is done in the Old Testament. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for legality in tithing (Matthew 23:23). Jesus did not abolish the law of the tithe. The New Testament emphasizes the attitude of the giver's heart.

The tithe is not isolated from the broader demands of generosity and social justice. This is the case in both Testaments. Man is a steward. As stewards we are responsible and accountable to God at all times. The covenant must be kept at all times. There is no prophetic utterance in the Old Testament about when tithing would be abolished, nor is there any doctrine in the New Testament about what should replace tithing for the support of the church and its ministry.

In the New Testament tithe is not emphasized but the principle of giving was not abolished at all. The scripture instructs us to give. New Testament stresses the fact that Christians should make regular provision for giving. Christians should give generously and cheerfully. In Malachi 3:8 and 10, repentance is required. The Bible speaks of our obligation to give for the work of God as his stewards. We are guilty if we do not give or tithe. Tithing is a biblical concept.

6.2 *Relating the findings with aims and objectives of the study*

The outcomes of the study have shown the following:

- Although tithe is downplayed in the New Testament, the principle of giving was never abolished. Christ did not abolish the tithe but He validated it. Human beings are stewards and are expected to manage and give to the Owner who blesses them. Through Christ we were reconciled with God. As Christians living today, we have to show our gratitude to God. Our tithing must be in response to God's love and mercy. God is the one who blesses us in abundance and we should not forget that. God is sovereign

and we are just stewards mastering the Master's money or properties. Despite our situation, we still are responsible and accountable to God.

- If the Reformed Churches in Synod Midland had applied the principle of tithe, their financial state could have improved a lot. We need to apply the biblical principle of tithing or giving. Churches have to be realistic. The flat rate system e.g. R5.00 a month today is not relevant to the cost of living today. The local church is the economic foundation to spread the word of God and its ministry.
- The study showed that *מִשְׁעַר* is to give a tenth part of ones income. Malachi wanted the people to repent from not giving a tithe of their belongings to the Temple. It is clear that not giving is a sin.
- Tithing is still relevant today. The giver has to give with a cheerful, willing heart that gives gratitude to God the Provider and Keeper of all. It should be inherent in our faith that our giving of tithe is not determining our being righteous before God. Our giving is coupled with our good deeds or fruits showing faith in us that God is sovereign and is the Provider. We have to have faith and trust in the Lord God at all times.

6.3 *Some guidelines and remedy to the situation*

There is a widespread need in the churches today for study on biblical principle of giving or tithing. As church councils we have the authority to make decisions pertaining to giving as well, are we really complying with the biblical principles? Does our actions, bring life in the church or lead to its non-functioning? As Church councils we need to be realistic with matters pertaining to money and giving. The need is aroused with the fact that we are faced with these three basic truths at all times: (a) the majority of our congregations or churches in synod Midlands are faced with deep financial problems year after year. At the moment it is even worse for the sister churches that have all along rendered help financially but are also in a financial squeeze. (b) What is more important is the fact that the

study of the biblical basis or foundation will change people's ideas and practices. Our people are used to part with the least towards the church or nothing at all. This is not an easy matter to change but it will only take place through biblical teaching and prayer. (c) The serious study of the bible is the best single approach for our personal and spiritual growth in the area of stewardship. Our people have to realize that we are just stewards managing the Master's money or property. Let us teach our people to give / tithe because it is our bounden duty to give, because we are guilty if we do not give.

The money that we receive as church belongs to God. Therefore it needs a proper way to be handled and managed. Start by rectifying this factor and win the confidence of those who contribute for the well being of the church and its ministry. Let responsible and trustworthy and able people work and handle church money. Let us avoid a situation whereby non contributors work and make decisions with matters pertaining to money. As a church let us not emphasise much on one time solution matters (fundraising) but on giving. Let us improve on our Sunday offerings and on our tithing / giving monthly, these are constant income means for the church.

God says in Malachi 3:10-12, if they would be generous in their giving, He would open the floodgates of heaven and blessing would overflow. He would provide all their needs and more. He actually challenges them to test Him in this. When we do not give to God, it shows our priorities are wrong and we are trying to find happiness in things. Things however never satisfy, but we spend our money on them and even go in debt searching for happiness. God then warns that those who do that are under a curse and He will allow things to come along and use up our money to force us to return to Him. But if we truly repent and return to Him, put our trust in Him alone and prove it with our faithful giving, He will withhold things to come along that are going to use up our money and pour out his blessings on us. Let us get our priorities right and seek happiness in God, then tithe or give to Him faithfully and gratefully and we will find satisfaction in life

through relationship with Him. God provides all our needs and He abundantly blesses us. Always give thanks to God and contribute towards the ministry of his word.

6.4 *Concluding remarks*

Tithe is a biblical concept, although downplayed in the New Testament in comparison to the Old Testament. The word tithe refers to ten percent. Tithe is needed. The author does not ignore the existence of the argument that tithe is an Old Testament matter. In Christ we were reconciled with God. Jesus did not abolish tithe but He validated it (Matthew 5:17-20).

The study has shown that a biblical basis of giving emphasises tithing and proportionate giving. The church council can and have the authority to decide how much contribution members are to contribute, but let biblical principles be implemented. Church council members themselves must be a good example in this matter. It is wrong to conclude and implement that all members e.g. contribute R10.00 a month but rather a certain percentage according to individual blessing. Let everyone contribute in proportion to the blessings received. Give your tithe and more. It is the church role to teach about stewardship and giving. Church leaders must lead with example. Trustworthy and able people are to handle church funds. Transparency is vital. We have to continue giving today under the leadership and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Our giving must be of free-will, out of gratitude and open heart. We are to give to God, for He is the Creator, Giver and Redeemer of all. Members are to be encouraged towards giving and to be trustworthy themselves. Indeed tithing is a Biblical concept for all ages.

Field for further

1. Gross or net salary for tithing?
2. Does my tithing include the offerings of love for the needy?
3. If I'm unemployed, am I exempted from tithing?
4. Is tithing to be offered by every family member who is employed or only by the head of the family?

Keywords

Tithing, offering, exegesis, Malachi, Old Testament, Reformed Churches, principles, first fruit.

Sleutel woorde

Bydrae (tiende), offer, eksegesi, Malaki, Ou Testament, Gereformeerde Kerke, beginsels, eersteling (vrug).

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