

The Misuse of Malachi 3:10

Why the Prosperity Gospel's Tithing Promise Is a False Gospel

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Malachi 3:10, Deuteronomy 14:22, Nehemiah 10:37–38, Nehemiah 13:10–11, 2 Corinthians 9:7

KEY SCRIPTURES

Prosperity teachers extract Malachi 3:10 as a transactional formula: give money to the church (the “storehouse”), and God is obligated to “open the windows of heaven” with material wealth. This is a grave misuse of the Scriptures.

- Ø This reading is anachronistic - it is outside of the time to which the Scripture applies.
- Ø It is eisegeses – reading into Scripture, that which is not there.
- Ø It makes a Scriptural category error - confusing two different levels of critical analysis.
- Ø It transplants a covenantal obligation tied to the Levitical-priestly economy of Second Temple Judaism – It turns it into a personal wealth-generation scheme for the New Covenant believer. The error is not merely interpretive but structural: it misidentifies *what* the tithe was, *who* received it, *why* it was commanded, and *to whom* the covenant blessing-and-curse formula applied.

What follows establishes each point from the text and from Jewish tradition. confirmed in New Testament Apostolic teaching.

The Text in Question

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. Then there will be food in My House. Now test Me in this”—says Adonai-Tzva’ot—“if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out blessing for you, until no one is without enough .” (Malachi 3:10)

Read in isolation, the verse can be made to sound like a personal opportunity for an investment return. However, read with a Jewish understanding in its covenantal, historical, and cultic context, it says something very, very different.

The Tithe Was Agricultural Produce, Not Currency

“You will surely set aside a ????????? [tenth] of all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year.” (Deuteronomy 14:22)

Deuteronomy 14:22 defines the tithe precisely: a tenth of the *yield of the field*, year by year. The Hebrew *ma’aser* (????????) – a tenth - is levied on agricultural increase, that is grain, wine, oil, and herds – that which the Land of Israel produces. Tithing therefore cannot be separated from the

Land covenant that God made with Israel.

Rabbinic law confirms this view. The tithe belongs to the category of *mitzvot ha-teluyot ba'aretz* - *commandments dependent on the Land* (Kiddushin 36b–37a; m. Challah 4:8). Produce grown outside the Land of Israel was, in principle, exempt from the biblical tithe. It must surely follow that a commandment, territorially bound to agricultural yield in the Land, cannot be the basis of a universal monetary demand on Gentile believers worldwide.

The “Storehouse” Was the Temple Treasury for Priestly Provision

Where the Masoretic text reads “storehouse” (*beit ha-otzar*, ????? ?????????), the Targum makes the meaning explicit:

Targum (Malachi 3:10) “The prophet said, bring all the tithes into the treasury, that there may be food for them that minister in the house of my sanctuary.”

The Targum makes clear that the verse was, for its original audience, precisely as provision for the **ministering priests and Levites**—not a generic offering fund, and certainly not a believer’s chance to get a tenfold return on their investment, suggested by the prosperity gospel. This is supported structurally by Nehemiah, who describes the very system Malachi presupposes:

Nehemiah 10:37–38 ...the firstborn of our sons and our livestock...to the kohanim [priests] ministering in the House of

our God; and the first of our coarse meal...to the kohanim at the storerooms of the House of our God, as well as a tenth of the crop of our land to the Levites, for they, the Levites, receive tithes in all the towns where we labour.

The tithe is for “the Levites” in the towns; the *terumah* (heave-offering), firstfruits, and firstborn go to the *kohanim* (Priests) and into the storerooms—the *lishkot*, the chambers of the Temple. The “storehouse” of Malachi 3:10 is these Temple storerooms of Nehemiah 10:38: the very same chambers, the same priestly recipients, the same institution. Malachi and Nehemiah are roughly contemporary (post-exilic, mid-fifth century BC), addressing the identical crisis – that was the people had stopped supplying the Temple, and the Levites, unsupported, had abandoned their posts.

The Crisis: Absent Priests and Defiled Sacrifice

Nehemiah 13:10–11 “...the portions of the Levites had not been given them, so that the Levites...had fled every one to his field. Then I contended with the rulers and said, “Why is the House of God forsaken?”

When the tithe was not given, the ministering class went back

to their farms for their own survival. This is the problem Malachi addresses. The point about unchecked sacrifices finds its anchor here. Malachi 1:6–14, immediately preceding the text we are considering. It condemns precisely the corruption of the altar and those offering blemished, blind, lame, and sick animals offered in place of the unblemished.

The priestly inspection of sacrifices (Leviticus 22:17–25 mandates that the priest verify the animal is *tamim*, without defect). This breaks down when the priests are absent in the fields. The book's logic follows a clear path:

The withheld tithe leads to unsupported ministry, absent Levites which means no priestly inspection which in turn leads to corrupt, defiled sacrifice – in this God was being robbed (Mal 3:8).

The tithe of 3:10 is the remedy for an institutional, priestly failure. It has nothing to do with personal enrichment for Christians.

“Robbing God” Confirms a Covenantal, not an investment opportunity

Malachi 3:8–9 calls the withholding as theft (“Will a man rob God?”) and invokes a national curse (“you are cursed with a curse...for you are robbing Me, this whole nation”). This is covenant-legal language. The blessing-and-curse structure is that of Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26—the corporate, conditional blessings on national Israel under the Mosaic covenant *within the Land*.

Crucially, the “windows of heaven” pouring out blessing is the language of **rain on the agricultural land**: “The LORD will open to you His good treasury, the heavens, to give the

rain of your land” (Deuteronomy 28:12). The promised blessing is, categorically, agricultural fertility will be again restored. The promise is of the future rain that produces the very crops that create the harvest, from which will come next year’s tithe. It is a closed farming, covenantal loop – harvest, tithe, harvest, tithe.... It is not a money-multiplication promise to Christian individuals.

A Note on the Talmudic “Tithe and Prosper” Saying

Prosperity teachers occasionally reach behind the text to a rabbinic saying (b. Ta’anit 9a; cf. Sanhedrin 113a): R. Yochanan’s wordplay *asser bishvil shetit’asher*—“tithe so that you may become wealthy.” It is important I address this directly.

“You will surely set aside a tenth of all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year.” Deuteronomy 14:22

Deuteronomy 14:22 itself, and the surrounding *sugya* (a set of arguments in the Talmud that together discuss a particular issue or Mishnah) ties together the promise of **rain and agricultural blessing**—exactly the farming, Land-covenant frame argued above. It is a teaching about trusting God’s faithfulness within the tithe system of the Land of Israel, not a formula for an individual monetary making scheme. Let me confirm this setting out the *sugya* stripped of the technical language:

This whole passage sits inside a section of the Talmud about *rain* — specifically, what causes God to send it. That's not incidental; it tells you the passage is thinking in farming terms from the start. Rabbi Yochanan runs into his young nephew — the son of a colleague named Reish Lakish - and asks the boy, "What verse did you learn in school today?" The boy answers: "*You shall surely tithe*" (Deuteronomy 14:22 — the Hebrew repeats the verb, "tithe, tithe").

Rabbi Yochanan explains the repetition with a pun. In Hebrew, "tithe" (*aser*) and "become wealthy" (*titasher*) share the same root letters. So, he reads the verse as: "Tithe — so that you'll become wealthy."

The boy pushes back: "How do you know that's true?"

Rabbi Yochanan says: "Go test it and see."

The boy objects - sharply, for a child: "Are we even allowed to test God? Doesn't the Torah say, 'Do not test the Lord your God' (Deuteronomy 6:16)?"

Rabbi Yochanan answers by quoting an older teacher, Rabbi Hoshaya: *You may not test God in anything — except this one thing*. And the exception comes from Malachi 3:10 itself, where God says, "Test Me in this."

In other words, *the Talmud treats "test Me" as a rare, narrow exception to a general rule*, not a general principle about giving and getting. It's the *one* loophole in an otherwise firm prohibition — and the rabbis felt they needed a special dispensation just to justify it existing at all. That's the opposite of treating Malachi 3:10 as a template for financial life generally.

The boy, unimpressed, replies: "If I'd already read that far, I wouldn't have needed you or your teacher to tell me." Rabbi Yochanan is struck by how sharp the child is - and then the boy's mother pulls him away, afraid of what happened to his

father after a past clash with Rabbi Yochanan. (A sober note buried in what looks like a cute anecdote.)

There are three further pieces that guard against a prosperity reading:

1. In Tractate Shabbat (119a), the same wordplay is read two ways at once: "tithe so you'll get rich" *and* "tithe so you won't be lacking." The second reading reframes the promise as *sufficiency*, not enrichment.
2. A few lines later, the Talmud tells the story of a wealthy man, Nakdimon ben Gurion, whose generosity is questioned — was it genuine, or for honour? The rabbis leave it unresolved. It's a built-in warning against assuming wealth proves piety, right next to the passage that could be misread that way.
3. Deuteronomy 14:22 sits beside the animal-tithe laws (worked out at length in Tractate Bekhorot), all of which describe food eaten "before the Lord, in the place He will choose" — Temple-and-Land categories, not a transferable cash principle.

I set this out because of the perniciousness of the prosperity gospel that defrauds innocent believers duped by it.

Even the one Talmudic passage that comes closest to "give and God will make you rich" treats that idea as a fenced-off exception to a general prohibition. It is enclosed in a rain-and-Land discussion, immediately qualified by an alternate reading ("so you lack nothing"), and followed by a story cautioning against assuming money proves faithfulness. The sugya undercuts the prosperity reading even while containing the very phrase prosperity teachers like to use for their benefit.

The New Covenant Makes the Levitical Tithe Obsolete

The decisive Christian argument is found in the Letter to the Hebrews, which addresses tithing and priesthood directly. Hebrews 7:5 notes that it is the sons of Levi who “have a commandment to take tithes from the people according to the law.” But the complete argument of Hebrews 7 is that the Levitical priesthood has been superseded by the priesthood of the Messiah after the order of Melchizedek:

“For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well” (Heb 7:12).

The tithe was a function of the Levitical-priestly system. When that system was fulfilled and set aside in the Messiah, the legal mechanism of the tithe that supported it was also set aside with it. The Temple is destroyed; there is no storehouse, no ministering Levite, no altar requiring inspected sacrifice. When the prosperity teacher attempts to resurrect a defunct covenantal obligation, he strips it of its original priestly purpose. He redirects the tithe to himself, and reattaches it a blessing that was always about rain on Israelite fields – not about money in his pocket.

The New Testament Pattern of Giving

Christian giving in apostolic writings is explicitly *not* a tithe-

formula. It is proportional, voluntary, cheerful, and free of compulsion:

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7)

Paul’s only “return” language in 2 Cor 9:6–12. It is good gave it in its fulness:

“As it is written, "He scattered; he has given to the poor; his righteousness remains forever." He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for eating, may He supply and multiply your seed, and increase the fruits of your righteousness you being enriched in everything to all generosity, which works out thanksgiving to God through us. For the ministry of this service not only supplies the things lacking of the saints, but also multiplying through many thanksgivings to God..”

It is deliberately an agricultural metaphor aimed at generosity toward the poor and the saints, with the explicit purpose that the giver may “abound in every good work” - not build up wealth. The prosperity reading inverts the apostolic motive: it makes giving a means to getting, whereas Paul makes

provision a means to further generosity. Note – “increase the fruits of your righteousness” and “thanksgiving to God” and “many thanksgivings to God”. Not one promise of gaining financial wealth.

Furthermore, there is a warning in Hebrews:

“Let your way of life be without the love of money, and be content with such things as you have, for He has said, "Not at all will I leave you, not at all will I forsake you, never!"” (Heb 13:5)

In conclusion let us consider how we are to give to the work of God – not as the teacher of the false prosperity gospel, but with total generosity. Consider the widow in Mak 12 – she gave everything. Jesus’ response was

“For all cast in from their abundance. But she, out of her poverty, has cast in all that she had, all her livelihood.” Mar 12:44

The thing to notice is the commendation of Jesus to the widow – a contrast between the proud giving of the hypocrites and the humble offering of the widow. Note also, He does not add anything about her being blessed financially from her gift.

Paul wrote:

“I have shown you all things, that working in this way we ought to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Acts 20:35

At Fenlands Church, no collections are taken up at Sunday gatherings. Have you ever asked why? The answer is in Scripture:

“On the first day of the week, each of you should set aside some income and save it to the extent that God has blessed you, so that a collection will not have to be made when I come..” (1 Cor 16:2)

Some will argue that this was on collection for a specific purpose. In doing that they miss that this was not about this one situation, it was about the heart and spirit behind the giving. Paul addresses the support of the ministry of the local church elsewhere. Here, it is to show that the act of giving is a freewill gesture that gives generously to the work of God, in recognition of how much God has blessed you. It is not a

giving for you to be blessed financially in return. Therefore, let your giving be generous, in secret, away from public gaze. God will see.

