

Tu B'Shevat
New Year of the Trees
Pastor Greg Stone
February 3, 2017

Torah Reading

Leviticus 19:23-25 (NKJV)

²³ 'When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. *It* shall not be eaten. ²⁴ But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the L-RD. ²⁵ And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I *am* the L-RD your G-d.

Service Portion

Happy New Year. Shanah Tovah (Good Year)

We have a Biblical New Year's Day on February 11, 2017. It starts next Friday evening, February 10 at sunset. Many of us have not given much attention to Tu B'Shevat. It is the New Year of the Trees. Tu B'Shevat means "The 15th day of the month of Shevat." (Shevat is the 11th month of the Hebrew calendar if we consider Nisan as the 1st month; or, the 5th month if we consider Tishrei as the 1st month.)

Rosh HaShanah La'llanot (ראש השנה לאילנות) literally means "New Year of the Trees." In contemporary Israel, the day is celebrated as an ecological awareness day. Trees are planted in celebration. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tu_BiShvat

The Mishnah and the larger Talmud tell us that we Jews have 4 different New Year Days.¹

1. We are all familiar with Rosh Hashanah.

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- 1:1 A There are four new years:
 B (1) the first day of Nisan is the new year for kings and festivals;
 C (2) the first day of Elul is the new year for tithing cattle.
 D R. Eleazar and R. Simeon say, "It is on the first day of Tishre."
 E (3) The first day of Tishre is the new year for the reckoning of years, for Sabbatical years, and for Jubilees,
 F for planting [trees] and for vegetables;
 G (4) the first day of Shebat is the new year for trees, in accord with the opinion of the House of Shammai.
 H The House of Hillel say, "On the fifteenth day of that month [is the new year for trees]."
 Neusner, J. (1988). [*The Mishnah: A new translation*](#) (p. 299). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Here is the Talmud's on it.

MISHNAH. THERE ARE FOUR NEW YEARS.1 ON THE FIRST OF NISAN2 IS NEW YEAR FOR KINGS3 AND FOR FESTIVALS.4 ON THE FIRST OF ELUL5 IS NEW YEAR FOR THE TITHE OF CATTLE.6 R. ELEAZAR AND R. SIMEON, HOWEVER, PLACE THIS ON THE FIRST OF TISHRI.7 ON THE FIRST OF TISHRI8 IS NEW YEAR FOR YEARS,4 FOR RELEASE AND JUBILEE YEARS,9 FOR PLANTATION10 AND FOR [TITHE OF] VEGETABLES.11 ON THE FIRST OF SHEBAT12 IS NEW YEAR FOR TREES,13 ACCORDING TO THE RULING OF BETH SHAMMAI; BETH HILLEL, HOWEVER, PLACE IT ON THE FIFTEENTH OF THAT MONTH. GEMARA. FOR KINGS. Why this law?

Simon, Maurice. *Soncino Babylonian Talmud Rosh Hashanah* (Kindle Locations 126-133). Talmudic Books. Kindle Edition.

The Bible calls it the Feast of Trumpets, Yom Teruah. יום תְּרוּעָה

- Lev 23:24 calls the day, “Zik·rone Teruah” or “a Memorial of Trumpets.” זִכְרוֹן תְּרוּעָה
- Numbers 29:1 calls it Yom Teruah or, “A Day of Blowing the Trumpets.”

2. Then, there is the first day of the month of Nisan.

While the Bible never specifically says that the 1st of Nisan is New Year’s Day, Exodus 12:2 does say that Passover is in the first month of the year.

Exodus 12:2 (NKJV) – ²“This month *shall be* your beginning of months; it *shall be* the first month of the year to you.

- So, if Passover is the 14th day of the first month, then the first day of that month must be New Year’s Day.
- So, Passover is understood as the beginning of our festival or liturgical calendar.
 - Yeshua was crucified on Passover. He is our Passover Lamb.
 - Passover is the New Year that points to His sacrifice on our behalf.
- And, Rosh Hashanah – with the blowing of *coronating* trumpets is the beginning of the Royal or civil calendar.
 - Rosh Hashanah is the New Year that points to the day when the King blows His trumpet and calls us to be with Him.

3. Then, there is the 1st day of the 6th month – the month of Elul.

I have never celebrated this day. And, I don’t know anyone who has. Really, this New Year’s Day is not celebrated any more. But, it is identified in the Mishnah as a New Year’s Day. And, the day was used to help calculate how to tithe on animals.

And, I am unaware of any Biblical reference to support the establishment of 1st of Elul as a date for tithing our livestock. But, there is a Biblical reference for tithing the fruit of the trees. So, our forefathers figured, “If there is a need to establish a date for tithing crops, maybe there should a date for tithing livestock?”

- Tonight, I want to spend a few minutes talking about the Fourth New Year’s Day.

4. Finally, there is Tu B’Shevat – the 15th day of the Month of Shevat – the New Year of the Trees.

The Bible has a lot to say about trees.²

- The **ark** was made of **acacia** wood. Exodus 25:1.
- The **Temple** of **cedar**. 1 Kings 6:14-18.
- David's **instruments** of **pine**. 2 Samuel 6:5
- **Noah's ark** of **cypress**. Genesis 6:14

We barely started in the Bible, and we can read about

- All kinds of trees (Genesis 2:9)
- The tree of life (Genesis 2:9)
- The tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:9)
- Fig trees (Genesis 3:7)

Not only does the Bible start with trees but it also ends with the Tree of Life being mentioned in Revelation 22:14.

In ancient Israel, key points in life were tied to trees. For example, when a child was born, the parents planted a tree. A cedar tree was planted for a boy. A cypress tree was planted for a girl. As the child grew, it was the child's responsibility to care for their own tree. And, when the child grew up and was married, they took branches from the tree to support the bridal canopy under which they were married.³

With the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, Tu B'Shevat lost much of its relevance because we didn't have a Temple, so our people couldn't bring the tithes of our trees. But, since 1948, this holiday has been enjoying a revival.⁴

On the first Tu B'Shevat of the modern nation of Israel in 1949, thousands of people gathered to plant trees which are called the "Forest of the Martyrs." 6 million trees have now been planted in that forest. 4 ½ million **pine** trees represent the **adults** who perished in the Holocaust. 1 ½ million

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- **Moses** built the **ark of the covenant** out of **acacia** wood – covered with gold – Exodus 25:1.
 - **Solomon** built the **temple** out of **cedar** trees – 1 Kings 6:14-18.
 - Every year during the 7-day Feast of **Tabernacles**, Israel was to live in shaky booths made of **Palm** Trees and **fruit-bearing** trees – Leviticus 23:40.
 - King **David** used the wood of **pine** trees to make many of his **instruments** – 2 Samuel 6:5.
 - God told **Noah** to make his ark of **cypress** wood – Genesis 6:14.
 - The **2 Last Days' prophets** are called "**olive trees**" – Revelation 11:3-4.
 - The **oil** for the **lamp stand** in the Holy Place was made from the fruit of olive trees – **olive oil**.
 - **Psalm 139** says that during the **Babylonian Exile**, the Jews hung their harps on the **weeping willows** – Psalm 137:1-2.
 - **Zacchaeus** climbed up a **sycamore** tree so he could see Jesus – Luke 19:4.
 - Jesus talked about the **mustard seed** as a symbol of **faith** – Matthew 13:31.
 - Jesus cursed the **fig** tree because it didn't have fruit when it should have – Mark 11:14.
 - Isaiah talked about Oaks of righteousness.

³ Morris Epstein, *All About Jewish Holidays and Customs*, (KTAV Publishing House, Inc, 1959, 1970), p. 43.

⁴ <http://judaism.about.com/od/holidays/fl/Tu-BShevat-101.htm>

cypress trees represent the **children** who perished. Trees were part of the healing of the nation of Israel.

- In our day where so many like to do everything “Green”, some Jews will even have Seders to celebrate.
- And, it’s a tradition to eat a lot of fruit on this day.⁵

In Deuteronomy 20:19-20, God told Israel that when she came into the Promised Land she was to protect the trees. Trees were not to be cut down in time of war. God didn’t want Israel to receive a tree-forsaken land.

When the Ottoman Empire controlled the Promised Land, she taxed people based on the number of trees that they had on their land. If your taxes were based on the number of trees that you had, you would probably go home today and cut down every tree you had. That’s what happened to the Promised Land. The result was that the land that once flowed with milk and honey become like a desert. In other places, the land turned to swamp.

1. So, trees are symbolic of the healing of the land.

When trees do well, the earth does well. When trees do poorly, the earth does poorly.

2. Trees are symbolic of the healing of the soul.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was tied to the fall of man. In Deuteronomy 21:22-23, Moses said that a murderer was to be hung on a tree because he was “under God’s curse.” Paul explained this in Galatians 3:13.

Galatians 3:13 (TLV) – Messiah liberated us from *Torah’s* curse, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”).

(Ref: Deuteronomy 21:22-23)

In the Bible, we can find that trees are symbolic of financial healing, and the healing of the nations and even the healing of the body.

1 Peter 2:24 (NKJV) – who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

Well, this Friday evening is the New Year of the Trees.

- Our people established a New Year’s Day to help us know how to tithe the fruit of the trees.

Here’s how it actually played out. They said, we need to know how to comply with Leviticus 19.

⁵ <http://judaism.about.com/od/holidays/fl/Tu-BShevat-101.htm>

Leviticus 19:23 (NKJV)

²³ ‘When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. *It* shall not be eaten.

The word uncircumcised is interesting.⁶

- NASB / NIV / NLT / TLV = forbidden.
 - Message = inedible
 - The NKJV and the Old KJV really got it right.
- The word means “uncircumcised.” Circumcision is part of God’s covenant with Abraham. So, God is essentially telling Israel, “This is *covenantly* important to our relationship.”
- It’s almost like the command that God gave Joshua and the Israelites when they first came into the Promised Land.
- In Joshua 6, God told Israel, “Destroy the city of Jericho. And, you can’t touch any of the silver or gold else you bring destruction upon yourself. Of course, Achan violated God’s command. He took some silver and gold. And, as a result, the next time that Israel went to battle, Israel experienced a military defeat at the city of Ai until she repented.

Joshua 6:17-19 (NIV) ¹⁷ The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the L-RD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. ¹⁸ But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. ¹⁹ All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the L-RD and must go into his treasury.”

When Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land, she had to learn that even though she had a covenant with God, there are consequences for violating the covenant. God does discipline those whom He loves. (Prov. 3:12 & Heb. 12:6)

So, God told Israel that she could not eat the fruit of the trees for the first 3 years. But, then something changed in the fourth year.

Leviticus 19:24 (NKJV) – But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the L-RD.

Notice that Israel still can’t eat the fruit of the tree in the 4th year. It’s not called “uncircumcised.” But, the entire crop was holy. The entire crop belonged to the L-RD. This is different from what happens in the fifth year.

Leviticus 19:25 (NKJV) – And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I *am* the L-RD your G-d.

- So, in the fourth year, the entire crop is holy. That’s the first fruits of the crop.
- In the first 3 years, the crop was not worthy of giving it to God. It was *uncircumcised*.
- But, in the fourth year, the crop is worthy of being offered. It is no longer

⁶ עָרְלָה – עָרְלָה [aw·rale] n m. 35 occurrences; AV translates as “uncircumcised” 34 times, and “uncircumcised person” once. 1 uncircumcised, having foreskin.

uncircumcised. So, God gets the entire crop of the 4th year. And, when the 5th year comes around, God didn't require the entire crop. He required a tithe of the crop.

Leviticus 27:30 (NKJV) – And all the tithe of the land, *whether* of the seed of the land *or* of the fruit of the tree, is the L-RD's. It is holy to the L-RD.

- **So, then the tithe is distinct from the first fruits.**
- Friend, Tu B'Shevat teaches us about tithing. And, it also teaches us about first fruits.
- **I would like to tell you how I learned about tithing. And, then I will briefly say a few words about first fruits.**

1. Tu B'Shevat teaches us about tithing.

I would like to tell you how I learned about tithing.

I had read the Hebrew scriptures before I came to faith in Yeshua, but 35 years and 12 days ago, I came to faith in Yeshua as a 24-year old young man. And, I had major awakenings in nearly every area of my life. One of them was in the area of tithing. I don't remember *why* I started to tithe. Perhaps someone told me about it? Whatever the reason, I started to tithe very early in my walk. God's call on my life was evident from the very beginning.

Within 5 years, the military had transferred me twice. By 1988 I was on the Board of new, small church. The church was struggling. It wasn't a healthy situation. I used to go down to my basement and pray for the church. One day, I found myself praying about leaving the church. While I was praying, a coincidence happened – a friend that I had led to the Lord a few years earlier calls me up. The first words out of his mouth on the phone were, "So how's church?" And, I knew that God was telling me, "Greg, cut it out. Stop thinking that way about your church. I choose what church people belong in. When I want you to move, I will tell you to move." By God's grace – under His leadership I was truly able to implement the truth of 1 Corinthians 7:20.

1 Corinthians 7:20 (NKJV) – Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.

So, I stayed at the church, and I served. One Sunday – it was a few months later as the service ended, I was surprised by the voice of God. He said, "It's time to move." So, we left the church and went up to another spirit-filled church about a mile away where I met a Pastor who became a lifelong mentor to me. To this day, that Pastor has a remarkable place in my heart."

But, I was carrying a bunch of hurts from the unhealthy situation that we had come out of. And, I let those hurts get the best of me.

It was probably a month later that I told Donna, “Dear, we have a lot of debt. I think we need to stop tithing. We should just give as we want, but let’s get out of debt and then we can go back to tithing. Our giving went from tithing to a perhaps a \$20 tip to nothing.

I need to back up in the story to mention that at the time, we had 4 kids. That 4th child had been conceived when I was enlisted in the Air Force just before I was accepted into *Officer’s Training School*. Donna was pregnant with Jeff when I went off to OTS. Now, *Officer’s Training School* keeps you very busy. It’s 3 months of no free time. So, for the entire 3 months of OTS, I had no devotions. Back then I was a tither. And, so during OTS, my entire devotional life was me claiming Malachi 3:10-11.

“God, I thank you that my wife will not cast forth her fruit before the time while I am in the field.”

I’d love to share with the awesome testimony of Jeff’s conception and birth another time. But, for tonight – we fast forward. Jeff was now born. He was about 18 months old. We had left that church about 6 months earlier. We were still carrying hurts. And, we had stopped tithing.

And, one day, my Son Jeff is standing next to me. I notice that he has a little bump on the top of his head.

- Donna, what is this bump? --- I don’t know?
- How long has he had it? --- I don’t know. Maybe **6** months.
- Well, we better check it out...

We took Jeff to the doctor. They did an MRI.

- The Doc said, “This is not good. A tumor had formed on the top of his head under his skin. It had grown down.”
- “The tumor has eaten a whole in his skull the size of a quarter. There is a blood vessel on the top of the brain. The tumor is immediately up on the vein. We cannot tell by the MRI if the tumor has infected the vessel. If it has infected the vessel, there is nothing that we can do.”
 - “Well, can’t you replace it with a vein from the leg or something?”
- “No, and it needs to come out as soon as possible. And, you need to know that there is a possibility that its removal will result in bleeding on the brain. If that happens there is nothing we can do.”
 - “Nothing?”
- “Well, we can dab it with cotton.”

- At one point, I had been a Pre-Med student – so I understood that what he was saying was “blood on the brain” – brain damage.
- Either brain damage or a tumor for which nothing can be done.
- We scheduled the surgery in the next couple of days.

In a God coincidence, I went home that day and my daily read through the Bible routine took me to Malachi 3. And, I read these words:

Malachi 3:10-11 (KJV)

¹⁰ Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse,
That there may be meat in mine house,
And prove me now herewith, saith the L-RD of hosts,
If I will not open you the windows of heaven,
And pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

¹¹ And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes,

The word devourer caught my attention. “Devourer” – that sounds like a person. So I looked it up. The word means to eat or to consume.⁷ I quickly realized that when I stopped tithing, I gave room to the Devourer, to the Enemy. When I did this I granted Satan access to my Son and He planted a tumor in my Son. I cannot tell you how bad I felt.

I proceeded to do a word study on the entire passage.

Malachi 3:11 (KJV)

And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes,

Malachi 3:11 (KJV) – And he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground;

The word for fruit is פְּרִי [per·ee] and it does mean fruit like an apple or a banana, but lexicons also point out that the word also means children or progeny of the womb.⁸

Malachi 3:11 (KJV) Neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the L-RD of hosts.

⁷ QAL singular participle of אָכַל [aw·kal], verb, AV translates as “eat” 604 times, “devour” 111 times, “consume” 32 times, and translated miscellaneous 55 times. 1 to eat, devour, burn up, feed. 1A (Qal). 1A1 to eat (human subject). 1A2 to eat, devour (of beasts and birds). 1A3 to devour, consume (of fire). 1A4 to devour, slay (of sword). 1A5 to devour, consume, destroy (inanimate subjects—ie, pestilence, drought). 1A6 to devour (of oppression). 1B (Niphal). 1B1 to be eaten (by men). 1B2 to be devoured, consumed (of fire). 1B3 to be wasted, destroyed (of flesh). 1C (Pual). 1C1 to cause to eat, feed with. 1C2 to cause to devour. 1D (Hiphil). 1D1 to feed. 1D2 to cause to eat. 1E (Piel). 1E1 consume.

⁸ Singular noun פְּרִי [per·ee] AV translates as “fruit” 113 times, “fruitful” twice, “boughs” once, “firstfruits + 7225” once, “reward” once, and “fruit thereof” once. 1 fruit. 1A fruit, produce (of the ground). 1B fruit, offspring, children, progeny (of the womb). 1C fruit (of actions) (fig.).

And, lexicons point out that the word for cast forth is really the word for miscarry.⁹

And, that phrase was the exact phrase that I held my devotions over while I was at OTS – separated from my pregnant wife. It was entirety of my devotional life for over 90 days while that Son was in gestation.

I can't tell you how thankful I was when the Doc said, "The surgery went better than we expected. We cut the skin and were able to literally lift out the tumor. It will take a few years, but we expect his skull to grow back."

Friend, children are all over this passage in Malachi. Look at what God said earlier in this same chapter –

Malachi 3:6-7 (NKJV)

- ⁶ "For I *am* the L-RD, I do not change;
Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.
- ⁷ Yet from the days of your fathers
You have gone away from My ordinances
And have not kept *them*.
Return to Me, and I will return to you,"
Says the L-RD of hosts.
"But you said,
'In what way shall we return?'

Why does God call Israel the "sons of Jacob" in Malachi 3:6?

Well, remember that Jacob has a brother named Esau. And, in Genesis 27 Jacob deceived their Father Isaac to give him the blessing that belonged to Esau since Esau was the elder brother.

At the time, Isaac was blind, very old, and nigh unto death.

Genesis 27:41 (NKJV) – Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

When their Mother, Rebekah, heard what Esau was planning she convinced Jacob to flee for his life. Remember Isaac was dying.

Genesis 28 describes Jacob's first night as he ran from Esau.

Genesis 28:20-22 (NKJV) –

⁹ Active, piel verb **נָחַשׁ** [shaw·khath/] 147 occurrences; AV translates as "destroy" 96 times, "corrupt" 22 times, "mar" seven times, "destroyer" three times, "corrupters" twice, "waster" twice, "spoilers" twice, "battered" once, "corruptly" once, and translated miscellaneously 11 times. **1** to destroy, corrupt, go to ruin, decay. **1A** (Niphal) to be marred, be spoiled, be corrupted, be corrupt, be injured, be ruined, be rotted. **1B** (Piel). **1B1** to spoil, ruin. **1B2** to pervert, corrupt, deal corruptly (morally). **1C** (Hiphil). **1C1** to spoil, ruin, destroy. **1C2** to pervert, corrupt (morally). **1C3** destroyer (participle). **1D** (Hophal) spoiled, ruined (participle).

²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If G-d will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on,
²¹ so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the L-RD shall be my G-d. ²² And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be G-d’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.”

The word for tenth¹⁰ is the same root word as the word for tithe in Malachi 3:10.¹¹

Notice that word “a tenth.” The word tithe means the tenth part.

- No one in the history of creation has ever tithed 11%. They have tithed 10% and given an offering above the tithe of 1%.
- No one in the history of creation has ever tithed 9%. They have returned to the Lord 9% and held back the other 1%.

Twenty years after Genesis 28, Jacob is returning from his exile.

- When Jacob returns, His blind Father Isaac who had been on his death bed 20 years earlier was still alive.
- On top of that, Jacob returns with 2 wives who each have a handmaid. And, through the 4 women, Jacob has fathered 12 sons – the Tribes of Israel.
- You see, 20 years earlier (back in Genesis 28), Jacob made a vow, God if you will bring me back to my Father’s house in shalom (complete wholeness), then I will tithe. Apparently, Jacob tithed.
- He comes home to His Father with 12 Sons – and great wealth.
- And, in Malachi 3, God told Israel, “There is a reason that I have not destroyed you. The reason that I have blessed you sons of Jacob is that your forefather (Jacob) tested me with the tithe 1,500 years earlier.

Malachi 3:6-7 (NKJV)

- ⁶ “For I *am* the L-RD, I do not change;
 Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.
⁷ Yet from the days of your fathers
 You have gone away from My ordinances
 And have not kept *them*.
 Return to Me, and I will return to you,”
 Says the L-RD of hosts.

And, recognize this: in Malachi 3, Israel is not in exile. She has already

¹⁰ Piel infinitive absolute verb –רָשַׁע [aw·sar] verb, A primitive root, Nine occurrences; AV translates as “tithe” four times, “take ... tenth” twice, “give tenth” once, “surly” once, and “truly” once. 1 to tithe, take the tenth part of, give a tithe, take a tithe. 1A (Qal) to tithe. 1B (Piel) to give a tithe. 1C (Hiphil) to take a tithe.

¹¹ Singular, absolute, singular noun –רָשַׁע [mah·as·ayr] AV translates as “tithe” 27 times, “tenth part” twice, “tenth” twice, and “tithing” once. 1 tithe, tenth part. 1A tenth part. 1B tithe, payment of a tenth part.

come back from Exile to the Promised Land. But, her heart is not there. And, God says, “This is how you return to me – with the tithe.”

There is one other thing that the Lord taught me about tithing through that stressful testimony.

Malachi 3:10 (NKJV) –

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse,
That there may be food in My house,
And try Me now in this,”
Says the L-RD of hosts.

- Notice that word storehouse.
- And, notice the name of God – the Lord of Hosts. יהוה צבאות
- Twenty-four times, Malachi will refer to God by this name which literally means “the Lord of the armies [of heaven].”

Let me show you another place where the phrase Lord of Hosts appears.

Jeremiah 50:25 (NKJV) –

The L-RD has opened His armory,
And has brought out the weapons of His indignation;
For this *is* the work of the L-rd G-D of hosts.

לאדני יהוה צבאות

- Oh! And, there’ that word armory too!
- The Lord of the armies of heaven has an armory. The word for armory¹² is the same word translated as storehouse in Malachi 3:10. And, the Lord of the armies of heaven says this:

“If you will bring your tithes into my *owtsar* – the place where I keep the weapons of my wrath – then I will bring out my weapons and I will fight the Devourer for your sake. And, he – that stinking Devourer will not destroy your family. I have declared it, And, I am the Lord of the armies of heaven!”

That’s how I learned about the value of tithing. But, now firstfruits is distinct from tithing.

2. Tu B’Shevat teaches us about first fruits.

Can I tell you some things that I have learned about first fruits?

¹² noun אוצר [*owtsar*] 79 occurrences; AV translates as “treasure(s)” 61 times, “treasury” 10 times, “storehouse(s)” three times, “cellars” twice, “armoury” once, “granaries” once, and “store” once. 1 treasure, storehouse. 1A treasure (gold, silver, etc). 1B store, supplies of food or drink. 1C treasure-house, treasury. 1C1 treasure-house. 1C2 storehouse, magazine. 1C3 treasury. 1C4 magazine of weapons (fig. of God’s armoury). 1C5 storehouses (of God for rain, snow, hail, wind, sea).

There is a difference between giving God your first paycheck and giving God the first 10% of your paycheck. I learned this from a couple in my last church.

- The husband was an engineer. He had a good paycheck. And, every year, he received significant pay raises. The first time that the pay raise showed up in their pay check, they gave the full amount of the raise – not 10% of the pay raise, but the full amount. The next week, they only gave 10% of the raise – so they tithed on the raise. But, this was their joy in acknowledging God’s promotion.
- By way of example:
Let’s say that he got a \$1,200 pay raise. And, let’s say that he got paid once a month. (I making up the scenario.) His pay raises were usually more. And, he was paid more than once a month. But, for the sake of this scenario – let’s say that he got a \$1,200 pay raise and it was divided between 12 equal paychecks over the year. That would mean that he would have a \$100 gross (not net) pay increase on his first paycheck in January. So, he would give that \$100. The next time he got paid, he would only give \$10 of that 100. His tithe (10%) would go up.

Donna and I now practice this idea of giving with our pay raises.

Friend, there’s a difference between tithing and firstfruits.

- Tithing acknowledging God’s provision.
- Firstfruits acknowledges a new source of blessing. It recognizes God’s promotion.
- When God showed me this a few years ago, I determined that the next time that I was asked to speak somewhere other than my church, I would give God the entire offering.
- Recently, I was invited to teach a course at The Kings. So, the first paycheck will go to God because that income is a new source of provision.

In Leviticus 19 the new tree is a new source of provision. So, whenever there is a new kind of blessing, we have the opportunity to give God a first fruits offering.

Friend, this is not just about money. It is about any kind of first.

A. For example, the Bible speaks about the first year of a marriage.

Deuteronomy 24:5 (NKJV) – When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.

Of course, after the first year, God still wants us to gather together with our families for weekly worship, but that first year is special. We

are newlyweds.

B. Firstfruits would include giving God a **fast** at the beginning of a year.

C. First Conference.

D. God gave Israel the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** in the first month of the year.

E. At **Gateway**,

- We have the First Friday Messianic Service.
- We give the first 15% of your offerings to our Global (Missions) Department.
- We give the first portion of that 15% “To the Jew First.”

F. Firstfruits can be about **school**.

Soon I first came to faith in the Lord, the Lord sent me back to school. Now remember, I had been a drug addict. My life had fallen apart. The entire time I was doing drugs, I never made A's. The Sunday before I went back to school our Pastor told a testimony of a young student who was failing in school. He committed that he would read once chapter of the Bible every day before he did his homework. I said, “That’s for me.” And, I made this commitment:

In addition to my daily devotions, every time before I did my homework, I would read 1 chapter of the Bible. I was specific. If I had 2 or 3 times over the day when I did homework, I was only making this commitment about the first time that I did homework.

- I had never made an A on anything the first time around.
- I failed Spanish twice and Chemistry.
- But by putting God first, I only made A's. God turned my life around.
- I had 1 class with a B between my Bachelor's Degree, 2 Master's and a Doctorate.

This is not just about money. It is about stewarding every area of our lives.

Friend, I have asked our Stewardship Department to have a presence in the foyer this evening. There might be some here who would benefit from personal, godly counsel.

Well, next Friday evening starts Tu B'Shevat – the New Year of the Trees.

And, there is one tree in particular that we all need to be concerned about.

Galatians 3:13 (TLV) – Messiah liberated us from *Torah's* curse, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”).

Deuteronomy 21:23 (NKJV) – his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the L-RD your G-d is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged *is* accursed of G-d.

We have an ancient Jewish tradition that connects the Messiah with Trees.

The youngest son of Hillel, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zaikai¹³ said,

¹³ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/yochanan-ben-zakkai>

"If you should happen to be holding a sapling in your hand when they tell you that the Messiah has arrived, first plant the sapling and then go out and greet the Messiah."

One of the most Jewish things that you can do is to recognize the connection between the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua, and the Tree of Life.

Friend, listen to me: God paid to redeem your life from the curse of the Law. And, He did that on tree.

God's set up His plan to redeem people from a tree before He even created time.

Revelation 13:8 (NKJV) – All who dwell on the earth shall worship him—everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the Book of Life of the Lamb who was slain.

Revelation 17:8 (NKJV) – Those who dwell on the earth—whose names have not been written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world—will be astonished when they see the beast, because he was and is not and is to come.

Is there any area of your life where you feel there is a lack of blessing?

God wants to make your life a fruitful tree.

Closing: The blessing over fruit of the tree:

ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי העץ

Baruch atah Adonai, Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam borei p'ri ha-etz.

Blessed are You, L-RD our G-d, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the tree.

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