

The list goes on and on and we are prompted to ask, what does offering a *re'shiyth* look like for us? It could be as simple as the first few minutes of our day or as intricate as offering up our career, a certain relationship, or even our life savings if God has asked us to. One truth becomes clear: the *re'shiyth* is more than just a 10 percent tax. As David noted, it reflects an attitude that says, "I will not offer to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2 Sam. 24:24). Giving our firstfruits to God will always be a costly act.

While costly acts and offerings can be hard to bear, we must always keep their end result in mind. However painful it was for Abraham to climb that mountain with his beloved son Isaac, or for Abel to slay one of the best of his sheep (knowing that he would never profit from it again), we see that for both of these men God approved of their lives and counted their acts as righteousness forever (Hebrews 11:4, 6, 17-19). When we are willing to go beyond the bare minimum in our obedience to God, offering the best we have, we please our heavenly Father and **make a choice we will not regret for all of eternity.**

The next time you write that tithing check and think about the concept of firstfruits, remember that over 2,000 years ago another son climbed a hill out of sacrificial obedience. There on the hill of Golgotha, the Father gave his *re'shiyth*, sacrificing his strength, his firstborn, his choice part and most prized possession. Because God was willing to offer us his best, we receive forgiveness of all our mistakes and life eternal. May we always hold onto this truth in all of our extravagant giving to God, in all of our "reasonable" acts of worship that Paul wrote of in Romans 12:1. For God, no costly offering is too great.



by Valerie Jones
The Lookout Magazine
November 27, 2016

GIVING GOD the FIRSTFRUITS

It's that time in the worship service when the music plays and the offering plate is passed around. Week after week we reach for the check written to the church. We are mostly familiar with the command that calls us to give back to God 10 percent of what he has given us financially. Sometimes however, setting aside that 10 percent becomes so customary that perhaps we need a reminder of how it began.

The Origin of the Tithe

At quick glance, the first appearance of tithing in the Scriptures points us to the time of Moses. As he was leading the Israelites out of Egypt's bondage and preparing them to become keepers of their own promised land, God gave him a set of instructions to pass along to the people. The point was simple: obeying these commands would bring about God's blessing while ignoring them would yield only famine, drought, and disaster.

Detailed in the book of Leviticus, Moses ended one of his monologues with this simple statement: "Every tenth of the land's produce, grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD...Every tenth animal from the herd or flock...will be holy to the LORD" (27:30-32, all quotes from *Holman Christian Standard Bible*).

As it was important for the Israelites to show regard for orphans, foreigners, and widows and to not murder or steal, they were also commanded to tithe. This act of setting aside a tenth of their personal profits for the Lord was a part of the choice to honor the one who gave them their promised land.

Giving Before the Command

But did the concept of the 10 percent tithe only begin with the nation of Israel at Sinai? Perhaps not. Before there was ever an Israelite nation or the clear directives of Sinai, Scripture reveals at least two

individuals who had an understanding of the call to give back to God because of what he had given to them.

The first of these was Abraham, the very father of nations. When Abraham returned from battle in Genesis 14, loaded up with the spoils of war; he encountered mysterious Melchizedek, “priest of God Most High” (v.18). Seeing that Melchizedek was perhaps a very special divine figure who had blessed him. Abraham gave him a tenth of

“Giving our firstfruits to God will always be a costly act.”

everything (v.19, 20). Many years later, Abraham’s grandson, when learning to navigate his own relationship with Yahweh, engaged in a similar act. When leaving his homeland, possessing nothing as he fled the wrath of his brother, Jacob acknowledged that any protection, blessing, or profit he would receive would only come from God. At Bethel he made a vow: “the LORD will be my God...and I will give to You a tenth of all that You give me” (Gen. 28:21, 22).

Before they ever received a command, Abraham and Jacob realized that it was only proper, knowing that all their increase came from God’s favor, to set aside a portion of their blessings for his sake.

Firstfruits: More Than a Tenth?

With these spontaneous and voluntary offerings of Abraham and Jacob in mind, we should take note of another term that Moses used to speak of the offerings Israel was to set aside for Yahweh: the giving of the *firstfruits*. We find mention of it here:

“When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance...you must take some of the first of all the land’s produce...and put it in a container...the priest will take the container from your hand and place it before the altar of the LORD your God” (Dt. 26:1-4; see also Leviticus 23:10). The Israelites were not only called to

set aside a tenth of their earnings for God but also to leave for him the *firstfruits* of their profits. What could be the difference?

Quite literally, the firstfruits were the very first of the produce coming up from the ground at harvest time. But the Hebrew word used for firstfruits, *re’shiyth*, has a meaning even more vast and complex. A *re’shiyth* can refer to “a beginning, the first, the firstborn, the best, or even the choice part.” It is even the *first* word of the Bible, “In the beginning”! In Genesis 14, we saw that God blessed Abraham with victory in battle and therefore Abraham offered up a tenth of that blessing. Years later, however, God granted to him a bigger blessing: a firstborn son through Sarah. Later we find that God asked more from Abraham than a 10 percent offering upon his material goods alone. God asked Abraham if he was willing to give him his most choice part and treasured possession: his firstborn son. Abraham, the man of faith, rose to the occasion and in essence, showed he was willing to offer up to God his own *re’shiyth*. Perhaps Abel, the first man born of woman, also passed this test. Rather than giving an insignificant portion of the produce of the land like his brother, he was willing to give God the firstborn of his flock.

The First, the Best, and the Choice Part

Re’shiyth is the term Jacob used for his firstborn son, Rueben, calling him “my strength” on his deathbed (Gen. 49:3). Perhaps offering our *re’shiyth* to God means that we are called to give him more than just a tenth but rather the thing or things representing our strength—that which is most dear and valuable to us. When we take a step back and look at all the stories of the Bible, we find that this is what fills its pages; stories of souls walking in faith and willing to offer God their best.

For Hannah, it was also her firstborn son (“as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD,” 1 Samuel 1:28). For Ruth, it was her homeland and chance at marriage. For David, it was repeatedly offering to God the chance of being king as he continued to honor Saul over and over again.