



# MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

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## TEN PERCENT

Some churches make tithing an important requirement for their members. Everyone is expected to give at least ten percent of their income to the church. I even knew of a church in the Philippines that expected every member to declare their annual income. At the end of the year they would bill members for the difference between what they had already given and one-tenth of their income. If a person did not pay the bill, they were excommunicated from the church. When it comes down to it, such churches justify their requirement for a tithe (Middle English for 1/10) by the Jewish requirement to give a tenth of the produce of the field.

The first problem with such a requirement is that it applies one law where that law may not apply. Just because God required a tithe of the Jewish people does not imply that it is necessary for someone who is not Jewish. New Mexico has an income tax. Texas has none. I could not get away with failure to pay my New Mexico taxes by arguing that Texas has no income tax. Nor, if I still lived in Texas, would I expect the government to bill me for the equivalent of a New Mexico income tax. I would expect to pay under the law which I currently lived. So it is with the tithe. Those who were not part of the physical nation of Israel were never expected to pay a tithe. Nor should they be so required today.

A second problem with what churches require as a tithe today is that it even ignores the Jewish law. That law is expressed in Deuteronomy 14:22-27.

Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always. And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, Then shalt thou turn it into money, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, And the Levite that is within thy gates;

thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee.

Moses goes on to say that every third year the entire tithe is to be presented to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. That is, every three years it became went to the local welfare system.

Two things are notable about the tithe. First, for two of every three years it was to be consumed by the one giving it. It did have to be eaten in a specific place, and for the specific purpose of praising God for all the good he had blessed the individual with during the year. While even part of that tithe was to be designated for those who had no income, the majority belonged to, and stayed with, the giver. Second, the tithe of the third year was used exclusively for feeding the poor. How many churches that demand a tithe today would put two-thirds of it back to be used for member pot-luck meals, and give the other third to a soup kitchen? Generally, they expect to use the tithe for operating expenses, paying the preacher and other staff, building expansion and maintenance, and countless other expenses, few of which have anything to do with eating. Their concept of a tithe has nothing to do with God's requirement.

There is nothing wrong with giving a tenth of one's income to the church, for whatever purposes the church uses it. While a Christian is to give willingly, and "as he has prospered," most do not give a tenth of their income. It would be good to give a tenth. It would be legalism to demand it because it was demanded of Israel. It is an even greater evil to require it and ignore the purpose God gave for the tithe in the first place. We should eat before God in gratitude. That was the purpose of the tithe. That is the attitude with which we should eat, anytime, today.

### CONTENTS

Ten Percent	1
At the Rest Stop	2
The Evil Bunny	4

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# AT THE REST STOP

Most of what I am about to tell you I did not see. So consider me more a historian than an eyewitness. I did speak to those two people involved, and so I think I have the story straight.

A certain faction in the capital objected to what the Teacher was doing. They heard that the Teacher was immersing more people than John, and were afraid. (Actually, those of us who accompanied him did most of the witnessing of the immersions, but since they were by his authority we are willing to give him the credit.) It was getting dangerous for the teacher to stay in the capital, and when it got dangerous for the teacher it got dangerous for those of us who accompanied him. We decided to go north, to the Teacher's home.

Usually when someone comes south from Caesarea they cross the Jordan south of the Sea of Galilee and then recross it near Jericho. That way they avoid Samaria. The people of the capital frown on anyone entering the city after being in Samaria. It is one of those racial quirks. Since the Samaritans are generally people who could not prove a pure Israelite lineage after the Captivity, they are considered to be less pure than those who brought their genealogical proof back with them.

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Jacob's Well may or may not actually have had anything to do with the person whose name it bears.

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Some Samaritans even take pride in their mixed ancestry. They can trace their lineage back to the first people planted by the Assyrians after the conquest of the Northern Tribes. It seems, though, that people have fewer qualms about going through Samaria when leaving Jerusalem. It is, after all, the quickest route to the north. I am not sure the Teacher ever had any real objection either way. It is this incident that makes me say that.

Anyone who travels from the capital to Galilee through Samaria will most likely stop at or near Shechem, sometimes called Sychar. After all, this place holds significance in the history of Israel. Jacob bought a piece of land here, and set up an altar upon it. It was there that Dinah was raped, and Simeon and Levi fell out of favor with Jacob for their defense of her. There Joseph was buried after the exodus. There

the Israelites were to set up whitewashed stones on which would be written the Law. The tribes were to divide themselves between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerazim and shout blessings and curses at each other. Joshua made the city his base of operations. It was one of the Cities of Refuge to which one who accidentally killed a person could flee for safety. And it was at Shechem that the division of the kingdom occurred as Rehoboam went there to be crowned. As tourist spots go, Sychar was high on the list. Besides, it was the largest city in Samaria at which to replenish our food supplies.

Before we went into the city to buy food, the Teacher decided to stop at Jacob's Well. Not being big on tourism, we left him there as we went to market. Jacob's Well, like many tourist traps, may or may not actually have had anything to do with the person whose name it bears. Nevertheless, it is an interesting site. Technically, I'm not even sure it should be called a well. It is truly a deep shaft, like a well. And you can get water from it. Depending on the season and the year you may have to lower the bucket anywhere from 80 to 200 cubits to get water. Unlike many wells or cisterns, however, Jacob's Well is an opening to an underground stream. It is not stagnant; rather it is living water. In spite of its depth, it is still a working well. Some people from Sychar still come here to draw their water.

After we went into town, one woman came to do just that. Because of the depth of the well, and the difficulty of drawing water, crowds usually came to draw at once. But it was now the heat of the day, and not the normal time for drawing water. This woman came alone at midday to draw water. Since it was obvious she wanted to be alone, she seemed taken aback by seeing a man sitting by the well. She had seen nothing yet.

Despite the area immediately around the well being well-watered (in more than one sense), it was hot. The teacher was tired from walking. He asked the woman for some water. A simple request. Yet it was one having grave political and social implications.

"You ask me for water?" she asked. "Since when do Jews talk to Samaritans, especially Samaritan women, even to order us around?"

The Teacher was never one to engage in political arguments. That did not mean, though, that he shied away from religious ones.

"If you knew God's gifts and who I was, you would actually ask me, and I would give you living water."

"Ah, a comedian. You don't have a bucket. Are you going to dive in and bring up some of that living water? Or are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, that

you will just speak the word and the water will rise up to you?”

The Teacher responded that the water from this well only quenched thirst temporarily. His water was quenched thirst permanently. This intrigued the woman. A source of water that she could access from inside her house! She would never have to go to the well again. Who could even conceive of such an idea? She wanted some of that.

In response, the Teacher made a seemingly unrelated request. He asked her to bring her husband. She replied that she had none.

When I talked to her later, I was too embarrassed to ask about her husbands. It seems that she had been married five times. I chose not to ask how many of those marriages had ended in the death of her spouse. Perhaps some had; perhaps all had. Somehow, the teacher knew this. He told her he knew that she had married five husbands, and further that the man she was living with was not her husband. So maybe some of those marriages had ended in divorce.

I don't know exactly how the Teacher sounded when he told her about her husbands. Apparently he did not come across as judgemental or accusatory. Nevertheless, she thought it a good time to change topics.

Ever since Jereboam's reign, the Samaritans worshipped God at Mounts Gerazim and Ebal, just as Moses had said. When the Assyrians planted strangers there, they learned from the inhabitants. One of the problems Jews have with Samaritans is the temple to God on Mt. Gerazim. This appeared to be a quick way to take this man's attention off of her. So the woman asked about this discrepancy. If it was good enough for Moses, why did the Jews from the capital claim that their temple was the only true place of worship?

“Actually, there is no reason for argument,” the Teacher replied. “Soon people will worship in neither place, specifically. You aren't sure what you believe, but the Messiah will be a Jew. And when he comes God will look for people who worship in their spirits, not in manmade halls. As a spiritual being, God wants spiritual worship. He is not limited to either temple.”

She replied, “Even we Samaritans know that Messiah is coming. When he comes he will clear all of this up.”

The woman at the well was the one person to whom the Teacher made what may be the most significant statement of his life. He made us figure out for ourselves that he was Messiah. He told this woman flat out that this was the case.

It is hard to say how she reacted to this statement when he made it. That is because we walked up at that time and interrupted his conversation. Although we didn't question him about talking to a woman, his lunchtime

companion chose to leave this large company of men and go into the village.

Now that we were a large number, it seemed she wanted some reinforcements. She told some men in the city that there was a man at the well who had told her all about her own life, even though she had never seen him before. Naturally they followed her out to the well to see this marvel.

While the woman was gone we urged the Teacher to eat. He said he was not hungry; he had refreshed himself while we were gone. Some of us wondered, “Did that woman give him food? Did somebody else come out and feed him? And he knew that we were going to get food.”

“I have a kind of food that you know nothing about,” he stated. In his own style of teaching deep spiritual messages that we did not understand right away, he told us to look for the harvest because it was ripe. We were to be sent to harvest fields that we did not sow. This was his kind of food. He had harvested a soul. We would learn about this kind of food. But that was to come later.

Soon a delegation from the town came out to the well, with the woman at their head. This may have been

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the first time she had respectability rather than notoriety. In subsequent days I even heard people speak of her with respect, saying that they believed the Teacher was the Messiah simply because this woman had told her story.

This crowd of men invited us to stay in town. We expected the Teacher to go onward, because we were still too close to the capital. Instead, he accepted their invitation, and stayed for two days. Why not? Here was an audience eager to hear what he had to say. He never turned away an audience.

Some of the Jews are less than complimentary about the Samaritans. I will say this, though. These men knew the prophecies. They knew all about Messiah. After two days of discussions with the Teacher, many told the woman that they didn't need her testimony any more. They had met Messiah himself. Too bad more people did not acknowledge him as the savior of the world.

*(Based on John 4:1-42)*

# ***THE EVIL BUNNY***

The evil bunny is gone. He disappeared the other day, given to a worthy cause. I guess I should explain. The evil bunny was just a stuffed toy. I called him the evil bunny because his round plastic eyes appeared to stare with an evil look. Since he resided on a shelf opposite my bed I often tried to outstare the evil bunny. I never succeeded. His plastic eyes never closed. But even if I could not outstare him, I could just tell myself to ignore him and his evil stare would not bother me.

The devil is kind of like the evil bunny. If you let him get to you, you can't win. But if you tell him to go away, he has to do so. (James 4:7) He becomes like the evil bunny, powerless to do any harm.

The evil bunny may be gone, but the memory of him lingers on. The evil bunny was not really evil, he just looked that way. I called him that because of his appearance, not because of any actual evil in him. He was, after all, merely white cloth, plastic eyes, and stuffing. It seems to me, though, that we often try to call things evil that may not be so. If I don't like what someone is doing, what better way to get them to stop than call it a sin? It doesn't matter that the Bible doesn't call it a sin. God may not say anything about it, but if I can call it a sin I can justify telling someone to stop doing it. After all, they probably wouldn't stop if I just said I didn't like it.

I've seen this all my life, and apparently I am not the only one. Among the most consistently popular questions at What Does the Bible Say About..? are questions about whether certain activities are really sin. I think it is wrong to smoke, but what does the Bible say about it? I don't drink, but is it a sin to take an occasional drink of alcohol? And what about dancing?

When we tell a child, or a new convert, that something is a sin, we had better be able to back it up with clear scriptures. Otherwise we alienate the listener. Otherwise we are making an evil bunny out of a stuffed animal.

The evil bunny left quickly. One day he was there. I looked up a couple of days later and he was gone. I didn't know when he was given away. I just suddenly realized he was not there.

How like our lives that is. "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14) We have probably all known people whose diseases were such that they lingered for a long time. But we have also known of people who died in an instant. I remember, when I was teaching at Boles Home near Dallas, a student of mine got married soon after she graduated. On their wedding day, within ten miles of home, on their way to their honeymoon, this couple was in a car accident and the husband died instantly. Teenagers don't expect to die, but it happens. Here was a beautiful young lady on what should have been the happiest day of her life, mourning a husband of only two hours.

If our lives are like the evil bunny, here today and gone tomorrow, what does that mean to us? We have to be ready, as one rabbi put it, to repent one day before your death. Instead of trying to justify our disobedience by asking "what about those who never heard the gospel" we need to remember that we have, and may not have much time to respond. The evil bunny disappeared, and so will you.

*Copyright 2007 from a blog I wrote. The blog, like the evil bunny, is gone, but I can still use what I wrote as material for an article.*

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