Generosity Principles in God's Instructions to Israel

***bikkurim* – first fruits**

Nehemiah 10:35 (NRSVA)
35 We obligate ourselves to bring the first fruits of our soil and the *first fruits* of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord

- First part of the harvest was given annually to the Temple in Jerusalem.
    - Fruits of the soil and of the tree:
        - Typically, of the seven species of Israel:
            - Wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates

***bekhor* – firstborn**

Nehemiah 10:36 (NRSVA)
36 also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the *firstborn* of our sons and of our livestock, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks

- Firstborn male of every animal was given to the Temple.
    - There were different stipulations for different animals, but the firstborn principle was held at the heart.
        - This included redeeming firstborn sons (giving a payment/contribution to the Temple as a way of saying the firstborn is given back to God).

***terumah* – contribution/portion/gift/heave offering**

Nehemiah 10:39 (NRSVA)
39 For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the *contribution* of grain, wine, and oil to the storerooms where the vessels of the sanctuary are, and where the priests that minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers are. We will not neglect the house of our God.

- Contributions/donations were given annually to the priests and their families.
    - Typically grain, grapes, and olives in their processed form (bread, wine, and oil)

***pe'ah* – corners/edges**

Leviticus 19:9-10 (NIV)
9 "'When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap *to the very edges* of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. **10** Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God."

- Leaving the edges of your fields unpicked and anything that falls untouched, so that anyone who is poor or traveling through can pick of your field for their sustenance.

***nedabah* – freewill offering**

Exodus 35:29 (NIV)
29 All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the Lord *freewill offerings* for all the work the Lord through Moses had commanded them to do.

- Voluntary gifts or sacrifices given to God out of a willing heart.
    - Often spontaneous gifts given out of benevolence or gratitude:
        - Freewill offering of an animal as a peace or burnt offering.
        - Donations of gold, silver and other commodities for the service or building of the Temple.
            - The *terumah* could also be used in this way. There were spontaneous donations given as a *terumah* as well.

***ma'aser* – tithe/tenth**
- Three types in the rhythm of the Israelites lives:

***Ma'aser Rishon* – The First Tithe/Tenth**

Numbers 18:24 (NIV)
24 Instead, I give to the Levites as their inheritance *the tithes* that the Israelites present as an offering to the Lord. That is why I said concerning them: 'They will have no inheritance among the Israelites.'"

- Given once a year to the Levites and their families.
    - Levites did not have a land inheritance like every other tribe. They were dedicated to the Temple; therefore, their sustenance came from the rest of the family/community.
    - God called this the wages of their temple service.
    - The Levites would also give a tenth/tithe to the priests (a tithe of the tithe).

***Ma'aser Sheni* – The Second Tithe/Tenth**

Deuteronomy 14:22-23 (NIV)
22 Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. **23** Eat *the tithe* of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always.

- Given in years 1, 2, 4, and 5 as a way of setting aside for festival celebrations. Several times a year they would travel to Jerusalem to honor and celebrate God together, and this tenth was set aside for that purpose.
    - This was also shared with the Levites and poor so they could celebrate as well.

***Ma'aser Ani* – The Poor Tithe/Tenth**

Deuteronomy 14:28-29 (NIV)

28 At the end of every three years, bring all *the tithes* of that year's produce and store it in your towns, **29** so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the orphans and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

- Given in years 3 and 6 to anyone who was in need within the community. This would've typically constituted the Levites, the foreigners, the orphans, the widows, and any others in need.
    - The foreigner, orphan, and widow, in ancient terms, were the "needy and marginalized" groups.

Schedule

- 1st Year – 1st Tithe for the Levite & 2nd Tithe for the Feasts
- 2nd Year – 1st Tithe for the Levite & 2nd Tithe for the Feasts
- 3rd Year – 1st Tithe for the Levite & Tithe for the Poor
- 4th Year – 1st Tithe for the Levite & 2nd Tithe for the Feasts
- 5th Year – 1st Tithe for the Levite & 2nd Tithe for the Feasts
- 6th Year – 1st Tithe for the Levite & Tithe for the Poor
- 7th Year – The Sabbatical Year: No Tithes were offered

New Testament Scriptures for Reflection

Matthew 6
Luke 12:13-34
Acts 2:42-47
Acts 4:32-35
Romans 12:13
2 Corinthians 8
2 Corinthians 9
1 Timothy 6:17-19
1 John 3:16-18