

What the Bible Teaches About Tithing

by Keith Malcomson

Keith Malcomson's sermon explores the biblical foundations and significance of tithing through the examples of Abraham and Jacob, emphasizing the heart behind giving.

Scripture: Genesis 14:18, John 8:39, Romans 4:20, Galatians 3:7, Hebrews 7:4

Topics: "Stewardship Of Finances", "Tithing And Giving"

Description

Keith Malcomson addresses the controversy and contention surrounding the subject of tithing, emphasizing the importance of returning to God's truth on this matter with a pure heart. He highlights the two extremes in the Church - the hyper prosperity movement and the rejection of tithing, urging believers to seek a balanced, scriptural approach. Malcomson stresses the need to place God at the center of our hearts in relation to money, consecrating our finances unto the Lord and avoiding carnal disputes. Through the examples of Abraham and Jacob, he illustrates the principles of tithing under grace, faith, and obedience, encouraging believers to honor God with their substance.

Transcript

Restoring its Holiness unto the Lord

This is just an initial introduction and chapter to a booklet I'm writing on tithing. This subject of tithing has become a point for controversy, disagreement and contention.

With a pure heart we want to exhort all to return to God's truth on this. Please pray the Lord will give further wisdom and insight.

Introduction

It is important for us to say from the very out-start that tithing is only one issue under the banner of scriptural stewardship and the subject of money. In this booklet we are primarily dealing with tithing and not the full spectrum of the Believer and his money.

Today in the Church, as with every issue, we have two extremes and both of these extremes feed off each other. The first is that of the hyper prosperity movement where money has become the idol, prosperity the goal, and the use of scriptures taken out of context the means to that end.

As this trend has grown and spread over recent decades another new teaching has sprung up and flourished well in the wake of this heresy, and that is the rejection of the scriptural teaching of tithing. Like never before certain leaders are doing acrobatics in order to disprove and extinguish any light concerning tithing in the Bible.

This second trend may well have some appearance of scriptural balance and integrity but I believe very often it comes more from a contentious spirit than out of a love for God's truth. The abuse of tithing is held forth as good reason to reject tithing with no recognition that there are many who tithe and teach tithing out of a pure heart, with pure motives, with the intent of obeying Christ and the teachings of Scriptures.

Of course there are those who have a pure heart, pure motive and pure desire yet who wrongly make a stand against the teaching of tithing and who give far in excess of their finance with a glad heart. With such believers we have no quarrel even though we may disagree on certain scriptures.

Whatever a man believes or no matter what camp he belongs to no one has the right to twist scripture to fit their experience or doctrine, no matter how correct they think they are. In this simple short booklet we want to clear the ground of all the debates, arguments and unscriptural teachings on both sides and return with a clear mind to that which is revealed in the inspired teachings of scripture.

I speak as one who has steered clear of extremes and honoured the lord with tithes and offerings from a child and have also lived by the principle of never making known my needs in ministry

Amidst the controversy of this issue it is easy to lose the perspective of giving God the central position in our hearts in relation to the issue of money. This whole area of money, tithing and free-will offerings must be again consecrated unto the Lord.

We must take this out of the realm of carnal dispute and discussion and place it steadfastly in the hands of a Holy God by living unto Him, obeying Him and following His instructions. May this simple booklet aid you in placing God supremely as Lord in all things and of delivering you from extremes, controversies and distractions in order that you may fulfil the will and Word of God by honouring Him with your substance.

Chapter 1.

TITHING IN GENESIS

Abraham

"And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all." (Gen.14:18-20)

The law of first mention is a very helpful and insightful tool in finding truth concerning any teaching in the Bible. In this chapter we have the first mention of war, of priesthood, of kingship, of communion, of the Most High God, and of course the first mention of tithing.

And so as we begin on this subject of tithing we start where God starts in His record of this subject. It is worth noting that Paul when mentioning tithing for the last time in scripture in the book of Hebrews returns to this first mention.

As we survey the life of this man Abraham we see that he was chosen, called and justified by God. He was called the friend of God and the servant of God. By faith he saw the day of Christ afar off, Isaac being a type of Christ, and was persuaded of a resurrection of the dead.

The clear Gospel message was preached to Abraham, which he believed, embraced and obeyed. He is called the "father of all them that believe" who are justified by faith and to whom righteousness is imputed. "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham...So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." (Gal.3:7, 9)

And again, "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." (Rom.4:20-21). We sum it up with the following Scripture, "And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised." (Rom.4:12)

Abraham is the father of the faith to the circumcision, or to the Jew, but not only to them. He is said to be the father of all those who believe yet who are not circumcised. How? He walked in faith prior to circumcision. And so we are instructed to walk in the steps of that faith of Abraham prior to his circumcision as well as after.

In our text we read of the days prior to his circumcision, days when he was walking by faith. Abraham is a picture and type of the New Testament believer in Christ. His life is a foreshadow of a walk of faith in the New and Everlasting Covenant of Grace. In his life we search out "steps of faith" which we are to walk in.

The context and background of Genesis 14 is the capture of Sodom and Gomorrah with the abduction of Lot and his family. Lot had set his heart towards the things of this world. Abraham and 318 of his trained servants with him pursued the invaders and slaughtered them.

We then read of Melchizedek King of Salem coming forth to meet Abram after this war. Who was this Melchizedek? So many mistakes are made in interpretation, exposition and understanding of this chapter, character and conduct because men try to interpret this chapter without the insight, revelation and understanding shed upon it by the teaching in the New Testament.

We read in Hebrews 7 concerning Melchizedek that he was "King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God;" (v??)

He was both Priest and King just as Christ is.

We are told that he was "made like unto the Son of Man", that is Christ. This term *aphomoio* means to assimilate closely, to become similar to, or be like. In other words Melchizedek was modelled upon Christ Himself.

Again in verse 15 we are told that "after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest", that is Christ. The term *homoiotēs* used here means resemblance, in the same manner or similitude. This clearly means that Christ our New Testament High Priest resembles in certain ways the Melchisedec of Genesis.

This Melchisedec in Genesis 14 was carefully patterned according to the Eternal Son of God. We see that all that is written of him in Genesis 14 was patterned upon Christ. In Hebrews 7 we then see that Christ as

priest arose in the same likeness or after the order of Melchisedec.

We say all this to show that Melchisedec is a type and picture of Christ. Abram is a type and picture of a believer under the New Covenant. Each action in the account is carefully patterned after the New Testament High Priestly ministry of Christ.

There are five important things here to point out; 1) "Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine:" 2) "he was the priest of the most high God." 3) "he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:" 4) "And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand." 5) "And he gave him tithes of all."

In all these points we see a picture of Christ and the blood washed Church which has been justified by faith in Christ alone.

As already said here we have the first mention of communion with bread and wine. Here we have the first mention of tithing. Here we have the first mention of a priest. Here we have the first mention of God as the Most High God, or El Elyon.

This name means He has all power and authority above all others. There is none high as Him. All are under him and under his sovereign rule.

It is significant that the Lord reveals Himself to Abram at this time as "the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:" It came as a revelation that "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." (Ps.24v1)

It is at this time that the King of Sodom also comes forth to Abram and says "Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself."

"And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich:" (Gen.14:22-23)

Abram's trust was in the Lord alone. Armed with a new revelation of the Lord he would not even take a shoelace from Sodom. Every eye was going to see that it was the Lord providing for him - not carnal men with good intentions. This was a temptation to draw him subtly down the path that Lot had trod when he looked towards this worlds systems and provisions.

In the light of the revelation of Gods character Abram did these two things i) he refused the resources of this world ii) and he tithed unto God. In this meeting with Melchizedek and the King of Sodom we see Abram winning a greater victory than he won earlier in the chapter when fighting Kings. It was a victory over mammon and the world.

The Lord must be Lord over our finance, our provisions and our means of getting it. Some have been blessed by the King of Sodom but have claimed that this was the blessing of God.

We see some foundational things concerning tithing in this passage. First we read of no command to tithe. This act of tithing was a response to the knowledge that God owned everything. Tithing was also Abram's response to the blessing of God upon his life. He did not tithe to get blessed by God but because he was blessed by God.

This tithe pre-dated that which was instituted in the law. This act of Abram was under grace not law. It was willing not legalistic. It was to Christ not to the Levites. If the tithe in Abram was willing, an act under grace and to Christ as a result of seeing that all belongs to God, so also it can be today.

This is all a lesson to the seed of Abraham. According to the New Testament, Christ was the "seed" singular of Abraham, but we the Church are the seed plural of Abraham. The New Testament is clear that "...if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal.3:29)

Many today want the blessings and promises of Abraham but do not want to keep the principles and examples of Abraham. We are those who walk by faith "who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham" which he walked in before his circumcision.

"And he gave him tithes of all."

Until this time Abram was rich, he lacked no provision. But now having met with the Lord in this manner his heart rose up to a fresh consecration.

Abraham has left some footprints and a track for us to follow. His tithing to Melchisedec was one such act of faith and footprint for us to follow in. we could say much more about Abraham, Melchisedec and tithing but this is sufficient for now.

Jacob

We next move to Jacob, Abraham's grandson. This knowledge of tithing was obviously passed on to Isaac, Jacob and his seed just as prayer, obedience, blood sacrifice, the character of God and other such knowledge was passed on. Of course instruction and example are not enough. It is not until an individual meets with God that such truths take on personal conviction.

There is always a time when the Lord will separate out individuals that he may begin to deal with their heart. In Chapter 28 of Genesis we see Jacob sent away by Isaac on a journey to search for a bride from his mother's family. We see the separation of Esau and Jacob in this passage as Esau takes wives of the Canaanites but Jacob follows the way of the Lord.

Not long into this journey we read that he reached a certain place and "tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep."

In a dream he i) saw a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reached to heaven: ii) with angels of God ascending and descending on it. iii) the LORD stood above it, who revealed Himself as the "God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac." iv) The Lord then made promises to him including giving him the land; his seed being without number and being a blessing to all families of the earth; and finally the promises of his abiding presence in keeping him wherever he would go and in doing all He promised to Jacob.

When Jacob woke up what was his response to such an experience? i) He said "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not." ii) "he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place!" iii) this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. iv) Jacob rose up early in the morning, v) and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, vi) and poured oil upon the top of it.

vii) he called the name of that place Bethel: viii) Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on...; then shall the LORD be my God: ix) And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: x) and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.

In the NT Christ took this dream and visitation of God to Jacob and applied it to Himself, "And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." (Jn.1v51) Christ was that ladder.

Because of this experience Jacob calls this place Bethel. Bethel of course means the House of God, Paul applies this OT term to the Church "...the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." In this story we see great lessons concerning Christ and the Church.

Again we will pass over these many beautiful shadows and teachings to the tithing. He vowed to God that "...of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." This was Jacobs's glad response to the blessing and pledge of God. Although it is the only explicit mention of Jacob tithing it is a statement packed with meaning.

Remember he was standing in awe and fear of God. His pledge was to give 10% of all that God would bring to his hand in the days ahead. At that time he was a poor man with no means to give but he settled his heart that if God blessed him, as He had promised, then he would give a tithe of all of it to God.

Many years later after the hardship of living in Laban's house and his decision to leave and return home, the Lord comes to Jacob again in chapter 31v13, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred."

Although some in the anti-tithe camp try to make us believe that the vow of Jacob to tithe to God was of no consequence whatsoever and that he did not keep it, the clear teaching of Scripture shows otherwise. Here we have God years after the initial vow bringing it to mind in speaking to Jacob. The Lord did not rebuke Jacob for disobeying, forgetting or neglecting to do so. Any one who implies such is adding their theories to the text of scripture.

Again in Chapter 35 the Lord comes to him, "And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments:"

Here we see Jacob preaching holiness to his family after which a holiness revival visits this home. After this the fear of God falls upon the whole area. Nowhere do we read of Jacob not keeping his vow down over these many years. The Bible teaches that it is a serious thing to vow unto God or man yet not keep it.

His God was the God of Bethel. His vow to tithe to God was ever before him.

Here we have a Tither in scripture yet never read of the act of tithing. We must realize that not every incident is recorded after having been inferred or stated in scripture. If Jacob had not tithed of all he had in the following years, be sure that we would have heard about his disobedience and of the Lord's chastisement for such.

Contentions

Before finishing this chapter we must deal with just a few of the contentions raised against New Testament tithing in relation to these particular Bible references. Those who are determined to remove tithing from the Bible do great damage to the character of Abraham and Jacob not to mention the clear meaning of the text in the process.

That in itself ought to concern us greatly.

First we address the accusation that Abram was simply copying pagan practices in tithing. This is a popular accusation but unfounded in the text. This whole meeting between Melchisedec and Abram was patterned on the person of Christ. Abram tithed as a response of thankfulness at the revelation of who God was in character. That was the source, not pagan culture or practice.

These same critics contend and criticize anyone who says that this came as a revelation from God, but they themselves instead insert their own belief that it was a pagan practice. This is neither honest nor upright to do.

Abraham tithed to Christ.

Again in the same vain some try to say that Melchisedec was a pagan priest and that the name El Elyon was simply a pagan god. They would have us believe that God would pattern His Son's priesthood on the example or shadow of a pagan priest who worshipped a false god. This is ridiculous.

Melchisedec was a follower and priest of the true God. In verse 14 Abram calls God "the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth." Was Abram deceived? Here he joins the name of God used from the creation of all things and by Adam and joins it to "Most High." From this point this was indeed a sacred name for God known by all Israel. Melchisedec was no more pagan than Abram or Job.

It has been said that the tithe Abram gave to Melchisedec was not a proper tithe and that it was something very different from the tithing spoken of elsewhere in Scripture. We answer this simply with Paul's words, "Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham." Here Paul clearly marks out a parallel between the tithing of Abraham and the tithing of Israel and the Levites.

Paul did not seem to think that Abram's tithe was of no significance as do today's Anti-tithers and he does not count it as some other form or type of tithing. This was an act of true Biblical tithing.

The next argument we face is from those who say 'This was a tithe of the spoils of war, not a tithe of all his possessions?' Now this is a more genuine query which deserves an answer. They say this based on the story in Genesis as well as verse 4 in Hebrews 7 "...the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils."

First of all it should be obvious that all the spoil that Abram took in the war with the enemy was returned to the King of Sodom. "I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich:" He goes on to clarify to the king of Sodom concerning the only portion which was not returned to him: "Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion." (14:24).

From this we know that Abram did not give tithes to Melchisedec from the spoils of war. If this is true how do we explain that in Hebrews we are told he "gave the tenth of the spoils"? This word "spoils" literally means 'top of the heap' it is only used once in the New Testament but an associate word is used twice in referring to Christ as the chief corner stone.

It simply means of all that that you have you take from the top of the pile. We are also told in Genesis and Hebrews that he tithed of ALL. So we see that Abraham gave a tithe off the top of the heap of what he had. This may well have been of all his own possessions that he had with him at that time. He did not give a tithe of other people's possessions, it was his own.

This most likely was a token of what he performed at a later stage with all his possessions. If this is not true then we must believe the Anti-tithers by saying that he never again at anytime tithed, or gave significantly of his all to God. Here is a rich man with great wealth but some expect us to believe that this was a one-off act of tithing never to be repeated.

That Abraham only once in his life paid tithes and that only of his war loot is the normal dismissive statement of many. We must point out here the simple fact that Melchisedec only once met with Abraham. Does that make him insignificant, obsolete or of no consequence? Of course not. Neither does it make this one recorded act of tithing of no consequence.

The sum of the matter is found in the words of Jesus, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39).

I'm afraid the same sort of wrangling happens around Jacobs's act of tithing.

It has become popular by some to accuse Jacob of bargaining with God, manipulating God or of having no faith when he vowed to tithe. They start to discredit Jacob's character in order to discredit the act of tithing. If they were right in this, alongside all of their other arguments, it is indeed a wonder that the Lord has not blotted out the term tithe altogether from the Bible!

In order to remove the teaching of tithing from the scriptures some foolishly insist that Jacob never kept his vow as there is no further mention of his act of giving. I think we have dealt with Jacob enough and shown enough for anyone who correctly divides the Word of God to see that this was certainly the habit, practice and example of his future life.

Even though we do not have the explicit record of each act of tithing we can be sure that it was a lifestyle of tithing for Jacob. There was no act of unbelief concerning his vow to tithe. He had nothing to give God at that time but was willing to give God a tithe of all that he received in the future. Faith is always followed by acts of obedience. When Jacob vowed it was in faith for he walked it out in obedience later.

Remember he was standing in awe and fear of God. His pledge was to give 10% of all that God would bring to his hand in the days ahead.

It is worth noting that in Genesis there is no clear command given to Adam and mankind at the beginning to not lie, commit adultery or steal, yet we see throughout Genesis that God either blessed or cursed men according to their lifestyle in relation to all these things.

Let's look at one last point on this issue of tithing in connection with Abraham and Jacob. Where did Jacob get this practice of tithing from? "...of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

Abraham was still alive and living in the same home as the young Jacob before he left and set out on his own adventures.

He learnt the practice from old Abraham. He must indeed have seen the old patriarch tithe or he would not have known of such a practice being pleasing and right before God. If he was willing to tithe of all future income where had he seen such a practice of regular consistent giving? It must surely have been in the home of his youth.

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