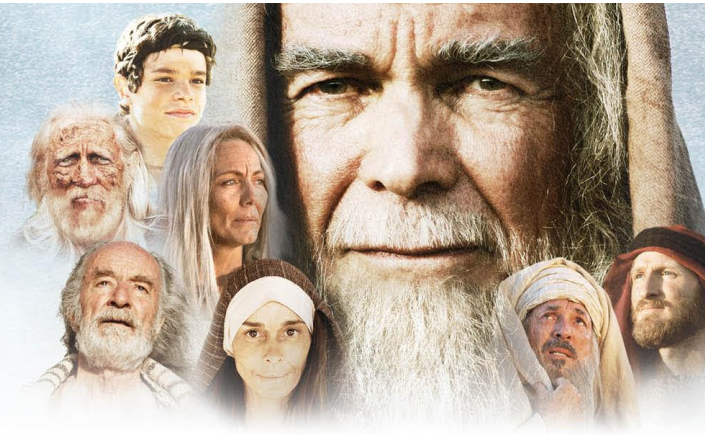


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Biblical Background on Tithing

A lesson from *Abram's Reward*, adapted from Genesis 12–15:6

In the film *Abram's Reward*, we see that Abram (later known as Abraham) met the priest Melchizedek and gave him 10 percent of the spoils that he had collected in the battle to rescue Lot. The Bible refers to this 10 percent as a “tithe”—a word you’ve probably heard before. The word literally means “tenth.”

Melchizedek was a king-priest who ruled over Salem (ancient Jerusalem), and in the Bible he is a “type” of Christ. In Scripture, types are events, people, and places that are used to interpret things that happened later. And in Hebrews 7 the apostle Paul points to similarities in the priesthood of Melchizedek and that of Christ.

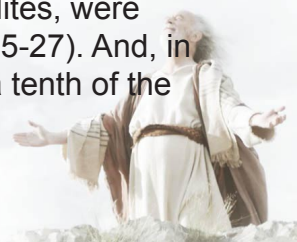
Regarding the importance of Melchizedek, Paul writes, “*See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils!*” (Hebrews 7:4).

Abram’s tithe to Melchizedek provides us with a standard for giving to our Lord, and this standard appears early in the Bible. Shortly thereafter, Abram’s grandson, Jacob, makes the following vow to God:

“If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you” (Genesis 28:20-22).

Hundreds of years later, when God delivered Abram’s descendants from slavery in Egypt and made them into a great nation (Israel), He gave them the Mosaic Law, which established the tithe (Leviticus 27:30-32).

Even the Levites, who served as priests and lived off the tithes of other Israelites, were required to give God a tenth of what He had provided to them (Numbers 18:25-27). And, in Deuteronomy 14:22, we read of Moses reminding the Israelites to set aside a tenth of the crops that they harvested each year.



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Some have argued that the tithe applied only to ancient Israel and not to Christians, which frees us to give whatever we feel like giving. However, the precedents set by Abram and Jacob in the book of Genesis occurred hundreds of years before the establishment of Israel's Mosaic Law.

And, in the New Testament, we find the earliest Christians—who were not under the Law—giving far beyond a tenth. *“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need”* (Acts 2:44-45).

So, why should we tithe? While we're on this earth, our giving serves as a physical demonstration of our commitment to God. It acknowledges His Lordship and His Ownership of all things and the fact that whatever we have has been entrusted by Him to us. *“The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein”* (Psalm 24:1).

We need to take care that tithing does not become just another bill to be paid. If this happens, we'll miss the blessing associated with giving back to God. We also need to make sure that we don't view the tithe as a limit. For many Christians it should be the beginning of their giving.

To ensure that we give in accordance with God's will, we need to acknowledge His Lordship and Ownership. And, we need to give ourselves first to Him, just like the Macedonians, who were commended by Paul for their great generosity (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

Paul says they *“gave themselves first to the Lord”* (verse 5). If we are fully dedicated to the Lord, generous giving will follow. We will be focused on laying up treasures in Heaven, not on earth. This is important, because Christ noted that wherever our treasure is, there our hearts will be also (Matthew 6:21).

Scripture quotations in this article are from the English Standard Version of the Bible.



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