

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
First Quarter 2023: *Managing for the Master—Till He Comes*
Lesson 3 “The Tithing Contract”

Read for this week’s study

Genesis 14:18–20; Malachi 3:10; Deuteronomy 12:5–14; Leviticus 27:30; 1 Kings 17:9–16; 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2.

Memory Text

“ ‘Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it’ ” (Malachi 3:10, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Tithe Equals a Tenth
- III. Where Is the Storehouse?
- IV. The Purpose of Tithing
- V. Tithing on the Gross or the Net Income?
- VI. An Honest or Faithful Tithe
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. There are three main ways that scholars approach the Bible. 1) I call the first approach Biblical Exegesis. That method seeks to answer the question, “What was the Bible writer trying to say?” It focuses on the text in its original context and the intention of the author in writing that text. 2) The second approach is Biblical Theology. That method seeks to answer the question, “What did the Bible writer believe?” It focuses on the larger understandings of the author that would cause him or her to write what they did. What did Paul, Moses or John believe? 3) The third approach is Systematic Theology. That method seeks to answer the question, “What should we believe? What should I believe?” It seeks to answer the questions of today by means of the Bible and any other sources of truth that may be available to human beings, including later inspiration, science, history, philosophy and psychology. Most authors of the Sabbath School Quarterly follow the third approach to the Bible. But without paying careful attention to biblical exegesis and theology,

systematic theology can misuse the Bible in a way that leads people astray. So careful attention to all three approaches can help to clarify both the Bible's original meaning and its application for today.

2. In approaching the question of tithing, it is helpful, first, to understand each tithing text in the Bible in terms of the original author's intention (Biblical Exegesis), then its place in the larger canon of Scripture (Biblical Theology) and then how the biblical concept of tithing should apply in today's world (Systematic Theology). All three of these methods will prove helpful to our study of this week's topic.
3. In a full canon approach to the Bible (Biblical Theology), the first and last references to a particular theme in the Bible are often noteworthy. Interestingly, the first and last references to tithing in the Bible both concern the figure of Melchizedek. Please read the very first reference in Genesis 14:17-24. Why do you think the author of Genesis included this story (Biblical Exegesis)? Who is Melchizedek and what role did he play in the story (Biblical Exegesis)? What implications does this story have for how we approach the tithing question today (Systematic Theology)? What does this story tell us about God (Systematic Theology)? (Sabbath Afternoon's Lesson)
4. The last reference to tithing in the Bible is the retelling of the Melchizedek story in the book of Hebrews. Read Hebrews 7:1-10. How does the author of Hebrews build on Genesis and what does he add to the Melchizedek story (Biblical Exegesis of Hebrews)? What implications might both versions of the story have for the way we relate to non-Christians today (Systematic Theology)? What does this story tell us about tithing (Systematic Theology)? What does it tell us about God (Systematic Theology)? (Sunday's Lesson)
5. Read Malachi 3:10. What does this verse tell us about where the tithe was supposed to go in Malachi's day? What did "the storehouse" mean back then (Biblical Exegesis)? Read Deuteronomy 12:5-14. What was Deuteronomy's function for Israel at the time it was written? What was Moses telling Israel about tithing back then (Biblical Exegesis)? What was the New Testament equivalent of the temple (Biblical Theology)? What implications does the New Testament concept of temple have for the storehouse principle today (Systematic Theology)? (Monday's Lesson)
6. What further can we learn about tithing in ancient Israel from Leviticus 27:30 and Numbers 18:21-24 (Biblical Exegesis)? Who is the equivalent of the Levites in the church today? What reasons can you think of that the tithing system is still relevant today (Systematic Theology)? (Tuesday's Lesson)
7. People sometimes ask whether one should tithe on the gross income (before taxes) or the net income (after taxes)? The Bible does not seem to address that question, so the lesson author sees that as a personal decision. Surveys suggest that the majority of Seventh-day Adventists tithe on the gross rather than the net. What reasons can you think of that might support either approach (Systematic Theology)? (Wednesday's Lesson)

8. Read Matthew 25:19-21. What was Jesus' point in the context of Matthew 24 and 25 (Biblical Exegesis)? What encouragement does this passage have for faithfulness in financial affairs today (Systematic Theology)? (Thursday's Lesson)
9. Where does tithing fit in with our picture of God (Systematic Theology)? (Friday's Lesson)
10. Share your own experiences with tithing and what you have learned from this practice (Systematic Theology)? (Friday's Lesson)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

But then everything depends upon what we understand by the word "faith". For faith has traditionally, and still is so often, been understood as a willingness to believe and obey, preferably the right and proper things. If that's the right understanding of faith, then of course, we want to teach our children to believe and do the right and proper things. We want them all to believe in God, and in the inspiration and authority of the scriptures. We want them to all believe in Christ and in the seventh-day Sabbath. In fact, all ten of the Ten Commandments. We want them to be persuaded that they should support the church with their tithes and their offerings. We want them to espouse and practice the principles of what we've come to call health reform. We want them all to be looking forward to the coming of Christ, the Messiah.

And so we work hard to be sure that they know these things and all the others that could be put on that list. And that they believe these things and practice them. It's possible, though, to have this as our goal and thus use the Bible primarily as a code book of these things to be believed, these deeds to be done, not to mention the sins to be shunned.

You recall, though, that about nineteen hundred years ago there was a group of very religious people on this planet who espoused everything I've mentioned on that list, and many more things beside. They believed in God. They looked forward to the coming of Christ. They called him the Messiah, it's just the Hebrew for the Greek Christ—same person. They kept all ten of the Ten Commandments. They especially emphasized the fourth. They paid a very careful tithe, in fact, a double tithe, and many more offerings besides. And how careful they were in their practice of the laws of health. They would even strain gnats out of their lemonade lest they violate the rules of good health.

But did this make them the kind of people God wanted them to be? They hated Christ and they worked to bring about his murder. It must not then be the right goal just to be sure that our children know and believe and do the things that might be on this list. And we shouldn't underestimate the faithfulness of those people who lived in the time of Christ, did all these things, and yet hated him.

Think, for example, of their great concern on crucifixion Friday to be ready for sundown. You recall that after they had crucified their creator and their redeemer they hurried home to get ready for another seventh-day Sabbath. And they cleaned their houses, and they took their baths, and they cleaned their sandals, and how they wished that Jesus would hurry up and die. Their great concern, you see, was to be ready for Sabbath. And finally, the good news surprisingly came that he was already dead. And they rushed to Pilate to get permission to bury him. And they succeeded in burying their Lord in time before the sun went down. And can't you see them gathering around singing their sundown hymns, and feeling so right about it? Obeying all ten and especially the Sabbath commandment.

Think, too, how in Old Testament times the prophets often mentioned how very religious these people were. Amos mentions how diligently they kept the Sabbath—though they didn't enjoy it. In fact, they would gather toward the gates as the sun would go down on Sabbath afternoon and they would cry—as he mentions in Amos 8: “Oh when will the Sabbath be passed that we may buy and sell and get gain?” Now mind you, they weren't going to buy and sell until the sun went down because they were agreed that God had a right to state his will. He had a perfect right to express his will in the Ten Commandments. And one of those ten was “Thou shalt not work from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown.” They never argued with that. The sovereignty of God was acknowledged. But they could hardly wait for the end of those twenty-four hours.

How they would have appreciated the nice little calendar which indicates to the precise minute when you're free to buy and sell. They had to watch the sun go down and make allowances, maybe, for a little elevation on the horizon. And you know how carefully they worked out the details in those days. I mean, God only said twenty-four hours, no use giving him anymore.

And Isaiah mentions how they would gather together to worship but their hearts weren't in it. And God said of those reluctant worshipers, “Who requires of you this trampling of my courts?” And Amos mentions again their meeting for song services and God would say because their hearts were not in the singing, “I cannot stand the sound of your noisy hymns.” Could you imagine God ever saying that at the end of one of our Friday evening song services? “I cannot stand the sound of your noisy hymns.”

Because, as Isaiah says, it was not in their hearts—and the Bible describes the heart as the place where a man does his thinking. Now we stress the heart is the place of feeling. In the Bible it was the place of thinking—the whole inner man. And this led Isaiah to write in the twenty-ninth chapter, and the thirteenth verse: “This people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote.” Their worship of God was mere mechanical conformity and repetition without earnest concern as to the sense and the meaning of what they were doing or saying or singing. And what an insult that was to our infinitely intelligent and gracious

God. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, PUC Teacher’s Conference, #1 “The Purpose of Teaching Bible”, recorded April 1974, Angwin, California} To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/1MMPUCTEACH>

Further Study with Ellen White

God would not have His children, for whom so great salvation has been provided, act as if He were a hard, exacting taskmaster. He is their best friend; and when they worship Him, He expects to be with them, to bless and comfort them, filling their hearts with joy and love. The Lord desires His children to take comfort in His service and to find more pleasure than hardship in His work. He desires that those who come to worship Him shall carry away with them precious thoughts of His care and love, that they may be cheered in all the employments of daily life, that they may have grace to deal honestly and faithfully in all things. {SC 103.2}

The blessing of God is a healing power, and those who are abundant in benefiting others will realize that wondrous blessing in both heart and life. {CH 28.2}

God is not dependent upon men for the advancement of His cause. He might have made angels the ambassadors of His truth. He might have made known His will, as He proclaimed the law from Sinai with His own voice. But in order to cultivate a spirit of benevolence in us, He has chosen to employ men to do this work. {CS 20.1}

He has honored us by making us co-workers with Him. {3T 390.2}

Wherever there is life, there is increase and growth; in God’s kingdom there is a constant interchange—taking in, and giving out; receiving, and returning to the Lord His own. God works with every true believer, and the light and blessings received are given out again in the work which the believer does. Thus the capacity for receiving is increased. As one imparts of the heavenly gifts, he makes room for fresh currents of grace and truth to flow into the soul from the living fountain. Greater light, increased knowledge and blessing, are his. {6T 448.2}

And the effort to bless others will react in blessings upon ourselves. This was the purpose of God in giving us a part to act in the plan of redemption. He has granted men the privilege of becoming partakers of the divine nature and, in their turn, of diffusing blessings to their fellow men. This is the highest honor, the greatest joy, that it is possible for God to bestow upon men. Those who thus become participants in labors of love are brought nearest to their Creator. {SC 79.1}

Truthfulness and integrity are attributes of God, and he who possesses these qualities possesses a power that is invincible. {ML 331.2}

Christ imbues men with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a goodly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty. Thus the very righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the believer in Christ. {DA 762.2}

The life of Christ in you produces the same fruits as in Him. Living in Christ, adhering to Christ, supported by Christ, drawing nourishment from Christ, you bear fruit after the similitude of Christ. {DA 677.1}