

Church leaders who manage the tithes and offerings have a sacred responsibility to manage it with great care and prudence. It is God's money and it deserves the greatest care possible.

primary purpose of tithe is to support the gospel ministry. Yet when we go back to the biblical beginnings of tithe, we discover that it really is about worship.

A worship approach states that we will be faithful to God regardless of what He chooses to do with it. This approach declares that we trust God to supply everything we need and to be in control of His Church. After all, He knows what is best for us, and He is able to control and guide our lives as He knows best.

Stop and think about it. Everything belongs to God. We

are only managers of His resources. When we tithe we are returning to Him something that already belongs to Him. When we recognize that it all belongs to Him and we return our tithe to Him, we worship Him as Lord and Owner of all, including His Church.

In the end, as we choose to worship God our tithe becomes a continued blessing. It blesses us to give for it helps us integrate God into the material side of life, and it blesses others as God uses His tithe to advance His kingdom in His way. Let's give Him the freedom to manage His tithe His way.

*** About the Author: Ben Maxson** is pastor in Paradise, CA. He served as the Director of the Stewardship Department for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists for almost 10 years. Born in Venezuela, he is the son of missionary parents and has served in ministry in North and South America. Ben has served as a pastor, Youth Director, Ministerial Secretary, and Stewardship Director in a number of different conferences. He is a graduate of Southern Missionary College (now Southern Adventist University) as well as Andrews University (M.Div. and D.Min.).

Distributed by: Upper Columbia Conference Stewardship Ministries. **Director:** Bill Skidmore. **Produced by:** Pacific Union Conference Stewardship Department. **Director:** Gordon Botting. **Design/Assistant Editor:** Carol Lowe.

the Stewpot

A potpourri of practical ideas to help you become a better steward

March 2008
Volume 13, Issue #3

How Should We Use Our Tithe?

By Ben Maxson*

He came up to me after a camp meeting seminar. We had been talking about stewardship and Jesus as Lord of our lives. As an extension of that Lordship I had presented the concept that tithe was not ours to control. I stated that the tithe belonged to God and it was up to Him to decide how He wanted to use it. This gentleman took exception to my statement.



“Should we give our tithe to a church where we think the pastor is teaching the wrong thing?” he asked. “Should we give our tithe to a conference when we don't trust its leadership? After all, I am responsible to make sure that my tithe supports the right things.”

Abraham

Going back to Scripture can help us. The story of Abraham is the first time the concept of tithe appears in the Bible (Genesis 14:1-20). Enemy kings had conquered Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot and his family were taken captive. When Abraham heard the news he called together a personal army of 318 men from his own household

and went to war to rescue Lot and his neighbors.

As Abraham returned from his victory, Melchizedek (the king and priest of Salem) met him with food and a blessing and gave God the credit for the victory. In response, Abraham gave a tenth of what he had to Melchizedek.

There was no command from God at that point. Tithing simply seemed to be his habit. But the question comes, what did Abraham do with his tithe during the rest of his life?

Jacob

The next time we see the concept of tithe is in the story of Jacob (Genesis 27 & 28). He

Stewardship is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality and finances.

deceived his father and tricked his brother with his mother's help. He received the birth-right blessing through deception. In response his brother threatened to kill him as soon as his father died. His mother Rebekah sent him back to her brother Laban in Haran.

On the way to Haran, Jacob had a dream of a stairway between heaven and earth with angels ascending and descending. The Lord stood at the top of the stairway and repeated the covenant promise He had made to Abraham. Their descendants would become a great nation. Through him all people would be blessed. Then God promised to be with Jacob and bring him back to Canaan. In response to this blessing, Jacob promised to give God a tenth of all God would give him.

Again there was no command.



Jacob promised to tithe because that was the family habit. Tithing appears to have been a well-known custom. It was also a response to the blessings as they were received from God — not a means for gaining greater blessings.

Questions

The questions grow. What did Jacob do with his tithe? To whom did he give it? What church did Jacob and Abraham support with their tithe? There was no church. There was no priesthood to support. So what did they do with their tithe?

Scripture does not answer these questions directly. We can only deduce what happened to the tithe as we look at the sacrificial system. Anything given to God was offered as a sacrifice and burned on the altar. The patriarch of the large extended family functioned as priest. He made morning and evening sacrifices. We can

only conclude that tithe was given to God in worship through a sacrifice. Tithe was consumed by fire.

Later, God established Israel as His people as He called them out of Egypt. He chose the Levites to serve the sanctuary and named the family of Aaron as priests. Then He chose to use the tithe system of worship to support the sanctuary ministry of the priests and Levites. But even then, the tithe was given to and belonged to the Lord (Leviticus 27:30). He gave His tithe to the Levites (Numbers 18:26).

Tithe Houses

This reminds me of the *tithe houses* I saw on the South Pacific Islands I visited. A *tithe house* is a simple structure about four feet square and four feet off the ground. People bring their tithe and place it in the *tithe house* whenever they harvest anything. It might be sweet potatoes or yams, coconuts or bananas. They place their “tithe” in the *tithe house*. Then if someone has a little cash, they can pay for some of the “tithe” and leave the money there for the treasurer to collect. One of the duties of the deacons is to take the tithe that is left in the *tithe house* to the market and sell it. The money is then turned over to the treasurer to send

to the conference.

However, there are some remote islands and villages where there is no market and the members have little or no cash. What do you do with “tithe” that spoils in the *tithe house*? After all, if no one buys it and there is no market,

it will just rot. So the deacons have the responsibility of taking care of this tithe by burying or burning it. The issue is not what happens to the “tithe”. What is important is

that the members have the opportunity to worship God from the material blessings they receive from God.

A Sacred Responsibility

Church leaders who manage the tithes and offerings have a sacred responsibility to manage it with great care and prudence. It is God's money and it deserves the greatest care possible. God has trusted them with the responsibility of managing His tithe. But tithe is not ours to manage as givers. It belongs to God.

Sometimes we think the tithe is ours and that we support the church and thus have the right to control the tithe or the church. We have commonly stated that the



Tithing appears to have been a well-known custom. It was also a response to the blessings as they were received from God — not a means for gaining greater blessings.