

EMET INSIGHTS

A Weekly Teaching On The Torah Portion

By Rabbi Dani'el Rendelman ♦ emetministries.com

Parasha Lekh' L'kha Genesis 12:1-17:27

Avram has many strange encounters during this week's portion. These meetings will showcase him journeying from his homeland to having his name changed and receiving the establishment of the covenant of circumcision or "brit milah" in Hebrew.

First Avram hears the actual voice of Yahweh Almighty. This is pretty exciting! Yahweh tells him to leave the land of Babylon and cross over, to become an Ivri, a Hebrew. (Note that Avraham was not a Jew and was not originally from the Land of Judah. Avram was originally from the nations - not the land of Israel.)

Then as he approaches the land of promise, out of fear of the Egyptians, Avram tells his wife to disguise herself as his sister. Avraham's odd encounters continue as he is brought to appear before the mighty Pharaoh himself. (Just imagine coming before this powerful ruler, it was definitely a once in a lifetime experience)

Pharaoh scolds Avram for his dishonesty and then sends him away. It is written that Avram left the land of Egypt. A dispute arose between his family and that of his brother's son Lot. Avram settles the dispute and time passes. Later Avram rallies the mighty men of his household to fight for Lot and his family. Lot's household has been taken captive. Through heroic efforts Avram brings salvation to the house of Lot and rescues them from imminent destruction. It is after this combat that Avram has possibly his most surprising experience yet.

The scriptures say, "Malki-tzedek, king of Shalem, brought out bread and wine. He was a Cohen of El'Elyon, so he blessed him with these words: Blessed be Avram by El'Elyon, maker of heaven and earth, and blessed be El'Elyon who handed your enemies over to you." Avram gave him a tenth of everything," Beresheet 14:18-20.

The first tenth; setting a standard

Meeting the priest of Yahweh and possibly El'Elyon Himself surely was an event, yet what is most astonishing here are not the acts of Malk-tzedek but the acts of Avram.

Avram and the Cohen share the fellowship of bread and wine, which by the way is where this festive combination of bread and wine has its origin. Then the priest blesses Avram and the Cohen speaks blessing of Yahweh. In response to the time spent together, the Torah says that Avram gave him a tenth or a “tithe” of everything. According to Hebrews 7:4 Avram’s tithe included the gain or the spoil from the enemies he had just defeated. Anyway, throughout the Bible the “tithe” is a misunderstood word that simply means one tenth.

It is here that giving a tenth is first spoken of in the Scriptures. Sure, giving and sacrifices have already occurred, yet this is the initial time a person tithes. It is here that the tithe is established as the heavenly direction and principle for giving. Many believe that Malk-tzedek taught the Torah to Avram and that is why he tithed to him. Well, thousands of years later from this first tithe, the notion of tithing has become a distorted and perverted way for greedy speakers and money-grubbing leaders to manipulate people. Like a marionette puppet being moved by slick hands people give and give, yet never question what the Bible really says about tithing and exactly how a believer should tithe.

There are those who even question is tithing is for today since the Temple does not stand, ignoring Yahshua’s own words, “Give to Elohim what is Elohim’s,” Mark 12:17.

Back to the basics

Before delving into the touchy subject of tithing one must first answer some questions to decide a starting place. This is an important first step because giving is one of those topics that every Bible teacher has an opinion on, yet few ideas on tithing are Torah based. Remember that Avinu Avram gave a tenth and later Yahweh would reveal to all Israel the exact prescribed method of giving.

It was once said that if you ask a rabbi one question that you receive back at least three answers. Anyway, here are a few questions to ask yourself about tithing that should be easy to answer...

1. Is the Torah eternal?
2. Are the first five books of the Bible for every believer yesterday, today, and forever?
3. What does the Torah have to say about tithing?

Well, what are the answers? If you believe the Torah is eternal and its commands are for every person then the next logical step would be to delve into what the Torah teaches about tithing. The first five books of Moshe illustrate and develop the type of lifestyle every Bible believer should have.

The tithing commands spoken of in the Torah was to a culture of farmers who brought their gifts to the temple or tabernacle based on a seven-year cycle. Today most do not farm, yet all do “work the land.” Some teachers dismiss Mosaic tithing as illegitimate for today since one does not live in and off of the land (meaning the physical land of Eretz Isra’el). But, if the Torah is eternal and it is for all believers yesterday, today, and forever, then it is for us.

Besides, the tenth is given from the production of The Land. Wasn't man made from The Land? Did not Yahweh create man from the dust of the Earth of Israel? If so, then everything a man produces for gain is made from the land (from man) and is to be tithed.

Money can simply be converted into a monetary donation that can be used to allow modern-day Israelites to correctly tithe to Yahweh. In fact there is a specific command NOT to change the set Torah tithing method described in the Torah, Exodus 22:28 (of the 613 mitzvah, this is negative command number 154).

The concept of converting the produce of the land into money is spoken of in the Scriptures as in Leviticus 27:31 and Deuteronomy (Devarim) 14:25. This remains as an example for how people should tithe today.

Time to break it down

Again, tithing was based upon a seven-year cycle. To put it plainly, the first, second, fourth, and fifth years of tithing was to be eaten in Jerusalem only – this whole year of tithing was to pay for seven years of trips to the Temple and celebrations of the holy days, see Devarim 14:22. This giving was the produce from the land simply converted to money and used to pay for the annual pilgrimage festivals. This is called the Maaser Sheni and is vital to the keeping of Torah. When the scriptures say in Malachi, “Bring the whole tithe to the storehouse” it is speaking to the people when the whole tithe was to be used at the temple –during one of these years.

During the third and sixth years of tithing the tithe was given to tzedekah or the poor for charity, Devarim 14:28-29.

A tenth of the yearly tithes, or a tithe of the tithes, went to the Cohanim, see Numbers 18:26 and Leviticus 27:30. This is often called the Masserot or the first tithe. It was given to the Levites who would then give it to the Cohen HaGadol, apparently to be distributed to the Aharonic priests, for more on this see Numbers 18:23-32. Ten percent of the tithes helped pay for the upkeep of the Temple and the priests who performed their duties there.

To recap all of this, Dr. James Trimm has written, “There are actually two tithes in the Mosaic Covenant which were tied to the seven year cycle of the Land. The first tithe (Masserot) is due every year for the maintenance of the Levites (Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:21) who then gave a tenth of the tithe to the High Priest (apparently to be distributed to the Aharonic Priests (Numb. 18:23-32). The second tithe (Maaser Sheni) was converted to money and used to make a personal pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The "pilgrim" could spend this money however he liked on the pilgrimage but was expected to treat the Levites to a feast as well upon his arrival and any surplus was given to the Levites (Deut. 14:22-27). Every third year however the tither stayed home and used this second tithe to feed the needy and local Levites (Deut. 14:28-29). Thus the Mosaic-tithing schedule goes like this:

Year

1. First Tithe: Levites; Second Tithe: Pilgrimage and Levites
2. First Tithe: Levites; Second Tithe: Pilgrimage and Levites
3. First Tithe: Levites; Second Tithe: Feeds the needy and Levites
4. First Tithe: Levites; Second Tithe: Pilgrimage and Levites
5. First Tithe: Levites; Second Tithe: Pilgrimage and Levites
6. First Tithe: Levites; Second Tithe: Feeds the needy and Levites
7. The Sabbath of the land, only the First Tithe was paid on any volunteer crop and on other non-planted produce.”

How to tithe today

Here are some principles Yahweh spoke to Moshe and to us about tithing:

First of all, tithing is from the net and not the gross! In Devarim 14:22 (Deuteronomy) it says, “You shalt truly tithe all the increase of your seed, that the field brings forth year by year.” It is of the increase or profit of the seed that is to be tithed from. Also, Israelites are told in Leviticus 19:10 and Devarim 24:21 to leave the produce located in the corners of their fields for the poor. They were to tithe off of what was harvested NOT including what first went to take care of those less fortunate. In the King James Version this is called “gleaning” the fields. Because Israel as a people has failed to fulfill its mandate and destiny as taking care of the poor, the various governments around the world have stepped in with programs like welfare and social security. So you tithe off of the money you make after Uncle Sam take’s his share. (If insurance or stocks or any other payment is taken out of your check you are still to give ten percent of those amounts) Other verses that speak of this are found in Leviticus 19:9-10, 19, and Deuteronomy 24:19.

Next take the whole tithe amount and break it up for dispersion. Let’s use \$100 for example. Suppose you make \$100 after taxes. Simple math says that 10 percent of \$100 is equal to a tithe of \$10. According to the Torah and Rabbi Ed Nydle this \$10 does not all go to the church or synagogue! Described below is how the giver should break down the donation as prescribed by the Torah and applied in today’s society.

So if you are tithing \$10, you will take this \$10 and give half of it (or \$5) to the temple or sanctuary where you worship. You will then take a tenth of the tithe or \$1 and give it to the Cohen, priest or Torah teacher. \$2 or twenty percent of your tithe goes to tzedekah. Tzedekah is the Hebrew word used to describe gifts of charity to the poor or needy. The last \$2 or last twenty percent is then placed in a “feast fund” to pay for the expenses of celebrating the festivals. A reference diagram is provided below.

The Torah even provides a blessing that is to be said when the tithe is separated and given: “Then say to Yahweh your Elohim: “I have removed from my house the sacred portion and have given it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, according to all you commanded. I have not turned aside from your commands nor have I forgotten any of them.

I have not eaten any of the sacred portion while I was in mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean, nor have I offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed Yahweh my Elohim; I have done everything you commanded me. Look down from heaven, your holy dwelling place, and bless your people Israel and the land you have given us as you promised on oath to our forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey,” Devarim 26:13-15.

Torah tithing overview

This short article is not meant to be a manifesto on the subject but rather an overview of what the Torah teaches. This is conceivably what Avram was taught by Malk-tzedek. Remember that the Rabbis of Judaism believe that it was the teaching of Malk-tzedek that prompted Avram to give.

But, perhaps Avram did not just give a basic tenth. Perhaps Avram actually gave a tenth of a tenth to Malk-tzedek – the EXACT prescribed amount to give to the Cohen or Torah teacher. Maybe the tithing of Avram was to set an example for all of his children. Perhaps what is being taught here is what Malk-tzedek taught Avram. And as a response to the Torah teaching Avram gave a tithe. One question remains though...what is your response to this...will you tithe as the Torah teaches?

Torah Reference	Converted Breakdown
Numbers 18:23-32 & Leviticus 27:30	10% of tithe to the Torah Teacher
Devarim 14:28-29	20% of tithe to Tzedekah
Devarim 14:22	20% of tithe to Feast Fund
Shemot 30:12 & Leviticus 27:30	50% of tithe to Temple

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