

Offering Words: Tithe (Genesis 14.17-24)

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Dominant Thought: Our giving displays our allegiance to God Most High.

Objectives:

I want my listeners to know God delivers us from our enemies.

I want my listeners to feel confident to choose God over all others competing for our allegiance.

I want my listeners to respond to God Most High with generosity.

Today, we continue our series on Offering Words. We want to be a congregation who is generous as Christ is generous. At Berlin Christian Church, we are committed to preaching the whole counsel of God which includes a biblical understanding of money and possessions. Today's word is tithe. It means 10%. I am here to testify that when our giving is where God wants it to be it is amazing how far the rest of the dollars stretch. I love seeing God provide for this church and our family.

In our time today, we will look at the first time the tithe or tenth is recorded in Scripture. It doesn't take long. It's found in the fourteenth chapter of the first book of the Bible—[Genesis 14](#).

In [Genesis 14](#), we encounter an action-packed story that could be made for the big screen. It's a story of kings, alliances, battles, mystery, rescue, family, and concludes with a choice.

I'll be honest [Genesis 14](#) is one of those stories with several names that are hard to pronounce. Here's the overview. Our story begins with an alliance of four kings that is led by a king named—Kedorlaomer. They go to war against another alliance of five kings. These kings were over cities. So, it's on a smaller scale than we might think when we think of some of our wars. This second group of kings has a couple locations that may sound familiar to some of you—Sodom and Gomorrah. Earlier in [Genesis 13:13](#), we read, "Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great

sinner against the Lord.” Four kings against five. The alliance of the four kings led by Kedorlaomer wins. They rule over the five kings for 12 years. During these 12 years the places like Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbors were required to pay tribute—money or crops to Kedorlaomer and the other kings. Twelve years—twelve payments of tribute.

Year 13 comes and the five kings say, “We are tired of living under the thumb of Kedorlaomer. We are tired of sending our crops and taxes to this king. No more payments.” [Genesis 14.4](#) says, “in the thirteenth year they rebelled.” It’s like the movie, “A Bug’s Life.” The ants worked hard all year long to give the grasshoppers the food. Well, on year 13 they choose not to pay their dues.

So, in year 14 Kedorlaomer and his alliance of kings go out and defeat the neighbors of the five kings. In one translation (Greek Septuagint), Kedorlaomer and the kings cut down, cut into pieces, massacred the neighbors. Quite a show of power.

Then, in [Genesis 14.8](#), the king of Sodom and the group of his kings drew up their battle lines in the Dead Sea Valley. They go out to march against Kedorlaomer. Five kings against four. It doesn’t turn out any better for the king of Sodom and their men. The Scripture tells us there were tar pits in the area. We have seen tar in an earlier story in [Genesis 11](#) when the people used tar for bricks to make the tower of Babel. One of the words used to describe the tar is where we get the word asphalt. As the kings flee from Kedorlaomer, some of the men fall into the tar pits. I imagine it like the quicksand in some of the movies. The men are trapped.

The four kings seize all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, all their food and leave. They also carried off Abram’s nephew Lot and his possessions since he was living in Sodom.

Abram and Lot. We met Abram in [Genesis 12](#). He was living in what’s now modern-day Iraq. God calls him to leave his homeland and go to the land he will show him. God will bless him, make his name great, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through him. Abram trusts God and leaves his home to go to a new land. In [Genesis 12.4](#), Abram leaves and takes his nephew Lot with him.

In [Genesis 13](#), Abram became very wealthy in livestock, silver, and gold. Lot's flocks were growing, too. The land was not able to sustain both of their ranches. The herdsmen of Abram and Lot start fighting. Maybe it was over water rights or running out of green grass for grazing. Abram says, "Hey, we're family. We don't need to be fighting. Look, the whole land is before us. You choose where you want to live and ranch. If you go left, then I'll go right. If you go right, then I'll go left. Lot, you choose first." Lot looked over the land and saw that the land of the Jordan was well watered and looked like the garden of God. He chose the land of the plain that was near the city of Sodom. Remember from earlier, Sodom was a wicked city.

So, back to the story in [Genesis 14](#). Kedorlaomer defeats the four kings, and kidnaps Lot and all that belongs to him.

It's not looking too good for God's people at this time. In [Genesis 14.13](#), a man escapes from the bad guys and runs to find Abram. He reports all that has happened. When Abram heard what had happened and how his nephew Lot had been taken captive, he called together 318 trained men in his household. Remember, Abram is wealthy. He's got quite a ranching operation going on. It's like calling in the cavalry. They start up north in pursuit of Lot and the alliance of the four kings.

They get to the northern border of Israel, the town of Dan. Then, at night under the cover of darkness, he divides his men and attacked them. They chase them down up into Syria past Damascus and slay the bad guys. Abram recovers all the goods and brought back his nephew Lot, his possessions, the women and other people.

The rescue is complete. How cool to have an uncle like Abram who will chase down bad guys and rescue you and your household.

That would make a nice story as it is. But wait, there's more. In the next couple of scenes, the action centers around Abram.

On his way back home from a decisive victory against those four kings, Abram will meet two kings. The first king, the king of Sodom, is briefly introduced in [Genesis 14.17](#) and then comes back in a later scene ([Genesis 14.21-24](#)). We will talk more about him later.

The second king to meet Abram appears in [Genesis 14.18](#). His name is Melchizedek. He is the king of Salem or king of Peace. Some think it will

be Jerusalem. He is called a priest and a king. It is very unique. In the Hebrew Bible, you were either a priest or a king. You generally didn't hold both titles. Melchizedek's name means king of righteousness ([Hebrews 7.2](#)). Everything about this guy says good: king of peace, king of righteousness, priest of God Most High. He appears out of nowhere and provides Abram a meal—bread and wine.

Now, we have to be careful what to make of it. At minimum, our Christians eyes think about another meal of bread and wine—the Lord's Supper. The bread representing the body of Christ. The blood representing the blood of Christ. Much of this scene starts signaling to later chapters of God's rescue of mankind through His son Jesus.

But here in [Genesis 14](#), we need to simply let the meal be what it is. It's showing kindness, compassion, care. When you eat together, you welcome one another in friendship. It's a special moment.

Then, after the bread and wine, this priest of God Most High blesses Abram. Remember back to [Genesis 12.1-3](#), God promises to bless Abram. "I will bless you..." ([Genesis 12.2](#)). We will talk more about blessing in a couple of weeks when Michael DeFazio comes to preach.

Hear the blessing Melchizedek gives to Abram:

Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.

And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.

He blesses Abram and praises God. Melchizedek blesses Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. We talked about creation last week. We serve a Creator God who invites us to rule His world. Melchizedek praises God Most High by giving Him credit for delivering the enemies into Abram's hand. Melchizedek reminds Abram who really won the victory that day. God Most High gets the credit for this victory, Abram.

So, we have a meal, a blessing, and now it's Abram's time to respond. The last part of [Genesis 14.20](#), we read, "And Abram gave him a tenth of everything." On first glance, this seems really strange. You are giving this stranger a tenth of everything? Really? Abram is wealthy. Abram gives a tenth of the spoils according to [Hebrews 7:4](#), "See how great this man was

to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils!" Abram responds to the kindness of God with generosity. Abram responds to God's goodness by giving back to God Most High. This verse is the first time we find the idea of a tenth or a tithe as a gift to God.

What's beautiful about this scene is the tithe is a gift freely offered. It is not pressured or expected. It seems genuine and grateful. What does Scripture mean when it talks about giving a tithe? It describes giving 10% of what God has given you.

Later in [Deuteronomy 14.22-25](#), we read these instructions about the tithe.

Deuteronomy 14:22–25 NIV

Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always. But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the LORD your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the LORD your God will choose.

Notice, the tithe is in response to the blessing of God. In the Old Testament, they had tithes and offerings. God instructed generosity. Some people will argue that tithing is an Old Testament expectation. We don't read as much about tithing in the New Testament. I'm always cautious of people who try to put the Old Testament at odds with the New Testament. It is one unified story leading to Jesus.

Jesus did address the tithe in [Matthew 23.23](#).

Matthew 23:23 NIV

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

Jesus confronts the legalism of the religious teachers. They would count out their little spices and tithe them, but would not show justice, mercy, and

faithfulness. Jesus said, "Follow God in both the small minute details and the more important ones."

I invite you to pray about how God wants to use your life in regard to giving. Don't become legalistic about the amount. However, I remember what Gordon Venturella told me several years ago when we were raising money to build this building. He said, "I'm going to tell you how much you can give." All along the process we told people to pray and do what God tells you to do. That is still my counsel to people today. Then, he gave the answer to his question. "Here's how much you can give...More than you think."

I invite you on this generosity journey with us. When we give to the Lord, it is exciting to watch Him provide.

We want to raise up generous people like Jesus who is generous and gave His life. He commended the widow who gave all she had to live on when she offered two small coins.

Back to our story in [Genesis 14](#), Abram gives Melchizedek a tenth of everything. Abram gives it to this priest of God Most High, this King of Righteousness and King of Peace.

But there's another king. The king of Sodom is a king of a wicked people. This wicked king makes Abram an offer. Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself. On face value, this offer seems good.

Listen to Abram's response, "With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the LORD, the God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth..." ([Genesis 14.22](#)). That's quite an introduction. He declares his allegiance to a King that is greater than this king in front of him. God Most High, the Creator of heaven and earth is my King. Then, Abram says, "I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or a strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich'" ([Genesis 14.23](#)). He accepts nothing other than the food they have eaten. He does give the shares to the men who came along with him but didn't take anything from the king of Sodom.

King of Righteousness and Peace—Melchizedek and the King of Wickedness—the no-named King of Sodom. His name sounds like bad son. When put in those terms, it sounds like the choice is easy. Follow the good king.

Here's the main idea for today, ***Our giving displays our allegiance to God Most High.*** You only have to go a few more chapters and find [Genesis 19](#) to find out the king of Sodom's city is destroyed with fire and brimstone.

Melchizedek vanishes almost as quickly as he appears. And yet, the writer of Hebrews connects Melchizedek to Jesus.

Hebrews 6:19–20 NIV

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Jesus is the perfect, forever High Priest and King. He's the one who rescued us from Satan's power. He didn't just travel to the northern border of the holy land. He left heaven to come to earth. He lived a perfect life and laid down His life to rescue us from sin and death.

He's the one who restored our relationship with the Father. He's the one who blesses us with life. Our giving is a response to the love from Jesus.

To help us understand the importance of how our giving displays our allegiance to God Most High, I have a pan of brownies. I need some volunteers. I have cut this brownie to represent a general family budget. Each piece represents part of the budget. For example, most people have the following expenses: 1) Housing, 2) Food, 3) Clothes, 4) Saving, 5) Utilities, 6) Car, 7) Insurance, 8) Education, 9) Fun, 10) God. What happens if we pay all our bills first and then remember to give to God what is left over? If you have given all the pieces out, then God gets the crumbs.

Here's our action step this week. Respond to God Most High in generosity this week. What would it look like if everyone here today prayed about their giving and followed the Holy Spirit's lead? How would the needs of our community and this world be different if they chose to honor the King of Righteousness and Peace instead of the King of Wickedness and Evil? What would it look like if people decided to prioritize God in the budgets? Would there be fewer hungry children in our world? Would churches be able to reach more people with the good news of

Jesus? Would credit card debt go away? I invite you to respond to God Most High in generosity this week.

We are experiencing the blessings of today in this church because people went before us and chose to honor God Most High. They chose to live generously as Christ is generous. I've heard of stories from a couple generations ago at Berlin Christian Church. They would pass the offering plates. After the service, if the offering didn't cover enough to pay the preacher for that week, then a couple of the elders would reach into their wallets to make sure the preacher got paid. Why would they do such a thing? They realized who their provider was—the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.

I'm thankful for the generosity of faithful Christians who went before us. I'm thankful for the generosity of this generation, as well.

Remember, our giving displays our allegiance to God Most High.