

JACOB'S VOW

Today, many churches continue to teach that as Christians, we are obligated to observe the law of tithes, that is, we should be giving a tenth of all the income we receive, for the support of the church. But is this what is actually the expected practice for the Christian of today to follow? What did the Bible say regarding tithing? In this booklet, we will search into the biblical understanding of Jacob's vow to God of giving the tenth of all his gain.

One of the main verses used in defense of upholding the practice of tithe giving is Malachi 3:8, which states: ***"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings."*** At first glance, this verse may seem to be a requirement for all practicing Christians to give a tenth of all, but let us look a little closer. To whom was this statement directed? Read Malachi 3:6, 7: ***"For I am the LORD, I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?"*** We see that God was speaking to the 'sons of Jacob' or in other words, the Jewish nation, who were the descendants of Jacob. At the time in which these verses were being spoken, Israel had once again fallen into decadence of sin by disobedience to God's word and the renegeing of their vows to Him. What should become obvious is that, unless we have Jacob's blood in our veins, we are not direct descendants of Jacob, and therefore, the verse from Malachi 3:8 is not directed towards the Christ followers of the new dispensation. Jacob's vow was made for his blood descendants and they were obligated to pay the tenth to the Levitical priesthood.

What is the significance, you may ask, whether we are descended from Jacob or not? To help us answer this question, read Genesis 28:10 to 22: ***"And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set: and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillow and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed. And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north, and to the south, and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace: then shall the LORD be my God. And this stone which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."*** From these verses, we can assert that God, as He had done with Abraham and Isaac, made a promise to Jacob to give him the land that he was on, and multiply his descendants greatly. In reply, Jacob vowed to give a tenth of all that he received, if God would guide him and protect him. This vow was binding for his descendants because Jacob had made the vow after having been promised the land and protection from God, and therefore, in order for the descendants to receive these promised benefits, they too, would have to uphold the promise of their ancestor, of which they did through the support of the Levitical priest system. Read Leviticus

27:30, 32, 34: ***"And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's: it is holy unto the LORD... And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD... These are the commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses for the children of Israel in mount Sinai."***

It is important to note that once a vow is made to God, it is binding because, as he said in Malachi 3:6: ***"For I am the LORD, I change not."*** And for that matter, when any one of us makes a vow, we are obligated to fulfill it. Read Ecclesiastes 5:4 to 5: ***"When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay."*** A vow is a pledge to perform or fulfill an act or deed. In Genesis 31:13 when Jacob was told to return home, God reminds Jacob of the vow he made to him earlier. ***"I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar; and where thou vowedest a vow unto me."*** Remember that God gave the land to Jacob and His seed as stated in Genesis 28:13: ***"...the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed."*** To be clear, God had not asked Jacob to have him and descendants to pay a tenth of all that the land would prosper them, but Jacob vowed of his own free will, therefore, from then on, the tenth belonged to God. The children of Israel were bound to this vow, so much so, that Moses wrote about vowing in the book of the law. From Numbers 30:2: ***"If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth."***

For churches to use scriptures out of context, such as Malachi 3:8, to encourage its congregations to pay tithes, is deceitful, unless such churches are truly ignorant of the fact that the text was directed at Jews and not Christians. Malachi 3:6 to 8 clearly tells us that Jews, who are the sons of Jacob, were bound to the law of tithing and not those who follow Christ Jesus. The aim of this tract is not to discourage supporting one's church because carrying out benevolent works costs money, however, we do not believe in manipulating verses for one's own gain. Let us give to our churches with a cheerful heart and not out of a feeling of being compelled to do so.