

Chapter 4

Jacob's Tithe Proposal

Jacob is another biblical character who mentions tithing before the law. The context of Genesis presents a particular problem for tithe advocates. When you point out to hardcore tithers that Jacob's tithe proposal was obvious bargaining with God, many of them who bet their lives on tithing trip over their rock solid theological understanding of the issue. That's because Jacob's tithe proposal dismantles the current tithe dogma heralded from pulpits today.

When tithe sermons echo from the pulpits, most pastors are silent as lambs about Jacob's tithe in the book of Genesis. The Sunday morning sermon stickup starts with pressure packed theological positions as to why you owe God ten percent using Abram's tithe example as a proof text. Then the sermon heats up and jumps straight to Malachi's curses like a star ship in warp speed running over Jacob's tithe in the book of Genesis. This chapter will not gloss over Jacob's tithe proposal. Let's look at the context of scripture in Genesis 28:20-22:

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.

Jacob's life saga has a wealth of insight. To understand Jacob's offer of a tenth (tithe), we must draw from the context of his history to appreciate why pre-law tithing did not exist with Jacob either. We know Jacob's name means supplanter. It means one who uses treachery and deception to gain something. As the story goes, Jacob deceived his father Isaac out of the blessing that was supposed to go to the first son Esau who sold his birthright to Jacob for some food. This event set off a blood feud between the brothers and for a time Jacob had to stay on the run to escape the wrath of Esau. Genesis shows Jacob lying on stones to symbolize the future temple, which later became the fulfillment of Jacob's vow to tithe through his 12 sons who later became the 12 tribes of Israel in which the 11 tribes tithed to the tribe of Levi.

The context of verses 20-22 in Genesis 28 is about Jacob's character and that is important because it speaks to his mindset when he offered a tenth to Yahweh as a vow. Jacob's motivation to this vow tells us why tithe preachers ignore this scripture text like the plague. When Jacob dreamed about the ladder, he responded to the unexpected presence of God by saying he did not know the Lord was in the place where he slept and became afraid. Some theologians and writers argue that Jacob did not have a real knowledge or personal relationship of God at this point but finally gave into God when he wrestled with the angel later in the book of Genesis. A point to think about in verse 22 is that Jacob used the word give a tenth instead of pay a tenth to show that his tenth may have been an offering. If God required the tenth he offered, the text would indicate

that with the use of the word pay. His words would have read, *22 "And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely **pay** a tenth to You."* The word pay implies an obligation not a voluntary act of free will.

Considering Jacob's background, here is how he offered a tithe to God. First, Jacob's multiple tithe proposal starts with (1) *if God would be with him*; (2) *If God would protect him on the road he was traveling*; (3) *If God gave him bread to eat*; (4) *If God gives him clothes to wear*; (5) *and if God brings him back to the place of his forefathers in peace then Adonai would be his God*. I added the `if's to show the nature of his request. Jacob basically said he would give a tenth if Yahweh met the prerequisites of the conditional contract proposal first. Now that's a switch from what is taught today which requires the tither to perform first before God acts to bless. The question is, a tenth of what? Was it food, clothes, money or something else and how would Jacob give a tenth? Does the fact the text says he would give a tenth make it a freewill offering since no tithe command or instruction existed when Jacob made the vow? Tithe proponents can't explain Jacob's tithe proposal because it does not fit the invented tithe theology of today. Sunday after Sunday Jacob's tithe proposal is ignored. That's because his tithe proposal turns the modern tithe doctrine on its head and exposes it as an error. For example, to tithe like Jacob suggested, God must meet all my requirements for cars, money, clothes, and a six-figure salary before I give Him a tenth. You don't tithe until after you get all the pre-requisites

you requested from the LORD. Jacob put all the burden of proof on God to fulfill his request before Jacob would give a tenth. The scriptures never record Jacob giving the tenth himself.

Jacob's tithe proposal is a weapon of mass destruction to all mandatory tithe arguments heralded from pulpits around the world. Jacob's tithe pattern wouldn't fly today. Congregants or individual believers who tithe based on God meeting conditions of a vow before they hand over a tithe might get them thrown out of the back doors of their churches. Jacob's tithe bargain with God is not based on faith but fear considering the context. If tithe teachers showed you Jacob's "If" statements in the scripture, the aftermath could destroy the entire modern tithing system. To prove that a specific tithing instruction existed as an eternal moral universal principal from the LORD prior to the law, tithe proponents must answer the question of why Jacob included the clause "if" in his contract with Yahweh if God required a tithe. If you look at Jacob's proposal closely, it seems like a slight to God's law. Why would Jacob bargain with God's tithe instructions if a mandatory universal tithe law existed? The only argument that can be made about Jacob is that his Grandfather Abram informed him of the tithe. The text shows that Jacob offered to give a tenth to God but not from an attitude of worship. It was to buy protection and safety from his brother Esau's who vowed in anger to kill him.

The Fear Factor

There is scriptural evidence that suggests the fear factor motivated Jacob to offer a tenth to God. Author Tony Badillo explains the fear factor of Jacob's offer of a tenth. As you continue to read further, I will highlight some of his arguments from his book, *Tithing, God's Command or Man's Demand* dealing with Jacob's vow at Bethel from the section called, "*Jacob's Tithe: A Vow at Bethel And His Terror of Esau?*"ⁱ

Family history and stories Jacob heard from his father Isaac about what his grandfather Abram did could have motivated Jacob to offer a tenth as payment for protection from Esau's revenge. Jacob offered a tenth as a matter of expedience to get the promised inheritance. But Jacob did not need to do that because God's promise to bless him was final and not conditional. It would have passed down to him from Abram. We know Jacob stole his brother's birthright by disguising himself as the first son. Esau's response, in today's language, could have gone like this, "We cool brother during our father's funeral. But after we bury him and finish mourning for the proper days, I'm going to get you sucker and end your life for stabbing in my back and stealing my blessing from our Father!" Now I know that's my way of saying it but Genesis 27:41-43 says:

intending to kill you. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice: arise, flee to my brother Laban in Haran (NKJV).

Examining scriptures, it is clear Esau had a grudge about what happened. Jacob's mother sent him to his uncle Laban to live to escape Esau's wrath. We know Jacob feared Esau for twenty years and later in life they reconciled their

differences. The story shows Jacob showering his brother with gifts as a way to make amends for what he stole from him. The text is clear about Jacob's fear in Genesis 32:7-9 and verse 11:

No one reading this chapter can explain this information away because the scriptures speak for themselves. When you look at Jacob's vow to give a tenth at Bethel in Genesis 28:20-22, it is fear based. Jacob's own words in Genesis 35 proves that point and is the smoking gun because here is what he says in verse 3:

As you can see, Jacob's distress and fear of Esau motivated his actions and there is no way around it. Jacob made a deal with Yahweh by offering the tenth/tithe to buy protection and safety from his brother. Jacob's promise to give a tenth amounted to telling Yahweh to put up or shut up by saying if God will do this or that. Now let me digress and mention two key words in Genesis 28:20-21. The text reads, *If God will be with me, and **keep** me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in **peace**, then the LORD shall be my God...* (NKJV).

As I stated before, context and the Hebrew language means everything in scripture interpretation. Since we know Jacob was on the run from his brother Esau, two words in the text, keep and peace when viewed in the Hebrew is important for context. The word 'keep' in Hebrew is Shemar, (Strong's #8104). It means *guard, protect, save, preserve, and watch*. Going back to the text, Jacob

was asking God to *protect, save, and guard* him in the way he was going from his brother Esau. Why would Jacob ask for protection? Based on the context, it was his brother Esau, Jacob needed protection from while on the run. The other key word in verse 21 is 'peace'. The Hebrew word for peace is Shalom (Strong's #7965). It means well, rest, happy, friendly and peace as it concerns a prosperous relationship between two people. In this case, the peace Jacob wanted was with his brother Esau. He wanted no drama but peace if God brought him back to his father's house. When you read this verse in the Jewish Bible, it gives a better rendition of the original language. *"Yaakov took this vow: "If God will be with me and will guard me on this road I travel, giving me bread to eat and clothes to wear, so that I return to my father's house in peace..."*. The Contemporary English Version of the Learning Bible also gives a better reading of the text. The CEV version says, *"Jacob solemnly promised God, "If you go with me and watch over me as I travel, and if you give me food and clothes and bring me safely home again...."*. Jacob was asking for safety and protection and he thought to offer a tenth would buy what he needed from God.

Let's look at Jacob's story another way. If a tithing law existed during Jacob's time either before the oral or written law, which we know it wasn't, it raises several questions. Why would Jacob vow to give a tenth if an implied tithing law already existed? Another problem for tithe teachers is that they must explain why Jacob phrased his offer of a tenth in a conditional fashion. Whether Jacob did or did not give the tenth, God had already promised to bless him and

his seed, and Genesis 28:13-15 proves his vow of a tenth was not dependent on him keeping a vow. God's promise to bless Jacob while at Bethel was not conditional. God spoke these words to Jacob in the dream:

I have concluded that Jacob's vow offer to tithe is based on fear. The question becomes, do scriptures in the Bible solidify my position? The answer is yes. Jacob made a vow in fear and even if his father Isaac and his mother Rebekah told him about his grandfather Abram's exploits and the tithe he gave to Melchizedek, the context of Jacob's tenth is still fear. Here are some examples of people making vows in scripture as a result of fear. If you wrote a research paper on vows in the Bible, you would discover that men and women who found themselves in terrible situations they could not fix often made vows. When you compare the context and nature of Jacob's vow with other scriptures I reference, it is apparent that Jacob made a fear vow, a common biblical practice.

In Jonah chapter 1, Jonah tells the men on the ship he is the reason for the great stirring of the sea because he did not follow Yahweh's instructions to preach to the people of Nineveh. The sailors feared for their lives and were very afraid their ship would capsize. The sailors prayed to God in verse 16 to not perish for throwing him off the ship to calm the raging storm. The men were scared and the Bible says in verse 16, *Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.* The situation deals with fear just as it did with Jacob who said to the Lord, if you bring me

back to my land safely and bless me, then I will give you a tenth. Jacob's tenth is a payment to God so that He intervenes and calm Esau's anger.

In Jonah 2:9, Jonah languishes in the belly of a fish and reemphasizes his vow by saying, *But I will sacrifice to you with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.* It is clear at some point while under distress inside the fish, Jonah made a vow and promised to pay it. Likewise, while under distress and in fear of Esau, Jacob made a vow to give a 10th to God if God fulfilled Jacob's request first.

Another example of people making vows in fear shows up in Psalms 61:1-5 when David cries out to God for help and to remember his vows:

Another Psalm addressing a vow made by a distressed David is in Psalms 66:13-14 and hits the point I'm making: *I will go into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows, which my lips have uttered and my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble.* When you deal with scripture concerning vows, there is no slight of hand because the examples prove people made vows while in trouble, distress and fear for which they had no way to overcome. The Bible reveals that men and women made vows to God out of fear and 1 Samuel 1:10-11 shows Hannah also made a vow out of distress.

Jacob's offer of a 10th looks nothing like the modern tithe teaching. One, giving a tenth leans toward a voluntary act by Jacob. Two, Jacob placed pre-conditions on God before he would hand over a tenth that is never described in

detail. Three, Jacob did not offer to give God a 10th continuously, but on a one-time basis after God met the conditions of his vow. How do we know the 10th was a one-time act? There is no scriptural record showing Jacob's 12 sons or his daughters tithing money anywhere in the Old Testament. Four, Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, when he ruled in Egypt as second in command to Pharaoh told the kingdom to save up one-fifth of the harvest for seven years to prepare for a future famine. Isn't it strange that Joseph did not tell them to bring a 10th of the harvest to the king? We can conclude that if tithing resonated with God before the law, Jacob would have taught all his children to follow pre-law decrees or oral teachings passed down by family members. However, the text is silent on whether Jacob's sons tithed at all.

Dogmatic tithe teachers must come up with substantial evidence that Abram passed down tithe teaching to his grandson Jacob down through Isaac. To prove their theological position, they would have to argue tithing by discrediting Jacob for trying to offer an illegal conditional tithe because a tithe law already existed. If you follow Jacob through his years working for his uncle Laban, not a single instance in scripture mentions that Jacob tithed or fulfilled his vow to give a tenth during the time he worked and prospered under his uncle. Jacob's tithe vow came to fruition generations later under the Levitical priesthood in the book of Leviticus 27:30-33 and Deuteronomy 12:6-7 and 14:29. Yahweh acknowledged Jacob's vow to give a 10th by showing us tithe scriptures in the law. Jacob's tithe is conditional before the law and the tithe established under

the law is unconditional and mandatory. The fulfillment of Jacob's tithe vow takes place hundreds of years later through the tribe of Levi named after Jacob's son Levi who God used for the priesthood. Jacob acted as a priest before the law by constructing altars for performing personal sacrifices and burnt offerings. If he tithed, logic and reason dictates, he must have tithed to himself. But the Bible never records Jacob giving a tithe of his substance to anyone during his entire life.

It is interesting to note that although extra-biblical sources are not something to form doctrine; however, one "source of possibility that elaborates on Jacob's vow is the book of Jubilees. One of Jacob's conditions in the vow was that God would return him safely again to his father's house. Jubilees 31:24-32:5 provides an alleged account of Jacob remembering and fulfilling his vow many years later while his son Joseph was in Egypt. In the account, Jacob returned to his father Isaac and relayed his vow at Bethel. Isaac told Jacob to carry out his vow but that he was too old to go with him to Bethel. He commissioned him to take his mother Rebekah with him to Bethel. As Jacob and his family members spent a night in Bethel, Jacob's son Levi dreamed that he and his descendants would become God's segregated priests in Israel. The next morning Jacob performed a counting ritual of his sons and discovered that Levi would be the priest and recipient of tithes. He then dressed Levi in priestly clothing and gave him a tenth of everything that he possessed—servants, animals, food, money, clothes, and other goods. If the Book of Jubilees is an accurate historical account

of Jacob fulfilling his vow, then it was a direct link to the Levitical Priesthood of the Mosaic Law. If the book of Jubilees is not a reliable account outside the Bible, then the Scriptures themselves provide no useful model by which Jacob's vow itself applies to anyone other than Jacob and its fulfillment remains a mystery. Both Abraham's tithe and Jacob's vow exhibit volitional acts and serve no literal proof of a command to tithe prior to the Mosaic Law. If Jacob's vow demonstrates a pre-law obligation to tithe, which it could not possibly do, its link to the Levitical priesthood would cancel it per Hebrews 7:5, 12, 18. Jacob's tithe is conditional, today's tithe is taught as unconditional so there is no reliable comparison. Although Jacob's vow differed from Abraham's in that the tithe was not of the spoils of war, the Scriptures do not elaborate on the substance of Jacob's tithes. Jacob pledged to tithe of all his possessions, and not simply of sources of monetary income. No record of scripture exists to prove that Jacob kept his vow. Rational reasons exist for a direct link between Jacob's vow itself and the tithe in the Mosaic Law according to the covenant promise given to Jacob and his name Israel. If the Book of Jubilees supplies reliable extra-biblical insight into a possible fulfillment of Jacob's commitment, the direct link to tithing under the law is established as well as the Levitical Priesthood, which the epistle to the Hebrews succinctly cancels after Jesus Christ. The account of Jacob's vow in Genesis 28 cannot possibly support the modern monetary income tithe doctrine or any related mandate on the church." ii

Abram and Jacob's tithes speak of their personal endeavor to tithe, but no one can use them as an example for others to follow because they are vastly different. Abram's tithe consisted of spoils of war and the contents of Jacob's 10th is never described in the Bible, so we don't know what the makeup of his tithe was. You cannot assume that because the Bible mentions Abram's and Jacob's tithe that it was money just because the word is mentioned. Jacob's tenth vow was his personal vow, not your vow to claim. Even though Jacob promised a 10th, how did he give it to God since there were no temples or Levites to receive it? God never promised Jacob blessings for tithing, and if some oral law existed during his time, why was Jacob starving in a famine, which prompted him to send his sons to Egypt to buy grain in Genesis 41:57 and 42:1. If God required a tithe, why didn't Jacob receive the rain blessing in the area to water the land where he lived if he was a faithful tither like it says in Malachi 3:8-11? Giving a tithe to God based on what he gives you is nothing more than a shuffling of money by tithers who are participating in tax-deductible refund giving. It is a self-imposed tenth that is a tax for religious purposes. Filing out giving envelopes every week at church and getting a receipt at the end of the year totaling your giving to report on your income taxes, brings you a tax refund from the government if you don't owe, not a blessing from God out of the windows of heaven.

Jacob's bargain to tithe cannot be overlooked. Jacob's tithe is important because most tithe proponents never use Jacob as an example to preach tithing

because the scripture text changes the tithe argument from mandatory giving to voluntary giving based on negotiation with God. There is no way the New Testament church can use Jacob's pre-law tithe promise as an example for the congregation.

Nowhere in the scripture do we see Jacob tithe money other than his promise to give a tenth at some future point. The Bible never says he acted on his vow. Because Jacob operated as a priest, the theological assumption is that Jacob tithed to himself and he and his family ate the tithe from the sacrifices he offered on the altar. The only teaching one can pull from Jacob's example is that Yahweh will never expect you to tithe until he blesses you first as Jacob requested. That way you can afford it. Who did Jacob give a tenth to is the question that every student must ask? If God or angels didn't personally collect the tenth and if the tenth wasn't sent on heavenly chariots to God; if no temple existed yet and the Levites did not exist, then who received Jacob's tithe?

When examining Abram's spoils of war tithe and Jacob's proposed tithe offer, neither one has any authority under the New Covenant. The tithe under the law is only authorized under the covenant in which it exists. As you read this book, you will realize that a New Covenant tithe under the law of Christ never existed. "However, for many Christians, due to fear of the unknown and rejection by other believers who swear by tithing, find themselves unable to break free from the bondage of tithing. Hence, they allow themselves to be manipulated by

individuals, many of whom are not necessarily wiser or smarter than them” on the subject. ⁱⁱⁱ

Many people believe the tithe is money. To prove that notion, a thorough scripture dig on the subject of money must be pulled from the scriptures to conclude that. The next chapter deals with the word money and will examine if any Biblical person tithed money. Because modern day tithing is all about the Benjamin's, let's dig in and find out.

ⁱ Tony Badillo, *Tithing God's Command or Man's Demand—Which?* Xavier Press, Dallas TX ©1984, 40-44.

ⁱⁱ Daniel Mynyk, *Freedom To Give: The Biblical Truth About Tithing*, Crosslink Publishing, Castle Rock, CO ©2011 E-book version.

ⁱⁱⁱ Oliver John, *Tithing: The Financial Disaster of Christians*, Alpha Wolf Publishing, ©2013, E-book version, 94.