



Is Tithing Biblical? (with the Context Most People Miss)

Description



Asking “Is tithing biblical?” is actually three different

questions. Thus, the answer changes depending on which specific question you mean. Typically, people mean one of these three:

1. Does the Bible **Command** Christians to tithe?
2. Does the Bible **Suggest** Christians should tithe?
3. Does the Bible **Allow** Christians to tithe?

We’re going to tackle all of them in this article. But first realize they are very different questions. Because of that, I’ll deal with them separately (*though I’ll spend the bulk of time on if the Bible commands it*)

What is Tithing?

The word “tithe” simply means “tenth”. The word in Hebrew (*the Old Testament*) is [“Ma`aser”](#). There are several words in the Greek (*the New Testament*) but they all come back to various forms of the word “tenth”.

Tithing is the practice of giving 10% of your income (*gross or net*) to your church.

A majority of denominations say you must tithe to your local church (*the one you attend on a regular basis*). Some also allow you to give it to the denomination instead.

In most churches I've attended, they say all giving above your "tithe" is an "offering". It's very common to hear pastors and teachers talk about your "tithes and offerings". They mean the required 10% (*tithe*) plus anything beyond that you decide to give.

Does the Bible Allow Tithing?

The short answer is yes.

There is no place in the Bible where giving 10% of your income (*gross or net*) is prohibited. I don't think there's a Christian alive or dead who would argue the point.

Moving on.

Does the Bible Command Tithing?

This is a contentious issue.

Before we dive into the debate, let's get some context. **Context is absolutely crucial** when talking about doctrine because without it, misinterpretation is too easy. I might say this in every article on this website, but that's okay because it's so important.

If you've read my [article on Revelation](#) or [my article on the gift of tongues](#), you'll see how context adds clarity. As you'll soon see, this case is no different.

The first recorded "tithe" was Abraham to Melchizedek... but only kind of

So here's the context.

There were five kings who were paying tribute to Chedorlaomer; two of them were the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. They all decided to stop paying, so Chedorlaomer went to war and routed the five kings. The two verses below explain the results of the battle. It's important that the "they" in verse 11 is Chedorlaomer and the armies with him (*which included three other kings*).

Genesis 14:11-12

11 Then **they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah** and all their food supply, and departed.

12 They also took Lot, Abram's nephew, and his possessions and departed, for he was living in Sodom.

Now, someone tells Abraham that Chedorlaomer has captured his nephew Lot. Abraham mounts up the fighting men in his camp and heads out to save his nephew.

Genesis 14:15-16

14 When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, **he led out his trained men**, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

15 He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.

16 **He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people.**

Now, we know Abraham headed out with his fighting men (*and I assume their food*). The Bible doesn't say he left with anything else. Further, there's good reason to think Abraham wouldn't take anything but those fighting men. (*and some provisions*).

Mobility is key in warfare, especially when you need to catch someone like Abraham did. They would've left behind everything they could so they could travel quickly. Abraham's flocks, gold/wealth, and servants would've stayed behind. And no man in his right mind would bring children to war, so they would've stayed too.

Verse 16 says Abraham "brought back all the goods" and "the people".

Abraham didn't have much with him, but Chedorlaomer had all the goods and people from Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham just defeated Chedorlaomer. Therefore, it's likely that the goods and people Abraham brought back were what Chedorlaomer had just captured from Sodom and Gomorrah.

Moving on.

Genesis 14:17-19

17 Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest

of God Most High.

19 He blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” **He gave him a tenth of all.**

The obvious question is: **Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of what?**

As we already talked about, Abraham probably didn’t have anything he owned with him except the fighting men and their provisions (*weapons and food*). However, we’ve already covered that Abraham brought back the goods and people that Chedorlaomer had previously captured from Sodom and Gomorrah.

So Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of what?

The obvious answer is a tenth of all the goods from Sodom and Gomorrah... which really wasn’t even his.

Verse 23 makes this perfectly clear.

Genesis 14:21-24

21 The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself.”

22 Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth,

23 that **I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours**, for fear you would say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’

24 I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share.”

The goods and people had been taken by Chedorlaomer, Abraham was just returning them. Hebrews 7 makes it 100% clear that it was the spoils of war (*originally from Sodom and Gomorrah*) and not Abraham’s personal wealth.

Hebrews 7:1-2

1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,

2 to whom also **Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils**, was first of all,

by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace.

Abraham didn't "pay a tithe" to Melchizedek from his own wealth or income. Quite the opposite; he gave away a tenth of Sodom and Gomorrah's stuff to Melchizedek!

Now, is returning goods looted from a city an example of how we should tithe?

Russell Earl Kelly, PHD said in his book "Should the Church Teach Tithing?"

As documented in the first chapter, tithing did not originate in the Bible (and nobody claims that it did). It was a well-known pagan practice from Phoenicia, Egypt, Canaan, Mesopotamia and lands around the Fertile Crescent. It was a mandatory customary tax to a pagan god or ruler. The Roman Empire continued this tradition by requiring its defeated subject nations, like Israel, to return the spoil of the first tithe of the land to them! From a comparison of discussions of verse 21, Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek was in obedience to this old Arab war custom and was not a command from Yahweh. Evidently, the Arab war custom specified that ten percent of the spoils of war be given to the local priest-king, while the ninety percent belonged to the victor. Abraham was OBLIGATED to pay a special one-time tithe-tax of the spoils of war.

Abraham didn't tithe from his own income or wealth. Instead, he tithed of someone else's stuff in obedience the Arab customs of the day.

Apparently, the king of Sodom didn't have a problem with Abraham giving away a tenth of his stuff. I'd be annoyed if someone gave away a tenth of my stuff, but evidently the king of Sodom wasn't. This lends further credibility to the idea that it was a custom of the day.

Further, we've already seen that Abraham didn't keep the rest either.

Genesis 14:21-24

21 **The king of Sodom** said to Abram, "Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself."

22 Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth,

23 that **I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours**, for fear you would say, 'I have made Abram rich.'

24 **I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten**, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share."

Abraham says that besides the food his men ate, they would take nothing. Instead, he returned it all to

its original owner: the king of Sodom. (*I want to point out that this is the king of Sodom, of “Sodom and Gomorrah” fame; yes the same Sodom that God destroyed for their incredible wickedness.*)

Abraham gave a “tithe” (tenth) of Sodom and Gomorrah’s stuff to Melchizedek because of the Arab Custom, but he returned the rest to the rightful owners.

We’ve already covered that Abraham was just returning the goods from Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham technically could’ve kept the goods (*because they were the spoils of war*) but he didn’t. He did the right thing and returned them to the original owners.

I don’t see a command – or even example – of tithing there.

Do you?

Now let’s look at the Israelites under the Law

Most people “know” that under the Mosaic Law, the Israelites gave 10%.

Leviticus 27:30

30 ‘Thus **all the tithe of the land**, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s; **it is holy to the Lord.**

We know from Numbers that this Tithe was paid to the Levites.

Numbers 18:20-21

20 Then the Lord said to Aaron, “You shall have no inheritance in their land nor own any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel.

21 “To the sons of Levi, behold, **I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance**, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting.

There you go; it’s only 10%... In that section of scripture. However, that’s not the only place where God instituted a tithe.

(Note: the verse below takes place before the Israelites had entered the Promised Land. The place where God chose to establish His name in verse 23 is Jerusalem.)

Deuteronomy 14:22-27

22 “**You shall surely tithe** all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year.

23 **You shall eat** in the presence of the Lord your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, **the tithe** of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, so that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always

24 If the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring the tithe, since the place where the Lord your God chooses to set His name is too far away from you when the Lord your God blesses you,

25 then you shall exchange it for money, and bind the money in your hand and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses.

26 **You may spend the money for whatever your heart desires:** for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household.

27 **Also you shall not neglect the Levite who is in your town, for he has no portion or inheritance among you.**

How many sermons have you heard on this tithe?

Notice in verse 23, God commanded Israel eat this tithe.

In fact, you are supposed to bring it to Jerusalem and eat it there. If you had too much and couldn't eat transport it all, then you were supposed to sell it, take the money, and buy "whatever your heart desires" to eat.

Notice also that this is in addition to the other tithe to the Levites. In verse 27, God makes it clear this tithe is in addition to the Levite's tithe.

But God isn't done instituting tithes just yet...

Deuteronomy 14:28-29

28 **"At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall deposit it in your town.**

29 The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.

Some say this is a modification of the second tithe (*that they ate*). But that's not what the Jews thought. The Historian Flavius Josephus (*who lived just after Christ in 37-100 AD*) mentions the three tithes in his work [Antiquities of the Jews, in 4:8:22](#).

Besides those two tithes, which I have already said you are to pay every year, the one for the Levites, the other for the festivals, **you are to bring every third year a third tithe** to be

distributed to those that want; to women also that are widows, and to children that are orphans.

The Jews even have specific names for each of the tithes. The first tithe for the Levites is called the “*ma’aser rishon*”. The second tithe for eating at festival is the “*ma’aser sheni*”. The third tithe for the poor is called the “*ma’sar ani*”.

The Jews under the Mosaic Law paid two tithes every year, plus one tithe every third year for a total of 23.33% in total “tithes”.

Unless my math is very wrong, I think 23.33% is different than 10%.

Further, Tithes were not paid with money

It’s true. Let’s look at Leviticus again:

Leviticus 27:30-32

30 ‘Thus **all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s**; it is holy to the Lord.

31 If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it.

32 For **every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the Lord.**

Note: the rod mentioned in v32 is a tither’s rod:

The tithers’ rod, it being the manner of the Jews in tithing to cause all their cattle to pass through some gate or narrow passage, where the tenth was marked by a person appointed for that purpose, and reserved for the priest.

[Source.](#)

Notice what God claims as His portion.

Verse 30 tells us about the tenth of the land which includes fruits and seeds. Verse 32 tells us that a tenth of the flocks and herds are God’s too.

Did you notice money was missing?

God didn't command the Israelites to "tithe" of their money anywhere in the law. It's just not there. It is always food/crops/animals, and never anything else. *(If you find a verse that proves me wrong please [contact me](#), but I'm pretty sure you'll be looking a long time...)*

God did Command that the Israelites give of their crops and animals, but not of their money.

In fact, there was a PENALTY for paying your tithe with money.

Let's look again:

Leviticus 27:30-32

30 'Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord.

31 *If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it.*

32 For every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, **the tenth one** shall be holy to the Lord.

The word redeem there simply means to "buy back". So if your prized bull just happened to be the tenth animal under the rod, then you could "redeem it" by buying it back. However, you had to fork over an extra 20% to do that.

You could theoretically pay your whole tithe in money, but that would cost an additional 20%.

In fact, tradesmen and employees didn't pay ANY tithes under the Mosaic Law.

Don't believe me? Look again at the list of things God requires.

Anything that comes out of the ground (*crops, fruit from trees etc*) and all the animals they owned were part of the tithe. Nothing else. If you didn't own any of this, then you weren't required to tithe. Therefore, if you were a tradesman (*a carpenter from Nazareth for example*) you weren't required to tithe because you didn't produce crops or animals.

Under the Mosaic Law, employees weren't required to tithe either. They didn't receive any of the things that God said you must tithe, so they weren't required to tithe. You were only required to tithe from the produce of the land (*crops and animals*)

Why was the tithe only from the land?

Technically it wasn't. *(God took the tribe of Levi to be His also.)* So it was a tenth of the land and a tenth of the people. *(If you use the Jewish "under the rod" system. And since the Old Testament was written by Jews, to Jews, in a Jewish culture that's a good idea.)*

The Context for the Levitical Tithe

Believe it or not, this is arguably the largest and hardest part of the Tithing debate to explain. That's because it involves elements of Jewish culture that are very foreign to westerners (*and might seem unfair*). Jared over at [tithing.com](#) has [a two part article that covers this in exhaustive detail](#).

I'll condense it here.

Context for the verses below: Jacob tricks Esau out of his blessing, and Esau wants revenge. So Isaac sends Jacob away to keep Esau from killing him. The excuse Isaac uses is that Jacob needs to get a wife. On the way, Jacob stops to sleep and has a dream.

Genesis 28:12-15

12 He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

13 And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; **the land on which you lie, I will give it to you** and to your descendants.

14 **Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth**, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

15 Behold, **I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land**; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Jacob is amazed when He wakes up. He builds an altar and makes a vow.

Genesis 28:20-22

20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear,

21 and I return to my father's house in safety, then the Lord will be my God.

22 This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and **of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.**"

Notice the parallels between God's vow and Jacob's vow. In verse 13, God promises to give Jacob the land and a LOT of decedents. In verse 22, Jacob vows to give back a tenth of all that God gives him.

However, Jacob is never recorded as tithing.

Ever.

I would argue that's because he couldn't.

Notice that Jacob does NOT promise to give God 10% of everything; only to give back 10% of whatever God gives him.

God promised Jacob the land of Israel and a LOT of decedents. However, in his lifetime Jacob never "owned" the Land of Israel. He lived in it, but there were other nomads and kings who did also. Jacob didn't own the land, so he wasn't required to tithe by the conditions of his vow.

In Hebrew culture, there are two kinds of vows. One is binding for the person who makes it. The other is Binding for the person who makes it AND his decedents. It's a generational vow. (*Like I said, this element of Hebrew culture is completely foreign to westerners.*)

I would argue that Jacob's vow was a generational vow and the Nation of Israel fulfilled it by tithing.

God promised a lot of decedents, so God took the Levites to be his tithe (*remember the "tithing rod system" I mentioned before*). He also took the Levitical tithe to be His portion of the land in fulfillment of Jacob's vow. It's also why the tithe was only paid from the produce of the ground: Because that's what Jacob vowed.

Think about it like this:

Jacob didn't vow money, just to give back a tenth of what God gave. God gave Jacob land and decedents, so a tenth of those were given back to God (*the Levites and the Levitical Tithe*).

This is further supported the location of God's command concerning the Levitical tithe; It's located at the end of a section on vows. Seriously, chapter 27 opens with God's commands about how to handle certain types of vows, including "difficult vows". I could be completely wrong, but with some cultural context (*about vows*) it makes good sense.

As it applies to Christians, we aren't obligated to fulfill Jacob's vow.

Even if we did, the tithe is only from the land of Israel, which we don't own. Also, there are no Levites we could pay it to anyway.

Context is SO important.

What about the famous passage in Malachi?

I have heard more sermons on tithing from this passage than probably any other.

Malachi 3:8-10

8 “Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘**How have we robbed You?**’ **In tithes and offerings.**

9 **You are cursed with a curse,** for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!

10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and **pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.**

Alas, context is a much maligned tutor who is often ignored to the detriment of those who don’t seek her out.

Sigh.

The question we must ask is “why was Israel under a curse?” The reason is obvious from the passage but there’s more to it. Way back in Deuteronomy, God made a VERY specific promise to the nation of Israel. The promise covers all of [Deuteronomy chapters 28-30](#). I highly recommend you read (*or even skim*) those chapters.

However, the four verses below should give you enough context to make the point (*as it concerns tithing*).

Deuteronomy 28: 1-2 & 15

1 “Now it shall be, **if you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today,** the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.

2 **All these blessings will come upon you** and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God:

(God lists the blessings in verses 3-14.)

15 “But it shall come about, **if you do not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you** and overtake you:

(God lists the curses from verse 16 to the end of the chapter.)

The summery comes in Chapter 30.

Deuteronomy 30:19

19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that **I have set before you** life and death, **the blessing and the curse**. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants,

God warned the nation of Israel that He would curse them if they broke their covenant and disobeyed His commands. On the other hand, God said He would bless the nation beyond measure if they obeyed His commands. *(It's important to note that Israel agreed to this covenant; God didn't force them into it.)*

That's what's going on here in Malachi.

God said Israel would be put under a curse if they broke their covenant and disobeyed God's commands. Israel was breaking their covenant by not tithing 23.33% as God commanded. Therefore, God had put them under a curse. *(If God hadn't, He would've been a liar.)*

Israel was being disobedient by breaking the Mosaic Law. Christians aren't under the Mosaic Law. (*Read Galatians chapter 3 if you disagree*) Therefore, we aren't robbing God if we don't give 23.33% in "tithes".

Further, WHO wasn't tithing in Malachi?

Again, context.

The biblical context is SO important here because there was only one group of people who were supposed to bring tithes into the store house. That group is the Levitical Priests.

Let's take a look.

Nehemiah 10:38

38 The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when **the Levites receive tithes**, and the Levites shall bring up **the tenth of the tithes** to the house of our God, to **the chambers of the storehouse**.

Okay, I lied. There were actually four tithes in the Mosaic Law (*sort of*). The Levitical tithes were paid to the Levites, and the Levites brought a tenth of the tithes to the storehouse.

So what did the Levites do with tenth of a tenth?

Numbers 18:25-26

25 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

26 “Moreover, you shall speak to the Levites and say to them, ‘When you take from the sons of Israel the tithe which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then **you shall present an offering from it to the Lord, a tithe of the tithe.**”

They presented this tenth of a tenth (*1% of the original*) as an offering, presumably a burnt offering. But that’s irrelevant to our discussion of tithing. **The point is the priests – and the priests alone – brought tithes to the storehouse.**

That might be the reason that the book of Malachi is addressed directly to the priests.

Malachi 1:6

6 “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?’ **says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name.** But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’

Malachi 2:1-2

1 “And now this commandment is for you, **O priests**.

2 If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name,” says the Lord of hosts, “then **I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already,** because you are not taking it to heart.

If we are going to say that modern day pastors are analogous to Israel’s priests, then Malachi is mostly for pastors not ordinary Christians.

(Note: the Israelite people were already corrected on not tithing (in Nehemiah 13) by the time Malachi was written. According to [BibleHub’s timeline](#), Malachi was written about 2 years later. Nehemiah would still be enforcing the tithe by the common people. Evidently however, the priests needed a reminder that they too needed to tithe.)

The Old Testament Model in Modern day

I know the following will sound absurd; that's the point.

If we're following Abraham's model of tithing, it would look something like this. If you see a bully take something from someone and you get it back, subtract 10% (*for the local pastor/church*) and give the remaining 90% back to the actual owner. Other than that, you don't have to tithe.

If we're following the Old Covenant model of Levitical tithing, it would look something like this. Everyone who has animals or crops should bring a tenth of them to the pastor, who then offers 10% of them as a burnt offering and then gets to eat the rest. If you want to bring money instead of crops or animals, then add 20% to their value. Also, if you don't have crops or animals, you don't have to pay anything.

If we're following the model of the feast tithe, then save 10% of all the crops and animals you produce that year and eat it with your family in a feast. (*employees and tradesmen bring nothing*)

If we're following the model of the Poor tithe, then bring 10% of your crops and animals every third year for the poor. (*employees and tradesmen bring nothing*)

Do any of those sound like a good model for Christian giving?

Christians are not under the Mosaic Law.

Even a cursory reading of the New Testament will reveal this. So the idea that we must tithe because they tithed is simply ridiculous. Read Galatians 3 (*We'll talk about whether it was a good example to follow later*)

We'll cover if the Bible suggests tithing soon.

Tithing in the New Covenant

I say "New Covenant" not "New Testament" because most of the four Gospels take place while the Jews were still under the Law. Jesus talks about tithing when rebuking the Pharisees, but they were still under the law at that point.

Put simply, there is no command to tithe in the New Testament.

If you remember from way back at the beginning of this article, we were talking about whether the Bible commands tithing. I hope you see that God does not command Christians to "tithe".

There is no verse in scripture that requires Christians to tithe. I've looked, others have looked, and feel free to look yourself; but you won't find it.

So no, the Bible does not command Tithing.

Does it suggest Tithing as a good practice? We'll get to that in a few moments.

Tithing as Heresy?

Oh, I'm going to ruffle some feathers with this section.

I firmly believe that you should NEVER add to God's commandments.

God Himself has some pretty specific things to say about those who add (*or take away*) from His words. We also know it was a bad idea because of the Pharisees. How many sermons have you heard about the Pharisees adding to the commands of the Mosaic Law?

Have you ever heard anyone say it was a good idea?

Me either.

In my opinion, adding to the commands of God is Heresy.

Teaching that God requires something when He doesn't is wrong. Nowhere in scripture does God say that Christians must give 10% of their income to the church. It's simply not in there.

Therefore, saying Christians must tithe is adding to the commands of God... which makes it heresy.

Sad, but true.

(Suggesting it is fine though. I have no problem with suggesting 10%; only a problem with requiring 10%)

To be clear, I am not against giving 10% of your income. I am against adding to the commands of God by saying you MUST give 10% of your income.

Many pastors teach this out of ignorance, and they can be forgiven. They didn't know and their ignorance mitigates their guilt. However, those who know the Bible doesn't require tithing and teach it anyway...

James 3:1 says God will judge teachers more strictly. I wouldn't want to be them on judgment day.

Further, teaching tithing as a commandment greatly damages the message of the Gospel. I know people who refuse to set foot in a church because they think the Church just wants their money... Because of tithing.

Does the Bible Suggest Tithing?

If the Bible wants you to tithe, it doesn't say so directly. There is no verse anywhere (*that I'm aware of*) that suggest tithing as a good practice for Christians.

One decent argument is the Old Testament Patriarchs voluntarily offered tithes, so we should follow their example.

As we've already seen, Abraham and Jacob both offered tithes. Abraham tithed because it was required by Arab custom, Jacob because he wanted to give back to God. I would write off the Abraham example because it was an Arab custom and wasn't voluntary or ordained by God.

But Jacob's vow to give 10% is interesting.

Up until the point of Jacob's vow, he hasn't been a good example of anything. He cheated his brother out of his inheritance and stole the blessing too. However, his vow doesn't seem selfish to me, but rather born out of gratitude.

I have no problem holding up Jacob's vow as an example to follow; however that does NOT mean we MUST follow his example.

That's the only voluntary tithing example we have in the Old Testament.

The Early Church Fathers on Tithing

We know from the writings of the early church fathers that tithing wasn't practiced in the early church. Or at least, tithing wasn't practiced in the very early church. Fast forward to the 300s – 400s and suddenly quotes about tithing appear, but that's hundreds of years later.

Irenaeus (130-202) said in [Against Heresies, Book 4, chapter 13, section 3](#).

3. And for this reason did the Lord, instead of that [commandment], "You shall not commit adultery," forbid even concupiscence; and instead of that which runs thus, "You shall not kill," He prohibited anger; and **instead of the law enjoining the giving of tithes, [He told us] to share all our possessions with the poor**

Clement of Alexandria (150-215) also mentions tithing, but definitely not in favor of it. In fact – depending on how it's translated – it could be directly against tithing.

And that's it. For a couple hundred years after Christ was born the quote by Irenaeus is the only quote concerning Christians tithing. If tithing were so important, why didn't more early church fathers mention it?

My Perspective on Money and Giving

I think 10% of your income is about 90% too low... Sort of.

Remember the opening of Psalm 24:

Psalm 24:1

The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains,
The world, and those who dwell in it.

We own nothing.

We don't own a single thing because it **ALL** belongs to God. However, God has given this entire planet into our care. We don't own it, but we manage it. That makes us stewards not owners.



...dior" in the Lord of the Rings?

He had a problem. (okay several but we'll only focus on one

). He didn't want to recognize the king of Gondor (*Aragorn*). He wanted to keep doing as he pleased with the king's money and land.

Too often, we are the same.

We work hard for our money and think it's ours, but it's not. It belongs to God and we are merely stewards of it. If God asks you to give everything your have to the poor and become a missionary to deepest darkest Africa, you should do it. But if he tells you not to, then don't you dare. (*1 Samuel 15:22: "To obey is better than to sacrifice"*)

I know exactly how much you should give to make God Happy: You should give exactly what He tells you to give. Not one penny more, not one penny less.

God once told me to write a check for literally my entire Bank account. I obeyed. (*Of course, I was 16 and it was only ~\$70 bucks; but that's a lot of money when it's all you have*) Occasionally (*rarely*) God told me not to give anything at all. I obeyed.

God ALWAYS blesses Obedience.

I know many people who swear that God blessed them because they tithed. They were almost out of money, and the choice was to pay a bill or tithe so – thinking it's what God commanded – they tithed. They thought God required them to tithe, so God blessed their obedience to what they thought He wanted.

If you think God requires you to do something, you better do it. Not doing it would be sin. But just because you *think* God wants you to do something, doesn't mean He does.

And by all means, GIVE!

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul tells about the Church of Macedonia. He talks about their "deep poverty", so we know they weren't rich.

2 Corinthians 8:3-5

3 For I testify that **according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord,**

4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,

5 and this, not as we had expected, but **they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.**

Notice how they gave. It was "*of their own accord*", so no one was trying to pressure them. And it was "*by the will of God*", so they listened to God's direction on how they gave.

That about sums up how we should give.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

7 **Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, **so that** always having all sufficiency in everything, **you may have an abundance for every good deed**;

God gives us resources so we can help others. Obviously you should take care of your own affairs/family, but God gives abundance so we may bless others.

(One final note. In 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul says to put aside money at the beginning of each week so he can collect it when he comes. He is not talking about “regular” giving. Rather, he was talking about a relief fund for a famine in Judea/Jerusalem. You can check this out for yourself by reading Acts 11:27-30. Again, context is crucial)

Conclusion

6000+ words later, Let's review the three questions we asked at the beginning

Q. Does the Bible Command Christians to tithe?

A. No. *Saying it does is adding to the commandments of God, which is heresy. (though most pastors are simply misinformed and not malicious)*

Q. Does the Bible Suggest Christians should tithe?

A. Not directly but Jacob's vow gives precedent to the idea.

Q. Does the Bible Allow Christians to tithe?

A. Absolutely.

All of that said, don't forget to give. No the Bible doesn't require you to give 10%, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't give. After all, it's more blessed to give than receive.

I would give exactly what God tells you to give; if for no other reason than because He always rewards obedience.