

# First Things First



Week Eleven

## inTro



Read This Week's Passage:  
Malachi 3:7–12

### THREE DREAMS

After receiving the Adventist message in the 1940s through Daniel Lewis, the first Adventist missionary to Albania, Meropi Gjika, got caught in the religious oppression of her country.

For more than 40 years, Gjika had three dreams and got to see two of them happen in her lifetime. The first was to her baptism. Having waited fifty years, she eventually went into the watery grave when Communist rule ended. Her second dream was to see the construction of an Adventist church building in Tirana, her hometown. Though she never saw it with her own eyes, the Tirana-Center Adventist Church was eventually inaugurated in 2017, years after her death. Her third and most well-known desire was to return her tithe and offerings to the church. For exactly 46 years she had no contact with the outside Adventist church, yet she heeded the biblical principle of stewardship and set aside her tithe and offerings. Though Albania was one of the poorest countries in Eastern Europe, she never “borrowed” from this fund but placed the money in biscuit tins that she hid under her bed.

Gjika read three chapters of the Bible each day and five on Sabbath. Through her devotional life and Bible study, she was convicted to obey the biblical principles of stewardship. She knew this to be the will of God, and through her trials, God sustained her through thick and thin. How was Sister Gjika so sure that this was the will of God? Does God have counsel regarding finances? This week's lesson looks at tithe—the biblical number going to the biblical place for the biblical purpose in the biblical manner.



## **inScribe**

Write out Malachi 3:7–12 from the translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, outline, or mind map the chapter.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

**Circle** repeated words/phrases/ideas

**Underline** words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you



Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?



Memorize your favorite verse in Malachi 3:7–12. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

How are your financial stewardship habits today?



Read more at [www.inverseible.org/will11-3](http://www.inverseible.org/will11-3)

**ONE OF TEN: THE RIGHT NUMBER**

Of the many topics that the Bible addresses, one subject that stands out is wealth and finances. Jesus incorporates money into a lot of His parables. The Pauline epistles utilize the motifs of debt and value. While prosperity gospel preachers assert that these passages obligate God to make His followers wealthy, there is a more humble and biblical reason. Finances are an integral part of our lives, and Christ uses this most common element of money to convey the gospel message.

More than the traditional nonprofit pitch to donate to a worthy cause or need, the appeal for the remittance of financial offerings to the Lord has a spiritual dimension. The character component includes the removal of greed and the development of generosity. Rather than God “needing” these funds, they point to the joining of divine and human effort to spread the message of the gospel. The church is to be an agency to preach, teach, heal, and be an extension of Christ’s ministry. Not a financial sacrifice to earn salvation, the funds are to point to a grace-filled relationship because of salvation. Financial offerings are the conveying of gratitude to God.

Of the types of financial giving, the first and foremost is tithe. According to Leviticus 27:30–32, God defines tithe as 10 percent of gain. Though He is due all 100 percent, God only requires a tenth. Second, He defines it as holy. As a form of worship and not salvific merit, this becomes the most private and personal form of devotion. The decision on the amount is between the individual and God—no one outside of Him knows of its accuracy. For this reason, in this exclusive relationship, God labels knowingly giving less than a tenth as robbery (c.f. Mal. 3:8, 9).

The Bible greets were known to have returned tithe. After Abraham rescued Lot from Chedorlaomer in Genesis 14, Abraham returned the tithe of all of his increase to Melchizedek, the priest king of Salem (Gen. 14:20). Jacob covenanted with God to give tithe during his experience at Bethel (Gen. 28:22). All the Israelites were taught of the holiness of this tithe and God’s sole ownership of it (Lev. 27:30). It was important that this tithe be returned to God. This “returning” was an act of acknowledging God as the Creator, Sustainer, and Provider of the universe as well as worshipping this Being for His supremacy.

## THE STOREHOUSE: THE RIGHT PLACE

Not only is the right percentage necessary, but Scripture also emphasizes the right place for the tithe to be collected. In Deuteronomy 12:5–14, some principles of the storehouse are mentioned. First, God’s sanctuary was a depository where the tithes and offerings of all God’s people are collected. From sacrifices to offerings and tithes, all were collected in an actual place that God chose. Second, it was from this central place that the Levites received their portion. Later, the temple storehouse was the collection place for the tithes and offerings from the twelve tribes of Israel. And from this same place the priests and Levites were paid.

This centralized place denoted the purpose of the tithing system. Numbers 18:21, 31 says that it was for the purpose of ministry, for supporting those who teach and serve. Today this centralized place is the local conference, a sisterhood of local churches that pool the tithes together to sustain the ministry of pastors and teachers. To ensure their proper and faithful usage, there are two components instituted by the church. The first component is a policy established by the church body. Policy may sound like a boring topic, but it ensures that everyone agrees in understanding and practice as to what will happen to the centralized funds. This takes place in a public format, where everyone can comment and participate in the corporate fidelity of God’s resources. Policies regarding tithe usually state their exclusive use for ministry, Bible teaching, church administration, and mission field operations. Per the biblical injunction, tithe cannot be used for other subsidiary purposes, such as paying off debt or assisting in building operations. Second, an auditing system is established by the church which assures the ecclesial body that tithe is being used faithfully at every level.

One test of the storehouse or treasury of the Lord is mentioned in the account of the fall of Jericho. In Joshua 6:17–19, the faithfulness of Israel was tested when they raided the city. All the silver, gold, brass, and iron goods were to be kept in the treasury, while they burned everything else. While almost the whole nation obeyed, one individual named Achan disobeyed and kept things for himself, leading to their army’s defeat at Ai. Surely an important principle to be mindful of is faithfully maintaining the central depository of God’s resources. For further information, see the document *Where Do We Bring Our Tithe?* (<https://stewardship.adventist.org/where-do-we-bring-our-tithe-in-search-of-the-storehouse.pdf>).



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks overall seem to point to?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?



Read more at  
[www.inverseible.org/will11-4](http://www.inverseible.org/will11-4)



What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Isaiah 56:7

2 Chronicles 31:1–10

Matthew 23:23–27

2 Corinthians 9:6–15



What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with tithes and offerings?

Review your memorized verse from Malachi 3:7–12.

## JESUS: THE RIGHT PERSON

Though many in the postmodern age can be skeptical of organizations, the most crucial factor of tithes and offerings is the Person to whom the resources are directed. Ultimately, tithe is not going to support a church, an organization, or some establishment. Though it supports ministers, teachers, and other gospel workers, it is not going to individuals. It is for God and is God's alone. This is the most significant aspect of the return of tithe.

As you do this act of worship, no other individual is aware of the amount, percentage, accuracy, intention, or motive. It is a private act between the giver and the Receiver. In many ways, the worshiper not only needs to literally let go of the funds, but also spiritually. Concerns of the future, anxiety over financial stability, acquisition of particular goods, investment in various securities, and the quick achievement of dreams and goals are all laid before Jesus Christ, the Lord of lords and King of kings. Not surrendering these funds testifies to the nonlegitimacy of the sovereignty of God for that individual. God's creative power and loving character are replaced with the desire to provide for oneself through the deceit of covetousness, the hunger of avarice, and the idol of materialism. Who else can release us from the power of money? (See 1 Tim. 6:10.)

As a private act to the Lord, it is important to note that we are not responsible for how the tithe is used by those in ministry. How church leaders use these funds is not in our hands but in God's alone. Since He is the owner of this tithe, He will reward and discipline in His own way and in His own time, with divine justice and divine mercy. Questioning, criticizing, and analyzing these activities reveals a lack of focus on Jesus and undue attention toward human beings. When certain individuals have the right authority, opportunity, and attitude, correction and restitution for financial wrongs should and must occur. But to act out God's justice prematurely exposes other aspects of the human heart that are contrary to the original principles of stewardship and God's will.



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Where is Jesus in the midst of the prophecies of Malachi 3:7-12?



Where is Jesus in your stewardship?

What is He saying to you through these texts?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

Prayer: How do you respond to seeing Jesus in this way?



Read more at  
[www.inverseible.org/will11-6](http://www.inverseible.org/will11-6)

First Things First



Review the memory verse.  
How does it apply to your  
life this week?

—————→  
After this week's study of the  
chapter, what are personal  
applications you are convicted of  
in your life?

What are practical applications  
you must make in your school,  
family, workplace, and church?



Read more inSight from the  
Spirit of Prophecy at  
[www.inverseible.org/will11-7](http://www.inverseible.org/will11-7)

**THE RIGHT PLAN**

“Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.’

“This scripture teaches that God, as the Giver of all our benefits, has a claim upon them all; that His claim should be our first consideration; and that a special blessing will attend all who honor this claim.

“Herein is set forth a principle that is seen in all God’s dealings with men. The Lord placed our first parents in the Garden of Eden. He surrounded them with everything that could minister to their happiness, and He bade them acknowledge Him as the possessor of all things. In the garden He caused to grow every tree that was pleasant to the eye or good for food; but among them He made one reserve. Of all else, Adam and Eve might freely eat; but of this one tree God said, ‘Thou shalt not eat of it.’ Here was the test of their gratitude and loyalty to God.

“So the Lord has imparted to us heaven’s richest treasure in giving us Jesus. With Him He has given us all things richly to enjoy. The productions of the earth, the bountiful harvests, the treasures of gold and silver, are His gifts. Houses and lands, food and clothing, He has placed in the possession of men. He asks us to acknowledge Him as the Giver of all things; and for this reason He says, Of all your possessions I reserve a tenth for Myself, besides gifts and offerings, which are to be brought into My storehouse. This is the provision God has made for carrying forward the work of the gospel.

“It was by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who gave His life for the life of the world, that this plan for systematic giving was devised. He who left the royal courts, who laid aside His honor as Commander of the heavenly hosts, who clothed His divinity with humanity in order to uplift the fallen race; He who for our sake became poor that we through His poverty might be rich, has spoken to men, and in His wisdom has told them His own plan for sustaining those who bear His message to the world” (*Counsels on Stewardship*, 65, 66).



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



How have your stewardship habits been challenged?

Why is tithe important for God?

What is the meaning behind the number "one of ten"?

How do policy and auditing systems play into our spiritual development?

How can the concept of storehouse be hijacked?

What does Jesus have to say about tithe?

How do you overcome concerns about potential financial abuses in the church?

What is the end goal of tithes and offerings?

How has God's will for your life changed your financial habits?