A ONE-WAY TRIP

It was not easy for Abraham to explain to his family and acquaintances why he was leaving. He risked losing safety, stability, familiarity, and prosperity by going to an unknown place. If it was nowadays, he couldn’t even Google it, because the place was not defined.

The only information he got was enough: God’s testing Word called him to leave. God assured Abraham what He would do if he obeyed by faith, promising greatness, blessings, land, posterity, and far-reaching meaning and purpose in life. In him all families of the earth would be blessed!

We also cannot see the future when we obey God’s call to give up our plans and dreams to be His missionaries anywhere. When we accept this call, working as His representatives to bless others, God’s Word should be enough for us. All promises made to Abraham and the blessings that he received become ours if we follow his example of faith.

Some of us will also be called to leave our families and to serve God in different places. Others will be called to leave a profitable job, relationships, food, drink, types of destructive entertainment, music, fashion styles, you name it. The bottom line is that it is impossible to follow Jesus without any kind of self-denial. After all, He did the same, leaving heaven to come down to the earth and die for us. Abraham knew that he would not be sponsored by anyone in his missionary work. Instead, it was God Himself. Investing all he had, Abraham departed with all his possessions, leaving nothing behind. He knew that he would never come back. It was a one-way trip, as it always should be with our spiritual journeys with God!
Write out Hebrews 11:8–19 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Hebrews 11:17, 18. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.
PUTTING OTHERS FIRST

Abraham's implicit and full trust in God's providence was key in his dealings with his nephew Lot. When their herdsmen began to fight with each other, Abraham's trust in God enabled him to be courteous and generous to Lot, offering him the option to choose where to go first.

This kind of generosity is a practical expression of trust, believing that nothing in the world will be able to harm you when God is backing you. Nothing! Not even when giving the best part in putting others first! After all, we trust that “all things work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). So “if God is for us, who can be against us?” (v. 31).

Abraham trusted that his wealth, if he were to have any, would ultimately come from God, and not from calculated decisions made from limited human wisdom. After all, not all that seems to be profitable will really be so at the end. Who knows? Sometimes, by applying God's principles and letting others take “the best part” (as Abraham did), you may be avoiding the very thing that would destroy your family and your spiritual life!

Abraham was able to acquire material things without compromising his spiritual walk and relationship with God. While not despising any opportunity for material gain, Abraham's first goal was spiritual—to please God and to develop his spiritual intimacy with Him. He was waiting “for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10), while aiming to follow His principles of life.

On the other hand, Lot's decisions were frequently driven by the profit-first principle, which is a materialistic perspective on how to become rich. His desire for prosperity led him to choose the cities of the plain, surrounded by rich pastures, sophistication, comfort, and ease, without considering the spiritual risks. By doing so, he exposed his family to fatal spiritual and physical dangers.

A worldly, materialistic, sophisticated, and consumerist lifestyle will always erode our desire for heaven and our perception of eternity, turning our focus in gain for this life only. What about the influences upon the family? Children will be more inclined to choose God if they see their parents modeling His character by exercising self-denial and generosity. Lot's greediness led him to a chain of circumstances that exposed his children and wife to corruptive influences that he was unable to counter.

By keeping himself from that wicked atmosphere, Abraham's family was protected from its degrading influences. After Lot left him, God told Abraham that he would not lose anything by being courteous and generous. On the contrary, He asked Abraham to lift his eyes and to look in all directions, reassuring him that he and his descendants would possess that land forever. Abraham's response was to build an altar to the Lord, presenting offerings as a simple act of worship (not a donation), an expression of faith in God’s greatness and of trust in His promises!
AN ACT OF WORSHIP

All the goods, all provisions, and all the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were taken by enemies in a war. Lot and his possessions were also taken. Moved by a sense of justice, Abraham and his 318 trained servants overtook the invaders, attacked them by night, and recovered all the goods and people, including Lot and his goods. (This episode should have taught Lot how fleeting worldly riches are.) According to the customs of that time, risking his life and winning the battle allowed Abraham to keep the spoil for himself. But what happens next?

Abraham was met by two kings: the king of Sodom, and another king who strangely was not involved in that war. Melchizedek was the king of Salem, but also a priest of God, the Most High. It may not be a coincidence that Salem (Jerusalem) was later associated with God's center of worship (Ps. 76:2), His temple and storehouse, and the only place tithe and offerings were to be brought (Deuteronomy 12). Even today, offerings and the tithe must still be brought to God's storehouse (Mal. 3:8–10), a centralized place established by God. From there, the tithe will be equitably distributed exclusively to all who should be supported by it—the authorized ministry (Num. 18:20–24; 1 Cor. 9:13, 14).

This Melchizedek blesses Abraham, pointing to God as the “possessor” of all things, and his protector. Before doing anything, Abraham returns the tithe “of all” (Gen. 14:20) to God's representative, in an act of worship that expresses submission and allegiance to the “Possessor” of all things. It is noteworthy that Abraham did not deduct war expenses before tithing—even though it would have been appropriate.

The absence of any explanation of tithe indicates that it was a common pre-Israelite practice, adopted by God-fearing people since the days of Adam. This principle is still in force in the New Testament era, evidenced by Christ's endorsement of it (Matt. 23:23). The tithe and the Sabbath are holy to the Lord, and the silence of the New Testament about the cancellation of their practice is additional evidence that both have not been repealed by Jesus.

Because tithe is a specific proportion of what was already received (exactly ten percent, no more, no less), it is impossible to tithe without a preceding blessing. Therefore, the act of tithing should express recognition that not only is God the “possessor” of all things, but also that He is the provider of income, or increase.

Consequently, not to return tithe, when there is an income or increase, means not recognizing Him as possessor of all things and the provider of that gain. This practical denial of God's attributes produces great spiritual loss, and frequently leads to apostasy.

As indicated by God, tithe must be given as the right percentage, entirely brought to the right place (the storehouse; Mal. 3:8–10) and allocated for the right purpose—the support of the authorized ministry (Num. 18:20–24; 1 Cor. 9:7–14).
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Exodus 19:5
Psalm 34:15, 16
Galatians 3:6–9, 29
Malachi 3:8–10
Numbers 18:20–24
1 Corinthians 9:7–14

What other verses come to mind in connection with Hebrews 11:8–19?

Review your memorized verse from Hebrews 11:8–19.
AN EXTREME OFFERING

After Abraham returns the tithe of the goods, the king of Sodom asks for the return of the people, but for Abraham to retain the remaining goods, which was according to the custom. Abraham, knowing that any attempt to take advantage of others’ misfortune is considered by God as robbery, returns everything, including all the remaining goods, to the king of Sodom.

After receiving God’s assurance of protection and of a very great reward, Abraham was also promised a son and that his descendants would possess that land! When Abraham was ninety-nine (Genesis 17) and still childless through Sarai, God reaffirmed the covenant with Abraham, explaining that the land would be given to him as an everlasting possession under the condition that his descendants would also keep the covenant (v. 9). When children, after inheriting God’s properties from their pious parents, fall away from the faith, they essentially move God’s properties with them to Satan’s side, and will use the resources to strengthen the enemy’s cause. Since Adam, the rejection of the covenant (apostasy) has always implied the loss of God’s covenantal possessions.

When Abraham and Sarah finally received Isaac, their joy was so great and their emotions so moved that they were at a great risk of idolizing the child. The gift was not to be more important than the Giver. Therefore, God asks Abraham to offer Isaac in sacrifice, and specified a place where this sacrifice should be offered. It was the same place God would later also establish His temple and storehouse—the right place for delivering tithes and offerings.

Abraham now trembles at the realization that God will always require undivided allegiance. Paraphrasing theologian and missionary physician Albert Schweitzer, Abraham knew that if you have something that you cannot give back to Him, you don’t own it; it owns you, and will finally destroy you.

Accordingly, Abraham obeys and departs, walking side by side with his offering. When his arm was lifted to kill that precious gift, he was halted by a voice from heaven! God states, “now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Gen. 22:12). This extreme test indicates that only those who will not withhold anything from God are recognized as subjects in His kingdom.

Lifting his eyes, Abraham sees a ram and offers it in place of Isaac, calling that spot “The-Lord-Will-Provide.” In one sense, God always provides our offerings, for we cannot bring anything to Him unless He has provided us with something beforehand.

But in a prophetic way, this name (“The-Lord-Will-Provide”) points to an Offering that would later be presented in that same place. A Son, provided by God, Jesus Christ, would die as His offering to all humanity. It is the death of the Son of God alone that makes available to us the repentance, forgiveness, redemption, and all other blessings that we need!
**THE TEST OF TITHE**

Many are still tested as was Abraham. They do not hear the voice of God speaking directly from the heavens, but He calls them by the teachings of His word and the events of His providence. They may be required to abandon a career that promises wealth and honor, to leave congenial and profitable associations, and separate from kindred, to enter upon what appears to be only a path of self-denial, hardship, and sacrifice. God has a work for them to do; but a life of ease and the influence of friends and kindred would hinder the development of the very traits essential for its accomplishment. He calls them away from human influences and aid, and leads them to feel the need of His help, and to depend upon Him alone, that He may reveal Himself to them. Who is ready at the call of Providence to renounce cherished plans and familiar associations? Who will accept new duties and enter untried fields, doing God's work with firm and willing heart, for Christ's sake counting his losses gain? He who will do this has the faith of Abraham, and will share with him that “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” with which “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared.” 2 Corinthians 4:17; Romans 8:18. (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1890], 126, 127.)

The tithe is set apart for a special use. It is not to be regarded as a poor fund. It is to be especially devoted to the support of those who are bearing God's message to the world; and it should not be diverted from this purpose. (Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship* [Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1940], p. 103.)

I was shown that it is wrong to use the tithe for defraying the incidental expenses of the church. . . . you are robbing God every time that you put your hands into the treasury for funds to meet the running expenses of the church. (E. G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, 103.)

The [tithing] system . . . enjoined upon the Hebrews has not been repealed or relaxed by the One who originated it. Instead of being of no force now, it was to be more fully carried out and more extended, as salvation through Christ alone should be more fully brought to light in the Christian age. (E. G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, 75, 76.)

The New Testament does not reenact the law of the tithe, as it does not that of the Sabbath; for the validity of both is assumed, and their deep spiritual import explained. (E. G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, 66.)

The Lord made a special covenant with men, that if they would regularly set apart the portion designated for the advancement of Christ's kingdom, the Lord would bless them abundantly, so that there would not be room to receive His gifts. But if men withhold that which belongs to God, the Lord plainly declares, “Ye are cursed with a curse.” (E. G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, 77.)
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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.

By the custom of war, it was accepted for Abraham to keep the spoil, but he didn’t take advantage of the unfortunate dwellers of Sodom. What kind of lawful or accepted customs of your culture are not strictly in line with God’s law of love and justice?

Does God require tithe from someone who has no income? Why? Explain.

How do you know that tithe is exactly 10 percent of income? Which Bible verse explains that tithe is 10 percent?

With Abraham’s example in mind, should tithe be given from the net or from the gross? In which circumstances could tithe be given from the net?

What indications can be found in the Bible that the tithing principle is still valid in the New Testament era?

What indications from Abraham’s story show that tithing includes all our earnings, not just agricultural and livestock goods?

Abraham: The Faithful Giver