

### The Abram Method for Financial Planning.

*Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five. Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills. The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.*

*One who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshcol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.*

*After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).*

*Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

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

*But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share."*

There are all kinds of financial planning programs out there. There is the old envelope system where you put cash in envelopes labeled, "Groceries," "Gas," "Personal," and so on. Another popular method is the Dave Ramsey method. I found information on others including Saving Benjamins, Get Money, and one called the Mr. Money Mustache. All of them are designed to help you plan your money so you get and stay out of debt and save for the future.

We have one more financial plan before us today. You heard about it in our Old Testament reading earlier. I call it the Abram Financial Plan. Maybe we should consider this because it shows faith in God and honors him.

First, let me give a bit of context to our Old Testament reading. It is pretty frustrating listening to American politics. People seem to be fighting with each other over partisan lines. But our system of government isn't all that bad when you compare it with others. In ancient days, you settled political differences by raising an army, conquering your opponents, taking all their money and captives back to your home country, and then forcing them to pay extremely high taxes. I'll take our form of government over that any day.

That is what happened in the days of Abram. The Kings in Canaan, modern day Israel, where Abram lived, had been paying high taxes to the four kings from the east, around modern Iraq. After about 12 years those Canaanite kings including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah stopped paying their taxes. The four eastern kings came back with an army and humiliated them in battle. They took their money, charged high taxes again, and carried off captives. Politics as usual.

Normally Abram paid little attention to local politics. But he got involved now because one of those captives was his nephew, Lot. Abram mustered his 318 trained men from his herds and got a couple allies and he chased down those eastern kings. Abram devised a perfect battle plan. He attacked at night. He also split his force into several parts and attacked from all sides. This so thoroughly confused the eastern kings that their men panicked and they were decisively beaten. Abram rescued Lot. Abram and his allies also had a whole battlefield of loot and spoils for their taking: gold, silver, horses, a lot of it.

What should Abram do with all his loot? Well, two men came to Abram with two separate financial plans. ***"After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."***

We know almost nothing about Melchizedek. We know he was a believer. We know he came from Salem. Salem would later become known as Jerusalem or Jeru-SALEM. We also know from Hebrews that he would become a type of Christ. Finally, he gave Abram a sermon. What should you hear in a sermon? Well, sermons really shouldn't be about us. Sure, they should apply things to us and give us guidance, but sermons really are suppose to be about God and what he does for us. And that is what Melchizedek preached on. ***"Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."*** It was God who gave Abram success, not his tactics, not his allies, not the fact he attacked at night. God defeated his enemies.

And how did Abram respond? ***"Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."*** Note that Melchizedek didn't ask or demand

a tenth. This was hundreds of years before tithing or 10% offerings would be part of the Sinai covenant. This came from the heart. Abram wanted to honor God with 10% of everything.

Compare that with the financial advice the other person gave him. ***“The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.”*** This makes sense. I mean, he did win the battle. To the victor goes the spoils. Just think of what Abram could do with all that money? What could you do if you got tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars?

But note Abram’s response. ***“But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share.”*** Apparently Abram made a promise to the Lord before the battle. He wasn’t in it for money or glory. He just wanted to rescue Lot so he would give it all back. He is going to keep his word. Besides, he didn’t want anyone to think that he was rich because of this king from Sodom. No. He wanted everyone to know that it was God that blesses him.

From a normal, worldly point of view, Abram followed the wrong financial advice. He suddenly came upon a lot of wealth, but he gave it all away. In fact, he was poorer because he gave 10% out of his pocket to the Lord. He took a step backward. But to show he was generous with his own wealth, he said his allies should keep their share of the spoils.

But Abram wasn’t looking at things from a worldly point of view, and we don’t, either. Abram understood God had blessed him in so many ways. And God will continue to bless him as his descendants will number like the stars including the Messiah. So Abram was generous with his earthly possessions: generous to his friends, generous to strangers, and generous to God. The truth is, God doesn’t need our offerings. He is the Lord who created everything from nothing. He may not need our offerings, but I suggest that we need to give offerings to him.

We need to make offerings to the Lord because of all his blessings. Melchizedek gave a brief sermon on how God defeated Abram’s enemies. That should be the kind of sermon we need to hear. But which enemies do we face today? Sin, death and the devil. That descendant of Abram came, God himself, Jesus Christ. He came for the purpose of defeating the devil for us. And he did this by defeating sin for us. Like Melchizedek, Jesus is a priest. Only he made the ultimate sacrifice for our sins by offering himself on the cross. We sinned, but as far as God is concerned, sin is as far away from us as the east is from the west. And with the defeat of sin comes the defeat of death. We may hear that someone lost the battle against some disease. No they haven’t. The believer may die on earth, but Christ is coming back. He doesn’t just save our souls; he saves our bodies as we will all rise to eternal life.

Abram’s offering also showed that he trusted the Lord. It took faith on his part when he went to battle. His troops were not professional soldiers, yet he trusted in the Lord to protect him. But his faith didn’t stop after the battle. Thankful for the victory God gave him, he continued to trust in him as he made his offering of 10% of everything. It takes faith to give offerings back to the Lord. If you are generous especially in your offerings, it means you have less for bills, food and retirement. The generous Christian will live on less than everybody else. But he continues to be generous because he or she believes the Lord because the tells us not to worry for God knows what he needs. And do you remember what Paul stated earlier: we brought nothing into this world and we will take nothing out of it? So, why does God bless us with things in this world? So we can use them for God and be generous with them because we don’t take them with us.

Like Abram, God doesn’t need our gifts, but he encourages us to use for his work here on earth. There was nothing more exciting for me than when my dad worked in his little work room in the basement. I would watch as a kid. And then he asked, “Do you like to help?” He and I then would cut that piece of wood or drill that hole. Fun. God turns to believers like us and asks, “Would you like to help?” And we do. We share our faith. We support the gospel. We make offerings to him and then turn around and use them for his gospel like the school, Sunday School, synod missions to send out missionaries, and so on.

And finally, we need to give because it is a confession of faith. Abram’s offering let it be known that he loved his Lord. Someone who makes sure his family is well clothed while he wears worn out shoes tells people he cares for his family more than himself. Our offerings can tell people that we love and trust the Lord and honor him.

That is Abram’s financial plan. On paper, it doesn’t look so good. It means living with less. But in Abram’s heart and in God’s eyes, it was the perfect financial plan. It is because Abram showed that he was using his gifts from God for what they were intended, for good here on earth. And his offering lets the world, and Lord willing all of us, how much God did for him and how much that meant to him.

So, like Melchizedek we will not tax you and God certainly does not tell you how much to give. Abram chose 10% because it is generous. But it is a way to show God how much we love him and trust him. It gives us a chance to join in. Give this plan a try and see what happens. Amen.