

## THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: VICTOR TASHO HOUTEFF'S UNDERSTANDING OF TITHING OBLIGATIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS IMPACT ON THE UNITY AND MISSION OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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The Seventh-day Adventist Church acknowledges the significance of a correct biblical understanding of tithing in promoting unity and advancing its mission.

However, the views of Victor Houteff, a former member of the church who later founded the Davidian Seventh-day Adventist movement, have sparked controversy and division. Houteff's initial rejection of tithing as a ceremonial Mosaic law practice was later replaced with a modified acceptance, but with a crucial caveat: he believed that tithes should be funneled to his own organization rather than the official church administrative offices. This departure from both biblical principles and mainstream Adventist theology has had profound consequences, leading to disunity, and hindering the church's mission efforts. This research explores the impact of Houteff's unconventional views on tithing, uncovering the inconsistencies in his teachings and the negative effects on the church.

By carefully analyzing primary sources and historical accounts, this study

highlights the importance of a correct understanding of tithing in promoting unity and advancing the church's mission. To address the issues stemming from Houteff's teachings, the study proposes a multi-faceted approach, including enhanced training and education, regular strategy evaluation, a strengthened review process, and a comprehensive teaching approach that emphasizes clear biblical support for the denominational "storehouse" and global mission.

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OF TITHING OBLIGATIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS  
IMPACT ON THE UNITY AND MISSION OF THE  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

A thesis

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

by

Claudious Makiwa

April 2025



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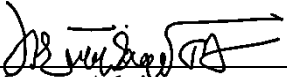
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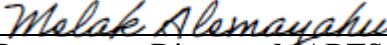
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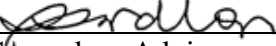
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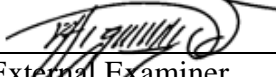
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With profound gratitude, I dedicate this thesis to the Divine Source of all knowledge and wisdom. This achievement is also a tribute to my beloved wife, Pamela, whose unwavering support has been my constant pillar of strength. Moreover, I extend this dedication to our children, Panashe, Simbarashe, Tinashe, and Ruvarashe, whose boundless love and encouragement have been an unwavering source of inspiration throughout my educational journey.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

**Background of the Study**

The influence of Victor Houteff,<sup>1</sup> the founder of “the Davidian Seventh-day Adventist (DSDA) movement” also referred to as “the Shepherd’s Rod”<sup>2</sup> on the unity and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church cannot be underestimated.<sup>3</sup> According to Albert Waite, the VH influenced offshoot is known to be the most damaging of many of the Adventist Church breakaways of his time.<sup>4</sup> His group is believed to be the foster parent of other splinter groups like “The Eleventh Hour Adventist Remnant Church-Isaac Branch; Calendar Research Organization, International; [and] The Root of Jesse.”<sup>5</sup>

Some of the fundamental teachings of Victor Houteff included his purported “reformation” drive of the Seventh day Adventist Church. His call as the new “divine

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<sup>1</sup> Also referred as to VH, or simply Houteff, in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> George W. Reid, “The Branch Davidians: Who Are They?” *Adventist Review*, April 1993, 5; The Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Church, *Conflict in Texas: A Report and Analysis of the Koresh Movement* (Exeter, MO: Universal, 1997), 6; The Davidian Seventh-day Adventists (DSDAs) were commonly known as the Shepherd’s Rod movement after its first publication. Victor Tasho Houteff, *The Shepherd’s Rod* (Waco, TX: Davidian Seventh-day Adventists Association, 1930), 1:32.

<sup>3</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia (SDAE)*, rev. ed., (1976), s.v. “Davidian SDA’s-Shepherd’s Rod.”

<sup>4</sup> See Albert A. C. Waite, “From Seventh-day Adventism to David Koresh: The British Connection,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 38, no. 1 (2000): 107-126.

<sup>5</sup> Reid, “The Branch Davidians,” 6; The Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Church, *Conflict in Texas*, 6.

messenger” after the death of Ellen White.<sup>6</sup> His divine selection to “sanctify” the SDA Church, through the unveiling of Revelation’s seven seals and the gathering of the 144,000 to establish a Palestinian Kingdom under the rulership of David.<sup>7</sup> These together with his theology of tithing made him unpopular among the Adventist loyalists.

Initially, VH believed that tithing was invalid in today’s Church because it was part of the ceremonial law.<sup>8</sup> Later he made a U-turn and accepted its obligation, but questioned the place where it was to be stored.<sup>9</sup> While the SDA Church defines the storehouse as her administrative offices<sup>10</sup> where these tithes are remitted,<sup>11</sup> Houteff, believed the storehouse was to be an organization with the present truth, which was, as he claimed, the DSDA.<sup>12</sup>

While a lot has been written about his views on apocalypticism and their effects on the functionality of the SDA Church,<sup>13</sup> little is mentioned about his

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<sup>6</sup> “Ellen G. White,” Wikipedia, last modified 2024, accessed May 15, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ellen\\_G.\\_White&oldid=1290237238](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ellen_G._White&oldid=1290237238).

<sup>7</sup> *SDAE*, s.v. “Davidian SDA’s-Shepherd’s Rod.”

<sup>8</sup> Victor Houteff, “The Revival and Reformation Crowned with the Purification,” *Timely Greetings*, March 6, 1948, 30, <https://www.bdsda.com/authors/victor-houteff/timely-greetings/timely-greetings-vol-2-nos-29-30/>.

<sup>9</sup> Lowell Tarling, *The Edges of Seventh-day Adventism: A Study of Separatist Groups Emerging from the Seventh-day Adventist Church (1844-1980) Including the Worldwide ... David Koresh & His Followers at Waco Texas* (Aldinga, Australia: Galilee, 1981), 113.

<sup>10</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists—Overseeing the World Church,” 2023, accessed July 16, 2023, <https://www.adventist.org/world-church/general-conference/>.

<sup>11</sup> G. Edward Reid, *Where Do We Bring Our Tithe?: In Search of the Storehouse* (Silver Spring, MD: Stewardship Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Houteff, “The Revival and Reformation Crowned with the Purification.”

<sup>13</sup> David Bromley and Edward D. Silver, “The Branch Davidians: A Social Profile and Organisational History,” in *America’s Alternative Religions*, ed. Timothy Miller (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 149-158.

theology on tithing and how it seems to negatively affect the unity and mission of the church.

Consequently, this study endeavors to explore Victor's understanding and theological interpretation of tithing and how it negatively affects the SDA Church. To meet the demands of this set goal, a biblical analysis and assessment of Victor Houteff's theological and historical views on tithing will be conducted.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Victor Tasho Houteff's understanding of the tithing system as practiced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, among other things, led him and his followers to leave the church and form a splinter group now known as the Davidians.<sup>14</sup> Many continue to leave the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church today on the same grounds.<sup>15</sup> The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that tithing was instituted by God Himself at creation and continued in the Christian era when Jesus reaffirmed it during His earthly ministry (Matt 23:23).<sup>16</sup> However, while the SDA Church sees its conferences<sup>17</sup> as the storehouses where these tithes are to be remitted,<sup>18</sup> Houteff, believes the storehouse is

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<sup>14</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Committee, *The Story of "The Shepherd's Rod"* (Washington, DC: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1955), 3-27.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Angel M. Rodriguez, *Tithing in the New Testament and the Christian Church* (Silver Spring, MD: Stewardship Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2003); Leiland Wilson, "The Old Testament and Tithe," ed. Ralph G. Turnbull, *Baker's Dictionary of Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1967), 357; C. G. Tuland, "Tithing in the New Testament," *Ministry*, October 1961, 12.

<sup>17</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists—Overseeing the World Church."

<sup>18</sup> Reid, *Where Do We Bring Our Tithe?*

with his group, the Davidians, who—he claims—were mandated by God to preach the present truth.<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, Houteff's skepticism is an ongoing threat to the SDA Church's unity and its mission as they stand in opposition to the divine directive for harmony within the body of Christ, as emphasized in Romans 12:4, 5, 16 and Ephesians 4:3.<sup>20</sup> Just like Christ and his disciples worked together to maintain a supportive unity of mission, the today's church needs to emulate the same to advance her God given mandate.<sup>21</sup>

In consideration of the arguments presented, this research raises the following questions: What is Houteff's understanding of tithing obligations? How does his understanding of tithing compare with the SDA interpretation of it? Furthermore, what are the effects of his theological understanding of tithing on the unity and mission of the SDA Church?

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study exposes VTH's understanding of tithing theology and elaborates on its implications on the mission and unity of the SDA Church. The findings of this study will strengthen the Church's theological position on tithing, which will promote and foster its unity of purpose in the fulfilment of its God given mission.

### **Significance of the Study**

Understanding how VTH viewed the Adventist theology of tithing is of vital importance for the church and its individual members. To the Church, it fosters

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<sup>19</sup> Houteff, "The Revival and Reformation Crowned with the Purification."

<sup>20</sup> Seventh-day Adventist Church, "How Adventists Promote Unity in the Body of Christ," accessed July 9, 2023, <https://www.adventist.org/unity-in-the-body-of-christ/>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

member retention, improves giving patterns of its members and enables mission advancement in unity. To individuals it brings confidence in the teachings of the church.

### **Delimitations of Study**

This study will focus on VTH's teaching on tithing from 1885 to 1955. It may refer to "the Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventists (BDSAs)," a subsequent splinter group from Houteff's "Shepherd's Rod" (SRod), latter known as the Davidian Seventh-day Adventist (DSDA). Both the BDSA and the DSDA will help in giving a holistic understanding of Houteff's views on tithing.

### **Research Methodology**

This study uses primary and secondary source materials. Chapter one introduces the background, problem statement, purpose, significance and delimitation of study. Chapter two deals with the Biblical understanding of tithing. Chapters three outlines the life of Houteff and his theology of tithing. Chapter four will give an analysis of the implications of Houteff's tithing beliefs on the unity and mission of the SDA Church. Finally, chapter five will give a synopsis of the findings and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF TITHING

This chapter establishes and explores the biblical meaning of tithing and the storehouse. This endeavour provides the framework within which one needs to understand and assess VH's views on tithing and why his understanding adversely affects the mission and unity of the SDA Church both in his time and currently.

The concept of "tithing" originates from the meaning "to pay or give a tenth part."<sup>1</sup> In the Old Testament, there are two primary words that relate to "tithing." The first is "ma'aser," which literally translates to "a tenth part," derived from the Hebrew verb meaning "to give a tenth of one's harvest." Under the Levitical system, ma'aser referred to the requirement of setting aside one-tenth of the harvest to support the temple services and the priesthood.<sup>2</sup>

Another Hebrew term connected to tithing is "asar," signifying "ten" or "a tenth." Asar embodies the foundational proportional concept of one-tenth that is inherently in the practice of tithing (Mal 3:8-10). These tithes sustained the work of the Levitical priests in the temple (Num 18:21, 24). The Greek language of the NT contains specific words related to tithing. The word "dekatē" literally means "a tenth portion," analogous to the Hebrew term "Asar" for tithe. Additionally, in Matthew

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<sup>1</sup> J. Avanzini, "Are Tithes and Offerings the Same?" accessed 23 March 2024, <https://www.scribd.com/document/488803346/John-Avanzini-Are-Tithes-and-Offerings-the-Same>.

<sup>2</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, rev., New American Standard Bible (Chattanooga, TN: AMG International, 2008), 176.

23:23, the verb “apodekatōō” is used, which means “to pay or give a tenth.”<sup>3</sup> The presence of these terms in the biblical text indicates that the concept and practice of tithing was linguistically preserved and carried over from the Old Testament into the New Testament era as well as in the early Church.

In both Hebrew and Greek, the core meaning behind the words translated as “tithe” conveys the fundamental notion of a tenth portion or 10%. While using the term “tithe” rather than explicitly stating “ten percent,” the biblical tithing system revolves around this key proportional concept. Therefore, according to the original Hebrew and Greek definitions, “tithe” intrinsically signifies “a tenth” or “ten percent.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Tithing Obligation in the Old Testament**

The practice of tithing was an ancient custom predating the nation of Israel, observed by Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Canaanites. Smith notes there are seventeen biblical references to tithing, spanning from Genesis 14:28 to Hebrews 7:1-10 in the New Testament, indicating this system was significantly practiced among various peoples.<sup>5</sup> The biblical basis for tithing is rooted in the Old Testament laws and principles outlined in the Hebrew Scriptures. Tithing is not merely a command but a principle.<sup>6</sup> The Bible outlines three areas of tithing practice. The first tithe required the Israelites to give one-tenth of their produce to the Levites (Num 18:24). The second tithe obligated the Levites to tithe a tenth of what they received to the priests

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<sup>3</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 10th ed., 1993, s.v. “Tithe.”

<sup>4</sup> Prince E. Peters, “Deontology of New Testament Tithing: An Analysis,” *Theologia Viatorum* 45, no. 1 (2021): a102.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary 32 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 333.

<sup>6</sup> Robert J. Kloosterhuis, “Where Is the Storehouse,” *Ministry*, August 1997, 14-17.

(Num 18:26). These were legislative tithes, along with those mentioned in Malachi 3:10. As Raven pointed out, “what is in Leviticus 27 is a systematization of an ancient practice.”<sup>7</sup> Meaning tithing did not originate with the Levites nor was it intended to end with them.<sup>8</sup> The third tithe was given triennially, except in the seventh year, to assist the poor. This practice aimed to provide support for those in need during specific intervals while ensuring the overall well-being of the community (Deut 26:12).

### **Pre-Mosaic Period**

Although found in the Hebrew Scriptures, the practice of tithing did not originate with the Hebrews themselves. Biblically, tithing was an ancient tradition broadly practiced throughout the ancient Near East.<sup>9</sup> This practice was reaffirmed at Mount Sinai in accordance with God’s covenant with Jacob. The patriarchal narratives in Genesis point to both Abraham and Jacob as examples of pre-Mosaic law practicing the principle of tithing (Gen 14:20; 28:22). Abraham gave tithes from the plundered loot he acquired after battling against the king of Sodom and his allies. Later, Jacob tithed in fulfilment of the vow he had made while on his way from Laban’s home.

Regarding Jacob’s vow to give a tenth (tithe) in Genesis 28:22, Rodriguez noted that while the biblical account does not explicitly state to whom or when Jacob fulfilled this vow, it can reasonably be inferred that he likely did so. This is because

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<sup>7</sup> John Howard Raven, *History of the Religion of Israel in Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 118.

<sup>8</sup> F. Meyrick, “Commentary on Leviticus,” *The Pulpit Commentary*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950), 2:58-60.

<sup>9</sup> For the ancient Near Eastern evidence, see Moshe Weinfeld and Cecil Roth, “Tithe,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, Israel: McMillan, 1971), 1156-1162.

the Scriptures do not provide any evidence that would contradict or call into question Jacob's adherence to the vow he made.<sup>10</sup> These two biblical passages explicitly demonstrate the practice of tithing before the issuance of the Mosaic law.<sup>11</sup> In both instances, Abraham and Jacob gave tithes from their increases, well before the establishment of the Levitical law system.<sup>12</sup> Rodriguez argues that tithing is applicable to Christians, as it transcends the Levitical system and is rooted in Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek, demonstrating its universal and timeless nature.<sup>13</sup>

**Motivations for tithing.** The motivations behind Abraham and Jacob's acts of tithing differed. For example, Abraham, offered a tithe to Melchizedek the priest as an honour to God after the victory granted to him. For Jacob, his vow and tithing seem to be part of a bargain he struck with God. He vowed that, if God protected him, provided for him, and brought him back to his forefathers' land, then he would make God his God, build Him a house, and give Him a tithe of everything. So for Jacob, it was part of a two-way commitment with God.

As observed by Verhoef, tithing has the broader purpose of acknowledging God's sovereignty.<sup>14</sup> Both Abraham and Jacob acknowledged God's reign in their hearts by tithing. Their pre-law tithes arose voluntarily out of gratitude and religious devotion. They established the background principle of giving back a portion of one's

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<sup>10</sup> Angel Manuel Rodriguez, *Tithing in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Silver Spring, MD: Stewardship Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 73.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 14:18-20; 28:22. "Abraham gave tithes of his loot to Melchizedek, the Priest, and King of Salem (Gen. 14:20), Jacob vowed to the Lord that he would give tithes of everything as a show of gratitude to the Lord for protection.

<sup>12</sup> David A. Croteau, *Perspectives on Tithing: 4 Views* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Rodriguez, *Tithing in the New Testament and the Christian Church*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 47.

increase to honour God, even before specific commands were instituted.<sup>15</sup> In this instance, tithing is a personal decision. Abraham and Jacob's participation shows that the practice was customary.

**Theological basis of tithing.** Wilson outlined some guiding principles found in the tithing practices of Abraham and Jacob. The first principle shows that God is the creator, and “without the biblical concept of creation, tithing lacks solid meaning.”<sup>16</sup> The blessing of Abraham by God through Melchizedek, which prompted Abraham to give him tithes, signifies that tithing is a response, not a prelude.

The third principle is that tithing stems not only from God's blessings but also His preservations of human life (verse 20); it was God who gave Abraham victory in the war. Jacob's tithe showed his commitment to God (Gen 28:21) and trust in God's providence. God had promised Jacob protection (v 28:15), descendants (v14), land (v13), and goods (v20), and Jacob vowed a tithe in return as confirmation of his recognition of God's ownership.

Another foundational principle is that tithing is an act of worship. The tithe vow Jacob made was in the context of worshipping after his encounter with God. As one scholar notes, “Tithing is imitating God, just as sabbath-keeping is imitating God.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the act of tithing is presented as a form of worship - an acknowledgment of God's ownership and an imitation of His character. The holiness ascribed to the tithe highlights tithing's theological underpinnings stemming from God's role as Creator.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For the ancient Near Eastern evidence, see Weinfeld and Roth, “Tithe,” 1156-1162.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson, “The Old Testament and Tithe,” 357.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, “The Old Testament and Tithe,” 359.

## Post-Mosaic Period

In the post-Mosaic era of the Old Testament, the concept of tithing held great significance in ancient Israelite society. The practice evolved over time, with the recipients shifting from the Levites during the First Temple period to the priests at the beginning of the Second Temple period under Ezra's leadership. After the Second Temple's destruction, tithing reverted to supporting the Levites once again.

**The first tithe.** The first tithe known as the Levite Tithe, formed the foundation of the biblical tithing system commanded by God. The Israelites were required to give one-tenth of their annual agricultural yields and income to the tribe of Levi, who were set apart for religious service without an allotted territory.<sup>19</sup> This 10% tithe sustained the Levitical priests for the first six years of every seven-year cycle, but no tithe was collected during the seventh Sabbath year.<sup>20</sup> Several passages like Leviticus 27 and Numbers 18 outline this commandment, portraying the tithe as holy and belonging to the Lord to support His ministers.

After the Babylonian exile, the prophet Malachi strongly rebuked the people for robbing God by failing to give their full tithes and offerings. A technical analysis of the Hebrew words reveals the severity of withholding the sacred tithe due to the Lord.<sup>21</sup> Malachi used emphatic language, declaring they were cheating and deceiving

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<sup>19</sup> Rodriguez, *Tithing in the Writings of Ellen G. White*, 73.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator*, vol. 3, *Isaiah* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1981), 21.

<sup>21</sup> H. A. Brongers, *Die Sehuzal in Der Bible Und in Ihrer Umwelt* (Veenman, Germany: Wageningen, 1966), 30-32.

God by keeping what rightfully belonged to Him. The verb “bring” בא (bo) implies the physical action of transporting the tithes to the temple.<sup>22</sup>

Severe consequences were given as warning for failure to remit the full tithes due to the Levites. After the exile, the Israelites renewed their commitment to tithe the firstfruits to the priests serving at the Jerusalem temple (Neh 10:37). This act demonstrated obedience and trust in God’s provision if they honored Him first with the choicest portions.<sup>23</sup> Their tithing renewal was part of a larger covenant renewal ceremony, recommitting them to following the Law of Moses.<sup>24</sup>

In summary, Malachi forcefully condemned the post-exilic community for brazenly robbing God by withholding tithes and service from the priesthood. The people’s subsequent repentance and tithing resumption signified a return to covenant faithfulness with an unchanging divine principle.

**The second tithe.** Alongside the initial tithe given to the Levites, the Israelites were also instructed to allocate a separate, second tithe from the yields of their agricultural endeavors. This second tithing obligation entailed setting aside one-tenth of their annual crops and livestock during the first, second, fourth, and fifth years of every seven-year cyclical period (Deut 14:22-26). However, unlike the first tithe which was given away, the second tithe belonged to the Israelite families themselves.

They were instructed to bring this portion to Jerusalem and consume it there while celebrating the annual religious festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. If

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<sup>22</sup> Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 334-335. Linguistically, according to Botterweck, the verb בא “bo” is a causative hiphil<sup>22</sup> verb expressing the need for personal action - “cause yourself to carry.” In simple terms, the statement, bring ye means cause yourself to carry.

<sup>23</sup> Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, New American Commentary 3B (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2000), 123.

<sup>24</sup> Maurice Ashton, “Tithing: A Hebrew Perspective,” Sabbath School Net, accessed March 12, 2024, <https://ssnet.org/blog/tithing-a-hebrew-perspective/>.

the sanctuary was too distant, they could convert the tithe into money to purchase food and drink for the celebrations in the holy city. Essentially, the second tithe system instituted a divinely mandated saving program. By annually setting aside this 10% portion, the Israelite families could save up the necessary means to make the required pilgrimage to Jerusalem for celebrations and renewal of their covenant with God.

**Third tithe.** Beyond the first tithe devoted to the Levites and the second tithe designated for personal religious observances, the biblical tithing system incorporated a third tithe aimed at providing for the underprivileged segments of society. The biblical instructions in Deuteronomy 14 mandated rendering a tithe specifically for the poor once every three years, during the third and sixth years of the seven-year agricultural cycle. This entailed setting aside an additional tenth portion of all crop yields and livestock.

More than just a charitable donation, this tithe for the poor represented an act of spiritual obedience integrally linked to practically providing care for the needy members of society. It established an institutionalized support system woven into the fabric of Israelite communal life, promoting a collective sense of responsibility and inclusion.

## **Summary**

This section outlined the OT tithing obligation, covering both the pre-Mosaic and post-Mosaic periods. It describes the three main types of tithes:

1. The First Tithe given to the Levites for their religious duties.
2. The Second Tithe kept by Israelites to fund festival celebrations in Jerusalem.
3. The Third Tithe given every three years to support the poor and underprivileged.

Finally, it examined the patriarchal motivations for tithing, and its theological basis.

### **Storehouse in the Old Testament**

The term “storehouse” originates from the Hebrew noun ‘otsar, which signifies treasure. When we encounter the phrase “Bring ye the tithes and offerings into the storehouse,” it specifically refers to the house of treasure.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, the term “storehouse” does not merely denote the items stored within, but rather the place of storage itself. The Hebrew word otsar, encompasses meanings such as depository, cellar, garner, armory, store, or treasure-house. It is the most frequently used word for describing treasure. In practical terms, the storehouse served as a facility that held the supplies for the priests and Levites.

It functioned as a warehouse for the produce sent by Israel.<sup>26</sup> During Bible times, tithes and offerings were brought to the temple and deposited in storerooms specifically designated for offerings of fruits, grains, and monetary contributions. These storage chambers were also referred to as treasuries during the reign of kings (as seen in passages like 1 Chr 9:26, 28; 28:11, 12). The Israelites diligently maintained a storehouse within the temple premises. This practice was essential for God’s provision to those who served in the Temple, especially the Levites, who did not possess their own land. By centralizing provisions in these storehouses, the livelihoods of priests and Levites were effectively supported. In the context of

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<sup>25</sup> G. Wyper, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 4:631.

<sup>26</sup> David Weston Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: An Introduction and Commentary*, New International Version Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 123.

Malachi 3:10, where the concept of tithing is discussed, the “storehouse” unequivocally refers to God’s house—the place of worship for His people.

In the Old Testament, this place of worship was either the tabernacle or the temple. Notably, there is no provision for tithes to be deposited anywhere else besides this designated place of worship.<sup>27</sup> Even tithes intended for aliens, fatherless, and widows every third year were still given through the priests serving at the temple. The indirect object in this context refers to the term “storehouse.” In Hebrew, the transliteration for “storehouse” is ‘ôśār, which encompasses meanings such as “treasury,” “storehouse,” “storeroom,” and “storage vault.” Based on this, we can infer that the nation of Israel is being instructed to bring one-tenth of something that has been set apart into the designated storehouse—God’s house of worship.<sup>28</sup>

### **Pre-Exilic View on Storehouse**

In ancient times, the concept of tithing had its origins with Abraham, who gave a tithe to Melchizedek, the high priest. During this period, Melchizedek was regarded as the storehouse, since there was no physical temple constructed as yet. Before the Israelites entered Canaan, they were instructed to give all tithes to the Lord (Gen 14:20). The Lord designated the Levites as the recipients of these tithes in exchange for their service in the temple (Num 18:21). The Levites themselves were also required to tithe (Num 18:28).

In the initial years of David’s kingship, the ark of God was transferred to Jerusalem. Although no physical temple structure existed at that juncture, Jerusalem gained recognition as the centralized location for worship and effectively functioned

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<sup>27</sup> Kloosterhuis, “Where Is the Storehouse,” 15.

<sup>28</sup> Mattathias Johnson, “Exegetical Word Study Assignment: Malachi 3:10” (Term Paper, South Florida Bible College and Theological Seminary, 2022), 3.

as a storehouse (2 Sam 6). Subsequently, Solomon undertook the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem, solidifying its status as a permanent, dedicated storehouse.<sup>29</sup> Over time, the practice of bringing tithes to the 48 Levitical cities was phased out. Instead, all Israelites began to directly bring their required tithes and offerings to the Temple storehouse in Jerusalem.

For instance, during Hezekiah's reign, he commanded people living in Judah's cities to bring tithes and offerings to Jerusalem. This shift suggests that after the division of the 12 tribes, the 48 Levitical cities no longer functioned as storehouses.<sup>30</sup> The author further emphasized that it became more practical to return all tithes and offerings directly to the Jerusalem Temple. Consequently, during the monarchy, the Temple in Jerusalem served as the centralized location for storing and distributing tithes and offerings, replacing the previous system of regional Levitical cities from acting as storehouses.

### **Post-Exilic View on Storehouse**

During Nehemiah's absence, the practice of tithing was neglected, but upon his return, the system was reinstated. Nehemiah, a leader during the post-exilic period, reintroduced the tithing system as it had been practiced previously. Levites were responsible for collecting tithes and bringing a portion of those tithes to the Temple storehouse. Men were appointed to oversee the chambers where tithes and offerings were gathered according to the law (Neh 12:44).

The prophet Malachi, a contemporary of Nehemiah, emphasized the divine command to faithfully bring the full tithe. This was essential to ensure an adequate

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<sup>29</sup> Kloosterhuis, "Where Is the Storehouse," 15.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

supply of provisions in God's house for the Levites who ministered there. Although local remittance of tithes to Levites occurred at times, during Nehemiah and Malachi's era, the storehouse unambiguously referred to the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>31</sup> It served as the centralized collection and distribution centre for tithes and offerings. The storehouse concept persisted throughout both eras, but its significance and application evolved. Whether pre-Exilic or post-Exilic, the central focus remained on sustaining God's house through faithful tithing and giving.

### **Summary**

This section explored the concept of storehouse in the Old Testament, covering both the periods before and after the Exile. It investigated if there were any transformations in the practice of tithing as understood during these times.

### **Tithing Obligation in the New Testament**

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were strictly mandated to give 10% of their agricultural goods, livestock, and income as a tithe. This practice supported the Levitical priesthood and fulfilled religious obligations. The Mosaic Law codified this requirement, shaping Jewish worship practices for centuries.<sup>32</sup> The focus now shifts to the New Testament era, which began after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this period, we explore how tithing was viewed.

Specifically, we analyzed the relevant New Testament texts to determine whether the strict 10% tithe remained a regulation or evolved into a broader encouragement for generous, cheerful giving to support ministers. The investigation

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<sup>31</sup> Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (1960), s.v. "Tithe."

<sup>32</sup> L. Ray Smith, "Tithing Is Unscriptural under the New Covenant: A Scriptural Exposition on the Fraudulent Fleecing of the Flock," Bible-Truths.Com, accessed April 3, 2018, <https://bible-truths.com/tithing.html>.

drew insights from Jesus' teachings, the practices of the early church, and instructions from apostles like Paul. By examining these sources, we can understand how the perspectives and customs around tithing transformed from the OT to the NT period.

### **Endorsement by Jesus**

While there are no explicit NT texts that directly command tithing, Matthew 23:23 has been interpreted as an endorsement of this practice by Jesus Christ. In this verse, Jesus upholds careful tithing alongside the pursuit of justice and mercy. He criticizes the scribes and Pharisees who meticulously adhered to certain aspects of the law while neglecting others.<sup>33</sup> These religious leaders went beyond the original Torah requirements, including additional elements in their tithing practices. Jesus acknowledges that if they choose to tithe on these extra items, they are free to do so. However, He emphasizes that they must not overlook the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness.<sup>34</sup> By addressing tithing in this context, Jesus places it in its rightful perspective.

Tithing is enlisted among the laws that should be observed. Notably, Christ rebukes their excessive scrupulosity in tithing, rather than challenging the overall

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<sup>33</sup> C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares: The Message of Daniel for You and Your Family*, vol. 2 (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1981); do directly cite Matthew 23:23 here in the context of principles of tithing remaining relevant for Christians alongside weightier moral duties. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome, Italy: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977); Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (New York, NY: Longmans, 1904), 784. in reference to Christ's statement that the weightier matters of the law are more important than strict tithing (Matt 23:23)." William G. Johnsson - Longtime editor of Adventist Review magazine and New Testament scholar. He discusses this verse in several writings as an example of weightier matters of the law (justice, mercy, faithfulness) taking priority over tithes... Jacques Doukhan - Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis at the seminary. He discusses Matthew 23 briefly in the context of spiritual authenticity and morality weighing more than religious rituals.

<sup>34</sup> See Isaiah 1:17, and Jeremiah 22:3 outlines the importance of justice. Hosea 6"6, Zechariah 7:9-10 describes the importance of showing mercy in religion, while Micah 6:8, Habakkuk 2:4 outlines the importance of faithfulness espoused in the Torah. These three are at the heart of the OT law. They are a fulfilment of the law itself.

system of tithing. The OT system specified tithing from livestock, the seed of the land, grain, and fruits of the trees—not the flavoring herbs that were later included in the Mishnah.<sup>35</sup>

When Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees regarding their tithing practices, several important lessons emerged:

1. Tithing and Worship:

- a. Jesus emphasized that tithing was intricately connected to worship. The items mentioned—mints, dill, and cumin—were associated with temple services.
- b. Tithing was not merely a financial obligation; it was an act of devotion within the sacred context of worship.<sup>36</sup>

2. Priority of Justice, Mercy, and Faith:

- a. Support for religious work should never overshadow justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These three principles take precedence in interpreting the Torah. Jesus underscored their significance.
- b. Hauerwas rightly observed that Jesus endorsed the Torah first, and then the tithing system. His critique wasn't against tithing itself but rather the neglect of other essential aspects of the law.<sup>37</sup>

3. Majoring in the Minors:

- a. Christ rebuked His hearers for focusing excessively on minor details while neglecting weightier matters. Tithing, though important, should not overshadow justice and compassion they are both important and necessary.
- b. Matthew's account serves as evidence that Jesus affirmed the continuation of tithing for His followers.

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<sup>35</sup> See Leviticus 27:30, Deuteronomy 14:22,23, the inclusion of mint, dill and cumin which was not in the original list was in a way scrupulous tithing by the scribes and pharisees.

<sup>36</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33B (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 653.

<sup>37</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 198.

4. “These Ought Ye to Have Done”:
  - a. Jesus endorsed tithing by stating, “these ought ye to have done.” He meant that the tithing law from Deuteronomy should be observed without neglecting other aspects of the same law.
  - b. Tithing was not less significant; rather, the Pharisees had added unnecessary complexities.
  - c. The Scribes and Pharisees, in their meticulousness, committed sins of omission by trivializing other parts of the law.<sup>38</sup>
  
5. Fidelity in Little Duties:
  - a. Jesus taught that faithfulness in small matters does not excuse negligence in greater duties. When we trust in God, even seemingly minor obligations receive proper attention.
  - b. Pringle echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that Jesus rebuked not the general practice of tithing but the Pharisees’ excessive focus on mint and anise as a display of piety.<sup>39</sup>
  
6. The Commandment Interwoven:
  - a. Jesus did not compare tithes to the law; instead, He exposed the Pharisees’ pretence. Tithes were like an “appendage,” not the core.
  - b. His teaching emphasized that commandments are interconnected. True obedience involves justice, kindness, and truth toward our neighbours.<sup>40</sup>

The passage in Matthew teaches a crucial lesson about maintaining the proper balance between ritualistic observances and moral principles. Jesus did not condemn tithing itself; rather, He criticized the excessive emphasis on embellishments while neglecting weightier matters of the law.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> M. Eugene Boring, “Matthew,” *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 8:268.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 198.

<sup>41</sup> John Calvin, *John Calvin’s Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. William Pringle, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009); Their motives in tithing things that were not included was to receive applause from people. Jesus did not object tithing of even those common flavoring herbs, but while they did this, they neglected things that mattered the most, W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew, Volume 1: Matthew 1-7*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 2004).

## Paul's Perspective on Tithing

Many scholars have debated whether tithing remains an obligation for New Testament believers based on Paul's writings.<sup>42</sup> While Paul does not explicitly discuss tithing, his theology on giving is nuanced and divergent among theologians.<sup>43</sup>

Beale gave a brief analysis of some of the passages that seem to be misinterpreted (1 Cor 9:13-14):<sup>44</sup>

1. Paul refers to those involved in the “temple service” benefiting from it. He likely means the existing Jerusalem Temple, not a past one.
2. The phrase “even so also” reflects a scriptural pattern. God did not stipulate a fixed 10%—there was room to go beyond that figure.
3. Tithing is a starting point; grace giving should surpass 10%. It does not replace the tithe.<sup>45</sup>
4. Kaiser aptly asked, “If a tenth was the minimal amount under the law, how can Christians do any less?”<sup>46</sup>

Tithing, the practice of giving 10% of one's income, serves as the foundational baseline for believers. Its origins predate the Mosaic law, tracing back to God's instructions to Adam. Later, Moses reinforced this concept. Jesus assumed that His followers would engage in tithing, not merely as a rigid minimum but as a starting point for more generous giving beyond the 10%. The Apostle Paul's teachings shed light on this matter:

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<sup>42</sup> Bertie Brits, *Jesus Is the Tithe: The Message of God* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Gysbert Brits, 2019); Russell M. Stendal, *The Truth about Tithing: The Tithe according to the New Covenant* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1933), 93.

<sup>43</sup> D. A. Carson and G. K. Beale, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 772.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 773.

<sup>45</sup> Fred R. Coulter, “Paul, Corinthians and Tithing,” Christian Biblical Church of God, accessed April 3, 2025, <https://www.cbccg.org/series/tithing/paul-corinthians-and-tithing.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Book of Leviticus,” *New Interpreter's Bible.*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1:985.

1. Paul's View on Giving:
  - a. Paul encourages cheerful and generous giving, building upon the established baseline of tithing from the Old Testament law.
  - b. Under the New Covenant of grace, believers are expected to give at least as generously as those under the Old Covenant. The tithe serves as the minimum foundation for their giving.<sup>47</sup>
2. Melchizedek and Jesus:
  - a. In the book of Hebrews, Paul demonstrates the superiority of Jesus' priestly ministry over any earthly priest.
  - b. He introduces Melchizedek from Genesis 14, where Abraham offered tithe to him. Paul treats this narrative as a historical account.
  - c. Melchizedek represents the true God, to whom even Abraham paid tithes—acknowledging one greater than himself.
  - d. Whatever was true about Melchizedek in a limited, typological sense is fully realized in Jesus, the great High Priest perpetually serving before God.
3. Typological Argument:
  - a. Paul argues that if Abraham gave tithe to Melchizedek, Christians should likewise offer tithes to Jesus—the ultimate High Priest who surpasses Melchizedek.
  - b. The Genesis 14 narrative serves as a typological argument, emphasizing that believers should honor Jesus with their giving, recognizing Him as the supreme High Priest.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> J. MacArthur. "Tithing in the New Testament: What Does It Say?" accessed March 10, 2024, <https://get.tithe.ly/blog/tithing-in-the-new-testament-what-does-it-say>.

<sup>48</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *Theophany: A Biblical Theology of God's Appearing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018). Regarding the figure of Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18-20, some interpreters have thought he represents a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, mainly based on what is said about him in Hebrews 7:1-3. However, a better interpretation is that Hebrews 7:1-3 presents Melchizedek as a type or foreshadowing of Christ. Melchizedek is described as both a king and a priest, foreshadowing Christ's roles. The lack of mention of Melchizedek's genealogy indicates that his priesthood did not depend on tribal descent, similar to Christ's eternal priesthood. And the fact that no beginning or end is mentioned for Melchizedek points to a similarity with the greater, perpetual priesthood that Christ would initiate. So rather than being a literal pre-incarnate appearance, the Genesis and Hebrews passages present Melchizedek as an Old Testament type that prefigures important aspects of Christ's superior, everlasting priestly ministry to come under the New Covenant. Melchizedek's unusual portrayal is meant to foreshadow the uniqueness of Christ's eternal priesthood.

Tithing remains relevant, but grace-giving goes beyond legalistic requirements. Christians honor Jesus by giving generously, knowing that He exceeds even the revered figure of Melchizedek.

### **Summary**

This discussion explored the obligation of tithing within the New Testament context. It highlighted Jesus' endorsement of tithing and delved into Paul's perspectives on this practice. While tithing serves as a foundational baseline, grace-giving goes beyond mere legalistic requirements. Both Jesus and Paul emphasized the heart behind giving, urging believers to honor God through generosity.

### **Storehouse in the New Testament**

In the Old Testament, explicit instructions were given for bringing tithes and offerings to a designated, centralized "storehouse" location, often associated with the tabernacle or temple. This section explores how that storehouse concept was understood and operationalized in the New Testament era and early Christian Church.

The New Testament does not explicitly mention a specific "storehouse" for tithes and offerings.<sup>49</sup> However, there are references to collections being taken to support ministers, those in need, and missionary efforts. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, Paul instructed the Corinthian Church to set aside a weekly collection to support believers in Jerusalem. 2 Corinthians 8-9 discusses a collection taken among the Macedonian and Achaian Churches for the Jerusalem believers. Acts 4:34-35 describes the early Jerusalem Church pooling resources, with proceeds laid "at the apostles' feet" for distribution to the needy.

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<sup>49</sup> Flavius Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.8.8 (trans. William Whiston 92).

While not called a “storehouse,” these passages indicate a practice of centrally gathering funds for, supporting ministers/apostles, providing for the poor and needy believers and funding missionary efforts. In the first-century church, the apostles and elders oversaw collecting and distributing these resources, rather than a designated storehouse location. The focus was on believers’ regular, generous giving as an act of worship, with resources responsibly managed for the Church’s needs. No permanent storehouse structure is described in the New Testament itself.<sup>50</sup> However, we see incidents like Peter rebuking Ananias and Sapphira for not bringing their whole offering to the place of worship (Acts 5:1-8).

Jesus drove out the moneychangers selling in the temple, which He called His Father’s house (John 2:16). Paul counselled believers to weekly set aside funds to be brought to church gatherings (1 Cor 16:2). During New Testament times, the term “storehouse” became associated with the Temple treasury holding tithes, offerings, money, and dedicated items (Mark 12:41).

The word connoted a “store” of resources set aside for divine purposes. A couple instances use the Greek word “*apothékē*” meaning “storehouse” or “barn” metaphorically.<sup>51</sup> While the literal agricultural storehouse is not heavily emphasized in the New Testament, the limited references symbolically employ the idea to convey important spiritual teachings. This indicates the audience and Jesus considered the storehouse principle significant, even if the practice differed from Old Testament stipulations.

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<sup>50</sup> Lloyd Rosenvold and Leola Rosenvold, *A Fresh Look at the Storehouse* (Hope, ID: Rosenvold, 1990), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Young, *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969). Also see Matthew 3:12 and Luke 12:24

## **Gospels Era View of Storehouse**

While the Gospel of Matthew does not explicitly reference a “storehouse,” it highlights the importance of generosity, charity, and caring for those in need. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encourages his followers to store up treasures in heaven rather than accumulating wealth on earth, emphasizing the priority of spiritual riches over material possessions. Mark’s Gospel does not directly address the concept of a storehouse either, but it is centered on the urgency of spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and following him wholeheartedly.<sup>52</sup>

The Gospel of Luke places a strong emphasis on compassion, social justice, and inclusivity. Throughout the narrative, Jesus is depicted as one involved in interacting with and ministering to marginalized groups. In one notable passage, Jesus advises selling possessions and giving to the poor, underscoring a selfless approach to the use of material resources. While the Gospel of John does not specifically mention a storehouse, it focuses on the spiritual significance of Jesus’ teachings. John’s Gospel highlights the need for a personal relationship with Jesus as the source of eternal life and sustenance.<sup>53</sup>

In summary, while the concept of a physical storehouse is not explicitly referenced, each of the four canonical Gospels brings a unique perspective that aligns with the broader themes of generosity, compassion, and prioritizing spiritual treasures over the accumulation of material wealth. The Gospels consistently emphasize these values through Jesus’ teachings and interactions with his followers.

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<sup>52</sup> Valerie Fentress, “What Do We Know about Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John?” accessed August 12, 2024, <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/people/what-we-know-about-matthew-mark-luke-john.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Jack Wellman, “Matthew, Mark, Luke & John: A Look at the Gospel Writers,” accessed August 12, 2024, <https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/matthew-mark-luke-john-a-look-at-the-gospel-writers/>.

## **Apostolic Era View of Storehouse**

In the Old Testament, the Israelites had a central sanctuary for worship, but the early Christian Church did not have a single, centralized location akin to the temple in Jerusalem. Instead, the apostolic community was decentralized, with believers gathering in various homes and locations. Rather than emphasizing a specific physical storehouse, the focus was placed on generosity, caring for one another, and supporting those in need within the community.<sup>54</sup>

In summary, during the apostolic period, the priority was placed on spiritual treasures, generosity, and community care, rather than on a centralized storehouse.<sup>55</sup> The heart of giving was rooted in faith and love for God and fellow believers, transcending the need for a physical repository for tithes and offerings. The emphasis was on the underlying principles of stewardship, compassion, and sharing resources to support the needs of the early Christian community.

### **Summary**

The focus of this section was to investigate the idea of the “storehouse” during the time of the New Testament, including the periods of the gospels and the apostles. The goal was to ascertain whether and how the Old Testament practice of bringing tithes and offerings to a centralized storehouse location carried on or was reinterpreted in this later era.

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<sup>54</sup> Harry L. Herman, “Tithes and Offerings,” Apostolic Information Service, accessed August 12, 2024, <https://www.apostolic.edu/tithes-and-offerings-entire/>.

<sup>55</sup> Relevant Christianity, “The Apostolic Period,” accessed August 12, 2024, <http://www.relevant-christianity.com/history-of-theology/hcmt01%20-%20apostolic%20period.html>.

## CHAPTER 3

### HOUTEFF AND HIS TITHING THEOLOGY

#### **Victor Houteff: A Biographical Sketch**

Victor Houteff was born in Raicovo, Eastern Rumelia (modern-day Bulgaria), and was baptized as a child into the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.<sup>1</sup> As a young man, he was engaged in the mercantile trade. In 1907, Houteff faced difficulties and disputes with the leaders of that his church as well as with the Bulgarian government authorities. As a result of these conflicts, he was forcibly expelled from Bulgaria, his country of birth.<sup>2</sup> Houteff and his brothers later immigrated to the United States.<sup>3</sup> Houteff would, on several occasions, return to visit his family, many of whom now lived in the U.S. He arrived in the U.S. virtually penniless but soon found work as a hotelier and grocer in the state of Illinois. In 1919, he joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>4</sup>

Houteff grew disenchanted with the Church at a relatively early stage after an unsatisfactory experience while receiving care at one of the Church's sanitariums.

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<sup>1</sup> General Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventist, "To Davidians Everywhere," *The Symbolic Code 10SC0304*, January-February 1955, 9, [https://davidiantoday.org/library/sc\\_5/10SC0304\\_208](https://davidiantoday.org/library/sc_5/10SC0304_208).

<sup>2</sup> Victor Houteff, "Life Is but What We Make It," *Timely Greetings*, July 19, 1947, 49-50, <https://www.bdsda.com/authors/victor-houteff/timely-greetings/timely-greetings-vol-1-nos-49-50/#life-is-but-what-we-make-it>.

<sup>3</sup> Shepherd's Rod, "The Original Shepherd's Rod—Frequently Asked Questions," last modified 2015, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.shepherdsrod.com/faqs>.

<sup>4</sup> Church Record Book, Bk. B, of Clerk of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Rockford, IL, quoted in General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Committee, *The Story of "The Shepherd's Rod"* (Washington, DC: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1955), 3.

This led him to doubt whether the sanitarium and the people running it truly represented God’s vision. He concluded that while the sanitarium and church itself were God’s, the people in charge were reactionary and equivalent to the scribes, Pharisees, and priests that Jesus criticized. Despite this, Houteff decided he would stay with the Church, stating “God’s truth is here” and committing himself to being a positive reforming influence, like the Good Samaritan.<sup>5</sup> However, this experience planted “a root of bitterness” in Houteff’s heart toward the Church leadership even though he remained a member. His dissatisfaction with how the Church was being run by those in authority set the stage for his eventual separation.<sup>6</sup>

### **Houteff’s Adventist Roots and Excommunication**

During the 1920s, Victor Houteff, a strict member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, became a Sabbath School teacher at the Exposition Park Church in Los Angeles. As a keen student of the Bible, Houteff began to delve deeper into the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White. His Bible study classes at the Church grew longer and more complex, attracting large groups of Adventists every week.<sup>7</sup>

However, Houteff encountered opposition from the established SDA Church regarding his interpretation of these passages. Eventually, Houteff and a large number of his Bible class members were disfellowshipped.<sup>8</sup> Undeterred, Houteff persisted,

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<sup>5</sup> Victor Houteff, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” *Timely Greetings*, April 24, 1948, 13-15, <https://www.bdsda.com/authors/victor-houteff/timely-greetings/timely-greetings-vol-2-no-35/>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Victor Houteff, *Latest News for “Mother,”* Tact no. 4 (Waco, TX: General Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventist, 1943).

<sup>8</sup> W. H. Schacht letter to R. L. Odom, dated November 28, 1951, quoted in General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Committee, *The Story of “The Shepherd’s Rod,”* 4.

moving his class of more than fifty students to a large house across the street from the Church, where he continued to study and teach.<sup>9</sup>

In the summer of 1930, Houteff compiled his religious ideas into a 172-page manuscript titled “The Shepherd’s Rod.” This work advocated for reform within the SDA Church and presented Houteff’s interpretations of Adventist eschatology, including his perspectives on the doctrine of tithing. During the 1930 General Conference Session, Houteff personally distributed copies of his manuscript to Church leaders in attendance. Afterward, F.C. Gilbert, a highly regarded Adventist author, provided a critical evaluation that rejected Houteff’s biblical interpretations as flawed and erroneous.<sup>10</sup>

In an effort to guide Victor Houteff back to the fold, church leaders, including elders and pastors, engaged in a series of meetings with him to address his controversial teachings and behaviours. Their goal was to steer him back towards the church’s doctrine and practices, but Houteff remained resolute in his unorthodox ideas. As Houteff continued to disseminate his teachings, church leaders issued formal warnings and rebukes, urging him to repent and align with the church’s teachings. However, Houteff refused to budge, prompting the church leadership to take disciplinary measures to curb his influence and prevent further division. These measures included suspending him from teaching and preaching.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Houteff, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” 23.

<sup>10</sup> Houteff, *The Shepherd’s Rod*, 1:15.

<sup>11</sup> O. J. Graf and D. E. Robinson, *The Shepherd’s Rod: A Review*, January 1934, 3; Victor Houteff, *The Great Controversy over “The Shepherd’s Rod,”* Tract No. 7, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Waco, TX: The Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1941), 6; Victor Houteff, *Pre-Eleventh Hour Extra!*, Tract No. 1 (Waco, TX: The Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1941), 48; Houteff, *The Shepherd’s Rod*, 1:15.

Victor Houteff's separation from the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a lengthy and complex process that unfolded over five years, from 1930 to 1935. Initially, his teachings and writings, especially his book "The Shepherd's Rod," sparked concerns among leaders at the Exposition Park Church in 1930. In January 1931, Houteff was called to a meeting with church elders, who expressed their disapproval of his teachings. When he refused to retract his statements, the local church voted to disfellowship him in February 1931.<sup>12</sup>

Houteff appealed this decision to the Southern California Conference Committee in March 1931, but the Committee upheld the local church's decision, disfellowshipping him from the Conference in May 1931. Undeterred, Houteff continued to preach and distribute his literature, leading to further conflict with Conference leaders in 1932.<sup>13</sup>

At the General Conference level, Houteff appealed to the General Conference Committee in 1932, which appointed a special committee to investigate his teachings. After a thorough examination, the committee concluded that Houteff's teachings were erroneous and disloyal to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1933. As a result, the General Conference Committee voted to disfellowship Houteff from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1935, marking the culmination of a five-year process.<sup>14</sup>

Houteff's teachings and writings, particularly his book *The Shepherd's Rod*, had raised concerns among Church leaders due to his unconventional interpretations of prophecy and criticism of the Church. Despite efforts to reconcile and address these

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<sup>12</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Minutes of the General Conference Committee* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1934), 1208.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

concerns, Houteff remained steadfast in his beliefs, leading to his eventual excommunication.<sup>15</sup>

Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to view the Davidian movement, which emerged from Houteff's teachings, as a "disloyal, divisive movement." Any member who identifies with either the Davidian message or its originator is subject to church discipline, up to and including disfellowship. This stance reflects the church's commitment to maintaining unity and adherence to its established teachings and practices.<sup>16</sup>

### **Houteff's Formation of Davidianism**

In 1934, Victor Houteff founded his headquarters west of Waco, Texas, marking the beginning of Davidianism. Initially known as the Davidians, the group was renamed the General Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventists in 1942. The term "Davidian" symbolized their belief in the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom of Israel, a core tenet of their faith.<sup>17</sup>

Initially, some of Houteff's followers resisted leaving the SDA Church, but eventually, many did leave to join Houteff's new organization. This marked the beginning of a new religious movement that would undergo significant transformations over the years.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Committee, *The Story of "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 8-16.

<sup>16</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Minutes of the General Conference Committee*, 1208.

<sup>17</sup> Houteff, *Latest News for "Mother."*

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey W. Barbeau, "Book Review of *The Branch Davidians of Waco: The History and Beliefs of an Apocalyptic Sect* by Kenneth G. C. Newport," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 59, no. 1 (2008): 177-178.

After Houteff's passing in 1955, the Davidian movement branched out into various factions. One such group, the Branch Davidians, was established by Ben Roden in 1955 near Waco, Texas. Roden's teachings built upon SDA Church doctrine, emphasizing the imminent return of Christ, Sabbath observance, and dietary regulations. He also embraced Houteff's vision of a purified Church, free from corruption and spiritual stagnation.<sup>19</sup>

Roden's unique contribution was his focus on the significance of the state of Israel, which he believed played a crucial role in fulfilling biblical prophecy. He saw the 1967 Israeli-Arab War as a pivotal event that paved the way for the proclamation of God's word from Jerusalem, signalling the end of the present age.<sup>20</sup>

Following Roden's death in 1978, his wife Lois assumed leadership of the group, introducing innovative concepts that further distinguished the Branch Davidians from other Davidian factions. She championed the idea of a female Holy Spirit, challenging traditional gender roles in religious leadership and advocating for the ordination of women.

The Branch Davidians continued to emphasize the importance of tithing, but with a twist. They believed that the Shepherd's Rod, their organization, was the new storehouse and therefore the rightful recipient of tithes, rather than the General Conference, as taught by the mainline SDA Church.<sup>21</sup> Over time, some members of the Branch Davidians eventually left the organization, disillusioned with the

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<sup>19</sup> Barbeau, "Book Review of *The Branch Davidians of Waco: The History and Beliefs of an Apocalyptic Sect* by Kenneth G. C. Newport," 174.

<sup>20</sup> General Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventist, "Back to the Old Paths," *The Symbolic Code ISC15*, September 15, 1935, [https://davidiantoday.org/library/sc\\_5/1sc15\\_150](https://davidiantoday.org/library/sc_5/1sc15_150).

<sup>21</sup> General Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventist, "A Letter to 'Ammi' and 'Ruhamah' on behalf of 'Mother,'" *The Symbolic Code ISC8*, February 15, 1935, [https://davidiantoday.org/library/sc\\_5/1sc8\\_144](https://davidiantoday.org/library/sc_5/1sc8_144).

leadership and teachings. Some returned to the SDA Church, while others formed new groups or became independent.<sup>22</sup>

The development of Davidianism exemplifies the adaptable and transformative character of religious movements, where leaders and adherents continually re-examine and modify their beliefs in response to perceived changes and spiritual promptings that deviate from biblical teachings. This persistent process has moulded the Davidian movement, resulting in the formation of diverse factions, each with their distinct viewpoints and customs.

In conclusion, the history of Davidianism is a complex and multifaceted one, marked by initial resistance, eventual schism, and ongoing transformation. From its inception to the present day, the movement has continued to evolve, reflecting the dynamic and adaptive nature of religious belief and practice.

### **Victor Houteff's Perspective on Tithing**

Victor Houteff's approach to tithing underwent a significant transformation, revealing a shift from a purported desire to reform the SDA Church to a calculated strategy for building his own movement. Houteff's strategy of infiltrating the SDA Church from within allowed him to maintain a presence while secretly advancing his own agenda. Meanwhile, he financially benefited from this arrangement by collecting tithes and offerings from his followers, many of whom had previously been faithful members of the mainstream SDA Church. By diverting these funds to his own organization, Houteff was able to sustain his movement and further his own interests,

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<sup>22</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Committee, *The Story of "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 25.

all while claiming to reform the very church from which he was drawing financial support.<sup>23</sup>

However, Houteff's approach underwent a significant shift as he eventually boasted about the financial advantages of breaking away and leading his own group in Waco, Texas. He claimed to have unlimited credit, writing checks for thousands of dollars despite owning no property and having no personal bank account. This bold claim raised eyebrows and hinted at a deeper agenda.<sup>24</sup>

In 1935, Houteff publicly denounced the Adventist policies that barred him from accessing tithes and offerings for his work. Yet, in a paradoxical move, Houteff urged his sympathizers to remain within Adventist Churches, believing that his movement would ultimately emerge as the true remnant, replacing the apostate church. He anticipated that the prophecy of Ezekiel 9 would be fulfilled through his group, the Shepherd's Rod, which would become the faithful remnant, superseding the existing SDA Church.<sup>25</sup>

While Houteff presented himself as a reformer within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, his actions suggest a more self-serving agenda. By encouraging his followers to remit tithes to his organization rather than the mainstream church, he effectively diverted resources to finance his own programs. This move implies that Houteff's primary goal was to consolidate power and wealth, rather than genuinely reform the church. If his intentions were truly reformative, it would have been logical for him to instruct his followers to continue remitting tithes to the church he claimed

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<sup>23</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Committee, *The Story of "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 22.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, 22.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

to be reforming. Though he may not have directly stated this motivation during the interview, the implication is clear: his actions were driven by a desire for control and financial gain.<sup>26</sup>

Houteff's approach to tithing evolved from a purported desire to reform the SDA Church to a calculated strategy for building his own movement, revealing a pursuit of power and financial gain over genuine reform and spiritual growth. His actions and statements exposed a hidden agenda, one that prioritized personal ambition over the well-being of the church and its members. As Houteff's movement gained momentum, his true intentions became increasingly clear, leaving many to question his motives and the true nature of his "Shepherd's Rod" movement.<sup>27</sup>

### **Houteff's Reforms at "Mount Carmel"**

In 1935, Houteff and his devoted followers embarked on a journey to Mount Carmel, Texas, driven by their conviction that Isaiah 11 had designated this site as the "midst of the land." This marked the beginning of the Mount Carmel community, which would soon grow to approximately 70 members. United in their quest for spiritual purity, they distanced themselves from the world, constructing their own housing, dining, and meeting facilities. Embracing a simple way of life, they dedicated themselves to worship, study, and self-sufficiency.<sup>28</sup>

Before his move to Mount Carmel, Houteff had already made a significant impact within the SDA Church as a Sabbath School teacher. His innovative teaching

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<sup>26</sup> Sighandcry, "The 1942 Interview: V. T. Houteff and M. L. Andreasen—Truth Seeker or Informant?" *The Shepherd's Rod Speaks*, published February 24, 2018, accessed May 20, 2025, <http://www.shepherds-rod-speaks.org/2018/02/the-interview-m-l-andreasen-and-v-t-houteff-truth-seeker-or-informant/>.

<sup>27</sup> Sighandcry, "The 1942 Interview."

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

style, biblical insights, passion for evangelism, leadership skills, commitment to Scripture, mentorship, community building, and prophetic emphasis had earned him recognition and respect. These positive contributions positioned him as a respected and influential figure within the SDA Church, ultimately leading to his leadership role in the SRod movement.<sup>29</sup>

Victor Houteff's impact on the SDA Church was multifaceted and profound. As a Sabbath School teacher, he captivated his students with his innovative and dynamic teaching style, making him a beloved and popular instructor. His fresh and thought-provoking insights into biblical prophecies not only showcased his vast knowledge but also inspired his audience to delve deeper into the scriptures.

Houteff's passion for evangelism was contagious, and his conviction about the imminent return of Jesus inspired others to embrace the Adventist message with renewed enthusiasm. His natural leadership abilities and charisma earned him recognition within the Church, paving the way for his future role as the leader of the Shepherd's Rod movement.

Houteff's commitment to scripture was unwavering, and his emphasis on its authority and relevance resonated deeply with those seeking a deeper understanding of God's word. He mentored and inspired young individuals, fostering their spiritual growth and nurturing future leaders within the Church. Through his efforts, he helped create a sense of community among his students and fellow Church members, laying the groundwork for the close-knit fellowship that would characterize the Shepherd's Rod movement.

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<sup>29</sup> Reid, "The Branch Davidians," 5.

During their time in Waco, the Davidians accomplished a notable feat by setting up a printing press, which became a powerful tool for disseminating their message. This press enabled them to produce and distribute a vast number of copies of Victor Houteff's writings, including tracts, pamphlets, and books, thereby spreading their teachings to a vast audience, both near and far. Through this impressive publishing endeavour, the Davidians successfully propagated their beliefs, reaching a substantial number of people across the globe.<sup>30</sup>

In 1942, Houteff made a strategic decision to rename his movement from "Shepherd's Rod" to "Davidian Seventh-day Adventists." This name change was a deliberate attempt to align his organization more closely with the SDA Church, from which he had originally broken away. By adopting a name that explicitly linked his movement to the Adventist tradition, Houteff aimed to legitimize his organization and appeal to a broader audience. The name change proved successful in securing conscientious objector status for young Davidian men, who were exempt from military service due to their religious beliefs. This recognition by the US government granted the Davidians a measure of legal protection and validation, allowing them to continue their religious activities without fear of persecution.<sup>31</sup>

At the heart of Houteff's teachings in Texas lay a fervent belief in the imminent return of Christ, which he saw as the culmination of human history. He was resolute in his conviction that Christ's second advent would usher in a new era, and he devoted himself to preparing his followers for this pivotal moment. Houteff's teachings emphasized the need for a thorough reform of life, urging his followers to break away from the corrupt practices of the mainstream church and society. He

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<sup>30</sup> Reid, "The Branch Davidians," 6.

<sup>31</sup> Sighandcry, "The 1942 Interview."

envisioned a select group of 144,000 followers, purified and refined through their commitment to his teachings, forming a truly reformed church, untainted by the sins of the world.<sup>32</sup>

Houteff's teachings also emphasized the importance of stewardship and parenting. He believed that responsible parenting and wise stewardship were intertwined, reflecting one's commitment to God's guidance. At Mount Carmel, Houteff implemented innovative approaches to education, agriculture, and community living, all centred around the concept of stewardship. He encouraged members to adopt a holistic understanding of stewardship, encompassing not only financial resources but also time, talents, and the environment. This comprehensive perspective was mirrored in his teachings on parenting, where he emphasized the importance of nurturing children's spiritual growth and fostering a sense of responsibility.<sup>33</sup>

Houteff's parenting philosophy was deeply rooted in his theology of stewardship. He believed that parents were entrusted with the sacred responsibility of raising children, much like stewards manage resources. Effective parenting, in his view, required a commitment to spiritual guidance, discipline, and education, all aimed at helping children develop into capable stewards of their own lives and resources. By integrating his teachings on stewardship and parenting, Houteff aimed to create a community at Mount Carmel that embodied the principles of responsible management, mutual support, and spiritual growth.<sup>34</sup>

Houteff's teachings extended beyond stewardship and parenting to advocate for a vegetarian diet, which he believed was a healthier and more spiritual way of

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<sup>32</sup> Sighandcry, "The 1942 Interview."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

living. He saw a plant-based diet as a means to achieve physical and spiritual purity, preparing his followers for Christ's return. Additionally, he established strict rules of conduct, including abstinence from tobacco, dancing, and movies. Women were expected to abstain from cosmetics and wear distinctive long dresses, symbolizing their separation from the world and commitment to the Davidian way of life.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the passage of time, some followers of Houteff's Shepherd's Rod have maintained their membership in various SDA congregations worldwide, remaining true to his original teachings. They continue to seek reform, often dominating Sabbath School discussions and targeting newly baptized members with their message. This has led to disruptions in several SDA congregations, including at least three in London, England. In one instance, a specialist on Rod theology was invited to address a West London congregation, but the Rod activists attempted to dominate the question time, requiring skilled management to prevent an altercation.<sup>36</sup>

Houteff's teachings in Texas emphasized reform, purification, and preparation for Christ's second advent. His followers regarded him as a prophet and leader, guiding them towards heightened spiritual awareness and readiness for the impending events. Under Houteff's leadership, the Davidian movement aimed to establish a community of faith and reform, distinct from the world and dedicated to Christ's imminent return. These teachings resonated with some Adventists, who found comfort in the Davidian movement's alignment with their own church's teachings, making it a relevant and appealing extension of their original faith community.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Milton Hook, "Shepherd's Rod," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, accessed July 17, 2024, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=C84T>.

<sup>36</sup> Albert A. C. Waite and Laura Osei, "The British Connection," *Spectrum*, May 1993, 34.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

## **Houteff's Teaching on Tithing at Waco**

At Mount Carmel, M. L. Andreasen interviewed Victor Houteff about the Davidians' tithing practices and funding for their Waco projects. Houteff emphasized the importance of tithing, urging his followers to contribute a double tithe, especially those employed in Waco. This practice demonstrated their dedication to the cause and supported the community's activities. Although lacking biblical basis, Houteff justified the double tithe as a response to the community's financial crisis, ensuring sustainability in the absence of external funding.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the Great Depression, the Davidian community thrived, expanding to 64 residents, 10 buildings, and 375 acres of land by 1940. However, this unconventional tithe practice had a ripple effect, impacting the financial inflows to the mainstream SDA Church. Houteff instructed his followers to redirect their tithes to the Shepherd's Rod organization, rather than the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, implying that the latter was disregarding God's Word. This redefinition of the biblical "storehouse" led devoted Rod-believing SDAs to remit their tithes to autonomous associations supporting the Rod teachings.<sup>39</sup>

Houteff's teachings on tithing mirrored his emphasis on responsible parenting, stressing accountability, faithfulness, and wise stewardship. He believed tithing was a test of obedience to God's command and a demonstration of trust in God's provision and blessings. Moreover, tithing supported the community of believers, recognizing that tithes funded the church and its ministries. Houteff saw tithing as a means of

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<sup>38</sup> Sighandcry, "The 1942 Interview."

<sup>39</sup> R. Gale, "The Davidian Movement: A Study of the Emergence and Development of a Seventh-day Adventist Reform Group," *Journal of Adventist Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017): 35-50.

spiritual growth, fostering detachment from material possessions and trust in God's provision.<sup>40</sup>

Initially, Houteff argued that tithing was part of the obsolete Levitical law, but later changed his stance after being expelled from the church. He taught that the poor and newly baptized should not have to pay tithes, and that the church demanding tithes from them was robbery. According to Houteff, tithes should compensate individuals engaged in ministry, including elders, deacons, and singers, but not full-time salaried gospel workers, which he believed was against biblical teaching.<sup>41</sup>

In essence, Rod believers diverted their tithes to Houteff's organization based on his teachings, which redefined who should receive tithes and what constituted the biblical "storehouse." This approach led to a significant shift in the financial support of the mainstream SDA Church, as followers of Houteff's teachings redirected their tithes to support the Davidian community and its activities.<sup>42</sup>

### **Houteff's Teaching Methods**

Houteff's journey as a Sabbath School teacher played a pivotal role in shaping his theological trajectory and leadership in the Shepherd's Rod movement. The intimate setting of these small group classes proved to be a fertile ground for his ideas to germinate and flourish. Here, he built lasting relationships with his students, fostering trust and connection, which allowed him to share his thoughts and interpretations with ease.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Hook, "Shepherd's Rod."

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> General Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventist, "What Do You Know about Davidians Today?," accessed July 17, 2024, [https://davidiantoday.org/study/what-do-you-know-about-davidians-today\\_34](https://davidiantoday.org/study/what-do-you-know-about-davidians-today_34).

The dynamic and interactive nature of these classes encouraged discussion, debate, and questioning, helping Houteff refine his teachings and solidify his arguments. This setting served as a testing ground for his ideas, allowing him to gauge responses, refine his approach, and adjust his message as needed.<sup>44</sup>

As a result, Houteff's Sabbath School classes became a hub for like-minded individuals drawn to his unique perspectives. This loyal group of students formed the core of his support base, which would eventually follow him into the Shepherd's Rod movement. Through his teaching, Houteff developed essential leadership skills, such as communication, persuasion, and conflict resolution, which served him well in his future leadership role.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, the Sabbath School setting offered Houteff the freedom to explore unconventional ideas and interpretations, which might have been met with resistance in a larger, more formal setting. His teaching style encouraged critical thinking and questioning, creating an environment where students felt comfortable challenging assumptions and exploring new ideas.<sup>46</sup>

By leveraging his experience teaching Sabbath School classes, Houteff was able to develop and refine his theology, build a loyal following, and hone his leadership skills. This foundation ultimately propelled him to leadership in the Shepherd's Rod movement, where his ideas and teachings continued to inspire and shape the lives of many.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> General Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventist, "What Do You Know about Davidians Today?"

<sup>45</sup> The Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Church, "1950 General Conference Special," General Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventist, accessed June 18, 2024, <https://gadsda.com/1950-general-conference-special/>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Houteff's approach to sharing his message was distinct from traditional sermons, instead opting for lectures that effectively conveyed his teachings. One of his greatest strengths lay in his ability to disseminate his ideas through literature, which he distributed freely to a vast audience worldwide. This generosity was a hallmark of his mission to spread his message and foster spiritual growth.

Throughout his life, Houteff remained prolific, continuing to publish his prophetic writings until his passing in 1955. His body of work includes an impressive array of publications, such as 15 numbered tracts, five volumes of *The Answerer* - a collection of questions and answers from both believers and non-believers - and two volumes of *Timely Greetings*, comprising 98 books in total. Additionally, he authored *The Symbolic Code*, a monthly series featuring his Sabbath sermons, as well as practical guidance on Christian living, recipes, and spiritual encouragement. Rounding out his literary legacy are various miscellaneous publications and public letters addressed to the leadership of the SDA Church, including nine "Jezreel Letters." Through these writings, Houteff's message continues to resonate with readers worldwide.<sup>48</sup>

### **Houteff's Views on the Storehouse**

Victor Houteff's revolutionary teachings on the concept of the "storehouse" formed a cornerstone of his Shepherd's Rod (SRod) doctrine. According to SRod teachings, the true "storehouse" is not a physical structure but a spiritual entity that dispenses present truth, or spiritual food, to God's people. Houteff argued that the traditional understanding of the storehouse as the ancient place for storing and

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<sup>48</sup> The Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Church, "1950 General Conference Special."

dispensing food was limited, and that the term must be redefined to encompass a spiritual context.<sup>49</sup>

Houteff contended that the SDA Church, though proclaiming some truths, had failed to propagate the message specifically adapted for the present era. Therefore, the SDA Church could not be considered the true storehouse. However, Houteff's teaching took an unexpected turn by asserting that the storehouse did not necessarily represent a single entity. Instead, it could include multiple sources if they were dispensing present truth. This redefinition implied that God had not designated a sole entity to receive tithes.

Houteff's interpretation of Malachi 3:10 led him to believe that the "storehouse" referred to a specific location or organization faithfully carrying out God's present truth message according to Scripture. He claimed that the Adventist Church had fallen away from upholding present truth and thus could no longer be considered the true "storehouse" deserving of tithes and offerings. In a bold move, Houteff instructed his followers to redirect their tithes to support his own Shepherd's Rod movement and its headquarters at Mount Carmel, which he viewed as the legitimate storehouse of truth. This directive posed a direct challenge to the Adventist Church's financial system and authority.<sup>50</sup>

When a member inquired about where to direct their tithes, Houteff responded that if one believed the SRod contained the urgent message for the time, specifically the sealing message for the 144,000, and if one felt that joining the SRod had made

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<sup>49</sup> Rodriguez, *Tithing in the Writings of Ellen G. White*, 24.

<sup>50</sup>Victor Houteff, *The Answerer* (Waco, TX: General Association of Davidian Seventh-day Adventist, 1944), 4:41-43.

them a better Adventist, deepening their love for the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, then they should remit their tithes to the SRod.<sup>51</sup>

In summary, Houteff suggested that those who accepted the SRod as the genuine end-time message should financially support it by redirecting their tithes from the SDA Church to the SRod. By reinterpreting the concept of the storehouse, Houteff sought to redirect the flow of tithes and offerings away from the traditional church leadership and towards his own movement. This strategic move not only threatened the Adventist Church's financial foundation but also its spiritual authority, as Houteff claimed that his movement was the authentic source of present truth, thereby challenging the church's legitimacy.<sup>52</sup>

### **Houteff's Interpretation of the Storehouse**

According to Victor Houteff's teachings, the "storehouse" mentioned in Malachi 3:10 was not referring to the SDA Church or its entities. Instead, he believed that the true "storehouse" was his own organization, the SRod, which he considered to be the rightful repository of God's truth.<sup>53</sup>

Houteff believed that the SDA Church had become apostate and had fallen away from the true teachings of God, and therefore, it could no longer be considered the storehouse of God's provision and blessings. In contrast, he saw his own organization, the SRod, as the divinely appointed storehouse, tasked with proclaiming the correct interpretation of prophetic issues and upholding the truth.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Houteff, *The Answerer*, 4:41-43.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

In Houteff's view, the SRod was the only legitimate storehouse because it alone presented the unadulterated truth, whereas the SDA Church had compromised and deviated from the true teachings of God. This belief led him to establish the SRod as a separate entity, which he saw as the sole custodian of God's message and the rightful recipient of tithes and offerings.<sup>55</sup>

Houteff's interpretation of the storehouse was central to his teachings and his critique of the SDA Church. He believed that by supporting the SRod, individuals were supporting the true storehouse of God's provision and blessings, whereas supporting the SDA Church would be equivalent to supporting a fallen and apostate organization.<sup>56</sup>

In conclusion, Victor Houteff's teachings on the "storehouse" in Malachi 3:10 reveal a pivotal aspect of his doctrine and his critique of the SDA Church. By identifying his own organization, the SRod, as the sole legitimate storehouse of God's truth and provision, Houteff drew a clear distinction between his movement and the SDA Church, which he saw as apostate and fallen. This belief had significant implications for his followers, as it emphasized the importance of supporting the SRod as the only true repository of God's message and blessings. Houteff's interpretation of the storehouse thus became a defining feature of his teachings, shaping his movement's identity and its relationship with the SDA Church. His legacy continues to influence the Davidian movement, which remains a distinct entity within the broader Adventist tradition.

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<sup>55</sup> Houteff, *The Answerer*, 4:41-43.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Houteff's View on the Significance of the "Storehouse"**

Houteff's teachings on the storehouse are a unique interpretation that diverges from traditional biblical understanding. He believed that the "storehouse" referred to in Malachi 3:10 was not just a physical structure, such as the temple in Jerusalem, but also a spiritual entity, specifically his organization, the SRod.

Houteff argued that the storehouse represented a central hub for spiritual nourishment and resources, extending beyond physical boundaries. He saw his organization as the modern-day embodiment of this storehouse, tasked with gathering and disseminating spiritual riches to God's people.<sup>57</sup> By broadening the definition of "storehouse" to include spiritual dimensions, Houteff aimed to emphasize the importance of his movement as a vital source of spiritual sustenance and guidance. This interpretation allowed him to position the SRod as a crucial component of God's plan, rather than just a physical building or institution.

While this view may be seen as innovative and thought-provoking, it has also been met with criticism and controversy within religious circles, as it challenges traditional understandings of scripture and potentially blurs the lines between spiritual and organizational loyalty.

In summary, Houteff's teachings on the storehouse emphasize a dual nature – physical and spiritual – with his organization at the forefront of the spiritual storehouse, serving as a central hub for God's people. This interpretation, while unconventional, reflects his vision for the SRod as a vital source of spiritual nourishment and guidance.

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<sup>57</sup> Houteff, *The Answerer*, 4:41-43.

## **Summary**

This chapter has provided an in-depth examination of Victor Houteff's life and teachings, offering a comprehensive understanding of his beliefs and legacy. The analysis began with a biographical sketch of Houteff's life, including his childhood and formative years. The discussion then turned to his involvement with the SDA Church, his eventual excommunication, and the subsequent emergence of the Davidian movement. Additionally, the study delved into Houteff's theological views on tithing and the concept of the "storehouse," as interpreted through Malachi 3:10, highlighting the significance of this concept in his teachings. These sections formed the core of the study, achieving the objectives of shedding light on Houteff's life, teachings, and lasting impact.

CHAPTER 4  
DISCUSSION OF HOUTEFF’S TEACHINGS  
ON TITHING

**Examination of Houteff’s Tithing  
Theology**

This chapter examines the divergent perspectives on tithing between Victor Houteff’s teachings and the SDA Church’s beliefs. Both parties claim to be rooted in biblical principles and the writings of Ellen G. White, yet a closer examination reveals significant disparities.<sup>1</sup> When Andreasen asked Houteff, “Are you a Seventh-day Adventist?” he replied, “Yes, I am a Seventh-day Adventist. I believe the truth the same as you do, both the Bible and the Testimonies.”<sup>2</sup>

Houteff’s teachings deviate from the SDA Church’s stance on four key aspects. Firstly, he advocates for double tithing, whereas the SDA Church adheres to the biblical principle of single tithing.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, Houteff designates his movement, the Shepherd’s Rod, as the storehouse for tithes, contrary to the SDA Church’s belief that the conference should serve as the storehouse.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, Houteff exempts the poor from paying tithes, whereas the SDA Church teaches that everyone is obligated to tithe, regardless of socioeconomic status.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, Houteff believes that tithes should

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<sup>1</sup> Sighandcry, “The 1942 Interview.”

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Gale, “The Davidian Movement,” 35-50.

<sup>5</sup> Sighandcry, “The 1942 Interview.”

support both full-time and local church workers, whereas the SDA Church restricts tithes to support full-time church workers only.<sup>6</sup>

This examination of divergent perspectives seeks to illuminate the far-reaching consequences of Houteff's teachings on tithing, shedding light on how they have historically and continue to impact the church's unity and mission, with the goal of fostering a deeper understanding and resolution to the ongoing debates and discussions.

### **Houteff's Double Tithing Doctrine**

Victor Houteff's doctrine of double tithing, based on his unique interpretation of Malachi 3:10,<sup>7</sup> diverges from the biblical teaching on tithe. He believed the phrase "all tithes" in Malachi 3:10 referred to a double tithe, requiring individuals to give twice the standard tithe.<sup>8</sup> However, this teaching contradicts the biblical teachings and writings of Ellen White, which form the foundation of Adventist beliefs.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, Adventists understand the term "all tithes" to mean a complete or whole tithe, not a double one. Ellen White's writings support this understanding, using the term "all tithes" in the context of proportionate giving, emphasizing that our offerings should reflect our gratitude for God's abundant blessings. The tithe is returned to God in proportion to our income, acknowledging that everything we have is a gift from Him.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Sighandery, "The 1942 Interview."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Ten Tithing Questions Answered," accessed August 28, 2024, <https://stewardship.adventist.org/ten-tithing-questions-answered>.

<sup>10</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2015), 3:394.

The Hebrew phrase “kol ma’aser” in Malachi 3:10, translated as “All Tithes,” reinforces this understanding. “Kol” means “all,” “everything,” “whole,” or “complete,” and “ma’aser” means “tithe,” “tenth,” or “a tenth part.” Therefore, “kol ma’aser” literally means “all the tithe” or “the whole tenth,” emphasizing the complete amount of the tithe. This phrase is often translated as “all the tithes” or “the whole tithe,” highlighting the importance of giving the entire amount required, rather than a partial or incomplete amount.<sup>11</sup> Notably, Houteff’s interpretation of “all tithes” as a double tithe is inconsistent with both the context and the Hebrew text of Malachi 3:10. While Hebrew words like, “Keful,” Mishneh, Kital and “Ta’am” mean “double,” none of these words appear in Malachi 3:10. The repetition of words in Hebrew is often used for emphasis, rather than to indicate duplication. Therefore, the phrase “kol ma’aser” in Malachi 3:10 clearly means “whole tithe” rather than “double tithe,” aligning with the fundamental principles of Adventism.<sup>12</sup>

### **Houteff’s Views on the “Storehouse”**

Houteff reinterpreted the biblical concept of the “storehouse” in Malachi 3:10. He believed the true storehouse was not a physical structure but a spiritual entity dispensing present truth.<sup>13</sup> Houteff argued the SDA Church had failed to deliver present truth, making it ineligible as the true storehouse.<sup>14</sup> Instead, he claimed his SRod movement was the legitimate storehouse, tasked with proclaiming the correct interpretation of prophetic issues and upholding truth.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Zodhiates, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, s.v. “All Tithes.”

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Houteff, *The Answerer*, 4:41-43.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

Victor Houteff believed that the mainstream Seventh-day Adventist Church had become apostate and no longer held the “present truth”. He based this belief on his interpretation of biblical prophecy and Ellen White’s writings, which he believed pointed to a need for a renewed emphasis on righteousness and a return to the “original” Adventist teachings.<sup>16</sup> Houteff defined “present truth” as the current, living truth that God is revealing to His people in the present time, which he believed was distinct from the “old” or “past” truth that had been established in the early days of the Adventist Church. He believed that the Davidian movement was the true custodian of this “present truth.”<sup>17</sup>

Ellen White, on the other hand, defined “present truth” as the truth that is currently being revealed and emphasized by God, which is always in harmony with the Bible and the fundamental principles of the Adventist faith. She wrote: “The present truth, which is the truth for this time, is the truth that is to be proclaimed to the world. It is the truth that is to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord.”<sup>18</sup> In another statement, she emphasized that “present truth” is not a new or different doctrine, but rather a fresh emphasis on the timeless truths of the Bible: “The present truth is not a new doctrine, but a new presentation of the old, old story. It is the truth that has been from the beginning, but which has been lost sight of in the darkness of error and superstition.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over “The Shepherd’s Rod,”* Tract No. 7, 76.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ellen G. White, “Words of Comfort—No. 2,” *Review and Herald*, October 26, 1897.

<sup>19</sup> Ellen G. White, “Preparation for Camp-meetings,” *Review and Herald*, April 22, 1884.

Houteff directed followers to redirect tithes to his movement, challenging the SDA Church's financial authority and spiritual legitimacy truth.<sup>20</sup> His interpretation emphasized the importance of supporting the SRod as the only true repository of God's message and blessings. This belief remains a defining feature of the Davidian movement, influencing its identity and relationship with the SDA Church.<sup>21</sup>

Houteff's storehouse theology was deeply rooted in Ellen White's writings, drawing inspiration from four key statements that emphasized the importance of the "storehouse" and proper tithe and offering management. Ellen White wrote, "The storehouse of God's abundance is to be in the church, and from it, the necessities of the gospel are to be supplied"<sup>22</sup> Additionally, she stated, "The Lord has made provision for the support of His work, and has placed the responsibility upon the church to manage the talents He has entrusted to them"<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, she emphasized, "The storehouse of the Lord is to be in the church, and from it, the necessities of the cause are to be supplied"<sup>24</sup>

According to Houteff, these statements clearly outline the church's role in managing God's resources and supplying the necessities of the gospel, providing a foundation for his storehouse theology.<sup>25</sup> However, one quote in particular stood out as the cornerstone of Houteff's storehouse theology: "The tithe is the Lord's, and it

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<sup>20</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over "The Shepherd's Rod,"* Tract No. 7, 76.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 3:392.

<sup>23</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 4:468.

<sup>24</sup> White, *Gospel Workers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1883), 423.

<sup>25</sup> Rodriguez, *Tithing in the Writings of Ellen G. White*.

should be brought into His storehouse, which is the treasury of the church.”<sup>26</sup> This statement, penned by Ellen White, was frequently cited by Houteff to underscore the importance of directing tithes and offerings to the rightful repository, which he believed was his own organization, the Shepherd’s Rod.<sup>27</sup> By emphasizing this quote, Houteff sought to establish his movement as the legitimate storehouse of God’s abundance, tasked with managing the talents and resources entrusted to it.

Houteff applied these statements to his own organization, the Shepherd’s Rod. However, a closer analysis reveals that Ellen White consistently used the term “church” to refer specifically to the SDA Church, not any other entity.<sup>28</sup> For example, she writes, “The Lord has made provision for the support of His work and has placed the responsibility upon the church to manage the talents He has entrusted to them.”<sup>29</sup> In this context, she is referring to the SDA Church, not the SRod. Similarly, she writes “the tithe is the Lord’s, and it should be brought into His storehouse, which is the treasury of the church.”<sup>30</sup> Again, she is explicitly referring to the SDA Church as the “church.”

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<sup>26</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 6:384.

<sup>27</sup> Victor Houteff, “The Revival and Reformation Crowned with the Purification,” *Timely Greetings*, March 6, 1948, 18, <https://www.bdsda.com/authors/victor-houteff/timely-greetings/timely-greetings-vol-2-nos-29-30/>.

<sup>28</sup> See Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 327; “The church is the body of Christ, and He is the head of the church.” Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 309; “The church is the pillar and ground of the truth.” Christ’s Object Lessons, page 415. The church is the light of the world.” Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 415; Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Ontario, Canada: Pacific Press, 1954), 397. “The church is the salt of the earth.” These quotes demonstrate Ellen White’s consistent use of the term “church” to refer to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, emphasizing its importance as the repository of God’s abundance, the manager of His talents, and the body of Christ.

<sup>29</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 4:468.

<sup>30</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 6:384.

These quotes demonstrate Ellen White's consistent use of the term "church" to refer to the SDA Church, emphasizing its importance as the repository of God's abundance, the manager of His talents, and the body of Christ. This inconsistency between Ellen White's intended meaning and Houteff's interpretation raises questions about the validity of his storehouse theology. Moreover, Houteff's reluctance to encourage his followers to leave the SDA Church suggests that he may have doubted his own interpretation.<sup>31</sup>

The SDA Church follows a biblical model of tithe collection and distribution, centered on a unified and centralized system. This model is based on the Old Testament concept of the "storehouse," which refers to the temple or tabernacle where tithes and offerings were stored (1 Chr 9:26, 28; 28:11, 12). As Malachi 3:10 instructs, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house." The storehouse served as a repository for supplies supporting the priests and Levites, functioning like a warehouse.

Following the Babylonian exile, tithes and offerings continued to be brought to the storehouse for safekeeping, as seen in Nehemiah 10:38-39 and Ezra 8:29-30. In the New Testament, while there is no explicit mention of a specific storehouse, collections were taken to support ministers, those in need, and missionary efforts.<sup>32</sup> The early Church practiced generosity, compassion, and community care, with an emphasis on spiritual treasures over material wealth (Matt 3:12, Luke 12:24). As seen in Acts 4:34-35, "For there was not a needy person among them, for as many

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<sup>31</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 76.

<sup>32</sup> See 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, 2 Corinthians 8-9, Acts 4:34-35. Also, Herman, "Tithes and Offerings."

as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”

Even after Christ's ascension, the disciples continued to receive offerings from members while in the temple, as seen in John 13:29 and Acts 5:2. Peter spoke about the offerings of Ananias and Sapphira,<sup>33</sup> and Judas Iscariot was the treasurer during Christ's time, keeping the money wherever they went (John 13:29). The disabled man who sat at the gate, whom Peter and friends healed, asked for money from worshippers who entered the temple, suggesting that they brought money to the temple (Acts 3:2-3). When the poor woman gave some money, it was in temple, and Jesus commended her (Mark 12:41-44).<sup>34</sup>

The SDA Church, in its official documents, states that the storehouse is the church through its entities, such as the conference. The Church is the storehouse of God's treasures, and it is our privilege to bring our tithes and offerings into His storehouse, that He may use them for the advancement of His work. The church is considered the storehouse of God's treasures, and members are encouraged to bring their tithes and offerings into His storehouse to advance His work. The conference is responsible for administering the tithe and distributing funds for the support of the ministry and the advancement of the gospel.<sup>35</sup>

In this view, local conferences, missions, fields, and unions serve as designated “storehouses” representing the worldwide Church organization. Tithes, constituting 10% of members' income, are gathered at local churches and then

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<sup>33</sup> See Acts 5:1-11; Relevant Christianity, “The Apostolic Period.”

<sup>34</sup> Fentress, “What Do We Know about Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John?”

<sup>35</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 19th ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 2015), 142-144.

directed to these appointed administrative bodies. This “storehouse” principle facilitates the pooling of resources for vital purposes: supporting ministers, funding evangelism, operating educational institutions, and enabling humanitarian initiatives worldwide.

Throughout both Testaments, the storehouse concept represents the centralization of resources for divine purposes. While it was a physical location in the Old Testament, it symbolizes the importance of generosity, compassion, and spiritual priorities in the New Testament. The storehouse principle remains significant, emphasizing responsible stewardship and support for the community of believers.

Houteff disputed the Church’s understanding of the “storehouse” for tithe collection, asserting that it should be entrusted to those promoting his interpretation of “present truth” rather than the established Church hierarchy.<sup>36</sup> He selectively drew on Ellen White’s writings to argue against a centralized control of tithe distribution. However, both biblical teachings and the Spirit of Prophecy clearly indicate that tithes should be directed to the organized Church as the designated “storehouse,” rather than being dispersed to individuals or splinter groups.

### **Houteff’s Poverty Exemption**

A third significant point of divergence between Houteff’s tithing theology and that of the SDA Church’s stance, which is rooted in both the Bible and Ellen G. White’s teachings, revolves around the question of exempting the poor from tithing obligations. This disparity was highlighted by Andreasen during an interview with Houteff at Waco, wherein Houteff cited his interpretation of select Ellen White quotes

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<sup>36</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over “The Shepherd’s Rod,”* 76.

as justification.<sup>37</sup> Specifically, he referenced her statement, “The Lord does not require from the poor man that which he does not have,” to support his argument for exempting the poor from tithing.”<sup>38</sup>

Contrary to Houteff’s teachings, the Bible and Ellen White’s writings emphasize that giving to God is a universal responsibility and privilege, extending to all individuals, regardless of economic status.<sup>39</sup> Jesus commended the widow who gave her last two coins, and the widow of Zarephath shared her meagre resources with Elijah, demonstrating trust in God’s provision.<sup>40</sup> Even the Levites, who received tithes, gave a tenth to the priests, showing that no one is too poor to give to God.<sup>41</sup> The Israelites, freshly freed from slavery, willingly gave to build the Tabernacle, exemplifying dedication despite poverty.<sup>42</sup> These examples demonstrate that God values the heart and willingness to give, regardless of one’s economic situation.

Ellen White echoes this, stating that God makes ample provision for all and expects faithful stewardship from everyone.<sup>43</sup> She highlights God’s special care for

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<sup>37</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over “The Shepherd’s Rod”* Truth’s Decree on Earth Is the Decree in Heaven.” *Timely Greetings*, February 28, 1948. <https://www.bdsda.com/authors/victor-houteff/timely-greetings/timely-greetings-vol-2-nos-29-30/>, ” 76.

<sup>38</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 3:394.

<sup>39</sup> Ellen G. White, “Practical Thoughts for the Camp-meetings,” *Review and Herald*, May 8, 1883.

<sup>40</sup> See 1 Kings 17:8-16: A widow, struggling to survive during a famine, shared her last meal and oil with the prophet Elijah, trusting God’s promise to provide for her and her son. Also, in Mark 12:42-44, Luke 21:2-4: A poor widow gave two small coins, all she had, into the temple treasury. Jesus praised her for giving out of her poverty, while others gave out of their abundance.

<sup>41</sup> See Numbers 18:24-28: Even the Levites, who themselves received tithes from the Israelites, were required to give a tenth of their received tithes to the priests, showing that no one was too poor to give to God.

<sup>42</sup> See Exodus 25:1-7, 35:4-29: The Israelites, recently freed from slavery, willingly gave their valuable possessions, skills, and time to build the Tabernacle, demonstrating their dedication to God despite their poverty.

<sup>43</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 3:394.

the poor and the importance of sharing our blessings with others.<sup>44</sup> These examples and writings demonstrate that giving is a matter of the heart, not wealth, and that the poor are not exempt from supporting God's work. Houteff's interpretation of Ellen White's quotes on the poor and tithing is misleading and incomplete, as he selectively uses statements to support his idea that the poor are exempt from giving.<sup>45</sup> However, he neglects the broader context of Ellen White's teachings and biblical principles, which emphasize the importance of willingness, sacrifice, and faithfulness in giving, regardless of economic situation. Ellen White frequently warned against isolating sentences from their context, emphasizing the importance of understanding the original intent and meaning.<sup>46</sup>

In reality, Ellen White's teachings on giving are not limited to the wealthy, but rather, she encourages all who have received blessings from God to share them with others. She appeals to "all who are united with Christ" and "have received from Him the bread of life" to "impart it to others" This principles of giving is not based on one's economic status, but rather on their willingness to trust God and share their blessings with others.<sup>47</sup> By ignoring this context, Houteff's interpretation contradicts Ellen White's balanced view of giving, which emphasizes both the support of the poor and the importance of faithfulness in giving, regardless of economic situation. A comprehensive understanding of Ellen White's teachings and biblical principles is

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<sup>44</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 3:394.

<sup>45</sup> Houteff, *The Shepherd's Rod*, 1:236.

<sup>46</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2005), 1:44.

<sup>47</sup> White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 415.

essential to accurately apply the principles of giving and tithing, rather than relying on selective and misleading interpretations.<sup>48</sup>

A closer analysis reveals that Ellen White's quotes must be considered in harmony with other teachings and biblical principles.<sup>49</sup> The Bible teaches that giving is a matter of the heart, and that God values our willingness and faithfulness more than the amount we give.<sup>50</sup> In essence, Paul is saying that God looks at the heart, not just the action. He wants people to give from a position of love, joy, and willingness, rather than duty or necessity. By doing so, Paul emphasizes the importance of cultivating a heart of generosity, rather than just going through the emotions. By ignoring this context, Houteff's submission is inconsistent with Ellen White's overall teachings and biblical principles.<sup>51</sup>

### **Houteff's Contrasting Perspective on Tithing Usage**

Victor Houteff claimed to base his theology on tithing usage on Ellen G. White's writings, frequently citing her works as support, but a closer examination reveals that his teachings actually deviated from her principles, misapplying her words to justify his own divisive views on tithing allocation.<sup>52</sup> Houteff's own statements provide the most reliable insight into his professed regard for the Spirit of Prophecy. In his words,

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<sup>48</sup> Richard M. Davidson, "Interpreting Scripture according to the Scriptures: Toward an Understanding of Seventh-day Adventist Hermeneutics," Biblical Research Institute, 2003, accessed August 26, 2024, <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/articles/interpreting-scripture-according-to-the-scriptures-toward-an-understanding-of-seventh-day-adventist-hermeneutics>.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> See 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 Here, Paul emphasizes that giving is a matter of the heart, and that one should give willingly and cheerfully, without coercion or obligation. He encourages the Corinthians to give from a place of generosity and kindness, rather than mere obligation.

<sup>51</sup> Rodriguez, *Tithing in the Writings of Ellen G. White*.

<sup>52</sup> Sighandcry, "The 1942 Interview."

“Our only aim in life is to be true to the Word of God—the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy...”<sup>53</sup> This quote suggests Houteff held White’s writings in high esteem, positioning them alongside Scripture as authoritative sources of truth.<sup>54</sup> However, he failed to provide biblical backing for his views, unlike the Adventist Church, which harmonizes its beliefs with both Scripture and Ellen White’s teachings.<sup>55</sup>

The Bible teaches that tithes supported the priests and Levites in the Old Testament, replaced by gospel ministers in the New Testament.<sup>56</sup> Despite Houteff’s claims of reverence for Ellen White’s counsel, his teachings and practices often diverged from her explicit guidance.<sup>57</sup> Ellen White’s writings clearly define tithe usage as exclusively supporting gospel laborers engaged in preaching and ministering, mirroring the Old Testament model.<sup>58</sup> Tithe is designated for funding gospel proclamation, emphasizing the importance of supporting the church’s ministry.<sup>59</sup> However, Houteff broadened the definition to include his Shepherd’s Rod movement, which Ellen White did not intend.<sup>60</sup>

Houteff selectively used a quote from *Testimonies*, Volume 6 to justify his call for tithes, but the full context reveals Ellen White was urging practical support for

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<sup>53</sup> Sighandcry, “The 1942 Interview.”

<sup>54</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 6:387.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Leviticus 27:30-33; Malachi 3:10; Genesis 28:22; Deuteronomy 14:22-27 ; 1 Corinthians 9:13-14 These passages provide guidance on tithe usage, emphasizing the importance of setting aside a portion of one's resources for God's purposes, supporting the ministry and the poor, and recognizing the blessings that come from honouring God in this way.

<sup>57</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 166.

<sup>58</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2005), 101.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>60</sup> Sighandcry, “The 1942 Interview.”

gospel workers through living faith, not financial sustenance.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Houteff elevated Ellen White's writings to a level equal to Scripture, contradicting her own stance that her writings were a lesser light subordinate to the greater light of the Bible.<sup>62</sup> Ellen White's writings emphasize the sacred purpose of tithe, highlighting its vital role in supporting gospel laborers. However, Houteff's interpretations and practices deviated from her explicit counsel, revealing a discrepancy between his professed reverence and actual implementation of her guidance.<sup>63</sup>

Houteff's words revealed a troubling parity between Ellen White's writings and the Bible, positioning them as coequal sources of revelation. However, Ellen White herself emphatically taught that her writings were not on the same level as Scripture, but rather a secondary witness that pointed to the supreme authority of the Bible.<sup>64</sup> In her own words, Ellen White emphasized the superiority of Scripture, declaring that "The Scriptures are the greater light, our guide" and "The Bible is the greater light, the more sure word of prophecy." She humbly regarded her own writings as "a lesser light" that must be subordinate to the greater light of the Bible.<sup>65</sup>

If her writings contradicted Scripture, she acknowledged that they must be adjusted to align with the supreme authority of the Bible.<sup>66</sup> By elevating Ellen White's writings to a level equal to the Bible, Houteff's stance contradicted her own teachings and blurred the line between authority and testimony. Ellen White's words clearly

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<sup>61</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 6:215.

<sup>62</sup> White, "Notes of Travel-No. 1," *Review and Herald*, June 14, 1906, 1.

<sup>63</sup> White, *Manuscript Releases* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981), 1:246.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:247.

<sup>65</sup> White, *1888 Materials* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 161.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

showed that she viewed her writings as subordinate to Scripture, and they should be tested and judged by the Bible.<sup>67</sup>

### **Impact on Church Unity**

Victor Houteff's teachings on tithing and behaviour had a profound and lasting impact on the Church, leading to widespread division and fragmentation. His legacy continues to affect the Church's unity today, with various groups influenced by his teachings perpetuating his ideologies. These groups include the BDSAs, The Living Waters Branch, The Branch of the Lord, The House of Yahweh, The Church of God International, The Remnant Church, The Assembly of Yahweh, and The Kingdom of God Restoration, each with their own unique twist on Houteff's teachings.<sup>68</sup>

In addition, individual members in certain regions, such as Zimbabwe, have adopted practices that reflect Houteff's ideology, refusing to submit tithes to the conference and instead choosing to give directly to selected ministers they trust. These individuals, seemingly inspired by Houteff's arguments, justify their actions by claiming that the church has strayed from its original purpose. They argue that their tithes and offerings are better spent directly supporting individuals who are perceived to be doing God's work, rather than going through traditional channels.<sup>69</sup>

This lingering impact of Houteff's teachings continues to hinder the church's unity and mission, a testament to the far-reaching consequences of his actions and

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<sup>67</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 6:215.

<sup>68</sup> Roxy Simons, "Does Branch Davidians Still Exist? What Happened to David Koresh's Cult," *Newsweek*, Published March 22, 2023, accessed August 26, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/does-branch-davidians-still-exist-what-happened-david-koresh-cult-1789158>.

<sup>69</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 6:215.

ideologies. The proliferation of these groups and ideologies has created a complex web of division and strife within the church, creating challenges in the achievement of true unity and harmony.

During the 1934 General Conference session, church leaders endeavored to address the challenges posed by the Davidian movement, led by Houteff. Despite being given ample opportunities to share and defend his views, Houteff claimed that church leaders failed to provide him with a sufficient platform, contrary to evidence.<sup>70</sup> Some hearings would prolong for up to eight hours, with one notable instance reported by O. J. Graf on November 11, 1932, which exemplifies how Houteff's controversies exhausted the church's resources and energy, diverting attention away from its primary mission of spreading the gospel.<sup>71</sup> The prolonged and intense nature of these hearings not only consumed considerable time but also drained the church's emotional and spiritual energy, hindering its ability to effectively fulfill its mission and outreach endeavours. The extensive duration of these hearings highlights the significant impact Houteff's issues had on the church's overall well-being and its capacity to carry out its core objectives.<sup>72</sup>

Houteff's actions and teachings, as evidenced by his own words, demonstrate that he caused disunity in the church by promoting his own doctrines and interpretations despite warnings from experienced brethren. He himself once said: "At the time the message of The SRod came, I was both a member and officer in one of our churches." "It was after the book had been written that my name was dropped

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<sup>70</sup> *Shepherd's Rod Propaganda* (n.p.: General Conference Committee, 1946), 1, 2.

<sup>71</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Committee, *The Story of "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 7.

<sup>72</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 6:215.

from the church records.”<sup>73</sup> This was in direct violation of both the scriptures and the writings of Ellen White, which he claimed to adhere to. The Bible emphasizes the importance of unity, urging believers to “be of the same mind, same love, same spirit, same purpose” (Phil 2:2). Paul also encourages believers to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). Furthermore, Jesus prayed for His disciples to be one, saying, “Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory, which You have given Me. For I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one” (John 17:24).

Ellen White counsels in line with these biblical principles, emphasizing the importance of submitting new teachings to the scrutiny of brethren of experience and yielding to their judgment if they see no light in it. She writes, “There are a thousand temptations in disguise prepared for those who have the light of truth; and the only safety for any of us is in receiving no new doctrine, no new interpretation of the Scriptures, without first submitting it to brethren of experience.”<sup>74</sup>

Houteff began teaching his views in 1928, continued to do so despite repeated counsel from brethren, and was eventually disfellowshipped from the church. His refusal to submit to the guidance of experienced brethren and his determination to promote his own teachings led to division and strife within the church. In contrast, Ellen White emphasized the importance of humility, teachability, and submission to the counsel of brethren in matters of doctrine and interpretation. She warned against receiving new doctrines or interpretations without first submitting them to the scrutiny of experienced brethren, highlighting the safety that lies in seeking counsel from

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<sup>73</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 6:215.

<sup>74</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 5:293.

others.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, church leaders exercised restraint and patience before making the difficult decision to disfellowship Houteff and his followers.

In accordance with SDA protocol, local church leaders and faithful members made persistent efforts to guide Houteff back to the truth, only resorting to disfellowship after these attempts at redemption failed. This process demonstrated the church's commitment to upholding doctrinal integrity while also showing compassion and patience in dealing with Houteff and his adherents.<sup>76</sup> Walter H. Schacht's account of Victor Houteff's actions exposes a troubling trend of division and betrayal, defying the biblical principles of unity and love.<sup>77</sup> As a Sabbath school teacher, Houteff was entrusted with leading his students in the truth, but he abused this position to promote unconventional ideas that contradicted the church's teachings and Ellen White's writings, which he claimed to support (1 Cor 1:10; Phil 2:1-2).

Despite warnings from church leaders, Houteff continued to spread his teachings, moving his studies to a separate location where he could freely disseminate his views, showing disregard for church authority and a willingness to split the congregation. This stance goes against the teachings of Proverbs 6:19 and Luke 11:23, which emphasize the importance of unity and harmony.<sup>78</sup> Houteff's actions led many astray, causing division and strife within the church, and blatantly disregarded Ellen White's counsel on unity and harmony. His refusal to heed warnings and

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<sup>75</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 5:293.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Schacht letter to Odom, in General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Committee, *The Story of "The Shepherd's Rod."*

<sup>78</sup> See Galatians 5:19-20. This passage emphasizes the importance of cultivating unity and love in our relationships and warns against the destructive nature of division and strife. It encourages us to walk in the Spirit and manifest His fruit in our lives, rather than being controlled by our fleshly nature.

determination to promote his teachings, even at the cost of separation, highlights his prioritization of personal ambition over unity and truth.<sup>79</sup>

Houteff's behaviour is characteristic of authoritarian leaders who prioritize personal agendas over community well-being, as seen in Matthew 20:25-28 and 3 John 1:9-10. By exploiting trust and introducing doctrines contrary to church teachings, Houteff betrayed the faith placed in him by the Church and its members, leading to the fragmentation of the Church and the formation of the Davidian movement.<sup>80</sup> Houteff's conduct towards Church leaders was marked by evasion and dismissal, as he claimed to be busy when they sought to engage him in meaningful discussions. This avoidance tactic created a sense of discomfort and perceived intolerance within the Church, suggesting a lack of respect for authority and a reluctance to engage in constructive dialogue.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, Houteff seized opportunities like General Conference sessions to promote his own organization, disseminating literature and causing disruptions.<sup>82</sup> This behaviour demonstrates his prioritization of personal interests over unity and harmony, exploiting platforms intended for collective growth and fellowship to further his own agenda.<sup>83</sup> Through his actions, Houteff demonstrated a lack of accountability and transparency, showcasing a selfish approach that potentially harmed the community. His behaviour likely contributed to the perception of him as

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<sup>79</sup> White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 163.

<sup>80</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 6:215.

<sup>81</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Committee, *The Story of "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 11, 12; Houteff, *The Shepherd's Rod*, 1:6; Houteff, *Pre-Eleventh Hour Extra!*, 48; Houteff, *The Great Controversy over "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 76.

<sup>82</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Committee, *The Story of "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 4.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

intolerant and divisive, fostering a sense of discomfort within the church. By prioritizing his personal agenda over the well-being of the church, Houteff's behaviour undermined the unity and harmony of the church.<sup>84</sup>

The Davidians reported that their message had angered church leaders, who struggled to respond effectively. In one instance, the church leaders threatened to close the West Union Church due to the disunity and discomfort caused by Houteff's teachings.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, the Davidian movement gained traction, with emotional preaching services and converts, including two ministers, joining from the mainstream SDA Church.<sup>86</sup>

A church in Loma Linda company was established, with leaders elected and a commitment to support the work through tithes and offerings.<sup>87</sup> However, this approach diverged from biblical principles on giving, involving coercion and forced tithing. Ultimately, the entire church shifted to the SRod, leading to disfellowship and a decision to redirect tithes and offerings to the SRod instead of the church.<sup>88</sup> Houteff went on to establish his own currency, dubbed 'trade money', which was used within the community. Members had no direct access to US dollars after settling in Waco unless they specifically requested it.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Committee, *The Story of "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 5.

<sup>85</sup> Houteff, *Latest News for "Mother,"* 64, 65.

<sup>86</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 76.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Sighandcry, "The 1942 Interview."

Houteff's leadership was marked by a glaring contradiction.<sup>90</sup> On one hand, he denounced the church for its perceived authoritarianism, suggesting a desire for a more inclusive and accepting environment. Yet, within his own organization, he exercised a similar level of control, expelling members who deviated from his teachings. This paradoxical behaviour raises questions about the true motives behind his criticisms of the church. Was it a genuine desire for unity and inclusivity, or a lust for power and control?<sup>91</sup>

Houteff's hypocrisy had far-reaching consequences. It eroded the credibility of his teachings and leadership, sowing confusion and mistrust among his followers. His organization became another splinter group, fragmenting the Church further and creating rigid boundaries. Ultimately, Houteff's actions hindered the unity of the church, making it more challenging to achieve its mission. His behaviour was driven by a desire for control and power, rather than a genuine interest in promoting unity and inclusivity within the church. This realization sheds light on the impact of his teachings and serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of hypocrisy and the importance of authentic leadership.<sup>92</sup>

The Olympic Exposition Park Church board in Los Angeles met to tackle the escalating problem posed by Houteff's controversial teachings. After thorough deliberation, they voted to request that Houteff cease conducting his meetings on church premises.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, they decided to appeal to the conference for a

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<sup>90</sup> Sigheandcry, "The 1942 Interview."

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Garrick D. Augustus, *What Every Seventh-day Adventist Should Know about the Shepherd's Rod* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2018), 1:723.

thorough examination and evaluation of Houteff's doctrines to determine their alignment with the church's beliefs. Despite this, Houteff continued to disseminate his teachings, disregarding the Church leadership's requests to cease.<sup>94</sup> This led to unnecessary turmoil, confusion, and division among the congregation, as some members were persuaded by his teachings and chose to support him, thereby fragmenting the Church and hindering its ability to function in unity. The resulting schism created a deep rift within the church, impeding its capacity for harmonious functioning.<sup>95</sup>

Unfazed and unwavering, Houteff continued to spread his erroneous teachings a year later, in the spring of 1930. With unrelenting determination, he widely circulated his doctrines in hectographed form, titled *The Shepherd's Rod*.<sup>96</sup> During the SDA Church's General Conference in San Francisco, California, from May 29 to June 12, 1930, he brazenly distributed 33 copies of his work among church leaders, sowing the seeds of discord.<sup>97</sup> These initial manuscripts, comprising the first 172 pages of the book, focused on the 144,000 and a call for reformation, laying the foundation for his misguided and divisive ideology.<sup>98</sup>

Houteff's teachings on tithing had far-reaching consequences, impacting not only his local Church but also the broader church structure, affecting conferences, unions, and ultimately the General Conference.<sup>99</sup> The Church leaders found their

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<sup>94</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 6:215.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:25.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:387.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 76.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

mission-focused meetings and business sessions disrupted as they endeavoured to address and resolve the issues raised by Houteff's controversial teachings, which demanded significant attention and time. Despite the wise counsel and guidance offered by experienced brethren in California, Houteff remained resolute in his defiance, opting to disseminate his teachings on a larger scale.

In November 1930, he published his manuscript, *The SRod*, as a 255-page book in Los Angeles, and in the following month, he distributed copies to numerous denominational workers, thereby perpetuating his erroneous teachings throughout the church's hierarchy. His obstinacy and refusal to heed counsel led to a significant disturbance in the church's unity and doctrine.<sup>100</sup> As Rhodes, pointed out, Houteff's teachings were causing more harm than good, generating significant distress and unease among the congregation, and threatening the church's harmony and doctrine. This made it clear that Houteff's motivations were misaligned with the church's well-being, and his teachings were detrimental to the unity and faith of the community.<sup>101</sup>

### **Implications on the Church's Mission**

The departure of the Davidians, led by Victor Houteff, had a devastating and crippling effect on the financial stability of the SDA Church, causing widespread financial hardship and undermining its ability to carry out its mission. Houteff's teachings on tithing, which emphasized individualistic giving and bypassed the traditional storehouse, resulted in a significant diversion of funds away from the Church's mission to spread the gospel.<sup>102</sup> While exact figures are not available,

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<sup>100</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 76.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Sighandcry, "The 1942 Interview."

Houteff's own testimony to Andreasen reveals a substantial loss of financial resources for the church. He boasted about the financial stability of his organization, compensating workers at their compound generously, with hourly wages ranging from 14 to 17 cents. Moreover, he claimed to support missionaries abroad, albeit differently than the SDA Church. Unlike SDA pastors, who received a regular salary, Davidian missionaries worked as volunteers, relying on tithe funds for support, which were distributed differently than the monthly wages paid to SDA pastors.<sup>103</sup>

On April 19, 1993, a devastating encounter between the Davidians and the FBI resulted in a tragic loss of innocent lives, leaving a profound impact on the SDA Church.<sup>104</sup> The 51-day standoff culminated in a deadly fire that claimed the lives of 76 people, including Davidian leader David Koresh and many of his followers. The tragic event not only scarred the lives of those directly affected but also had far-reaching reputation effects for the Adventist Church as far as sharing the gospel was concerned.<sup>105</sup>

The Davidians' use of a similar name and their claim to be working within the church led to widespread confusion and misinformation about the church's teachings.<sup>106</sup> The fact that they also used Ellen White's writings to support their beliefs further blurred the lines, causing many to question the church's true stance. As a result, the Adventist Church's reputation suffered significantly, with many viewing

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<sup>103</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 76.

<sup>104</sup> Tara Isabella Burton, "The Waco Tragedy Explained," *Vox*, last modified 2018, accessed August 19, 2024, <https://www.vox.com/2018/4/19/17246732/waco-tragedy-explained-david-koresh-mount-carmel-branch-davidian-cult-30-year-anniversary>.

<sup>105</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 76.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

it as being associated with the controversial Davidian movement.<sup>107</sup> The aftermath of the tragedy saw the church facing intense media scrutiny and criticism, which led to a significant backlash against the church. The public's perception of the church was marred, and its mission and evangelistic efforts were severely hindered.

The Church leadership faced an uphill battle in clarifying the differences between the Adventist Church and the Davidian movement, and in rebuilding its reputation and trust with the public.<sup>108</sup> In the face of this adversity, the church leadership worked tirelessly to educate the public about the true teachings and beliefs of the Adventist Church, and to distance themselves from the misguided ideologies of the Davidians. Through concerted efforts and a commitment to transparency, the church slowly began to rebuild its reputation and restore trust with the public. However, the scars of that fateful day remain, serving as a poignant reminder of the importance of clarity and discernment in the face of misinformation and confusion.<sup>109</sup>

A disruptive turning point in the church's history emerged at Loma Linda, where a significant portion of the membership defected to the Shepherd's Rod movement, led by Houteff. This mass exodus resulted in a substantial drain on the church's resources, both financially and in terms of human capital.<sup>110</sup> The conference, which lasted for ten days and had an estimated attendance of sixty-nine, saw nearly three-quarters of the attendees publicly declare their support for Houteff's teachings, indicating a substantial segment of the church membership had been swayed. Even

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<sup>107</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 76.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

the remaining one-quarter, including two ministers, showed interest in joining, requesting additional time to study the movement.<sup>111</sup>

Notably, Houteff's testimony revealed that each member was required to pay a double tithe, indicating that these defectors redirected their financial support from the SDA Church to the Davidians. The group's organization and structure became apparent with the election of leaders and the unanimous decision to dispatch representatives to spread the message, further solidifying the movement's hold on church members. This incident at Loma Linda highlights the profound impact of Houteff's teachings on the church, resulting in a significant loss of membership, leadership, and resources, ultimately weakening the church's overall strength and stability. The event marked a turning point in the church's history, underscoring the challenges posed by offshoot movements and the need for vigilant leadership to maintain unity and doctrine.<sup>112</sup> This Loma Linda incident showcases the significant impact of Houteff's teachings on the church, resulting in a substantial loss of membership, leadership, and resources, ultimately weakening the church's overall strength and stability.<sup>113</sup>

The Ontario Conference's recent action serves as evidence of the SDA Church's long-standing struggles with offshoot groups, including the Davidians.<sup>114</sup> They mentioned the Davidians by name; "some identified groups and individuals negatively affecting our churches today and in the past on a variety of ways are the Davidian Seventh-day Adventists or SRod's, Desmond Ford and Good News

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<sup>111</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 76.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

Unlimited, Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement, Hope International–Our Firm Foundation.”<sup>115</sup>

These groups have been recognized by the sub-committee as promoting damaging teachings that have undermined Church unity and well-being, causing division and discord among members.<sup>116</sup> The subcommittee’s unanimous decision to create guidelines acknowledges the growing threat posed by offshoot-related activities and demonstrates the church’s commitment to addressing this critical issue, with the ultimate goal of fostering a more harmonious and unified church community.”<sup>117</sup>

This response serves as a significant indicator of the church’s overall well-being, highlighting the deep-seated and widespread nature of the problem. The guidelines expose a troubling trend of division and discord within the church, fuelled by groups like the Davidian Seventh-day Adventists, who persist in promoting teachings that erode unity and divert attention from the church’s mission.<sup>118</sup> The document recognizes extreme ideologies and media-driven dissemination of dissident views, underscoring the complexity and nuance of the challenge.

This ongoing struggle bears witness to the lasting impact of Victor Houteff’s teachings, causing decades of unrest and hindering the Church’s progress. Despite this, the church remains committed to its mission, acknowledging the need for progressive revelation, balancing unity with the unfolding of truth. By directly

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<sup>115</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over “The Shepherd’s Rod,”* 76.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> East Jamaica Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Guidelines for Addressing Offshoots and Doctrinal Dissenters*, PDF file, October 2016, <https://ejcsda.com/media/0ynfrinm/offshoots.pdf>.

confronting these challenges the Church can emerge stronger and more united, advancing its mission to spread the gospel and prepare for Christ's return.<sup>119</sup>

The Church's unity and faithfulness are essential to fulfilling its divine purpose. In harmony with biblical principles and Ellen White's writings, the SDA Church emphasizes that unity is crucial to effectively advancing God's mission and fulfilling His will. Ellen White's writings emphasize that "unity is the strength of the church" and that its members must be united in their efforts to proclaim the gospel and prepare the world for Christ's return.<sup>120</sup> She also highlights the importance of faithfulness, stating that it is the proof of faithfulness in greater things.<sup>121</sup>

The *SDA Church Manual* echoes these sentiments, defining the church as a united community of believers called to proclaim the gospel and prepare the world for Christ's return.<sup>122</sup> It also emphasizes unity in diversity as a hallmark of the Adventist Church and faithfulness to God and His commandments as essential for fulfilling the church's mission.<sup>123</sup> The church's mission includes proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, serving others, and promoting unity and harmony within the church.<sup>124</sup> The SDA Church, guided by biblical teachings and Ellen White's writings, recognizes unity and faithfulness as indispensable components for fulfilling its mission and achieving its spiritual aspirations. By embracing biblical principles and the guidance

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<sup>119</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 76.

<sup>120</sup> White, *Testimonies*, 4:21.

<sup>121</sup> White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 163.

<sup>122</sup> *Church Manual* (2015), 15.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

of the Spirit of Prophecy, the church can overcome division and effectively prepare the world for Christ's return.<sup>125</sup>

The impact of Houteff's divisive teachings on tithing still resonates across Africa, where various countries are home to Davidian and Branch Davidian communities. These communities are scattered throughout the continent, with a significant presence in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, which includes South Africa, Malawi, Mozambique, Mauritius, Seychelles, Lesotho, Namibia, Botswana, and Eswatini (formerly Swaziland). In certain regions, such as Zimbabwe, the presence of Davidian and Branch Davidian groups within Seventh-day Adventist Churches presents a distinct challenge.<sup>126</sup> Unlike typical splinter groups, they do not separate themselves into independent churches. Instead, they integrate into SDA congregations, making identification difficult. This strategy is intentional, driven by their belief in reforming the Church from within. The sole distinguishing feature of these groups is their approach to giving and tithing. They do not recognize the church as the storehouse, and therefore, refrain from tithe payment, even if they actively participate in other church activities like evangelistic campaigns and Bible studies. This makes them nearly indistinguishable from genuine SDA members, allowing them to operate undetected from within the church.<sup>127</sup>

In the East-Central Africa Division, countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi also have significant Davidian and Branch Davidian populations. Meanwhile, the West-

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<sup>125</sup> *Church Manual* (2015), 16.

<sup>126</sup> J. Gordon Melton, "Branch Davidian: Religious Organization," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Branch-Davidian>.

<sup>127</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 76.

Central Africa Division, comprising Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, The Gambia, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad, and Central African Republic, also grapples with the influence of these communities. In North Africa, the division includes Sudan, South Sudan, Republic of South Sudan, and Western Sahara, while the Indian Ocean Union Conference comprises Djibouti, Eritrea, Comoros, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, and São Tomé and Príncipe. Additionally, Somalia, which falls under the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission, also has a presence of Davidian and Branch Davidian communities.<sup>128</sup> The widespread presence of these communities highlights the ongoing impact of Houteff's teachings and underscores the need for unity and faithfulness within the church to fulfil its mission effectively.<sup>129</sup>

The statistics and facts presented demonstrate that the collective impact of Houteff's teachings and the departure of the Davidians dealt a crippling blow to the church's financial stability, causing a significant decline in resources. Furthermore, the lingering influence of Houteff's teachings continues to destabilize the church's finances, as splinter groups inspired by his ideology adopt self-serving tithing practices. These groups bypass the traditional storehouse, redirecting funds to their preferred leaders or ministries, thereby undermining the church's capacity to support its mission and ministries. This shift in financial practices has resulted in a substantial reduction in resources, severely hindering the church's ability to fulfil its objectives and effectively spread the gospel. The ongoing disruption to the church's financial stability poses a persistent challenge, necessitating a concerted effort to address the lingering effects of Houteff's teachings and restore fiscal stability.

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<sup>128</sup> Houteff, *The Great Controversy over "The Shepherd's Rod,"* 76.

<sup>129</sup> Houteff, *The Shepherd's Rod,* 1:24.

## Summary

This chapter examined Victor Houteff's theology on tithing, juxtaposing his views with those of the SDA Church. A key aspect of this analysis was the contrast between Houteff's belief in exempting the poor from tithing and the SDA Church's principle of inclusivity. Furthermore, the chapter explored the divergent perspectives on tithe usage, with Houteff's views pitted against the SDA Church's concept of the "storehouse". The implications of these differences are far-reaching, and the chapter investigated how they have affected and continue to influence the unity and mission of the SDA Church, shedding light on the lasting impact of Houteff's teachings on tithing.

In conclusion, the SDA Church has been deeply scarred by the teachings of Victor Houteff, which have siphoned off resources and stifled the spread of the gospel. The persistent presence of Davidian communities serves as a poignant reminder of the urgent need for unity, faithfulness, and a return to biblical principles. To break free from this cycle of division and distraction, the church must rediscover its core mission and values, embracing the timeless truths of Scripture and the inspired guidance of the Spirit of Prophecy. Only then can it heal the wounds of division, restore its faithfulness to the original mission, prioritize fiscal responsibility, and revitalize its commitment to spreading the gospel and preparing the world for Christ's return. By doing so, the church can emerge stronger, more united, and more effective in fulfilling its divine purpose, shining brightly as a beacon of hope in a world eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Summary**

This study investigated the tithing teachings of Houteff, the founder of the Davidian movement, to determine their historical and contemporary impact on the unity and mission of the SDA Church. The findings showed that Houteff's teachings departed from biblical principles and the SDA Church's teachings on tithing, causing a schism and financial instability. Chapter one presented the study's introduction, outlining the background and rationale for this research.

In Chapter two, the biblical principles of tithing and the storehouse were examined, providing a basis for evaluating Houteff's teachings. Houteff's argument for a double tithe, based on Malachi 3:10, was found to be misinterpreted, as "all tithes" does not support his claim. Additionally, the study reaffirmed the SDA Church's biblical stance on tithe usage, which contrasts with Houteff's teaching of using tithes for all-inclusive benefits.

Ultimately, chapter two demonstrated a uninterrupted requirement for tithing from the patriarchs to the present-day church, contradicting Houteff's initial assertion that tithing was only obligatory under the Levitical law. This analysis demonstrated the detrimental effects of Houteff's views on the SDA Church's mission and unity, both historically and ongoing.

In chapter three Houteff's reforms at mount Carmel and his storehouse concept were subjected to critical scrutiny, revealing a misguided understanding of

scripture. His claim that his organization was the storehouse was found to be erroneous and without basis in scripture or Ellen White's writings, contradicting Houteff's assertions.

Chapter four compared and contrasted the differing views on tithing held by Victor Houteff and the SDA Church, revealing significant discrepancies. The study conclusively demonstrated that Houteff's teachings on tithing were at odds with both scriptural principles and Ellen White's writings. Víctor Houteff's argument for exempting the poor from tithing lacks biblical support and deviates from the Seventh-day Adventist Church's stance on the matter.

In the final section of chapter four, the consequences of Houteff's teachings on tithing were examined, exposing how they have led to the proliferation of splinter groups and the ongoing depletion of the Church's human and financial resources.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has comprehensively examined the tithing teachings of Houteff and their far-reaching impact on the SDA Church. The findings unequivocally demonstrate that Houteff's teachings on tithing deviated from biblical principles and the SDA Church's doctrine, leading to a schism, financial instability, and the proliferation of splinter groups.

This research highlights the importance of adhering to scriptural teachings and the need for vigilance in protecting the unity and mission of the church. The study's conclusions serve as a warning against the dangers of misguided interpretations of scripture and the importance of aligning teachings with biblical principles and the Church's doctrine. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the promotion of unity, financial stewardship, and faithfulness to scripture within the SDA Church.

## **A Neglected Aspect of Houteff's Teachings**

In spite of the extensive research on Houteff's controversial teachings, a thorough examination of his tithing views and their effects on church unity and mission has been conspicuously lacking. Prior studies have mainly concentrated on the repercussions of his prophetic interpretations, seemingly downplaying the significance of his beliefs on tithing. However, this research demonstrates that even seemingly minor aspects, such as tithing, can have far-reaching consequences on broader issues. Notably, tithing is a crucial aspect of the SDA Church's fundamental beliefs, specifically emphasized in number 15, which highlights stewardship. The church's mission relies heavily on finances and manpower, making tithing an essential component that cannot be overlooked.

## **Reaffirming the Biblical Approach to Tithe Usage**

This study reaffirms the Bible-based approach to tithe usage, a topic of ongoing debate in the church, which has been influenced by Houteff's teachings. The research debunks the idea that tithe should support non-permanent church workers and refutes the notion that tithe should be used for a broader range of purposes, including infrastructure development and aid for the needy, beyond ministry support. The findings unequivocally show that adhering to biblical principles is the most reliable and prudent approach to tithe usage.

## **The Storehouse Reaffirmed**

The discussion surrounding the traditional "storehouse" concept persists, with some members advocating for the freedom to designate their tithes as they see fit, rather than solely supporting conference organizations. This study underscored the significance of adhering to biblical teachings, particularly regarding the storehouse.

This research served as a reaffirmation of the church's existing stance on this matter, rather than introducing a new concept. Both biblical scripture and Ellen White's writings confirm that the church and its entities constitute the storehouse, emphasizing that individuals do not have the authority to withhold or redirect tithes for personal preferences.

### **A Cautionary Tale: Navigating Controversy and Offshoots in the Church**

This study has exposed the tactics employed by Houteff to lure individuals into his organization, including making false accusations against church leaders, claiming they failed to follow proper procedures in addressing his concerns. This highlights the propensity of offshoots to spread misinformation and tarnish the church's reputation. However, the study reveals that church leaders had, in fact, followed established protocols and possess documentation, including signed documents bearing Houteff's signature, to support their actions. This research serves as a cautionary tale for navigating future controversies, emphasizing the importance of thorough investigation and meticulous documentation when dealing with splinter groups or contentious individuals within the church.

### **Recommendations**

As the church builds upon its existing foundation in comprehensive stewardship education, I strongly recommend the following enhancements to further strengthen its approach:

Firstly, intensify training for teachers and leaders, develop supportive curriculum, and establish small group sessions that foster a culture of questions, dialogue, and personal responsibility. This will empower individuals to take

ownership of their stewardship journey and deepen their understanding of biblical principles.

Secondly, regularly assess and refine the strategy to ensure it remains aligned with biblical teachings. This ongoing evaluation will help the church stay true to its core values and mission. Thirdly, strengthen the review process for teachings and materials, promoting open communication channels and transparency. This will create a safe space for members to raise concerns or questions, encouraging constructive feedback and accountability.

Fourthly, continue implementing a comprehensive teaching approach to tithing, addressing ambiguities and emphasizing clear biblical support for the denominational “storehouse” and global mission initiatives. This will help members understand the purpose and significance of tithing in advancing the Gospel.

Lastly, refine the policy for addressing theological disputes, ensuring teachings align with biblical principles and promoting collaboration among leaders and members through the theological review committee. This will help prevent future disunity by addressing rogue views and fostering a culture of transparency, accountability, and constructive feedback.

By embracing these recommendations, the church can fortify its core identity and mission. It will steadfastly uphold its biblical foundations, ensuring that all teachings and practices remain deeply rooted in scripture. This commitment will foster a culture of collaboration and open communication, preserving organizational unity and promoting a sense of community among its members.

Moreover, the church will safeguard its shared vision, advancing the Gospel through comprehensive stewardship education that empowers individuals to live out their faith with purpose and integrity. By addressing rogue views and promoting

transparency, accountability, and constructive feedback, the church will prevent future disunity and strengthen its overall mission and impact.

Ultimately, these recommendations will enable the church to remain true to its core values while navigating the complexities of a rapidly changing world. By doing so, it will emerge stronger, more united, and more effective in its mission to spread the Gospel and make a lasting difference in the lives of its members and the broader community.

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