

Quality Holy Day Offerings

The Fall Holy Day season will soon be here!

Let us go back in time approximately two thousand years to the Fall Feast celebrations at the Temple in Jerusalem in the year 30 AD. It is interesting to consider that Jesus Christ would have been there to keep the Fall Holy Days. What do you think it would have been like at the Temple on, for example, the Feast of Trumpets? How do you picture it? Solemn? Quiet and serene? Something like a great, majestic Anglican Cathedral perhaps?

If that is how you picture it, forget that image! It was nothing like that. Nor was it anything like any of us have ever experienced before! Thousands of Israelite men – most of them of the tribe of Judah – would have been crowded into the narrow Court of the Israelites – the closest they were allowed to approach the altar and the sacred inner buildings of the Temple. Seventeen thousand priests and Levites would have been on duty on this Holy Day – resplendent in their special uniforms. But despite all this majesty, just a matter of a few metres from the precious and sacred Holy of Holies, the Court of the Priests smelt and sounded like a farmers' market! These were the sounds and the smells of animal sacrifices which had been specially selected for this day: bulls, rams, lambs and goats – the very best of their species, it is true, but still noisy, smelly animals. Add to these smells and sounds the odours of cereal flour, olive oil, wine, and something akin to whisky, and the mental picture is complete. I don't think the old Anglican archbishop would approve of all this going on in his cathedral – even during Harvest Festival!

The point that I want to concentrate on here is that all of these offerings – the animals, the cereal, and the alcoholic beverages – were the very *best* of their kind. A great deal of care had gone into their selection, and even more care would go into their preparation and sacrifice. They were meant to be offerings of the very highest quality! As we approach the Fall Holy Days, I would like to encourage you to ensure that – like those temple sacrifices – all of your offerings will be of the highest possible quality.

Old Testament Feast of Trumpets offerings

The quantity and value of the temple offerings was staggering. Here is what God commanded to be given for the special Feast of Trumpets offering:

On the first day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work. It is a day for you to blow the trumpets, and you shall offer a burnt offering, a pleasing odor to the LORD: one young bull, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish; also their cereal offering of fine flour mixed with oil, three tenths of an ephah [*8 gallons*] for the bull, two tenths [*1.6 gallons*] for the ram, and one tenth [*0.8 gallons*] for each of the seven lambs; with one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you; besides the burnt offering of the new moon, and its cereal offering, and the continual burnt offering and its cereal offering, and their drink offering, according to the ordinance for them, a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD. (Numbers 29:1-6 RSV)

What were these additional New Moon offerings and Continual burnt offerings? They are described in the previous chapter of Numbers:

At the beginnings of your months you shall offer a burnt offering to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish; also three tenths of an ephah [*2.4 gallons*] of fine flour for a cereal offering, mixed with oil, for each bull; and two tenths [*1.6 gallons*] of fine flour for a cereal offering, mixed with oil, for the one ram; and a tenth [*0.8 gallons*] of fine flour mixed with oil as a cereal offering for every lamb; for a burnt offering of pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD. Their drink offerings shall be half a hin [*0.667 gallons*] of wine for a bull, a third of a hin [*0.444 gallons*] for a ram, and a fourth of a hin [*0.333 gallons*] for a lamb; this is the burnt offering of each month throughout the months of the year. Also one male goat for a sin offering to the LORD; it shall be offered besides the continual burnt offering and its drink offering. (Numbers 28:11-15)

That was the requirement for the New Moon offerings. Here are the details for the Continual burnt offering:

And you shall say to them, This is the offering by fire which you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs a year old without blemish, day by day, as a continual offering. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer in the evening; also a tenth of an ephah [0.8 gallons] of fine flour for a cereal offering, mixed with a fourth of a hin [0.333 gallons] of beaten oil. It is a continual burnt offering, which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD. Its drink offering shall be a fourth of a hin [0.333 gallons] for each lamb; in the holy place you shall pour out a drink offering of strong drink to the LORD. The other lamb you shall offer in the evening; like the cereal offering of the morning, and like its drink offering, you shall offer it as an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the LORD. (Numbers 28:3-8)

If you total all of these items, here is what was offered at the Temple each and every Feast of Trumpets: three young bulls, two rams, sixteen male lambs, two male goats, twenty-three gallons of cereal, four gallons of wine, six pints each of strong drink, and olive oil.

Remember that all of these were the very best of their kind. A local sheep farmer here on southern Vancouver Island tells me that a best, prize breeding ram would cost more than \$16,000 today. Think about the value of the best wine and the best whisky you can buy. At a restaurant during the Feast one year we saw a bottle of wine on the menu with a price tag of \$1,600! The total value of these Feast of Trumpets offerings was worth a small fortune, and the attention to detail in their preparation must have been something to behold.

God appreciates quality offerings

Although physical food and drink mean relatively little to God, He does appreciate the thought and effort behind a quality offering. And for good reason!

According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper... he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption... Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

(Hebrews 9:9, 12, 22-24)

Here, the apostle Paul, a very learned Pharisee, tells us that, although these Old Testament offerings could not actually forgive sin, they – along with the Temple and the Levitical priesthood – were symbols of important, precious, heavenly things, including the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Many years before God instituted the Levitical priesthood and its associated offerings, He was pleased with righteous Abel's high quality offerings:

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking.

(Hebrews 11:4)

We also know that Jesus Christ was touched by the tiny, but high quality, offering of a poor widow:

He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury; and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins. And he said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had. (Luke 21:1-4)

Let us take a look at the account of a perhaps lesser-known high quality offering:

And Gad came that day to David, and said to him, "Go up, rear an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." So David went up at Gad's word, as the LORD commanded. And when Araunah looked down, he saw the king and his servants coming on toward him; and Araunah went forth, and did obeisance to the king with his face to the ground. And Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" David said, "To buy the threshing floor of you, in order to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be averted from the people." Then Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him; here are the oxen for the burnt offering, and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "The LORD your God accept you." But the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy it of you for a price; I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. And David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD heeded supplications for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel.

(II Samuel 24:18-24)

David – a man after God's own heart – refused to give an offering that had cost him nothing. Some monetary or otherwise physical sacrifice he knew to be mandatory. God saw and appreciated the quality of David's sacrifice, and answered His prayer.

Conversely, God frowns upon poor quality offerings. Cain gave a poor quality offering and paid the penalty. The quality of an offering does not, however, necessarily depend on its monetary value or amount. As we have seen, the poor widow of Luke 21:1-4 will be remembered for eternity for her tiny offering, whereas Ananias and Sapphira lost their lives by giving a sizable amount from the proceeds of a real estate sale, but in a vain, lying and deceitful attitude:

But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Hark, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things. (Acts 5:1-11)

Again, the number of dollars in our offerings is not the important thing. The important thing is the attitude, the thought, the effort, and the preparation that goes into our offerings. I knew a church family in which the husband and father had been laid off from his job. The Fall Holy Days were coming up, and he didn't have any money for an offering. This enterprising young man took his family and created a Sunday afternoon outing, hiking along a pleasant stretch of highway, retrieving cans and bottles that litter-bugs had thrown from their cars. Some may turn their noses up at this, and I do not say it is for everyone, but I am convinced that God would have been very pleased with the attitude, thought and effort that went into that particular offering. I think it had a "King David" type quality.

Our offerings are appreciated

Recent years have been a financially tough year for many church members. Tax increases and dollar exchange decreases continue to knock huge holes in our already depleted spending power. The term, "discretionary spending" has become a sad joke and does not exist for many church members who are just making it from paycheque to paycheque. But we can take courage. We are not the first of God's people who have been through this type of financial bind. Here, in a quote from the book, "Jesus and His times," is a description of working class life in the Jerusalem of 30 AD:

Crushed by poverty and taxation, the great mass of urban rabble were largely unable to live by all the Pharisees' precepts regarding purity and tithing, or by the priests' rules of ritual and sacrifice. Their existence was frugal at best and could easily slide off into grinding, impoverished misery... Here the common people lived... day laborers, who awoke each morning freshly unemployed. Here too were the chronic unemployables, beggars who no longer dreamed of useful work - the crippled, the diseased, the blind, the insane, the unloved old - all those for whom there was no hospital, no aid, no hope.

Does this sound familiar? Please do not think that God cannot see, understand and appreciate what many brethren are going through financially. He can and He does! The purpose for the Holy Day offering sermonettes is not to squeeze an extra few dollars from each member. Most envelopes are already completed and sealed by the time the offering is taken up. But I would like to encourage you once again by reiterating that God and His true ministers really do understand our financial constraints and appreciate our efforts.

Please really take time to think about, to plan, to have good attitudes about, and finally to give – quality Holy Day offerings.

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