

# Quality Holy Day Offerings

by Staff

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What was it like approximately two thousand years ago during the Feast of Trumpets at the Temple in Jerusalem? In AD 30, Christ would have been there to keep the fall holy days. How do you picture the scene? Was it solemn? Quiet and serene? Perhaps like the ambience of a majestic cathedral?

If so, forget that picture! It was nothing like that—and nothing like any of us have ever experienced before! Thousands of Israelite men, most from the tribe of Judah, would have been crowded into the narrow Court of the Israelites. This courtyard was the closest ordinary males could approach the altar and the sacred inner rooms of the Temple. In addition, as many as 17,000 priests and Levites, resplendent in their special uniforms, would have been on duty on this high day.

Despite all this majesty—just a few meters from the precious and sacred Holy of Holies—the Court of the Priests smelled and sounded like a farmers' market! The noise and smells came from the animal sacrifices that had been specially selected to be offered on the altar this holy day: bulls, rams, lambs and goats—the very best of their species. Mingled with these pungent animal odors were the scents of cereal flour, olive oil, wine, and something akin to whisky. This is far different from the holy day services we attend today!

We do have offerings in common, though today ours are predominantly monetary. One major feature of all the offerings brought to the Temple—the animals, the grain, and the alcoholic beverages—is that they were the very best of their kind. Those who offered them took a great deal of care to select the finest specimens, and they took even more care in their preparation and sacrifice. They were to be offerings of the very highest quality!

As we approach the fall holy days, we need to consider how we can ensure that all our offerings to God—like those Temple sacrifices—are of the highest possible quality.

## **Old Testament Feast of Trumpets Offerings**

The quantity and value of the Temple offerings staggers the mind! Notice what God commands to be offered on the Feast of Trumpets:

And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. For you it is a day of blowing the trumpets. You shall offer a burnt offering as a sweet aroma to the LORD: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish. Their grain offering shall be fine flour mixed with oil, three-tenths of an ephah [approximately equal to 2.4 gallons] for the bull, two-tenths [1.6 gallons] for the ram, and one-tenth [0.8 gallons] for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, to make atonement for you; besides the burnt offering with its grain offering for the New Moon, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, as a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD. (Numbers 29:1-6)

What were these additional New Moon offerings and regular burnt offerings? Moses records them in the previous chapter:

At the beginnings of your months you shall present a burnt offering to the Lord: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish; three-tenths of an ephah [2.4 gallons] of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, for each bull; two-tenths [1.6 gallons] of an ephah of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, for the one ram; and one-tenth [0.8 gallons] of an ephah of fine flour, mixed with oil, as a grain offering for each lamb, as a burnt offering of sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD. Their drink offerings shall be half a hin [0.667 gallons] of wine for a bull, one-third of a hin [0.444 gallons] for a ram, and one-fourth of a hin [0.333 gallons] for a lamb; this is the burnt offering for each month throughout the months of the year. Also one kid of the goats as a sin offering to the LORD shall be offered, besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering. (Numbers 28:11-15)

These are the requirements just for the New Moon offerings. The details for the regular burnt offering are in verses 3-8:

This is the offering made by fire which you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs in their first year without blemish, day by day, as a regular burnt offering. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, and one-tenth of an ephah [0.8 gallons] of fine flour as a grain offering mixed with one-fourth of a hin [0.333 gallons] of pressed oil. It is a regular burnt offering, which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD. And its drink offering shall be one-fourth of a hin [0.333 gallons] for each lamb; in a holy place you shall pour out the drink to the LORD as an offering. The other lamb you shall offer in the evening; as the morning grain offering and its drink offering, you shall offer it as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD .

If we total all these items, this is what the priests offered at the Temple every Feast of Trumpets:

- 3 young bulls
- 2 rams
- 16 male lambs
- 2 male goats
- 23 gallons of grain
- 4 gallons of wine
- 0.7 gallons of strong drink
- 0.7 gallons of olive oil

Remember, all of these were the very best of their kind. A prize breeding ram would cost more than \$16,000 today. Consider the value of the best wine and the best whisky one 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. The attention to detail in their preparation must have been something to behold as well.

### **High-Quality Offerings**

Although physical food and drink means very little to God, He does appreciate the thought and effort behind a quality offering—for good reason! "And according to the law almost all things are purged [purified (RSV); cleansed (margin)] with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no remission [forgiveness of sins (RSV)]" (Hebrews 9:22). Here, the apostle Paul, a very learned Pharisee, tells us that, although these Old Testament offerings could not actually forgive sin (verses 9, 12), they—along with the Temple and the Levitical priesthood—symbolized important heavenly things (verses 9, 23-24), 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 offering:

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. (Hebrews 11:4)

The tiny but high-quality offering of a poor widow touched Jesus Christ Himself:

Then He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and he saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites [*lepta*, small denomination copper coins]. So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had." (Luke 21:1-4)

A lesser known high-quality offering appears in II Samuel 24:18-24

And Gad came that day to David and said to him, "Go up, erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." So David, according to the word of Gad went up as the Lord commanded. Now Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming toward him. So Araunah went out and bowed before the king with his face to the ground. Then Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" And David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people." Now Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up whatever seems good to him. Look, here are oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing implements and the yokes of the oxen for wood. All these, O king, Araunah has given to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the LORD your God accept you." Then the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs 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 the prayers for the land, and the plague was withdrawn from Israel.

David, a man after God's own heart, refuses to give an offering that had cost him nothing. He knows that some monetary or other sacrifice is mandatory when one gives an offering to God. Seeing and appreciating the quality of David's sacrifice, God answers his prayer.

### **Poor-Quality Offerings**

Conversely, God frowns upon poor-quality offerings. In Genesis 4, Cain gives a poor quality offering and pays the penalty. The quality of an offering does not necessarily depend on the monetary amount. The poor widow of Luke 21:1-4 will be eternally remembered for her tiny offering, whereas Ananias and Sapphira, although giving a sizable amount from the proceeds of a real estate sale, offer it in a lying attitude and become immortalized as negative examples.

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain 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 keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" And she said, "Yes, for so much." Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon the church and upon all who heard these things. (Acts 5:1-11)

Again, the number of dollars is not important. What is important are the attitude, thought, effort, and preparation that go into our offerings. As Peter says, Ananias and Sapphira had total control over how much of the proceeds of the sale of their land went to the church. Their sin lay in misrepresenting to both God and the apostles that they were giving the entire amount. They wanted everyone to think they were sacrificing when, in truth, they were not.

The father of a church family was laid off from his job, and as the fall holy days were coming up, he did not have any money for an offering. However, this enterprising young man created a Sunday afternoon outing with his family, hiking along a pleasant stretch of highway and retrieving cans and bottles that litterbugs had thrown from their cars. The money they received from recycling these items made up their offering.

Some may turn their noses up at this, but God was probably very pleased with the attitude, thought and effort that went into that particular offering. It has a "King David" type quality about it.

### **Offerings Appreciated**

The last few years have been financially tough for many church members. Tax increases and rising prices continue to knock huge holes in our already depleted spending power. The term "discretionary spending" has become a sad joke—it does not exist for many church members who are just making it from paycheck to paycheck.

We can take courage, however. We are not the first of God's people to go through a financial bind. Here, in a quotation from *Jesus and His Times* is a description of working-class life in AD 30 Jerusalem:

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: artisans and craftsmen, . . . tradesmen, . . . 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. (p. 75)

We can be thankful that our lives have not sunk this low.

Please do not think God does not see, understand and appreciate what many brethren are going through financially. He does! The purpose for holy day offering sermonettes is not to squeeze an extra few dollars from each member. Besides, most envelopes are already completed and sealed by the time the sermonette is given. Instead, they are designed to inspire us to give them in the proper attitude and for the right reasons.

God and His true ministers really do understand our financial constraints and appreciate our efforts. Please take the time to consider, plan, and give quality holy day offerings.