

## What Is An Offering?

**Back to Basics**

**Richard T. Ritenbaugh**

**Given 07-Oct-25; Sermon #FT25-01AMs**

It has been 41 years since my baptism. I know, I do not look that old. That was May 1984, as John Reiss well knows. He congratulates me on my baptism every year.

Many of you have been church members for even longer than that, many more years than I have. And I look at the intervening years and I think, wow, they have gone by in a flash. Then I begin to think I have learned a great deal over those 41 years, not just scripturally, you know, the wisdom that comes from from God's Word, but also experientially by the things that God has put me through over those 41 years. And I hope that expansion of knowledge and wisdom has resulted in growth in righteousness, and wisdom of course, and as Pat mentioned in the prayer there, in my relationship with Jesus Christ. And I am sure that you feel the same with your own conversion, that you understand that God has been working with you down the years and helped you to grow ever more like His Son Jesus Christ.

Now, we older people often take certain things for granted because we have advanced beyond the basics, right? We forget that new members come into the church regularly and we are having babies and they grow up and they need to learn the basics before they can learn the more complex things. Because they just lack the depth of understanding, so we have to teach them. We take Hebrews the 6th chapter, verse 1 literally and leave the elementary principles of Christ behind and rarely if ever do we revisit those basic doctrines.

Then we preachers in our zeal to go on to perfection or to help you go on to perfection in the knowledge we impart to the church, we have to remember that on occasion, we have to define terms, go over basic material, and rehearse the biblical foundation every once in a while.

So, I want to rehearse the basic elements of offerings today, and why we give them. This sermonette will be a review for many of you. I hope it is a review, but it may be helpful to our young people and our newer members just to get the foundation firm once again, or for them, for the first time.

First, some definitions. In English, according to the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, an offering is generally a thing offered (I hate when dictionaries do that. They used the word in the definition. It is like, that is pretty useless.), especially as a gift or a contribution. That is the important part. It includes the more theological definition: a thing offered as a religious contribution or a religious sacrifice or token of devotion. That is fine.

Now our word derives from Latin. Pretty much the same word, *offerre*, made up of *of*, which means toward or before, and *ferre*, which means to bring forth. So it is to bring toward or to bring before someone else. In Old Testament Hebrew, where offerings are discussed most in the Bible, there are two terms. You probably know the first one because Jesus speaks of it.

This term is *korban*. Either *korban* or *qorban* as they are transliterating it these days. That word, *korban*, means that which is brought near to God. So it is something you bring to God, you bring it close to Him as an offering, and it implies that one is devoted to God and you have given a certain portion for His use. And if you remember what happened in the New Testament in the gospels where Jesus was talking about this, He was saying people were devoting widow's houses and such to the Temple and keeping it out of those who had need. And they were trying to make themselves look good by giving all of this to God rather than helping the widows.

The other word that is used in the Old Testament is *minhah*, which means gift or tribute.

So they are very similar words, we could call them synonyms.

I would like to go to Genesis, the 4th chapter, verses 1 through 5, and we are going to read the first mention of *minhah*, so gift or tribute.

**Genesis 4:1-5** Now Adam knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the Lord." Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering [*minhah*] of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but he did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

This is a sermonette so we lack the time to go into this in greater detail, but we can extract a few basic points that are important to us in understanding offerings.

First, making offerings to God is an ancient practice, and after obedience, it is the second act of worship that is mentioned in Scripture. Now, Adam and Eve did not do very well in the obedience part, but it is implied there that they did obey God before they disobeyed God. The important point here though is that offerings started at the very beginning.

The second point, offerings are tied to the work that Cain and Abel did in their normal lives. The offerings came from the fruit of their labors. So, Cain was a tiller of the ground, and he gave something from that. And Abel was a shepherd, he kept sheep, and he gave of that, of what he had done.

Third, a very important point, the most important point in terms of our relationship with God, is that God does not respect all offerings. He makes a judgment. Something about Cain's offering did not please God.

Now, we teach that Cain gave an offering of the fields and so it was most likely a grain offering. And you have to know what these offerings in the Old Testament symbolize, but the grain offering symbolizes love toward man. The person that was sacrificing, giving an offering, would normally give a burnt offering and the grain offering went on top of it and all the other things

were combined on this particular offering. But Cain only gave the grain offering, which meant that his viewpoint, if you will, his motives were toward man. He was the first humanist, we might say.

While Abel gave a burnt offering from the flock and that symbolizes love toward God. That his first priority was God. And so he gave a life, not just, you know, plant life that is a lower form than a sheep or or a lamb. And in this case, Abel gave a better offering than Cain did because Abel showed that his love was toward God first, whereas Cain said his love was toward other men first.

So seeing Cain's attitude in the whole story, the greater problem then, as God clearly saw, was in his heart, it was in his character and in his motives. God saw and judged that Cain's offering was not a worthy offering, and so he rejected it.

And of course, Cain's actions subsequent to this proved that God was right and it led to Cain's killing of his brother because he could not get over the fact that God had not accepted him and that his brother had been accepted. He was very jealous of his brother.

So, what we can learn from this is that an offering can be done in vain because it can be done with a wrong motive. And God, as we know, looks on the heart. He sees right through our justifications and our excuses, and he knows for what reasons we do things. And He made a perfect judgment in this case and rejected Cain's offering because when you put all these things together, he was either 1), trying to get something from God, or 2), he really did not care, and he just gave what he had on hand.

And so he gave a bad offering. He gave wrongly.

Let us move forward into the Bible to a scripture that we often come to during offertories.

**Deuteronomy 16:16-17** "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord

empty-handed. [So this is a commanded offering. He wants His people to give. But hold on for a moment.] Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you."

Now also ancient in the world is the principle of bringing a gift before one's sovereign or overlord. If we would have the time, we could go see that the Queen of Sheba brought gifts to Solomon, the magi in Matthew 2, they brought gifts to the newborn King, Jesus.

In this way, an offering is also a form of tribute. That was one of the definitions that we saw earlier. It is a gift or a payment from a vassal to his king as an acknowledgment of submission or obligation or even gratitude or admiration. This fits with our status within the covenant that we have made with God. We have taken Him, if you will, as our sovereign. We have agreed to that and we owe Him our allegiance and our obedience and our love. It is all written in there as part of the covenant and so we could think of an offering as a tribute to Him. Just one of the ways we can think of it, but it fits.

So an offering is a symbol of our subservient status toward Him, before Him, and our gratitude then also for His manifold blessings that He showers upon us.

Now three times a year here refers to the three holy day seasons, particularly the three pilgrimage festivals where the Israelites would all come up to Jerusalem to the Tabernacle or to Jerusalem, the Temple, and they literally came before God. They presented themselves, as it were, before His throne, which the mercy seat depicts, and they would give offerings. Now, we do this on the seven annual holy days within those three seasons, when we come before God spiritually in holy convocation.

One thing we need to note here is that God does not set a fixed amount. We are to contemplate, think it through how much God has blessed us in the past year. And even longer term, it does not need to be just the past year. But He wants us to sit down and really come to understand how much He has made a difference in our lives, how much we owe Him and acknowledge that through an offering. Now, he gives no figure. He does not say you are to give \$100 for each blessing. He does not do that at all. He says, you think

about it, you fix a price on it, you fix a value upon God having called you, given you this precious knowledge, and done all the work for you up to a certain point. It is a lot of work that He did and a very little amount that we actually have to do.

Let us go to II Corinthians 9 and we just read verses 6 through 8.

**II Corinthians 9:6-8** But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

Now, this section actually speaks to giving an offering for the relief of those who are undergoing famine in Judea. But it fits the principle here in our giving of holy day offerings. In this principle, we can return to Cain's attitude, Cain's bad attitude, and thus to Abel's good one, evidently.

Did Cain give grudgingly or of necessity? Perhaps. Did Abel give abundantly and cheerfully and with the purpose of pleasing God? Probably. Did Abel think his offering through, realizing that God had given him grace and blessing, and that God was responsible for all the abundance that they had? I would say yes. From everything we know about Abel, it seems that he was a very thoughtful man. Was that the difference between rejecting Cain's offering and accepting Abel's? You have to think that it probably is.

Let us finish in Psalm 107 and we will read verses 1 and 2 and then drop down to verse 19.

**Psalm 107:1-2** Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He redeemed from the hand of the enemy,

Now down to verse 19.

**Psalm 107:19-22** Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions. Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicing.