



Gospel / life

Toward A Spirituality Of Freedom

New Creation Teaching Ministry: Tuesday Night Studies 2011, Seacliff Anglican Church

Study 17: The Fellowship Offering , the Grain Offering & the Priests

The grain offering

The procedures and regulations for the grain offering in Leviticus are found in chapter 2 (for the offerors) and chapter 6:14-23 (for the priests).

The grain could be offered either as uncooked fine flour (2:1-3), or cooked fine flour, cooked in various ways (2:4-10). Every one of these offering was to be offered without yeast, but with salt (2:11-13). A third grain offering was the offering of first fruits: that was to be the grain itself, crushed and then roasted in the fire. Oil was to be used in all the offerings. For the flour offering and the grain offering, incense was to be placed on the offering when it was brought.

Fine flour (or *choice* flour) came from wheat or barley: it is fine because it has been especially carefully threshed and ground. The oil was pressed from olives. Frankincense was a costly imported spice made from the resin of a tree. This was not a regular ingredient in bread. Salt was another expensive ingredient. It was to be used in seasoning the bread.

The amounts are not always specified, and there was some variation depending on circumstances. Normally the amount of flour was one tenth of an ephah (about 3kg, ~ 12 cups). The oil was a quarter of a hin (1-1.5 litres). The loaf made would be quite substantial! (See Exod. 29:40; Num. 28:5.) (Bread was the most common food that an Israelite ate, the staple of the diet, the “filler-up-er”. So, perhaps this quantity was approximately equivalent to a day’s bread for a family?)

The costliness and the King

This sacrifice was a costly sacrifice, even though it came from the every day setting of life. It took time and effort to prepare—grinding the grain and pressing the olives. And the ingredients were expensive. To use oil instead of water to make dough, to use fine flour rather than the more common and cheaper coarse flours (fine flour was “fit for a king”), and to add the costly frankincense was very costly to the average Israelite. This was a gift to the LORD, the king. The offeror was giving something *costly* to the LORD, and there was sacrifice and effort needed. This was a way of honouring and symbolising His priority over us.

The salt of the covenant

The addition of salt as seasoning to the offering was a reminder of the covenant relationship of Israel with the LORD. Salt was a common element in covenant making ceremonies. It symbolised the permanence of the covenant (see Num. 18:19). In offering the grain offering, the Israelites were saying that the basic fact of life for

them was God's faithfulness to them. And this of course meant that they acknowledged in this sacrifice that they lived not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3).

The memorial portion

From this offering, the priest was to take *a memorial portion* and burn it on the altar (2:2,9,16; 6:15). This portion consisted of a handful of the offering, with all of the incense that was offered with it. It was burned as "an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD." (This phrase is used in conjunction with all the offerings apart from the guilt or reparation offering.)

The memorial portion was to remind the people of their need for the LORD's favour. This portion was to celebrate the LORD's remembering of His people. It was not as though the LORD had forgotten, or ever could forget His covenant people (See Isa. 49:15!) In the Old Testament, to *remember* meant to bring to mind for definite action. When the Lord remembered His people, it meant that He would intervene on their behalf. See Gen. 8:1; 19:29; 30:22, Ex. 2:24, Num. 10:9, 1Sam. 1:19, and Psa. 98.3; 105.42, etc! When the grain offering was made, the offeror recognised that all he had came from the gracious hand of the LORD, and was asking the LORD to continue to be gracious or kind into the future.

In a place and time of prosperity we may forget that all we have comes from His hand, and how much we depend on His favour and grace. But life can change course in the blink of an eye. All that we thought was secure can be swept away in seconds. If nothing else, many of the disastrous events of this year have told us this. All things are in the hands of the LORD. We need to cast all our cares on Him; we need to seek Him for our future.

All in all, the grain offering was a kind of way of praying, "Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name; Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread..."

Provision for the ministers of God

The rest of the offering belonged to Aaron and his sons, i.e. to the priests. It was a most holy part of the offerings made to the LORD, and was to be eaten in a holy place (6:16; 2:3,10). Whoever touched this offering was made holy, and so could not perform common duties until the time of consecration was passed (6:18). The "holy place" was the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting, the area around the altar of burnt offering (6:16). (When a priest offered his own grain offering, especially at the anointing of the high priest, that offering was to be burned in its entirety, and not be eaten by any person at all (6:19-23).)

In this way the grain offerings bear some similarity to the fellowship offerings. In the fellowship offerings, a part of the offered animal was burned on the altar (the fatty parts, the *choice* part of the animal) and a part of the animal was given to the priests for food. Like the fellowship offerings, the grain offerings could be given at times of thanksgiving, petition, or vow fulfilment, and specifically were to be given as a first fruits offering, and could be given just as a free will offering.

The grain offering, with the fellowship offering, was an important part of the continuity of Israel's worship. By these offerings the priests had a source of food that they could not have like other Israelites. They were not farmers, and did not have large territory in Israel, apart from some of the land surrounding certain cities. That land would have grown vegetables, and pastured some animals, but not nearly enough

to feed the whole tribe of Levi. By the gifts brought in the grain and fellowship offerings, the priests were enabled to conduct their important ministry for the LORD and for Israel.

In the book of Malachi, the failure of Israel to bring the tithe was described as robbery towards God. “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house,” commanded the LORD (Mal. 3:8-10). It seems as though the people believed that it would be imprudent to do this at the time, and that it was wiser to store up the food for themselves. They had become jaded and believed that serving the LORD was futile (3:13ff). But the Lord’s dare to them is that they should test Him! His promise is that faithfulness in seeking Him in this way would see Him open the floodgates of blessing on them (3:10b-12).

In the New Testament, the leaders of churches were called to exemplary leadership, not being greedy for money or gain from their position (e.g. 1Pet. 5:1-4). The congregations that they led were called to be generous in providing for them so that they could go about this task without being hindered by the need to provide for them and their families. “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” (1Tim. 5:17) The Old Testament law about how cattle are to be treated humanely and generously as they go about their work (“Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain”—Deut. 25:4) is brought into this matter. “The worker deserves his wages.” This last quote comes from the teaching of Jesus himself, when he sent out the seventy two in his name and mission. They were to receive hospitality from a “man of peace” who offered help to them when they arrived with the gospel in his village.

In 1Corinthians 9, Paul sets out what should be done for those who are engaged in the ministry of the gospel (9:3-12), arguing that those who sow spiritual seed among God’s people deserve a material harvest from those people. He says:

Don’t you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. (1Cor. 9:13-14)

And yet he also goes on to show how, in order that the gospel in no way be hindered, he let go of these “rights”, and “put up with anything.” (1Cor. 9:15ff). This is the dynamic of the gospel itself.

For us today, in our churches, congregations who desire that they have elders who are able to devote themselves to the ministry of the word and sacraments, prayer, and pastoral care need to do all they can to ensure that these men are able to do so without also having to find the means to live.

Thoughtfulness about providing for these ministers is needed. Israel, in its tithing and in the first fruit offerings, had to consider the whole of God’s blessing on them and bring an appropriate amount to the Lord. Today, it takes thoughtfulness about our income and preparation to ensure that the amount we give to support the ministers in our congregations is appropriate. Just pulling out your wallet at the time of the offering to see what is in there (often nothing!—it’s been spent on other things through the week!) is in the end a dishonouring of God’s gracious gift of the preaching and teaching of His word and the pastoral care of the congregation by gifted ministers that He provides. (Can you imagine the outcry if we were paid by our employers in the same fashion!?)

