



## Gospel / Life

### Toward A Spirituality Of Freedom

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

#### **Study 15: The Fellowship Offering**

The two sacrifices we have so far considered, the sin offering and the guilt (or atonement) offering were offered to deal with the problem of sin, and to make atonement, such that the worshipper would be forgiven and accepted by God. But this was not the totality of Israel's sacrificial system. The sacrifices were given to not only deal with sin, but to give expression to the wholehearted love of God that His mercy and grace work in the hearts of those who know Him.

The fellowship or peace offering (or *shalom* offering) was in some respects the high point of the sacrificial system. It was what all the other sacrifices led up to and in which they all reach their great culmination. Essentially the fellowship offering was a sacrifice in which God's people could rejoice and feast in His presence. It was like a holy barbeque!

#### **The regulations for the fellowship offering**

In **Leviticus 3** and **7:11-36**, the responsibilities of offerers and priests in this sacrifice are spelled out. There are similarities with the sin and guilt offering. As before, he was to bring a flawless animal—either of the herd (cattle) or the flock (sheep or goat)—into the Tabernacle/Temple and present it with himself at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. He was to lay his hand on the head of the animal and slaughter it before the Lord. The priests were then to gather the blood, which then was to be splashed on all four sides of the altar of sacrifice.

However there were some differences. The offerer was then to take the fatty parts of the animal, and also the breast and the right thigh of the animal, and bring it as a wave offering to the LORD. (The breast belonged to the family of Aaron; the thigh belonged to the priest who assisted in the sacrifice.) A wave offering was a ritual presentation of a sacrifice to the LORD, a solemn presentation to Him. After this presentation, the fatty parts were to be completely burned up on the altar, and the other presented meat taken to be cooked and eaten by the priests in a holy place.

The rest of the animal was then to be cooked and eaten with his family and other guests. The animal was to be eaten then and there, on that day, in a clean place. In some cases the feast could be extended by a day. At the end, whatever was remaining of the meat was to be burned up. Care had to be taken to not contaminate the feast with ceremonial uncleanness. The meat was not to be brought into contact with anything unclean, and all who were at the feast were to be ceremonially clean. Should a person contaminate this meal with ceremonial uncleanness, he or she was to be excluded from the people of Israel for a time.

The fellowship offering was offered for various situations. It could be offered to express thankfulness to the LORD for an answer to prayer; it could be offered at the completion of a vow, or simply as a 'freewill' offering (an action simply expressing love and devotion to the LORD). In the case of it being offered as a thanksgiving offering, the worshipper was also to bring an offering of various kinds of bread: bread cooked without yeast and mixed with oil, wafers without yeast and spread with oil, and well-kneaded cakes (or scones) mixed with oil. (There was no prohibition of yeast in this last offering.) One of each kind of bread was to be brought, and this bread would belong to the priest who did the 'blood work' in the offering.

In **Deuteronomy 14:22-29**, the laws regarding tithing in Israel clearly see the tithes as a kind of fellowship offering. The offerer was every year to put aside a tenth of all that his fields and vineyards and olive trees produced, as well as setting apart all the firstborn of the flocks and herds (i.e. the very first animal to be born of a cow, sheep or goat), and then these were to be taken to the Tabernacle as a sacrifice. If taking all this was too onerous and difficult, the offerer could sell these things, and take the money up with him, and there by cattle, sheep, goats, wine, or anything he liked for the tithe offering.

And what a generous sacrifice God was arranging!—all these things were to be set apart so that the worshipper and his family and friends could feast in the presence of the LORD! The tithe didn't "benefit" the LORD; it was his way of ensuring that the people could have joy in His presence. As well as feeding his household, he was not to neglect the Levites living nearby, who had no inherited allotments, but was to invite them along to the celebration also. And then, every third year, all the tithes of a town were to be brought in and stored so that the Levites, as well as the immigrant non-Israelites, the fatherless and the widows who had no means of support could also come and have food to eat.

### **The significance of the fellowship offering**

Clearly this sacrifice was one of joy and celebration. It was about recognising the abundance of the LORD's kindness, goodness, favour and grace, and then abundantly celebrating these things! It was a joy that was not to be kept to oneself, but to be extended to others.

Essentially joy springs from knowing the reconciling and atoning love of God. Joy springs from salvation. The forgiveness and grace that work atonement for our sins, and reconcile us fully to God so that we are accepted by Him, are forgiveness and grace that count for all of God's people. It is impossible to be reconciled to God without knowing a deep bond of fellowship with all who have likewise been reconciled. Moreover, this joy must also contain a deep appreciation of the priestly ministry that enabled the reconciliation to be effected.

The joy is joy in the presence of the LORD. It is the presence of God among His people that gives and sustains joy. Joy doesn't simply arise out of remembrance of past grace; it flows from the experience of the presence of God who remains faithful and gracious.

In the coming weeks, we are going to look at Christian implications of the fellowship offering in our lives. It sets a glorious pattern for our lives together in joy before the Father.