

## *A Biblical Understanding of Firstfruit Offerings*

### **Purpose of Feasts & Sacrifices in OT:**

In the Old Testament the feasts and sacrifices that God commanded of His people were to serve as acted-out object lessons that reminded them of God's covenant goodness to them and as a marker to remember all that He had done and would continue to do for them. Every offering or sacrifice was intended to help the individuals who saw or participated in it since his or her identity with what God had done in the past. Each new generation was to relive God's great and wonderful acts for His people. In the festivals that annually reminded Israel of what God had done for them, each object or action that helped Israel identify with some particular spiritual truth.

When God dictated the laws, ceremonies, feasts and sacrifices to Moses, the Firstfruit offerings were intended to help God's people connect with the gracious provision and covenant loyalty of God (see Exodus 22:29; Leviticus 2:12–16; Numbers 18:12; Deuteronomy 18:4).

### **Meaning & Significance of Firstfruit:**

Even the words that were used in the Bible for Firstfruit offerings pointed to the meaning of the sacrifices themselves. The Hebrew word for Firstfruit means “the choice part, the first, the beginning, the best, the chiefest.” In other words, in their agrarian society, God's people were to take the first fruits, vegetables, animals, etc. that God brought forth from their farms and offer them to God. They were not to hold back until later or to give Him that which did not represent the best of the increase He provided (which may have been the reason why God did not accept Cain's sacrifice in Genesis 4:1-7; Hebrews 11:4). He wanted something of value to them that would point to their faith and commitment to God. It was to serve as an expression of the people's gratitude to the Lord for His provision and supplying of their needs.

In the New Testament, the Greek word translated as “firstfruit” implies “the very finest.” However, the meaning did not stop there. Because God's people were willing to offer the first and the best, Firstfruit also carried the connotation of an expected harvest. A farmer's first fruit

were the initial harvesting of his first-ripened crops. This first installment was a foretaste and promise that more harvest was to come.

In the Old Testament, the day after the Sabbath that followed Passover, which would be the first day of the week, the priest took the first sheaf of barley from the field and waved it as an offering before the Lord. It was a token that the first and the best belonged to God (Exodus 23:19; Nehemiah 10:34–37; Proverbs 3:9).

Even deeper, and more symbolic, the New Testament refers to Jesus the Christ as a type of “Firstfruit” (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). Biblical scholars point out that Jesus died on the Passover and rose from the dead on another Jewish holy day, the Feast of Firstfruit! He is a representative part of the whole of all the people of God who believe on Him. He even has given us of His Spirit, Paul says, as a “Firstfruit” down payment of the sanctification and glorification to come. Just as the Firstfruit of a crop, given to the Lord, pointed to more crops to come, God the Holy Spirit, indwelling believers, is a foretaste that they will enjoy many more blessings, including living in God’s presence forever (Romans 8:23). Two major truths emerge here. First, God accepted the sheaf for the whole harvest, and because the Father accepted Jesus Christ, we are accepted in Him (Ephesians 1:6). Second, the sheaf is like the harvest. As the Firstfruit of the resurrection harvest, Jesus Christ is now what one day His people shall be (James 1:18).

Paul says in Romans 11:16 “<sup>for</sup> if the Firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches.” The reference here is to Numbers 15:17–21. The first part of the dough (a Firstfruit offering) was to be offered up to God as a symbol that the entire lump belonged to Him. The same idea was involved in the Feast of Firstfruit, when the priest offered a sheaf to the Lord as a token that the entire harvest was His (Leviticus 23:9–14). The basic idea is that when God accepts the part, He sanctifies the whole and promises to bless the rest of the harvest because we honored Him with a representative part. Firstfruit was an Old Testament picture of Matthew 6:33. Bishop Long, in leading us to give a Firstfruit Offering, is leading us in faith to acknowledge that all we have belongs to God, and, even in tough times, we are expecting a harvest of more provision to come from God for us, His covenant people!

## Time & Place of Firstfruit Offerings:

In the Old Testament, the Firstfruit offerings were always brought into the presence of the Lord at the Tabernacle (see Exodus 22:29; 23:19; 34:26). Check out the response of God's people to the appeal to bring a Firstfruit offering to the Temple during Hezekiah's reign in 2 Chronicles 31:5-10:

<sup>5</sup> **As soon** as the commandment was circulated, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruit of grain and wine, oil and honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they **brought in abundantly the tithe of everything**. <sup>6</sup> And the children of Israel and Judah, who dwelt in the cities of Judah, brought the tithe of oxen and sheep; **also the tithe of holy things which were consecrated to the LORD their God** they laid in heaps....<sup>8</sup> And when Hezekiah and the leaders came and saw the heaps, they blessed the LORD and His people Israel. <sup>9</sup> Then Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. <sup>10</sup> And Azariah the chief priest, from the house of Zadok, answered him and said, "Since *the people* began to bring the offerings into the house of the LORD, we have had enough to eat and have plenty left, **for the LORD has blessed His people**; and what is left *is this great abundance*" (emphasis added).

The very first "Firstfruit Offering" instituted was in Deuteronomy 26:3–10 (before there was a temple) as a thank offering upon entrance into the Land of Promise. However, during Nehemiah's revival, he instituted an oath of God's people to give Firstfruit every year to reestablish their commitment to God: "We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the LORD **each year** the Firstfruit of our crops and of every fruit tree" (Nehemiah 10:35). How blessed we are that our spiritual leader, Bishop Eddie L. Long, is leading us in a revival of recommitment and continuous reconnection to God, just as Nehemiah did in his day!

Though there is no directive in Scripture where we are told how much of the Firstfruit the people were to bring to the temple (Exodus 23:19; 34:26), we know that the offering was to be brought before the people did anything else with their harvests. It is also clear that the offering was to be measured by the blessing God had given to His people, as well as their devotion to Him. As a matter of fact, for all three annual holy convocations for God's people in Scripture, a freewill offering was the minimum sacrifice to be brought.

For the purposes of our Firstfruit offering, our Bishop is directing us to bring a week's income, which would indicate our first and best offering from our increase to the house of God on April 5<sup>th</sup>, the Sunday before Easter. As we have already seen, this is in line with the directives of

Scripture and the intentions of pointing us to God's covenantal goodness and faith in His provision.

### **The Blessings of Firstfruit:**

The Jews were taught to give God the first and the best, and this is a good example for us to follow today. "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruit of all your crops" (Proverbs 3:9, NIV). This text indicates that the Firstfruit should always be His. If we don't faithfully give to the Lord, we don't really trust the Lord. Of course, our tithes and offerings aren't "payment" for His blessings; rather, they're evidence of our faith and obedience.

In Proverbs 3:9-10, those who honor God with their Firstfruit receive a promise from God to fill their barns. Barns are places of storage and supply for the future. They represent savings and investments. In return for honoring Him with our Firstfruit, He promises to make sure that our storage and supply places are filled with "plenty" (NKJV). Then, God promises that, for those who honor Him with their Firstfruit, their vats would overflow with "new wine." Vats were places where harvests were turned into useable and sellable assets. Biblically, a full vat was a sign of prosperity (Genesis 27:28; Deuteronomy 7:13), and "new wine" was symbolic of Holy Spirit-induced joy. God promises that our useable assets would be overflowing and would be a source of joy in the Holy Spirit. In general, we know that the Bible teaches that obedience and Godly sacrifice result in gain and brings prosperity (see Proverbs 3:2; Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Matthew 6:33).

God never asks us to honor Him with a great sacrifice, unless He has already pre-ordained a blessing and a promise attached to our obedience (Matthew 19:29; Philippians 4:18-19). As our great Bishop leads us in honoring our great and glorious God in this year of the Holy Spirit and exponential increase, dedicating all that we are and have to Him anew, let us fix our faith firmly upon the power and promises of our God and the advancement of His Kingdom!