

Three Times a Year

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When appearing before a king proper protocol requires that those approaching bear a gift honoring his personage. Our God is a great King above all (Psa. 95:3). Majestic, Eternal, and Holy, the Almighty deserves more respect and honor than any human king. Accordingly, on specified holy days, the Eternal commands His people to assemble before Him and present a gift.

This intimate exercise was established by God to be an act of worship in which believers could honor and reverence Him. So important was this service that the Almighty God did not leave any details to the caprice of man. His veneration would not be influenced by the arbitrary needs, desires, or instincts of humanity. Therefore, God revealed every aspect of this divine ceremony in His Word. He explained which days were holy, how to properly celebrate them, and specifically when people were to present their offering. Nevertheless, many continue to misunderstand and misquote His instructions telling us exactly when and how often are we required to present our sacred gift.

While some organizations have chosen to pass an offering basket every single week, others understand that the Scriptures command that these gifts be taken up only at designated holy days. As Moses recorded:

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. Every man *shall give* as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you (Deuteronomy 16:16-17).

God commands males to make an appearance, and to bring an offering “three times a year.” In addition, He specifically lists the three occasions in which this is to be done. Despite the instructions, some read this verse and interpret the term three times to mean three seasons in which all seven high holy days occur. As a result, they take up offerings every annual holy day—an equivalent of seven times a year. A small number of others understand the instructions as only three required offerings.

Which is correct? What exactly does God expect from His people regarding this observance? How should we understand these verses in order to properly fulfill His will?

What God Does Not Say

Before attempting to determine exactly what God is requiring in these verses, it is important to recognize what God does not say in this commonly quoted scripture. Conspicuously absent from the list of holy days are the Memorial of Blowing of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Eighth Day. If the Scriptures are taken at face value, they DO NOT advise us to take up an offering on these holy days. To take up an offering seven times a year results in giving an offering more than three times as God commands. Why, then, do some teach we are required to give an offering on every annual high day?

The decision to take up offerings seven times a year may have originated from the fact that there are seven annual holy convocations (Lev. 23). Many have assumed that because we appear before God in worship on these seven days that we must give an offering on each one of them. However, that belief is not based on God’s Word. It is an assumption and we cannot create doctrine based upon inference.

Are There Three Seasons of Holy Days?

Another reason that most take up offerings seven times a year is because they have been taught that the term “three times” actually means three seasons. They assert that all of the annual holy days occur during three seasons. This erroneous teaching has been used to claim that that God intended offerings to be taken up

on each of the seven high days—seven times—and not three as the Bible states. The mistake may stem from confusion about the Hebrew word for “feast.” It is the word *mo’ed* which can be translated as “feast” or “season” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, H4150). For example, in Leviticus 23 God commanded:

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, these *are* My feasts (Leviticus 23:2).

The Hebrew word translated as “feasts” in this verse is *mo’ed*. However, in a several of other places, translators chose to use the term “season” when *mo’ed* was used to reference a time to observe certain holy days. For example, speaking of Passover:

You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year (Exodus 13:10).

Because *mo’ed* has been translated as both feast and season, some may have thought that the word “times” in Deuteronomy 16:16 might also be talking about seasons. Based on that notion, it was assumed that all the holy days fell within three seasons. It was thought that Passover fell during the spring, Pentecost in the summer, and the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Eighth Day in the fall. This reasoning led many to conclude that God’s admonition to give offerings three times a year meant that His people were to present their offerings during three seasons and those seasons therefore included all of the holy days. While this conclusion may have appeared plausible, further examination show it to be untenable for several reasons.

First, the word *mo’ed* does not refer to four divisions of the year that are characterized by differences in weather, temperature, precipitation, amount of daylight, and plant growth. It does not mean spring, summer, fall, or winter. It was simply used to refer to a place and time when something significant would occur. *Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament* states:

Mo'ed, (means an) **appointed place of meeting**. The meaning is fixed within the context of Israel's religion. First the festivals came to be known as the appointed times or the set feasts... The word mo'ed also signifies a fixed place... In both meanings of mo'ed—**fixed time**, and fixed place, a common denominator is the meeting of two or more parties at a certain place or time (p. 46).

Vine's removes any and all doubt as to the meaning of *mo'ed*. This word is not a general reference to seasons at all! Instead, it denotes a very distinct time—a specific day—one designated for the express purpose of meeting.

A second point is provided by the annual holy days that foreshadow steps in God's plan for our salvation (Col. 2:16-17). The Eternal's plan consists of just two harvest seasons whose crops reflect the dual spiritual harvests of mankind. The first of these begins in the spring with the Passover and the adjacent Feast of Unleavened Bread. The day of the wave sheaf occurs within this feast and it is inextricably connected to God's first harvest of humanity (Lev. 23:10-14). Picturing Christ's ascension as the first of the firstfruits, the wave sheaf begins a count culminating fifty days later on the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost). On this feast, the high priest would lift up and wave two leavened loaves before God (Lev. 23:15-17). This ceremony pictures the first resurrection and the Father's acceptance of the saints from both the Old and New Covenants (Rev. 20:5-6).

In the fall, a much larger harvest occurs and the Feast of Tabernacles is observed. This final celebration of the year concludes God's series of annual holy days. It portrays a time when the Almighty will gather to Himself the majority of humanity (Dan. 12:2; John 7:37; Rev. 20:11-15). Thus, there are only two seasons of the year in which God's harvests of man are portrayed—spring and fall.

A third reason the word "times" cannot refer to the yearly seasons is based on the fact that nothing similar to the word seasons is found in either Deuteronomy 16 or anywhere else where the admonition to appear three times is stated.

Thus, three times cannot mean seven times during three seasons of the year. The seven annual holy convocations actually occur during two of the four seasons—not three. Finally, the Eternal never stated that men are to take up offerings every time they appear before Him. God simply states that all males must appear before Him three times bearing an offering. The Almighty then identifies those times as taking place during His three pilgrimage feasts and He tells us exactly which ones they are.

The Meaning of Times

The word “times” used in Deuteronomy 16:16 does not mean seasons. It is used alongside the Hebrew *shalosh* representing the number 3 (*Strong’s*, H7969). “Times” is rendered from the word *pa`am* and it is defined as “a stroke, once, order, rank or step” (*Strong’s*, H6471). In fact, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Brown, Driver & Briggs *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, and *The Complete Word Study Old Testament* all agree that *pa`am* NEVER refers to seasons in the Bible. For example, *The New Englishman’s Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance* shows every place *pa`am* is translated in the Bible. Not once is it translated as seasons.

The terms three and seasons cannot be found when speaking of the required annual offerings. The Hebrew *pa`am* translated into the English word “times” refers to a single occurrence. When this is understood, the real meaning of the phrase “three times a year” becomes obvious. It simply means what it says—three times.

The Context

God requires His people to appear for the purpose of celebrating these annually holy days, and they must bring an offering on three specific occasions—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. This truth is further verified by viewing the entire context of Deuteronomy 16. In so doing, the purpose of this chapter becomes clear. It only deals with pilgrimage feasts in which offerings were to be given.

It does not describe all of the holy days found in Leviticus 23. Notice God's command:

Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night. Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to put His name. You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days... And no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory for seven days... You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from *the time* you begin *to put* the sickle to the grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you. You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who *is* within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who *are* among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes you shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who *are* within your gates. Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice (Deuteronomy 16:1-15).

The context of Deuteronomy 16 is a discussion of the three festivals which were to be observed in Jerusalem. Referred to as

the pilgrimage feasts, these included the Passover week which is often referred to as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The verses remind celebrants that they are to give an offering on each of these occasions. As God continued to explain:

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: (1) at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, (2) at the Feast of Weeks, (3) and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. Every man *shall give* as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you (Deuteronomy 16:16-17).

Deuteronomy 16 is not addressing all of God's holy days. It is only addressing the observance of the three specific feasts in which offerings are to be given.

Parallel Verses

The context of Deuteronomy sixteen makes it obvious that God is only speaking of three specific times in each year when His people are to assemble for the purpose of presenting an offering. If this were the only place where this subject is discussed, we would need no further evidence. However, this topic is addressed in two other places in the Bible and in each case three times is reiterated. For example, Exodus 34 explains when God's people are to appear before Him and bring a gift.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread you shall keep. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, in the appointed time of the month of Abib... And none shall appear before Me empty-handed... And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end. Three times in the year all your men shall appear before the Lord, the LORD God of Israel (Exodus 34:18-23).

In this parallel verse, God made it known that there are three times when all the men will appear before Him with an offering. The Eternal names those exact times and never mentions The Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, or the Eighth Day.

In the next example, God explained how the three pilgrimage feasts are to be observed. In this statement He used the words “three times” twice in the same passage. As Moses recorded the Eternal to say:

Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in *the fruit of your labors* from the field. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD (Exodus 23:14-17).

In the passage above, God chose to state the words “three times” twice as a form of emphasis. In these verses the terms are actually different from one another. In verse 17, the word “times” is the same word *pa'am* used in Deuteronomy 16. This indicates three separate, specific occurrences.

In verse fourteen the words “times” is *regel* in the Hebrew. This word provides keen insight into God’s intended meaning. Used frequently in Scripture, this word means “foot, step or even journey” (*Strong’s, H7272*). This makes the intent even more obvious. God’s people are to walk, or journey to celebrate these three feasts. They are to give their personal offering during these three specific times when God’s people travel to the place where the Almighty has placed His name (Deu. 16:11).

Mo’ed and Chag

Leviticus 23 is one of only two places in the Bible where all of God’s holy days are mentioned in the same location. As each

of these observances are discussed in sequence, there are two distinct Hebrew words that are both translated into the English word “feast.” Author and historian Alfred Edersheim explained the difference between these terms:

In Hebrew two terms are employed—the one, *Mo’ed*, or appointed meeting, applied to all festive seasons, including Sabbaths and New Moons; the other, *Chag*, from a root which means ‘to dance,’ or ‘to be joyous,’ apply exclusively to the three festivals of Easter [Passover], Pentecost, and Tabernacles, in which all the males were to appear before the Lord in His sanctuary... these three as marking the great festivals... the appointed festive offerings of the worshipers, which are not to be confounded with the public sacrifices offered on these occasions in the name of the whole congregation; and *joyousness*, with which they connect the freewill offerings that each brought, as the Lord had blessed him, and which afterward were shared with the poor, the desolate, and the Levite, in the joyous meal that followed the public services in the Temple (*The Temple, Its Ministry and Services*, p. 152).

Edersheim made the point unambiguously. The two words God used when describing His festivals actually separate the holy days into two separate classifications. The first category is defined by the Hebrew word *mo’ed*. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* defines this expression as:

an *appointment*, that is, a fixed *time* or season; specifically a *festival*; conventionally a *year*; by implication, an *assembly* (as convened for a definite purpose); technically the *congregation*; by extension, the *place of meeting*; also a *signal* (as appointed beforehand) (H4150).

As we can see, *mo’ed* can apply to all of God’s days. The other term use to describe three of the feasts is *chag*. This term is defined as “A *festival*, (solemn) feast (day), sacrifice, solemnity”

(*Strong's*, H2282). *Chag* is not used when speaking of all God's holy days. Instead, it pertains only to the pilgrimage feasts. It is at these times that God's people are required to give offerings.

To illustrate, notice Leviticus 23:2 where all the holy days are mentioned. God states, "These are my feasts..." The term here is *mo'ed*. When this chapter speaks of the first pilgrimage feast, God said "And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD" (v. 6). In this case, as well as that of Tabernacles, the Eternal used the term *chag*. The holy days, consisting of the Trumpets, Atonement, and the Eighth Day, are all *mo'ed* feasts. They are holy, but are not—pilgrimage feasts. This is indicated when God gave the command for offerings three times a year. Deuteronomy 16:16 names three feasts and in every occasion the term *chag* is used—not *mo'ed*.

Specific sacrifices were offered on all the *mo'ed* holy days, as they were every day of the year, but these were provided by the priests; not the common people. However, all of God's males were required to attend the *chag* holy days in the specific place where God chose, and they were to bring an offering with them three times a year.

Seeing that God divided the holy days into two categories helps us to understand exactly when the offerings were required to be given. It was only on the pilgrimage feasts. These fell during two harvest seasons; spring and fall, but they occurred three times each a year.

Faithful people continue to congregate before the Great God of the universe on all of His holy days. They are commanded holy convocations. However, when it comes to presenting an offering during holy day observances, we are commanded to do it three times a year.

The Difference between Leviticus and Deuteronomy

Leviticus 23 tells us when we are to present ourselves before God. We are commanded to keep the Sabbath and the seven annual high days (Lev. 23:1-44). Deuteronomy 16 has an altogether different purpose. There the Almighty is delineating which of the annual feasts we are to appear before Him with a free

will offering. There, and two other places, God spells out which holy days an offering is required. He states that we must appear before Him on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. These freewill offerings presented by the congregation must not be confused with the sacrifices the priests were commanded to make.

The Priestly Offerings

There were specific offerings that were sacrificed on a continual basis solely by the priests. These were forbidden to be offered by the congregation. For example, the temple servants were commanded to offer a lamb, flour, oil and wine each morning and each evening as a burnt offering to God (Exo. 29:38-42; Num. 28:3-8). This number was doubled on the Sabbath (Num. 28:9). Two young bulls, one ram, seven lambs of the first year, a young goat, along with oil, flour and wine were offered at the beginning of each month (Num. 28:11-15).

The priests also had standard sacrifices to be made during the holy days. On the Feast of Unleavened Bread two young bulls, one ram, seven lambs of the first year, a young goat, along with oil, flour and wine were offered each day of the seven-day feast (Num. 28:19-25). This same offering was made on the Feast of Weeks and they were all presented beside the regular burnt offerings (Num. 28:26-31).

On the Feast of Trumpets, burnt offerings consisted of one bull, one ram, seven lambs, one goat, flour, and oil (Num. 29:1-5). These offerings were made besides the standard new moon and daily burnt offerings (Num. 29:6). On the Day of Atonement, the temple priests sacrificed the burnt offerings of one bull, one ram, seven lambs, one goat, flour, and oil along with the daily burnt offerings (Num. 29:7-11).

On the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the priests offered burnt offerings of thirteen bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs, one goat, flour, and oil in addition to the daily burnt offerings. Each succeeding day of the seven-day feast one less bull was offered, but the two rams, fourteen lambs, one goat, flour, oil, and the normal daily burnt offerings continued (Num. 29:12-34). Finally,

on the last day of this celebration, one bull, one ram, seven lambs, one goat, flour, and oil were offered in addition to the normal daily burnt offerings (Num. 29:35-39).

All of these days had a specific God-given number of offerings that were to be made by the priests alone. These offerings had nothing to do with the freewill offerings given by the congregation three times a year. They were entirely separate, as God instructed:

These you shall present to the LORD at your appointed feasts (besides your vowed offerings and your freewill offerings) as your burnt offerings and your grain offerings, as your drink offerings and your peace offerings (Numbers 29:39).

Sharing the Offering

There were other offerings taken to the ministry besides those commanded for the priests alone to perform. Those were the sin, trespass, and burnt offerings. These were wholly burnt and never eaten. Peace, vow, freewill, and thanksgiving offerings were always eaten by the priest and the individual who brought the sacrifice. For example, God stated:

You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God chooses, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, and the Levite who *is* within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in all to which you put your hands. Take heed to yourself that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land (Deuteronomy 12:17-19).

When speaking of the three pilgrimage feasts, God reiterates that these observances are “the place which the LORD your God chooses” to keep the holy days.

You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry *the tithe*, or if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange *it* for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household (Deuteronomy 14:22-26).

The three pilgrimage feasts are times when the festival tithe is to be used. They are occasions in which, through His ordained ministers, God chooses their place of observance. In addition, there are three special and required offerings that are to be directed toward the location where the pilgrimage feasts are held. They are offerings given at the feasts that are to be shared by the ones who offered them; along with their families, the poor, and the priesthood.

Common Sense

There is always a place for logic and in our attempt to understand the Word of God. Common sense dictates that the holy day offerings were not taken up more than three times a year. Consider the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or the Eighth Day connected with the Feast of Tabernacles. If an individual came to Jerusalem with only one lamb to offer as a gift for God, and yet he was required to give an offering on both high days, would he be forced to cut the lamb in half and give one portion the first day and the second half on the last day? This would be absurd. The severed animal would spoil and begin to rot by the

end of the feast. It would be an unfit offering to our great God—good for nothing! God obviously did not intend for offerings to be split in half and given on two separate days.

Next consider a case in which an individual brought ten lambs. Would he give some of them the first day, and then pay to corral the rest until he was able to offer them the last day? Would he then return home after offering the many animals with no time for anyone to partake of an offering of that size? Obviously, as God commanded, the intention was that the offering be given “in” the feast, and eaten during the days of the celebration.

Even within a modern society, giving an offering on the last day of a week-long festival makes no sense. God commanded that the quantity of the offering be based, “according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you” (Deu. 16:17). In that context, how could an individual evaluate how much he had been physically blessed from the time of the first high day until the last? While each person may have been blessed spiritually, as God stated, “the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands” (Deu. 16:15). Therefore, we are to give according to how God has blessed that which we have benefited monetarily from our work. There is generally no income produced between the first and last days of the feast and this is further evidence that God only intended one offering be given during each pilgrim festival—not two.

The Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement is unique among the holy days of God. All of God’s annual holy days are Sabbaths in which no customary work is to be done. However, food can be prepared on all the feast days with the exception of this one (Exo. 12:16). On the Day of Atonement, absolutely no chores are to be done; even that which is necessary for preparing food to eat after the holy day has ended. Notice the instructions:

Also the tenth *day* of this seventh month *shall be* the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. And you shall do no work on

that same day, for it *is* the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. For any person who is not afflicted *in soul* on that same day shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no manner of work; *it shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings (Leviticus 23:27-31).

In regards to offerings given on the Day of Atonement; several things are important to consider. First the offering made by fire is a burnt offering. It is one that only the high priest made. Further, absolutely no work was to be done. Second, no work was to be done meaning there were no sacks of grain hauled in, no bags of produce carried, or animals herded into the sheep's gate on this day. No oxen were brought to Jerusalem. There were no offerings presented by the people, and none eaten by the priests or worshipers. The only offerings given on this day were those made by the ministry—not the common people. Alfred Edersheim made note of this truth in his famous, historical work:

On the Day of Atonement, not ordinary priests, but the high-priest *alone* officiated, and that not in his ordinary dress, nor yet in that of the ordinary priesthood, but in one peculiar to the day, and peculiarly expressive of purity... The whole of the services of that day were performed by the high-priest himself, of course with the assistance of others, for which purpose more than 500 priests were said to have been employed (*The Temple, Its Ministry and Services*, pp. 241, 244).

Edersheim also explained the obligation of ordinary citizens of the community on this special day. They did not give freewill offerings:

The worshipers also appeared in circumstances different from those on any other occasion, since they were to fast and to afflict their souls; the day itself was to be a Sabbath of Sabbatism... (p. 241).

On this day, worshipers coming before God did not bring with them the produce, flocks, or herds that represented how they had been blessed. Only offerings by the high priest were presented. Worshipers gave none. No offerings were presented or eaten and in like manner, today, no offering should be taken up even if the load carried in is in the form of a paper check or currency. Just as eating or drinking would pollute this unique day, taking up offerings would also desecrate a day made holy by God. The Scriptures indicate that requiring offerings on the Day of Atonement is a sin!

Some Common Misconceptions

Misunderstandings have led some to assume that offerings were made by the common people every high day of the year. One such error stems from not distinguishing between the verses applying to priests and the congregation. For example, when God speaks to the children of Israel, most believe that He is talking to everyone. However, in many instances He is only speaking to the priests. Such is the case throughout the book of Leviticus. In fact, though there are many edicts in this book that apply to everyone, the very name “Leviticus” reveals who it was primarily written—the Levites.

Thus, when God addresses His feasts in Leviticus 23, He is instructing the ministry in regards to them. Because the Levites were also part of the congregation, God uses the same term when speaking to them. He refers to them as “the children of Israel.” For example, God spoke to Moses saying:

Command the children of Israel that they bring to you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to make the lamps burn continually. Outside the veil of the Testimony, in the tabernacle of meeting, Aaron shall be in charge of it from evening until morning before the LORD continually; *it shall be* a statute forever in your generations (Leviticus 24:2-3).

In this case the Almighty is speaking specifically to the priests and yet He calls them “the children of Israel.” This term is

used over 50 times throughout the book of Leviticus and its frequent use does not always mean that every ordinance applied to the entire congregation. For example, according to Leviticus 23 it is understood that the holy days were to be observed by everyone. Nevertheless, not all had the same responsibilities on these days. This chapter lists many burnt offerings that were to be made by the priests alone.

Believing that the term “children of Israel” always refers to the congregation has caused some to conclude that the offerings given on the Day of Atonement apply to everyone. However, as was shown earlier, the “offering made be fire unto the LORD” was one only made by the high priest (Lev. 23:27). In addition, on this day absolutely no work was to be done (Lev. 23:28). Therefore, no herds were corralled, no meals were prepared, and no offerings were given by the common people.

Further, Atonement was not one of the three pilgrimage feasts in which people gave their offering, ate it, and shared it with others. The sacrifice made on this day was for God alone. Thus, the instructions to offer an offering by fire recorded in Leviticus 23 were written for the high priest who performed the burnt offerings on that day. In addition, the “offering made by fire” was not a reference to the freewill offerings:

On the tenth *day* of this seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall afflict your souls; you shall not do any work. You shall present a burnt offering to the LORD *as* a sweet aroma: one young bull, one ram, *and* seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish. Their grain offering *shall be of* fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths *of an ephah* for the bull, two-tenths for the one ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats *as* a sin offering, besides the sin offering for atonement, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings (Numbers 29:7-11).

These burnt offerings were performed by the priests. They included the requirement of a bull, one ram, seven lambs, a goat,

flour, and oil. These offerings were fulfilled by the high priest and they are the “offering made by fire” spoken of in Leviticus 23. It is not a freewill offering given by the common people. It is an amount dictated directly by God and far more than the average Israelite could offer on any given holy day.

Another misconception found in this same chapter is in regards to the Feast of Tabernacles. Because there are multiple sacrifices offered, some conclude that more than one freewill offering was given by the congregation at that time. But consider what these verses are saying:

Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month *shall be* the Feast of Tabernacles *for* seven days to the LORD. On the first day *there shall be* a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work *on it*. For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. *It is* a sacred assembly, *and* you shall do no customary work *on it*. ‘These *are* the feasts of the LORD which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire to the LORD, a burnt offering and a grain offering, a sacrifice and drink offerings, everything on its day—besides the Sabbaths of the LORD, besides your gifts, besides all your vows, and besides all your freewill offerings which you give to the LORD (Leviticus 23:34-38).

As we have learned, this is speaking to the Levites regarding their obligation during God’s feast days. In this case the Scriptures require a burnt offering every single day of the feast. The verses conclude with the offerings made during each of the feasts; including the Sabbaths. The instructions also tell the Levites to process the gifts, vows, and freewill offerings provided by the common people.

It must be understood that the burnt offerings are not the freewill offerings given by God’s people at this feast. Therefore, the fact that numerous offerings were made does not indicate that

more than one offering was to be given by the congregation. In fact, consider the quantity of the priestly sacrifices. Such offerings were completely out of range for most individuals. Consider what the priests were to offer during the last feast of the year:

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work, and you shall keep a feast to the LORD seven days. You shall present a burnt offering, an offering made by fire as a sweet aroma to the LORD: thirteen young bulls, two rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first year. They shall be without blemish. Their grain offering *shall be of* fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths *of an ephah* for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two rams, and one-tenth for each of the fourteen lambs; also one kid of the goats *as* a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. On the second day present twelve young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one kid of the goats *as* a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings. On the third day present eleven bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one goat *as* a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. On the fourth day present ten bulls, two rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first year, without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one kid of the goats *as* a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. On the fifth day present nine bulls, two rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their

number, according to the ordinance; also one goat *as* a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. On the sixth day present eight bulls, two rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one goat *as* a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. On the seventh day present seven bulls, two rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one goat *as* a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. On the eighth day you shall have a sacred assembly. You shall do no customary work. You shall present a burnt offering, an offering made by fire as a sweet aroma to the LORD: one bull, one ram, seven lambs in their first year without blemish, and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bull, for the ram, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; also one goat *as* a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering. These you shall present to the LORD at your appointed feasts (besides your vowed offerings and your freewill offerings) as your burnt offerings and your grain offerings, as your drink offerings and your peace offerings (Numbers 29:12-39).

The multiple offerings were provided only by the Levitical priesthood; not the common people. If these numerous offerings applied to the entire congregation of Israel, then the required animals for such sacrifices would have been insurmountable. It would have necessitated each family to provide no less than 16 rams, 112 lambs, 71 bullocks, 8 goats and more than 714 quarts of flour mixed with oil. With a conservative number of 200,000 men in the nation of Israel, this would mean that a minimum of 39.8 million animals in addition to 143 million quarts of flour and oil would be needed.

Such astronomical numbers reveal the obvious. Each individual male was not commanded to give multiple offerings at the Feast of Tabernacles. Each man could offer more than one animal if God had blessed him that year, but they would be included in only one freewill offering during the Feast of Tabernacles, one during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and another on the Feast of Weeks.

Historical Evidence

God states that His people are required to present an offering to Him during the holy days three times a year. The context of the verses in Deuteronomy 16, and parallel verses discussing this subject, validate the number of times individuals are to give their offering. It was three—not seven. The wording in Leviticus 23 establishes this fact, and common-sense dictates that there could be no other meaning.

Further demonstrating this truism, history reveals that this is precisely what God's people have always understood and practiced. Alfred Edersheim, the accepted authority on the temple and its service, explains that the obligation of the males to give an offering to God occurred three times. He wrote:

The duty of appearing three times a year in the Temple applied to all male Israelites—bondsmen, the deaf, dumb, and lame, those who in sickness, infirmity, or age rendered incapable of going on foot up the mountain of the house, and of course, all in a state of Levitical uncleanness, being excepted. In general the duty of appearing before the Lord at the services of His house was deemed paramount... a sacrifice could not be offered for anyone unless he himself were present, to lay his hand upon it (*The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, p. 153).

Another historical piece of evidence comes to us from Flavius Josephus. A Jewish general taken captive by Titus prior to the destruction of the Temple, Josephus lived during the time of Christ. While held prisoner by the Romans he authored his famous work *Antiquities of the Jews*. In this epic history of God's people,

the confined great warrior turned to times past, documenting the history of the Israelite people. In so doing, he explained many of the ancient practices of the Jews. In these annals he relates that Israel understood the pilgrimage festivals to be three in number. For example, speaking of the value of God's feasts to the Jewish community, Josephus wrote the following commentary:

Let those that live as remote as the bounds of the land which the Hebrews shall possess, come to that city where the temple shall be, and this three times in a year, that they may give thanks to God for his former benefits, and may entreat him for those they shall want hereafter; and let them, by this means, maintain a friendly correspondence with one another by such meetings and feasting together... (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 4.8.7).

In another example, Josephus revisited the story of the Benjamites who had lost their wives. He relates how the Israelites agreed to let the men of Benjamin "catch" single women who accompanied men before an observance was kept at the Temple (Jdg. 21). In this story, Josephus reveals that the ancient Israelites went to the feasts three times a year; not seven:

They asked him what his proposal was. He said, That three times in a year, when we meet in Shiloh, our wives and our daughters accompany us: let then the Benjamites be allowed to steal away, and marry such women as they can catch (ibid, 5.2.3).

In another example, Josephus mentions the time when the land of Judea had come under direct Roman rule. The Roman boot was on the necks of the Jewish people and during this time, in order to exact greater control, the Roman authorities confiscated the clothing of the high-priest while he was not officiating. The Roman oppressors would allow the priest to wear the garments during the holy days when fulfilling his sacred, religious role. However, once that role was completed; the vestments were required to be returned to the Roman army. When Josephus described this

unusual practice, he confirmed the fact that during this time there were three annual pilgrimage feasts:

The like to what Herod did was done by his son Archelaus, who was made king after him; after whom the Romans, when they entered on the government, took possession of these vestments of the high priest, and had them repositied in a stone-chamber, under the seal of the priests, and of the keepers of the temple, the captain of the guard lighting a lamp there every day; and seven days before a festival (13) they were delivered to them by the captain of the guard, when the high priest having purified them, and made use of them, laid them up again in the same chamber where they had been laid up before, and this the very next day after the feast was over. This was the practice at **the three yearly festivals**, and on the fast day (ibid, 18.4.3).

In this recollection, Josephus indicates that the Romans allowed the high priest to wear the garments on the three yearly festivals as well as the Day of Atonement. However, it must be understood that wearing the garments on the fast day does not mean it was one of the pilgrimage feasts. Just the opposite is true. The historian separates the three annual pilgrimage festivals from Atonement. Only on the three pilgrimage festivals was attendance in Jerusalem and an offering required.

Other Jewish sources reveal that the feasts in which offerings were taken up were three. The *Mishnah* provides several examples. In one such instance, where the courses of the priests are discussed, it was written that:

At the three Feasts all twenty-four courses of the priests were present at the Temple and shared equally in the offerings (Sukkot 5.6 p. 180, footnote 13).

The Jews continued to recognize that the feasts in which God's people were to come before Him were three. As the *Mishnah* continues to state:

Three times in the year all the courses of priests shared equally in the offerings prescribed for the Feast and in the division of the Shewbread (Sukkot 5:7).

The supervising editor of the Babylonian Talmud, Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein validates that the offerings were brought only at these three feasts. He wrote:

The following are the things for which no definite quantity is prescribed. The corners of the field, first fruits, the offerings brought on appearing before the Lord at the three pilgrimage festivals (*The Soncino Press*, London 1948, Pe'ah 5, translated by Rabbi Dr. S M Lehrman).

The historical record matches the Biblical statute. Before, during, and after Christ walked this earth, God's commanded holy day offerings were taken up three times a year. The offerings were always taken up in accord with the scriptures, and it is only in recent history that some have thought to do otherwise by taking them up seven times.

Is This an Administrative Decision?

Some may object to the truth presented thus far because of a belief that the Church has the authority to make such a change as an administrative decision. The Church does have the authority to bind and loose (Mat. 18:19). When necessary, ministers are able to make decisions that become binding, but only in regards to administrative issues. Church leadership does not have the power to change the doctrine and teachings of Almighty God! This is an important principle to understand. The Bible must always be the guide for judgment and not men.

For example, they must decide exactly how offerings are going to be taken up. In so doing, they can elect to pass a basket, a plate, put a box in the back of the hall, or simply mail in envelopes. They can decide what time services will be conducted, where they will be held, and how many songs to sing. However, ministers cannot choose to take up offerings on all of the holy days. God has

already decided this issue. He says that this is to take place three times a year.

God's people are free to give offerings of their own volition as many times as they desire. In fact, the Church can request offerings from time to time if they find a need to do so. What the Church cannot, and must not, do is require members to give an offering when it is not commanded by God.

We must not distort the Scriptures in an attempt to make them mean something that they do not! Mankind simply does not have the moral compass to decide how we are to worship God. For this reason, the Eternal does not give humanity the option of deciding how many times to take up offerings each year. Man's only real option is to choose whether he will obey what God has commanded, or not!

This is the great lesson that we are required to learn. Will we lean toward our own interpretations, or do what God says? The answer is obvious:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5).

Doing More than Required

Some may consider that giving seven offerings a year fulfills Christ's words that to increase our faith we should do more than required. But, is this the case? Is giving an offering on the seven high days doing more than is necessary, or is it actually failing to do what is required? Notice Luke's account in which Jesus discusses this subject:

And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and

drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do'" (Luke 17:5-10).

The words of Christ encourage us to do more than is required of us. It is God's desire that we do more than just the bare minimum. In truth, it is only right that we should give God more than is obligatory. We should give offerings of our own free will, of the heart, and not just what is commanded.

However, does this mean that we are to do something other than what has been commanded? Absolutely not! This was a problem the Pharisees created. It is why they were always in conflict with Christ. They attempted to appear righteous, and in so doing they created overly strict unimportant details. They even manufactured religious laws of their own in opposition to those of God (Mark 7:9). As the Apostle Paul explained regarding those in this religious movement of his day:

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:2-3).

We are not to attempt to establish our own righteousness. Yes, we are to strive to do more than is required, but we are NOT to add to what God has commanded (Deu. 4:1-2). When churches require their people to give offerings more frequently than the Almighty has commanded, they are establishing their own righteousness and not submitting to His will.

Are Women and Children Required to Give Offerings?

The Scriptures indicate that God's people must tithe and give freewill offerings. However, because the commanded three times a year specifically refers to men, some have wondered if

women or children are required to keep the holy days and present an offering during these observances. It has long been the judgment of God's Church that women and children who do not have a source income are not required to tithe or give offerings. However, when a woman or child does have a job, or receive income, tithes and offerings are a required act of worship.

The reason women are not mentioned in the commanded annual assemblies is because Israel was a male dominate society. But this does not exclude women and children from doing as God says. In addition, many people lived long distances from the temple in Jerusalem. It was often an extensive journey to attend the three pilgrimage feasts where offerings are required. This meant that the males would need to leave their flocks, herds, and farmland unattended during these times. Because much of their property could be damaged or lost if not continually maintained, God mercifully required only the male heads of household to attend. This judgment allowed for some family members and/or servants to stay back and take care of the property while the heads of households traveled to Jerusalem. Though everyone in the family was welcome to attend the pilgrimage feasts, only the males were required to be present.

In addition, all males held a position that was symbolic of a priest in the family. While only Levites served in the temple, all men were required to work in service for his family by providing and protecting them. This includes instructing and upholding God's law in the home (Exo. 19:6; Deu. 6:6-9).

Because Israel widely failed to live up to God's standards, gentiles were grafted in (Rom. 11:17-24). When this occurred, God made it known that, although males were to continue as head of the family, there was no differentiation regarding race or gender when it came to salvation and a relationship with Christ. As Paul wrote:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:28-29).

Based on the instructions to Israel and the New Testament Church, it is understood that anyone who has earned income must tithe and give offerings. Those with no earned income are not obligated. In addition, if a woman has a husband who is the sole provider, and he is not converted and refuses to give tithes or offerings; she is blameless for his violation of God's command (1Cor. 7:12-13).

Plain and Simple

Read dozens of times during the average Christian's life, the verses in Deuteronomy 16 are not ambiguous. There is no hidden, coded message in them. They are straightforward and simply state that God's people are to come before their King, presenting Him an offering, three times a year. As Moses recorded God to say:

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 (Deuteronomy 16:16).

The Eternal God commands His followers to assemble and give an offering three times a year—not four, five, six, and certainly not seven! This is not to say that offerings of our own free will cannot be presented more than three times. They certainly can and should be given, but they should NEVER be given on the Day of Atonement and only three are required by God on His holy days.

The Almighty spells out the exact feast days on which these offerings are to be given. Because the law states that two or three are considered to be a true witness, God recorded this requirement in four separate sets of verses in the Bible (Deu. 16:16; 19:15; Exo. 23:14-17; 34:18-23). Our responsibility upon reading His Word is not to change or adjust what God has said. We are to simply do what He commands—no more—no less.

Is This a Twiggy Issue?

The truth of God is like a tree. There are the roots which reach deeper than any of us could ever envision. Then, like the commandments, there is the trunk; huge, visible, and life-giving to the rest of the tree. There are also branches sprouting out of the trunk upon which the various leaves hang much like our doctrine and judgments hang upon the law. But can the tree live without any of these parts? No! They all work together to form a living unified whole.

The branches are of vital importance to the tree. Just as an injury to the branches can lead to weakening of the tree, so damage to any single aspect of doctrine can do injury to the Church. From God's perspective every single instruction is important enough to put in the Bible. Therefore, each admonition that we find in His book is to be treasured and obeyed.

A dramatic example is found in the story of the man simply picking up sticks on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32-36). He thought that his actions were unimportant. He was only doing what he had always done. However, he, and all Israel along with him, had to learn this vital lesson. God desires that we pay attention to the details He has entrusted to us. As the Savior stated when quoting the Old Covenant:

It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God' (Matthew 4:4).

We are to live by every word of God—not by myth, superstition, or the ideas of men. Even the seemingly small points are important to the Almighty. If not, why would God put them in the print? Those things that appear small to us can be of enormous importance. Remember the words of our Savior, who said:

He who *is* faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much (Luke 16:10).

It may seem like a small thing to make such distinctions between three offerings a year and seven. But—could it be that it means much more to God? Could it be that He respects those who strive to be faithful in the ALL things? The Eternal has said that He knows we will be faithful in the great responsibilities of the Kingdom if we are faithful in even the small issues on Earth. Therefore, should we not strive to be faithful in even those small things He commands? The answer is a resounding yes! We should strive to be faithful in all those things God has commanded us. As the Great God thundered:

Thus says the LORD: “Heaven *is* My throne, and earth *is* My footstool. Where *is* the house that you will build Me? And where *is* the place of My rest? For all those *things* My hand has made, and all those *things* exist,” Says the LORD. “But on this *one* will I look: On *him* who *is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isaiah 66:1-2).

God is unimpressed with great temples of worship that man builds. He is also unmoved by our vast technological advancements. Instead, it is the ones who fear to break His Word who garner His respect. Therefore, we must strive to observe exactly what He has said!

You Shall Not Add to the Word, nor Take From it

There may be no greater injunction in the Scriptures than God’s admonition to not add to or take away from what He has written. It is implied in every instance where God commanded us to keep his statutes and laws. Our Savior confirmed this fact:

For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled (Matthew 5:18).

Christ told us that no part of His law is to be changed until He creates a new heaven and earth. Even what we might consider to be the least of the commandments is to be both taught and

followed. This means that in the Millennium when Christ requires Egypt and other nations to come up and celebrate His feasts, and bring their offerings, they will do this three times a year (Zec. 14:16-19). If this is the case, it would behoove all of us to teach and practice this now.

We are not to change what God has commanded no matter how deeply the tradition may be ingrained, or how much it might profit a church organization. This has always been man's temptation; to try and change the meaning of God's written word and thereby pervert that which is holy. For this reason, God warned both ancient Israel and His Church in the New Testament to not add or take away from that which He has declared:

Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you (Deuteronomy 4:1-2).

So important is this stern warning that the Eternal said again, "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it (Deu. 12:32). In these first writings of the Bible God warned His people not to add or subtract from His Word. Then in the last words of the Bible God repeats this caveat:

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18-19).

Some might believe that the above verses are only speaking of those things written in the book of Revelation. But consider that these are the very last words God communicates to humanity in the

entire Bible! They are the last thought that God leaves with His readers. Surely the Eternal is including every statute written in the entire Bible. This principle always applies.

If we are not to add to the book of Revelation, we are also not to add to the book of Deuteronomy or any other inspired manuscript. The Bible is not like the United States Constitution that can be amended as we see fit. We cannot create loopholes around keeping the law, just as we cannot design extensions to it. This means that we are not allowed to presumptuously require offerings seven times a year.

Yes—the people of God should desire to give God more than He requires. That is right and good, but we have been placed on this earth and called by God to practice doing exactly what He instructs. We are here to learn this vital lesson—His way is perfect—ours is not.

When it comes to the holy day offerings that are required, God declared that we are to give them three times a year.

The Eternal Church of God offers a variety of books, booklets, articles, audio, and video to help people better understand the Bible. Some of the printed material available includes:

The 144,000

Beyond the Clouds

The Unclean and the Clean

Keys to Understanding Revelation

The Truth about Tithing

The Calendar Controversy

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The Trinity – Fact or Fiction?

Three Resurrections of the Dead

A Place of Safety

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