

## Deuteronomy 16:16

Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before the Lord empty-handed:

By Don Haney

**QUESTION: Why do we collect an offering seven times per year, once on each of God's annual Holy Days, when the Bible says to collect three? (Deut.16:16)**

### **ANSWER:**

We cannot speak as to why all the various fellowships do what they do. But the simple answer for many is TRADITION. Most seem to base their beliefs according to as they were taught. True unity comes not from our traditions, respected teachers or individual beliefs, but from keeping God's Word and Spirit. For unless the Lord builds the house, the labor is in vain, and what is built will not stand. (Ps.127:1) So lets see what God's Word says, and build our beliefs upon the Rock. (Matt.7:24-27)

There are primarily two synoptic passages that primarily deal with the freewill Holy Day offerings. They are in Exodus 23 and Deuteronomy 16.

*Exod 23:14 "Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: 15 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); 16 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. 17 Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD. (NKJ)*

One obvious clue to how many times God commands the collections of these offerings is by the use of the words in the original Hebrew and their meanings. The word "three" here in the Hebrew simply means three, a triad, the number 3. That's pretty plain. The words translated "times" in this passage are Strong #7272 & #6471 meaning a step or pace or time, as an instance of time, or as a step in something larger. Many have been taught that this term "times" also means "seasons," (as in Holy Day seasons) so they collect offerings at each of the 7 Holy Days within what they see as three "seasons." However I can't find a place where these words are ever translated "season" in scripture, so I cannot teach that. Scripture uses completely different words to designate a season or space of time, and that is not the meaning of the words used herein. The Hebrew words used here denote three specific steps or instances, i.e. three times.

An even more concrete way to know for sure, is by the context. In the example above, what is known as the three pilgrim festivals are listed. The context is specifically referring only to those three pilgrim feasts out of the seven Holy Feasts, listed elsewhere. Let's now review the account in Deuteronomy.

*Deut 16:6 "but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt. 7 And you shall roast and eat it in the place which the LORD your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents. 8 Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a sacred assembly to the LORD your God. You shall do no work on it. 9 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. 10 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. 11 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. 12 And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. 13 You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. 14 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. 15 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. 16 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. 17 Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you. (NKJ) (emphasis ours)*

I have copied much of this passage to illustrate the point of the CONTEXT given here. Moses goes into detail for each of the three pilgrim feasts (meaning to journey to) and even makes reference to “tents” in verse 7, and calls the offerings, “freewill offerings,” in verse 10. The amount we give, is a freewill offering. What is commanded is that the males give something three times per year at Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Each male is to give at these three specific “paces” or “steps” in God’s plan, according to their blessings from God – verses 10 & 16-17.

Some teach that the church should collect Holy Day offering on each of the seven Holy Days, because sacrificial offerings were given at each of the seven Holy Days in Leviticus 23. However, with an honest look at Leviticus 23, we see that the offerings listed there were from the priests only. They were exact prescribed sacrificial offerings. Also, these offerings were actually given on EACH of the seven days of Unleavened Bread (not just the first and last day) and upon EACH of the seven days of Tabernacles (not just the first day). Look it up! (Lev.23:8, 36) So the practice of collecting seven freewill offerings annually cannot be based upon the collection of sacrificial offerings on each Feast Day, as there are actually nineteen annual Feast days plus the weekly Sabbath! (Passover 1, ULB 7, Pentecost 1, Trumpets 1, Atonement 1, Tabernacles 7, LGD 1. So 1+7+1+1+1+7+1= 19 days annual feast days.) If the collection of free-will offerings were patterned after the priests sacrificial offerings on the annual Holy Days, we would have to collect and give offerings on all seven days of Unleavened Bread, not just the first and last day, and upon each day of Tabernacles, plus on the other feast days – and on the weekly Sabbath.

***Lev 23:8 “But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.”***

The offerings in Lev.23 were NOT freewill offerings which can vary in amount and type, and they were NOT collected from each male. They were very specific sacrifices offered (and accepted) only by those in the Levitical priesthood. They are detailed in Numbers 28 and 29. Christ is our sacrifice once and for all. (Heb.10:10) So God’s Church does not offer animal sacrifices today. However, we all do still give freewill offerings. This was confirmed in several examples and teachings in the New Testament as well.

A man recently asked, “Why should I hold back part of my offering until the end of the feast? Why don’t we just do like it says in scripture.” Many have asked this. Many save and plan for their offerings throughout the year, setting a portion of their income aside for feast offerings from their earnings. Then

they offer them at the appropriate times at the feasts, as God commands. They give the same amount, whether they divide it into three or seven. Biblically, these feasts were often the only times people would be able to be in the presence of the priest, so they would give other tithes and offerings at this time as well. This is explained in Deuteronomy 12. Today, what was given as tithes or offerings to the Aaronic priesthood has been transferred to the Melchizedek Priesthood of Jesus Christ. (Heb.7:11-17)

To willingly give an offering seven times instead of three, is not wrong, but neither do we want to attempt to “add” to the Word of God or “require” it. (Deut.4:2)

There’s an account of Israel keeping seven additional days after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (2 Chron.30:23) God did not punish Israel for that, but it was not and is not required. This one time event, they all did willingly, not as a command. Neither does the scripture require males to appear seven times before the Lord to give freewill offerings – but God does require three. If freewill offerings on all seven Holy Days were actually commanded by God, this would have been born out in the context of scriptures. But the context of the passages dealing with this topic are very clear in specifically discussing giving freewill offerings only once during the Feasts of Unleavened Bread (not twice), once on Pentecost (or First-fruits) and once at the Feast of Tabernacles - for a total of three times.

There is one more related point worth mentioning about this same topic. That being giving Holy Day offerings at a time and place that differs from what God says. In years past, many may remember being taught to give the special tithe by dividing the 10% given in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> years by 7, and giving that much (2.85%) each year – instead of 10% on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> years as God’s Word says. (Deut.26:12) The only problem with that was that it was not the way God commanded it to be done. There are many well meaning ideas and leaders, but wisdom and the law comes from God not man. That was leaning to our own understanding (human reasoning instead of scriptural reasoning). It did not lead to trusting and obeying God in faith. The same can be said of the practice of mailing the Holy Day offerings in ahead of time or after the fact when traveling abroad for the feast, in order to get credit for your offerings in your home country. Deuteronomy 12 is pretty clear that offerings were to be presented at the location where God put His name and at the appointed time during the feast, not at some other time or location according to our convenience, or by the teaching of men contrary to God’s command.

***Deut 12:6 There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, heave offerings of your hand, your vows, your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks:7 And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all that you put your hand unto, you and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed you. 8 You shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man doing whatsoever is right in his own eyes.***

It’s not that God is trying to “catch” us. It is that God’s ways bring maximum blessings. It’s not being “strict.” We don’t try to “enforce” this and our opinions are not important. And neither did any of us make this law, so it’s not ours to tamper with or judge. I do not judge others. I am only trying to teach the wonderful truth of God’s Word to those interested, so we don’t go awry by teaching and practicing doctrines of men – and then attribute them to God. (Mk.7:7) God does not want us to each do what we think is right in our own eyes in the keeping of His Holy Days, or His Holy Day offerings. What we think individually or as a group is not important, so don’t believe or follow me - or any man. What God says is important! Believe and follow Him and His Son, the Teacher and the Christ! (Mt.23:7-12) Neither should we judge one another or bicker over differing beliefs. (2 Tim.2:24-26) Before God we stand or fall, but God’s love and mercy will make us each stand in His time. (Rom.14:4)

We each do the best we can according to our strength of faith and understanding. It’s best not to judge another’s faith. God helps each of us to rightly divide His Word according to our faith, maturity and willingness to obey Him at the time. What others do is their business, as God judges us all. We must teach the truth, not according to men as man pleasers, but according to the love and truth of God’s

Word. (Gal.1:10) Giving offerings is a godly principle. The fact that I may understand or teach these verses differently than another fellowship of God's Church, does not make me at odds with them or better than them in any way. Perhaps they are better than I. My words are not the focus. Let's seek to be at peace with our brethren in as many branches of the true vine as we can. We don't all grow at the same rate. The more we recognize what God requires of us, the more freely we are able to exercise His will within the framework of His law and love for us. As men, we all err. Only God's Word can be relied upon as TRUTH. (Jn.17:17) That TRUTH, when followed faithfully, MAKES US FREE! (Jn.8:32) Don't believe me or any man, over God's Word. Seek peace. Be humble. And believe God. Let's do it!