

Millennial Sacrifices

By Art Braidic & Dennis Fischer

Recently, the Restored Church of God published an emotional condemnation of a book entitled *A Sabbath Test*, which we co-authored. In their essay, a team of writers under the direction of RCG director, Mr. David C. Pack, advanced numerous arguments in an attempt to prove that God's people could dine out on the Sabbath with His full blessing. Although none of the RCG points reflected a reasonable Biblical view, one actually struck us as most surprising. Quite frankly, we are mystified as to why they would advance a point that directly contradicts both the Biblical and historical record, not to mention a long-standing teaching of God's Church.

According to the RCG, dining out on the Sabbath today is similar to what God's people will be doing every Sabbath during the millennium and beyond. Furthermore, these writers claim that *A Sabbath Test* is unequivocally wrong when it asserts that there will be no restaurants open on the Sabbath in God's Kingdom. They do this by suggesting that because the temple will feed God's people from the offerings they bring, it is a type of millennial restaurant. Notice how they introduce this particular point.

"During the Millennium, throngs of people will come to the temple complex on Mount Zion and offer sacrifices, especially on the weekly Sabbaths and annual Holy Days."

Here the RCG begins this phase of their argument by proclaiming that sacrifices will be brought by God's people on the weekly Sabbath as well as the annual feasts. They then claim that we, as the authors of *A Sabbath Test*, have contradicted the scriptures when we state that there will be no restaurants operating on the Sabbath.

"This [the statement in *A Sabbath Test* that there will be no restaurants open on the Sabbath in the Millennium] contradicts what is described in the book of Ezekiel. In the huge temple complex, four large kitchens in the outer court (Ezek. 46:21-24) will be in operation, providing food for many thousands who will dine in 30 separate dining rooms, each about 6,400 square feet. The kitchens provide a place to cook the sacrifices that people will bring to the temple. They will be allowed to have a portion of the offerings they present; a portion will also be reserved for the priests.

Just as this was done in ancient times, it will also be done in the world tomorrow. The future temple will be a huge complex that will accommodate the many thousands and later, millions who will come to worship there each year. This complex will need to accommodate far larger numbers than Solomon's temple or the temple that was renovated in the days of King Herod. In the future, certain types of service will be done on the Sabbath and this will be done with God's full knowledge and blessings!"

The RCG writers then suggest that because God does not impute guilt to the Levites who labor for His people on His Sabbath and holy days, He would certainly extend the same courtesy to those who serve His people in a restaurant.

"Ezekiel's vision of the future temple gives us a glimpse into how God will conduct things in the world to come. From this, we can readily discern that feeding large congregations on the Sabbath will entail a degree of real labor. If God Make can make and always has made allowances for His priests when they worked on the Sabbath, is it not possible for Him to make allowances for others who serve God's people? "

In these four brief paragraphs, the RCG writers present what is arguably one of their strongest "Biblical facts" in support of dining out on the Sabbath. After all, if the Sabbath pictures God's millennial Kingdom,

and if thousands and later millions will be fed by Levitical chefs preparing delicious meals from the sacrifices people bring on the Sabbath in that Kingdom, then the similarities between dining in the temple and going to restaurants today are pretty compelling. However, there is a HUGE problem with this representation of God's temple and its function on the Sabbath in God's Kingdom.

It Isn't True!

For Mr. Pack and his team of writers to suggest that God's people will bring sacrifices to the temple on the weekly Sabbath during the millennium is **TOTALLY FALSE**. Furthermore, despite what the RCG may claim, there is virtually no scriptural authority or historical record implying this was ever done in the past or will ever be done in the future.

It is true that while the temple worshipers partook of the meat and grain offerings on the annual Holy Days, they did **NOT** do so on the weekly Sabbath! To suggest otherwise is simply **NOT TRUE**. It is a huge distortion of both the Biblical and historical record. Furthermore, the real Biblical facts declare that the conduct of the priests on the Sabbath not only contradicts the RCG view, but actually proves why going to restaurants would be forbidden by God. To illustrate this point let's look at what the scriptures really say?

An Important Distinction

God's word declares that He makes an important distinction between food preparation on the weekly Sabbath and food preparation on the annual Holy Days. First, notice His instructions concerning food preparation on the Sabbath as given through His servant Moses.

Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which you will bake to day, and seethe that you will seethe; and that which remains over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. Eat that to day; for to day is a Sabbath unto the LORD: to day you shall not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none. (Ex. 16:23-30)

God's command concerning labor on the weekly Sabbath is similar to His instructions concerning labor on the Day of Atonement. According to His law total abstinence from work is the steadfast rule. While God's people were permitted to eat food on the weekly Sabbath, they were to perform absolutely no work on that day. This even included meal preparation.

Furthermore, when God gave the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai He specifically addressed the issue of labor on the Sabbath. His words were clear and direct. They were all encompassing. Consider what God Almighty commanded His people.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates: (Ex. 16:8)

What About the Annual Festivals?

With respect to the annual holy days, God made an exception when it came to the work of meal preparation. He explained that on the annual feast days, no servile work (the work of business) was to be done (Lev 23:7,9,21). However, when speaking of the work needed to cook meals, God said that this was allowed.

And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you. (Ex. 12:16)

At this point it is important to understand that God specifically forbade labor to be performed on His weekly Sabbath. Furthermore, He instructed His people that the food eaten on that day was to be prepared the day before. With this in mind, the scriptures make it absolutely clear that contrary to what

the RCG writers assert, there were never sacrifices eaten by the common people on the Sabbath day. Furthermore, there is absolutely no evidence this practice will change in the millennium.

Because God made an exception regarding food preparation on the annual holy days, His people were permitted to bring their personal sacrifices at that time, provided it did NOT fall on a weekly Sabbath. Furthermore, with the exception of the Day of Atonement, they could sacrifice their offerings on the pilgrimage feasts, and it was there that they could eat a portion of them with the priests and with God. However, once again this was NOT the case on the weekly Sabbath. The throngs of people described by the RCG writers that present their sacrifices on the Sabbath have never, and will never exist!

It is true that people will worship on the Sabbath in accordance with the command. But they will NOT bring offerings on that day because the very same command prohibits it?

The Historical Evidence

The fact that God's people will NOT come to sacrifice on the Sabbath in the millennium is also made clear by historical example. Consider the observation of Dr. Albert Edersheim, an internationally recognized scholar who has written prolifically on Jewish practices. Dr. Edersheim is regarded as one of the foremost authorities on the temple and its service during the time of Christ. Here is what he says.

“At the outset, indeed, it must be admitted that the whole social Rabbinical legislation on the subject seems to rest on two sound underlying principles: negatively, the avoidance of all that might become work; and, positively, the doing of all which, in the opinion of the Rabbis, might tend to make the Sabbath 'a delight.' Hence, not only were fasting and mourning strictly prohibited, but food, dress, and every manner of enjoyment, not incompatible with abstinence from work, were prescribed to render the day pleasurable.”

Mr. Edersheim goes on to describe the role of the temple on the Sabbath.

“The only directions given in Scripture for the celebration of the Sabbath in the sanctuary are those which enjoin 'a holy convocation,' or a sacred assembly (Lev 23:3); the weekly renewal of the shewbread (Lev 24:8; Num 4:7); and an additional burnt-offering of two lambs, with the appropriate meat and drink-offerings, 'beside the continual' (that is, the ordinary daily) 'burnt-offering and his drink-offering' (Num 28:9,10).”

Notice that there were NO OTHER OFFERINGS given by God's people on the weekly Sabbath. There were only the daily sacrifices performed by the priests as well as the addition of two lambs for a burnt offering, and these were done only according to the direct command of God. Once again, despite the assertion of the RCG, there were absolutely NO offerings performed by the priests on behalf of the common people on the seventh day. Furthermore, we know of no evidence that God's Church has ever taught otherwise—until now. This new understanding offered by the Restored Church of God is totally inconsistent with the teaching of God's Church in the past and with the Biblical record revealed throughout the scriptures. But there is more. As has been mentioned earlier, the historical record also contradicts the RCG claim. It paints a far different picture of the temple on the Sabbath than do the RCG writers. Notice what Dr. Edersheim continues to write.

“The ancient records of tradition enable us to form a very vivid conception of Sabbath-worship in the Temple at the time of Christ... the Sabbath commenced at sunset on Friday, the day being reckoned by the Hebrews from sunset to sunset. But long before that the preparations for the Sabbath had commenced. Accordingly, Friday is called by the Rabbis 'the eve of the Sabbath,' and in the Gospels 'the preparation' * (Mark 15:42; John 19:31)

No fresh business was then undertaken; no journey of any distance commenced; but everything purchased and made ready against the feast, the victuals being placed in a heated oven, and surrounded by dry substances to keep them warm.

Early on Friday afternoon, the new 'course' of priests, of Levites, and of the 'stationary men,' who were to be the representatives of all Israel, arrived in Jerusalem, and having prepared themselves for the festive season, went up to the Temple.

The approach of the Sabbath, and then its actual commencement, were announced by threefold blasts from the priests' trumpets. When the priests for the first time sounded their trumpets, all business was to cease, and every kind of work to be stopped. The second time the priests drew a threefold blast, to indicate that the Sabbath had actually begun. But the service of the new 'course' of priests had commenced before that. Then the outgoing 'course' handed over to the incoming the keys of the sanctuary, the holy vessels, and all else of which they had had charge. Next the heads of the 'houses' or families of the incoming 'course' determined by lot which of the families were to serve on each special day of their week of ministry, and also who were to discharge the various priestly functions on the Sabbath.

The first of these functions, immediately on the commencement of the Sabbath, was the renewal of the 'shewbread.' It had been prepared by the incoming course before the Sabbath itself, and—we might almost say, invariably—in one of the chambers of the Temple, though, in theory, it was held lawful to prepare it also at Bethphage. For, although it was a principle that 'there is no Sabbath in the sanctuary,' yet no work was allowed which might have been done on any other day. Even circumcision, which, like the Temple services, according to the Rabbis, superseded the Sabbath, was deferred by some to the close of the festive day. Hence, also, if Friday, on the afternoon of which the shewbread was ordinarily prepared, fell on a feast day that required Sabbatical rest, the shewbread was prepared on the Thursday afternoon."

Here, the scriptures make it abundantly clear that the Sabbath was a day in which no business was to be conducted, no food to be purchased, and no work was done even if it was to prepare meals. When reading Dr. Edersheim's words, as well as the words of God Almighty, there isn't even a hint that people brought their sacrifices to the temple, while Levitical chefs would labor over them to prepare and serve spectacular meals on God's holy Sabbath. IT JUST DIDN'T HAPPEN.

Furthermore, it is abundantly clear that by following God's word as well as considering the historical record, there were absolutely no people ever bringing their sacrifices to feast upon during the weekly Sabbath. Certainly no sacrifices were brought into the temple, and eaten by the common people that day. All Israel, including the priests, prepared their food in advance according to God's commandment. Even the shewbread for the temple service was prepared in advance. The point here is that virtually all work that could be done was accomplished the day before the Sabbath so as to keep the Sabbath holy.

Is There Something to Learn?

At this point it is important to understand that this article is not about finding fault with the Restored Church of God, its leader, Mr. Pack or his writers. We are pointing accusing fingers at no one—for good reason. We once believed as they do. It was not until we honestly examined the scriptures that God's wisdom became obvious to us. However, with that said, there is a purpose to this on-going debate. And even more important, there is something that can be learned by this particular aspect of the argument.

The fact that God's temple has never been a hub of intense labor on the Sabbath speaks volumes about how His people should conduct their lives on this day. The Bible reveals that God's Sabbath is a day that can be contaminated by profane labor. Furthermore, God's people have known this throughout history and so have the Levites. This is why they will refrain from preparing great meals for God's people on the Sabbath in the millennium. It is also why commercial restaurants will not engage in their business either. The argument by the RCG writers that God gives those working at a restaurant the same consideration as those who work in the temple is a huge leap in logic with one exception. Just as the Levites refrained from preparing meals for God's people on the weekly Sabbath, so should those who work in restaurants. In other words, if the RCG writers believed in their argument before, they should believe in the truth now. Furthermore, they should act on that truth.

A Final Thought

It is difficult for us to understand why the Restored Church of God would argue that God's people will bring their offerings to the temple on the weekly Sabbath during the millennium—especially in light of the fact that the scriptures, as well as the historical record, say otherwise. Perhaps in their zeal to justify the RCG's current practice, these learned men simply got carried away. We honestly do not know and we

make no accusations. What we do know is that their description of temple practices on the Sabbath is simply a distortion of the Biblical facts.

We also know that the Sabbath in the millennium will be given the great deference and respect it sorely lacks today. At that time the labor that consumes the lives of so many will cease. Commerce will cease. The harvesting of crops will cease. The gathering of food will cease. The purchasing of food will cease. Instead God's people will enjoy the wonderful meals they prepared on the sixth day, the day of preparation. They will then share them with family and friends and will celebrate the great freedom the Sabbath pictures. This is what will be done in God's kingdom. And it is what should be done by His people today.

Finally, the Bible declares that the Kingdom of God will bring about the restitution of all things (Acts 3:21). When it comes, Jesus Christ will restore all that is right including the proper observance of His Sabbath. Until that time God's people everywhere should be mindful of the wonderful blessing the knowledge of the Sabbath contains. We should respect this day and honor it. But most of all we should "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy."