

## **BRING AN OFFERING OF THANKSGIVING**

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*Lesson: Genesis 45*

Joseph sent gifts to his father, Jacob, and a message with his brothers that he was alive and the governor of Egypt. He sent and freely gave these wonderful gifts of corn and bread and meat to his father, because he loved him. He did not do it to try to impress him with the great power that he had during the time of terrible famine and hardship in the lands of Egypt and Canaan.

Jacob, whose other name was Israel, means the Lord in our story. He gives us everything that we have—our life, our parents, brothers and sisters, learned teachers, and friends. He gives us our nice homes, our fine food—and best of all - His Word. If we use it right, He can give us all these things again in our spiritual life in another world much later on. So we see now that everything that the Lord gives us in our natural lives is a free gift from Him.

But for all of these wonderful and grand things that the Lord gives us, He asks us to say thank you to Him, not just with our mouth but also with our heart. He requires us to come before Him with an offering of thanksgiving. Like Joseph of long ago, we are to acknowledge the good things of Egypt that our heavenly Father gives us.

Now, how should we thank the Lord for all His many blessings? We may feel at times that the Lord desires thanks for His own sake. But the truth is that the thanks we render to Him is really for our own sakes so He can go on giving us many more blessings, especially those for our spirit, mind, and heart—the real us. We can say, then, that the Lord does not need thanks for Himself, but really, all thanksgiving to the Lord is for our own sakes.

When we think about this carefully and truly humble ourselves before Him agreeing that everything good is from Him, then the Lord can give us more good things from heaven. He also gives us good things from the field, from the vine, and from the tree when the food is brought in at the harvest for the feast of ingathering or our Thanksgiving.

We celebrate with fine meats and fruits and nuts and breads. All of us have many Divine blessings, although they do not always appear to us. And when we are truly grateful to the Lord for them, then He begins to separate us from our selfish loves and the evil spirits that go with them.

Thanksgiving is a national holiday and feast time proclaimed by the ruler of our land, who represents the Lord as to Divine truth. In our country Thanksgiving is for the purpose of giving thanks to God for the harvest and for bountiful national blessings, progress in defense and prosperity in our homeland. But the idea of keeping a feast of harvest began in the Ancient Church. Those good people got together at certain times to worship the Lord from a glad mind. At these times the people of that church met together in friendship and love so that they might teach one another and learn more about what the Word taught and how the Lord wanted them to love each other.

The children of Israel who lived after the people of the Ancient Church were commanded to hold three feasts of Thanksgiving for the harvest. These feasts were the feasts of unleavened things that they called the Passover, the feast of harvest called the feast of weeks and the feast of ingathering that they called the feast of tabernacles. These were the three feasts of Thanksgiving that the Israelites had to hold to worship the Lord.

Let us look at these three feasts more closely and see what they may mean to us. The Passover means that the Lord made it possible for us to be freed from the clutches of dreadful spirits from hell by being born into our world and fighting them Himself. The feast of harvest means that the Lord tries to plant things of truth that we are willing to learn in our minds especially if we have learned to be good and have been taught to obey Him. The feast of ingathering is really more like our thanksgiving, because then the Lord implants in us more of what is good from His love and more of what is true from His Word if we come to worship Him with a glad mind.

You might ask, "Just what is a glad mind that we should have when we come before the Lord, especially at Thanksgiving time?" A glad mind is one that has fought hard against evil spirits that would distract us from our work and duty and is one that has tried to allow the Lord to build useful ideas for making others happy on the things that we imagine and entertain in our thoughts. A glad mind is also one that rejoices at the privilege of being able to partake of the wonderful things of the Lord's Word. And a glad mind is one that beams with genuine gratitude for all of the many blessings that the Lord heaps upon us. A person who has a glad mind is really one that believes in the Lord's heaven and the good things that He sends down to people in the world who have a feeling of Thanksgiving in their hearts and souls.

Did you know that the Lord does not really accept our fruit offerings that we bring to Him and appreciate them unless the thoughts that we have and the things in our heart are like the growing and harvesting of some fruit or vegetable that He has created? If perhaps, we brought an apple or cherries, oranges, or luscious ripe olives, then we would want to have much love for the Lord in us. If we brought fragrant grapes or anything from the vineyard, then we need to have love for our neighbor. If we might have brought sweet figs or

dates, then we recognize our need to obey the Lord from now on. And so it is with all of the offerings of Thanksgiving that we bring to worship the Lord with. Gifts and offerings are like all of our deeds. If we do not plan to stop thinking, doing or saying something evil, if we do not plan to do good for others, and if we do not obey the Lord, then they are only empty gestures.

The real harvest then is our bearing fruit from having the Lord implant His Word in us, and our doing what is necessary to get rid of the weeds in our mind, and then being useful and eager to be useful and to learn more in whatever things and places that we can.

The greatest gifts that we all share are the truths of the New Church. It is the Lord's offering to us. In the Writings of Swedenborg are the unfolding and blossoming of the stories of the Word. These are a free gift from the Lord to us so that we may bear spiritual fruit and become a wholesome person filled with love and wisdom.

And this is the offering that the Lord wants us to have when He judges us with righteousness and justice after we have passed over to the other world at the heavenly harvest time when all the real in-gathering takes place.

Let us seek to have the Lord make us a meaningful and loving heart and an understanding and glad mind so that like the four and twenty elders we also may say, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for You have created all things, and for Your pleasure they are and were created."  
*Amen.*