

The Approach Present



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I was born and raised in Hampton, VA. Established in 1610, it is the oldest continuous English speaking settlement in America. Within a short distance from my childhood home were many historic places to visit, such as Jamestown, Williamsburg and Yorktown, which may have contributed to my interest in history.

THE AMERICAN CAESAR

One lesser known place I often visited in my youth was the *General Douglas MacArthur Memorial* in Norfolk.

Along with many personal items, *The MacArthur Memorial* is filled with gifts that had been given to the general. His role was significant in the past century; among other positions he held was that of the *Supreme Commander of Allied Powers*, and was referred to as the *American Caesar*. Many foreign dignitaries had given him substantial gifts. We're not talking of ties and handkerchiefs. We're talking of gifts of special honor and significant value.

The giving of such gifts to powerful men and monarchs, to gain access and favor, has been a common ancient custom.

THE APPROACH PRESENT

Unbeknown to many, the Scriptures themselves actually speak to this gift-giving practice. The reason that so many are unaware of its presence in the Bible is because of the failure of English translations to properly convey the existence of the practice.

Nearly 300 times the *Concordant Version* uses the phrase “*Approach Present*.”¹ It was a gift offered for the purpose of gaining an audience with the recipient, and of provoking in the receiver, especially a superior, kind inclinations toward the giver – thus acceptance.

The *Approach Present* was a gift offered to win another’s favor. It was a humble, sacrificial act to enable the giver to draw near to the recipient.

Discussing one of the Hebrew words for *Approach Present*,²

James Strong says that it is

euphemistically [a] *tribute*.³

W.E. Vine says that it was

frequently ... used in the sense of ‘tribute’ paid to a king or overlord.⁴

THE EXAMPLE OF JACOB AND ESAU

Jacob the deceiver, some 60 years after manipulating his brother Esau’s birthright from him, humbly met him with an *Approach Present* in a respectful attempt to mend their longstanding breach.

*Jacob replied ... If now I have found grace in your eyes, then you must take my **Approach Present** from my hand ... Take, pray, **my blessing** which I bring to you* (Genesis 33:10-11, CV).

As we can tell from this passage the *Approach Present* was intended to be a “*blessing*” to another so that any distance between the two parties may be removed.

The *Approach Present* was not a box of chocolates; not a gift card to Wal-Mart. It represented a most significant sacrifice on the part of the giver.

In this example of Jacob and Esau, the actual substance of the *Approach Present* is detailed for us:

200 female goats
20 male goats
200 lambs
20 rams
30 milk camels⁵
30 young camels
40 calves
10 bulls
20 female donkeys
10 colts

1. Current edition of the *Concordant Version*.

2. מִנְחָה, *mincháh*.

3. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance: Hebrew Lexicon #H4503*.

4. *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*.

5. Martin Zender says, “If you’re going to buy a camel, you might as well buy a milking one.”

An estimated value of all these based on an average of today's prices would be about \$261,000 (over a quarter-million dollars).

Little wonder that the Hebrew word⁶ is defined in part, not only as a “present,” but as “a *sacrificial present*,”⁷ “approach offering.”⁸

LEVITICUS

The book of Leviticus goes into great detail concerning the *Approach Present*⁷ offered to God. It is referred to by name nearly 70 times in this single book alone. Over half of these times the access word “*near*” is used in connection with it (*i.e.*, “*bring near*,” “*come near*,” etc.).

In fact, the Hebrew word⁷ is derived from the root word⁹ meaning “to come near, approach, enter into, draw near.”¹⁰

It is also interesting to note that Leviticus tells us that anyone who came in contact with these offerings became holy (6:18).

It is repeatedly referred to as or associated with a “*sacrifice of peace*” (the cessation of againstness). It is also mentioned as a “*voluntary sacrifice*” (not required) and “*ascent offering*” (moving up close).

THE ANOINTING OF THE TABERNACLE

In Numbers 7 we read of the anointing of the Tabernacle after it had been set up.¹¹ At that time the Princes of the Twelve Tribes of Israel brought *Approach Presents* to God. The presents are enumerated in this chapter:

- 12 silver dishes
- 12 silver bowls
- 12 gold spoons
- 36 bulls
- 72 rams
- 72 lambs
- 72 goats

An estimated value of all of these presents based on an average of today's prices would be about \$558,000 (over a half-million dollars).

6. קרבן, *qorbân*.

7. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: Hebrew Lexicon #H7133.*

8. *E.W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible* (Leviticus 2:1).

9. קרב, *qârab*.

10. *Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew Lexicon #H7126.*

11. *Interestingly, Numbers 7 is the second longest chapter in the Bible by verses, with 89; proceeded only by Psalm 119 with 176 verses.*

THE EXAMPLE FROM SOLOMON

Solomon may well have been the richest man of his day, but those who came near to him – even other kings seeking his favor – brought him additional wealth, as an *Approach Present*.

*As for Solomon, he came to be the ruler over all the kingdoms from the stream as far as the land of the Philistines unto the boundary of Egypt; they brought close **Approach Presents** and were serving Solomon all the days of his life ... They came from all the peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and he took **Approach Presents** from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom (I Kings 4:21, 34).*

THE FIRST USAGE

Now that we have established the extreme sacrificial nature of the *Approach Present*, let us consider its first usage in Scripture. Long before the account of Jacob and Esau, we read of it in relationship to two other brothers, Cain and Abel.

*And it came to be at the end of a year's days that Cain brought an **approach**¹² **present** to Yahweh from the fruit of the ground. As for Abel however, he brought some firstlings of his flock and their fat portions.¹³ And Yahweh gave heed to Abel and his **Approach Present**. But to Cain and his **Approach Present** He did not give heed; so Cain's anger grew very hot, and his face fell (Genesis 4:3-5).*

In this passage we see that Cain offered an *Approach Present* to God consisting of vegetation (“fruit of the ground”), while Abel made a far more significant *sacrificial* offering of livestock (“firstlings of his flock”). The Hebrew word for flock¹⁴ suggests “sheep and goats.”¹⁵

Whatever significance there may have been between blood and bloodless offerings, the *Approach Present* draws attention to their costly nature. While an average of the modern day value of various farm crops is currently about \$12 a bushel, that of goats and sheep are around \$225 each.

Given multiple quantities of either class (say 10), which would cause one to take notice?

10 bushels would be \$120.00

10 livestock would be \$2250.00

Between the two, which would be viewed as a serious, sacrificial act intended to extract the attention and favor of the recipient? Our passage says that,

*Yahweh gave heed to Abel and his **Approach Present**. But to Cain and his **Approach Present** He did not give heed ...*

Abel's *Approach Present* got God's attention; Cain's did not. Abel's won Divine favor; Cain's didn't.

12. מִנְחָה, *minchâh*

13. “and their fat portions.” *Figure of speech Hendiadys, “the firstlings, and the fattest ones too.”* — E.W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible* (Genesis 4:4)

14. צֹאן, *tsô'n*

15. *Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew Lexicon #H6629.*

THE EXAMPLE OF THE WISE MEN

Just as the *Approach Present* is soon introduced to us in the Hebrew Scriptures (Genesis 4), so also in the Greek Scriptures it appears almost immediately (Matthew 2).

*And, coming into the house, they perceived the little Boy with Mary, His mother, and, falling, they worship Him. And opening their treasures, they bring Him **Approach Presents**,¹⁶ gold and frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2:11).*

Why did the magi bring *Approach Presents* to “the little Boy”? Because they had sought out and found the “**King of the Jews.**”

Where is He Who is brought forth King of the Jews? For we perceived His star in the East, and we came to worship Him (Matthew 2:2).

The choice of these *Approach Presents* were not random. All of the gifts were specifically mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures as *Approach Presents*.

Gold (Numbers 31:50; I Kings 10:25; II Chronicles 9:24).

Frankincense (Leviticus 2:1,15; 5:11; 6:15; Numbers 5:15; Nehemiah 13:5; 13:9; Isaiah 43:23; Isaiah 66:3; Jeremiah 17:26; 41:5).

Myrrh (an essential oil; *oil* being mentioned in: Leviticus 2:1,4,5,6,7,15; 5:11; 6:15; 7:10; 9:4; 14:10,21; 23:13; Numbers 4:16; 5:15; 7:13, 19, 25, 31, 37, 43, 49, 55, 61, 67, 73, 79; 8:8; 15:4, 6, 9; 28:5, 9, 12, 20, 28; 29:3, 9, 14; Ezekiel 45:24-25; 46:5, 14-15).

THE TABLES TURNED

When we get to Paul’s letters, we find that the tables have completely turned on the whole concept of the *Approach Present*.

*For in grace, through faith,¹⁷ are you saved, and this is not out of you; it is God’s **Approach Present** (Ephesians 2:8).*

The unimaginable has happened: here we see that, instead of humanity bringing an *Approach Present* to God, it is God that has brought one to humanity.

This verse speaks of much more than a mere “gift” as most English translations would lead us to believe.

16. As with the Hebrew, there are two Greek words used to translate “Approach Present.” Here the Greek word is δῶρον, *dōron* (Strong’s #G1435); the other word is προσφορά, *prosphora* (Strong’s #G4376). The distinction is noted in the Concordant Version by its use of bold and light typeface: *dōron* is “**approach present**”; *prosphora* is “**approach present**.”

17. We are saved by grace, not by faith, which is the channel through (*dia*) which flows to us the Divine stream of saving grace. Both alike are God’s gifts. – E.W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible* (Ephesians 2:8).

The Greek word translated “*Approach Present*” here means “gifts offered in expression of honor,”¹⁸ “GIVE-GUSH.”¹⁹

Here we find a most unprecedented and unfathomable truth: instead of us attempting to draw near to God and win His favor, God has drawn near to us and is winning *our* favor!

This is a display of the transcendent riches of God’s grace (Ephesians 2:7). It is super-excessively above all that we could have requested or apprehended (3:20).

A.E. Knoch tells us:

These *Approach Presents* were given to God in [Israel’s] terrestrial worship. Now, however, the table is turned. The temple and its service are destroyed. Now God, besides providing the one great Sacrifice, presents *celestial gratuities*.²⁰

WHAT IS GOD’S APPROACH PRESENT?

Exactly what is the *Approach Present* God has made? Well, the question more accurately should be “*Who is the Approach Present?*”

*And be walking in love, according as Christ also loves you, and gives Himself up for us, an **Approach Present** and a sacrifice to God, for a fragrant odor* (Ephesians 5:2).

The very nature of the *Approach Present* brings us face to face with the immensely incalculable, sacrificial superiority of **THIS** *Approach Present*. It is super-excessively transcendent above all prior *Approach Presents*. God comes near to us to win our favor, costing Him His very Best.

It is interesting that the life of our Lord Jesus Christ began with Him being given an *Approach Present*, and ends with Him becoming an *Approach Present*.

*By which will we are hallowed through the **Approach Present** of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time* (Hebrews 10:10).

*For by one **Approach Present** He has perfected to a finality those who are hallowed* (:14).

Notice carefully the usage of “*hallowed*” in both verses. Remember that Leviticus 6:18 tells us that anyone coming in contact with the *Approach Present* becomes holy.

18. *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament*.

19. *The Concordant Keyword Concordance Words*, p. 231.

20. *Unsearchable Riches Magazine*, Volume 49 (1958).

IMPORTANCE OF ALL OF THE WORD OF GOD

Among those who grasp the wonderful riches of Paul's writings, recognizing that his message is unique and that he alone is the apostle of our day, there are some who seem to have a disregard for the rest of Scripture.

What they have failed to realize is that the advanced revelations given to Paul regarding the work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ are actually built on an understanding of all of the rest of Scripture.

All Scripture is inspired by God, and is beneficial for teaching, for exposure, for correction, for discipline in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16).

Without the foundation of the rest of Scripture one can't fully grasp or understand many glorious truths revealed by Paul, not the least of which is the grand truth of God's *Approach Present* to us.

For whatever was written before, was written for this teaching of ours, that through the endurance and the consolation of the Scriptures we may have expectation (Romans 15:4).

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