

Tabernacle

The Ashes of The Brazen Altar

Introduction

When God gives to man fore-gleams of our Lord, He is very particular concerning every aspect of them. There is no doubt that the sacrifice is the most important feature, but God seeks to teach us lessons from each aspect of it, and that includes the “ashes”.

In the consideration of the scriptures it is observed that there are several contexts in which “ashes” are mentioned. Some of these are:

- a) Individuals who have been brought into the depths of anguish: Jeremiah, “O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation: for the spoiler shall suddenly come upon us” (Jer. 6:26); Job, “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6); The Jews, “great mourning among the Jews . . . and many lay in sackcloth and ashes” (Est. 4:3).
- b) The judgment of God and its severity. “Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, and it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee” (Ezek. 28:18).
- c) Human weakness as seen in Abraham when he is interceding and says: “Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27).
- d) Deep humility as seen in Daniel when he said: “I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes” (Dan. 9:3).
- e) Regular ashes from a fire (Ex. 9:8).
- f) An accepted sacrifice: “The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble . . . Remember all thy offerings and accept (translated “ashes”)” (Psa. 20:1, 3)

Before delving into the significance, there are several lovely truths to observe:

- a) In contrast to our Lord, the fire of divine judgment was not because of personal sin as was Israel’s (Ezek. 28:18), for the Son of God was impeccable in His holiness. How comforting to read: “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5).
- b) Again, when the judgment of God for sin had been fully poured out upon Him, He was still as Holy and perfect as before He endured the judgment of God’s righteousness. He endured and endured and endured until the price was fully paid.

*Such was the sacrifice He made, the law could ask no more,
And not a mite was left unpaid when He my judgment bore.*

There are six different Hebrew words used for ashes, but only two of them are used relative to sacrifices. They are “aphar” and “deshen”. The word translated “deshen” is translated “ashes” seven times: “on the East part where the ashes are poured out” (Lev. 1:16), as well as: (Lev. 4:12; 6:10-11; 1 Kgs. 13:3, 5; Jer. 31:40). It is translated “fatness” seven times (Jud. 9:9; Job 36:16; Psa. 36:8; 63:5, 65:11; Isa. 55:2; Jer. 31:14); and “accepted” (Psa. 20:3).

Christ And The Dust Of Death

At times it is intimated that the ashes indicate the “dust of death” (Psa. 22:15), but I submit that we need to be careful when speaking of the body of our Lord and dust. The body of our Lord was NEVER brought into a state of dust, for apart from His holiness God had decreed: “Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Acts 2:27).

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The Four Major Truths Concerning The Ashes And The Lord

When we muse on the “ashes” as typifying our Lord among the various truths, four become prominent:

- a) An accepted sacrifice for the fire had consumed the offering (Lev. 9:24)
- b) A finished work for there was nothing left to be consumed (Lev. 1:9; 4:26)
- c) The fulness of divine goodness to us (Psa. 65:11)
- d) A magnificent change: “To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isa. 61:3)

Rather than developing these, this paper will be a consideration of the men who removed the ashes. It will be observed that there is constant reference to the man being “clean” (Num. 19:9); the bullock was to be carried to a “clean place, where the ashes are poured out” (Lev. 4:12); a “clean place” (Lev. 6:11). That which is being typified is the men who were the Lord’s undertakers, Joseph and Nicodemus, and the tomb in which His body was placed.

The Clean Man

When it came to the handling of our Lord it is very seldom unclean hands touched Him. There can be no doubt the Lord touched unclean people, the woman touched the hem of His garment. When He was slapped on the face unclean hands touched Him, but after His crucifixion hands soiled by sin never touched Him again. It is to be remembered that cruel unclean hands nailed Him to the cross, the Father’s holy hands received His spirit, and clean hands took Him down from the cross.

There were two men who were the undertakers of our Lord, Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus. Concerning Joseph we read: “And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor; and he was a good man, and a just” (Lk. 23:50). He was “an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God” (Mk. 15:43). He is mentioned in all four gospels as going to Pilate, begging the body of Jesus, and supply the linen cloth. It would appear that after Joseph acquired the right to have the body of the Lord Nicodemus came. There is no way of knowing if this had been arranged before hand or not, but and in many ways it is irrelevant. Nicodemus was “a ruler of the Jews” (Jn. 3:1-3) and he brought the mixture of “myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight” (Jn. 19:39). There are two mentions to Nicodemus before John 19, one in chapter 3:1-3 and the other in chapter 7:50. These men came and:

a) Wrapped His body in a clean cloth

“And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth” (Matt. 27:59)

b) Laid His body in a clean tomb.

“And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed” (Matt. 27:60); “And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulcher that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid” (Lk. 23:53; Jn. 19:41).

It is fascinating to realize that although the death of Christ had been settled from eternity, yet everything about it was in haste. The had not wanted to kill him on the feast day (Matt. 26:5) and yet such was their haste they came by night to take Him (Jn. 18:3). He was tried during the night and crucified by 9:00 AM the next morning. He was hastily buried (Jn. 19:42) for the body was not to be left on the cross on the Sabbath day (Jn. 19:31) and that started at 6:00 in the evening. Thus, from the point of time when the Lord died at 3:00 PM until He was buried was less than three hours.

Roman law demanded that the corpse of an executed criminal was to be handed over to the next of kin, except for those guilty of sedition whose bodies were left for the vultures, indicating the ultimate indignity. However, the Jews would not let a body be so treated, but they would not bury such a one in the family tomb where the criminal’s body would desecrate those already buried, yet this is exactly what Joseph did. Mary showed her devotion to Christ by breaking the alabaster box of ointment, and Joseph showed His by giving the Lord an

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honorable burial. The evangel records: “His own new tomb” (Matt. 27:60), thus the Lord was put in the family tomb. There was a burial site for criminals just outside the city but God would not let His Son be buried there. It would seem to me that Pilate knew that this was a righteous man (Matt. 27:19) and it was only right that He was to be given a proper burial. Where the Lord was buried was in a garden. I am aware of only two other men buried in a garden, they were both kings.

- a) Manasseh was “buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza” (2 Kgs. 21:18)
- b) Amon who also was “buried in his sepulchre in the garden of Uzza” (2 Kgs. 21:26)

A beautiful truth is presented in the following words: “And on the East side toward the rising of the sun shall they of the standard of the camp of Judah pitch throughout their armies: and Nahshon the son of Amminadab shall be captain of the children of Judah” (Num. 2:3). Then we can read: “And very early in the morning the first day of the week” (Mk. 16:2) “as it began to dawn” (Matt. 28:1). How lovely the sight, the sun was just arising and a new day had begun, the Lord was raised, the judgment past, and the flood gates of mercy were opened wide.

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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