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INSTANT FAMILY

As soon as Rody and Tessie walked into our home, they immediately embraced all of our children, singing and teaching them songs, and proceeded to tell them this story: "There was a young boy who wanted a bicycle very badly. So he went into his mother's room and took the statue of the virgin Mary and put it under his bed. Then he prayed, "Jesus, if you ever want to see your mother again, you will give me a bicycle!" As we all began laughing at this, Rody then spoke seriously to the children about how we should always trust the Lord and go to Him in faithful prayer when there is something we need but don't have it. The words that came to my mind as we were experiencing the joy of sweet fellowship with such happy Christians in our home were "Instant Family."

How is it that two people who we've never met, who live so far away from us in such a distant

unfamiliar culture to us could instantly transplant themselves into the family of complete strangers so effortlessly? Jesus, as shocking as it must have sounded to his own immediate family, was able to do the same thing with his disciples. "While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother,'" Mt. 12:46-50.

Of all the memories we were blessed with during this past week, the one that will stick with me the most is that of

Rody and Tessie walking through our door and immediately interacting with us and our children as if we were close personal family members who have known each other for years and were finally getting to see each other again after years of separation. The truth is we had never even seen a photograph of each other let alone even spoken or interacted with one another before that moment. But this is the beautiful truth of every faithful member of the house of God, that we are all family – instantly – from the moment we are born again rising out of the waters of baptism (Jn. 3:3-8). “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father. Treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity,” 1 Timothy 5:1-2. “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well,” Romans 16:13. “But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel,” Philippians 2:22.

But often we simply acknowledge one another with the term “brother” or “sister” and fail to actually interact and treat one another in truth as such. We have our own

brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers who have been reserved the right to closeness and warmth of genuine meaningful relationships and so often fail to do as Jesus taught us.

When we are born again, we are immediately “transferred” into the Kingdom of Jesus (Col. 1:13), where the definitions and terms of “family” are no longer merely determined in physical ways, but through the adoption by faith which makes God our Father, Jesus our brother, and all who do the will of the Father our household (Eph. 1:3-10; Heb. 2:10-11; Eph. 2:19). Let us seek to honor our Lord in this way, by honoring the spiritual brotherhood Jesus reminded His own physical family of when He walked this earth. “And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother,’” Matthew 12:49-50.

- Daniel Ruegg

ADD AN EGG

I have read that years ago, when the Betty Crocker company first began selling their cake mixes, they offered a product which only needed

water. If you simply poured your mix into a bowl and added the right amount of water, you could enjoy a perfect cake. They were sure that busy moms around the country would love this easy way to make a cake.

But it bombed. Few bought the product, and the company didn't know why. A study provided a very surprising answer. People were not buying the cake mix because it was just too easy. All their lives they had been pulling out all the ingredients, mixing, stirring, and baking. The new approach, however, did not allow them to contribute to the process.

So Betty Crocker made a simple change to the formula. The newer mix would require an egg to be added in addition to the water -- and it was an immediate success. It seems that many religious people have been making the same kind of mistake when they are presenting the gospel. Sometimes, Christianity is "packaged" with instructions that make the path to eternal life as easy as possible. The fear is that people may not "buy" the way of Christ if it seems too hard.

What was necessary for a tasty cake? Just add water. What must I do to be saved?

Just believe. This is what many are told. But where in the New Testament are sinners told to "just believe"? Believing in Christ (trusting in Him to save) is the basis of salvation but not the only thing that is required to enter the way of Christ.

God wants more to be added to the mix. We learn from Acts 2:38 that He expects those who believe in Jesus to add repentance and baptism in order to receive the forgiveness of sins. I am not adding to Christ's finished work at the cross. I am simply sharing with you the way of salvation as revealed in the Bible. Jesus purchased our salvation; we receive it through obedient faith.

Once you are saved, you learn that being a Christian is not an easy life to live. We have to work out our own salvation (Phil. 2:12). And do note that once we take the steps to be saved and add our efforts of service, we still have not earned our way to heaven. Salvation is free -- even as it requires work on our part. And the reward makes it all worthwhile!

To make a cake from a mix, add an egg. To walk in the way of the Lord, add obedience.

- Colin Stringer

People, Places, and Things of the **BIBLE**



HOW TAXES WERE COLLECTED UNDER KING MANASSEH (II Chronicles 33:1-20)

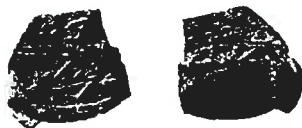
When Tax Day rolls around each year, taxpayers may take some small comfort in the fact that taxes are by no means a modern invention. Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain both famously remarked about the certainty of death and taxes, and a recent archaeological discovery concerning ancient taxes in Jerusalem has added to scholars' certainty about a tax system in ancient Israel, especially during the reign of Judah's King Manasseh.

While wet sifting soil from the excavation of an ancient refuse pit on the eastern slope of the Temple Mount, workers at the Temple Mount Sifting Project discovered a small clay bulla, or seal impression, inscribed in paleo-Hebrew script. Although some of the letters had broken off, archaeologist and co-director of the sifting project Gabriel Barkay reconstructs the two lines of fragmentary paleo-Hebrew text to read "Gibeon, for the king." This puts the new find in a special group of more than 50 so-called fiscal bullae, but it is the first of these to come from a professional excavation; all of the previous examples are from the antiquities market (the Temple Mount Sifting Project subsequently discovered a second example while sifting soil from Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron's excavation near the Gihon Spring).

Unlike the "Gibeon, for the king" jar handles familiar to our readers, Barkay told Biblical Archaeology Review (BAR) by telephone that the fiscal bullae were not part of Hezekiah's administrative preparations for the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 B.C. Rather, he thinks the bullae are evidence for a system of ancient taxes used by Hezekiah's son and successor, King Manasseh, in the seventh century B.C.E. Barkay told BAR that under this system, "the urban administrative centers collected [ancient] taxes in kind [i.e., grain, oil, etc.] and then sent them on to the king in Jerusalem with the documentation attached and sealed by these bullae identifying where it had come from—in this case, Gibeon." At least 19 cities are identified in the paleo-Hebrew inscriptions on the fiscal bullae, representing nine of the 12 districts of Judah listed in Joshua 15:20–63. Barkay suggests that this Biblical passage may even have been composed for purposes of administering and collecting ancient taxes during the reign of King Manasseh.

King Manasseh was not popular with the Biblical authors (as Barkay puts it, "they hated his guts"), but Assyrian records suggest that he implemented heavy taxes on his people in order to pay tribute to King Esarhaddon and then King Ashurbanipal, Sennacherib's successors in Assyria. These ancient taxes thus helped King Manasseh maintain relative peace in Judah during his 55-year reign. Other evidence from the paleo-Hebrew inscribed fiscal bullae indicates that the city of Lachish was rebuilt during this time, as Barkay told BAR, 16 years after its destruction by Sennacherib's invading army.

Proof once again that, when it comes to taxes, saving receipts is always a good idea.



Discovered during the Temple Mount Sifting Project, this seventh-century B.C.E. clay bulla inscribed in paleo-Hebrew script with the phrase "Gibeon, for the king" provides new evidence for how ancient taxes were collected during the reign of the Biblical King Manasseh.