

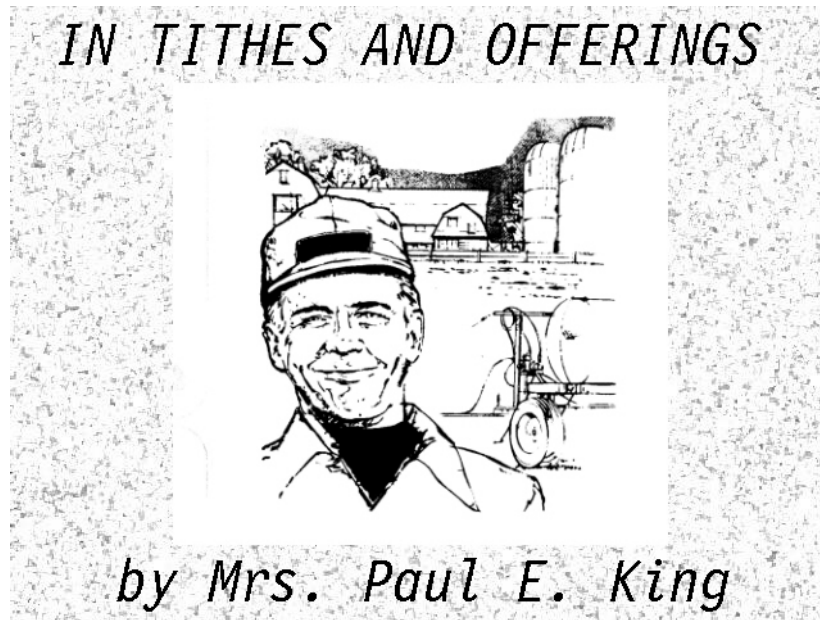
Copyright 2001 By Lucille King
All Rights Reserved and Duplication
Of This Publication Is Forbidden,
Except For Personal Use

* * * * *

Digital Edition 10/22/2001
By Holiness Data Ministry

* * * * *

The Sunday School Beacon
March 28, 1993



IN TITHES AND OFFERINGS
By Mrs. Paul E. King

You'd think I'd have learned my lesson when I lost the apple crop to hail, but I didn't. No sir, I didn't. Seems I was one of the most hardheaded of all hardheads. Yes sir, it does. You see, it was this way. . . .

Oh, first of all, maybe I'd better introduce myself and give you a sort of verbal resume: I'm Jason Abbott, and I live in that beautiful big house

alongside the highway going west out of our town. The house sits up on the hill. It overlooks a well-kept, well-stocked fish pond and terraced gardens that draw visitors from miles around.

I inherited the fruit farm from my parents. I was born and brought up on that farm and, naturally, the place is really and truly home to me. Seems I know every inch of ground and land on the place, and I love it. Always did and always will.

More than forty years ago I brought Trudy Burgess there as a bride, only, she dropped the Burgess name to proudly wear the Abbott name instead. Trudy's love for the place was and is as strong and deep and great as mine. We were as happy as two larks on a sunny-warm day in a meadow, when she moved in as my wife. And we were not only happy but we were prosperous too. And all because those beautiful fruit trees on the hillsides and in the lush meadow land produced abundantly and prolifically for us year after year.

We worked hard, Trudy and I; late into the night too. All that choice, perfect, juicy and delicious fruit you buy at the roadside market or store, or wherever, doesn't just happen. Oh no. Behind the scene, working almost year long, the fruit grower is busy. Busy. But like I said, we were happy, Trudy and I.

I had grown up helping my father with the trees from my earliest boyhood years. It was work I enjoyed doing; and when I'd get home from school on a cold February or early March day, I could scarcely wait until I was out in the orchards working side by side with my father, pruning the trees. We never heard of a generation gap back then, and if I'd have heard about it I'd not have known what it meant, for, you see, my father and I were close: He was not only my father but he was my closest and most trusted friend and my confidant. We loved each other.

My parents went to church regularly; just like Trudy and I did from the day we were married. It was unthinkable for us not to attend church on a regular and consistent basis. And we gave to the church too; sometimes what I thought was a "tidy" sum, mind you. I never thought of Trudy and me as being "tightfisted." No indeed. We gave as much as anyone else in the church, I was sure. Sometimes more.

It's easy to just kind of settle down and sit back and compare what you're doing and giving with what someone else is doing or giving, I guess. Especially when the preacher acts like everything's fine and what everyone's doing is all right, and he doesn't preach to warn you about what you are commanded to do and what God expects you to do. Our pastor of many years failed miserably to, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression. . . ." (Isaiah 58:1).

Now don't misunderstand, I'm not accusing the preacher for my sins and my wrong doings. No indeed! I have a Bible, and, for a fact, Trudy and I read that Bible every single day of our lives. But it does help a body when his preacher "cries aloud" and names the specific sins instead of generalizing and very calmly saying one should not sin. Yes, it sure helps a body.

Well, like I said, Trudy and I own the productive and very beautiful fruit farm on the hill going west out of our town. We're not poor, mind you; not at all. And like I said, we give money to our church -- enough to appease my conscience and make me feel that I wasn't miserly.

I had often read that chapter in Malachi about giving tithes and offerings and about proving God. But I figured I didn't need to prove Him, that I was doing well enough without doing such a thing. And I was, too. Doing well, I mean. Like the rich man in the Bible whose barns were full, my fruit storage "barns" were indeed full. Year after year after year, it was the same. I was thankful for the excellent cooling system which kept my fruit in prime condition for months, thus, when local fruits were no longer available, my fruit brought top prices as it came from the cooler, crisp and solid and firm and juicy and fresh tasting.

Yes, we were getting along well, never thinking that anything really bad could happen to us. Oh, we had had a few minor set backs but nothing serious. And Trudy and I were happy. We were good moral people and as honest as anybody could be. Or so I thought. And we were "deeply religious" too, being faithful to church attendance every Sunday morning and night and to the mid-week service too.

I guess I'll never forget that storm, though. No, not so long as I live. Trudy and I had just finished our evening meal when the first roll of thunder sounded in our ears and a flash of jagged lightning lighted the sky for a brief, momentary time.

I sat down to read the newspaper and Trudy cleared the table and began washing the dishes. The sky, which had been clear that day, became suddenly dark and ominous looking. I called Trudy in to me. Together, we watched the fearful sight. I feared we'd be having a tornado; the sky had the same eerie coloring and look as it had some years previously when a tornado ripped through the countryside north of our town.

We watched the rapidly approaching storm in a sense of awe and with a rising fear. Lightning raced across the heaven with lurid, blinding flashes and the rolling, rumbling thunder made our sturdily constructed old house to shake and tremble. In a little while, the rain began to fall in blinding sheets. And then we heard it, a sound every farmer and fruit grower fears: The hail began to fall. It rattled on the porch roof and knocked its icy fists on the windows, cracking some and smashing holes in others.

Some of that hail was as big as a soft ball, others were smaller, and still others were thick and flat and jaggedly-sharp. I had never seen hail like this. Never. By now the ground was covered; it was piling up all around us. Trudy lamented the demise of her beautiful and carefully tended blooming flowers, crying softly in her apron as she watched the utter havoc the storm was wreaking and inflicting upon our land and the surrounding area.

I wrapped a comforting arm around her, telling her we could redo the flower beds even if it was late in the season, my mind, all the while, on the late and last bearers of the peaches and on the apple trees, loaded (like every year) with fruit so heavily until the limbs bent beneath the weight. Instinctively, I knew the crop was a loss. Totally so. No fruit could survive the fierce onslaught. And I was right.

Well, you'd think I'd have thought seriously about the scripture in Malachi and would have done something about it. But I didn't. I had heard one of our church members testify once about God getting the tithes -- when we failed to give our one-tenth regularly and consistently -- even if it meant taking a cow or two. He had lost two of his most productive milk cows, I learned, and that shook and startled him until he promised the Lord he'd tithe on everything he earned and made. And on a regular and consistent basis, too. And he did.

The next big shock and loss for Trudy and me came the spring following the hail storm that destroyed the apple crop completely. It was the peaches and nectarines and apricots this time -- destroyed by a hard frost. I began thinking seriously of that Chapter in Malachi then. Yes, I did. And I even meditated upon that part where it says, ". . . and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts. . . ." But that's as far as it went.

Well, our minister of many years finally resigned and left the area for full retirement in one of the warmer states and we got a minister who was as much unlike our former pastor as the North Pole is from the South Pole. This new minister was with us only two weeks when he began preaching on things that would keep us out of Heaven and land us in the lake of fire for sure.

"There will be no sin in Heaven," he declared emphatically and positively. And he then began to name sin; not in generalizational overtones but to call the sins out by name, thundering out for all to hear that any who were guilty of committing adultery and fornication, of lying and cheating, stealing and gossiping and robbing, were headed for the burning fire of hell unless they repented of their sins and were born again.

"You appease your conscience," he said in no uncertain tone of voice, "by saying, 'Oh, I don't steal; I'm an honest man: I'm not a robber.' But wait a minute! Can you say that truthfully? What about your tithe? Are you giving one-tenth of all you make to the Lord? Are you? If you aren't, you're a robber."

I felt jolted. Me, a robber? I never thought of myself as being a robber. Never. I was numb with shock. And fear.

"Listen to what God's Word says," the preacher continued. "Reading from Malachi 3, verses 8 through 12; 'Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

"And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before her time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.

"And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts."

Ye are cursed with a curse! It stood out before me in blazing letters. Cursed with a curse! How dreadful! How fearful! Cursed, by God. And because of robbing Him.

I heard nothing more the new preacher said. Suddenly, I was on my feet. Waving my arms, I cried, "I'm guilty! I'm guilty!"

I literally ran to the altar and cried to God for mercy and for forgiveness, feeling I'd die unless I knew I was forgiven. And right there on my knees, bawling out loud and not caring about it at all, I told the Lord that I'd pay tithes and offerings on everything I made and earned and that He could have every single part of me, and the farm too.

I told Him I'd been so very proud of that fruit farm and its lush and lovely land and beautiful orchards. I repented, confessed and forsook from the bottom of my heart and soul. Nothing was worth losing my soul over. Nothing. I made a clean sweep of everything. And then He came! Oh, how He came! My heart felt like it had had a bath: It was washed -- in the blood of Jesus! -- and it was whiter than snow.

Oh, I wish I could tell you how glorious and wonderful it is to have all your sins forgiven; but you'll have to experience it for yourself to know. Peace and joy like I never had before now filled my overflowing soul. Yes, I settled the question there on my knees to go through with God, and to pay, not tithes only, but offerings, too! And I am blest.