

Leviticus Bible Study #4

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 3:1-17

1 “If his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers an animal from the herd, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD. **2** And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and kill it at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons the priests shall throw the blood against the sides of the altar. **3** And from the sacrifice of the peace offering, as a food offering to the LORD, he shall offer the fat covering the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, **4** and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. **5** Then Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering, which is on the wood on the fire; it is a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

6 “If his offering for a sacrifice of peace offering to the LORD is an animal from the flock, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish. **7** If he offers a lamb for his offering, then he shall offer it before the LORD, **8** lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it in front of the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. **9** Then from the sacrifice of the peace offering he shall offer as a food offering to the LORD its fat; he shall remove the whole fat tail, cut off close to the backbone, and the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails **10** and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. **11** And the priest shall burn it on the altar as a food offering to the LORD.

12 “If his offering is a goat, then he shall offer it before the LORD **13** and lay his hand on its head and kill it in front of the tent of meeting, and the sons of Aaron shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. **14** Then he shall offer from it, as his offering for a food offering to the LORD, the fat covering the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails **15** and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. **16** And the priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering with a pleasing aroma. All fat is the LORD'S. **17** It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood.”

Introduction

The idea of a “peace offering” requires a maturity of faith among Christians today. Despite its simplicity of explanation, it is a practice which might be considered doctrinal “solid food” compared to the “milk”¹ of basic Christian doctrines. When we begin learning from the Catechism about the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Sacraments, these matters pertain almost exclusively to the believer's salvation and moral code of conduct - “milk” that everyone should imbibe regularly. Some of the more advanced doctrines, like typology or the Hypostatic Union, present a “solid food” to believers that bring them head knowledge. With *peace offerings*, the “solid food” is more in the relational context between God and man. This is because the offering itself is not merely a declaration of thanksgiving, but a moment of fellowship with God Himself. A proper understanding of these offerings challenges the typical fixation on matters of soteriology which keep men from having that fellowship in the first place. To understand them is to move beyond the mire of guilt and hierarchical thinking, and to see the necessity of treating God *personally*.

1 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Vs.1-5

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The phrase “peace offering” is rendered from one word. שְׁלָמִים, “Shelamim,” is the plural form of שָׁלֵם, “shelem.”²³ It is etymologically connected to the root שָׁלַם, “shalam,”⁴⁵ which is a broad term for amends, peace or completion. For a relationship to have “shalam” is for it to have met (or never had) any debts or hostilities. Though the Septuagint renders this sacrifice to be a “salvation offering,” using the word σωτηρίου,⁶⁷ suggested that these offerings were made for the broader term is preferred on account of the multifaceted use of the sacrifice.

Peace offerings were utilized in a variety of ways. They could be used to declare that peace had been reached between persons, or they could be used to *establish* peace between them. They were used in the completion of vows.⁸ They could be used as a means of proclaiming a continued state of relations, as Joshua uses one for renewing the Covenant.⁹ They were also a means of celebration, as David employed them when bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.¹⁰ While it had a wide range of applications, the theme is nonetheless the same: “there is shalam now,” whether that be in fulfillment of an agreement, a payment of debt, the end of a conflict, or even the expression of gratitude. Moses does not need to define the sacrifice for us on account of the name of the sacrifice itself, for this shared theme of peace or wholeness is self-explanatory.

Peace offerings were voluntary by nature, but the text assumes that people will want to perform them. Declaring peace or wholeness does not require a sacrifice in every matter, after all. However, making a sacrifice with the priesthood's involvement places the matter before our Lord, declaring it to Him as well as the other parties involved. For example, if we imagine two clans that had been in armed conflict with one another, the end of the conflict may include a peace offering so as to say “as God is our witness, we are no longer fighting.” God is called as a witness to the establishment of “shalam,” and invites Him to participate in it with His people.

So a peace offering proclaims peace – or, again, “shalam” – as one of the highest ideals in the Mosaic code. It is a state of affairs in which things are declared “right.” The Mosaic civil code includes things like forcing thieves to pay back fourfold what was stolen from them in order to *make* things right, thus restoring shalam. This is the prerequisite teleological *step* necessary to enjoy the benefits of a societal, personal or religious completeness and tranquility (which is more often referred to as *shalom*).¹¹ To put it more simply, the peace offerings declare that the principle of making peace has been accomplished, and now with God as witness both He and the people may enjoy its benefits.

One may notice that the peace offerings are all cows, sheep or goats. There is no provision for

2 Strong's #8002

3 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8002.htm>

4 Strong's #7999

5 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/7999.htm>

6 Transliterated “sotereou,” Strong's #4992

7 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4992.htm>

8 Leviticus 7:16 (more on this when we reach the seventh chapter).

9 Joshua 8:30-32

10 2 Samuel 6:17-19

11 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/7965.htm>

birds to be offered, and thus the poor were likely unable to make many of these sacrifices. This is likely intentional, as the status of a poor man has an inherent lack of the wholeness that the offering is celebrating. Anxiety over where he shall obtain his next meal, misery over his low estate, or in enduring conflict with men he competes with for occupational opportunities means that he (and by extension all the impoverished) necessarily does not have much “shalam” in his life. Yet the amount of meat on a cow or goat gives an opportunity for the more wealthy members of the nation to *bring* that peace to those less fortunate than themselves.

Vs.6-11

6 “If his offering for a sacrifice of peace offering to the LORD is an animal from the flock, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish. **7** If he offers a lamb for his offering, then he shall offer it before the LORD, **8** lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it in front of the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. **9** Then from the sacrifice of the peace offering he shall offer as a food offering to the LORD its fat; he shall remove the whole fat tail, cut off close to the backbone, and the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails **10** and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. **11** And the priest shall burn it on the altar as a food offering to the LORD.

Of course, the peace offering proclaiming that peace has been made is something ultimately fulfilled by Christ with the Atonement and His Return. St. Paul celebrates the inclusion of the Gentiles into the Kingdom of God by saying that Jesus made *peace* between God, believing Gentiles and believing Jews.¹² Isaiah prophesied that our Savior would be the Prince of Peace who would bring this world to an everlasting peace. What the Mosaic peace offering declares in the moment, Christ establishes eternally; not merely the absence of conflict, but all things being made right. The Old Testament prophesies concerning the Messiah led to a strong understanding that He would be the one to solve the problem of evil forever.

Outside of predicting the Atonement, there is no discernible reason for the means by which the peace offering is conducted. Just like the laws concerning burnt offerings, the one offering up the bull or lamb or goat must offer one that is *spotless*, and place his hand upon its head. The priests must still bathe the altar in the blood of the animal. When making offerings for sin, this is a sensible motion, declaring that the animal's blood was shed for the sin committed by the one making the offering. But here, it appears absurd that someone would “declare” that the animal's blood had anything to do with the peace that is already recognized as being established prior to the offering. But in the context of the *Gospel*, the peace offering is easily clarified as a prophetic movement. Every time these offerings were made, they proclaimed that one day there would be peace between God and men on account of the shed blood of the Lamb of God.

Vs.12-17

12 “If his offering is a goat, then he shall offer it before the LORD **13** and lay his hand on its head and kill it in front of the tent of meeting, and the sons of Aaron shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. **14** Then he shall offer from it, as his offering for a food offering to the LORD, the fat covering the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails **15** and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. **16** And the priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering with a pleasing aroma. All fat is the LORD's.

17 It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood.”

Fatty portions of the animals sacrificed were reserved for the Lord. Much ink has been spilled

¹² Ephesians 2:11-16

claiming that this was a way of rebuffing the pagan practice of ceremonially eating fat from their sacrifices, but the text itself does not make such a claim: though it may or may not be true, it does not veer the text away from its main point. The fattiest parts of the animal are given to the Lord for a *food offering*, meaning that the intent is for God to enjoy the celebratory meal of the offering *with* the people who made it. And if God is present, then it honors Him to receive the “choice cut” of the meat.

In later parts of the Old Testament, the implications of this part of the sacrifice had to be clarified. The Israelites took the “food offering” aspect of things too far, to the point where God found it necessary to condemn the notion that He literally ate the sacrifices or drank their blood; apparently this “carnalist” error was in vogue among the Israelites by the time Asaph was tasked with correcting it.¹³ The reason for the choicest fats to be burned was in honor of God's presence among those making the peace offering. This is to say, Moses writes concerning the peace offering as a moment where the Lord Himself is there among men during their feasting, enjoying a moment of fellowship with His people. It was an expression of *friendship* with the Lord, spending time with Him in a way not unlike the offerings of Abraham, whom God declares to be a personal friend.¹⁴

Each time a peace offering was made, a sort of pantomime of the Gospel writ large was performed. The blood of the spotless Lamb of God *brings* the peace which these sacrifices pointed to, and then for those beneficiaries of the sacrifice they are permitted to be *in God's friendly, peaceful presence*. The celebratory meal, wherein the people have spend time with God on this basis, points to the ultimate fulfillment of all things, the final Day by which eternal joy is secured. Thus the offering is unique, in that it does not present God as Judge, but as the King of His beloved friends who spend their time with Him. In this sense, the “shalam” principle stressed by Moses throughout the Law is fulfilled, meaning that there is nothing preventing the Lord from being there in the moment; for the duration of the peace offering observance, men are in something like an edenic state – the space is made sacred, and the people enjoying the meal would be made stronger in their faith on account of it.

This deepens our understanding of the Eucharist, which by even that name suggests a continuity of purpose.¹⁵ Everyone involved with a peace offering ate of the sacrifice, from the laity to the priests to even our Lord enjoying the aroma of the fat being burned. The benefit of the offering assumes that peace has already been established, so now it is time to declare it; so too do we hold that Christ has already gone to the Cross in our stead and risen again, so now He comes to us with His Body and Blood to proclaim peace to our hearts. Like the correction of Psalm 50, our Heavenly Father is not eating, but observing the peace established and proclaimed by Christ, and rejoicing at the fellowship won for us.

13 Psalm 50:12-15

14 Isaiah 41:8-10

15 The word “Eucharist” means “thanksgiving,” the other term for peace offerings in the Old Testament.