

LEVITICAL SACRIFICE: THE PEACE OFFERING

An Assignment

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by

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THE PEACE OFFERING

The peace offering is one of the five sacrifices that God gave Moses, as recorded in the book of Leviticus, to instruct the Israelites in how to worship their God.¹ These sacrifices, which included the burnt offering, the grain offering, the peace offering, the purification (sin) offering and the reparation (guilt) offering, were given by God to preserve His holiness in light of dwelling among a sinful people.² In the book of Leviticus, God gives Israel instructions for living distinctly from the people around them because of His holiness and their unique relationship to Him. In light of this, God anticipated unholiness and sin of His chosen people. The sacrificial system was given to the Israelites as the means of atonement, having the penalty paid and their guilt removed, for their sins, or violations of God's law.³ These sacrifices, or offerings that atoned for sin required the shedding of blood. However, the peace offering is one of the "sacrifices having nothing to do with sin and atonement."⁴ In looking at the peace offering in greater detail, the process of the ritual for the sacrifice is important to understand. It is also important to understand the significance of it to the ancient Israelites because in that we can see its contribution to understanding the work of Christ. Then, we can make applications for us as modern believers.

¹ *NET Bible*, Leviticus 1:1, (n.p.: Biblical Studies Press, 2001). All scripture notes are cited from The NET Bible unless otherwise stated.

² *Ibid.*, Leviticus 1:1-6:7.

³ R. Laird Harris, "Leviticus," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary: Volume 1: Old Testament*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger, III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 127-128.

⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 233.

Like burnt and grain offerings, the peace offering is a “sweet savor” to the Lord, “a soothing aroma,” in contrast to the later two which focus on the forgiveness of the worshipper.⁵ According to Leviticus chapter three, the actual sacrifice allows for an animal from the herd or the flock, but no mention of birds is made as in the burnt offering.⁶ This could possibly be because the peace offering provides a meal for the worshipper and the animal sacrificed would need to provide enough meat for a “worthwhile meal.”⁷ The actual ritual of the sacrifice for the peace offering begins the same as that of the burnt offering. The worshipper brings a “flawless male or female” animal to the entrance of the Meeting Tent where the priests are.⁸ Yet, the worshipper is to lay his hand on the head of the animal and slaughter, skin and cut it himself.⁹ The blood is then splashed by the priests against the altar’s sides.¹⁰ Gordon Wenham points out that even though not specifically stated in chapter three, the animal must be skinned and cut up as is done in the burnt offering, then deviates in its similarities to the burnt offering.¹¹ The peace offering is also similar to the sin offering in the killing of the animal up to this point except that the blood is poured out by the priests at the base of the altar after some is put on the horns of the altar and some is sprinkled towards the curtain, instead of splashed on the altar’s side.¹²

⁵ *NET Bible*, Leviticus 1:9; 1:12; 1:17; 2:2; 2:9; 3:5; 3:16; James Allman, “Unit 4. Leviticus,” in BE102:Old Testament,” (videos), accessed June 20, 2014, https://online.dts.edu/courses/870/quizzes/4060?module_item_id=119022, video 3; *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 234.

⁶ *NET Bible*, Leviticus 3:1, 6.

⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus, New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 75.

⁸ *NET Bible*, Leviticus 3:2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Leviticus 3:1-2; 3:6-8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Leviticus 3:2; 3:8.

¹¹ *The Book of Leviticus, New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 75.

¹² *NET Bible*, Leviticus 4:6-7; 4:18; 4:25; 4:30; 4:34; 5:9.

Unlike the burnt offering and the sin offering, in which the entire animal is burned up in some way, the peace offering provides for a large portion of the meat to be given back to the worshipper.¹³ The part of the animal that is given to the Lord to be burned on the altar as an aroma soothing to Him are the fat from the entrails, the two kidneys with their fat, the “protruding lobe on the liver,” and the fat of the tail, if applicable.¹⁴ These are referred to as “a food gift to the Lord.”¹⁵ As with the burnt offering, the priests were given the skin, but in this case also the breast and right thigh of the animal as well as an offering of a kind of grain cake that is given to the priest who splashed the blood as a wave offering.¹⁶ And the completion of the offering is made by the worshipper, along with family and friends, eating of the meat given back to him, within the day of the offering if it is a thanksgiving offering, or within the next day of the offering if it is a votive or freewill sacrifice.¹⁷

The peace offering is significant to the ancient Israelites mainly in that it is a strictly voluntary act of worship or to fulfill a vow, it includes an element of thanksgiving, or gratitude, and it’s a celebration.¹⁸ It is a communal meal shared between the worshipper, the priests and God Himself symbolizing peace with God.¹⁹ And the only way a human is to commune with God in this way is to be assured that he is clean and redeemed before Him. This is reflected in

¹³ Ibid., Leviticus 7:15-19.

¹⁴ Ibid., Leviticus 3:4.

¹⁵ Ibid., Leviticus 3:3-5; 3:9-11; 3:14-16.

¹⁶ Ibid., Leviticus 7:11-14; 7:28-34; 7:29-30; *The Book of Leviticus*, 76; Mark F. Rooker, *The New American Commentary: Leviticus*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holmes Publishers, 2000), Logos Bible Software, 134.

¹⁷ *NET Bible*, Leviticus 7:15-17.

¹⁸ “Leviticus,” in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, 130; “Unit 4. Leviticus,” video 5.

¹⁹ “Unit 4. Leviticus,” video 5.

that the peace offering to the Lord is set atop the burnt offering.²⁰ Victor Hamilton notes that the burnt offering and sin offering coming before the peace offering makes the point that sin has to be dealt with before any other fellowship with God can happen.²¹ “It’s a sign of reconciliation accomplished.”²² Even the act of the worshipper being the one to kill the animal just as in the burnt offering is a solemn reminder “that sinful man is always in need of the forgiveness for his sin.”²³

The peace offering would also be significant to the ancient Israelites in that not only was it a rare opportunity to celebrate, but it was an expensive sacrifice. Only those who were prosperous, or blessed by God, would have been able to give a peace offering.²⁴ In Leviticus chapter three, the only animals mentioned for the offering are herd and flock animals.²⁵ Wenham explains that “[e]ating meat was a luxury in ancient Israel” and a reminder of the benefits of being “at peace with God.”²⁶

Also, the significance of peace offerings is demonstrated by their occurrence at notable historical events. They were offered at all of the appointed festivals as a memorial for the people before God.²⁷ Peace offerings were made during times of war after victories and even

²⁰ *NET Bible*, Leviticus 3:5.

²¹ *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 238.

²² “Unit 4. Leviticus,” video 5.

²³ *The Book of Leviticus, New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 80.

²⁴ “Unit 4. Leviticus,” video 5.

²⁵ *NET Bible*, Leviticus 3:1, 6.

²⁶ *The Book of Leviticus, New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 81.

²⁷ *NET Bible*, Numbers 10:10.

after defeats.²⁸ David made peace offerings when he brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem and even after his sin that caused a plague on the people.²⁹ Peace offerings were made at the dedication of the tabernacle, at the establishment of Saul as king, and then again at the dedication of the temple.³⁰ King Solomon made peace offerings three times a year during his reign and the evil king Manasseh made peace offerings after coming face to face with the judgement of the Lord.³¹

The peace offering contributes to understanding the work of Christ in that the peace offering would not be possible without first being reconciled to God and now we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.³² In the Old Testament, that was done by the burnt and sin offerings being made first, as previously mentioned. With the coming of Christ, those offerings were no longer necessary. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews explains, “[Jesus] has no need to do every day what those priest do, to offer sacrifices first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people, since he did this in offering himself once for all.”³³ He then adds, “For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow sprinkled on those who are defiled consecrated them and provided ritual purity, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our consciences from dead works to worship the living God.”³⁴ Now that Jesus is the one who has been sacrificed

²⁸ Ibid., Joshua 8:31; Judges 20:26.

²⁹ Ibid., 2 Samuel 6:17; 24:25.

³⁰ Ibid., Numbers 7:17; 1 Samuel 11:15; 1 Kings 8:63.

³¹ Ibid., 1 Kings 9:25; 2 Chronicles 22:16.

³² Ibid., Romans 5:1.

³³ Ibid., Hebrews 7:27.

³⁴ Ibid., Hebrews 9:13-14.

on the altar as our burnt offering and our sin offering, Paul then adds to this change by stating that it is now through Christ that we are reconciled to God.³⁵ Because of Christ's work, we are indwelled by the Spirit of God and so can commune and fellowship with Him any time we want.³⁶

So then , today as believers, there are several points of application. First, in light of Christ reconciling us to God, Paul clearly tells us in his letter to the Ephesians that He also reconciled believers to one another, "making peace" and killing hostility.³⁷ Secondly, in burning the fat on the altar to God, it is symbolic of giving the best part of the animal to God.³⁸ And because in the laying the hand on the animal, the animal represents the worshipper. For the modern believer, it is giving the best of yourself, "burning everything that makes you significant on the altar."³⁹ This is reminiscent of the call on the Christian "to present your bod[y] as a sacrifice - alive, holy, and pleasing to God" and to "[l]ove the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."⁴⁰

Finally, as believers today, we should come to the communion table with a heart of celebration, thanksgiving and praise. Just as the peace offering culminated as a party of fine food with enough to share beyond family and friends in the presence of the Lord, communion is a meal instituted because we have peace with God through Jesus Christ.⁴¹ Like the Israelites who

³⁵ Ibid., 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.

³⁶ Ibid., John 7:39; 16:13-14; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12; Ephesian 2:17-18.

³⁷ Ibid., Ephesians 2:11-16.

³⁸ "Unit 4. Leviticus," video 5.

³⁹ Ibid., video 5.

⁴⁰ *NET Bible*, Romans 12:1; Matthew 22:37.

⁴¹ "Unit 4. Leviticus," video 5.

received the law from Moses, we can offer praise of the faithfulness and mighty works of God when we take the Lord's Supper. Even when Jesus gave the instructions to take the cup as His blood and followed it with singing hymns, He was creating an opportunity for His disciples to praise God.⁴² In taking the Lord's Supper, Jesus calls us to remember Him and the new covenant in His blood.⁴³ As Dr. Allman points out, often in church services, communion is a quiet, somber ceremony.⁴⁴ If we, as believers today, can take anything away from our Old Testament counterparts, it is that we have much to praise God for and taking the Lord's Supper together should be a reflection of the joyous celebration that came with the peace offering. "Instead of eating meat, we now consume bread and wine as physical pledges of God's goodness toward us. They remind us of our salvation achieved through Christ; they assure us of his favor in the present; and they promise that he will continue to bless until he comes again."⁴⁵ "When God has saved and blessed his people, they can and should enjoy worshipping him."⁴⁶

The sacrificial offerings in Leviticus are often overlooked by Christians today in studying their Bibles. They fall in the midst of the giving of the law, which most modern believers dismiss as irrelevant to them and their faith. However, in understanding the ritual of a sacrifice like the peace offering, we can gain clarity on the implications for the ancient Israelite. And in looking deeper from that perspective, we can then see its contribution to understanding the work of Christ which then allows us to make some applications as modern believers. If "[e]very

⁴² *NET Bible*, Matthew 26:27-20; The NET Bible notes in this passage that the Hallel Psalms, or praise psalms, were sung at the Passover celebration with the fourth cup taken being the cup of praise (page 1860, footnote number 23).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25.

⁴⁴ "Unit 4. Leviticus," video 5.

⁴⁵ *The Book of Leviticus, New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 83.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work” must be true of even the most obscure passages of scripture.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ *NET Bible*, 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

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