

I NEED TO RESPOND

Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

Dr. George O. Wood

Leviticus 2:1–16 (NIV)

“When someone brings a grain offering to the LORD, his offering is to be of fine flour. He is to pour oil on it, put incense on it and take it to Aaron’s sons the priests. The priest shall take a handful of the fine flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the LORD by fire. If you bring a grain offering baked in an oven, it is to consist of fine flour: cakes made without yeast and mixed with oil, or wafers made without yeast and spread with oil. If your grain offering is prepared on a griddle, it is to be made of fine flour mixed with oil, and without yeast. Crumble it and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering. If your grain offering is cooked in a pan, it is to be made of fine flour and oil. Bring the grain offering made of these things to the LORD; present it to the priest, who shall take it to the altar. He shall take out the memorial portion from the grain offering and burn it on the altar as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the LORD by fire. Every grain offering you bring to the LORD must be made without yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in an offering made to the LORD by fire. You may bring them to the LORD as an offering of the firstfruits, but they are not to be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma. Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings. If you bring a grain offering of firstfruits to the LORD, offer crushed heads of new grain roasted in the

I NEED TO RESPOND
Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

fire. Put oil and incense on it; it is a grain offering. The priest shall burn the memorial portion of the crushed grain and the oil, together with all the incense, as an offering made to the LORD by fire.”

Leviticus 6:14–23 (NIV)

“These are the regulations for the grain offering: Aaron’s sons are to bring it before the LORD, in front of the altar. The priest is to take a handful of fine flour and oil, together with all the incense on the grain offering, and burn the memorial portion on the altar as an aroma pleasing to the LORD. Aaron and his sons shall eat the rest of it, but it is to be eaten without yeast in a holy place; they are to eat it in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. It must not be baked with yeast; I have given it as their share of the offerings made to me by fire. Like the sin offering and the guilt offering, it is most holy. Any male descendant of Aaron may eat it. It is his regular share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire for the generations to come. Whatever touches them will become holy.” The LORD also said to Moses, “This is the offering Aaron and his sons are to bring to the LORD on the day he is anointed: a tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a regular grain offering, half of it in the morning and half in the evening. Prepare it with oil on a griddle; bring it well-mixed and present the grain offering broken in pieces as an aroma pleasing to the LORD. The son who is to succeed him as anointed priest shall prepare it. It is the LORD’s regular share and it is to be burned completely. Every grain offering of the priest shall be burned completely; it must not be eaten.”

I’m sure you all had perfect comprehension of the spiritual significance of what I just read!

The Book of Leviticus is kind of a blueprint, if you will. The Word of God is what a blueprint is to a building. Leviticus really shows us what Christ is to fulfill. Just like we have problems maybe reading blueprints, so we have problems reading Leviticus. Yet if we understand what

I NEED TO RESPOND

Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

God is saying to us from the blueprint of Leviticus, He is building something that Christ will fulfill; as the Lord said, “Think not I’ve come to abolish the Book of Leviticus or the Law and the Prophets. I’ve not come to abolish them.” When begin to take that path of approach to the Book of Leviticus, it will make a lot of sense to us.

I think also as we look at an introductory moment of Leviticus, we need to recognize Israel’s experience with God and the Bible shows the extent to which God seeks involvement in our life and in our work, and dominance in all that we do. We find Him in this book moving the Tent of Meeting in the midst of the encampment. Three tribes on the north, three on the south, three on the east, and three on the west, symbolizing that God wants to be in the center. He moves himself geographically to the center. He gives us a calendar and He wants one day in seven and other holy days as well, signifying that God wants to be in our chronology of time. He wants us to have regular moments that are built into the system when we set aside time for Him in worship and thinking of Him. He moves the Law into our life. It gives us the understanding that He wants to shape what we believe in theology and shape how we believe our morality. He gives us rules on holiness and the Book of Leviticus is filled with all kinds of rules on holiness, things we should and shouldn’t touch, and the like. But what He is doing in this is moving Himself into the middle of our culture relationships. Saying to us that He wants to be involved in the cultural processes of life. Then He provides a sacrificial system that restores relationships after we have violated His law, and that’s the whole purpose of the offering.

The first offering is the burnt offering, or the “that-which-goes-up” offering. That symbolized the whole in dedication to the Lord. The second offering is called the “cereal offering” or the “grain offering.” It speaks of our need to respond, where as the burnt offering spoke of our need for acceptance. God accepts us. This speaks of our need to respond.

I NEED TO RESPOND

Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

Let me comment on what the cereal offering is not. As a kid I couldn't figure out what the cereal offering was. All I thought of was Cheerios and Wheaties. The King James also used the word "meat" offering. That is really confusing because it's not meat at all. Meat in the sixteenth century King James English was a word that could be used for more than just animals' blood. It could describe anything that was eaten. So meat in Leviticus 2 in the King James is totally inaccurate in modern English. This offering in Leviticus 2 has nothing at all to do with meat. It is totally a grain offering or a cereal offering. It's called cereal because the grain is ground up.

The basic element of the cereal offering is finely ground grain, or flour that is offered cooked or uncooked on the altar of sacrifice in the Tent of Meeting to God. Verses 1–3 describe the regulation if you bring the grain or the cereal uncooked. Verses 4–11 describe the processes or the way you could present the offering if it is cooked. You can bake it in an oven, you can prepare it on a griddle, or you can cook it in a pan. In other words, the Lord allows a good deal of variety in the offering of this offering, just like He allows variety in our worship as well. The Lord has made provision. What is important for Him is the variety of expression in the midst of sincerity of heart. They that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.

The purpose of the cereal offering is what we want to look at more.

I. There are at least four purposes, four basic purposes we could look at in respect to this offering.

A. It represents first the presenting of our work to God. We're dealing here in Leviticus with a culture that is basically agricultural. That's what 95 percent of the people do. They work with their hands to either raise herds or raise crops to provide the resources to get by in life.

There was a provision on the grain offering that it could not be presented unless the man or woman had done something with it. You couldn't just go out and snip the grain off the stalk and

I NEED TO RESPOND
Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

bring it in and lay it on the altar. You had to do some things with it. You had to take it and grind it up. Your hand had to be involved in the process. In fact, in the offering of grain a lot of things were involved.

God is saying to us that the whole process of work or labor is significant to Him. When the cereal offering is presented to God, it's most often in the Old Testament accompanied with the offering of the burnt offering. The sheep or the pigeon goes up as an offering to God and immediately with that they come with the grain offering. The burnt offering is the acceptance of our life being offered up to God. The cereal offering or the grain offering symbolizes that what we have worked with is also being presented to God and is being offered up in response to God for His provision in our life.

Work is very important to all of us. God has regard for our work. Work does marvelous things for us. It keeps us alive. It keeps our family alive. It may even give you a sense of fulfillment although sometimes it may not.

So this cereal offering first of all means presenting our work to God.

B. The second idea of the cereal offering was presenting tribute to God. The word for cereal offering in the Hebrew simply means a “present” or “tribute.” It was used in the Old Testament to signify the kind of a present that you give to somebody whose favor you need to gain. They were in a higher position than you. Or you maybe were in a dangerous position like Jacob was when he came back and saw Esau and had been away from him for many years. He sent a present before he crossed the river. So the cereal offering contains the idea of making tribute or a present to God who is greater and it is the symbol of His continuing good will and of our needing to respond to Him as a mark of wanting to have His good will continue.

I NEED TO RESPOND
Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

C. A third idea in the cereal offering is that the cereal offering represents the continual response to God. The burnt offering and the cereal offering together were offerings that were offered up all the time. It wasn't something you just did once in your life and never did again. In fact, every single day of Israel's existence the burnt offering and the cereal offering were offered up for the whole nation every morning and every evening. The opening of the Tent of Meeting or maybe the opening of the temple that was the offering that was offered. It was also offered at the closing before the gates shut at night. It was a continual memorial to God, a presentation of the life of the nation and the work of the nation to God. Likewise, in any one person's lifetime, they would present many, many cereal offerings to the Lord. In responding to God, we need not just a one-time response. We need a perpetual response of our life to Him.

I grew up as many of you in the Pentecostal tradition, which had a good deal of emphasis on "eternal insecurity." Some of you, like me, have been saved a number of times! In my youth, this took place once every week and sometimes more often. We had this theology that if you sinned once, you were out, and you needed to get back in. I don't think I ever heard that preached, but it was what I assumed. Of course, in our relationship with God we need to keep alive a commitment, so there was some good in that rededication.

If you're married, marriage must be a continual affirmation—I love you, I support you, I'm committed to this relationship. Even in a marriage relationship there are special times when you find that you need to have some special act of rededication and recommitment because you've gone through a time of stress or change and you have the need to reaffirm what you started off with.

I NEED TO RESPOND

Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

That's the idea of the cereal offering, this making this response to God. There is a continual need in our lives to keep responding to God and not let a relationship with Him grow technical or grow cold or just grow into a relationship that we do out of motion or habit.

The burnt offering was totally consumed on the altar. But with the cereal offering only a memorial portion was burned—a reminder of this continual response to God that He accepts our work, He accepts our tribute, and He accepts our response.

D. The fourth purpose of offering this cereal offering to the Lord was that it provided a way of caring for the ministers. In those days they were the priests. When a person brought their cereal offering they might have several quarts; they might have a gallon. We're not told how much they might bring. If they were bringing something cooked, they might have a number of what might have passed for pancakes. They only offered a small portion on the altar. The rest was given to the ministers. There was the principle that the offering that was brought, most of it, went to care for the people who were tending to the things pertaining to the altar, and to the Tent of Meeting and later to the temple.

This becomes the principle which Paul uses in the Early Church to teach Christians to support those who minister the Word. He says in 1 Corinthians 9:13–14, “Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (NIV). So coming out of the Old Testament, those who make their living this way are to be supported in this manner.

It is a personal pain at times to realize that those who minister full time are dependent upon others for their support. Yet I suppose it's the way the Lord sees to do the task.

I NEED TO RESPOND

Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

There are four purposes, then, for this cereal offering. It presents our work to God. It presents our tribute to God. It presents our continuing response to God. And it is a means of caring for the ministers.

II. There are some additional elements of the offering that we ought to look at.

A. The flour represents our work. God refuses to let us live in the world where we think our labor is unimportant. He takes that product of our labor—in the Old Testament it was grain made into flour—He takes that product and it is offered to Him. God throughout the New Testament is talking to us about the importance of work in presenting our whole life to the Lord. Paul talks to us about the importance of labor when he says in Colossians 3:23, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men” (NIV).

B. The second ingredient of the offering was oil. In this case it was olive oil. It was mingled with the flour. The oil had a practical purpose. When flour is offered on an open altar, the wind is going to blow the flour away unless there’s some paste to hold it together. So the olive oil provided the paste to keep the flour together as a whole when it was offered.

But I think it had far more than a practical purpose. I think it’s reasonable to suggest that the oil on the altar was an Old Testament blueprint of the presence of the Spirit on our labor. Oil, when it’s used in the Scriptures, in the Old Testament especially, is most frequently descriptive of the work of the Spirit. God uses physical things to teach us spiritual truths. When we have children we teach them concrete things before we teach them abstract things. God does as well. In the Old Testament, He doesn’t spend a lot of time talking about the Spirit. He uses physical things to represent the Spirit. So the Lord doesn’t start out in Leviticus with the Spirit filled life. But He points us to the oil in the cereal offering. He says there is something significant about oil when it is mingled with the fruit of your work. There is. God is calling for oil, the oil of the Spirit to be

I NEED TO RESPOND

Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

mixed with our labor. God does not want preachers, He wants anointed preachers. He does not want parents, He wants anointed parents. There is a special grace and ministry of the Spirit upon their parenting tasks. He does not want schoolteachers, he wants anointed schoolteachers. He does not want just doctors. He wants anointed doctors. Our own doctor, when he's finished with the examination, will take time to pray with the patient. He is practicing the anointing in his practice. This whole principle is let your work be accompanied with oil. He doesn't just want carpenters, He wants anointed carpenters.

The priests were anointed, the furniture of the tabernacle was anointed, the Messiah was anointed. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news" (Luke 4:18, NIV). And so God's people are meant to be anointed.

C. The third ingredient was incense. Incense was made from an aromatic resin used as an extremely fragrant spice. It was burnt up entirely on the altar.

There again was a practical purpose for that. The cereal offering was offered with the meat offering and burning flesh doesn't smell all that good. But the incense with it provided a counteraction. From a symbolic purpose in the Old Testament incense is used as a symbol of prayer. It's that way in the New Testament as well. Psalm 141:2 says, "May my prayer be set before you like incense" (NIV). And in Revelation 5:8, "Golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (NIV). The Lord says in Acts 10:4, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering" (NIV), thinking back to the cereal offering. It has ascended like frankincense as a memorial before God.

What is being visualized in this? The Lord wants our work to not only be accompanied by the work of the Spirit, but also by prayer. Ingredients of the cereal offering symbolized the various

I NEED TO RESPOND
Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

aspects of our labor. In flour we give our work, in placing of oil upon the offering we give our life to the anointing of the Spirit. In incense we give to God the longings of our heart.

D. Then salt is the fourth part of each offering. It's not to be left out. It's to accompany every offering. Why salt? Wouldn't that be a funny thing to do? What is the symbol of putting salt on the offering? It's that salt was a sign of eternity. It was still useable after fire. Time would not destroy it. It kept its flavor and its taste unless it was adulterated with other substances. In the Old Testament, salt was a sign of an unbreakable covenant.

The Judah king says to the Israelite king, "Don't you know that the LORD, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt?" (2 Chronicles 13:5, NIV). In other words, the kingdom is given to David forever and the witness of that kingship being given is that it is marked forever by a covenant of salt. Therefore, salt in the offering is a sign that we're not in a temporary trial period of relationship with God. But we've made an eternal, an unequivocal commitment of our life to Jesus Christ. In turn, He has been bonded to us.

E. There were some things that were excluded from the cereal offerings, things like leaven and honey. Leaven is a dough that had been kept over from a previous baking, which in the keeping had fermented, and it stood for corruption. We're told in the New Testament that we are not to keep the leaven but to purge out the evil leaven. Our response to God in the cereal offering is we're to seek to purge out the evil aspects, the aspects of our labor that would tempt us to dishonesty or teach us to not put in a day's labor for a day's pay. Or to be in some way less than what God has called us to be in that situation.

Also, the Lord is saying that yesterday's provision may not work for today. The leaven comes from dough that was once used and then kept over. It remained. There is sense in which today's

I NEED TO RESPOND
Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

demands can't be satisfied with yesterday's answers and yesterday's experience with God. God wants us to rely upon a fresh provision of relationship with Him.

Honey was also to be kept out. This was probably not honey made from bees but syrup made from figs. It went through a fermentation process and therefore like leaven was inappropriate to offer to God since it stood for decadence.

III. There were special occasions for the cereal offering.

A. The offering of firstfruits. I don't think of fruit as a grain offering. Yet in the spring, after the long hard winter, the farmer has invested all his seed in the ground and finally it has come up. The first grain that came up was offered to God. Even that had to have something done to it. It had to be roasted. But it was offered to God as a response, signifying that the whole crop belongs to God. And as a symbol that the whole crop belongs to God, we offer up the very first of it to Him.

B. The cereal offering was also used, as we've read in chapter 6, for the anointing of priests.

IV. What are some of the applications of this cereal offering to our lives?

What response does God make to us as we present the cereal offering? What picture does God want us to know now?

A. For one thing, God wants our offering to be made through a priest. When you have this provision in the Book of Leviticus you'll find that these offerings were all administered through the agency of priests. We're to come to Jesus Christ. He is our priest. We bring Him our life, and the presentation of our work. Hebrews 13:15–16 says this and I think this is application of the cereal offering. "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for

I NEED TO RESPOND

Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

with such sacrifices God is pleased” (NIV). We offer up to the Lord the good that we do to other people.

B. The second application of this offering is that He wants our offering to be continual.

Continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. This means that in our hearts and on our lips there is to be constant response of our lives of praise to Jesus Christ.

C. The third thing this represents is that the Lord wants us to keep the abundance of the fruit of our toil. The Old Testament saint, when he brought his grain offering to God, only brought a portion of what he had earned. The rest of it really belonged to him. The Lord wants us to recognize as well that most of what we earn is kept back for ourselves. Only some of it is given as dedication to the Lord. Most of us keep the 90 percent or the 80 percent. The Lord wants His people to get the benefit of what they earn.

D. The fourth application is that He wants a portion of our work to be set aside for Him. This is the law of the cereal offering. In fact, two things happen to the portion that we give to the Lord. Some is burned, and some is given to the priests. The burned symbolizes that we get no benefit at all. And some is given to the priest. The same way when we give our offering to the Lord, some offerings we give are finally from our work; we receive back benefits because we receive ministry from it. Some we see no benefit at all. It goes totally to benefit another.

E. The fifth application is the Lord wants a portion set aside for Him, to be a symbol that the whole of our life and work is dedicated to Him even though we may retain use of a part of it. This then is an aroma that is pleasing to Him. Look at Leviticus 2:12. The offering of the firstfruits “are not be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma.” Yet verse 2 says that the cereal offering is an aroma pleasing to the Lord. There is almost a contradiction between verse 2 and 12. One is a pleasing aroma and the other is not a pleasing aroma.

I NEED TO RESPOND

Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

The reason one is a pleasing aroma is that it refers to the cereal offering when it's presented with the burnt offering. In verse 12 it's when the grain is presented by itself as the offering of firstfruits, not accompanied by blood sacrifice. What pleases God is when we present Him our lives as well as our labor. When those two go together, that is a pleasing aroma to the Lord. The presentation of our labor apart from the presentation of our lives is not a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

This whole offering is calling us to dedicate our work to the Lord, to realize that the Lord thinks it's significant that we may work from 8 to 5 or maybe you don't punch a time clock. Maybe you have a way of working that is different. Maybe with your hands, maybe with your mind. But all that work, whether it's being a mother, caring for a house, working in a blue-collar or white-collar employment or wherever—all of it is significant to God and it's for a purpose. God wants us to have meaning to our work and present to Him the fruit of that work. We must recognize that He owns the whole of what we have, and we dedicate a portion of it to Him as a symbol that it all belongs to God.

Are you in meaningful and satisfying work? Is your work all it can be for you? Or is there discontent in your labor? Is the discontent because you need to change jobs? Or is the discontent because the Lord wants you to change in the midst of your job? If the discontent is here because the Lord wants you to change jobs, then ask the Holy Spirit to pour His oil out upon your life and give you a sense of what to do and where to do it and how to look for it. Have the faith to make the change. But if the Lord is calling upon you in the midst of your work to be more of a candle for Him to have more of His life permeate what you do, then make that a matter of prayer before the Lord that the work which you do will be acceptable to Him.

Closing Prayer

I NEED TO RESPOND
Leviticus 2:1–16, 6:14–23

Our Lord, each of us this morning comes to You and brings to You our work—whether it's being a student or realtor, an electrician, a teacher, factory worker, whatever it is Lord—we think of that work now. We realize that other than sleep it's what we do the most in our lives. It's important to You and it's important to us. Lord, I want in this moment on behalf of all these friends to ask that our labor will be in a fresh way dedicated to You. Lord, there may be some of us here in this audience who have never thought of dedicating our work to You. We just kind of go and put in our hours and go home and draw a paycheck. But Lord, this moment I want to involve Your presence upon our labor that our work might be dedicated to You, and that whether we're typing a letter or making a phone call or changing parts on a machine, that our work will be done for the glory of God. And that our work will be a means by which we can lift up your name in this world. We dedicate our work to You Lord. We realize too that there are people who work around us, some of whom are less disposed to be friendly to us than others. We ask, Lord, that in the midst of our work You will give us the key to unlocking their hearts and that those who work around us will be given the delicious sampling of Jesus Christ through our lives. Grant your anointing upon our labor and make our work significant to us and to others and to You. We ask this Lord Jesus in Your name. Amen.