

## **I NEED PEACE**

**Leviticus 3:1–17, 7:11–36**

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As we have gone through Leviticus we have alternated between a chapter then going back a couple of chapters. The first five chapters of Leviticus spell out different offerings. Then chapter 6 and 7 talk about each of those five offerings giving additional instructions usually for the priests. That's why I give a chapter like chapter 3 then we turn over to chapter 7:11–37 to get the finished part of this presentation of the peace offering. Rather than reading the entirety of the Scripture, just to give you a flavor of it, I'm going to read 3:1–5. Then the rest of the message will help us get some understanding of what is going on: "If someone's offering is a fellowship offering [that's a newer word; the older word is "peace offering"], and he offers an animal from the herd, whether male or female, he is to present before the LORD an animal without defect. He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle the blood against the altar on all sides. From the fellowship [or peace] offering he is to bring a sacrifice made to the LORD by fire: all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys. Then Aaron's sons are to burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering that is on the burning wood, as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD" (NIV).

As you go through chapter 3 you'll find there are three different types of offerings. Verses 1–5 talks about the offering of cattle; verses 6–11, the offering of sheep; verses 12–16, the offering of goats. Then in chapter 7 we find the rules on eating the sacrifice, for unlike the burnt offering, this sacrifice can be eaten. The burnt offering was a holocaust, totally consumed. Then also in

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chapter 7:28–36 there are instructions given on the priest's share of the offering, things we'll look at in a little while.

#### **I. What is the “peace offering”?**

Notice the New International Version calls this offering the “fellowship offering.” Others call it the “confession offering.” Some call it the “covenant offering.” But the older name, and I think the better name, for it is the “peace offering.” The word that is used of this sacrifice is a related word to the word *shalom* in the Hebrew, the word for peace. Peace in the Hebrew means not something that people have when they just quit fighting. But “peace” in the Scripture carries the idea of completeness, the idea of completeness physically and mentally and spiritually, the idea of prosperity and health and wealth and right relationships.

The kids today have a phrase that perhaps expresses peace best of all. They describe a person who's “got it together.” If you have *shalom* you've got it together. There's nothing at all lacking in your life or experience and there is a sense of what the psychologists would call the “actualized personality.” You have been able to implement all of the kinds of sound principles and lifestyle that apply to the healthy person. The *shalom* offering, the “I've-got-it-together” offering.

When we read Leviticus we just have instructions on the offering. We don't get a good perspective on Leviticus of how this offering was employed, in what way was it used, what were the feelings of the person who brought it. What I've tried to do is create some contemporary scenes that describe for us what the peace offering is. I think when I go through these you can then see how it's distinguished. The burnt offering is the presentation of our life to God, the fact that we need to belong to God and we're expressing that need to belong. The cereal offering is

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bringing our work and responding to God with the fruit of our work. The peace offering is totally different.

Here's when you'd offer a peace offering:

You just got a lab report back telling you that the biopsy performed on you was nonmalignant.

You just learned that a lost uncle you didn't know had died and he had made you the sole heir of his five-million-dollar will.

You ask the girl you love to marry you and she said yes.

You are scuba diving and got trapped under water and promised God if He would only save you, you would serve Him. And at that particular point another diver rescued you and you were taken to shore alive and well.

You've been working on your doctoral program and you just learned that your thesis had been approved and you would consequently graduate.

Your twenty-fifth wedding anniversary was today. Looking back you realize you would marry the same person all over again.

You just got promoted to assistant foreman and received a five-dollar-an-hour raise.

You just sold a piece of property that had a 500 percent appreciation in the last five years and when you first bought the property you told God He was your partner and if He caused the asset to increase you would split the profit with Him.

You just came home with all A's on your report card and your parents had been expecting all C's.

You bought five acres of land in Texas and just learned they discovered a massive oil reserve on your land.

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You are the pastor of Newport Mesa Christian Center and the congregation by secret ballot vote just cast 100 percent vote to affirm you for another three years.

Your teenage children just told you that you are the greatest parents in the world and they wanted you, because of your wisdom and your love for them, they wanted you to select their future spouse.

Your married son or daughter just called you and said they were making you a grandparent for the very first time.

You just purchased your dream home after years of wondering whether or not it would ever be possible.

The Sunday School class of junior boys and girls you taught fifteen years ago just had a reunion and one by one told you that they are serving Christ today because of your influence on their lives.

You just gave the last of your building fund pledge and when you made the pledge you wondered how in the world you were ever going to make it.

You feel wonderful for no special reason. You're grateful to God just for His goodness and mercy. You are at peace within yourself.

Those are some contemporary settings that would call for the Old Testament peace offering.

### **II. How was the peace offering used in the Old Testament?**

When we look through the usages of the peace offering in the Old Testament we get the idea of how it's used by seeing throughout the historical portion of the Old Testament why it was that people came to bring it. The peace offering was brought in three significant ways.

**A.** It was first of all brought as a thanksgiving to God for something good that He had done, something we perceive to be good.

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You can identify a number of these occasions in the Scripture. First, the peace offering is seen as being brought when God had fulfilled His plan. Deuteronomy 27:7 is the occasion where Moses is telling the people of Israel that eventually they're going to get into the Promised Land. They had come out of Egypt. Moses knows as he gives them his farewell address that they've spent forty years in the wilderness that is now going to be followed by a time of success. He says that when they come into the Promised Land after giving up burnt offerings they are to sacrifice peace offerings there, eating there and rejoicing in the presence of the Lord your God. A real key to the peace offering is that rejoicing and eating together was always part of it. When God fulfills His plan in the Old Testament the peace offering would be given.

When God gave a victory the peace offering would be given. In 1 Samuel 11:15, Saul has just been made king. In the very first test of his military prowess, he is victorious. God gives him the strength and the power to draw together these scattered Israelites and give them a smashing military victory. What he does then is bring peace offerings before the Lord and all the Israelites had a great celebration. When God gives us victory we give a peace offering.

Another way in which the peace offering was given was when something that had been lost is recovered. In 2 Samuel 6:17, David had his heart set on recovering the ark of the covenant. This box that was gilded with gold, and inside of it were the tables of the Law that had been kept for centuries, had once fallen into Philistine hands. Then some private Israelites had it. But finally David gets it and secures it and brings it back to Jerusalem. When he brings it into Jerusalem everybody goes wild with celebration. David is so beside himself in fact that Michal his wife looks in disdain at the way he carries on in celebration. On that occasion, that occasion for recovering something that had been lost, David offered sacrifice offerings and he offered peace offerings to the Lord.

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This is fundamental, that the offering is given when we have something to greatly be thankful for in our lives.

**B.** Another time that the peace offering was given was when we were successful in seeing a vow that we made to God come to pass. I don't necessarily encourage people to make vows. The Scriptures talk about rash vows. We can get into a lot of trouble with vows.

There were times in Scripture when a serious vow to God was made and when that vow was completed then a peace offering was given.

Look at Jacob when he's fleeing. He's gotten his father's blessing, and Esau is mad, so as Jacob is fleeing he comes to a place called Bethel. There he makes a vow to God. He says, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth" (Genesis 28:20–22, NIV). Years later he comes back, Genesis 35. He returns to Bethel. He makes it a place of worship to God.

Another occasion where a vow would be paid is Nazirite vows. These are people who sometimes had taken a lifelong vow, sometimes a temporary, maybe thirty-day vow to abstain from wine and things unclean, to not cut their hair during that period of time, and the like. When that vow was completed they would then bring a peace offering, the completion of their vow. In Acts 21 we find Paul taking under the sponsorship of four Jerusalem Christians who had made such a vow. They were to give peace offerings.

Hannah made a vow to God. She had been pleading to God to give her a son. Finally God gives her Samuel, and when the boy had been weaned, she brings him with a three-year-old bull and offers up the bull as a peace offering unto God (1 Samuel 1:24–28). Her vow that she would give

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this child to the Lord is now being fulfilled. She didn't forget the vow. She kept the vow and brought a peace offering.

Another great example is from Psalm 56:12–13 where David had been held as a captive by the Philistines. After escaping from death at the hand of the Philistines he prays this prayer. "I am under vows to you O God. I will present my peace offering to you. For you have delivered my soul from death and my feet from stumbling that I might walk before God in the land of life."

The vow in Psalm 56 is what we call "foxhole religion." Many people have made a kind of vow to God in a foxhole kind of experience—"God, if You'll get me out of this jam, I'll serve You the rest of my life." David, when he's delivered out of that jam, says, "I'm going to act on it. I will pay my vows."

**C.** A third way the peace offering was given was it was given as a freewill expression of joy.

This is where we get the term "freewill offering." It might be offered for no particular reason: just because you're feeling great, just because you're satisfied with life, because things are going super, because some specific thing had happened which had brought a great deal of joy. You don't have to give thanks but you want to come and bring thanks and give an offering.

One such an occasion would be the joy of harvest. Deuteronomy 16:10 says, "Celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD has given you."

There would be the joy of dedication; there are two such dedications in the Old Testament, one in Numbers 7 and another in 1 Kings 8. First, the dedication of the Tent of Meeting. When it was all finished and set up there was a great festive dedication. The peace offerings went on for 12 days. Each day a different tribe brought 2 oxen, 5 rams, 5 male goats, 5 male lambs for peace offerings. They'd offer the offerings then all sit down and have a meal for that tribe. It was a

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great joyous, happy occasion. When they were all done with the 12 days they had sacrificed 24 bulls, 60 rams, 60 goats and 60 sheep.

Solomon when he dedicated the temple went wild with expressing the joy of dedication. When the temple was completed following its dedication, Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord—22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats. So the king and all the Israelites dedicated the temple of the Lord. That's to say they had a huge crowd and they put on a big feed. The peace offering served that purpose. The wild joy of dedication.

There was the joy of restoration as a freewill offering. 2 Chronicles 30 talks about the time when Hezekiah came to the throne. The king before him was Ahaz, a bad king. He let the temple fall into disrepair and the temple wasn't even being used. So Hezekiah restored the temple to its proper use. He cleansed the temple, celebrated for the first time in many, many years the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. What he did then was have a joyful peace offering—1000 bulls, 7000 sheep.

Jeremiah also talks about the time (Jeremiah's writing during the time of captivity of his people), he tells about the time they're going to be brought back into the land. Again there would be the sound of joy and gladness, the voice of bride and bridegroom, the voice of those who brought peace offerings to the Lord. Notice how important the peace offering was that it was linked with such things as sounds of joy and gladness and the voice of bride and bridegroom. The sound of joy—"Give thanks to the LORD Almighty, for the LORD is good; his love endures forever" (Jeremiah 33:11, NIV).

Then the freewill offering could also be for the joy of promise and potential. Solomon has a dream (1 Kings 3) in which the Lord says, "Ask anything of me that you want and I'll give it to you." Solomon asks for wisdom and the Lord says "I'll give it to you." When Solomon wakes up

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he realizes he's really heard the voice of God so what he does is offer a peace offering to the Lord and give a feast for his court. The promise of potential.

These are some of the settings. We need to understand the setting in the Old Testament in order then to transfer this concept of the peace offering and apply it to our lives in celebration of life.

### **III. What are some of the meanings of the peace offering for us today?**

**A.** The first and maybe the most important application for our life is that God wants us to celebrate His goodness in our lives. When we are having problems we gloss over the good times and we don't fully experience any good that's happening to us because we are so bound up in the bad thing that's happening to us at that particular moment. If all I can do is focus on my trouble, I tend to gloss over all the good things that happened.

Often we don't feel as we go through life that God is really pleased that we enjoy things, that we enjoy providential circumstances He may provide for us. We may have the feeling that "God is really happy when He has his thumb on me and I'm squirming, then God is most satisfied. God is really happening when I'm suffering." We don't allow ourselves sometimes to be happy. If we do for a moment think that we can be happy it's touched with a twinge of guilt—"I shouldn't be happy. I should be guilty. It's wonderful that I had a thanksgiving dinner but there are people in Africa that are starving. I can't enjoy this." We begin to get the idea that the only way to experience life is to suffer: "God doesn't want me to be relaxed. He wants me to strive. He wants me to strain. He wants me to suffer."

Frequently this is augmented by our low sense of self worth. We don't feel like we're worth anything. We have a low sense of self esteem. When something good happens to us we say, "I don't deserve that. It's a fluke that happened to me." This can then become self-fulfilling

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prophecy that we don't really believe God can do good things in our life, so we expect all the time we just get the bumps in the road.

I don't want to minimize the fact that God calls His people to walk through valleys of the shadow of death. I'm not trying to join the contemporary group that says speak your way through everything and act like it's roses when it's not. I think we have a realistic suffering. One of the things that happens in church, in the Christian life sometimes, is we don't have an exalted enough view of joy. We're not really convinced that when we're happy, God is happy. Because we think if we're happy maybe God is saying at that moment "Get sad. I'm burdened with a lot of needs of the world and you need to be burdened down with Me."

But God in these offerings is doing a delicious thing. He is giving us the permission to enjoy. He is offering us the opportunity to be at peace within ourselves. He is saying you can be content whether you are abased or you bound. Sometimes we have a lot more experience being content when we are abased, to use Paul's terms, than when we are abounding. But the peace offering is today you can be content when you are abounding. There is a celebration in being God's child. The fatted calf is killed now. It's not killed in heaven. The celebration is this moment. We open our hearts to the God who says when great things happen to us in life it's ok to celebrate. Our emotions often reflect a poor or wrong image of God. But the Lord wants us to see that He takes delight in the joys of His people.

So the Lord calls us in the peace offering to celebrate His goodness, to be thankful for a fulfillment of His planning our life. When we've come to some milestone and we've achieved it we can open our hearts and be grateful and joyous. He wants us to be thankful and rejoice when He has given us a victory that we sought. To be thankful when we have recovered a relationship or an object that was lost. To mark the success of our vows when we've completed them. To

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rejoice in celebration that the goal that we had is finished; it's a time to God to party, it's a time to rejoice. And to be thankful in the sense of freely expressing joy, joy for the harvest in our lives, joy for the times of dedication we bring, joy for restoration, joy for promise and potential. All of these things are ok with God. He wants us to rejoice, to celebrate His goodness in our lives.

**B.** A second application of the peace offering is that God wants us to know that true peace comes only through the death of a sacrifice, just like in the burnt offering an animal has to die and in order for us to belong an animal has to die. We'll see in the sin and trespass offerings that an animal has to die. God is continuing to teach us that it takes the death of an innocent to restore us into proper relationship with Him and to bring us the inward cleansing that we need. This offering is in a sense like other offerings even though its purpose is different. When the worshipper came he laid his hands upon the offering, symbolizing of course that he was transferring whatever was in his life to this victim. Then the animal was killed and its blood was sprinkled on the altar. These things are in common with the other offerings because what God is saying to us is that for peace to be accomplished in our lives we must still have the death of a substitute. Of course there is no real peace without the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives.

**C.** The third application for us I think is that God desires our peace to be shared and to be enjoyed. It's a beautiful teaching of the peace offering. There are three ways in which the offering is shared. First thing is that some of the offering is given to God and is burned up in the fire. God reserves the fat, the kidneys, the fatty covering of the liver. What unusual requirements God has for the offering. These the worshipper couldn't have. They were to be offered directly to God. In fact, the phrase is used, "All the fat is the LORD's" (Leviticus 3:16, NIV). Fat in the Old Testament was a sign of richness and prosperity like Genesis 45:18, "Enjoy the fat of the land."

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We call a person today a “fat cat,” meaning they’ve got a lot of financial worth. Isaiah 55:2 states, “Delight yourself in fatness.” What’s the idea of the fat being offered up to God? These days, we’re lean meat eaters. In other cultures frequently that is not the case. It was not the case in the culture then. The fat was the delicious part. That part was offered up to God. The richness, the good things are God’s. The kidneys also and the covering of the entrails belonged to God; this may be a little much for us to get a hold of. We talk about our heart being the center of our emotions. We know that our heart is a mechanical thing. It’s a term that probably refers to the right side of the brain. In the Old Testament, where the word “heart” is used today, it refers to the will, an act of the will. Not feelings at all. We now use “heart” to describe “feelings.” We have to be careful when we read heart” in the Old Testament because it stood for a decision of the will and not an emotional thing at all. What happens sometimes, you find a word in the Old Testament that the modern translators say nobody will understand that if we translate it right. In those days people thought of the kidneys and the entrails as the seat of the deepest emotions. So when the phrase “all the fat is the LORD’s” is used, it means in a symbolic way to offer up the deepest and the best of your emotions to God because they belong to God. And let God enjoy what you’re enjoying. Don’t give Him the scraps but give Him the finest and the best, the deepest, the most meaningful. Our deepest and our best emotions belong to God. The Lord is saying it’s an aroma pleasing to Him.

Another disbursement of the peace offering was that the priests were to receive their portion. They receive the breast and the right thigh. Of course they received a portion of the cereal offering as well. Usually with the peace offering there was some wine brought and some bread, which meant that the priests had the ability to continue eating because of the offerings being brought.

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But the third disbursement went to you and your family. You enjoyed the greater part. Most of the animal went back to you to take and to eat. It was totally unlike the burnt offering which was completely consumed. In the peace offering, you got to eat it. If the nature of the peace offering was to simply give thanks you had one day to eat it. If it were a vow offering you had two days to eat it. But in no case could you let the meat remain until the third day.

A lot of people read lot of things in there. I think the Lord had a neat way of forcing the person who hoarded things to not let them do it. They had to eat it in one or two days. Who could eat a cow in one or two days? A whole sheep? You cannot do it. The only way you could do that is bring your family, everyone you could find—the servants in your house, employees, friends and the like and depending on the size of the animal you get everybody there and have a big deal. That's a way of saying when we have wonderful things happen to us it is to be celebrated and shared with other people. God, by saying you can't preserve the meat, is forcing people to do it in association with community.

The idea of the peace offering was don't store up joy—spend it, celebrate it. Celebrate it in community.

The focus about the sharing and the enjoyment of the peace offering is that God lay down restrictions. We see these in Leviticus 7. He didn't want anything unclean to interfere with the offering. The same way with joy in our life. He does not want those things which are unclean for us to interfere with the joy He's given to us.

**D.** A fourth application of the peace offering is when accompanied by another offering the peace offering is always last. Many times the peace offering was not offered simply by itself. It came in association with another offering. When it did it always took place last. If it came in association

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with the burnt offering, the burnt offering came first. With the sin offering, the sin offering came first. The trespass or guilt offering, that came first.

Why was this? It has to do with the fact that in the burnt offering God wants us to know that before we can have peace we must belong to Him. Therefore the offering which relates to our belonging new to God must come first. If it's sin, the sin question or the guilt question or trespass, that must be dealt with before we can really get peace in our lives. When those things are dealt with, then God gives us peace. Paul has the order right in his letters when always in Paul's greetings he uses the words "Grace and peace be to you." It's never the other way. He never says "peace and grace be to you." He always says grace and peace. Always in that order. In order to experience God's peace you must first of all know His grace. Forgiveness in your life will never be really experienced unless you've understood the grace of God that God really does forgive your sins. That God really does accept you a person. That because of Jesus Christ, God has the highest regard in the world for you. Most of us live our lives even as Christians feeling that God's not quite sure about us yet. We're sort of on probation. We're not going to find out until we stand before Him and hear from His own lips whether or not we're going to enter glory or not. We're on pins and needles. We're on probation. What marriage relationship could last if after saying the vows at the altar then for forty years the bride kept wondering, "Does he really love me or not?" What kind of relationship is that? None at all.

That's why the New Testament talks about the fact that when we come to Christ, eternal life has already begun. There's a certainty. We've passed from death unto life. God's grace brings to us the sense of knowledge that we've been restored to God, that we've been made one with God. Because the grace is there, peace flows through it. The whole world has it cockeyed. The world is looking for peace, to be the integrated personality, to have everything altogether. But God is

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continuing to say to us, “You only have everything together when you have it right with Me. When you know that I’ve forgiven you and I accept you and I receive you then there can be peace in your life.”

So the order to us is grace and peace. Isn’t God a good psychologist? He has things in the right order. Restored to Him then peace in our life.

### **Closing Prayer**

Our Father, we thank You for this day that we can be here. Perhaps there are persons here today who have had in the last few days significant and wonderful things happening to them. Your goodness has been poured on their life and we want in this moment to celebrate with them what You have done. We want in our moments of life when we are really allowed by You to kind of ride high on life’s experiences, we want to celebrate that. We want to like the father of the prodigal, to call a party and kill the fatted calf. That’s how you feel towards us Lord. We want to come to You and make relationships right. You want to kill the fatted calf and celebrate the peace offering. I pray for persons here who are so caught up in problems and straining that maybe they’ve lost hold of the fact that at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. You want us to have a great comprehension of the good things, the things that we perceive as good that happen to us in life. To release ourselves inwardly to enjoy them and celebrate them. Lord, do that freeing work in our lives as we present ourselves to You. For each of us in this room give to every person here that solid understanding in our own heart that when we have come to You, You completely accept us. That statute of acceptance is based upon the death of the Lamb of God who takes away our sin. When that has occurred, peace flows into our life. Grant us Lord Your peace, Your wholeness. Let there be nothing lacking in our life of the things You want. We ask it in the name of the Lord. Amen.