



Leviticus - Chapter Three

I Leviticus 1:1-6:7 - Five Major Offerings (continues)

Summary of Chapter Three

This offering achieves and expresses peace or fellowship between an offerer and the Lord. The ritual as a whole symbolises a communion meal that is held between the offerer, the officiating priest, and the Lord. In OT times such meals were a means of affirming a covenant relationship, as seen in the account of Isaac and Abimelech: *<<They said, 'We see plainly that the Lord has been with you; so we say, let there be an oath between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you so that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord.' So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank>>* (Genesis 26:28-30).

Generally speaking, then, this offering was a time to remember and reaffirm the covenant relationship between the Lord and Israel, as confirmed by Paul: *<<The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar?>>* (1 Corinthians 10:16-18), and: *<<For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes>>* (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

As with the burnt-offering, there are various specific motives for the offering of well-being, ranging from petition to praise. In this chapter, though, the entire emphasis is on the procedure for the offering, with a special focus on the burning of the fat.

I.c Leviticus 3:1-17 - Offerings of Well-Being

See the chapter summary above.

Introduction to Leviticus 3:1-5

The procedure of this ritual involving a bull is the same as that of the burnt-offering, up until the shedding of blood. Only the fatty parts of the animal, instead of all of it, are to be burned up. The fat in ancient Israel represented the very best part of the animal. The fat would be like filet mignon, i.e. the most succulent and savoury part of the animal. To present this to the Lord was a way of acknowledging that he was the one worthy of most honour. When Eli allows his sons, as priests, to eat the fat of the sacrifices, he is rebuked for honouring his sons above the Lord: *<<Why then look with greedy eye at my sacrifices and my offerings that I commanded, and honour your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering of my people Israel?>>* (1 Samuel 2:29).

¹ If the offering is a sacrifice of well-being, if you offer an animal of the herd, whether male or female, you shall offer one without blemish before the Lord. ² You shall lay your hand on the head of the offering and slaughter it at the entrance of the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons the priests shall dash the blood against all sides of the altar. ³ You shall offer from the sacrifice of well-being, as an offering by fire to the Lord, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is around the entrails; ⁴ the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys. ⁵ Then Aaron's sons shall turn these into smoke on the altar, with the burnt-offering that is on the wood on the fire, as an offering by fire of pleasing odour to the Lord.

Leviticus 3:1-5

If the offering is a sacrifice of well-being. In contrast to the burnt-offering, an offering of well-being sacrifice could be either a male or female animal. However, the animal still had to be without blemish. The sacrificial system was abolished through the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, as was the gender differentiation: *<<There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus>>* (Galatians 3:28).

The priests shall dash the blood against all sides of the altar; the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is around the entrails. In the offering of well-being, the blood of the animal was offered to God along with the fat, which was considered to be the prime portion. There was no mention made of what to do with meat portions of the animal. This was because the meat portion was to be shared, with a part given to the priests and part given to the one who brought the offering, who ate it as part of a fellowship meal with God. This was not an offering to make peace with God, this was the purpose of the sin-offering of Chapter Four, but an offering to enjoy peace with God. The whole reason Jesus made peace between the Father and the believer is so that the peace could be enjoyed.

The greatest offering of well-being ever made happened when Solomon dedicated the temple, offering 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep (1 Kings 8:63). That must have been history's greatest barbecue. Hezekiah gave a festival where 2,000 bulls and 17,000 sheep were given for offering of well-being (2 Chronicles 30:24).

Introduction to Leviticus 3:6-17

Almost the same procedure is prescribed here for the offering of a sheep or a goat. Since the offering of well-being was the one offering in which the offerer was a participant, it makes sense for this chapter to end by underscoring the two parts of the animal of which the offerer was never to participate in, namely, the fat and the blood. The fat represented the very best part of the animal. As such, it was to be given to the Lord as the one worthy of most honour, thus the statement: **<<all fat is the Lord's>>**. The blood was reserved for a very special purpose: atoning for the life of the Israelites. As a result, it too must not be consumed.

⁶ If your offering for a sacrifice of well-being to the Lord is from the flock, male or female, you shall offer one without blemish. ⁷ If you present a sheep as your offering, you shall bring it before the Lord ⁸ and lay your hand on the head of the offering. It shall be slaughtered before the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. ⁹ You shall present its fat from the sacrifice of well-being, as an offering by fire to the Lord: the whole broad tail, which shall be removed close to the backbone, the fat that covers the entrails, and all the fat that is around the entrails; ¹⁰ the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which you shall remove with the kidneys. ¹¹ Then the priest shall turn these into smoke on the altar as a food-offering by fire to the Lord.

Leviticus 3:6-11

If you present a sheep as your offering. The procedure was generally the same as the offering of a bull or cow. The blood and the fat were given to the Lord, while the meat portions were for the one who brought the offering and for the priest. As always, it must be as perfect a specimen as possible: <<*When anyone offers a sacrifice of well-being to the Lord, in fulfilment of a vow or as a freewill-offering, from the herd or from the flock, to be acceptable it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it*>> (Leviticus 22:21).

The whole broad tail, which shall be removed close to the backbone, the fat that covers the entrails, and all the fat that is around the entrails. This offering of the whole fat tail was significant. That portion of the animal was considered a delicacy and could weigh as much as 60 lbs or 27 kgs.

¹² If your offering is a goat, you shall bring it before the Lord ¹³ and lay your hand on its head; it shall be slaughtered before the tent of meeting; and the sons of Aaron shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. ¹⁴ You shall present as your offering from it, as an offering by fire to the Lord, the fat that covers the entrails, and all the fat that is around the entrails; ¹⁵ the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which you shall remove with the kidneys. ^{16a} Then the priest shall turn these into smoke on the altar as a food-offering by fire for a pleasing odour.

Leviticus 3:12-16a

If your offering is a goat. The offering from the flock, whether a sheep or a goat, is treated in exactly the same way, yet the details are given separately. The separation of goats and sheep is symbolic of what will happen between those who have accepted Jesus and those who have not when he returns in judgement: <<*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left*>> (Matthew 25:31-33).

^{16b} All fat is the Lord's. ¹⁷ It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, in all your settlements: you must not eat any fat or any blood.

Leviticus 3:16b-17

All fat is the Lord's; you must not eat any fat or any blood. There was a spiritual significance to this command relevant to the offering of well-being. God's peace is enjoyed by giving him the best, represented here by the fat portion, and by offerers giving him their lives, represented by the blood. This was demonstrated as early as the offerings given by Cain and Abel: *<<and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering>>* (Genesis 4:4).

You must not eat any fat or any blood. This is a command that was introduced before the law was given: *<<Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood>>* (Genesis 9:4), and was a recommendation made to the Gentiles in the early church: *<<but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood>>* (Acts 15:20). Even as it was impossible to remove all the blood from an animal, so was it impossible to remove all the fat from meat; this speaks of removing as much as is practicable. There was a practical significance to this command. The prohibition of eating fat was good for Israel from the standpoint of blood-cholesterol and heart disease. It was especially good because tapeworms were often found in the fatty tissues and by obeying this command, the ancient Israelites avoided these dangerous parasites.