# YOU SHALL EAT BEFORE THE LORD

## The peace offering, *Leviticus 3:1-17*

Leviticus opens with three chapters detailing instructions for three offerings central to the problem driving the book's content - ***how will God manage His covenant with rebellious Israel***? While the placement (and idea of sacrifices and offerings) might seem dull and antiquated to us, the first-place position of the offerings in the book and the amount of space dedicated to them indicates their importance in understanding God's relationship with Israel. The purposes God gave to those offerings not only provided Israel insight into its relationship with God, but they also help us better understand how to navigate our relationship with God.

The first offering, the burnt offering (*Leviticus 1*), sought permission to come into God's presence by offering the life of an innocent (unblemished) animal in place of the worshipper's tarnished life. Having secured mercy to be in God's presence, the second offering, the grain offering (*Leviticus 2*), recognized the covenant binding the worshipper to God. It acknowledged the blessings they enjoyed because of that relationship and the obligations it placed on them.
The third offering, the peace offering (*Leviticus 3*), permitted the worshipper to share a meal with God while reminding them they owed God their heart and their allegiance. This lesson will consider that offering and some of the applications it holds for us.

## "A sacrifice of peace offering"[1]

- In Leviticus' presentation, the peace offering follows the burnt and grain offerings. Its placement after the first two offerings presents readers with a literary crescendo built on the relationship established between God and the worshipper in the preceding offerings.
    - The burnt offering sought permission to come into God's presence by offering the life of an innocent animal in place of the worshipper's tarnished life (*Leviticus 1*).
    - Having secured mercy to be in God's presence, the grain offering recognized the covenant binding the worshipper to God (*Leviticus 2*). It represented the supplicant's awareness of the blessings they enjoyed because of that relationship and the obligations it placed on them.
    - The peace offering possessed a unique distinction – it was the only offering in which God permitted the worshipper to eat a portion of the food they presented to Him (*Leviticus 7:11-34*). The peace offering gave Israel a ritual allowing them to share a meal with God in His presence (*Deuteronomy 12:5-7*).
        - The worshipper presented the offering at the altar in front of the entrance of God's temple (*Leviticus 3:1-2*), the place where His presence dwelt (*cf. Exodus 25:8; 40:34*).

[1] Leviticus 3:1. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

        - The combination of the Tabernacle's Eden imagery and the sharing of a meal at its entrance carried Edenic references and emphasized a crucial point - God created humanity to enjoy fellowship with Him (*cf. Genesis 1:26-28; Revelation 21:3*).
        - The peace offering signified Israel's unique opportunity – God not only permitted them access to His presence through ritual offerings (He spared them from the danger associated with His presence), but He also blessed them with the honor of table fellowship with Him.
- However, the meal reinforced a crucial point about fellowship with God - God required the worshipper to give Him their heart and allegiance.
    - The peace offering featured the sacrifice of an animal that followed specific and strange sounding (to us) requirements involving the animal's fat (*Leviticus 3:1, 6, 12*).
        - After identifying the animal as a substitute for their life (*Leviticus 3:2, 8, 13*), the worshipper slaughtered the animal and carefully divided out "the fat covering the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, and the kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver" (*Leviticus 3:3-4*).
        - The worshipper gave the fat from the offering to the priest, who burned it on the altar as "a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD" (*Leviticus 3:5*)
    - The curious use of fat in the offering becomes clearer when we recognize two things:
        - First, people in the biblical world considered the calorie-rich fat the choicest part of an animal.
        - Second, people in the biblical world used the kidneys to describe one's innermost being (*Leviticus 3:4; Job 19:27; Psalm 7:9; 139:13*).
    - By claiming a singular right to the offering's fat, God reminded the worshipper that He deserved their best – they owed Him their heart and allegiance (*Leviticus 3:16-17; 7:22-25*).

## Applications

Jesus' actions and teachings amplify the blessing of sharing a meal in God's presence embedded in the peace offering. The gospels indicate that Jesus, in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (*Colossians 2:9*), spent much of his time feasting with people and using meals as imagery in his teaching. With the backdrop of the peace offering in mind, consider the following:

- God's purpose has always centered on being in a relationship with humans (*cf. Genesis 1:26-28; John 3:16-17; Romans 5:6-11; Revelation 21:3*); He wants to share the blessings and abundance of His presence with us.
- Even though God desires a relationship, we can only enter it on His terms (*Matthew 22:1-14; 7:21-28*).
- The standards God sets for a relationship with Him reveal that He does not desire a casual relationship – He wants one in which we dedicate our entire self to Him (*Matthew 22:34-37; Galatians 2:20*).