

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## The Peace Offering Leviticus 3:1-17

**Intro:** As we look at ch3 I have to say, although there are a few variances from the previous chapters, it still sounds pretty much the same. There's no mention of frankincense but a lot of talk about fat and some particulars of livestock anatomy. We still have the "laying on of hands" but the sprinkling of blood around the altar is also included for the first time since 1:11. But, while it may sound like a lot of liturgical repetition, our text actually describes one of the most precious, desired and highly sought after realities in the world. This is something everyone in the entire world is seeking but the majority of the people who seek it never find it. It's not something that can be accessed by accepting or believing a human philosophy or by adhering to a political platform. No amount of money can buy it and no human can give it to us. The coveted reality ch3 reveals is peace with God. Only God can give this peace so; only God can determine how we access it. Most people fail to access it at all because they're unwilling to obtain it in the way God has prescribed. The sad result of this is that they live without peace with God because they lack the peace of God.

Peace is a rare commodity in our world today; not just between countries or races or classes but personal peace. In 1946 Joshua Liebman wrote a book entitled Peace of Mind that was very successful (58 weeks at #1, top 10 3 years straight). After the book came out, Liebman was inundated with phone calls and letters from people wanting actual peace of mind and asking him how to get it. He tried to help everyone who asked, until he was literally overwhelmed emotionally and physically. He couldn't stand up to the pressure and while his book was still on the best-seller list, Liebman died of a heart attack at age 41. His death ironically illustrates that no human can give peace to other people, even if they wrote the book on it.

Of course, God tells us in His Word not only how He gives us supernatural peace of mind but also, more importantly, peace with Him. Peace with God is vividly demonstrated in the old covenant peace offering described in our text. Since the Hebrew word translated "peace" is shalom, which is a word that carries far greater connotations than just the cessation of hostilities, some translations accurately refer to this sacrifice as the fellowship offering.

How do we, as modern, NT Christians access and express peace with God today? Well, let's just establish the basic truth that before peace can be given and entered into, we must first see the need for reconciliation with God.

Peace with God begins when we finally realize that we don't have it and we need it. The Bible clearly teaches that we're not automatically at peace with God. In fact, apart from our faith and His glorious salvation, all humans are at enmity with God. **Rom 5:10** says that before people come to Christ they're enemies of God. **Col 1:21** says "you... were alienated and enemies (hostile) in your mind by wicked works..." These realities are often hard for many people to accept, especially people who tend to think more highly of themselves than they ought to. But, while the Bible's declaration that we're alienated from God, hostile in our minds towards Him and engaged in evil deeds does sound a little harsh; it's completely and terribly true. What's more, it's true of all people, regardless of status or position.

At Mt. Sinai, God gave His law to His people knowing they would transgress it and transgressing God's law is sin. God is holy, so much so that sin cannot exist in His presence; thus, no sinful person can be in His presence. God is also just! He punishes sin and rewards righteousness. So what was God going to do with a nation of sinners? He could have wiped them out and just started over but He didn't. God is gracious and loving and He wanted His people to be with Him. God had also entered into a covenant with His people and God is always faithful to His covenants. So God made a way for His people to come into His presence and that way was the sacrificial system.

Another fact that necessitates the sacrificial system is the principle that sin leads to death. God has established this as an eternal, immutable spiritual reality. In His perfect justice, God has ordained death as the penalty for sin – every sin of every person in every generation (**Rom 6:23** wages). The first demonstration of this reality was in the Garden of Eden: God told Adam and Eve that if they sinned, they would die. They sinned and they immediately died spiritually but they also eventually died physically. Thus, death entered into the human experience.

So, why was the sacrificial system necessary? 1) God is holy, so holy that no sin is allowed into His presence. 2) God is just; He always punishes sin.

3) God has ordained death as the penalty for sin. 4) Humans are natural-born sinners, meaning that in our natural sinful state, we're barred from God's presence and our sin will lead to our death. 5) God is gracious, loving and faithful to His covenant. It's a real conundrum, a dilemma; but it's God's dilemma!

How did the one, true God who is holy, just, gracious, loving and faithful respond to sinful humans? He established a system of sacrifices by which His sinful people could be reconciled to Him and properly worship Him. The tabernacle represented God's presence. When Israel came near it, they knew they were approaching His presence. Because of God's holiness, they couldn't come into His presence with their sin. Sin must lead to death. But in His grace, God allowed a sacrificial animal to die in the place of the worshipper who brought it. When the sacrificial animal died, it died instead of, in the place of, the worshipper who had sinned. The death of the animal substituted for the death of the sinner. In this way, God introduced substitutionary sacrifice (or substitutionary atonement). Our sin is atoned for by means of a substitute for us. Praise God, He provides atonement for sin! And since He does provide it...

The next logical question is how do we access this atonement for sin that God has provided to us? Again, the first step in solving a problem is recognizing that there is a problem. First, we need to see that we are sinners, separated from God and in need reconciliation with Him. The next step is: we need bring our lives to God. Our text tells us that when a worshipper brought an animal for sacrifice, God instructed them to lay their hands on the animals head; thus, identifying themselves with the animal. This act was a formal ceremony of association (representation). The animal was now formally associated with the worshipper; it represented them. The worshipper was a sinner who had earned death for his sin, but the penalty of death was being applied to the animal. When the worshipper saw the animal die, the death represented his death for his sin. In essence, the animal was now subject to the death penalty because of the sin it had received by the laying on of hands. This concept will appear in a marvelous way in a later chapter.

Now **16:21** says that on the Day of Atonement when the high priest laid his hands on the goat, he confessed the sins of Israel. So confession may have been and understood, expected part of every sacrifice when worshippers

laid their hands on an animal. This confession and laying hands gave significant spiritual meaning to the sacrifice. 1) They were acknowledging the guilt of their sin. 2) They were affirming that God's just penalty for their sin was death. 3) They were acknowledging the concept of substitutionary sacrifice – the animal's death substituted for theirs. 5) They sought atonement for their sin and peace with God. Only God can give atonement for sin, so they brought their lives to God. In [Rom 12:1](#), the apostle Paul commands Christians to bring their lives to God in a similar way.

One aspect of Leviticus that's hard to miss is the amount of details that are included in it, which begs the question: why are there so many? Does it really matter exactly how the animal is to be cut apart or what parts are to be burned on the altar? Actually, the details carry some very important messages. For instance, certain parts of the animal were associated with certain ideas and practices. In their pagan worship, the Canaanites used animal livers as a form of divination. Priests would examine the livers to divine the future or to determine the will of whatever wretched god they happen to worship. So, the one true God instructed His people not to save that part of the animal but to burn it on the altar. Israel was not to look to a liver to determine the future; they were to trust in God for the future.

God also directed the priests to sprinkle the blood of the peace offering all around the altar (on all sides). [Lev 17:14](#) says the life of all flesh is its blood. So the blood represents the life of the sacrificial animal. The altar, as part of the tabernacle, represented God's presence. So, as the priests sprinkled the blood around the altar, the worshipper's mind would've reflected on the idea of giving the life of the animal to God. Following the details of God's prescribed procedures must have constantly reminded worshippers of specific theological concepts and ideas.

On the other hand, whether the details evoked a theological concept or not, faithfully observing them was significant because their faithful observance was direct obedience to God's spoken word. God *expected* His people to submit to His word and offer the sacrifices He commanded in the manner He commanded. When offering each sacrifice they had to stop and intentionally consider *how* and *why* they were offering it. The detailed instructions were a built-in safeguard against mindless ritual. The specific procedures forced them to slow down, follow God's instructions and remember that the Lord was in control of the process, not them.

The order of the sacrifices so far in Leviticus also seems to carry a message about a right relationship with God. Ch1 describes the burnt offering, of which one aspect is the atonement for sin. Sin had to be removed before a person could enter God's presence and be reconciled to Him. We saw the grain offering in ch2, which expressed dedication and thanksgiving to God. Then, once sin was atoned for and the worshipper had expressed dedication to God in worship, they were now ready to enjoy fellowship with God. The order is significant. First comes the removal of sin (God's just wrath is satisfied and He removes our sin from us). Second is dedication – expressing thanksgiving and worship to God. Third, we're ready for communion with God; we fellowship with Him. Fellowship with God is not like fellowship with anyone else. Because of His holiness, our sin must be removed and, because He is God, we have to come into His presence carefully.

Fellowship with God was the main theme of the peace offering. As mentioned earlier, the word "shalom" can also be translated as fellowship. The Hebrew word referred to being in a state of well-being. In a relationship, it means to be on friendly terms. In the peace offering, Israelites celebrated being on friendly terms with God; peace meant that everything was going fine. What a great blessing this fellowship offering must have been for Israel! It celebrated the fact that in the worshipper's relationship with God, things were OK – God and I are good!

In ch7 we'll see that after the specified parts of the peace offering are burnt on the altar, the rest of the animal was cooked as a meal for the worshipper, the priests and anyone else who might happen to be around. The meal was eaten in the tabernacle area, which symbolized eating in the presence of God and eating in the presence of God symbolized fellowship with God – a happy, right relationship with God. When we eat with people, we talk with them, laugh with them and listen to them; it's an expression of a relationship. Sharing a meal is an act of friendship.

This was the main idea of the peace offering – because of our reconciled relationship we can now enjoy fellowship with Him. We experience something similar in the Lord's Supper. The bread and the cup represent Christ's body and blood. When we take that into our bodies we're symbolizing fellowship with Christ through the meal. We call it "Communion"

because we're experiencing fellowship (communion) with God. His presence with us is symbolized in the meal. He was also present with His people during the meal of the peace offering.

But, there's an even greater significance seen in this sharing of a meal. We miss the significance if we merely assume that the offerer is inviting God to participate in the meal. On the contrary, God is the gracious host in this scene and He provides the meal. When the worshipper brings an animal to the deity's home (tabernacle) the entire offering becomes the Lord's. God, then, in His graciousness and kindness, returns most of the meat back to the worshipper to be shared and enjoyed with their family and friends. This is just one of many occasions in Scripture where God is the divine host, from providing food for Adam and Eve in the garden to providing nearly every meal the nation of Israel enjoyed during their 40 year sight-seeing tour of the wilderness.

When we come to the NT, again God, in the person of Jesus Christ, is the divine host. Jesus feeds the 5000 (Mt 14) then the 4000 (Mt 15). Jesus makes all the arrangements for and hosts the last Passover meal with His disciples (Mt 26). That's why it's called the Lord's Supper – He's the host! Of course, all this points to the time when God and His Christ will be our hosts at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the great messianic banquet held at the end of the ages. At every meal that believers enjoy, God is not merely the unseen guest that we acknowledge through prayer; He's the royal host and we are His guests. Thus, every meal is an opportunity to reflect on the graciousness and kindness of our divine host and to anticipate the great banquet yet to come.

Ch7 also says that one reason a person would bring the peace offering was to express thanksgiving. Of course they would be thankful! God had taken away their sin and allowed them into His presence to fellowship with the holy, almighty God of the universe! They were certainly guilty of sin; God knew it and they knew it. But, God in His grace forgave their sin and removed it from them as far as the east is from the west; which is an OT concept (Ps 103:12). God has done the same for us in Christ. Now we're able to have fellowship with Him just as if we had never sinned (justified) and that's just because of His love and grace. In God's presence we can now express thanksgiving to Him.



Also, in the peace offering, worshippers burned the fat portions of the animals because the fat was seen as the best portion. They didn't keep the best for themselves; they gave it to God. We might think it strange to consider the fat as the best. We're constantly trying to reduce the amount of fat in our diets so we wouldn't consider it to be the most desirable part. But, in that place and in that time, fat was rare. Meat was not a regular part of their diet and the animals they did eat were lean; they had little fat. So, the people of that time considered fat a delicacy. It was the best, so it was given to God and this was a permanent statute for Israel (17). When we are truly at peace with God, we will not think it strange or a burden to give our best to Him. We can give our best to God knowing that He gave His best for our salvation.

We will see later that worshippers ate the meal of the peace offering with other people – the priests and other worshippers. They celebrated the presence of God and His atonement for sin together. When the people of God follow the Word of God, they always get together for worship in God's presence. God tells us to gather to worship Him and celebrate His salvation. That certainly involves attending worship services together but it also involves so much more. Just think about all the "one another's" listed in the NT: pray for one another (Jam 5:16); encourage one another (Heb10:25 ESV); bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2); exhort one another (Heb 3:13); love one another (Jn 13:34); minister (serve) one another (I Pt 4:10); be kind to one another...forgiving one another (Eph 4:32). Clearly God intends for us to share our lives with His people.

In conclusion: God wants us to be at peace with Him; He's gone out of His way to make this possible. We can be at peace with Him but only after our sins have been taken away. In the OT, God did that by means of the sacrificial system in all of its facets and detailed requirements. Now God has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ and He has fulfilled every facet and requirement of the sacrificial system by His own sacrificial, substitutionary death for our sins on the cross. Now we can have peace with God through Christ, who is the perfect sacrifice for sin. Paul says in Col 1:20 that Jesus made peace through the blood of His cross and Eph 2:14 teaches us that Jesus is our peace but then Rom 5:1 plainly says we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that Jesus has offered Himself as our sacrifice, we no longer need any

of the old covenant sacrifices, including the peace offering. We have peace with God through Jesus Christ. You can look for peace from other sources but you will only sell yourself short because they will not fit the bill. If we look to possessions, power or passion to bring peace we'll live and die as fools and suffer eternally without God. But, through Jesus we have peace with God because He also gives us the peace of God. Jesus told His disciples, "My peace I give to you" ([Jn 14:27](#)). And, as we live in fellowship with God, His Holy Spirit will produce within us the fruit of love, joy and peace.

Do you have the peace of God? Are you enjoying peace with God in your life? You cannot bypass the first 2 steps of atonement for sin and dedication to God. Do you know Christ as your savior? If so, have you dedicated your life and future to Him? We may believe we know what's best for ourselves but we are wrong. Only God knows the future so only He knows what's best. He has a glorious future for each one of us and it's worth the living. You can start living that future today! Will you? 😊