

## “Communion Completion” (Lev. 3)

### 1. Motives (Covenant Relationship)

- a. Meaning: The definition of the term shelamim (often translated peace) is wonderfully ambiguous:
  - i. Shalem = complete. It brought the other offerings to a climax. For that reason it has been called ‘the completion offering’.<sup>45 1</sup> So the term shares the root with completion and it is the final accompanying sacrifice which completes the fellowship with Israel and God. Ro. 8:32!
  - ii. Shulmanue = gift. A free will offering of thanksgiving and/or accompanied with a vow to celebrate God’s faithfulness.
  - iii. Shalom = peace. Having knowledge of atonement and the resulting peace with God, a joyful offering of gratitude.
  - iv. Shillem = recompense/render. Offering back gratitude and acknowledgment to God for His liberating love is the best recompense we can offer. And yet it is the offeror who enjoys a literal feast of meat after giving to God the choicest part.
  - v. Silluma = reward.<sup>2</sup>
- b. Multifold:
  - i. As in the other animal and grain offerings, these well-being offerings have an array of nuance. Not only in the seemingly apropos ambiguity but in the prescribed manners and motives. “Personal reasons for bringing a fellowship offering are listed in 7:11–18 and included thanksgiving, the fulfilment of a vow, or just any occasion for a freewill offering (e.g. 1 Sa. 1). Public reasons included the making or renewal of the covenant (Ex. 24:5, Dt. 27:7), the appointing of a king (1 Sa. 11:15) and the dedication of the temple (1 Ki. 8:63–66). In the last case, the number of animals used by Solomon was not a matter of impressing God, but of providing an abundance of free meat for the people to celebrate the joy of the occasion.”<sup>3</sup> Milgrom wrote: “The main function of all the well-being offerings is to provide meat for the table. Except for kings and aristocrats, meat was eaten only on rare occasions, usually surrounding a celebration. Because a whole animal was probably too much for the nuclear family, it had to be a household or clan celebration. All joyous celebrations would have been marked by a well-being offering, the joyous sacrifice par excellence.”<sup>4</sup> “The fellowship offering was prescribed on three specific occasions: the Feast of Weeks (23:19, 20), the completion of the Nazirite vow (Num 6:17–20), and the installation of the priests (Lev 9:18, 22).<sup>115 5</sup>
  - ii. Varying instructions were given in Deut. 12:5-7, 11-17 promoting social fellowship of the faith. “The fact that the fellowship offering led on to a shared meal may be the reason why no provision was made for the offering of a bird since no bird known to Israelites would have been big enough for a family meal. One may assume, though it is not stated here (but implied in Dt. 12), that those who were too poor to lay on a

---

<sup>45</sup> P. Jenson, ‘The Levitical Sacrificial System’, in Beckwith and Selman, p. 31.

<sup>1</sup> Tidball, D. (2005). *The Message of Leviticus: Free to Be Holy* (A. Motyer & D. Tidball, Eds.; p. 69). Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>2</sup> Carr, G. L. (1999). שְׁלָמִים 2401. In R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., p. 930). Moody Press.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, C. J. H. (1994). Leviticus. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 126). Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>4</sup> Milgrom, J. (2004). *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus: a book of ritual and ethics* (pp. 28–29). Fortress Press.

<sup>115</sup> Rainey, “Sacrifices and Offerings,” 207.

<sup>5</sup> Rooker, M. F. (2000). Leviticus (Vol. 3A, p. 100). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

## “Communion Completion” (Lev. 3)

fellowship offering meal of their own would have been invited to share in those of others in the community.”<sup>6</sup>

- iii. Another variance allowed was sacrificing an imperfect animal as provided in Lev. 22:23. Wenham wrote, “Whereas the other kinds of peace offering were closely linked with petitionary prayer, prayers for deliverance or forgiveness or for safety or for children, the free-will offering came as a response to God’s unexpected and unasked for generosity. This is perhaps the explanation for men being allowed to bring less than perfect animals for free-will offerings (Lev. 22:23). Where confession of sin or vows were concerned, perfect animals were necessary.”<sup>7</sup>

### c. Margin:

- i. A reason for calling this type of offering a ‘fellowship’ or ‘joyful’ offering is that they could feast on the animal thus it was a literal meal they could enjoy. As a side note the fat this offering provided also served to keep the sacrificial fire ongoing.
- ii. So the instructions of presenting and identifying with the sacrificial animal and the sprinkling of its blood and such were the same but here there was margin given to the priests and a majority to the offerors. They were also permitted to offer the female prescribed animals.
- iii. Gracious God: in the precise and laborious sacrificial system which set apart Israel as holy unto the Covenant LORD (CL), God provided allowance for the poor and foreigners, etc, by making sacrifices affordable to all and including all who entered His covenant atonement and fellowship.

### 2. Means (Covenant Requirements before fellowship-atonement)

- a. Stipulations: as noted, the instructions mirrored those of the burnt offerings in chapter one.
- b. Significance: even though there is more margin given in these various fellowship offerings, some aspects had to remain.
  - i. Identification with the offered animal acknowledged the Covenant God and their allegiance to His requirements.
  - ii. Though not an offering for atonement, blood was sprinkled at the altar which reminds all of us that forgiveness and cleansing is needed to approach God cf. 17:11.
  - iii. They had to sacrifice the best part. The “fat” was used analogously as the choicest part. “Fat was symbolic of what was best and richest (Gn. 45:18; Ps. 81:16 [147:14], where the NIV’s ‘wheat’ is lit. ‘fat’ in Hebrew; Ps. 63:5, where the NIV’s ‘richest of foods’ is lit. ‘marrow and fat’ in Hebrew), and the point may therefore be that the very best part of the animal must be offered to God.”<sup>8</sup> Fat was the means to offer real sacrifice to God even though they could share the rest of the animal with the priests.
  - iv. Unlike other sheep, which have a short tail, ‘that of the broad-tailed is long and broad, containing a mass of fat which may weigh up to 13 kg [c. 28 lb]’, and is mentioned in several places as part of the sacrifice (Exod. 29:22; Lev. 3:9; 7:3; 8:25; 9:19) (FFB,

---

<sup>6</sup> Wright, C. J. H. (1994). [Leviticus](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 126–127). Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>7</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1979). [The Book of Leviticus](#) (p. 79). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>8</sup> Wright, C. J. H. (1994). [Leviticus](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 127). Inter-Varsity Press.

FFB *Fauna and Flora of the Bible*—prepared in cooperation with the Committee on Translations of the United Bible Societies, 2nd edn (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980)

## “Communion Completion” (Lev. 3)

75). It is considered a delicacy in many parts of the world today. This *entire fat tail* was to be burned along with the rest of the *fat*.<sup>9</sup>

- v. Verse 16 reiterates that “*All the fat is the Lord’s*. This is in keeping with the above observations: since the fat represented the very best part of the meat (see at vv. 3–4), it had to be given to the person of honour at the meal, namely, the Lord (see at v. 11). Indeed, Eli is rebuked for doing just the opposite: he honoured his sons above the Lord by allowing them to have the fat of the sacrifices (and also partook of the fat himself) (1 Sam. 2:15–17, 29).”<sup>10</sup>
- vi. Are you indulging in a prohibited practice? Are you taking for yourself what is the CL’s or what appropriately belongs in one of His institutions?

### 3. Meaning (Covenant Reciprocation)

- a. The parts given to CL were “only the *kidneys, the fat covering the intestines and the long lobe of the liver*, and in the case of the fat-tailed sheep, the fat of the *tail* (v. 9) were burned on the altar as a *food offering to the Lord*”<sup>11</sup> in Scripture, “the Kidneys are frequently associated with the heart as the seat of thoughts, emotions, and life;<sup>3</sup> like the blood, the proverbial life force, they must be returned to their creator.”<sup>12</sup> Wenham wrote, “The kidneys and entrails are referred to in the OT as the seat of the emotions (Job 19:27; Ps. 16:7; Jer. 4:14; 12:2), just as in English we talk of the heart. (The heart in the OT refers primarily to the mind and the will.) It is possible that offering the kidneys and internal fat symbolizes the dedication of the worshipper’s best and deepest emotions to God. For the peace offering was often tendered in intrinsically emotional situations, when a man made vows or found himself seeking God’s deliverance or praising him for his mercy.”<sup>13</sup> Gary Demarest concurred, “As to the kidneys and liver, we may not be pushing the symbolism too hard to suggest that to these people the kidneys and liver were regarded as the seat of the emotions, just as the heart was regarded as the seat of the mind and will. Since the peace offering was a time of deep emotional expression with one’s friends and family, some connection of this sort may have been felt.”<sup>14</sup>
- b. On one hand we have it much easier today – no laborious costly sacrifices. On the other hand we are expected to “offer up” all we have unto the CL. Read Lu. 14:25-33.
  - i. Re: “Hating.” Jesus did not ask His followers to sacrifice healthy relationships with family. He was saying that even the closest of relationships which come between us and Him must be sacrificed. He is supreme and wills our highest joy and fulfillment and thus He ought to receive not only what is naturally His (all things) but our heart felt devotion and mind volitional dedication.
  - ii. Re: “Renouncing all he has.” We can wrongly and unwittingly compartmentalize our lives e.g. thinking possessions such as housing, furnishing, transportation, etc, our ours. We are mere stewards of God’s provisions and blessings and must enjoy, rest, and labor unto Him. Demarest offered a good example of application for this Fellowship/Thanksgiving/Peace/Joyfull/Well-Being Offering. “One of my most memorable pastoral occasions was an invitation to “bless” a new home for one of our

<sup>9</sup> Sklar, J. (2013). *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (D. G. Firth, Ed.; Vol. 3, p. 104). Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>10</sup> Sklar, J. (2013). *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (D. G. Firth, Ed.; Vol. 3, p. 105). Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>11</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1979). *The Book of Leviticus* (pp. 75–76). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>3</sup> Jer 11:20\*; 17:10\*; 20:12\*; Ps 7:10\* (Eng. 9\*); 16:7\*; 139:13\*.

<sup>12</sup> Milgrom, J. (2004). *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus: a book of ritual and ethics* (p. 29). Fortress Press.

<sup>13</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1979). *The Book of Leviticus* (pp. 80–81). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>14</sup> Demarest, G. W., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1990). *Leviticus* (Vol. 3, p. 48). Thomas Nelson Inc.

## “Communion Completion” (Lev. 3)

families. They came from an Orthodox background, which has a regular liturgy for such an occasion. Never having been asked to do this before, I was somewhat hesitant, and even a bit fearful of what might be something of a superstitious rite to me. I agreed to the invitation, and had a very special evening. It was a delightful family occasion with relatives, neighbors, and children all included. After dinner, we went through the house, room by room, offering prayers of thanksgiving, petition, and intercession and singing hymns of praise and worship. It was a beautiful evening of ‘peace offerings.’”<sup>15</sup>

- iii. Re: Freewill Fellowship Offering. Rabbi Eleazar wrote, “One who is not commanded and fulfills is greater than on who is commanded and fulfills.”<sup>1</sup> After all, of what value is a gift brought under duress of being commanded? If the emotion is lacking, the offering brought is a sterile gift at best.<sup>16</sup>
- iv. Re: V. 17. The superlative imperative regarding this joyous offering, which provided a feast for the offerors and their families and even sojourners, was not to partake of what was reserved for the CL. After thrice instructed, v. 17 reiterates the fat and blood belong to God. Honoring this perpetual statute has not ceased. Such is fulfilled by the CL Himself via the Son who “shall sprinkle many nations” (Isa. 52:15) with the cleansing power of His blood. We are now called to commemorate such not with the blood of bulls and goats but at the Communion Table where the elements remind us how Jesus indeed fulfilled our atonement once and for all with His broken body and poured out blood.
- v. Such is done with a joyful praise of thanksgiving. Read Rev. 5:9, 12.

### PC

Oh the graciousness of God to provide for us an abundance in that we can give back to Him. Anything we could offer God can only come from what He first has afforded us. In this third category of ascending aroma offerings we see God’s provision for Israel to give back to Him joyfully, thanking Him for provisions, preservation, peace, and prosperity. And what is amazing about this is that it ends up truly blessing the offeror and his fellowship as much (or likely more) than God because the offerors get to feast on most of the offered animal. Romans 8:32 comes to mind. “He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things” (ESV). The appropriate question for us now is, “How could we withhold anything from the One who has redeemed us from evil, sin, death, and hell?”

### The NT and the Peace Offering

The specific term peace offering is never used in the NT. Paul did undertake to pay for the offerings of four men with a vow, and one of these offerings would have been a peace offering (Acts 21:23–26). A more general term for sacrifice is used in the NT which sometimes appears to refer to peace offerings. Hosea’s insistence (6:6) that God desires mercy (loving-kindness) rather than sacrifice is twice quoted by our Lord (Matt. 9:13; 12:7). This is a distillation of the essence of the peace offering, which involved the worshipper declaring God’s mercies and his own willingness to obey the law. It is taken further in the Epistles. Paul urges the Romans to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, “which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1). Hebrews invites us “continually (to) offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is,

---

<sup>15</sup> Demarest, G. W., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1990). *Leviticus* (Vol. 3, p. 49). Thomas Nelson Inc.

<sup>1</sup> y. *Šebi*. 6:1.

<sup>16</sup> Milgrom, J. (2004). *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus: a book of ritual and ethics* (p. 28). Fortress Press.

## “Communion Completion” (Lev. 3)

the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Heb. 13:15–16).

More directly related to the OT peace offering is the Lord’s supper. At the last supper<sup>45</sup> Jesus referred to the cup of wine as “the new covenant in my blood” (1 Cor. 11:25). In so doing he alluded to the blood of the old covenant (Exod. 24:8). When the Sinai Covenant had been agreed to by the people, Moses took the blood of the burnt offerings and peace offerings and threw it over the people and said, “Here is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you.” The last supper was more like the peace offering than a burnt offering in that the peace offering and the last supper were both meals, while the burnt offering never was. Christ’s death on the cross is a closer parallel to the burnt offering. His sharing of his body and blood with his disciples forms the closer parallel to the peace offering.

Other similarities between the Christian communion service and the OT peace offering can be drawn. Both demand that the worshipper should be clean, i.e., in a fit state to participate. “Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:27; cf. Lev. 7:20). Divine punishment is promised on those who eat without discerning the body. “That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died” (1 Cor. 11:30). Here Paul is putting the provisions of Leviticus into more modern terms. The first recorded peace offering was at Sinai, when the ten commandments were given. It is therefore highly appropriate for the Decalog, or our Lord’s summary of the law, to be read at the Lord’s supper.<sup>17</sup>

### **Perpetuity**

“This is a permanent rule for your descendants ...” is used a number of times in Leviticus to underline particularly important religious principles. Structurally it serves as a link between various groups of law within the book (cf. 7:36; 10:9; 16:29, 34; 17:7; 23:14, 21, 31, 41; 24:3).<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> The last supper may indeed have been a Passover meal (Matt. 26:17–19; cf. John 18:28). This would not invalidate the theological connections we are drawing between the peace offering and the Lord’s supper, for the Passover could be described as a specialized type of peace offering that was celebrated once a year by the whole nation.

<sup>17</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1979). *The Book of Leviticus* (pp. 82–83). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>18</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1979). *The Book of Leviticus* (p. 74). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.