

# THE BREAD OF LIFE

LEVITICUS 2:1-16

**EVERYTHING, INCLUDING LIFE ITSELF, IS A GIFT FROM GOD.**

I. THE OFFERING (VS 1a, 4, 12, 14)

**EVERYTHING WE HAVE BELONGS TO GOD.**

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**JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE.**

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# The Bread Of Life

Leviticus 2:1-16

Last time we were together, we talked about the most basic type of offering, the burnt offering. This was a very bloody and brutal type of sacrifice. After the animal was killed and cut up, the priest would arrange the pieces on the altar and burn up the whole sacrifice. The priests offered up this sacrifice the first thing every morning, and the last thing at the end of the day.

We also said that the general term for all the offerings described in these first 7 chapters means to draw near. The offerings are meant to be personal and costly. The sacrificial system was set in place to preserve and protect Israel. Since God is perfectly holy and since human beings are by nature sinful and rebellious, these sacrifices were meant to keep Israel alive as individuals and as a nation.

This morning, we will encounter the next type of offering known as the grain offering. This is a totally bloodless offering and all of it is not burned up. The priests will be given a portion of it to eat.

Sometimes I think we Christians miss the rich meaning of the New Testament because we don't spend much time studying the Old Testament. Some of Jesus' miracles, teachings, and perhaps even communion derive meaning from this type of sacrifice.

But we often misunderstand things in church. We do them, but we often don't have a clue as to what we are doing. Let me give you an example. In one of the churches I pastored, we let kids take communion. When I gave the little children communion, I would hand them the bread and say, "God be with you."

After church one Sunday, I was invited to one of our deacon's house for lunch. In order to get the kids quieted down and fed, his wife made sandwiches for the kids. Communion must have made an impression on the kids because I saw the deacon's second grade daughter break a piece of bread off her sandwich and whispered in her most angelic voice to her mother, "God will get you."

Let's take our time this morning and examine the meaning and ceremony for grain offerings.

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This morning we will see that this type of offering is meant to demonstrate to us that we owe everything to God. The main idea of the text is this. **EVERYTHING, INCLUDING LIFE ITSELF, IS A GIFT FROM GOD.** Just as we observed last week, there will be different variations of what the sacrifice will consist of and how it is to be offered. However, since there are so many similarities, I will deal with them together. The offering and its variations are described in the first half of verse 1, verse 4, verse 12, and verse 14.

The first half of verse 1 describes the nature of the offering as flour. The very first sentence starts out, "When someone brings a grain offering to the LORD, his offering is to be of fine flour." There are several words we have to define here. First of all, you will notice that the word offering is used in a generic sense. That word again is *qorban*. Last week we said that this word meant a costly and personal gift brought to God freely by the worshiper. The root word means to draw near to God. In other words, these types of gifts are meant to enable sinful people to approach a perfect, holy, and dangerous God without being killed. That is the general word for offering.

Secondly, the specific type of offering described this morning is a grain offering. The word in Hebrew is *minchah*. Throughout the Middle Eastern religions and cultures,

this word referred to a tribute or a gift to a sovereign or to a god. The tribute was meant to acknowledge the sovereignty of God over our lives and acknowledging that God provides us with everything we need to live, to survive, and to thrive. The attitude in which we offer this sacrifice is voluntarily and is an expression of our loyalty.

The Sovereign the Israelites offered their thanks and loyalty to was Jehovah. Again, for the Hebrews, and for us Christians, there is only One God. The God we worship is the God of the Hebrews. And remember LORD, in all capital letters, refers to God's personal covenant Name that He is known by in the middle of the Hebrew camp. And keep in mind, when they receive these instructions, they are still traveling in the wilderness between Egypt and Israel. They have not yet even seen Israel.

Next, the word someone is not the usual word for human being. I think this is important in our day and age to point out. Our language tends to be male dominated. I think we do it unintentionally but when we refer to human beings, we often use the word mankind. In Hebrew, Greek, and in English, the word man can be used to describe a male or a human being in general, male or female. In this case, the word used to describe the worshiper is a feminine noun. The word is *nephesh*. Literally the word means soul. But the word soul is not to be defined in the sense the Greeks separated the body and soul. In Genesis, creation is described as God creating human beings by forming us from dust of the earth, breathing life into us, and thus we became living souls. Women and men were expected to bring offerings to God.

Finally in describing this flour, it is to be fine flour. For us, it is equivalent to semolina. It is beautiful fine flour. This is the first option one can bring as an offering to God. Flour would be used in baking bread, which is a staple in the Middle East. It is a sign of food and survival. In offering this to God, one would be acknowledging that God provides all we need to live.

In verses 4, 5, and 7, the second option of the sacrifice is described as bread. In verse 4, the bread is baked. In verse 5 it is pressed into a wafer and griddled. In verse 7 it is fried.

In verses 12 and 14, a type of grain offering known as firstfruits becomes the third option of this offering. When the Hebrews settled the land, one of the religious festivals God commanded them to celebrate was the "festival of firstfruits." It is a harvest time festival. The Hebrews were to bring the very best of the first crops harvested as an offering to God. The word for firstfruits is *reshit*. This refers to the quality of the harvest. The worshiper was to select the very best. Later on the word *bikkuwr* is used to describe the firstfruits. This refers to first in time. This would pertain to the early harvest. The festival of weeks was meant to acknowledge that God provided the right amount of rain and ensured a successful harvest. It was a way for them to acknowledge God's provision. The worshiper was to bring to God the very best quality from his very first harvest.

Here is what is very interesting to me. We must keep in mind where Israel is at the time of these commands. Just one year ago, they were slaves in Egypt. They had no idea how to farm or anything like that. Maybe some who had to serve on Egypt's farms did, but the majority of the people were slaves assigned to Pharaoh's building projects. They made bricks, cut and moved stone. They are in the wilderness on the Sinai Peninsula at this time. They have not yet reached the Promised Land. They have not yet planted or harvested a thing. God has miraculously fed them with manna from heaven. Manna was flaky bread-like wafers. It sustained them for the

entire 40 years they spent in the wilderness. When they entered the Promised Land, the manna stopped coming down from heaven. Listen to how Moses sums up the experience of God's 40-year-provision:

*<sup>5</sup>During the forty years that I led you through the desert, your clothes did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet. <sup>6</sup>You ate no bread and drank no wine or other fermented drink. I did this so that you might know that I am the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 29:5-6 / NIV).*

The Lord kept them alive with manna from heaven. When Jesus went to fast in the wilderness before starting His public ministry, he was hungry. Satan came to tempt Him. Listen to the nature of the temptation and Jesus' response. Also keep in mind that Jesus, like Israel was in the wilderness:

*<sup>2</sup>After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup>The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."*

*<sup>4</sup>Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:2-4 / NIV).*

Jesus was acknowledging that we are to look to God for our life's provision. Jesus was demonstrating His trust in the Father. We will address this later, but Jesus miraculously provides the crowds with bread, and Jesus describes Himself as the bread of life. The nature of this sacrifice is a way for the Hebrews to acknowledge that **EVERYTHING WE HAVE BELONGS TO GOD**. And what is further interesting is that at the time they receive these commands, they don't have anything they could even be tempted to call their own. God is providing them with food daily.

I'm not going to go into this in this morning's study, but I would recommend you go back to the book of Exodus and see that not only does God provide the manna; He gives specific instructions how to gather it and eat it. And it's also interesting to see how the Israelites disobey these instructions and even complain about the manna. It is also a good study for us to see how we often grumble at God's provision for us and how we so easily disobey His commands.

In the next section, we will examine the contents of the entire sacrifice described in the second half of verse 1 thru the first half of verse 2, verses 4, 5, 7, and 11. In this section the notion that **WE BELONG TO GOD** becomes very clear.

The first ingredient is the grain product. For the Hebrews, like much of the Middle East, Europe, and other countries, bread and grain products were the basic staple of life. It would be the equivalent of rice for Asians. My wife could eat a ton of food, but unless she has her bowl of rice, she cannot feel full or satisfied.

In the Gospels, Jesus is recorded as having fed over 5,000 people with two fish and five loaves. Like the manna from heaven, Jesus came down from heaven to sustain our lives. Listen as Jesus identifies Himself as the bread of life. Please take some time to read and study through the entire chapter of John 6. But for now, I will take some selected statements from the passage:

*<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. <sup>27</sup>Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."*

*<sup>28</sup>Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"*

*<sup>29</sup>Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." ...*

<sup>31</sup>*Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"*

<sup>32</sup>*Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.*

<sup>33</sup>*For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* ...

<sup>35</sup>*Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ...<sup>38</sup>For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ...<sup>47</sup>I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. <sup>48</sup>I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup>Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. <sup>50</sup>But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. <sup>51</sup>I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."* ...

<sup>57</sup>*Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup>This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever" (John 6:26-58 / NIV).*

I have been thinking about this a lot lately. Can we say that Jesus is our very food for life? For example, which would shake your world more? If you lost your job, spouse, children, money, possessions and all your friends ... or if someone actually proved that Jesus was just a good man, was executed, was buried, but never rose from the dead? For me, I would be very sad if I lost everything in this world. But I could go on. However, if someone proved that Jesus really did not physically rise from the dead, ... I could not go on. I would just want to die immediately. I think the only thing that could suck absolutely all the joy, hope, and meaning out of life, would be if indeed Jesus were not the Promised Messiah of the Jews. I hope that just as the Hebrews received manna from heaven to keep them alive, each one of us look only to Jesus to keep us alive. All of life apart from Jesus is truly meaningless and in fact a deception and a lie.

Oil is the next ingredient used in this offering. It is mixed with the flour, grain, and bread. All throughout the Bible, oil is used in consecration and dedication ceremonies. Priests, prophets, and kings were anointed with oil. Consecration means that an object or a person is completely dedicated to the service of God. For example, let's take an ordinary glass. If we were to consecrate it for worship, we could no longer use that glass for ordinary drinking purposes. It could only be used in the worship service. As worshipers offered this grain offering to God, they would be reminded that God consecrated them when He freed them from Egypt, took them through the center of the Dead Sea, and called them a nation of priests. In all of our daily acts of worship we must remember that we belong to God. Through our salvation, baptism, and worship, we have dedicated ourselves to God. From the time we gave our lives to Christ, ... as demonstrated in baptism, ... our bodies, our souls, our minds, and our lives belong totally to God. They are not to be used for ordinary things. They are meant to serve and honor God.

Further, oil represents the Holy Spirit. When people were anointed with oil, they were symbolically being saturated with God's Holy Spirit. When we became Christians, we received God's Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came into our lives, set up house, and brought the fullness of the Godhead into our very lives.

Incense was the next ingredient. As incense is burned, a sweet aromatic smoke rises. In Israel's worship, the rising smoke of incense illustrated the prayers of God's

children rising to Him. But throughout the passages describing sacrifices, they become sweet aromas to God. Listen to what Paul says about our lives if we live them in Christ and for Christ:

*"... Now wherever we go he uses us to tell others about the Lord and to spread the Good News like a sweet perfume. <sup>15</sup>Our lives are a fragrance presented by Christ to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those being saved and by those perishing. <sup>16</sup>To those who are perishing we are a fearful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved we are a life-giving perfume ..." (II Corinthians 2:14-16/NLT).*

If we were to take time and evaluate how we are living our lives, what we consider to be valuable by seeing what we spend our time, energy, and money on, and if we are more concerned about the things of God rather than of this world, would God say our lives are a sweet fragrance or a stench that He cannot even stand to smell? I think the one thing we can learn from these offerings is that we cannot have it both ways. I would say that over 60% of us who call ourselves Christians don't live with Jesus at the center of our lives. What we do is carve out lifestyles that we like and desire. Then we bring the concept of God into our lives to comfort us when we are sad or experiencing difficulties. It cannot be like this. The picture of the Hebrew camp in the wilderness is how it has to be for our lives. The worship tent was set up right in the middle of the camp. There were three tribes camped on each side. The pillar of cloud and fire rested on the top. God Himself inhabited the tent. When the pillar of cloud or fire rose and moved, the Hebrews broke camp and followed the pillar. When the pillar stopped, they set up camp with the worship tent in the center. We must constantly remind ourselves that either Jesus is Lord over all our life or none of it. Either Jesus is in the center or He's not in our lives at all. For me personally, that is a frightening self-reflective thought.

Salt is added to this sacrifice. But look at this interesting addition in verse 13, "Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings." Salt was used throughout the ancient world in ceremonies. Salt was the only preservative. There were no refrigerators. Salt preserved the quality of the meat. Salt also added flavor to food. Jesus told us that we are to be salt of the earth.

But let's look at salt in this context. Salt was a symbol of binding a friendship, cementing a relationship, unity, and commitment to the permanence of a relationship. So what does God mean when He instructs the Hebrews not to leave out the salt of the covenant out of their offerings? It is possible to bring offerings to worship, go through religious motions, do all sorts of religious stuff, and not be authentic. I never cease to be amazed at how religious people can come to church, give huge amounts of money, get involved in all sorts of ministries, seem to be so pious, and in the end, don't even know the God we worship. The salt of the covenant for us is our total dedication to serving, loving, and honoring God with our lives. It is our personal, heartfelt, wholehearted dedication to God. It is an expression of our love for God. And just so there is no mistake, let's listen to how Jesus describes what it means to love Him:

*"<sup>9</sup>As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love" (John 15:9-10 / NIV).*

When the worshiper added salt to the sacrifice, she was saying that she was totally committed to demonstrating her love for God and her authentic faith by living according to all God commanded. There was nothing magical about the sacrifices and the way they were prepared. They were meant to be symbolic of the

worshiper's relationship with God and the adherence to the rules of preparation was a test of the worshiper's obedience and submission. For those of us involved in leadership positions, we should ask ourselves if we pay the same attention to detail in our offerings at church as we do to the attention to detail we exercise at our jobs. I think if again we were to self-evaluate, we would have to come to the conclusion that we love and respect our jobs more than we love and respect God. For those of us who are church attendees if we had activities that interfered with our work week or if our children had outside activities, would we miss work or allow our children to miss school as easily as we miss church and church functions in favor of outside activities? I think that if we examine our behaviors and attitudes we could say that we really value work and school, but church not so much. Maybe you are all more spiritual than I am, but when our children were young, we would never let them miss school for anything. However, if they had a sporting event, we did not hesitate to let them miss church to participate in a music program or a sporting event. What we taught them was that work, school, entertainment, and sporting events were all much more valuable and important than church attendance. What a sin and what a mistake. Now our children grew up to be good people and successful adults, according to the world's standards. And they still like us. However, you can look around you and not find them in church. We taught them that church wasn't all that important. That is a sin my wife and I will have to answer to God for some day. Whenever we do something we perceive to be religious or good, we must not forget to add the salt of the covenant to it. We must remember that we should not say we love God or claim to be Christians if we are not making God first in everything we do.

There are two forbidden contents for the sacrifice. They are yeast and honey. I'm not sure what the symbolism here is. But at the very least, it is a matter of obedience. In other words, we are not allowed to make up which commands of Jesus we will follow, which we will disobey, and which we will redefine so they make our lifestyle and values appear to be Christian. When God said, no yeast or honey, that's exactly what He meant. The whole point of this section, the contents and the procedures were meant to demonstrate that not only does everything we have belong to God; **WE BELONG TO GOD.**

And finally we see the disposition of the offering in the second half of verse 2 thru verse 3, verse 6, verses 8-9, and verse 16. The way the sacrifice is handled and divided up reminds us that **JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE.**

Verse 6 says that the worshiper is to break, crumble, or crush the bread. In describing the coming Messiah and His mission the prophet Isaiah says this:

<sup>14</sup> *Just as there were many who were appalled at him—  
his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man  
and his form marred beyond human likeness— ...*

<sup>3</sup> *He was despised and rejected by men,  
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.*

*Like one from whom men hide their faces  
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

<sup>4</sup> *Surely he took up our infirmities  
and carried our sorrows,  
yet we considered him stricken by God,  
smitten by him, and afflicted.*

<sup>5</sup> *But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.*

<sup>6</sup> *We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all. ...*

<sup>10</sup> *Yet it was the LORD'S will to crush him and cause him to suffer, ..." (Isaiah 52:14 - 53:10 / NIV).*

Jesus was crushed and broken for our sins. Part of our worship ought to move us to total humility and sorrow when hear Jesus' words repeated as we celebrate the bread portion of communion:

<sup>19</sup>*And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19 / NIV).*

We must never forget that everything we have and indeed our very lives belong to Jesus because He bought us and continues to feed us.

The memorial portion is described in the second half of verse 2, verses 8-9, and verse 16. The priest would take a handful of this flour, bread, or grain, and burn it up on the altar. This is a very small portion of the entire offering that was prepared. Only a handful went to God.

What comes next is very interesting to me, and I'm not sure I understand it. Remember the whole theme of the book of Leviticus has to do with holiness and degrees of holiness. For example, the most holy place in the camp is the section in the worship tent known as the Holy of Holies. It is the holiest place in all of Israel. Next, the rest of the inside of the worship tent is called the Holy Place. The courtyard that contains the altar and basin is holy. The further one travels from the Holy of Holies, the less holy the land becomes until finally outside the camp is the unholy place where all the garbage and waste is taken.

So what is a little confusing for me is that the most holy offering in verses 3 and 10 refers to the portion given to the priest. The portion offered up to God is called the memorial portion. The rest of the grain, flour, and bread, is given to the priests to eat. It is called the most holy offering. Shouldn't the portion offered up to God be the most holy? All I can say about is this. In the New Testament church, we are all referred to as priests. You are a priest. I am a priest. When we participate in communion, we are reminded that we are to be wholly dedicated to God and we are to be holy. Listen what Paul says about people who receive communion with a less than totally committed lifestyle:

<sup>27</sup>*Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup>A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. <sup>29</sup>For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup>That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep (died)"*

*(I Corinthians 11:27-30 / NIV).*

Somehow we have become lackadaisical in our attitude towards our Christian lives, God's commands, and His demands for holiness in our lives. The point is this. In giving Himself to us, Jesus has given us the most holy offering. We ought to be very careful in our approach to God. Indeed **JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE.**

I think that if there is a common theme emerging through our study through the book of Leviticus, it is that God is holy and that He demands holiness from us. We are not free to make up our own rules for living. If we want to call ourselves Christians in the Biblical sense, we must be totally dedicated to holiness. **EVERYTHING, INCLUDING LIFE ITSELF, IS A GIFT FROM GOD.**

The problem with most of us is that we have not yet learned to live lives of total thankfulness and surrender to God. We believe that we are entitled to things we have and even things we don't have. That kind of attitude will never draw us near to God. It will carry us far away from God.

Listen to how Henry Ward Beecher describes what a thankful attitude produces:

*"If one should give me a dish of sand, and tell me there were particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my eyes and search for them with my clumsy fingers, and be unable to detect them; but let me take a magnet and sweep through it, and how would it draw to itself the almost invisible particles by the mere power of attraction.*

*The unthankful heart, like my finger in the sand, discovers no mercies; but let the thankful heart sweep through the day, and as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings, only the iron in God's sand is gold!"*

If we want to please God, we must draw near to Him with thankful hearts remembering that absolutely everything comes to us as a direct gift from Him. And the only act of true thankfulness is love God. We demonstrate our love through total dedication to God through holy obedience.