

## Leviticus Bible Study #1

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Leviticus 1:1-2

1 The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, 2 “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock.

### **Introduction**

The Pentateuch is the collection of the five books penned by Moses. It begins with Genesis, which details the creation of the world by God and the origin of the Israelite peoples from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as how their descendants found a temporary home in Egypt. Exodus comes after, which describes the end of Israelite slavery in Egypt as God delivers judgment against the Egyptians and takes His chosen people to Sinai to receive the Law. After Leviticus, there is Numbers which teaches us about the census of the Israelites and their wilderness sojourn. Deuteronomy comes last in the five as a renewal of the Old Covenant and a commentary on the Ten Commandments.

Leviticus has a tendency to feel “out of place” among the other books of the Pentateuch to modern readers. The name is Latin, and refers to the full phrase *Liber Leviticus*, or “The Levite Book.” This is to say, it indicates that the entirety of the text is concerned with the tribe of Levi in its priestly operations for the Israelites. With very little historical narrative, most of the book is concerned with regulations and commands about sacrifices, cleanliness standards, holiness standards, festival gatherings and a “proto-Covenant” which is more fully stated in the later chapters of Deuteronomy.<sup>1</sup> In other words, Leviticus is a *religious* handbook for the children of Israel, and more specifically the children of Levi, as they begin to live as a coherent nation.

It is understandable if one raises his eyebrow at Leviticus seeming to be an interjection between the more narrative focused books. But it ought not surprise us that such a book had to be written. The Lord show His Providence in that He does not permit His people to live in an anarchic state of being, whether civically or religiously. With Leviticus, God provides a structure of living, believing and preserving the history of His relationship with them.

### *Who Wrote Leviticus?*

From the very first verse, Leviticus proclaims that Moses is the chief author of the book, as it is a written record of things God commanded him to say for the sake of instituting the Law. This places the authorship around 1445 B.C., before the beginning of Israel's 40 year wilderness sojourn. In the Gospels, our Lord Jesus confirms Mosaic authorship for the entire Pentateuch,<sup>2</sup> and of course Christ being Divine means we have assurance of the truth of the matter. This does not mean that Moses *alone* wrote every syllable, as there is some evidence that Moses had a secretary (or *amanuensis*) writing at times for him. After all, the final chapter of Deuteronomy includes the details concerning Moses's death,<sup>3</sup> and the period of mourning after he shed his mortal coil; to say the least, it is unlikely that the Lawgiver wrote posthumously. In addition to this, since Moses was brought up in the royal court of

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1 Deuteronomy 28

2 Matthew 8:1-4, cf. Leviticus 14

3 Deuteronomy 34

Egypt, he clearly relies on the oral and written tradition sources regarding matters of history previous to his own birth; someone had to *tell* Moses that the tribe of Asher was named according to Leah's happiness at Zilpah giving birth.<sup>4</sup>

While there is clear evidence that Moses utilized tradition sources which were previously divinely inspired, and he employed an amanuensis, he is still named as the principle author of the Pentateuch by Scripture wherever the topic is brought up. Accordingly, believers are called to reject the “documentary hypothesis” which claims that anonymous writers, each having exclusive motivations, wrote different books that were eventually redacted into the Pentateuch we have today. The claim is made by modernistic theologians like Julius Wellhausen that various names being used for God, like Elohim and the Tetragrammaton, are evidence of different authors, and the different contents of the five books are proof that different authors must have been used. Without taking too much time, suffice it to say that the theory lacks any credibility. Scholars do not question the use of different epithets for deities in pagan religions, and nor do they say that different authors penned works which utilize varied titles. Moses had the acumen necessary to utilize different names for God. Further, the different *purpose* of the different *books* in the Pentateuch is best understood as Moses writing for different *reasons*. A man writing a technical manual for a car does not have to write in the same technical style when penning a love letter to his wife; so too is Moses going to write historical narratives like Genesis differently than he writes a regulatory text like Leviticus.

### *Historical Context*

An entire book is written for a single tribe of Israel, who alone is tasked with running religious matters for the country. Why is this the case? The reason for it courses throughout the Pentateuch from the very beginning. Levi as a tribe was denied a land inheritance because their patriarch, Levi, was involved with killing Hamor and all the men of his city after the rape of Levi's sister Dinah; thus Jacob pronounced a prophetic utterance that he and his brother Simeon were to be scattered through the Promised Land.<sup>5</sup> In Numbers, the tribe of Levi was only granted a number of cities spread out, as Jacob predicted, through the land.<sup>6</sup> Being a “floating” tribe, God decided to take them unto Himself as a tribe of servants.

The appropriation of Levi as a priestly tribe is also presented as a means of redemption. After the Exodus, God consecrated all the firstborn of the tribes of Israel, as a remembrance for the Passover. The firstborn of any animal was to be sacrificed, while the firstborn of men was to be redeemed with an animal sacrifice; even with the offering being made, the firstborn still belonged to God.<sup>7</sup> Yet our Lord had no intention of breaking families apart; instead, the tribe of Levi was chosen to *represent* all those firstborn.<sup>8</sup> In this way, the tribe not only represented the people before our Lord in terms of sacerdotal efficacy, but also they prefigure the high priestly ministry of Christ.

### *Geographic and Historical Context*

While there is little historical narrative in Leviticus, the events described occur shortly after the renewal of the Covenant.<sup>9</sup> The children of Israel had failed to remain faithful during Moses's first forty day sojourn up the mountain, leading to the golden calf incident. The people were slated for destruction, when Moses intervened on their behalf. Exodus ends with the people beginning to depart the foot of Mount Sinai, having become the beneficiaries of the renewal God offered.<sup>10</sup> Leviticus is

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4 Genesis 30:9-13

5 Genesis 34, 49:5-7

6 Numbers 35:1-8

7 Exodus 13:1-16

8 Numbers 3:11-13

9 Exodus 34:10-28

10 Exodus 40:34-38

written as these travels continue, and they expand on the intercessory role of the priesthood in obtaining redemption for sinful people. Moses' intercession for the people after the golden calf incident forms the pattern and basis for Levitical ministry from that point on.<sup>11</sup> By their efforts, the priests and Levites were to serve as intermediaries between God and the children of Israel so as to ensure mercy and atonement could be made.

### **The Place of Leviticus in the Christian's Life**

There is no neutral reading of Leviticus. Scripture attests that all of its contents are, at least in the ultimate sense, about Jesus.<sup>12</sup> This is *doubly* so for Leviticus, as the entirety of the Levitical system, down to even the implements used by the priests, are intended for foreshadow Christ's redemptive work for all humanity.<sup>13</sup> The entirety of Leviticus is intended to preserve the Old Covenant believers under a system which points to Jesus constantly. With this aspect, Leviticus grants Christians a deeper appreciation for their freedom under the New Covenant, and a greater understanding of the way of life that Old Covenant saints experienced.

Leviticus is also crucial for hermeneutics across the Scriptures. The interpreter simply must understand the festivals in order to understand the times and seasons of events in the histories and the Gospels. The specific cleanliness standards assist in explaining various discussions and parables – for instance, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and Levite not touching the victimized man left for dead would not have shocked nor angered Christ's audience, and nor would it paint the two as having moral failings. Such details are found throughout the histories, the prophets, the Gospels, the Psalms, and more. In other words, the book provides a key to understanding the rest of the Bible, and as such cannot be ignored.

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11 Exodus 32:7-14

12 Revelation 19:9-10

13 Hebrews 8:1-6, 10:1-4

## Leviticus Bible Study #2

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### Leviticus 1:1-17

**1** The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, **2** “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock.

**3** “If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. **4** He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. **5** Then he shall kill the bull before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. **6** Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces, **7** and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. **8** And Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; **9** but its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

**10** “If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, he shall bring a male without blemish, **11** and he shall kill it on the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. **12** And he shall cut it into pieces, with its head and its fat, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood that is on the fire on the altar, **13** but the entrails and the legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer all of it and burn it on the altar; it is a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

**14** “If his offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves or pigeons. **15** And the priest shall bring it to the altar and wring off its head and burn it on the altar. Its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. **16** He shall remove its crop with its contents and cast it beside the altar on the east side, in the place for ashes. **17** He shall tear it open by its wings, but shall not sever it completely. And the priest shall burn it on the altar, on the wood that is on the fire. It is a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

### **Introduction**

Before diving into the text we must ask why this system of sacrifice is introduced in the first place, with men being required to bring their offerings to the priests at the Tabernacle. The ancient expression of the true religion underwent a subtle yet powerful change between the books of Exodus and Leviticus. While the first animal sacrifice portrayed in Scripture is that of Abel's in Genesis,<sup>1</sup> nothing is revealed to us about how he and his brother Cain were instructed to make offerings. The next time we see an offering, it is when Noah builds an altar and makes a burnt offering after the subsiding of the waters of the Flood.<sup>2</sup> Hereafter there is the Binding of Isaac, in which Abraham builds an altar at Moria – and after he passes the test he sacrifices a ram there.<sup>3</sup> After meeting God in Bethel, Jacob makes a pillar and pours out a drink offering.<sup>4</sup> Once more, in all of these there is no clear instruction given, no established priesthood, and no delineation of which parts of which animal are to be sacrificed.

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1 Genesis 4:3-5

2 Genesis 8:20-22

3 Genesis 22:9-14

4 Genesis 35:13-15

While there is mention of a Melchizedek being “priest of God Most High,”<sup>5</sup> it is generally assumed that whoever was a believer in the true God had the right and responsibility of offerings; this was almost certainly the exclusive domain of males, on account of Adam's rulership over Eve. Nonetheless, in the nomadic and semi-nomadic context of the Near East, the assumption is that, at most, the office of mediation through sacrifice was conducted by individuals, or the head of a family on behalf of that family.

Over time there was a development of sacerdotal offices by which a specific class of persons was responsible for conducting sacrifices and making requests of divinities. Yet this is first seen in *pagan* cultures, not among those who worship the true God. As Joseph the son of Jacob begins to run Egypt on behalf of Pharaoh, he buys up land from the native Egyptians in exchange for grain, but the lands stewarded by the priests are exempt.<sup>6</sup> As a class, they were an aristocratic caste which was able to offer up a daughter for Joseph to marry.<sup>7</sup> But by the time of the Exodus, it remained the case for people who worshiped the *true* God that sacrifices were typically performed by tribal chieftains or heads of families: we see this both with Job (Abraham's contemporary)<sup>8</sup> and Jethro (Moses' father-in-law).<sup>9</sup> Though Jethro is first referred to as the “priest of Midian,”<sup>10</sup> this is an honorary title, as he is shown to be first and foremost a shepherd.

This appears to have been the intent for the children of Israel upon their release from Egyptian bondage. Early on at Sinai, the ones conducting sacrifices were simple designated priests without reference to their lineage.<sup>11</sup> A few chapters later, they are found to be young men working with Moses for the confirmation of the Covenant.<sup>12</sup> The intent was for a nation of priests who operated alongside Aaron and his lineage (who would be the first among equals).<sup>13,14</sup> It is only after the golden calf incident, in which the sons of Levi appear to have been the only ones who abstained from Israel's apostatic revelry, in which the nature of Israel's relationship to the priesthood began to change.<sup>15</sup> No longer was Israel slated to be a “nation of priests,” but a nation which possessed a *tribe* of priests.

This helps us to understand Biblical history. As an example, when Jeroboam I took ten tribes of Israel in secession from Judah, his “reforms” included permitting people of non-Levitical descent to become priests and building golden calves in a sort of misguided “traditionalist” movement;<sup>16</sup> the message he sent was effectively to tell the Israelites “we are going back to the way things were, restoring the original priesthood.” But such so-called “reforms” were never going to last, for it was not until after Pentecost that God permitted a restoration of the universal priesthood; it was explicitly reserved for the restoration brought about by Christ.<sup>17</sup> Until then, the Old Covenant saints were strictly forbidden to live under any other system than the granular regulations and rules presented by that of the Aaronic priesthood and their patrilineal line, and the tribe of Levi being their assistants. Thus St. Paul speaks of the Law being added on account of transgressions.<sup>18</sup> Suffice it to say, Leviticus would not have been necessary if it were not for the golden calf incident.

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5 Genesis 14:18

6 Genesis 47:20-22

7 Genesis 41:50

8 Job 1:1-5

9 Exodus 18:10-12, called Reuel in Exodus 2

10 Exodus 2:16-22

11 Exodus 19:21-25

12 Exodus 24:3-8

13 Exodus 19:6

14 Instructions for the consecration of the Aaronic line are found in Exodus 29, but this does not happen until Leviticus 8

15 Exodus 32:25-29

16 1 Kings 12:25-31

17 1 Peter 2:9-10, notably predicted as an aside in Isaiah 61:6

18 Galatians 3:19

## Vs.1-2

1 The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, 2 “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock.

Before there is any command in Leviticus, there is the assumption that people will be making offerings. This is on account of previous commands (e.g., that of the Passover Lamb), but there is also *precedent* guiding the Israelites. Offerings had been made for over two thousand years at this point, beginning with Abel's sacrifices. So Moses receives a message, not about *if* the people will make offerings for the priests to sacrifice, but *when* and by *whom*. No longer could an Israelite make an offering by himself as previous generations had; now it must be done with the assistance and guidance of a priest.

The purposes for a sacrifice were varied, from atonement to thanksgiving, but the thing that all animal sacrifices shared was their expensive quality. “From the herd or from the flock” means that an offering of a sheep, goat or bull was expected. In the modern era, a sheep is expensive;<sup>19</sup> a cow is much more expensive.<sup>20</sup> The average man was supposed to understand that, though the priest did the burning, *he* was making a real sacrifice, demonstrated by his own responsibility to slit the animal's throat. It is, after all, a life that he is giving. The livestock were dying on behalf of and instead of the ones making the sacrifices.

## Vs.3

3 “If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.

The demand for unblemished sacrifices is for two reasons. First, as our Lord explains in Malachi, our God is a great King and as such deserves only the best.<sup>21</sup> The initial plan for Israel's governance was not to have an earthly king, but for God to be their King. A human king, who would impose his own taxes in the form of grain and wine and livestock, was understood to be an eventuality, but not the ideal as set out in the Law.<sup>22</sup> Thus, while the sacrifices endured after the establishment of the monarchy, they nonetheless served as regular confessions by the people that their *true* King was our Heavenly Father, and that they served under *His* laws.

The second (and more important) purpose for unblemished sacrifices is that every single sacrifice was intended to preach the Gospel. St. Peter teaches that the blood of Christ is comparable to the blood of an unblemished lamb, in that He is sinless and perfect.<sup>23</sup> The author of Hebrews says that *every* sacrifice is connected in its own way to Jesus, even their being taken outside the camp after the sacrifices are performed.<sup>24</sup> While there is mystery to its exact mechanics, each time an animal was offered it was a kind of pantomime of the Atonement won on the Cross. The first chapter of Leviticus provides a template for further sacrifices that were performed for different purposes – each of which emphasizes a different aspect of the Gospel.

## Vs.4-13

4 He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. 5 Then he shall kill the bull before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and throw

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19 From *Raising Sheep*: <https://www.raisingssheep.net/how-much-do-sheep-cost>

20 <https://circlejmeat.com/blog/how-much-does-a-whole-cow-cost-in-2026>

21 Malachi 1:14

22 Deuteronomy 17:14-20

23 1 Peter 1:17-19

24 Hebrews 13:10-13

the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. **6** Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces, **7** and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. **8** And Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; **9** but its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

**10** “If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, he shall bring a male without blemish, **11** and he shall kill it on the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. **12** And he shall cut it into pieces, with its head and its fat, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood that is on the fire on the altar, **13** but the entrails and the legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer all of it and burn it on the altar; it is a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

The one making the offering slaughters the animal after placing his hand on its head. This is a representation of the atonement, or כָּפַר which quite literally means “to cover.”<sup>25,26</sup> This is to say, the sacrifice starts with a covering for the animal who in turn covers the man with its life. This *covering* of the man by the animal's life is then shown quite literally, because the Scripture attests that blood has life in it and this life is thrown all about the altar.<sup>27</sup> Since the altar represents the man, with the sacrifice upon it, the blood shed on it represents the human being being covered in its blood. This foreshadows the way in which believers are washed of their sins by the shed blood of Christ – the spotless Lamb of God.

The slaughter is performed on the north face of the altar, because the entrance to the tent of meeting was always oriented with the priests facing toward the east, in the direction of the rising of the sun; the priests were expected to be facing *east* as they presented and burned the sacrifice.<sup>28</sup> This is for two reasons. The later Aaronic Benediction includes the words “May He make His Face to shine upon you,”<sup>29</sup> so when a sacrifice was made the sun itself would shine on the man making the sacrifice as a representation of God's blessing on the offering. The second reason is on account of Eden, the place where man first belonged, being planted in the east.<sup>30</sup> In effect, the statement being made by this representation is that the man, who is not in his original home and thus destined to die, looks forward *to* that blessed space as he gives the life of his animal in exchange for his own. In addition, Golgotha, where our Lord was Crucified was directly west of the Temple Mount; those who observed His crucifixion looked eastward at Him.

The head is placed on the altar first, then the fat on top of it, before the rest of the animal is washed and burned. This is under the assumption that the food offering is just that – a meal. The animals' body is cooked in its own fat as the flames ignite the meat, causing the sweet aroma of fat to fill the air and move heavenward. This is shown to please our Lord, who bestows His favor on those who are willing to give up the meat, labor and money that the animal offered could have given.

### **Vs.14-17**

**14** “If his offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves or pigeons. **15** And the priest shall bring it to the altar and wring off its head and burn it on the altar. Its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. **16** He shall remove its crop with its contents and cast it beside the altar on the east side, in the place for ashes. **17** He shall tear it open by its wings, but shall not sever it completely. And the priest shall burn it on the altar, on the wood that is on the fire. It is a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

25 Transliterated “Kaphar,” Strong's #3722

26 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3722.htm>

27 Leviticus 17:11, Genesis 9:4

28 Exodus 27:13

29 Numbers 6:23-27

30 Genesis 2:8

Sacrifices were to be expensive, but not universal in cost. What is expensive to a wealthy Israelite rancher is unimaginable to a slave or farmhand. So, for those who cannot afford a lamb, goat or bull, the concession is made that they may offer up pigeons or turtledoves. While pigeon costs run the gamut in the modern era,<sup>31</sup> they were among the cheapest animals a poor family could afford – but still left an impact on their bottom line. Since it is a smaller vessel, the operations are simpler but have the same impact. God is still pleased by the food offering and aroma, for He loves the poor just as much as the rich. To put it more poetically, the aroma which pleases God is not the scent of burning meat and fat, but the devout believer's trust and prayers rising up to Him in the act of sacrifice and obedience to the Levitical system. The Israelite making the best offering he could was a demonstration of absolute faith and trust, to the point of humbly submitting to the authority of the priesthood.

On the topic of how Leviticus helps us understand the rest of the Scripture, this chapter enlightens us concerning certain soteriological statements. It especially helps us also to understand why the disciples of Christ were so shocked when they heard Him say that it is “easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>32</sup> On account of the financial difficulties and burdens of bringing in offerings, it was easier (relatively speaking) for a rich man to do godly things in accordance with the Levitical system. It would have been common sense that the man who could make greater and more frequent offerings to our Lord would have an easier time getting into Heaven. Christ says that such a notion is exactly backwards, for that rich man need not make a true and impacting *sacrifice* which is *difficult* enough to garner trusting, salvific faith in our Lord. And that faith, both between the Gospels and the text of Leviticus, was the thing God is seeking from men.

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31 <https://birdsandtrees.net/pigeons-cost-pets-price-guide/>

32 Matthew 19:23-26

### Leviticus Bible Study #3

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

#### Leviticus 2:1-16

**1** “When anyone brings a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. He shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it **2** and bring it to Aaron's sons the priests. And he shall take from it a handful of the fine flour and oil, with all of its frankincense, and the priest shall burn this as its memorial portion on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. **3** But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the LORD's food offerings.

**4** “When you bring a grain offering baked in the oven as an offering, it shall be unleavened loaves of fine flour mixed with oil or unleavened wafers smeared with oil. **5** And if your offering is a grain offering baked on a griddle, it shall be of fine flour unleavened, mixed with oil. **6** You shall break it in pieces and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering. **7** And if your offering is a grain offering cooked in a pan, it shall be made of fine flour with oil. **8** And you shall bring the grain offering that is made of these things to the LORD, and when it is presented to the priest, he shall bring it to the altar. **9** And the priest shall take from the grain offering its memorial portion and burn this on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. **10** But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the LORD's food offerings.

**11** “No grain offering that you bring to the LORD shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey as a food offering to the LORD. **12** As an offering of firstfruits you may bring them to the LORD, but they shall not be offered on the altar for a pleasing aroma. **13** You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.

**14** “If you offer a grain offering of firstfruits to the LORD, you shall offer for the grain offering of your firstfruits fresh ears, roasted with fire, crushed new grain. **15** And you shall put oil on it and lay frankincense on it; it is a grain offering. **16** And the priest shall burn as its memorial portion some of the crushed grain and some of the oil with all of its frankincense; it is a food offering to the LORD.

#### **Introduction**

The Levitical regulations concerning sacrifices are surprisingly flexible. The first chapter outlines that if someone cannot afford a bull for animal sacrifices, a lamb or goat will do. If someone cannot afford a lamb or a goat, a pigeon or dove is acceptable. In matters of grain offering, the same dynamic is present. One who made a grain offering could do so with raw flour, baked bread, fried bread, or even ears of grain. The more important matter for the Lord is the proper observance of the sacrifice itself, which is done from the heart. The *sine qua non* aspects of the sacrifices, despite their general flexibility, reveal to us the true heart of the system God gave the Israelites.

#### **Vs.1-3**

**1** “When anyone brings a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. He shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it **2** and bring it to Aaron's sons the priests. And he shall take from it a handful of the fine flour and oil, with all of its frankincense, and the priest shall burn this as its memorial portion on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. **3** But the rest of the grain offering shall be for

Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the LORD's food offerings.

When this was written, Israel had only one recorded grain offering. Moses offered it alongside an animal sacrifice when erecting the Tabernacle. God's response to this was to fill the Tabernacle with His Glory.<sup>1</sup> This being the *first* offering at the altar was on account of the daily sacrificial requirement our Lord imposed for both morning and evening sacrifices.<sup>2</sup> Unless someone came to the priests with a private offering, the grain offering was not offered by itself. Even the grain offerings made during the feast of Firstfruits were performed as an accompaniment to a whole burnt offering.<sup>3</sup> Once the Israelites made it to the Promised Land, the core of their economy would be shaped by the dual forces of cattle ranching and farming, and the majority of sacrifices reflected this.

If the grain offering is flour, a certain protocol is observed. Oil (olive oil in particular) is poured on it first, to make it flammable. Frankincense adds an aroma to the offering which designates the act as holy. Since the grain offerings accompanied animal offerings, the frankincense may also have assisted in clearing away the smell of offal and blood from the altar. More importantly, both olive oil and frankincense come from *plants* reflecting the agrarian practices to come when the children of Israel begin living in their homeland. This means that even a farmer would have to make a real sacrifice from his produce as well. He must grow a variety of crops, or else make payments to other farmers, in order to make these sacrifices. Here, the economy of Israel was being formed before the conquest of Canaan even began, by dictating terms of sacrifice which ensures crop rotation, mutual aid between farmers, and a budding merchant class to make these items available. This is likely also the reason for the additional requirement of salt, which not only acts to preserve the sacrifice before it is offered but also creates a market for salt *merchants* within the Promised Land.

Note that only a handful of the grain offering is burned on the altar. Because the priests were not going to have a land inheritance outside of a few cities in Israel, the remainder of the offering provides them with a steady diet. Their access to meat was restricted, so the addition of olive oil and frankincense added nutrients to the flour for the priests to not only survive, but also to have the energy to conduct the massive amount of labor necessary for the sacrifices they had to make every day. Moses writes that it is a *most holy* part of the offering, rather than the part which went into the fire. The word for “holy” is *קֹדֶשׁ*,<sup>4</sup> denoting not only a sacred quality but also a *separate* quality to the substance. It is separate in that it was reserved especially for Aaron's family.

What made the food the priests ate so holy? It was the demonstration of absolute reliance Aaron and his sons had on God. With no ground of their own to till, the priesthood had an additional layer of uncertainty to the reception of their daily bread. They had to rely on God to make the crops grow, rely on Him inspiring the people to bring in their offerings, and for the weather conditions to be right for continuing to cook their food on the spot. In other words, Aaron and his sons were to model the Lord's prayer which states “give us this day our daily bread”<sup>6</sup> - and in turn, Christians are called to express a *priestly* reliance on the Lord through this prayer. With this we have the beginning of the universal priesthood foreshadowed by the Aaronic line and introduced by Christ before the Crucifixion even took place. The dynamic was such that if the people suffered from famine or war, the priesthood was called to suffer with them and pray for daily bread; it is for this reason that Eli's sons are condemned as harshly as they are, for they abused the sacrificial system so as to *thrive* during the time of crisis in which they dwelt.<sup>7</sup>

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1 Exodus 40:16:-38

2 Exodus 29:38-46

3 Leviticus 23:9-14

4 Transliterated “Kodesh,” Strong's #6944

5 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6944.htm>

6 Matthew 6:11

7 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 27-36

## Vs.4-10

4 “When you bring a grain offering baked in the oven as an offering, it shall be unleavened loaves of fine flour mixed with oil or unleavened wafers smeared with oil. 5 And if your offering is a grain offering baked on a griddle, it shall be of fine flour unleavened, mixed with oil. 6 You shall break it in pieces and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering. 7 And if your offering is a grain offering cooked in a pan, it shall be made of fine flour with oil. 8 And you shall bring the grain offering that is made of these things to the LORD, and when it is presented to the priest, he shall bring it to the altar. 9 And the priest shall take from the grain offering its memorial portion and burn this on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. 10 But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the LORD's food offerings.

Grain offerings were not identical, depending on how the person making the sacrifice chose to prepare the grain. This is likely a matter of convenience, and the long term planning of Leviticus comes into view with these options. As Moses writes the regulations for the Levites and priests, the children of Israel are *traveling*, making a community oven difficult to set up and tear down every day. Offering grain as fine flour or a pan-fried cake over a fire is simply easier to do for those on the move along with the priests. But when the children of Israel move into the land, traveling long distances with flour means the element for sacrifice is at greater risk for spoiling on account of weather or insects; when they are settled, carrying the grain offering as a loaf or pan-fried cake is more sensible. Yet the rules remain more or less the same, especially with the deepening connections between the priests and the welfare of the people. As with flour offerings, if the people prosper so do the priests – and if the people are in famine so are they.

## Vs.11-13

11 “No grain offering that you bring to the LORD shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey as a food offering to the LORD. 12 As an offering of firstfruits you may bring them to the LORD, but they shall not be offered on the altar for a pleasing aroma. 13 You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.

It would be tempting to say that the ban on leaven in grain offerings is on account of a symbolic connection between leaven and sin, but we must be careful. Sin is not compared to leaven until Christ does so, labeling the hypocrisy and false teachings of the Pharisees, sadducees and the Herodians as leaven.<sup>8</sup> St. Paul later directly uses leaven as a symbol for malice, evil and false teaching.<sup>9</sup> These are valid for the self-understanding of Christians today, especially as we do our best to extirpate sin from ourselves with the help of the Holy Spirit.

But the ancient Israelites themselves did not receive this message. If anything, the connection is made not to sin, but to the Exodus. Both before<sup>10</sup> and after<sup>11</sup> the tenth plague upon Egypt, rules are set for the children of Israel to *remember* the Passover and the seven days wherein unleavened bread was eaten. It was the diet they were given while fleeing slavery, and the remembrance of that moment was not to be solely observed in the yearly Passover feast day. By this we understand the triple use of the term *memorial* for the portion of grain sacrificed. Every single time the people made one of these offerings, they were reminded of the deliverance God gave them.

The priests, in having this portion of unleavened bread, stayed in a kind of permanent Passover remembrance. Their bread was all unleavened, their meat (when they received it in peace offerings) was roasted, and they had no land of their own to speak of for tilling; they were *always* remembering. In this way the priesthood *further* foreshadows the priesthood of all believers, in that we take

8 Matthew 16:5-12, Mark 8:15, Luke 12:1-2

9 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, Galatians 5:7-10

10 Exodus 12:14-20

11 Exodus 13:3-10

Communion and hear every time, “do this in remembrance of Me.”<sup>12</sup> Christians are called to be in a constant state of reminder for the Gospel and our deliverance from sin the same way the priesthood constantly ate unleavened bread to remember the Exodus.

### **Vs.14-16**

**14** “If you offer a grain offering of firstfruits to the LORD, you shall offer for the grain offering of your firstfruits fresh ears, roasted with fire, crushed new grain. **15** And you shall put oil on it and lay frankincense on it; it is a grain offering. **16** And the priest shall burn as its memorial portion some of the crushed grain and some of the oil with all of its frankincense; it is a food offering to the LORD.

The firstfruits offering here is distinct from the feast of firstfruits in Leviticus 23. Not all plants come to fruition at the same time, and perhaps a farmer would desire to make a private grain offering with the firstfruits of the season. If he does so, it is an offering of *roasted* grain, effectively turning it into a plant-version of the *roasted* lamb from the Passover.<sup>13,14</sup> It is also the first and freshest of the crops, the same way the Passover lamb was to be one year old. In other words, even the crops were to preach the Gospel as they understood it in their day.

The exact amount of grain to be sacrificed is not specified. This gives the priests breathing room to address any needs they may have for feeding their families. Nonetheless, in the case of firstfruits offerings, the fresh crops were to be unprepared except by their roasting. In this way, it is evident that they were not treated as any other grain would be (made into bread, cakes, etc.). Though later on roasted grain becomes a commonplace staple in Israel,<sup>15</sup> here it demonstrates *reserving* the grains for God.

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12 Luke 22:19 et.al.

13 Exodus 12:8-9

14 The method did admittedly differ, in that roasting corns of wheat is a slower process.

15 Ruth 2:14

## Leviticus Bible Study #4

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Leviticus 3:1-17

**1** “If his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers an animal from the herd, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD. **2** And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and kill it at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons the priests shall throw the blood against the sides of the altar. **3** And from the sacrifice of the peace offering, as a food offering to the LORD, he shall offer the fat covering the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, **4** and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. **5** Then Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering, which is on the wood on the fire; it is a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

**6** “If his offering for a sacrifice of peace offering to the LORD is an animal from the flock, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish. **7** If he offers a lamb for his offering, then he shall offer it before the LORD, **8** lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it in front of the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. **9** Then from the sacrifice of the peace offering he shall offer as a food offering to the LORD its fat; he shall remove the whole fat tail, cut off close to the backbone, and the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails **10** and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. **11** And the priest shall burn it on the altar as a food offering to the LORD.

**12** “If his offering is a goat, then he shall offer it before the LORD **13** and lay his hand on its head and kill it in front of the tent of meeting, and the sons of Aaron shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. **14** Then he shall offer from it, as his offering for a food offering to the LORD, the fat covering the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails **15** and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. **16** And the priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering with a pleasing aroma. All fat is the LORD'S. **17** It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood.”

### **Introduction**

The idea of a “peace offering” requires a maturity of faith among Christians today. Despite its simplicity of explanation, it is a practice which might be considered doctrinal “solid food” compared to the “milk”<sup>1</sup> of basic Christian doctrines. When we begin learning from the Catechism about the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Sacraments, these matters pertain almost exclusively to the believer's salvation and moral code of conduct - “milk” that everyone should imbibe regularly. Some of the more advanced doctrines, like typology or the Hypostatic Union, present a “solid food” to believers that bring them head knowledge. With *peace offerings*, the “solid food” is more in the relational context between God and man. This is because the offering itself is not merely a declaration of thanksgiving, but a moment of fellowship with God Himself. A proper understanding of these offerings challenges the typical fixation on matters of soteriology which keep men from having that fellowship in the first place. To understand them is to move beyond the mire of guilt and hierarchical thinking, and to see the necessity of treating God *personally*.

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1 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

## Vs.1-5

1 “If his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers an animal from the herd, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD. 2 And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and kill it at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons the priests shall throw the blood against the sides of the altar. 3 And from the sacrifice of the peace offering, as a food offering to the LORD, he shall offer the fat covering the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, 4 and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. 5 Then Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering, which is on the wood on the fire; it is a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

The phrase “peace offering” is rendered from one word. שְׁלָמִים, “Shelamim,” is the plural form of שָׁלֵם, “shelem.”<sup>23</sup> It is etymologically connected to the root שָׁלַם, “shalam,”<sup>45</sup> which is a broad term for amends, peace or completion. For a relationship to have “shalam” is for it to have met (or never had) any debts or hostilities. Though the Septuagint renders this sacrifice to be a “salvation offering,” using the word σωτηρίου,<sup>67</sup> suggested that these offerings were made for the broader term is preferred on account of the multifaceted use of the sacrifice.

Peace offerings were utilized in a variety of ways. They could be used to declare that peace had been reached between persons, or they could be used to *establish* peace between them. They were used in the completion of vows.<sup>8</sup> They could be used as a means of proclaiming a continued state of relations, as Joshua uses one for renewing the Covenant.<sup>9</sup> They were also a means of celebration, as David employed them when bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> While it had a wide range of applications, the theme is nonetheless the same: “there is shalam now,” whether that be in fulfillment of an agreement, a payment of debt, the end of a conflict, or even the expression of gratitude. Moses does not need to define the sacrifice for us on account of the name of the sacrifice itself, for this shared theme of peace or wholeness is self-explanatory.

Peace offerings were voluntary by nature, but the text assumes that people will want to perform them. Declaring peace or wholeness does not require a sacrifice in every matter, after all. However, making a sacrifice with the priesthood's involvement places the matter before our Lord, declaring it to Him as well as the other parties involved. For example, if we imagine two clans that had been in armed conflict with one another, the end of the conflict may include a peace offering so as to say “as God is our witness, we are no longer fighting.” God is called as a witness to the establishment of “shalam,” and invites Him to participate in it with His people.

So a peace offering proclaims peace – or, again, “shalam” – as one of the highest ideals in the Mosaic code. It is a state of affairs in which things are declared “right.” The Mosaic civil code includes things like forcing thieves to pay back fourfold what was stolen from them in order to *make* things right, thus restoring shalam. This is the prerequisite teleological *step* necessary to enjoy the benefits of a societal, personal or religious completeness and tranquility (which is more often referred to as *shalom*).<sup>11</sup> To put it more simply, the peace offerings declare that the principle of making peace has been accomplished, and now with God as witness both He and the people may enjoy its benefits.

One may notice that the peace offerings are all cows, sheep or goats. There is no provision for

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2 Strong's #8002

3 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8002.htm>

4 Strong's #7999

5 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/7999.htm>

6 Transliterated “sotereou,” Strong's #4992

7 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4992.htm>

8 Leviticus 7:16 (more on this when we reach the seventh chapter).

9 Joshua 8:30-32

10 2 Samuel 6:17-19

11 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/7965.htm>

birds to be offered, and thus the poor were likely unable to make many of these sacrifices. This is likely intentional, as the status of a poor man has an inherent lack of the wholeness that the offering is celebrating. Anxiety over where he shall obtain his next meal, misery over his low estate, or in enduring conflict with men he competes with for occupational opportunities means that he (and by extension all the impoverished) necessarily does not have much “shalam” in his life. Yet the amount of meat on a cow or goat gives an opportunity for the more wealthy members of the nation to *bring* that peace to those less fortunate than themselves.

### **Vs.6-11**

**6** “If his offering for a sacrifice of peace offering to the LORD is an animal from the flock, male or female, he shall offer it without blemish. **7** If he offers a lamb for his offering, then he shall offer it before the LORD, **8** lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it in front of the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. **9** Then from the sacrifice of the peace offering he shall offer as a food offering to the LORD its fat; he shall remove the whole fat tail, cut off close to the backbone, and the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails **10** and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. **11** And the priest shall burn it on the altar as a food offering to the LORD.

Of course, the peace offering proclaiming that peace has been made is something ultimately fulfilled by Christ with the Atonement and His Return. St. Paul celebrates the inclusion of the Gentiles into the Kingdom of God by saying that Jesus made *peace* between God, believing Gentiles and believing Jews.<sup>12</sup> Isaiah prophesied that our Savior would be the Prince of Peace who would bring this world to an everlasting peace. What the Mosaic peace offering declares in the moment, Christ establishes eternally; not merely the absence of conflict, but all things being made right. The Old Testament prophesies concerning the Messiah led to a strong understanding that He would be the one to solve the problem of evil forever.

Outside of predicting the Atonement, there is no discernible reason for the means by which the peace offering is conducted. Just like the laws concerning burnt offerings, the one offering up the bull or lamb or goat must offer one that is *spotless*, and place his hand upon its head. The priests must still bathe the altar in the blood of the animal. When making offerings for sin, this is a sensible motion, declaring that the animal's blood was shed for the sin committed by the one making the offering. But here, it appears absurd that someone would “declare” that the animal's blood had anything to do with the peace that is already recognized as being established prior to the offering. But in the context of the *Gospel*, the peace offering is easily clarified as a prophetic movement. Every time these offerings were made, they proclaimed that one day there would be peace between God and men on account of the shed blood of the Lamb of God.

### **Vs.12-17**

**12** “If his offering is a goat, then he shall offer it before the LORD **13** and lay his hand on its head and kill it in front of the tent of meeting, and the sons of Aaron shall throw its blood against the sides of the altar. **14** Then he shall offer from it, as his offering for a food offering to the LORD, the fat covering the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails **15** and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. **16** And the priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering with a pleasing aroma. All fat is the LORD's.

**17** It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood.”

Fatty portions of the animals sacrificed were reserved for the Lord. Much ink has been spilled

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<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 2:11-16

claiming that this was a way of rebuffing the pagan practice of ceremonially eating fat from their sacrifices, but the text itself does not make such a claim: though it may or may not be true, it does not veer the text away from its main point. The fattiest parts of the animal are given to the Lord for a *food offering*, meaning that the intent is for God to enjoy the celebratory meal of the offering *with* the people who made it. And if God is present, then it honors Him to receive the “choice cut” of the meat.

In later parts of the Old Testament, the implications of this part of the sacrifice had to be clarified. The Israelites took the “food offering” aspect of things too far, to the point where God found it necessary to condemn the notion that He literally ate the sacrifices or drank their blood; apparently this “carnalist” error was in vogue among the Israelites by the time Asaph was tasked with correcting it.<sup>13</sup> The reason for the choicest fats to be burned was in honor of God's presence among those making the peace offering. This is to say, Moses writes concerning the peace offering as a moment where the Lord Himself is there among men during their feasting, enjoying a moment of fellowship with His people. It was an expression of *friendship* with the Lord, spending time with Him in a way not unlike the offerings of Abraham, whom God declares to be a personal friend.<sup>14</sup>

Each time a peace offering was made, a sort of pantomime of the Gospel writ large was performed. The blood of the spotless Lamb of God *brings* the peace which these sacrifices pointed to, and then for those beneficiaries of the sacrifice they are permitted to be *in God's friendly, peaceful presence*. The celebratory meal, wherein the people have spend time with God on this basis, points to the ultimate fulfillment of all things, the final Day by which eternal joy is secured. Thus the offering is unique, in that it does not present God as Judge, but as the King of His beloved friends who spend their time with Him. In this sense, the “shalam” principle stressed by Moses throughout the Law is fulfilled, meaning that there is nothing preventing the Lord from being there in the moment; for the duration of the peace offering observance, men are in something like an edenic state – the space is made sacred, and the people enjoying the meal would be made stronger in their faith on account of it.

This deepens our understanding of the Eucharist, which by even that name suggests a continuity of purpose.<sup>15</sup> Everyone involved with a peace offering ate of the sacrifice, from the laity to the priests to even our Lord enjoying the aroma of the fat being burned. The benefit of the offering assumes that peace has already been established, so now it is time to declare it; so too do we hold that Christ has already gone to the Cross in our stead and risen again, so now He comes to us with His Body and Blood to proclaim peace to our hearts. Like the correction of Psalm 50, our Heavenly Father is not eating, but observing the peace established and proclaimed by Christ, and rejoicing at the fellowship won for us.

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13 Psalm 50:12-15

14 Isaiah 41:8-10

15 The word “Eucharist” means “thanksgiving,” the other term for peace offerings in the Old Testament.

## Leviticus Bible Study #5

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Leviticus 4:1-35

**1** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the LORD'S commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them, **3** if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering. **4** He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD and lay his hand on the head of the bull and kill the bull before the LORD. **5** And the anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting, **6** and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle part of the blood seven times before the LORD in front of the veil of the sanctuary. **7** And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense before the LORD that is in the tent of meeting, and all the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. **8** And all the fat of the bull of the sin offering he shall remove from it, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails **9** and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys **10** (just as these are taken from the ox of the sacrifice of the peace offerings); and the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering. **11** But the skin of the bull and all its flesh, with its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung— **12** all the rest of the bull—he shall carry outside the camp to a clean place, to the ash heap, and shall burn it up on a fire of wood. On the ash heap it shall be burned up.

**13** “If the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the LORD'S commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt, **14** when the sin which they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull from the herd for a sin offering and bring it in front of the tent of meeting. **15** And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD, and the bull shall be killed before the LORD. **16** Then the anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the tent of meeting, **17** and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD in front of the veil. **18** And he shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is in the tent of meeting before the LORD, and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. **19** And all its fat he shall take from it and burn on the altar. **20** Thus shall he do with the bull. As he did with the bull of the sin offering, so shall he do with this. And the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven. **21** And he shall carry the bull outside the camp and burn it up as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly.

**22** “When a leader sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by the commandments of the LORD his God ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, **23** or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a goat, a male without blemish, **24** and shall lay his hand on the head of the goat and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD; it is a sin offering. **25** Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering. **26** And all its fat he shall burn on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings. So the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and he shall be forgiven.

**27** “If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD'S commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, **28** or the sin which he has

committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. **29** And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill the sin offering in the place of burnt offering. **30** And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. **31** And all its fat he shall remove, as the fat is removed from the peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.

**32** “If he brings a lamb as his offering for a sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish **33** and lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill it for a sin offering in the place where they kill the burnt offering. **34** Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. **35** And all its fat he shall remove as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar, on top of the LORD's food offerings. And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.

## Introduction

Moses has written God's commandments regarding burnt offerings, grain offerings, and peace offerings. These are respectively concerned with scheduled sacrifices, offerings to accompany other sacrifices, and devotions which invite God and one's community to a moment of harmonious fellowship. Now however it is time to address the matter of sin, which receives much more attention, and for good reason. The sin of golden calf incident led to the establishment of a priestly tribe and class in the first place, with the Israelites having by and large abdicated their priestly rights through that act of apostasy. From that moment on, Aaron and his family were no longer the first among equals in a nation of priests,<sup>1</sup> but now the sole functioning intermediaries between men and God.<sup>2</sup> As animal sacrifices were the chief means of dealing with sin while under the Old Covenant, utmost importance is placed on the sin offering as a core (and perhaps most frequent) aspect of Israelite religious life, and this expands on the sacerdotal role of Aaron.

## Vs.1-3

**1** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them, **3** if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering.

In the matter of dealing with sins, the text provides a clarification regarding the particular nature of the offenses covered by the blood of animals. These are sins which are committed “unintentionally,” not those done with full assent of someone's will. Voluntary sins, that which arises out of our concupiscence, are those with **עֲוֹן**,<sup>34</sup> sins of guilt or iniquity which are dealt with later in the book and typically by the death penalty (if the offense is deemed to be casting the Mosaic Law aside entirely).<sup>5</sup>

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1 Exodus 19:6

2 Not the other way around of course – it should go without saying that God did not have to go through the priests to interact with people independently, as He does plenty of times in the Old Testament. However, if any Israelite man wanted to approach God properly outside of mere prayer and observance of the Law, he had to do so through the priesthood.

3 Transliterated “Avon,” Strong's #5771

4 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5771.htm>

5 Hebrews 10:28, Numbers 15:30

These sins which merit sin offerings are **שְׁגָגָה**,<sup>67</sup> which denote *mistakes*, those violations which are not done by active decision. A man could accidentally take something that does not belong to him, or touch priestly implements which are not lawful for him to touch, etc., necessitating this sort of offering to mitigate the violation of sacred space.

The concept of sacred space is mysterious and not well understood, but we shall make the attempt. When the universe was created by our Lord, He observed that it was “very good.”<sup>8</sup> The entirety of creation was devoted to God in such a way that there were quite literally *no problems*. But after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in Eden, God pronounces the earth to be cursed on account of Adam's transgression;<sup>9</sup> creation was no longer “very good” by nature. Whereas once the whole world was sacred, now it is not: in order for proper worship to be observed, space had to be dedicated to God, or made *sacred*, most often accomplished with sacrifices. Moses first encounters this doctrine personally when he meets God at the burning bush in Midian, wherein our Lord tells him “take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”<sup>10</sup> Later on in Leviticus, God informs the Israelites that they are conquering Canaan because the previous inhabitants rendered it unclean on account of their sins.<sup>11</sup> Sin defiles a place, while proper sacrifices render it holy once more; the morning and evening sacrifices maintain the sacred nature of the space the Israelites inhabit while sin offerings restore it when it is violated. Before the Atonement, which greatly eased the process of forgiveness and restoration of holiness to the Lord,<sup>12</sup> these sacrifices had to happen frequently if the people wanted to have anything like a national relationship with God.

In the Mosaic code, there is no appeal to being unaware of one's sin or ignorant of God's Commandments. Morality is absolute according to the deed and its nature. Yet because of man's frailty and the effects of sin upon the mind, sacrifices such as these were of utmost necessity. One may forget that he had sinned, only to remember it later; a sin may be committed without one being in his right mind; one could violate laws concerning cleanness without realizing that he or she was unclean.<sup>13</sup> All sins, whether with assent of the will or not, violated sacred space during these times.<sup>14</sup>

The priest is first in line in the requirements for sin offerings, because his unintentional sins bring “guilt” on the people. This “guilt” is **אֲשָׁמָה**,<sup>1516</sup> a state of trespass which must be redressed in order to be right with God once more. This is not about moral condemnation, and the people are not morally blamed for the priest's sin. It is more about *substantive* condemnation; the sin the priest commits is placed on the people in such a fashion as to taint them, because his sin stains all the sacrifices he conducted before atoning. The conception of sin in Leviticus and elsewhere in Scripture is as a foreign entity, a sort of negating *substance* which disrupts the life and soul of the person who has it as well as the space in which the people live. It is in line with “sin and concupiscence as indwelling entity” in St. Paul's writing as well,<sup>17</sup> but the exact nature of it is mysterious. One may liken the “sin entity,” or the moral stain of sin, to a kind of fungus that can only be detected in human perception by worsened behavior – sin leading to more sin – yet perfectly perceptible to God, who demands a cleansing

6 Transliterated “shgagah,” Strong's #7684

7 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/7684.htm>

8 Genesis 1:31

9 Genesis 3:17

10 Exodus 3:5

11 Leviticus 18:24-25

12 Matthew 27:51

13 An easy example would be the husband and wife who lie together in the middle of the night, not realizing that the wife's menstrual cycle had begun and thus being in violation of Leviticus 18:19

14 Sacred space is won much more easily under the New Covenant, in that the absolution of the saints clears away their sin without the sacrifice of animals and happens both in and out of the Divine Service.

15 Transliterated “ashmah,” Strong's #819

16 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/819.htm>

17 Romans 7:7-20

sacrifice to remedy the corruption. The priest's sin violates the sacred space around the Tabernacle, rendering peace offerings and sin offerings and burnt offerings that he performs *all* tainted until his sin is dealt with. Here the necessity for sacrificing a spotless bull is more sharply understood; the spotless individual animal is slain on behalf of the stained populace.

#### **Vs.4-12**

**4** He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD and lay his hand on the head of the bull and kill the bull before the LORD. **5** And the anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting, **6** and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle part of the blood seven times before the LORD in front of the veil of the sanctuary. **7** And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense before the LORD that is in the tent of meeting, and all the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. **8** And all the fat of the bull of the sin offering he shall remove from it, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails **9** and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys **10** (just as these are taken from the ox of the sacrifice of the peace offerings); and the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering. **11** But the skin of the bull and all its flesh, with its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung— **12** all the rest of the bull—he shall carry outside the camp to a clean place, to the ash heap, and shall burn it up on a fire of wood. On the ash heap it shall be burned up.

Animal atonement is not as simple a matter as a burnt offering or a peace offering. Whereas the animal for a burnt offering is slaughtered and its blood is splashed on the altar before the body of the animal is arranged, sin offerings required a more in depth process with more of a *message*. The hand is laid on the animal and the priest slaughters it before the Lord, showing a life being taken in his stead. Blood is sprinkled before the veil of the sanctuary and on the altar of incense to attach the life of the animal<sup>18</sup> both to the presence of God (whose special presence was within the Most Holy Place with the Ark), and to the incense which represents the prayers of the saints; it is a physical way of saying “with the life of this animal we humbly approach You and seek Your forgiveness.” In other words, it is not the sacrifice itself which makes the space sacred, but God is being *asked* to rededicate the man and the space unto Himself. The author of Hebrews informs us that the priesthood serves “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things,”<sup>19</sup> meaning that the sacrifice was intended to mimic heavenly realities; by this we understand that they were looking forward to the Atonement.

The best parts of the bull are offered to the Lord for accepting the offered animal, and the rest is summarily burned – without anyone taking its meat. In the immediate context, expiation of unintentional sins, this ensures that the person who makes the sacrifice is *actually sacrificing* something; even the priests have to give their own bulls, demonstrating that they are not “above” the other Israelites and certainly not above the Law. Yet the prohibition on having any meat left over from the sin offering looks forward to the superior priesthood of Christ. The priest can only sprinkle blood on the altar of incense, while the Christian is entirely covered by the Blood of Christ and joins Him in bearing one's Cross. And as for the meat itself, as Hebrews says:

**10** We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. **11**  
For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by  
the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. **12** So Jesus also  
suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.  
**13** Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he  
endured.<sup>20</sup>

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18 The blood is considered the life of the animal – Genesis 9:4

19 Hebrews 8:5

20 Hebrews 13:10-13

## Vs.13-21

**13** “If the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt, **14** when the sin which they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull from the herd for a sin offering and bring it in front of the tent of meeting. **15** And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD, and the bull shall be killed before the LORD. **16** Then the anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the tent of meeting, **17** and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD in front of the veil. **18** And he shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is in the tent of meeting before the LORD, and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. **19** And all its fat he shall take from it and burn on the altar. **20** Thus shall he do with the bull. As he did with the bull of the sin offering, so shall he do with this. And the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven. **21** And he shall carry the bull outside the camp and burn it up as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly.

Typically we think of sin as something done by an individual, and something done with intent. Not only does God require sacrifices of each Israelite for unintentional sin, but also for the nation *corporately*.<sup>21</sup> The Israelites could be led astray by bad practices, blight on their crops for food offerings, mistaken trends in sacrificing cattle (that is, masses of sacrifices being blemished and therefore unacceptable), etc. This excludes horrendous national sins like apostasy, as with the Balaam incident or the golden calf debacle; those were punished directly by God. But when Israel sins mistakenly, the correction is relatively mild, with only one bull sufficing for the entire assembly. If this were not the case, then the Israelites would have run out of cattle in short order, as unintentional sins happen every day. There is every reason to suspect that these communal sin offerings were made with some regularity on account of that fact, and the elders of Israel met frequently to represent their tribes as they placed their hands on the bull.

The sufficiency of the bull for the sins of all the people is a typological matter as well. Christ's death on the Cross paid for all the sins of humanity, every man and woman and child who ever was and ever will be.<sup>22</sup> If one unblemished bull pays for the unintentional sins of a single nation, how much *more* shall the Son of God pay for *all* sins, both intentional and unintentional, by *His* spilled blood? Every sacrifice Moses writes about is consciously a forward-looking prophetic moment which proclaims the future, greater, perfect sacrifice of the Son of God.

## Vs.22-35

**22** “When a leader sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by the commandments of the LORD his God ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, **23** or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a goat, a male without blemish, **24** and shall lay his hand on the head of the goat and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD; it is a sin offering. **25** Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering. **26** And all its fat he shall burn on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings. So the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and he shall be forgiven.

**27** “If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, **28** or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. **29** And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill the sin offering in the place of burnt offering. **30** And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of

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21 The Scriptures answer the question of the one and the many with “yes.” Both individuals and collectives exist and are mutually accountable.

22 John 1:29

burnt offering and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. **31** And all its fat he shall remove, as the fat is removed from the peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.

**32** “If he brings a lamb as his offering for a sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish **33** and lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill it for a sin offering in the place where they kill the burnt offering. **34** Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. **35** And all its fat he shall remove as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar, on top of the LORD's food offerings. And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.

The sins of the priest were considered worse than those of an individual, and thus a smaller sacrifice is required for both tribal leaders and “common people” alike. A priest sinning requires a more valuable sacrifice, a bull, on account of the potential for his sin to stain the people, whose sin collectively is taken care of by a bull as well; as goes the priest, so goes the people. But when it comes to individual Israelites, whether aristocrat or pauper, they are treated the same.

In the next chapter there is a provision for the poor to offer turtledoves or pigeons instead of goats or lambs, but in this moment the emphasis is placed on the relative status of both leader and commoner. Just as the priest is no better than the average Israelite in needing his sins forgiven, a tribal chieftain is no better than the average farm worker in God's eyes. The two are unequal *coram mundo* or “facing the world,” with the leadership having greater privileges, wealth and authority than the commoner; but *coram Deo*, facing God, they are considered equals entirely. No one can say they are above the Law on account of their high social status, nor can they say they are beneath it because they are too lowly. Here, God demands faithfulness from *everyone*.

Moses takes for granted that the experience of being a sinner is universal among the children of Israel. Though he writes many “if” statements, so that if someones sins then the rules for sacrifice are readily available, the process is given in such detail that the text clearly assumes this shall happen. In other words, the exegete may read each “if” statement regarding sins as “when” statements, highlighting the universality of sin in humanity. This becomes evident over time, such that David appeals directly to God for cleansing him of all his sins,<sup>23</sup> and St. Paul says in no uncertain terms that everyone is a sinner.<sup>24</sup> The Mosaic sacrifice system ameliorated the effects of sin on sacred space and granted *some* absolution, but if it did any more than that then the sacrifices would have stopped on account of the people no longer sinning. Yet here we see that the system could not remove their sinfulness itself, nor make them righteous, nor truly win the favor of God.

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23 Psalm 19:12

24 Romans 3:23

## Leviticus Bible Study #6

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Leviticus 5:1-13

**1** “If anyone sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity; **2** or if anyone touches an unclean thing, whether a carcass of an unclean wild animal or a carcass of unclean livestock or a carcass of unclean swarming things, and it is hidden from him and he has become unclean, and he realizes his guilt; **3** or if he touches human uncleanness, of whatever sort the uncleanness may be with which one becomes unclean, and it is hidden from him, when he comes to know it, and realizes his guilt; **4** or if anyone utters with his lips a rash oath to do evil or to do good, any sort of rash oath that people swear, and it is hidden from him, when he comes to know it, and he realizes his guilt in any of these; **5** when he realizes his guilt in any of these and confesses the sin he has committed, **6** he shall bring to the LORD as his compensation for the sin that he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat, for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.

**7** “But if he cannot afford a lamb, then he shall bring to the LORD as his compensation for the sin that he has committed two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. **8** He shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer first the one for the sin offering. He shall wring its head from its neck but shall not sever it completely, **9** and he shall sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering on the side of the altar, while the rest of the blood shall be drained out at the base of the altar; it is a sin offering. **10** Then he shall offer the second for a burnt offering according to the rule. And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.

**11** “But if he cannot afford two turtledoves or two pigeons, then he shall bring as his offering for the sin that he has committed a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering. He shall put no oil on it and shall put no frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering. **12** And he shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take a handful of it as its memorial portion and burn this on the altar, on the LORD's food offerings; it is a sin offering. **13** Thus the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed in any one of these things, and he shall be forgiven. And the remainder shall be for the priest, as in the grain offering.”

### **Introduction**

At first glance, these verses sound as though they are a kind of civic law. An offense has been committed, thereby violating sacred space, and the prescription is to make a sin offering which satisfies the Divine Law on the matter. No one, not even the priest, is exempt from these requirements and anyone caught refusing to obey them would necessarily be executed.<sup>1</sup> The list, and the required sacrifices, appear to be punitive in nature. Yet there is an issue with this notion which requires us to see it in a different light, namely that of *enforcement*. How was it that someone was to be “caught” having touched an unclean thing or having stayed quiet when they could have testified? Israel had no surveillance system, especially not in their wilderness sojourn, and the people were often too busy to “tattle” on others. In most cases, the only one who could accurately decide on the occasion to make a remedial sin offering was the offender himself. Speaking to Moses, God determines that the matter of unintentional sins must for all intents and purposes operate on the honor system.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 10:28

Whether or not a sin offering was made for unintended offenses relied entirely on the offender realizing his guilt and making amends to God. But this does not mean that these offerings are *voluntary*. Though these offerings are movements of piety in the individual, it is a *mandated* piety which God solemnly commands. The man who made a rash oath ought to have had the sort of conscience that directed him to an awareness of that sin. The believer who touched something unclean ought to be careful not to touch them in the first place. In this sense, the commands not only inspire private piety, but also bring a heightened awareness to God's standards in the minds of the faithful.

## Vs.1-6

**1** “If anyone sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity; **2** or if anyone touches an unclean thing, whether a carcass of an unclean wild animal or a carcass of unclean livestock or a carcass of unclean swarming things, and it is hidden from him and he has become unclean, and he realizes his guilt; **3** or if he touches human uncleanness, of whatever sort the uncleanness may be with which one becomes unclean, and it is hidden from him, when he comes to know it, and realizes his guilt; **4** or if anyone utters with his lips a rash oath to do evil or to do good, any sort of rash oath that people swear, and it is hidden from him, when he comes to know it, and he realizes his guilt in any of these; **5** when he realizes his guilt in any of these and confesses the sin he has committed, **6** he shall bring to the LORD as his compensation for the sin that he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat, for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.

The list of offenses is not exhaustive. In the previous chapter, *any* unintentional sin brought into attention is shown to be cause for a sin offering. But if the people were to understand the proper use of the offerings, then they needed to have a number of examples for their understanding. Thus with this passage that there is a *catechetical* use for Leviticus, and it is “top down” catechesis. God taught Moses these commands, and in turn he writes them for instructing Aaron and his sons and the Levites; from there, the Levites are tasked with ensuring the people understand them and apply them. Leviticus itself was *never* meant to remain cloistered within the priesthood as an internal document, but through this “trickle down” method helped establish the knowledge of the people. While it is not a direct command, it is clear that this system contributes to the general way the Church performs discipleship to this day, using a seminary and vicarage system to teach ministers who then teach the laity.

We may think of the offenses listed as “food for thought,” matters on which the average Israelite may meditate and learn deeper principles. A man who does not testify in court when he could contribute is held guilty and must make an offering; thus Moses teaches that obstructing or delaying justice is sinful. Doing so violates sacred space by disrupting the way things *ought to be*, or the Mosaic legal principle of “shalom,” requiring getting back to it in reflection of the principle of “shalam,” as discussed with the peace offerings.<sup>2</sup>

The Israelites are also catechized regarding the cleanliness standards and oaths in this way. The command is absolute, meaning a man was required to make a sacrifice for becoming unclean, even if he bathed before he learned of his offense. The laity, upon hearing this, are then prompted to *meditate* on why that must be, and thus they learn of the nature of the uncleanness; the Psalms later explicitly teach this practice.<sup>3</sup> If a man was to become unknowingly unclean, then his day to day activity causes other things to become unclean too, thus disrupting the sacred space of the congregation; he still bears responsibility to make amends. Oaths include the obligation to take responsibility for the result of their terms, so a man making a rash oath may find himself unwittingly causing damage to his neighbors in

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<sup>2</sup> In summary, “shalom” in the Mosaic Law is not merely peace, but a state in which things are right and functioning as they ought to. Shalom is the principle of *returning* to that state of being via making amends, paying reparations, or performing sacrifices. Thus, with peace offerings – or *shelamim* – the people declare that Shalom has been observed and Shalom is the current state of things.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 1:1-2. Psalm 119 in its entirety.

the same way that the unclean man does. Every command of this sort teaches the ancient Israelites not only how things ought to be, but how they can get back to that state, a sort of instruction on the practice of shalam.

### Vs.7-13

7 “But if he cannot afford a lamb, then he shall bring to the LORD as his compensation for the sin that he has committed two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. 8 He shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer first the one for the sin offering. He shall wring its head from its neck but shall not sever it completely, 9 and he shall sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering on the side of the altar, while the rest of the blood shall be drained out at the base of the altar; it is a sin offering. 10 Then he shall offer the second for a burnt offering according to the rule. And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.

11 “But if he cannot afford two turtledoves or two pigeons, then he shall bring as his offering for the sin that he has committed a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering. He shall put no oil on it and shall put no frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering. 12 And he shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take a handful of it as its memorial portion and burn this on the altar, on the LORD's food offerings; it is a sin offering. 13 Thus the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed in any one of these things, and he shall be forgiven. And the remainder shall be for the priest, as in the grain offering.”

As all men are held accountable to the Law, all social classes are given the opportunity to make sin offerings through a mediating priest. Everyone is under the general mandate toward private and public piety. Note then the responsibility placed upon the Levites in this Law. Again, God catechized Moses and Moses catechized the priests and Levites, who were charged with catechizing the people. Since the sacrifices are available to all social classes from prince to pauper, the Levites could not deny instruction to anyone. The Israelite had a right to know God's Law and be educated in it for the sake of obedience; these commands are written to accomplish just that in accordance with later command.<sup>4</sup>

A lamb is shown as the preferred sacrifice, but two doves or pigeons will suffice as well. One for sprinkling of blood, the other being for a burnt offering. This is likely out of practical consideration, given the smaller volume of blood in a single dove and the risk of damaging its body and losing a piece of the bird while it is being drained out. The priests were not expected to sift through blood and ashes to find a piece of the spinal cord or head if it accidentally became fully severed. Even if they did, such would go against the principle of sacrificing a bird for a *whole* burnt offering.

We must note also that the atonement offered here is one which foreshadows the imputed righteousness of Christ to believers and our justification by faith. The act of killing an animal does not undo a man's silence when he could testify, and nor does it actually remove uncleanness from the assembly. But the man who realizes his sin has righteousness imputed to him, *counted* as being his when the animal is sacrificed. He is treated as though he had not made anyone unclean or stayed silent when he could have given testimony or given a rash vow. The slate is wiped clean *for the man who benefits from the sacrifice*, even though the effects of his indiscretion may still occur. On his part, he was to trust that his offense had truly been undone by the atoning sacrifice, and thus he was in good standing with God again. The parallel is clear, that Christians today trust that through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ for all their sins their relationship with God is made whole again through the imputation of our Savior's righteousness.

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4 Leviticus 10:10-11

## Leviticus Bible Study #7

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Leviticus 5:14-6:7

**5:14** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **15** “If anyone commits a breach of faith and sins unintentionally in any of the holy things of the LORD, he shall bring to the LORD as his compensation, a ram without blemish out of the flock, valued in silver shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, for a guilt offering. **16** He shall also make restitution for what he has done amiss in the holy thing and shall add a fifth to it and give it to the priest. And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering, and he shall be forgiven.

**17** “If anyone sins, doing any of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, though he did not know it, then realizes his guilt, he shall bear his iniquity. **18** He shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent, for a guilt offering, and the priest shall make atonement for him for the mistake that he made unintentionally, and he shall be forgiven. **19** It is a guilt offering; he has indeed incurred guilt before the LORD.”

**6:1** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the LORD by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor **3** or has found something lost and lied about it, swearing falsely—in any of all the things that people do and sin thereby— **4** if he has sinned and has realized his guilt and will restore what he took by robbery or what he got by oppression or the deposit that was committed to him or the lost thing that he found **5** or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt. **6** And he shall bring to the priest as his compensation to the LORD a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent, for a guilt offering. **7** And the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven for any of the things that one may do and thereby become guilty.”

### Introduction

Thus far the Mosaic system of sacrifice has been concerned with matters of fellowship with God, proper offerings to Him, and the restoration of sacred space over unintentional sins. Now Moses addresses the topic of those sins which are best classified as a “breach of faith,” wherein the offender must offer up an act of true penance on account of the offense having a greater severity. Here we are witness to God's distinctions in moral culpability for different sins, something which demonstrates His mercy – and His understanding – upon all.

### Ch.5 Vs.14-19

**14** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **15** “If anyone commits a breach of faith and sins unintentionally in any of the holy things of the LORD, he shall bring to the LORD as his compensation, a ram without blemish out of the flock, valued in silver shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, for a guilt offering. **16** He shall also make restitution for what he has done amiss in the holy thing and shall add a fifth to it and give it to the priest. And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering, and he shall be forgiven.

**17** “If anyone sins, doing any of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, though he did not know it, then realizes his guilt, he shall bear his iniquity. **18** He shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent, for a guilt offering, and the priest shall make atonement for him for the mistake that he made unintentionally, and he shall be forgiven. **19** It is a guilt offering; he has indeed incurred guilt before the LORD.”

The term “breach of faith” is an approximate translation. **מעל**<sup>12</sup> is a noun form of the verb **מעל**,<sup>34</sup> and both are used in sequence in the fourteenth verse. While it would be more poetic and in line with Moses' alliterative writing style to translate the verse as saying “if anyone sins a sin,” it would miss the deeper meaning. Both involve an active decision on the part of the offender to do something bad and violate trust with another person. These are not accidental sins, unlike the **שגגה** sin<sup>56</sup> that is mentioned in the same verse. God relates to Moses here that, whether intentional or unintentional, violation of the Tabernacles implements requires more than a mere guilt offering.

The fine imposed alongside the animal sacrifice goes to the priests, because a disservice has been done to them in addition to the violation of sacred space whether the offense was intentional or not. For example, if a man has a stomach illness and vomits on the altar, thereby ruining a sacrifice that was in progress, he must make the guilt offering and offer an additional one-fifth of the ram's value. After all, the priests would have to reconsecrate the altar, which means more sacrifices, and then they have to re-do the first interrupted offering! If a man decided in a fit of rage to knock over the lampstand by the showbread, the same penalty is incurred. The Law imposes the same correction upon both intentional and unintentional offenses because the result is the same. In the case of violating the holy things at the Tabernacle, space must be reconsecrated, rites re-performed, etc. The priests determining the additional fee to be paid by the “shekel of the sanctuary” is in line with their having been affected by the violation.

The penalties are the same. This is in keeping with the principle of *Shalom* in Leviticus. *Shalom*, often translated as “peace,” is when everything is as it ought to be: conflict is absent, space is uncorrupted, and the people treat each other with fairness and love. When this state of affairs is broken, then efforts must be made to bring it back to that place of well-being. *Shalom* is the term for these efforts, making things right by positive action: in the case of disturbing the holy things of the Lord, a guilt offering is made to God and restitution is made to the priests. In legal cases like theft, as the sixth chapter discusses, *Shalom* is shown by returning what was stolen and adding a fee for the costs the victim of theft experienced.

After discussing the “compensation offering” (as some exegetes have called it), Moses then restates the purpose, circumstances and cost for *most* guilt offerings, summarizing the commandments given in the fourth chapter of Leviticus. He does not go into detail regarding which animal is to be sacrificed for which person according to their station or wealth status, wrapping these requirements as the “equivalent” to a ram as discussed in previous chapters. In other words, he brings up the general standards for guilt offerings as a means of reminder. While unintentional sins committed regarding the holy things in the Tabernacle have the one-fifth extra cost added, in other cases only the standard guilt offering is required.

## Ch.6 Vs.1-7

1The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the LORD by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor 3 or has found something lost and lied about it, swearing falsely—in any of all the things that people do and sin thereby— 4 if he has sinned and has realized his guilt and will restore what he took by robbery or what he got by oppression or the deposit that was committed to him or the lost thing that he found 5 or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs on the

1 Transliterated “Maal,” Strong's 4604

2 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4604.htm>

3 Also transliterated “Maal,” Strong's #4603

4 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4603.htm>

5 Transliterated “shgagah,” Strong's 7684

6 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/7684.htm>

day he realizes his guilt. **6** And he shall bring to the priest as his compensation to the LORD a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent, for a guilt offering. **7** And the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD, and he shall be forgiven for any of the things that one may do and thereby become guilty.”

The Tabernacle furnishings are not the only things to which “Maal” may be committed. Any intentional breach of the Second Greatest Commandment<sup>7</sup> also requires both sacrifice and restitution.<sup>8</sup> It is not coincidental. Whenever someone defrauds his neighbor, plunders him, or swears falsely, they are offending God (hence the necessity for a sacrifice) and harming their neighbor, adding the requirement of extra restitution. If someone has broken a single one of the Ten Commandments, then he or she has broken more commandments at the same time. Any sin we commit against our neighbors will displease our Lord, hence the need for both offering and restitution. Yet when a sin is more against God's standards for things like cleanliness, then only He requires restitution in the form of the offering; where our neighbors have not been made to suffer or materially damaged in some way, they remain between us and God (*without* easing the requirement of receiving absolution and doing our best not to re-offend).

Though the sin was intentional, the offender must still “realize his guilt.” This is to say, the restitution can only come from the penitent when they, by contrition, decide to make amends and perform penitential acts. The text presumes that these are situations when someone sins and effectively *gets away with it*; here is their chance to perform *Shalam* and make amends by the prescribed method as an act of voluntary piety. Otherwise, they are under the civic penalties as described in later portions of the Law, which are harsher.<sup>9</sup> This dynamic, wherein one receives more lenient treatment on account of their willingness to repent, has a deeper pattern in Scripture. If a man covets his sin, he is liable to strict and harsh punishment. Yet if he repents, then there is a spotless lamb who dies for him. So it is under the New Covenant as well; whoever covets their sin and resists the Holy Spirit only has Judgment to look forward to, while those who repent and believe have their sins covered by Christ's precious Blood.

Speaking of our Savior, He refers to this pious kind of *Shalam* act in the Sermon on the Mount. God speaks to Moses about a man repenting and making amends with the man he offended before making his guilt offering here, thus guaranteeing him a more lenient experience. Christ says:

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. **25** Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. **26** Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.<sup>10</sup>

The dynamic is the same, for Christ is the very same Divine One who spoke to Moses while he wrote Leviticus. Christians are to have the same attitude of active piety and making things right as the Old Covenant believers were, only now we have much greater freedom in our pursuit of it.

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7 “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” Leviticus 19:9

8 Of course, there are also sins for which the punishment is a swift death, but we will address those when they are mentioned.

9 At times, poetically so. Exodus 22:1 states that a thief who sells or kills a livestock animal must return five-fold what he stole; here, if he “turns himself in” so to speak, he only pays one-fifth extra.

10 Matthew 5:23-26

## Leviticus Bible Study #8

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Leviticus 6:8-30

**8** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **9** “Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the burnt offering. The burnt offering shall be on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it. **10** And the priest shall put on his linen garment and put his linen undergarment on his body, and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar and put them beside the altar. **11** Then he shall take off his garments and put on other garments and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place. **12** The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. **13** Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out.

**14** “And this is the law of the grain offering. The sons of Aaron shall offer it before the LORD in front of the altar. **15** And one shall take from it a handful of the fine flour of the grain offering and its oil and all the frankincense that is on the grain offering and burn this as its memorial portion on the altar, a pleasing aroma to the LORD. **16** And the rest of it Aaron and his sons shall eat. It shall be eaten unleavened in a holy place. In the court of the tent of meeting they shall eat it. **17** It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it as their portion of my food offerings. It is a thing most holy, like the sin offering and the guilt offering. **18** Every male among the children of Aaron may eat of it, as decreed forever throughout your generations, from the LORD's food offerings. Whatever touches them shall become holy.”

**19** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **20** “This is the offering that Aaron and his sons shall offer to the LORD on the day when he is anointed: a tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a regular grain offering, half of it in the morning and half in the evening. **21** It shall be made with oil on a griddle. You shall bring it well mixed, in baked pieces like a grain offering, and offer it for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. **22** The priest from among Aaron's sons, who is anointed to succeed him, shall offer it to the LORD as decreed forever. The whole of it shall be burned. **23** Every grain offering of a priest shall be wholly burned. It shall not be eaten.”

**24** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **25** “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the sin offering. In the place where the burnt offering is killed shall the sin offering be killed before the LORD; it is most holy. **26** The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tent of meeting. **27** Whatever touches its flesh shall be holy, and when any of its blood is splashed on a garment, you shall wash that on which it was splashed in a holy place. **28** And the earthenware vessel in which it is boiled shall be broken. But if it is boiled in a bronze vessel, that shall be scoured and rinsed in water. **29** Every male among the priests may eat of it; it is most holy. **30** But no sin offering shall be eaten from which any blood is brought into the tent of meeting to make atonement in the Holy Place; it shall be burned up with fire.

### **Introduction**

The eighth verse of Leviticus 6 signals a shift in the book's focus. Whereas the first five chapters are dedicated to the Israelite masses, now the new priests (Aaron and his sons) are the main topic. While the sixth and seventh chapters present strict regulations concerning the offerings, they serve as a prelude to the climactic ordination for Moses's brother and nephews, followed up by the deaths of

Nadab and Abihu.<sup>1</sup> With these in mind, a kind of historical narrative is introduced into Leviticus. Instead of being mere regulations, the book also presents events that demonstrate the legitimacy and accountability of Israel's sacerdotal class.

### **Vs.8-13**

**8** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **9** “Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the burnt offering. The burnt offering shall be on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it. **10** And the priest shall put on his linen garment and put his linen undergarment on his body, and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar and put them beside the altar. **11** Then he shall take off his garments and put on other garments and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place. **12** The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. **13** Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out.

In previous addresses regarding sacrifices, the children of Israel are the ones receiving instruction about the sacrifices.<sup>2</sup> *Now* however specific instructions are given to Aaron and his sons for their duties, permissions, and restrictions regarding those same offerings. This begins with a recognition that the remains of the morning and evening offerings (which go on the burning wood before the food offering)<sup>3</sup> must remain on the fire until completely consumed. This serves two functions. First, the burning fat of the offerings increases the intensity of the flames, making other sacrifices more easily consumed and keeping the fire going. The fire at the altar was to never go out, as the priests spent all day sacrificing guilt offerings, thank offerings, and burnt offerings – potentially even at night, if there was an emergency to address. There was always at least one priest standing night watch.

The other reason for these regulations is for the maintained recognition of sacred space. The priests are required to put on their linen undergarments and garments even just to remove ash, for a previous statute declared that if they were to be inappropriately clothed they would die.<sup>4</sup> The continually burning altar hearth served as a visual reminder to them that God was present and that the ground on which they stood was holy. The priests were to treat the fire as though it were the very burning bush that spoke to Moses and informed him that he was standing on holy ground.<sup>5</sup> While this was written during Israel's sojourn and the Pillar of Fire was there every night, a priest taking the night watch would be careful to not stare toward the Angel of the Lord who dwelt there; God had informed the children of Israel “My Name is in Him,”<sup>6</sup> signifying that this Angel is actually God Himself – a Christophany. To stare too deeply would be to invite wrath, for God says “man shall not see Me and live.”<sup>7</sup> So instead, during the evenings he was called to meditate on the presence of the Lord in the company of the fire of the altar between sacrifices.

### **Vs.14-23**

**14** “And this is the law of the grain offering. The sons of Aaron shall offer it before the LORD in front of the altar. **15** And one shall take from it a handful of the fine flour of the grain offering and its oil and all the frankincense that is on the grain offering and burn this as its memorial portion on the altar, a pleasing aroma to the LORD. **16** And the rest of it Aaron and his sons shall eat. It shall be eaten unleavened in a holy place. In the court of the tent

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1 Leviticus 8, 9 and 10

2 Leviticus 1:1-2, 4:1-4

3 Leviticus 1:

4 Exodus 28:40-43

5 Exodus 3:5

6 Exodus 23:20-21

7 Exodus 33:20

of meeting they shall eat it. **17** It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it as their portion of my food offerings. It is a thing most holy, like the sin offering and the guilt offering. **18** Every male among the children of Aaron may eat of it, as decreed forever throughout your generations, from the LORD's food offerings. Whatever touches them shall become holy.”

**19** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **20** “This is the offering that Aaron and his sons shall offer to the LORD on the day when he is anointed: a tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a regular grain offering, half of it in the morning and half in the evening. **21** It shall be made with oil on a griddle. You shall bring it well mixed, in baked pieces like a grain offering, and offer it for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. **22** The priest from among Aaron's sons, who is anointed to succeed him, shall offer it to the LORD as decreed forever. The whole of it shall be burned. **23** Every grain offering of a priest shall be wholly burned. It shall not be eaten.”

The stipulation here and in the subsequent verses maintains the “permanent Passover” that the priests lived out. Surrounded by the blood of animals which turns away the wrath of God, these men ate their unleavened bread and the roasted meat of sacrifices in haste.<sup>89</sup> While the previous dicta concerning grain offerings included giving some of the grain offering to Aaron and his sons,<sup>10</sup> here a restriction is placed on the manner and location of eating. The priests must only eat of the grain offering *in the court of the Tent of Meeting*. The cited reason is that the grain offering, like the sin and guilt offerings, are “most holy:” this is to say, they are made to be separate, sacred things that must remain on sacred space. The priest eating it does so under the auspices that in a sense he continues the offering by eating as well. These were holy men on holy grounds, enacting and living in a holy moment wherein deliverance was granted to the children of Israel, living out the Passover day by day; their eating perpetuated the remembrance of God's salvation, thus pointing *forward* every day to Christ our true Paschal Lamb and the Eucharist foreshadowed by these sacrifices. When Christ speaks of Himself as the Bread of Life,<sup>11</sup> He stood as the fulfillment of every grain offering the Aaronic priesthood ever made.

God also begins to introduce the upcoming ordination ceremony by speaking of Aaron's family grain offerings during the service. They are instructed to make a grain offering just as anyone else in Israel would,<sup>12</sup> but without personal benefit to themselves; they may not eat of it during the day-long ceremony. The twenty-second verse establishes this practice in perpetuity, so long as there is an Aaronic priesthood serving the Lord at the Tabernacle. Notably, the newly minted priest has a grain offering as the first sacrifice he ever performs, as it takes place in the morning: it is a perfect first step into the rigors of the priesthood. Having never butchered an animal sacrifice in such a particular way before, a new priest would not be trusted with that being his first act – a simple grain offering is the perfect first step for his ministry.

### **Vs.24-30**

**24** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **25** “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the sin offering. In the place where the burnt offering is killed shall the sin offering be killed before the LORD; it is most holy. **26** The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tent of meeting. **27** Whatever touches its flesh shall be holy, and when any of its blood is splashed on a garment, you shall wash that on which it was splashed in a holy place. **28** And the earthenware vessel in which it is boiled shall be broken. But if it is boiled in a bronze vessel, that shall be scoured and rinsed in water. **29** Every male among the priests may eat of it; it is most holy. **30** But no sin offering shall be eaten from which any blood is brought into the tent of meeting to make atonement in the Holy Place; it shall be burned up with fire.

Here we might be confused as to why the priests are permitted here to eat from some of the sin

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8 Exodus 12:7-13

9 Of course, the priests would have to eat in haste on account of their busy sacrificial schedule.

10 Leviticus 3:10

11 John 6:35

12 Leviticus 2:5

offerings. After all, the public instructions given to the Israelites included explicit directions for which part of the animal is burnt on the altar and which part is burnt outside of the camp:<sup>13</sup> by following these directions, there ought not be any meat left for the priests to eat! In the case of mass atonement offerings and leadership this is absolutely the case. But for other sin offerings, namely those enumerated in the previous chapter, there is no requirement to sprinkle blood in the Tent of Meeting: thus, while there is still a requirement to move the body of the animal outside the camp and burn it, while the sacrifice is being conducted the priests are at liberty to boil or roast<sup>14</sup> some of the meat and eat it (the earthen or bronze vessels for cooking keeps the meat from being mixed with the sacrifice).

The meat that the priests eat stays in the court for the duration of the sacrifice and may not be eaten outside of the Tabernacle area. This is because it, like the grain offering, is part of the sacrifice. St. Paul explains that those who eat from the sacrifices are “participants” in the altar: this is to say, they are connected to the sacrifice itself even while eating from it. The Apostle connects this priestly participation in the offering to the Eucharist, wherein the Christian participates in Christ by eating His Body and drinking His Blood.<sup>15</sup> Herein lay the meaning of their sacrificial diet and Passover lifestyle in the first place; they are modeling the Sacramental life of the Christian, who benefits from the universal priesthood by regularly partaking in Communion. The key difference being, in the New Covenant there is no need for any further sacrifices, for Christ's was sufficient for all – thank God!

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13 Leviticus 4, esp. vs. 8-12,

14 The word translated “boil” is the same word for typical roasting.

<https://biblehub.com/hebrew/1310.htm>

15 1 Corinthians 10:16-22

## Leviticus Bible Study #9

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Leviticus 7:1-38

**1** “This is the law of the guilt offering. It is most holy. **2** In the place where they kill the burnt offering they shall kill the guilt offering, and its blood shall be thrown against the sides of the altar. **3** And all its fat shall be offered, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails, **4** the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. **5** The priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering to the LORD; it is a guilt offering. **6** Every male among the priests may eat of it. It shall be eaten in a holy place. It is most holy. **7** The guilt offering is just like the sin offering; there is one law for them. The priest who makes atonement with it shall have it. **8** And the priest who offers any man's burnt offering shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering that he has offered. **9** And every grain offering baked in the oven and all that is prepared on a pan or a griddle shall belong to the priest who offers it. **10** And every grain offering, mixed with oil or dry, shall be shared equally among all the sons of Aaron.

**11** “And this is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings that one may offer to the LORD. **12** If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the thanksgiving sacrifice unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and loaves of fine flour well mixed with oil. **13** With the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving he shall bring his offering with loaves of leavened bread. **14** And from it he shall offer one loaf from each offering, as a gift to the LORD. It shall belong to the priest who throws the blood of the peace offerings. **15** And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his offering. He shall not leave any of it until the morning. **16** But if the sacrifice of his offering is a vow offering or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that he offers his sacrifice, and on the next day what remains of it shall be eaten. **17** But what remains of the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day shall be burned up with fire. **18** If any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering is eaten on the third day, he who offers it shall not be accepted, neither shall it be credited to him. It is tainted, and he who eats of it shall bear his iniquity.

**19** “Flesh that touches any unclean thing shall not be eaten. It shall be burned up with fire. All who are clean may eat flesh, **20** but the person who eats of the flesh of the sacrifice of the LORD's peace offerings while an uncleanness is on him, that person shall be cut off from his people. **21** And if anyone touches an unclean thing, whether human uncleanness or an unclean beast or any unclean detestable creature, and then eats some flesh from the sacrifice of the LORD's peace offerings, that person shall be cut off from his people.”

**22** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **23** “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, You shall eat no fat, of ox or sheep or goat. **24** The fat of an animal that dies of itself and the fat of one that is torn by beasts may be put to any other use, but on no account shall you eat it. **25** For every person who eats of the fat of an animal of which a food offering may be made to the LORD shall be cut off from his people. **26** Moreover, you shall eat no blood whatever, whether of fowl or of animal, in any of your dwelling places. **27** Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from his people.”

**28** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **29** “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever offers the sacrifice of his peace offerings to the LORD shall bring his offering to the LORD from the sacrifice of his peace offerings. **30** His own hands shall bring the LORD's food offerings. He shall bring the fat with the breast, that the breast may be waved as a wave offering before the LORD. **31** The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be for Aaron and his sons. **32** And the right thigh you shall give to

the priest as a contribution from the sacrifice of your peace offerings. **33** Whoever among the sons of Aaron offers the blood of the peace offerings and the fat shall have the right thigh for a portion. **34** For the breast that is waved and the thigh that is contributed I have taken from the people of Israel, out of the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons, as a perpetual due from the people of Israel. **35** This is the portion of Aaron and of his sons from the LORD's food offerings, from the day they were presented to serve as priests of the LORD. **36** The LORD commanded this to be given them by the people of Israel, from the day that he anointed them. It is a perpetual due throughout their generations.”

**37** This is the law of the burnt offering, of the grain offering, of the sin offering, of the guilt offering, of the ordination offering, and of the peace offering, **38** which the LORD commanded Moses on Mount Sinai, on the day that he commanded the people of Israel to bring their offerings to the LORD, in the wilderness of Sinai.

## Introduction

The shift in focus from the general population of Israelites to the priests has begun in anticipation of Aaron's anointing ceremony. But before Aaron and his sons can even begin to fulfill the duties of their offices, more detailed instructions must be given so they may begin *immediately*. This tells us why the first seven chapters are entirely devoted to instituting the sacrificial system. God commands morning and evening sacrifices, guilt offerings, sin offerings, peace offerings and more in order to establish, maintain, and regain sacred space for proper worship. All of the laws concerning human conduct, diet, and cleanliness are secondary to the pressing need to establish a place for the presence of our Lord so that the Israelites could be in relationship with Him.

This emphasis on sacrifice was not lost on the Old Covenant saints, to the point where they often fell into a dry formalism. When the prophet Micah speaks on behalf of the Israelites in the eighth century B.C., their question boils down to “how many sacrifices do You want us to do to make You happy with us?”<sup>1</sup> Asaph the Psalmist relates a message from God wherein the Lord corrects the peoples' distorted view of the offerings.<sup>2</sup> It appears that throughout their history, the Israelites mistook the initial priority on sacrifices to be something that ought to be done *to the exclusion* of weightier matters like virtue and justice, the more important things that occur when a proper relationship with God is established. This formalist bad habit continued well into the first century A.D., with Christ criticizing the ceremonial obsessions of the Pharisees.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, a bit of sympathy for the Israelites is due, for they saw that the first third of the Law which began the Levitical system was all about such matters.

## Vs.1-10

**1** “This is the law of the guilt offering. It is most holy. **2** In the place where they kill the burnt offering they shall kill the guilt offering, and its blood shall be thrown against the sides of the altar. **3** And all its fat shall be offered, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails, **4** the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. **5** The priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering to the LORD; it is a guilt offering. **6** Every male among the priests may eat of it. It shall be eaten in a holy place. It is most holy. **7** The guilt offering is just like the sin offering; there is one law for them. The priest who makes atonement with it shall have it. **8** And the priest who offers any man's burnt offering shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering that he has offered. **9** And every grain offering baked in the oven and all that is prepared on a pan or a griddle shall belong to the priest who offers it. **10** And every grain offering, mixed with oil or dry, shall be shared equally among all the sons of Aaron.

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1 Micah 6:6-8

2 Psalm 50:7-15

3 Luke 11:37-42

The priestly regulations concerning the guilt offering are the same as the sin offerings. The priests may eat from them, but only in the sanctuary and in a separate cooking vessel from the food offering given to God on the altar.<sup>4</sup> Moses reminds the reader of the processing required for a sacrifice (removal of the fat, the tail, etc.), so as to impress the order of operations on the reader's mind. Here however Moses adds that the priests may take the animal pelts from the guilt and sin offerings as well. This too has a practical consideration, as the pelts could be used for clothing, carpeting, and bedding. Additionally, the hair on the pelts could have served as repair materials for the Tabernacle, especially for goats (the Tabernacle's curtains were made of goat hair).<sup>5</sup>

One ought to note as well the way that the food from sacrifices is distributed. The priest who conducts a sacrifice benefits first from taking the meat – although he cannot take it to his personal tent, it must be eaten in a “holy place,” e.g. the Tabernacle courtyard. The intensive labor involved in skinning, gutting, burning, and cooking an animal meant taking a break afterward, wherein the priest would eat to conserve his energy. Meanwhile, the grain offerings are distributed evenly among the priests in the Tabernacle; this way, even if a priest was not assigned to conduct animal sacrifices, he still gets to eat. God made sure that all of the priests' living was *earned*, but also that all of their needs were met.

### **Vs.11-18**

**11** “And this is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings that one may offer to the LORD. **12** If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the thanksgiving sacrifice unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and loaves of fine flour well mixed with oil. **13** With the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving he shall bring his offering with loaves of leavened bread. **14** And from it he shall offer one loaf from each offering, as a gift to the LORD. It shall belong to the priest who throws the blood of the peace offerings. **15** And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his offering. He shall not leave any of it until the morning. **16** But if the sacrifice of his offering is a vow offering or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that he offers his sacrifice, and on the next day what remains of it shall be eaten. **17** But what remains of the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day shall be burned up with fire. **18** If any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering is eaten on the third day, he who offers it shall not be accepted, neither shall it be credited to him. It is tainted, and he who eats of it shall bear his iniquity.

Peace offerings had varied uses. A man could make a peace offering out of thanksgiving for something God did for him, out of devotion (also called a “freewill” offering), or to signal that he has fulfilled his vow. Because each use of the offering could be different, different observances may be necessary. Of course, every peace offering includes sharing the meal between the one making the offering, the priest, and anyone invited as well; but the *time* in which people may eat it may be different, as well as some specifics as to the materials presented. Offerings of thanksgiving were to be enjoyed in one day, while votive and freewill offerings had another day in which the people could eat their portion of the sacrifice. In all cases, the priest is invited to celebrate with God's people.

There is a peculiar restriction concerning eating the peace offering on the third day. We might be tempted to connect this to the third day after Christ's death on the Cross, and thus connect the restrictions to the Gospel (particularly the Resurrection) in a typological fashion. However, Moses simply writes that the meat of the offering is tainted by that time: to eat it puts people at risk for illness, uncleanness, etc. Hence, the rest of the meat must be burned with fire. It was holy and consecrated after the sacrifice was conducted and when the meal was being shared; to permit it to be made profane by rotting is a sign of spiritual neglect.

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4 Leviticus 6:24-29

5 Exodus 26:7-10

## Vs.19-27

**19** “Flesh that touches any unclean thing shall not be eaten. It shall be burned up with fire. All who are clean may eat flesh, **20** but the person who eats of the flesh of the sacrifice of the LORD's peace offerings while an uncleanness is on him, that person shall be cut off from his people. **21** And if anyone touches an unclean thing, whether human uncleanness or an unclean beast or any unclean detestable creature, and then eats some flesh from the sacrifice of the LORD's peace offerings, that person shall be cut off from his people.”

**22** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **23** “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, You shall eat no fat, of ox or sheep or goat. **24** The fat of an animal that dies of itself and the fat of one that is torn by beasts may be put to any other use, but on no account shall you eat it. **25** For every person who eats of the fat of an animal of which a food offering may be made to the LORD shall be cut off from his people. **26** Moreover, you shall eat no blood whatever, whether of fowl or of animal, in any of your dwelling places. **27** Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from his people.”

Great care is taken to preserve the holy nature of the sacrifices. That which is offered to the Lord must be entirely separate from the rest of the world, flesh of an animal that has been made sacred by sacred men using sacred tools on sacred space. If something unclean touches that meat, such as a leper's hands or an unclean animal, then to eat it is to accept as holy something which has been made profane. God commands that if anything would make an offering unclean, the flesh of the offering must be burned as an act of both cleansing and destruction; the world, with all its uncleanness, has made an encroachment on the sacred and thus it must be rededicated through purifying fire. Whoever would blaspheme by defiling the offerings would thus merit severe punishment.

Because the priests are expected to eat meat from various sacrifices, the dietary restrictions which were introduced earlier in Leviticus are reiterated here.<sup>6</sup> Note that the focus shifts once more from the priests to the entirety of Israel, clearing up any potential confusion. It could be that Moses was presented with the granular question of what to do with the extra fat and blood from a peace offering; they are instructed to eat the offering in a day or two, does this include consuming those parts of the animal which are in other contexts banned from consumption? The answer is simple: *don't eat the blood or the fat.*

## Vs.28-36

**28** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **29** “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever offers the sacrifice of his peace offerings to the LORD shall bring his offering to the LORD from the sacrifice of his peace offerings. **30** His own hands shall bring the LORD's food offerings. He shall bring the fat with the breast, that the breast may be waved as a wave offering before the LORD. **31** The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be for Aaron and his sons. **32** And the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a contribution from the sacrifice of your peace offerings. **33** Whoever among the sons of Aaron offers the blood of the peace offerings and the fat shall have the right thigh for a portion. **34** For the breast that is waved and the thigh that is contributed I have taken from the people of Israel, out of the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons, as a perpetual due from the people of Israel. **35** This is the portion of Aaron and of his sons from the LORD's food offerings, from the day they were presented to serve as priests of the LORD. **36** The LORD commanded this to be given them by the people of Israel, from the day that he anointed them. It is a perpetual due throughout their generations.”

Here we arrive at the “wave offering.” It is not exactly a separate sacrifice itself, but a ceremonial part of the peace offering which presents the priestly portion of the food as still being part of the sacrifice. We cannot forget that even though it is just fat and organs that are burning on the altar, the *whole* animal is a sacrifice to God. The priests engage in ceremonial eating for special parts of the offering, waving them in front of the Lord first in recognition that it is still *His* animal which they partake of.

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<sup>6</sup> Leviticus 3:17

National traditions still play a role in the format of the sacrifices. The priestly portion of the offerings is explicitly the breast and thigh of the animal. While not explicitly stated, the breast is likely reserved for the priests on account of the breastplate and ephod worn by the high priest;<sup>7</sup> wherein the heart is a sacred part of the animal, and the priests present a covered chest when going before God, this is reserved in recognition of his office. The *thigh* is reserved, and the right thigh in particular, most likely on account of the remembrance tradition among Israelites concerning Jacob. When Jacob wrestled the Angel of the Lord, his hip was torn out of its socket. Moses remarks on account of this, “to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.”<sup>8</sup> Whether it was Jacob's right or left hip which was dislocated does not matter: the priests still removed the sinew and ate the meat which was around it in a manner that identified them not as *above* the children of Israel, but as fellow kinsman with other Israelites.

### **Vs.37-38**

**37** This is the law of the burnt offering, of the grain offering, of the sin offering, of the guilt offering, of the ordination offering, and of the peace offering, **38** which the LORD commanded Moses on Mount Sinai, on the day that he commanded the people of Israel to bring their offerings to the LORD, in the wilderness of Sinai.

Here Moses concludes the guide to the sacrificial system. Aaron and his sons are counted ready to be ordained as the priestly family in Israel, and shall be consecrated in the next chapter. When he says that it was commanded “on the day” in which Israel was instructed to bring sacrifices, this is in reference to a period of time for the priestly instructions to take place. Aaron and his sons, as well as any priest studying Leviticus for a future ordination, took extensive time learning these practices before their first sacrifices were made – and after they begin their service, there is yet more for them to learn.

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7 Exodus 28:15-30

8 Genesis 32:32