



Leviticus - Chapter Two

I Leviticus 1:1-6:7 - Five Major Offerings (continues)

Summary of Chapter Two

Grain-offerings typically consisted of four elements: (1) choice flour; (2) oil; (3) frankincense; and (4) salt (vv.11-13). They could be brought either uncooked (vv.1-3) or cooked (vv.4-10). The priest would not burn the entire offering but only a handful as a token portion. The grain-offering would ordinarily be offered with a burnt-offering or an offering of well-being, and probably served the same purpose as the offering it accompanied, whether for petition or for praise.

I.b Leviticus 2:1-16 - Grain-Offerings

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ When anyone presents a grain-offering to the Lord, the offering shall be of choice flour; the worshipper shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it, ² and bring it to Aaron's sons the priests. After taking from it a handful of the choice flour and oil, with all its frankincense, the priest shall turn this token portion into smoke on the altar, an offering by fire of pleasing odour to the Lord. ³ And what is left of the grain-offering shall be for Aaron and his sons, a most holy part of the offerings by fire to the Lord.

Leviticus 2:1-3

When anyone presents a grain-offering to the Lord. The grain-offering was typically choice flour, mixed with oil and frankincense. A portion of the flour was burnt before the Lord on the altar. The remainder was given to the priests for their own use in making bread for the priest and his family, i.e. what is left of the grain-offering shall be for Aaron and his sons.

The priest shall turn this token portion into smoke on the altar, an offering by fire of pleasing odour to the Lord. God allowed and received this bloodless sacrifice as an expression of thanksgiving, not as atonement for sin. In an agrarian society this was a fitting symbol of thanks for God's faithful provision.

The use of **fine** or choice flour as well as the costly spice frankincense suggests that the Israelites were to present their very best to the Lord. The priest was to burn a handful of the offering as a **memorial** or token portion to the Lord. The language of remembrance is used in the Bible to refer to the Lord's favour: <<*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established*>> (Psalm 8:3). This token portion would have served as the Israelites' way of asking the Lord to 'remember' them with favour as they made their request or offered their praise.

⁴ When you present a grain-offering baked in the oven, it shall be of choice flour: unleavened cakes mixed with oil, or unleavened wafers spread with oil. ⁵ If your offering is grain prepared on a griddle, it shall be of choice flour mixed with oil, unleavened; ⁶ break it in pieces, and pour oil on it; it is a grain-offering. ⁷ If your offering is grain prepared in a pan, it shall be made of choice flour in oil. ⁸ You shall bring to the Lord the grain-offering that is prepared in any of these ways; and when it is presented to the priest, he shall take it to the altar. ⁹ The priest shall remove from the grain-offering its token portion and turn this into smoke on the altar, an offering by fire of pleasing odour to the Lord. ¹⁰ And what is left of the grain-offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings by fire to the Lord.

Leviticus 2:4-10

Three types of breads are mentioned in these verses: those baked in the oven, those prepared on a griddle, and those prepared in a pan. No matter what its form, the grain-offering had to be prepared at home. This conjures the image of an ancient Jewish woman carefully preparing the best her kitchen could make and presenting it to God as a sacrifice. This expression of devotion to God began at home and if offered with the right heart, it was a sweet aroma to the Lord. Since the grain-offering was holy, the remaining part was to go to the holy priests.

¹¹ No grain-offering that you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven, for you must not turn any leaven or honey into smoke as an offering by fire to the Lord. ¹² You may bring them to the Lord as an offering of choice products, but they shall not be offered on the altar for a pleasing odour. ¹³ You shall not omit from your grain-offerings the

salt of the covenant with your God; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.

Leviticus 2:11-13

Leaven and honey are both prohibited on the altar, although the text does not explain why. It is assumed that leaven and honey could not be presented as first fruits or choice products because these were not burned on the altar in the way that other offerings were, such as: *<<All the best of the oil and all the best of the wine and of the grain, the choice produce that they give to the Lord, I have given to you. The first fruits of all that is in their land, which they bring to the Lord, shall be yours; everyone who is clean in your house may eat of it>>* (Numbers 18:12-13). Various explanations for this prohibition have been put forward, e.g. that leaven, often translated as yeast, represents ‘corruption’ and is thus prohibited, as confirmed by: *<<Jesus said to them, ‘Watch out, and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees’>>* (Matthew 16:6); and honey was not allowed because it was a favourite sacrifice to pagan deities. God did not want to be worshipped after the customs of the pagans. Leaven can make things artificially sour and honey can make things artificially sweet. God did not want either of these in sacrifice. Leviticus itself, however, provides no clues. By contrast, the reason for including salt, a preservative, seems clearer. It is described here as the salt of the covenant, a phrase that is used elsewhere to refer to the permanence of a covenant relationship: *<<All the holy offerings that the Israelites present to the Lord I have given to you, together with your sons and daughters, as a perpetual due; it is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord for you and your descendants as well>>* (Numbers 18:19). It could thus serve to constantly remind Israel of the permanent nature of its covenant relationship with the Lord.

Salt was an important part of the offering because it spoke of purity, of preservation, and of expense. Every sacrifice offered to God should be pure, should be enduring, and should cost something. In this one verse God repeated the idea three times. As a preservative, salt will arrest the normal operations of the flesh. It is the nature of flesh to spoil, but salt-cured meats stay good. Salt also spoke of friendship. According to ancient custom, a bond of friendship was established through the eating of salt. It was said that once a person had eaten a man’s salt, they were his friend for life. God wanted every sacrifice to be a reminder of relationship. Jesus wants his followers to have this salt: *<<Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another>>* (Mark 9:50), and Paul echoed this sentiment when he wrote: *<<Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone>>* (Colossians 4:6).

Today, leavened bread is traditionally made with yeast. Yeast cells produce substances called enzymes. So when the yeast is added to bread dough, one enzyme goes to work on the flour, changing the starch in it into sugar. Another enzyme then takes over and changes the sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide, so that the CO₂ spreads through the dough in the form of bubbles. The dough is then placed in a dark, warm place for the fermentation to take place before going into an oven. As the dough bakes into bread, the heat causes the alcohol to evaporate and the bubbles to break. This leaves the tiny air pockets in the final bread or cake, making it light and fluffy. Since yeast was not available in manufactured form in ancient times but existed only as single cells floating in the air, then women used to produce the same effect with what they called leaven by taking a piece of old dough, leaving it in the sun to go mouldy, attracting yeast from the air. This was called leaven and was then mixed with a new larger batch of dough. The original mixture can be created by mixing flour, salt, sugar and a source of starch such as potato water, and letting yeast cells in the air supply the enzymes!

¹⁴ If you bring a grain-offering of first fruits to the Lord, you shall bring as the grain-offering of your first fruits coarse new grain from fresh ears, parched with fire. ¹⁵ You shall add oil to it and lay frankincense on it; it is a grain-offering. ¹⁶ And the priest shall turn a token portion of it into smoke – some of the coarse grain and oil with all its frankincense; it is an offering by fire to the Lord.

Leviticus 2:14-16

Up to this point the chapter has described the more common types of grain-offerings. It concludes by describing a very specific type, namely, a grain-offering of first fruits, which was confirmed by: <<*You shall observe the festival of harvest, of the first fruits of your labour, of what you sow in the field. You shall observe the festival of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labour*>> (Exodus 23:16), and: <<*The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God*>> (Exodus 34:26a). It appears that one way of offering these was to rub the fresh ears of the plant and for the resulting grain to be roasted or parched with fire: <<*You shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears until that very day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your settlements*>> (Leviticus 23:14), and: <<*On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain*>> (Joshua 5:11).