



Leviticus - Chapter Four

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

Summary of Chapter Four

This chapter prescribes how to deal with the sins of the anointed priest and the whole congregation. Blood is sprinkled in front of the veil that separates the outer and inner parts of the tabernacle, indicating that their sins have defiled the Most Holy Place. However, since this is a regular occasion, and not the Day of Atonement ritual as described in Chapter 16, the blood cannot be brought into the Most Holy Place. The ritual here shows that the priest and congregation as a corporate entity bear heavier responsibility before the Lord than an individual leader or layperson, so that a more costly animal is required for them to make atonement for their sins.

The priest atones for the sin of a leader or an individual by what he does with the blood at the altar of the burnt-offering and by burning the fat on it. The meat is not burned outside the camp, since it will be eaten by the priests.

I.d Leviticus 4:1-5:13 - Sin-Offerings

In this section the focus of the sin-offering, Hebrew *khatta't*, is on making amends for one's broken relationship with the Lord, caused either by unintentionally violating one of the Lord's prohibitive commandments (4:1-35), or by failing to do something that one was required to do (5:1-13). In other places the focus will be on addressing severe cases of uncleanness, as seen in 12:6, 14:19, 15:15 and 15:30. The sin-offering is distinguished from other offerings in that the ritual can vary according to the sinner's position before the Lord, e.g. the type of animal required or what the priest does with the blood.

In Chapter 4 the ritual for the sin of the anointed priest and that of the whole congregation is basically the same, while the ritual for a leader and a common individual is the same. A core part of the ritual is the sprinkling of blood. Since this

is a purifying act, as confirmed by 16:19, it implies that the holy objects are considered to be defiled by the sins of the people. Because of this, and the fact that this offering occurs to address uncleanness as well, some have preferred to call the offering a 'purification offering' instead of a 'sin-offering.' In either case, the offering deals with the sin or impurity of the offerer, culminating in the Day of Atonement ritual described in Chapter 16. In this regard it foreshadows the essence of the Messiah's atoning work on the Cross.

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ² Speak to the people of Israel, saying: When anyone sins unintentionally in any of the Lord's commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them:

Leviticus 4:1-2

When anyone sins unintentionally. The idea is not so much of an accidental sin, but of a sin committed by a person who basically loves God. The contrast to an unintentional sin is to sin presumptuously: *<<But whoever acts high-handedly, whether a native or an alien, affronts the Lord, and shall be cut off from among the people>>* (Numbers 15:30). There was no atonement available for the one whose heart was so defiantly turned against the Lord in presumptuous sin. If a person's heart was not turned towards the Lord, then all the animals in the world sacrificed on their behalf could do them no good at all.

God also commanded his people to build cities of refuge throughout the land so that a person who accidentally killed a person could find safety until their case could be heard: *<<These were the cities designated for all the Israelites, and for the aliens residing among them, that anyone who killed a person without intent could flee there, so as not to die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until there was a trial before the congregation>>* (Joshua 20:9).

³ If it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull of the herd without blemish as a sin-offering to the Lord. 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; the bull shall be slaughtered before the Lord. ⁵ The anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting. ⁶ The priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the Lord in front of the curtain of the sanctuary. ⁷ The priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is in the tent of meeting before the Lord; and the rest of the blood of the bull he shall

pour out at the base of the altar of burnt-offering, which is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ⁸ He shall remove all the fat from the bull of sin-offering: the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is around the entrails; ⁹ the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins; and the appendage of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys, ¹⁰ just as these are removed from the ox of the sacrifice of well-being. The priest shall turn them into smoke upon the altar of burnt-offering. ¹¹ But the skin of the bull and all its flesh, as well as its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung – ¹² all the rest of the bull – he shall carry out to a clean place outside the camp, to the ash heap, and shall burn it on a wood fire; at the ash heap it shall be burned.

Leviticus 4:3-12

The anointed priest. Opinion is divided over whether this phrase refers to ‘the high priest’ or to just any member of the priesthood, although the former option is commonly favoured.

If it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people. If a priest needed a sin-offering made on his behalf, a bull had to be sacrificed on his behalf, with the priest identifying with the victim through the laying on of hands. The presence of a separate ritual of cleansing for the sin of the priest shows that they had a great accountability before the Lord and were, in a sense, judged according to a stricter measure.

The priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the Lord in front of the curtain of the sanctuary. The blood of this bull was applied to the veil in the tabernacle of meeting, to the altar of incense, and to the altar of sacrifice outside the tabernacle. This shows that:

- Sin is an offense against the holiness of God, and so the veil guarding his holy presence must receive sacrificial blood.
- Sin affects a believer’s prayer life, and so the altar of incense representing the prayers of God’s people must receive sacrificial blood.
- Sin makes atonement necessary, so the altar of the burnt-offering, the place of atonement, must receive sacrificial blood.

These points are later affirmed by the author of Hebrews, who writes of the annual Day of Atonement procedure: <<*but only the high priest goes into the second, and he but once a year, and not without taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people*>> (Hebrews 9:7).

He shall remove all the fat from the bull of sin-offering. The fatty portions of the animal were offered to God. In this, the best was once again dedicated to God after the blood covered the sin.

The skin of the bull and all its flesh; at the ash heap it shall be burned. The valuable hide and the meat of the bull were burnt outside the camp, along with the worthless portions of the bull. It could not be offered to God, but it was burned as if it were a worthless thing. All selfish motives had to be removed in the sin-offering. If a priest brought the offering, the whole offering had to be destroyed. If a non-priest brought the offering, the priest could eat of it, but not the one bringing the sacrifice. A person could not bring a sin-offering because they wanted meat or leather, but only because they wanted to get right with God. This emphasised the idea that there is no benefit to sin. Paul expressed this attitude of heart: <<*Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*>> (Philippians 3:7-8).

¹³ If the whole congregation of Israel errs unintentionally and the matter escapes the notice of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the Lord's commandments ought not to be done, and incur guilt; ¹⁴ when the sin that they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull of the herd for a sin-offering and bring it before the tent of meeting. ¹⁵ The elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the Lord, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the Lord. ¹⁶ 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 curtain. ¹⁸ He shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before the Lord in the tent of meeting; 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 He shall remove all its fat and turn it into smoke on the altar. ²⁰ He shall do with the bull just as is done with the bull of sin-offering; he shall do the same with this. The priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven. ²¹ He shall carry the bull outside the camp, and burn it as he burned the first bull; it is the sin-offering for the assembly.

Leviticus 4:13-21

If the whole congregation of Israel errs unintentionally. The procedure was the same as the sin-offering on behalf of a priest, except that the elders of the congregation laid their hands on the head of the bull, representing the nation.

The law frequently held the entire community of Israel collectively responsible for sin: <<*But if you unintentionally fail to observe all these commandments that the Lord has spoken to Moses – everything that the Lord has commanded you by Moses, from the day the Lord gave commandment and thereafter, throughout your generations – then if it was done unintentionally without the knowledge of the congregation, the whole congregation shall offer one young bull for a burnt-offering, a pleasing odour to the Lord, together with its grain-offering and its drink-offering, according to the ordinance, and one male goat for a sin-offering*>> (Numbers 15:22-24).

²² When a ruler sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by commandments of the Lord his God ought not to be done, and incurs guilt, ²³ once the sin that he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a male goat without blemish. ²⁴ He shall lay his hand on the head of the goat; it shall be slaughtered at the spot where the burnt-offering is slaughtered before the Lord; it is a sin-offering. ²⁵ 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 All its fat he shall turn into smoke on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of well-being. Thus the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin, and he shall be forgiven.

Leviticus 4:22-26

When a ruler sins. The procedure was similar to, yet distinct from the offering for a priest or the nation at large. The sacrificial victim was a male goat, and the blood was only applied to the altar of burnt-offering, and the fat was burnt on the altar, as in the offering of well-being. According to 6:24-30, the rest of the animal was available for the priest.

²⁷ If anyone of the ordinary people among you sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the Lord's commandments ought not to be done, and incurs guilt, ²⁸ when the sin that you have committed is made known to you, you shall bring a female goat without blemish as your offering, for the sin that you have committed.

²⁹ You shall lay your hand on the head of the sin-offering; and the sin-offering shall be slaughtered at the place of the burnt-offering. ³⁰ The priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt-offering, and he shall pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. ³¹ He shall remove all its fat, as the fat is removed from the offering of well-being, and the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar for a pleasing odour to the Lord. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf, and you shall be forgiven.

Leviticus 4:27-31

If anyone of the ordinary people among you sins unintentionally. This was the same procedure for a ruler of the people, except that a female goat or a lamb could be offered instead of a male goat.

³² If the offering you bring as a sin-offering is a sheep, you shall bring a female without blemish. ³³ You shall lay your hand on the head of the sin-offering; and it shall be slaughtered as a sin-offering at the spot where the burnt-offering is slaughtered. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ You shall remove all its fat, as the fat of the sheep is removed from the sacrifice of well-being, and the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar, with the offerings by fire to the Lord. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the sin that you have committed, and you shall be forgiven.

Leviticus 4:32-35

The priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar, with the offerings by fire to the Lord. Again, presumably, the rest of the animal was available for the priest. This meant that the sin-offering for a civil ruler or common man was less costly than the sin-offering for a priest or the nation as a whole, and that the only profit a priest could gain from his own sin-offering was spiritual, not material.