



Leviticus - Chapter Five

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

I.d Leviticus 4:1-5:13 - Sin-Offerings (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Five

The chapter commences with a list of situations describing both deliberate and unintentional acts that are deemed to be sinful. Whatever the circumstances, the person is to repent of their sin immediately they become aware of it and are to make a sin-offering through the priest. Those unable to afford to offer an ox or a sheep can make the same offering using less expensive turtledoves or pigeons. If even they are beyond the means of the sinner then an offering of choice flour can be made as an acceptable substitute. The chapter concludes with required process for a guilt-offering, which is either a ram or the equivalent value in silver.

Introduction to Leviticus 5:1-6

The common element in the following four cases is that sinners either deliberately (v.1), or unknowingly (vv.2-4), fail to do something that is required. They might fail to give testimony (v.1), which could prevent justice from being carried out. They might fail to deal properly with ritual uncleanness (vv.2-3), which could lead to the Lord's tabernacle being defiled. Or they might fail to fulfil an oath (v.4), which would result in the Lord's name being profaned. In any of these cases, once they realised their guilt, they were to confess their sin (v.5) and bring a sin-offering so that the priest could make atonement for them (v.6).

¹ When any of you sin in that you have heard a public adjuration to testify and – though able to testify as one who has seen or learned of the matter – do not speak up, you are subject to punishment.

Leviticus 5:1

When any of you sin in that you have heard a public adjuration to testify and – though able to testify as one who has seen or learned of the matter – do not speak up. It was not enough to merely not tell lies. God also required his people to make the truth known, so even if one merely knew about a lie, they were responsible to make the truth known. Jesus, too, was called to speak on oath: <<*But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, ‘I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God’*>> (Matthew 26:63). Jesus only ever spoke the truth: <<*Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice’*>> (John 18:37).

Do not speak up, you are subject to punishment. Therefore it was the duty of someone who was a witness to come forward and tell the truth about the matter. In Israel all the people were to be involved in seeing that justice was done. Not to witness was itself a sin. The same principle applies to those who are called to witness for Jesus Christ. It is not enough that they refrain from actively denying Jesus or lying about their relationship with him. They must also take every opportunity to tell the truth about Jesus.

² Or when any of you touch any unclean thing – whether the carcass of an unclean beast or the carcass of unclean livestock or the carcass of an unclean swarming thing – and are unaware of it, you have become unclean, and are guilty. ³ Or when you touch human uncleanness – any uncleanness by which one can become unclean – and are unaware of it, when you come to know it, you shall be guilty.

Leviticus 5:2-3

Or when any of you touch any unclean thing. The cleansing of the sin-offering was also necessary when a person became ceremonially unclean through touching any unclean thing. The effect could be cumulative: <<*Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean, and anyone who touches it shall be unclean until evening*>> (Numbers 19:22).

Whether the carcass of an unclean beast; Or when you touch human uncleanness. There were several things that might make a person ceremonially unclean. These included touching the carcass of an unclean animal or a person who was already ceremonially unclean. The sin-offering was a remedy for this uncleanness.

⁴ Or when any of you utter aloud a rash oath for a bad or a good purpose, whatever people utter in an oath, and are unaware of it, when you come to know it, you shall in any of these be guilty.

Leviticus 5:4

Or when any of you utter aloud a rash oath for a bad or a good purpose. A careless promise was still a promise before the Lord and had to be observed. If the promise was not kept it had to be atoned for by a sin-offering.

When you come to know it, you shall in any of these be guilty. When a person becomes aware of their broken vows they must repent of them. It is common to make vows and promises in the Christian faith that are not kept, and when a believer sees this they must repent and trust in the atoning, covering blood of Jesus to bring forgiveness.

These are common examples of broken vows. A promise to:

- Spend more time in prayer.
- Spend more time in intercession for others.
- Spend more time in devotional reading.
- Undertake more intense Bible study.
- Provide more personal witness.
- Be more faithful in tithing.
- Be a better example to others.
- Be more patient with the children.
- Personal purity in sexual matters.

It may not be wrong to make such vows. They may be the legitimate expression of a move of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. Yet if the vow is not kept, it must be confessed as sin and repented of. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus stated: *<<Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord." But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be "Yes, Yes" or "No, No"; anything more than this comes from the evil one>>* (Matthew 5:33-37).

⁵ When you realise your guilt in any of these, you shall confess the sin that you have committed. ⁶ And you shall bring to the Lord, as your penalty for the sin that you have committed, a female from the flock, a sheep or a goat, as a sin-offering; and the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for your sin.

Leviticus 5:5-6

When you realise your guilt in any of these. Although a person is guilty of sin the moment he commits it, he has no idea he needs to repent until he realises his sin.

You shall confess the sin that you have committed. This was an important part of the sin-offering; to confess meant one would agree with God that the sin was wrong. Confession of sin is still an important principle for clearing away sin that hinders fellowship with God: <<*No one who conceals transgressions will prosper, but one who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy*>> (Proverbs 28:13). On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would make confession on behalf the nation: <<*Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task*>> (Leviticus 16:21).

A female from the flock. The female animals were of less value than the stronger male, which was often used to breed with multiple females. Once again, this appears to be a lower sacrificial offering but it should be offered with same heart as with all other offerings made to God. The provision of three possibilities for the sin-offering (vv.7-13), adjusted according to the sinner's economic situation, would ensure that all Israelites have the ability to present an atoning sacrifice, no matter how poor they might be.

⁷ But if you cannot afford a sheep, you shall bring to the Lord, as your penalty for the sin that you have committed, two turtle-doves or two pigeons, one for a sin-offering and the other for a burnt-offering. ⁸ You shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer first the one for the sin-offering, wringing its head at the nape without severing it. ⁹ 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 And the second he shall offer for a burnt-offering according to the regulation. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the sin that you have committed, and you shall be forgiven.

Leviticus 5:7-10

Two turtle-doves or two pigeons, one for a sin-offering and the other for a burnt-offering. The law recognised that there needed to be a sense of fairness in the offering process, much like fines based on income or wealth levels today. This allowed the transgressor to make restitution for their sin without being driven into poverty or debt and thus punished further rather than redeemed.

¹¹ But if you cannot afford two turtle-doves or two pigeons, you shall bring as your offering for the sin that you have committed one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour for a sin-offering; you shall not put oil on it or lay frankincense on it, for it is a sin-offering. ¹² You shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall scoop up a handful of it as its memorial portion, and turn this into smoke on the altar, with the offerings by fire to the Lord; it is a sin-offering. ¹³ Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for whichever of these sins you have committed, and you shall be forgiven. Like the grain-offering, the rest shall be for the priest.

Leviticus 5:11-13

You shall bring as your offering for the sin that you have committed one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour. Cleansing from sin was available to everyone, even if they could not offer a sheep or a goat. If a man was too poor to offer two birds, even fine flour could be offered as a sin-offering and a guilt-offering. This demonstrates just how strongly the principle of atonement by sacrifice is emphasised in the OT, and many people wonder why the Jewish people today no longer make sacrifice. The answer is that they believe their good works will substitute for animal sacrifice.

Christians trust in the sacrificial blood of Jesus for their redemption and realise there is no work they can perform to atone for their sin. Living their lives for Christ is the only sacrifice needed: *<<I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect>>* (Romans 12:1-2). However, Rick Warren observed that ‘living sacrifices’ have a habit of crawling off the altar!

I.e Leviticus 5:14-6:7 - Offerings with Restitution

The distinction between the offenses covered by the guilt-offering and the offenses related to the sin-offering is puzzling. In general, however, the offences here appear to be more serious, as shown by the fact that the sacrificial animal is more costly, i.e. a male instead of a female, and that the sins are described as *<<a breach of faith>>* in the ESV translation of v.15. The word translated ‘guilt-offering’, Hebrew *‘asham*, is used elsewhere with the sense of ‘compensation or a penalty for guilt’ (v.6), and the offering as a whole serves to repair the relationship between sinners and the Lord. This has led some to call this a ‘reparation offering.’

¹⁴ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ¹⁵ When any of you commit a trespass and sin unintentionally in any of the holy things of the Lord, you shall bring, as your guilt-offering to the Lord, a ram without blemish from the flock, convertible into silver by the sanctuary shekel; it is a guilt-offering. ¹⁶ And you shall make restitution for the holy thing in which you were remiss, and shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. The priest shall make atonement on your behalf with the ram of the guilt-offering, and you shall be forgiven.

Leviticus 5:14-16

When any of you commit a trespass. The guilt-offering was essentially the same procedure used in the sin-offering, except that the guilt-offering was used when someone had sinned in any of the holy things of the Lord. This spoke of some type of desecration of the tabernacle, its associated items or rituals.

And you shall make restitution for the holy thing in which you were remiss. When holy things had been desecrated in some way, a mere sin-offering was not enough. Restitution was also required, paying back what was lost plus twenty percent, i.e. shall add one-fifth to it. As with the burnt-offering, the priest was allowed to keep the hide of a bull that was sacrificed for a guilt-offering: <<*So, too, the priest who offers anyone's burnt-offering shall keep the skin of the burnt-offering that he has offered*>> (Leviticus 7:8).

¹⁷ If any of you sin without knowing it, doing any of the things that by the Lord's commandments ought not to be done, you have incurred guilt, and are subject to punishment. ¹⁸ You shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock, or the equivalent, as a guilt-offering; and the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the error that you committed unintentionally, and you shall be forgiven. ¹⁹ It is a guilt-offering; you have incurred guilt before the Lord.

Leviticus 5:17-19

If any of you sin without knowing it, you have incurred guilt, and are subject to punishment. If someone desecrated the holy things of the tabernacle, 'I did not know' was not an acceptable excuse. The guilty party had to still make sacrifice to atone for their sin.

The priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the error that you committed unintentionally, and you shall be forgiven. Ignorance can be sin. It is no excuse; often it is sin and must be atoned for.