

Leviticus Chapter 4

[Actually 4:1 – 5:13]

The Sin Offering

Leviticus 4:1-3 *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘If a person sins unintentionally in any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and commits any of them, if the anointed priest sins so as to bring guilt on the people, then let him*

offer to the LORD a bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed.”

[Picture from www.abulnb.ca/emc/tioocs/event8.htm.]

The sin offering is often also called the **purification offering** because it purifies an impure worshiper. God is Holy. Holiness is an attribute of God. It is not simply some standard God keeps, it is Who God is. An attribute is a part of a being, something which cannot be removed – by definition. Any violation of holiness prevents communion with a holy God. So not only sinful acts but defiled conditions of any kind must be dealt with, if communion with God is to be maintained.

God, by His grace, has made provision for the cleansing of sin and its effects, so that people may enter into His presence. But there are many things which can keep us from communion with God.

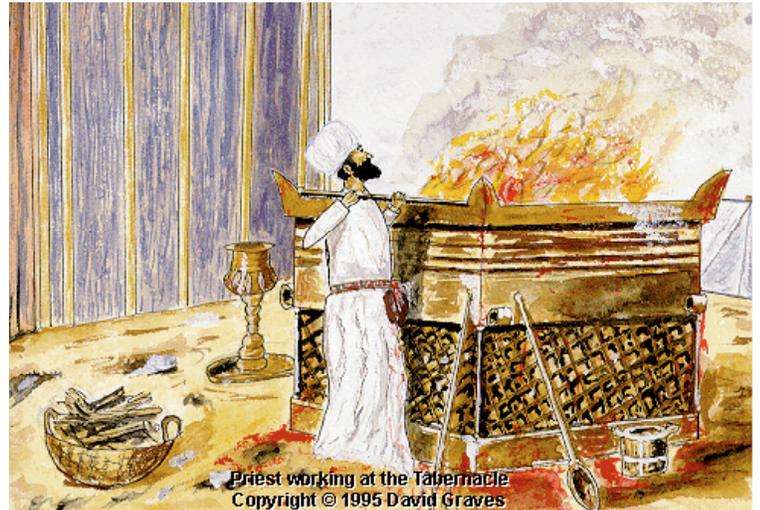
1. We may sin intentionally, premeditating it.
2. We may be overtaken in a sin when we get caught up in an unexpected temptation.
3. We may sin as a lesser evil, which, though lesser, is still evil.
4. We may fall into sin without realizing it, doing something we did not know was sinful.

But that’s not all. The consequences of sin, including many of our natural life-functions, are because of God’s judgment of sin. The effects of sin are also contrary to the holiness of God and hence prevent communion with Him. Those effects include:

- Contamination
- Diseases
- Appetite perversions, such as for food or sex
- Many bodily functions
- Childbirth
- Death

These things are often called: “The way God made us.” But they are actually the way God **cursed** us, due to the sin of Adam and Eve. Our present shortened longevity and death, the process of returning to the dust from which we came, is offensive to God because it is a consequence of sin, brought about by the judgment of a holy God. [Which is why they are reversed in the heavenly New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:1-3.] For example, God judged the world:

- When Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3)
- When the longevity of man was reduced after the Flood of Noah (Genesis 6–9)
- When God confused the languages at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)



We can categorize the sins requiring the sin offerings as being either physical impurities or the commission of unintentional sinful acts. Either of these leaves the worshiper in a state of contamination and hence offensive to a holy God. The sin offering was a purification offering that was designed to deal with these barriers. When Moses says: ***If a person sins unintentionally***, he is including those consequences of sin and the defilements of life that did not require forgiveness (such as child-birth (12:1-8), the healing of a skin disease (14:1-13) or contact with an unclean dead animal (11:31-32). So this was a more specialized sacrifice than the burnt offering. Or you might say it was a particular kind of burnt offering. Its purpose was to make purification.

Leviticus 4:3 begins with the sin offering of the anointed priest for himself. Chapter 4 outlines four distinguishable people groups needing a sin offering:

1. The anointed priest (4:3-12)
2. The congregation (4:13-21)
3. The leaders (4:22-26)
4. The common people (4:27-35)

Leviticus 4:4-10 Describes the sacrifice of a bull as a sin offering for the priest. The procedure is similar to the other animal sacrifices. For example, verse 10 reads: ***(just as it is removed from the ox of the sacrifice of peace offerings), and the priest is to offer them up in smoke on the altar of burnt offering.***

Leviticus 4:11-12. ***But the hide of the bull and all its flesh with its head and its legs and its entrails and its refuse, that is, all the rest of the bull, he is to bring out to a clean place outside the camp where the ashes are poured out, and burn it on wood with fire; where the ashes are poured out it shall be burned.***

This tells us something about how the camp, and particularly the Tabernacle, was kept clean. The area outside the actual Tent of Meeting, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies would be like a butcher shop where animals were continually being killed, cut up, and burned. This tells what happened to the carcass of the bull, in the case of sin offering, and what became of all the ashes from the various sacrifices done on the brazen (brass) altar. There was apparently a dumping/burning place outside the camp which was designated for dumping the ashes and the burning of the remainder of the bodies of the animals. When the Temple was built in Jerusalem to replace this Tabernacle, the Hinnom Valley south of Zion was used for that.

Leviticus 4:13-15 ***Now if the whole congregation of Israel commits error and the matter escapes the notice of the assembly, and they commit any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and they become guilty; when the sin which they have committed becomes known, then the assembly shall offer a bull of the herd for a sin offering and bring it before the tent of meeting. Then the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD, and the bull shall be slain before the LORD.***



This is not the same as *the common people*, which was a social class. The *congregation* could be anybody in any social class. The interesting question here is: “What is the difference between the *congregation* and the *assembly*? The Hebrew words don’t help us because the word *congregation* can be translated *assembly* and the word *assembly* can be translated *congregation*. From the context,

I would assume that the phrase *the whole congregation of Israel* refers to any individual Israelite who commits a sin. And the *assembly* refers to the nation of Israel as a community. The word “community” is only used once in the Bible, in Job 30:5, and it seems to refer to a city or village. But the point seems to be that, when one sinned, the whole community was guilty.

For example, when Achan stole some of the silver from Jericho, which God had put under a ban, the whole army lost the battle at Ai. When Joshua inquired of the Lord to see why this happened, God told him: *Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived* (Joshua 7:11). So the sin of one of the congregation, which was unknown by the rest of the assembly, caused the whole army to lose at Ai and many to be killed.

So God had an individual commitment to individual Israelites, but He also had an institutional commitment to Israel. God held each individual responsible for his or her sins, but He also held all 12 tribes of Israel responsible for the sin of each individual Israelite. The elders of the people were to recognize that, with a sacrifice of purification for the nation before God. And when that sacrifice had been made and the person was forgiven, it was considered *the sin offering for the assembly* (4:21).

Leviticus 4:16-21. In this section we read about the priest making a sacrifice using a similar procedure. It ends with this from verses 20-21: *He shall also do with the bull just as he did with the bull of the sin offering; thus he shall do with it. So the priest shall make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven. Then he is to bring out the bull to a place outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly.*

Notice in Leviticus there are two things being done: the sin or impurity required cleansing and the sins needed forgiveness. When Leviticus records the ritual for the person with some impurity, it says the impure person would *be clean* (such as Leviticus 12:8, after childbirth). When personal sin was involved and the priest performed the rites, it says that the sinner would be *forgiven* (Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35).

Leviticus 4:22-35 The rest of chapter 4 addresses two specific people groups, but the anointed priest (4:3-12) and the whole congregation (4:13-21) have already been singled out. So there are four separate groups mentioned, each of which must present a sacrifice for unintentional sin – the priests, the whole congregation, the leaders, and the common people. All four groups could appropriate the sin offering, but different types of animals should be brought, and the procedure was different.

- For the high priest, the sacrifice was a young bull (4:3).
- For the congregation, it was any bull (4:13, 14).
- For the ruler, it was a male goat (4:22).
- For the common person, it was a female goat or a lamb (4:28).



[Picture from www.oneyearbibleblog.com.]

As with the burnt offering, the animal was brought to the Tent’s entrance, the offer placed his hands on it, and killed it. For the common person or the ruler, the blood was dabbed on the horns of the altar and then poured out at the base of the altar. So for the leaders of the people, the ritual was different in that the Holy Place had to be purified. The blood was sprinkled on the veil of the Most Holy Place (4:5-6), some was dabbed on the altar of incense (4:7) and the rest was poured out at the base of the altar (4:7).

Leviticus 5:1-13 continues the sin offering for four specific acts:

1. Withholding evidence (5:1)
2. Touching something unclean (5:2)
3. Touching human uncleanness (5:3)
4. Swearing a foolish or reckless oath (5:4)

Leviticus 5:1 *Now if a person sins after he hears a public adjuration to testify when he is a witness, whether he has seen or otherwise known, if he does not tell it, then he will bear his guilt.*

What is fascinating about verse 1 is that a person is guilty of withholding evidence, even when he did not know he was withholding it. For example, he heard about something he witnessed, and he didn't know what he said was evidence. This required a sin offering. In what sense was it sinful for him to just happen to be in a certain place at a certain time and witness what he considered to be a normal act? For example, if you witnessed a car drive away from a building at a certain time and then watched the news on TV and realized it was a get away car for a crime, your guilt is that you witnessed it and you bear your guilt if you do not tell it. But the guilt of witnessing it would require a sin offering in Israel. It appears that the holiness of God extends to any non-revelation of truth, even if one is unaware of the non-revelation.

Leviticus 5:2 *Or if a person touches any unclean thing, whether a carcass of an unclean beast or the carcass of unclean cattle or a carcass of unclean swarming things, though it is hidden from him and he is unclean, then he will be guilty.*

Leviticus 5:3 *Or if he touches human uncleanness, of whatever sort his uncleanness may be with which he becomes unclean, and it is hidden from him, and then he comes to know it, he will be guilty.*

Some put these two verses together, since both deal with accidentally touching something the Law declares unclean. The first is the carcass of an animal, the second is some sort of human discharge or waste. It would seem that many of the results of the Fall, which causes living things to die and the human body to function as it does, are offensive to God. Natural is not necessarily godly. "Mother Nature" is perverted.

Leviticus 5:4 *Or if a person swears thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, in whatever matter a man may speak thoughtlessly with an oath, and it is hidden from him, and then he comes to know it, he will be guilty in one of these.*

It is good to know that there is a sin offering for our thoughtless words. In our case, it includes what Christ died for. But notice, it is a sin, and it requires a sacrifice. This particular thoughtless statement is an oath which the speaker could not or should not keep. One example would when a person takes a marriage vow and then their spouse divorces them against their wishes. They now are in a position where they have made a vow they are unable to keep. This is an offense to God and requires a sin offering. This is why Jesus said: *make no oath at all* (Matthew 5:34). We should not make any oath because we cannot control the future. Even sincere oaths which cannot be kept offend the holiness of God.

Leviticus 5: 5-6 *So it shall be when he becomes guilty in one of these, that he shall confess that in which he has sinned. He shall also bring his guilt offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin.*

The unintentional act or lack of action, which a person may not even have been aware of, which offends the holiness of God, requires two things.

1. ***He shall confess that in which he has sinned.*** And that's because he is ***guilty*** of sin.
2. He must present a ***guilt offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed.***

By way of application, we are to receive the payment of Christ on the cross for our unknown or thoughtless sins. But we are also to confess those as sin in our prayers to God.

Leviticus 5:7-13 Describes the procedure for the sacrifice for poor and very poor people.

Poor people could bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons (verses 7-10). Very poor people could bring *an ephah of fine flour*, which could presumably be obtained by gleaning the leftover grain in the fields. This section concludes with:

So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin which he has committed from one of these, and it will be forgiven him; then the rest shall become the priest's, like the grain (Leviticus 5:13).



So unintentional sin in Israel:

- Required a Levitical priest
- Required a confession/recognition of the sin
- Required an atonement be made with a sacrifice
- Resulted in the unintentional sinner being forgiven

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS:

- Sin is anything contrary to the character of God. Holiness is an attribute of God. And anything contrary to the holiness of God keeps us from God. So sin is not about what we do to each other. It is only about what offends God. Sin is not what hurts us or others, it's what offends God.
- Sin keeps us from God whether it is a motive or an action. Actions and conditions which are contrary to the character of God are sins which keep people from God, even if they had good intentions. For example, suppose you are wrong about your interpretation of the New Testament statements concerning head covering, or divorce, or women teaching men. You sincerely believe it teaches a certain thing but the author did not intend what you understand. Your motives are good, your intentions are sincere, but you are sinning and separated from fellowship with God. Christ died for your sin, you appropriate that by receiving Him as Savior. But you should ask God's forgiveness for any misinterpretations you have made.
- We must never think that just because something is part of our natural bodily functions it is godly. Everything, from our sex drive to our appetites to our bodily waists to the discharges involved in having a baby, are affected by the curse and contain aspects which offend God.
- Nature is perverted. Just because it is an act of God, such as earthquakes, wind, drought, or floods does not mean it isn't offensive to God. *Hell* is an act of God, but it also offends His holiness. All of nature has been judged, cursed, fallen and perverted from of the way it was created. Paul wrote: *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it* (Romans 8:20).
- God had both an individual and an institutional commitment to Israel. So when anyone sinned there had to be a ***sin offering for the assembly*** (4:21). God has no institutional commitment to the Church. The Church is a body, not a community (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

***In a community (such as Communism), no individual is significant.
Anyone can be replaced by another. It is the institution which is significant.
In a body, each part is essential to every other part.
In a body, if one part is damaged, the whole body suffers.***

The local church people, the believers in any city, were responsible for the conduct of one another (Matthew 18:15-18; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1-3; Revelation 2–3). But this was not the community responsibility of Israel. The sins of the believers in Corinth would hinder the work of the church. All the other churches in all the other cities should pray for them and possible assist them. But they were not held accountable for the sins of other believers. The purpose of church discipline was for the sinner to repent and to keep his influence from others. In Israel, the individual's sin required a sacrifice for the whole nation.