

The Book of Leviticus

Lesson 2: Peace, Sin, and Guilt Offerings -- Leviticus 3:1-5:13

There is a kind of holiness that keeps its distance, and there is a kind that draws you to the table. As Leviticus moves into chapter 3, we meet a God who does both at once. He is so holy that a careful blood ritual stands between Him and His people, and yet He invites those same people to sit down and share a meal in His presence. The peace offering, sometimes called the fellowship offering, is the only sacrifice the worshiper actually ate. Smoke went up to God, portions went to the priests, and the rest became a shared feast. Communion with God was the whole point.

But before we get too comfortable at that table, chapters 4 and 5 sober us. They deal with sin, and specifically with sin we did not even mean to commit. 'If a soul shall sin through ignorance' (4:2) is the recurring phrase. We tend to think guilt requires intention, that we are off the hook for what we did not notice. Leviticus disagrees. Even the priest sins this way. Even the whole congregation. Even the ruler and the common person. Unintentional sin is still sin, still a breach in the relationship, and it still needs atonement.

So God provides the sin offering and the guilt offering. Blood is applied, sometimes sprinkled before the veil, sometimes smeared on the horns of the altar, and the worshiper is forgiven. Where the guilt involves harm done to a neighbor or to holy things, restitution enters the picture: the wrong is not only confessed, it is repaired. Fellowship, forgiveness, and the making right of wrongs all flow through the same costly channel of atoning blood.

And every drop of it points forward. The shared meal of the peace offering anticipates the deeper communion we have with God through Christ, who is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). The blood of the sin offering anticipates the blood that 'cleanseth us from all sin' (1 John 1:7). These offerings could not finally take sin away; they were shadows. But what they pictured has come. In Christ the breach is healed, the table is set, and even the sins we never saw are covered. Let us study them carefully, and let the seriousness of sin drive us deeper into gratitude for the cross.

Group Discussion: The peace offering ended in a shared meal in God's presence, while the sin offering dealt even with sins committed unknowingly. As a class, discuss what these two offerings together reveal about a God who both demands atonement for sin and desires close fellowship with His people.

Personal Reflection: Leviticus insists that sin committed in ignorance is still real guilt requiring atonement. How does that truth change the way you think about the wrongs in your life you have excused because you did not intend them?

Read Leviticus 3:1-5:13

Study Questions

1. The peace offering (3:1-5) was the one sacrifice the worshiper shared in as a meal, with portions going to God, the priests, and the offerer. What does this fellowship offering reveal about God's desire not merely to forgive His people but to commune with them?
2. The fat of the peace offering, considered the best part, was burned to God, and Israel was forbidden to eat fat or blood (3:16-17). What does giving God the choicest portion stir in you about whether He gets your best or your leftovers?
3. Chapter 4 repeatedly addresses sin committed 'through ignorance' (4:2, 4:13, 4:22, 4:27), insisting it still brings guilt and requires atonement. What does this teach about the holiness of God and the true nature of sin, even when we do not intend it?
4. The sin offering required differed by the standing of the sinner, with the priest and the whole congregation bringing the costliest offerings (4:3, 4:14). As you consider that those with more influence bore a heavier accountability, where does your own influence over others raise the stakes of your obedience?
5. In the sin offering the blood was applied to the horns of the altar and sprinkled before the veil (4:6-7, 4:17-18), making atonement so the sinner 'shall be forgiven' (4:20). Why does Scripture tie forgiveness so closely to the application of blood, and what does that say about the cost of cleansing?

6. When a person realized their guilt, they were to confess 'that he hath sinned in that thing' (5:5) before bringing the offering. What is the role of honest confession in your walk with God, and what sin have you been reluctant to name plainly before Him?
7. The guilt offering (also called the trespass offering) in 5:1–13 addresses specific failures such as withholding testimony, touching the unclean, or rash oaths. What does it tell us about God that He attends to these concrete, everyday failures rather than only grand sins?
8. Leviticus 5:11–13 again makes provision for the poor, allowing fine flour when a person cannot afford a lamb or birds, yet still securing atonement. How does this gracious provision speak to you about a God who ensures no one is shut out of forgiveness?
9. Hebrews 9:11–14 says Christ entered the holy place 'by his own blood' and that this blood purges our conscience in a way the blood of bulls and goats never could. How do the sin and guilt offerings, with their applied blood and confession, foreshadow the once-for-all cleansing accomplished by Christ?
10. Looking back over the fellowship of the peace offering, the seriousness of unintentional sin, and the cleansing power of blood, name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to deepen both your reverence for His holiness and your nearness to His table.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 9:11–14, where Christ enters the holy place by His own blood and purges the conscience; 1 John 1:7–9, where the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin and we confess our sins; Ephesians 2:13–16, where Christ is our peace and reconciles us to God; Psalm 51:1–4, where David confesses sin and pleads for cleansing; 1 Corinthians 5:7–8, where Christ our passover is sacrificed for us

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