

Leviticus 2: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Leviticus chapter 2 It is a most holy part of the Lord's food offerings.

When you bring a grain offering baked in the oven as an offering, it shall be unleavened loaves of fine flour mixed with oil, or unleavened wafers smeared with oil. And if your offering is a grain offering baked on a griddle, it shall be a fine flour unleavened mixed with oil.

You shall break it in pieces and pour oil on it. It is a grain offering. And if your offering is a grain offering cooked in a pan, it shall be made of fine flour with oil. And you shall bring the grain offering that is made of these things to the Lord.

And when it is presented to the priest, he shall bring it to the altar. And the priest shall take from the grain offering its memorial portion, and burn this on the altar, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons. It is a most holy part of the Lord's food offerings. No grain offering that you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven. For you shall burn no leaven nor any honey as a food offering to the Lord.

[1 : 29] As an offering of firstfruits you may bring them to the Lord, but they shall not be offered on the altar for a pleasing aroma. You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering.

With all your offerings you shall offer salt. If you offer a grain offering of firstfruits to the Lord, you shall offer for the grain offering of your firstfruits, fresh ears, roasted with fire, crushed new grain. And you shall put oil on it, and lay frankincense on it. It is a grain offering. And the priest shall burn as its memorial portion some of the crushed grain, and some of the oil with all of its frankincense. It is a food offering to the Lord. In Leviticus chapter 2, the tribute offering is discussed. The tribute offering, or the minka, is often described as the grain offering, on account of the fact that it is usually composed of grain.

It is not always composed of grain, however, nor does the Hebrew term mean grain. As with other sacrifices, how we translate these terms actually matters. Nobayashi Kaiuchi uses loyalty offering as an alternative translation.

[2 : 35] The minka is best thought of as a gift or tribute from an inferior to a superior. The Hebrew term is not exclusive to sacrificial contexts, but is used on several occasions of gifts of tribute in contexts outside of Israel's worship.

When reading about the sacrifices in the book of Leviticus and elsewhere, we need to recognise that they hang together according to a deeper logic. One of the first questions that confronts us when treating chapter 2 of Leviticus is whether a minka, or tribute offering, could ever stand alone. Did such an offering always need to be offered alongside a preceding sacrifice, or as an integral element of such a sacrifice? If we want to think about this carefully, we need to distinguish between these two things.

Some offerings may be coordinated together in a sequence, whereas other offerings may be subordinated to primary offerings. Naftali Meshul, in his treatment of the grammar of sacrifices, gives a helpful analogy for what we're talking about here.

Imagine going to a fast food restaurant and ordering a burger. Then you're asked, Do you want fries with that? Do you want a soda? Would you like salt on your fries? There is a sort of logic to these requests.

[3 : 42] You would not order salt by itself, for instance. You might imagine ordering fries by themselves, but that would not count as a full meal. You might only order fries by themselves if you had already eaten a full meal, or planned to do so later.

Likewise, the salt does not belong with the burger or with the soda, but with the fries. The burger is never thought of as a side for the fries, either. The sort of questions that we're asking here about the grain offering are not dissimilar to questions like the following.

Could a large portion of fries reasonably be counted as someone's main, or is it only ever a side? If the person had eaten a meal before going to the fast food restaurant, would the fries, when considered in coordination with that meal, be a reasonable main, or are fries always only a side? Can a burger be considered a meal if it does not have fries or something similar on the side? There is a notable example in Numbers chapter 5, where we have a tribute offering or grain offering that is not coordinated with a preceding animal offering, nor is it subordinated to an animal offering to which it belongs.

Verse 15 of that chapter, This, it seems reasonable to argue, is a very special case of the tribute offering.

[5 : 03] It does not, as the offerings of Leviticus chapter 2, come with accompanying oil or frankincense. And its purpose is not to bring a pleasing aroma, but to bring iniquity to remembrance.

The unusual character of the tribute offering in this case seems to be related to the exceptional purpose for which it was being employed. In all normal cases, it would need to be coordinated with a prior sacrifice of an animal, or subordinated to an animal sacrifice, as the tribute offering belonging to it, as its side, as it were.

The first instances of tribute offerings in the Bible are found in Genesis chapter 4, with the offerings of Cain and Abel. Cain brought a tribute offering of the fruit of the ground, whereas Abel brought the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions.

Cain's offering seems to have been rejected, because it was neither coordinated with, nor subordinated to, an animal sacrifice. This would give weight to the argument that the tribute offerings of Leviticus chapter 2 were not intended to stand alone.

Rather, they would typically be offered with ascension or peace offerings. There is another exceptional case of grain being used as a sin offering in Leviticus chapter 5 verse 11. This is a helpful reminder that grain offerings were more expansive than merely tribute offerings, and so grain offering is not the best translation.

[6 : 17] In the case of a very poor person, a grain offering could be given as a form of sin offering. Furthermore, various forms of grain offering could be parts of near-bringsings that were not actually burnt upon the altar, such as in firstfruits.

The tribute offering, however, seems to have burning upon the altar as an integral part of it. Leviticus chapter 2 is especially addressed to laypeople, and gives a lot of attention to the process of preparing the offering.

Lee Trevascus notes that, in contrast to the peace offering that follows, none of it was to be eaten by the layperson. It was most holy, and the parts that were eaten were not eaten by the worshipper. It needed to be prepared in advance for the purpose. It should not just be grain or bread that was left over. The restriction upon the use of leaven strengthens this point. Although we might expect to find instructions concerning drink offerings given alongside the grain tribute offerings at this point, drink offerings are not mentioned here.

Perhaps we are to presume that the drink offerings only became a regular part of the worship after they entered into the promised land. However, in addition to a small number of cases where drink offerings are mentioned in the book of Leviticus, they are treated in a bit more detail in the book of Numbers.

[7 : 23] The uses of grain in tribute offering in this chapter all involve some form of transformation of the grain by the worshipper. The flour is made from the grain. The oil and frankincense are added to it.

It is transformed in some manner by fire. When considering rituals and their meanings, it is important to consider that which is integral to the ritual and that which is only ancillary or accidental to it.

For instance, in the sin offering, provided that blood is administered to a particular object, is the precise manner in which the text describes it being administered, being flicked, daubed or poured for instance, something integral to the right.

In this chapter, the various forms of cooking described do not seem to be integral to the right, but they are necessary preparations for it. However, the fact that we are told about the different forms

of tribute offering prepared in the oven, the griddle or the pan perhaps suggests that the worshipper's work in preparing this offering is of greater significance for its meaning. The tribute offering arguably bears an especially strong connection with the work of the offerer. While the ascension offering of chapter 1 could be seen as a bringing near of the offerer's person, the tribute offering of chapter 2 could be seen as bringing near their works as well. [8 : 32] Once the person of the offerer has been accepted, their works can also be accepted. Thinking about the tribute offering in this way might also help us to explain the exceptional case of the offering that's given along with the woman suspected of adultery in Numbers chapter 5.

The tribute offering of the woman offered in that instance likely represents the works of the woman being brought near to the Lord for judgment. A further connection that we can draw here is suggested by Johann Heinrich Kurtz.

Kurtz observes the relationship between the elements of the tribute offering and the furniture of the holy place in the tabernacle. The grain naturally corresponds with the showbread, the frankincense with the incense, and the oil with the lampstand.

There is, as it were, a symbolic tabernacle being established within the altar. The tribute offering could take a number of different forms associated with different kinds of preparation. All of the forms here are accompanied by oil, but the offering could be a sacrifice of raw semolina, or it could take the form of unleavened wafers or bread.

The tribute offering was divided by the priests into a memorial portion of it which was burnt upon the altar to the Lord, and the rest of it that was described as most holy and belonged only to the priests. [9 : 43] Verse 11 excludes both leaven and honey in the tribute offerings. On account of the feast of unleavened bread and the symbolism of cutting off an evil principle by cutting out leaven, many people see leaven here as a symbol of evil.

However, if this were the case, it would not fit with verse 12, which permits the use of leaven in the near bringings of firstfruits. Mary Douglas argues that the prohibition against honey and leaven, or sourdough, is best explained as follows.

The answer invokes the major division of the biblical worldview, On the one hand, natural generation, including sexual reproduction of humans, and on the other, divine generation by the covenant, symbolized by circumcision of the people of Israel.

Honey and leaven work in the natural mode of generation. Sacrifice works in the divine mode, and to teach the lesson they are kept apart. Douglas goes on to observe the way that honey and leaven are partners within the bread-making process.

The honey is used to activate the leaven. Koichi observes that both are associated with the Passover event. The honey represents the promised land, that is fertile, flowing with milk and honey, and then the leaven represents Egypt that they are leaving behind, cutting off the old leaven. [10 : 55] In discussing the offering of firstfruits described in verse 12, Jacob Milgram argues that we should distinguish between the first processed and the first ripe. First ripe produce is taken directly from the field or the orchard or the vineyard.

However, first processed produce is taken from the threshing floor, and other such places where the produce has already been worked upon. The requirement of verse 13 could be variously understood.

Are the three statements essentially synonymous, merely claiming that every single tribute offering should include salt, or is a stronger claim being made, that all the sacrifices of this section, or all the sacrifices in general, must include salt with them?

It is described as the salt of the covenant with your God, and elsewhere in scripture we see a similar association between the covenant and salt. Numbers chapter 18 verse 19, All the holy contributions that the people of Israel present to the Lord, I give to you, and to your sons and daughters with you, as a perpetual Jew.

It is a covenant of salt forever before the Lord, for you and for your offspring with you. Second Chronicles chapter 13 verse 5, Ought you not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt?

[12 : 09] Salt then might be an image of endurance and preservation. It might also evoke its savour. In Mark chapter 9 verses 49 to 50, our Lord says, For everyone will be salted with fire.

Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another. The description of being salted with fire might make

us think of the fact that salt with its savour is a sort of solid form of fire.

Ezekiel chapter 43 verse 24, You shall present them before the Lord, and the priest shall sprinkle salt on them, and offer them up as a burnt offering to the Lord, perhaps suggests that the requirement here was not intended to be exclusive to the tribute offering.

Rather, salt was the one substance found in every single one of the sacrifices, a substance by which all of the sacrifices were connected together. Salt, with its incorruptibility, its ubiquity, its preserving character, and its savour, represents something of the character of the covenant wherever it is found, communicating something of itself and acting upon everything to which it comes into contact.

The final verses describe what is the least processed of the tribute offerings, crushed new grain that has not yet been formed into flour. It is not the most elevated of the tribute offerings, which is probably why it comes last in this chapter, but it is logically the first form that such an offering can take, and as a result can represent the offering of the larger body of work that follows after it.

[13 : 37] The tribute offering and its associated drink offerings of wine should make Christians consider associations with the practice of the Eucharist. Just as one aspect of the tribute offering was a memorial, so the Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's work, calling the Lord to remember and to act on the basis of what Christ has done.

A question to consider, can you think of any further associations between the tribute offering and the Christian celebration of the Eucharist?