

Leviticus 7: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Leviticus chapter 7. This is the law of the guilt offering. It is most holy. In the place where they kill the burnt offering, they shall kill the guilt offering, and its blood shall be thrown against the sides of the altar. And all its fat shall be offered, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. The priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering to the Lord. It is a guilt offering. Every male among the priests may eat of it. It shall be eaten in a holy place. It is most holy. The guilt offering is just like the sin offering. There is one law for them. The priest who makes atonement with it shall have it. And the priest who offers any man's burnt offering shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering that he has offered. And every grain offering baked in the oven, and all that is prepared on a pan or a griddle, shall belong to the priest who offers it. And every grain offering mixed with oil or dry shall be shared equally among all the sons of Aaron. And this is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings that one may offer to the Lord.

If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the thanksgiving sacrifice unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and loaves of fine flour well mixed with oil. With the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving, he shall bring his offering with loaves of leavened bread, and from it he shall offer one loaf from each offering as a gift to the Lord. It shall belong to the priest who throws the blood of the peace offerings. And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his offering. He shall not leave any of it until the morning. But if the sacrifice of his offering is a vow offering or a free will offering, it shall be eaten on the day that he offers his sacrifice, and on the next day what remains of it shall be eaten. But what remains of the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day shall be burned up with fire.

If any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering is eaten on the third day, he who offers it shall not be accepted, neither shall it be credited to him. It is tainted, and he who eats of it shall bear his iniquity. Flesh that touches any unclean thing shall not be eaten. It shall be burned up with fire.

All who are clean may eat flesh. But the person who eats of the flesh of the sacrifice of the Lord's peace offerings, while an uncleanness is on him, that person shall be cut off from his people.

And if anyone touches an unclean thing, whether human uncleanness, or an unclean beast, or any unclean detestable creature, and then eats some flesh from the sacrifice of the Lord's peace offerings, that person shall be cut off from his people. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the people of Israel, saying, You shall eat no fat of ox or sheep or goat. The fat of an animal that dies of itself, and the fat of one that is torn by beasts, may be put to any other use, but on no account shall you eat it. For every person who eats of the fat of an animal, of which a food offering may be made to the Lord, shall be cut off from his people. Moreover, you shall eat no blood whatever, whether of fowl or of animal, in any of your dwelling places. Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from his people. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever offers the sacrifice of his peace offerings to the Lord shall bring his offering to the Lord from the sacrifice of his peace offerings. His own hand shall bring the Lord's food offerings. He shall bring the fat with the breast, that the breast may be waved as a wave offering before the Lord. The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be for Aaron and his sons. And the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a contribution from the sacrifice of your peace offerings. Whoever among the sons of Aaron offers the blood of the peace offerings and the fat shall have the right thigh for a portion. For the breast that is waved and the thigh that is contributed I have taken from the people of Israel out of the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons, as a perpetual Jew from the people of

[4 : 01] Israel. This is the portion of Aaron and of his sons from the Lord's food offerings from the day they were presented to serve as priests of the Lord. The Lord commanded this to be given them by the people of Israel from the day that he anointed them. It is a perpetual Jew throughout their generations. This is the law of the burnt offering, of the grain offering, of the sin offering, of the guilt offering, of the ordination offering, and of the peace offering, which the Lord commanded Moses on Mount Sinai on the day that he commanded the people of Israel to bring their offerings to the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai. From Leviticus chapter 1 to the first half of chapter 6, the book laid out the fundamental law of the sacrifices. There were five key forms of sacrifice, the ascension offering, tribute offering, peace offering, purification offering, and reparation offering. At the end of chapter 6, we move to further instructions concerning the sacrifices that had already been established, treating the ascension offerings, tribute offerings, and purification offerings. These instructions continue in chapter 7 here, in which we turn to the reparation and peace offerings. The instructions here fill out the picture concerning the reparation sacrifice from chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6. Many details of the reparation offering about which we might have wondered are given to us here.

The location of the killing of the reparation offering is stipulated at this point, being the same as that of the ascension offering on the north side of the altar before the Lord, as we see in chapter 1 verse 11. The description of the locations where the animals were killed varies. The peace offering is killed in front of, or at the entrance of, the tent of meeting, in chapter 3 verse 2, 8 and 13. The location for the killing of the purification offerings is given as before the Lord, seemingly at the entrance of the tent of meeting, in the case of the anointed priests or congregations bulls, chapter 4 verse 4 and 15.

Or in the case of the leader of the people or the commoner, it's given as the site in which they kill the ascension offering. The entrance of the tent of meeting probably refers to the area from the entrance to the bronze altar, which would be to the east of the complex. The north side of the altar would be to the right of it as you face the altar and the tabernacle from the entrance to the courtyard. Perhaps this was partly for reasons of practicality. Milgram speculates, the reason for the existence of two discrete slaughtering areas is not given and can only be surmised. It may stem from purely practical considerations. A bovine, especially a bull, is difficult to control, hence it may be slaughtered anywhere in the forecourt. Why was the north chosen for the flock animals? Again, practical reasons may have come to the fore. The ash heap was located east of the altar, the laver to the west, and the stairs or ramp to the south. The only area left with adequate space was the north. As in the case of the ascension offering, the blood of the reparation offering is thrown against the sides of the altar, possibly internal, or if Naphtali Meshul is correct, on top of the altar. As in the case of the purification and peace offerings, the fat of the reparation offering is offered to the Lord. The handling of the reparation offering also resembled the purification offering in the fact that the priests were able to eat of it in a holy place. Priests enjoyed privileges relative to the sacrifices that they performed for others. They could consume the meat in a holy place and could also keep the skin of the animal. Priests also were given the various tribute offerings of the people's grain, besides their memorial portions. We were introduced to the peace offerings in chapter 3, and now we have a more elaborate presentation of them, as we were instructed concerning several forms that they could take. The peace offering was the principal type of sacrifice that regular Israelites would offer, a voluntary offering that culminated in the enjoyment of a sacrificial meal. In contrast to the meat of the layperson's purification and reparation offerings, which the priests alone would eat, the meat of the peace offerings was also enjoyed by the party offering it. The first form of the peace offering described here is the thanksgiving offering. Such sacrifices are mentioned in places like Psalm 50 verse 14 to 15.

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me. The thanksgiving offering was a peace offering made on account of divine deliverance. The Lord had rescued the offerer from trouble, and in gratitude, the offerer performed this peace offering. With the sacrifice, he brings a number of grain offerings, unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and loaves of fine flour well mixed with oil, and also loaves of leavened bread. These are not here described as minkah, or tribute offerings, and we should recall leaven, required within some of the loaves offered here, was not permitted in the tribute offerings, whether offered in coordination with or subordination to animal sacrifices. We can see an example of how such loaves would have been handled in the sacrifice of the Nazarite upon the completion of his vow in Numbers chapter 6 verses 19 and 20.

And the priest shall take the shoulder of the ram, when it is boiled, and one unleavened loaf out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them on the hands of the Nazarite, after he has shaved the hair of his consecration. And the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the Lord.

[9 : 29] They are a holy portion for the priest, together with the breast that is waved, and the thigh that is contributed. And after that the Nazarite may drink wine. The flesh of peace offerings for thanksgiving had to be eaten on the same day as the offering. The author of the book of Hebrews, even after speaking about the way that the old covenant sacrificial system is no longer operative, exhorts his readers continually to offer a sacrifice of praise in chapter 13 verse 15. Most likely here he's adopting the language of the Septuagint of Leviticus chapter 7 verse 15 and Psalm 116 verse 17, which refer to the peace offering for thanksgiving in the same terms. From the earliest years of the church, the term eucharist, or thanksgiving, was adopted to refer to the Lord's Supper.

We see this in the Didache, for instance. While the old covenant involved a continual, twice-daily burnt offering that continued to ascend throughout the day and the night, and a continual tribute offering along with it, the new covenant is distinguished by a continual thanksgiving offering, its perpetual eucharist, and it seems likely that it's drawing upon this particular form of the peace offering. In celebrating the eucharist, we are celebrating a continual thanksgiving for the Lord's deliverance in Christ. The second kind of peace offering was the votive offering, which could be offered in fulfilment of a vow. For instance, an Israelite might say that if the Lord were to bring something to pass, they would celebrate a peace offering in thanksgiving.

Alternatively, another form of votive offering would be upon the completion of something like the Nazarite vow. In Numbers chapter 6 verse 14, in the Lords for the Nazarite, the Nazarite was expected to offer a ram without blemish as a peace offering at the conclusion of the period of his vow.

The third form of the peace offering was the free will offering, which didn't really involve the same occasion as the other two, but could be offered purely of the offerer's ungrateful initiative to the Lord. In the case of the latter two forms of the peace offering, the meat of the sacrifice could be eaten on the day of the sacrifice and on the day after it. Any meat remaining to the third day, however, had to be destroyed. If someone were to eat it, it would invalidate the sacrifice.

Holy food was for holy, or in some cases clean, people, and a failure to uphold this principle could lead to serious consequences. Verses 19 to 21 outline some of the boundaries that needed to be upheld in this area, and the severity of the punishments faced by those who breached them.

[11 : 58] There is another example of a law concerning someone eating holy food that he ought not to eat in chapter 22 verses 14 to 16. In this and other cases, it seems that such violations could be dealt with through making restitution for the item, paying some added compensation, and presumably sacrificing a reparation offering. However, where a person was not penitent, and their sin could not be dealt with through the trespass offering, they were to be completely cut off from the people for their sacrilege. In Genesis chapter 9, the Lord prohibited the consuming of blood, and this prohibition is often repeated in the law. In addition to that blood taboo, which is also reiterated in this context, Israel was to refrain from consuming the fat of animals, presumably the specific fatty covering offered in the peace and purification offerings. Like the blood, the fat of the animal was reserved for the Lord and the cult. To eat it would be a trespass of great severity. Israel was not only prohibited from eating the fat of their sacrifices, but also from eating the fat of animals more generally, on pain of excommunication from the people. Verses 29 to 36 concern the performance of the peace offering. The person whose animal was being offered needed to bring the sacrifice by his own hands.

The sacrifice involved a sort of change of ownership. The offer gave his offering to the Lord, and then received parts of it back from the Lord's hand in the form of the communion meal. The animal that entered into the tabernacle as common meat was received back by the offerer as holy meat. In particular, the fat and breast of the animal were presented as an elevation offering to the Lord. This is often translated wave offering. The parts were lifted up to the Lord, devoted or dedicated to him by the offerer, and then needed to be treated as the Lord's possession, no longer that of the offerer. The fat was the Lord's portion of the sacrifice, and the breast was the portion belonging to the priests.

The right thigh of the peace offering was the due of the officiating priest at the sacrifice. Instructions concerning this were given earlier to Moses in Exodus chapter 29 verses 22 to 28, in connection with the investiture of Aaron and his sons as priests.

Then you shall take them from their hands, and burn them on the altar on top of the burnt offering, as a pleasing aroma before the Lord. It is a food offering to the Lord. You shall take the breast of the ram of Aaron's ordination, and wave it for a wave offering before the Lord, and it shall be your portion. And you shall consecrate the breast of the wave offering that is waved, and the thigh of the priest's portion that is contributed from the ram of ordination, from what was Aaron's and his sons.

Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel. This chapter concludes the instructions concerning the offerings that opens the book of Leviticus, setting things up for the establishment of the priests and their duties in the chapters that follow.