

Leviticus 6: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Leviticus chapter 6. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, For the last thing that he found, or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full, and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realises his guilt.

And he shall bring to the priest as his compensation to the Lord a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent, for a guilt offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord, and he shall be forgiven for any of the things that one may do, and thereby become guilty.

The Lord spoke to Moses saying, Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the burnt offering. The burnt offering shall be on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it.

And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and put his linen undergarment on his body, and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar, and put them beside the altar.

Then he shall take off his garments, and put on other garments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place. The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it. It shall not go out.

[1 : 3 3] The priest shall burn wood on it every morning. And he shall arrange the burnt offering on it, and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually.

It shall not go out. And this is the law of the grain offering. The sons of Aaron shall offer it before the Lord in front of the altar, and one shall take from it a handful of the fine flour of the grain offering and its oil, and all the frankincense that is on the grain offering, and burn this as its memorial portion on the altar, a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

And the rest of it Aaron and his sons shall eat. It shall be eaten unleavened in a holy place. In the court of the tent of meeting they shall eat it. It shall not be baked with leaven.

I have given it as their portion of my food offerings. It is a thing most holy, like the sin offering and the guilt offering. Every male among the children of Aaron may eat of it, as decreed forever throughout your generations, from the Lord's food offerings.

Whatever touches them shall become holy. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, This is the offering that Aaron and his sons shall offer to the Lord on the day when he is anointed. A tenth of an ephor of fine flour is a regular grain offering, half of it in the morning and half in the evening.

[2 : 4 5] It shall be made with oil on a griddle. You shall bring it well mixed, in baked pieces like a grain offering, and offer it for a pleasing aroma to the Lord. The priest from among Aaron's sons, who is anointed to succeed him, shall offer it to the Lord as decreed forever.

The whole of it shall be burned. Every grain offering of a priest shall be wholly burned. It shall not be eaten. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the sin offering.

In the place where the burnt offering is killed, shall the sin offering be killed before the Lord. It is most holy. The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tent of meeting.

Whatever touches its flesh shall be holy, and when any of its blood is splashed on a garment, you shall wash that on which it was splashed in a holy place. And the earthenware vessel in which it is boiled shall be broken.

But if it is boiled in a bronze vessel, that shall be scoured and rinsed in water. Every male among the priests may eat of it. It is most holy. But no sin offering shall be eaten, from which any blood is brought into the tent of meeting to make atonement in the holy place.

[3 : 53] It shall be burned up with fire. Leviticus chapter 6 begins with the start of New's speech, but continues the discussion of the reparation offering from the preceding chapter.

The reparation offering is the fifth of the types of offerings that we have looked at to this point. It has much in common with the purification offering, the treatment of which proceeds it within the text of Leviticus.

The reparation offering, often translated as the guilt or trespass offering, protected holy things from desecration or trespass, requiring reparation to be made in cases of fault.

At the end of chapter 5, we were presented with two broad categories of fault for which reparation offering would need to be made. The first dealt with situations such as those in which someone unintentionally desecrated something holy or failed to complete a votive offering.

The second deals with situations where there was a violation of some commandment concerning holy things. We can imagine several situations that might fall under these categories of fault for which a reparation offering would need to be offered.

[4 : 56] Perhaps someone failed to pay his tithe on part of his produce, or perhaps he ate some holy food, which he ought not to have eaten, or had mixed crops on his land, not realising it was against the Lord's commandments.

Perhaps he hadn't been well taught by the Levites in his area. Perhaps he was a Nazirite, who inadvertently was defiled and could not complete his vow. Ananias and Sapphira's failure to pay the price of their devoted field to the Lord in Acts chapter 5 is a New Testament example of a trespass in holy things.

The Lord struck them both down for their trespass, and, as a result of their deaths, people's awareness of the weightiness of the holiness of the Lord was markedly heightened. In verses 1 to 7 of this chapter, we have a third category of cases.

These cases are cases of false swearing or perjury. In these cases, the person is guilty of bearing the name of the Lord in vain, lying after binding himself by oath to tell the truth.

The specific cases of perjury that are covered here concern the sinful obtaining of a neighbour's property, whether through deception, robbery, oppression, or failure to return a neighbour's lost property, and denial under oath that it had come into one's hands.

[6 : 07] A case of oppression might be the failure to pay a hired worker his due, as described in places like Deuteronomy chapter 24, verses 14 to 15. The reparation offering here backs up laws that we find in places like Exodus chapter 22, verses 7 to 12, where oaths before the Lord were used to resolve disputes concerning property.

If a man gives to his neighbour money or goods to keep safe, and it is stolen from the man's house, then, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. If the thief is not found, the owner of the house shall come near to God to show whether or not he has put his hand to his neighbour's property.

For every breach of trust, whether it is for an ox, for a donkey, for a sheep, for a cloak, or for any kind of lost thing, of which one says, this is it, the case of both parties shall come before God.

The one whom God condemns shall pay double to his neighbour. If a man gives to his neighbour a donkey or an ox or a sheep, or any beast to keep safe, and it dies or is injured or is driven away, without anyone seeing it, an oath by the Lord shall be between them both to see whether or not he has put his hand to his neighbour's property.

The owner shall accept the oath, and he shall not make restitution. But if it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to its owner. In these cases, where there is no clear proof of the claims or suspicions of the parties, and human courts would not be able to judge, taking a solemn oath before the Lord placed the matter in the Lord's hands.

[7 : 54] The case of the perjurer here gives weight to the idea that high-handed sins could be decreased in severity through confession. The sacrifice can never serve as a way of paying off guard while remaining proud in one's sins.

However, with confession and restitution to the wrong neighbour, the reparation sacrifice could deal with what was initially a high-handed and intentional sin. The Lord's sanctions undergirding just relations in society was a crucial aspect of the social effect of the law.

If you wrong or defraud your neighbour, you are not only accountable to them for your fault, but also to the Lord. The reparation offering was part of the manner in which such debts could be addressed.

In this case, unlike the earlier case where the misappropriated items belonged to the Lord and the repayment was made to him, here the repayment needs to be made to the wronged party, but for the sacrilegious use of the Lord's name, the perjured party has to offer a reparation offering or its monetary equivalent.

In all of the various cases of the reparation offering, some holy thing has been desecrated or misappropriated. In the case of the Nazarite who cannot complete his vow, it is his consecrated head.

[9 : 01] In the case of the perjurer, it is the Lord's name. When considering the reparation offering for the leper in this context, it could be helpful to think about the connection between leprosy, not the same skin condition as that which is conventionally referred to by that term, and being struck by the Lord on account of a trespass upon holy things.

Miriam was struck with leprosy when she spoke against the Lord's anointed leader Moses in Numbers chapter 12. King Uzziah was struck with leprosy when he committed sacrilege by trying to burn incense before the Lord, although he was not a priest, in 2 Chronicles chapter 26.

In Ezra chapter 10, John Kleinig suggests that we might see, in Isaiah chapter 53 verse 10, a reference to the reparation offering that helps us to consider the death of Christ in terms of it.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

Christ is the offering for guilt, or reparation offering, for people who have sinned against the Lord's holy things. The reparation offering seems to be a close relation of the purification offering.

[10 : 25] However, the reparation offering requires a ram or a male lamb. Male lambs and rams were animals that were not offered as purification offerings. Rather, female lambs and ewes and female goats were offered for the sins of laypersons, and male goats and bulls for the sins of leaders and priests.

The male sheep, missing in the purification offering, appears in the reparation offering. The fact that Jesus is spoken of as a male lamb suggests that he is associated in some way with the ram of reparation.

Christ deals with our Adamic trespass against the Lord's holiness. His sacrifice is, as James Jordan has maintained, the foundational sacrifice, the basis for our entire communion with God.

The rest of chapter 6 gives a series of instructions concerning various sacrifices that have already been established in the book of Leviticus. These instructions fill out the ritual law that we have in the preceding chapters.

In this chapter, we have instructions concerning the daily sacrifice of the ascension offering and the tribute offering, and then instructions for the purification offering. The altar involved a continual ascension of smoke to the Lord, much as the lamp in the holy place was to be kept burning.

[11 : 35] It was a pillar of cloud and fire that rose up perpetually, representing the ascent into God's presence and a conduit of communion between heaven and earth. Managing this perpetually ascending fire was a key responsibility of the priests.

They had to remove the ashes and place them in a clean place outside of the camp, the same location where the flesh of the purification offerings for the priests were burnt. The ashes were not holy, but nor were they defiled.

When disposing of the ashes, the priest had to wear holy garments of his office when taking up the ashes from the altar and change into common garments to deposit the ashes outside of the camp. Mary Douglas suggests that the altar was established as a sort of sacrificial mountain.

At the base of the mountain, on top of the wood, you would have the main pieces of the ascension offering, the main portions of its flesh chopped up, its head, and its fat. On top of those pieces, the fat of the peace offerings would be placed.

Then, at the summit of the mountain of the sacrifice, the washed entrails and legs of the ascension offering would be placed. This follows the pattern of Mount Sinai. The base of the mountain corresponds to the people, the middle section, the place where the leaders of the people and the priests were able to eat before the Lord, and then the summit of the mountain where God was present and to which Moses ascended.

[12 : 53] Douglas argues that by the legs, the text is euphemistically referring to the genitals of the animal. Together with the entrails, the genitals would represent the inmost reality of the creature.

The layperson offering an ascension offering was to wash these while the priests were arranging the main pieces of their offering upon the altar, presumably symbolically associated with the need for the cleansing of the inmost parts of the human self to ascend into God's presence.

As Psalm 24 verses 3 and 4 puts it, The tribute offering of grain comes next.

Once again, there are restrictions upon what can be offered and how it is to be eaten. The memorial portion must be offered to the Lord upon the altar, but the rest needs to be eaten by the priests in a holy place, in the court of the tent of meeting or tabernacle.

No leaven must be used in it or added to it. It is holy food and restricted to persons who are set apart. In addition to the regular ascension offering, a regular tribute offering must be offered, although a number of possible forms of baking, in an oven, in a pan or on a griddle, are listed in chapter 2.

[14 : 06] Here the exact mode of preparing the regular tribute offering is stipulated. It must be made with oil on a griddle. This suggests that there might perhaps be some symbolic import to the different modes of preparation of the offering listed in chapter 2.

No mention is made of frankincense here, although as it is explicitly excluded on other occasions, the fact that it is not mentioned here is not decisive evidence of its absence.

As the tribute offering is being made by the high priest, none of it is to be eaten. The concluding instructions of the chapter also concern the eating of the sacrifices and the disposal of things that had come into contact with them.

The purification offerings of the people were to be eaten in a holy place by the priests who offered them. Anyone or anything that came into contact with the meat or blood of the sacrificial animal contracted holiness and needed to be treated accordingly, either being cleansed or destroyed.

The purification offerings for the priests and the entire congregation which were brought into the holy place were not, however, to be eaten. Such sacrifices contracted a greater level of holiness and needed to be treated accordingly.

[15 : 14] A question to consider, where might we see some further examples of contraction of holiness like those mentioned at the end of this chapter?