

**PART ONE**  
**THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM**  
**LEVITICUS 1:1 – 7:38**

## Introduction

### Introduction to Part One: the Sacrificial System (chapters 1 – 7)

The first seven chapters of Leviticus contain laws regulating the offering of sacrifices in the tabernacle. There are voluntary sacrifices and there are mandatory sacrifices. Since anyone can offer any of these sacrifices, most of the information is directed at the people generally (1:1 – 6:7). However there are certain matters of ritual procedure that fall to the special competence of the priests. These are added separately (6:8 – 7:21). The section concludes with some final directions given to the community (7:22-36).

There are three sacrifices that fall into the voluntary category.

1. The burnt offering (1:3-17 and 6:9-17)
2. The cereal offering (2:1-16 and 6:14-23)
3. The communion sacrifice (3:1-17 and 7:11-21)

There are two sacrifices that are mandatory. The first is public, the second private.

4. The purification offering (4:1 – 5:13 and 6:24-30)
5. The reparation offering (5:14 – 6:7 and 7:1-7)

Scholars suggest a number of motives for the practice of offering sacrifices in the countries surrounding ancient Israel. Some of these may account for the origins of practices that we will find in the following pages, but play no part in the conscious motivation. Israelite sacrifices were not intended to provide food for YHWH, or to manipulate YHWH through magic. Nor were they intended as a way of magically transferring the life-force of the sacrificed animal to the offerer.

Other motives, however, do have their counterpart in Israel. One is the offering of sacrifice to effect communion with God. The people of Israel were not encouraged to imagine YHWH eating with them, but they did want to be as close as possible to his presence in order to experience his blessing. They did hope to reduce divine anger and punishment by atonement, or to induce divine blessing and protection by offering a gift. In the final analysis we should not forget that in cult we are dealing with symbolic action which is necessarily open to a rich variety of meanings that resist definition.

Essential to the offering of sacrifice is the ministry of a priest. More will be said on this in the next section (Leviticus 8-10), but it is clear from the texts on the sacrificial system that the following actions can be carried out only by a priest. Only the priest can carry out ministry at the altar. Only a priest can perform the blood rite. Only a priest can offer incense. Priestly ministries take place in the sanctuary and only in the sanctuary. A priest is required in special circumstances to burn the carcass of a sacrificed animal in a place outside the camp (4:11-12, 21), but to do this he must first remove his priestly vestments (6:11). It is important to note also that, apart from the offering of incense and the lighting of the lamp – actions which take place inside the tent, and so are necessarily unseen by the people – all the other services provided by the priest are in the public eye. The priesthood in Israel is hereditary, but, unlike the equivalent role in the surrounding cultures, it is not controlled by an esoteric group jealously protecting its secrets.

The importance of the priest's action in dashing the blood of the sacrificed offering against the altar will become obvious as we read the following sacrificial rites. It cannot be over-stated. Life is in the blood. Domestic animals (cattle, sheep, goats) can be killed for food, but only in the sanctuary. The people of Israel are forbidden to take the life of the animal. It must be given back to God. In the symbolic world of the cult, this is carried out by the dashing of the blood against the altar. Furthermore, it is the giving of the life of the offered animal back to God that purges the sanctuary of the negative pollution that human behaviour causes to adhere to it. It nullifies these forces, thereby making it possible for the presence of the all-holy God to dwell there, and so to bless and protect his people.

A final introductory comment is to note the ethical dimension in the following texts, sometimes explicit, but always present. The sacrificial system was not envisaged as a parallel system to the ethical one, and certainly never as a substitute for keeping the moral requirements of the covenant. On the contrary, it was a way of reminding people of the nature of YHWH and of what it means to be a 'holy nation' and a 'priestly kingdom' in the way people treated their neighbours, but also in the way they carried out their mission to the world. In this the Priestly School is in harmony with the critique of the prophets who spoke out against the blindness of those who believed that sacrifices had an efficacy independent of the moral behaviour of the one making the offering (see, for example, Jeremiah 7:1-15; 26:1-15).

**<sup>1</sup>YHWH summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying:**

**<sup>2</sup>Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When any of you bring an offering of livestock to YHWH, you shall bring your offering from the herd or from the flock.**

**<sup>3</sup>If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you shall offer a male without blemish; you shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, for acceptance in your behalf before YHWH.**

**<sup>4</sup>You shall lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be acceptable in your behalf as atonement for you.**

**<sup>5</sup>The bull shall be slaughtered before YHWH; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer the blood, dashing the blood against all sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.**

YHWH speaks to Moses now, not from the mountain, but from the tent of meeting (1:1). We are to imagine Moses standing in the courtyard of the tabernacle when summoned to this first meeting, for YHWH's glory has spilled over to fill the entire tent (Exodus 40:34). It is essential to note that God's words are to be conveyed 'to the people of Israel'(1:2). This supports what has just been said: laws governing the cult are not intended as esoteric information, jealously guarded by a priestly sect – and in this Israel's cult differs markedly from that generally found in the surrounding cultures.

The offerings detailed in the first three chapters are those which anyone who is so moved can make. Chapters four and five will speak of sacrifices that are required for purification and reparation. Public sacrifices on special calendar feasts are treated later.

### 1. The Burnt Offering

#### • of a Bull

The first offering (qorbān, from qārab, 'to bring near') is the 'burnt offering' ('ōlā, 'that which ascends', being wholly turned into smoke). Anyone can bring this offering. The text speaks first of a bull 'from the herd'(1:3). Only domesticated animals could be offered in sacrifice. Since it is being offered to God it must be 'without blemish'(tāmim; 'complete'), and 'male'(because they hand on life, or because they are more expendible?). The owner of the bull lays his hands on the bull's head as a declaration of ownership, which makes it 'acceptable on *your* behalf as atonement for *you*'(1:4). There could be many motives for offering this sacrifice. Atonement (kipper), that is, the removal of impurity, is highlighted here. Anyone can slaughter the animal (by slitting its throat). 'Before YHWH' tells us that the slaughtering is done somewhere (unspecified) in the tabernacle courtyard.

At this stage the priests take over, for only the priests can officiate at the altar. It is also their responsibility to see that everything is carried out according to God's instructions. Blood is always a symbol of life. Dashing the blood against the sides of the altar is charged with meaning (see the comment on page 187).

Anyone can skin the bull and cut it up. Only the priests can stoke the altar and organise the animal for sacrifice.

Anyone can remove the dung from the entrails, and wash what needs washing. Only the priests can minister at the altar as the animal (apart from its skin) is turned wholly into smoke which rises heavenward, 'a food gift ('iššeh) of pleasing odour to YHWH'. There may be a relic of an ancient understanding here (see Genesis 8:21). For possible motives for wanting to make the sacrifice see page 184 .

**<sup>6</sup>The burnt offering shall be flayed and cut up into its parts. <sup>7</sup>The sons of the priest Aaron shall stoke the altar and arrange wood on the fire. <sup>8</sup>Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the parts, with the head and the suet, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; <sup>9</sup>but its entrails and its legs shall be washed with water. Then the priest shall turn the whole into smoke on the altar as a burnt offering, a food gift of pleasing odour to YHWH.**

#### Aaron's sons, the priests

There is a lot of history behind the apparently innocent description of the priests as 'Aaron's sons'(1:5,7,8). In the temple in post-exilic Judah at the time the Torah was being completed, the priesthood was exercised exclusively by a group of priests who claimed to be descended from Aaron. Only subsidiary roles in the cult were carried out by 'Levites', to whom Leviticus gives only one passing reference (25:32-33). We are reading from the Priestly School, which recognises only 'Aaron's sons' as priests. A reading of Deuteronomy, however, gives a very different impression. Speaking of the death of Aaron in the wilderness, it states:

At that time YHWH set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of YHWH, to stand before YHWH to minister to him, and to bless in his name, to this day. Therefore Levi has no allotment or inheritance with his kindred; YHWH is his inheritance, as YHWH your God promised him.

– Deuteronomy 10:8-9 (see 33:8-11; 18:1-8)

A full study of the complex history of who could and who could not act as priests includes an investigation of the following: what happened when David moved the ark to Jerusalem, when Solomon built the temple, when priests from sanctuaries in the north poured into Jerusalem after the collapse of Samaria, and when Josiah centralised the cult in the Jerusalem temple? Jeremiah seems to have favoured the exercise of the priesthood by all Levites (see Jeremiah 33:17-22), as do those responsible for the story of Aaron and the golden calf in Exodus 32. Ezekiel supported a less extensive group, and it is this that won the day.

<sup>10</sup>If your gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, your offering shall be a male without blemish. <sup>11</sup>It shall be slaughtered on the north side of the altar before YHWH, and Aaron's sons the priests shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar.

<sup>12</sup>It shall be cut up into its parts, with its head and its suet, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood that is on the fire on the altar;

<sup>13</sup>but the entrails and the legs shall be washed with water. Then the priest shall offer the whole and turn it into smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering, a *food gift* of pleasing odour to YHWH.

<sup>14</sup>If your offering to YHWH is a burnt offering of birds, you shall choose your offering from turtledoves or pigeons.

<sup>15</sup>The priest shall bring it to the altar and wring off its head, and turn it into smoke on the altar; and its blood shall be drained out against the side of the altar.

<sup>16</sup>He shall remove its *entrails* with its contents and throw it at the east side of the altar, in the place for ashes. <sup>17</sup>He shall tear it open by its wings without severing it. Then the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar, on the wood that is on the fire; it is a burnt offering, a *food gift* of pleasing odour to YHWH.

<sup>2:1</sup>When anyone presents a grain offering to YHWH, the offering shall be of choice flour; the worshiper shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it, <sup>2</sup>and bring it to Aaron's sons the priests. After taking from it a handful of the choice flour and oil, with all its frankincense, the priest shall turn this token portion into smoke on the altar, a *food gift* of pleasing odour to YHWH. <sup>3</sup>And what is left of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons, a most holy part of the *food gift* to YHWH.

- of a Sheep or Goat

For obvious reasons (significantly expense), offerings of sheep and goats were the norm. The regulations are parallel to those given earlier for a bull. The small differences are related to the size of the animal.

- of a Bird

This is the offering of the poor. The principles are the same. The process is obviously more simple.

The idea seems to be to take hold of the tail feather and to pull the entrails out.

## 2. Various Cereal Offerings

Verses one to three speak of the offering (*minḥa*) of uncooked wheat flour. As with the burnt offerings of chapter one, anyone can bring and prepare the offering. However they must 'present it to the priest'. Only the priest can 'take it to the altar' (2:8).

The difference here is that only a ‘token portion’ is turned into smoke (2:2); the remainder is given for the priests’ sustenance. The portion given to the priests is called ‘a most holy part’—an expression used only of the part of an offering that is destined to be eaten.

Verse four to eleven speak of wheat flour that is cooked, but without leaven. Verse four speaks of baked flour, either thick (cakes) or thin (wafers). Verses five and six speak of flour that is cooked on a covered hotplate. Verse seven speaks of flour cooked in an open pan.

Verse nine reflects practice in a local sanctuary served by a single priestly family. Verse ten reflects practice at larger regional sanctuaries, such as Shiloh, or at the temple.

Verse eleven insists that cereal that is turned into smoke as an offering by fire must be unleavened. Leaven involves fermentation. It is a symbol of death. It is prohibited on the altar of the living God who pours out his blessings and life (2:11). The same goes for ‘honey’, the sweet syrup from dates or figs, for it ferments easily. Grain products where leaven and honey have been used can be offered, but not on the altar.

Salt was the main preservative. In grain offerings it symbolises the preservation of the covenant (b<sup>c</sup>rit).

Verses fourteen to sixteen repeat the same basic principles, applied now to barley.

**<sup>4</sup>When you present a grain offering baked in the oven, it shall be of choice flour: unleavened cakes mixed with oil, or unleavened wafers spread with oil. <sup>5</sup>If your offering is grain prepared on a grid-dle, it shall be of choice flour mixed with oil, unleavened; <sup>6</sup>break it in pieces, and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering. <sup>7</sup>If your offering is grain prepared in a pan, it shall be made of choice flour in oil.**

**<sup>8</sup>You shall bring to YHWH the grain offering that is prepared in any of these ways; and when it is presented to the priest, he shall take it to the altar. <sup>9</sup>The priest shall remove from the grain offering its token portion and turn this into smoke on the altar, a *food gift* of pleasing odour to YHWH. <sup>10</sup>And what is left of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the *food gift* to YHWH.**

**<sup>11</sup>No grain offering that you bring to YHWH shall be made with leaven, for you must not turn any leaven or honey into smoke as a *food gift* to YHWH. <sup>12</sup>You may bring them to YHWH as an offering of choice products, but they shall not be offered on the altar for a pleasing odour.**

**<sup>13</sup>You shall not omit from your grain offerings the salt of the covenant with your God; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.**

**<sup>14</sup>If you bring a grain offering of first fruits to YHWH, you shall bring as the grain offering of your first fruits coarse new grain from fresh ears, parched with fire.**

**<sup>15</sup>You shall add oil to it and lay frankincense on it; it is a grain offering. <sup>16</sup>And the priest shall turn a token portion of it into smoke—some of the coarse grain and oil with all its frankincense; it is a *food gift* to YHWH.**

3. Celebratory Communion Sacrifices (zēbaḥ šelāmîm)

This is the third kind of voluntary offering. It involves the sacrifice of animals in order to obtain meat which the offerer intends to eat. In the strictest interpretation, healthy domesticated animals could be slaughtered only if they were offered in sacrifice, the essential element of which was the action of the priest in dashing the blood of the animal against the altar, offering its life back to God (3:2,8). This acted as a ritual control on blood-lust. Celebratory joy is the keynote of this sacrifice, accompanied by thanksgiving. The rite parallels 1:2-13, except that only the subcutaneous fat tissue that can be stripped away is burnt on the altar, on which the morning sacrifice is still burning (3:5).

<sup>1</sup>If the offering is a *communion sacrifice*, if you offer an animal of the herd, whether male or female, you shall offer one without blemish before YHWH. <sup>2</sup>You shall lay your hand on the head of the offering and slaughter it at the entrance of the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons the priests shall dash the blood against all sides of the altar. <sup>3</sup>You shall offer from the *communion sacrifice*, as a *food gift* to YHWH, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is around the entrails; <sup>4</sup>the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys. <sup>5</sup>Then Aaron's sons shall turn these into smoke on the altar, with the burnt offering that is on the wood on the fire, as a *food gift* of pleasing odour to YHWH.

<sup>6</sup>If your offering for a *communion sacrifice* to YHWH is from the flock, male or female, you shall offer one without blemish. <sup>7</sup>If you present a sheep as your offering, you shall bring it before YHWH <sup>8</sup>and lay your hand on the head of the offering. It shall be slaughtered before the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. <sup>9</sup>You shall present its fat from the *communion sacrifices*, as a *food gift* to YHWH: the whole broad tail, which shall be removed close to the backbone, the fat that covers the entrails, and all the fat that is around the entrails; <sup>10</sup>the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which you shall remove with the kidneys. <sup>11</sup>Then the priest shall turn these into smoke on the altar as a *food gift* to YHWH.

<sup>12</sup>If your offering is a goat, you shall bring it before YHWH <sup>13</sup>and lay your hand on its head; it shall be slaughtered before the tent of meeting; and the sons of Aaron shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. <sup>14</sup>You shall present as your offering from it, as a *food gift* to YHWH, the fat that covers the entrails, and all the fat that is around the entrails; <sup>15</sup>the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which you shall remove with the kidneys. <sup>16</sup>Then the priest shall turn these into smoke on the altar as a *food gift* for a pleasing odour. All fat is YHWH'S. <sup>17</sup>It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, in all your settlements: you must not eat any fat or any blood.

It is clear why 'blood', the symbol of life, could not be eaten. Why eating the fat tissue of sacrificial animals was forbidden and reserved for a burnt offering is unclear.



## 4. Purification Offerings (4:1 – 5:13)

Like chapters one to three, chapter four is an instruction for ‘the people of Israel’ (4:1) and it concerns offerings to be made in YHWH’s sacred dwelling place, the tabernacle. Unlike chapters one to three the offerings here are not voluntary; they are mandatory, and are of the highest importance, for they concern ‘impurity’ (timmeš) and ‘purification’ (ḥaṭṭā’t).

Ancient Israel shared with its contemporaries the conviction that there were forces at work which threatened the ‘holy’ (qōdēš). Their prosperity, their very existence as a nation, depended on God’s presence among them, blessing them and protecting them. It is here that the cult played an essential role. In the surrounding cultures, people thought their gods were dependent upon them. In the symbolic world of cult they saw themselves as meeting the needs of the gods (including their need for ‘food’). They had an esoteric class of priests who were skilled in the lore of magic, through which they saw themselves as manipulating (controlling) the gods, and as working against other ‘divine’ forces which threatened their gods. In this Israel was different.

For ancient Israel the most serious threat to YHWH’s presence is deliberate sin: consciously and deliberately acting against God’s declared will – breaking the covenant. God is ‘forgiving’ and ‘slow to anger’, but there are limits. The most extreme proof of this was the destruction of the temple in 586: ‘The Lord has scorned his altar, disowned his sanctuary; he has delivered into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces’ (Lamentations 2:7). But the danger of God abandoning his dwelling and leaving Israel to its own resources was an issue that concerned the whole nation, especially the priests whose responsibility it was to see that this did not happen. The key ritual here was that which took place on Yom Kippur (see Leviticus 16).

There were other less dangerous, but still serious, ways of threatening the sacred, and so risking losing God’s presence. The common factor is that they all bespeak death. Obviously contact between a corpse or carcass and the holy had to be managed with the greatest care, for death and life are in constant tension. This explains why so much care was taken in regard to a skin disease that caused scaling: it has the appearance of death, which gives it a special ‘power’ to pollute. It, too, must be tightly controlled and contact between it and the sanctuary must be strictly avoided. Genital discharge, on the edge of life and death, was fraught with meaning in this highly symbolic world. Here, too, contact with the sacred had to be managed. Leviticus will speak later of all these matters.

Here in chapter four the topic is sin (ḥāṭā’). Not grievous, deliberate sin (‘āwōn, peša’), which bars a person from entering the sanctuary. As noted above, the polluting effect of this can be countered only at Yom Kippur, and on condition of repentance. Chapter four is about *inadvertent* ‘sin’, which happens when a person acts contrary to God’s will but without knowing; or a person may know but be distracted or careless and not avert to what he/she is doing. Even this ‘sin’ was believed to have a negative, polluting, influence on the God’s sacred dwelling, which must be ritually purified by a purification offering (ḥaṭṭā’t). We should not overlook the powerful educative influence of these rituals in the area of ethical training. They were a constant reminder to the people to choose life through careful observance of the covenant. Five situations are covered in this legislation.

**<sup>1</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup>Speak to the people of Israel, saying: When anyone sins unintentionally in any of YHWH'S commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them:**

**<sup>3</sup>If it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing *harm* on the people, he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull of the herd without blemish as a *purification* offering to YHWH.**

**<sup>4</sup>He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the tent of meeting before YHWH and lay his hand on the head of the bull; the bull shall be slaughtered before YHWH.**

**<sup>5</sup>The anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting. <sup>6</sup>The priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before YHWH in front of the curtain of the sanctuary. <sup>7</sup>The priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is in the tent of meeting before YHWH; and the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering, which is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.**

**<sup>8</sup>He shall remove all the fat from the bull of sin offering: the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is around the entrails; <sup>9</sup>the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins; and the appendage of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys, <sup>10</sup>just as these are removed from the ox of the *communion sacrifice*. The priest shall turn them into smoke upon the altar of burnt offering.**

**<sup>11</sup>But the skin of the bull and all its flesh, as well as its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung— <sup>12</sup>all the rest of the bull—he shall carry out to a clean place outside the camp, to the ash heap, and shall burn it on a wood fire; at the ash heap it shall be burned.**

Verses one and two are explained on the previous page. The concern is with breaking YHWH's 'commandments'(mišwôt).

#### 4.1. Purification Offering by the high priest

'Anointed'(mašiah) priest is the pre-exilic title for the 'high priest'. Only he had oil poured on his head (8:12,30). His inadvertent 'sin'(examples are not offered here) is of special significance for it harms ('āšmâ, 4:3) everyone. It requires the offering of a bull. The high priest's sorrow is assumed.

The extraordinary element in this sacrifice is that the blood is taken *inside* the tent of meeting, and is sprinkled on the veil that covers the inner sanctuary (4:6), and on the altar of incense inside the tent (4:7). As in every sacrifice it is the blood (the vehicle of life) that is the agent of purification. The inadvertent 'sin' of the high priest is the most dangerous, for it has the especially dangerous power to penetrate right into the most holy place.

The symbolism of 'incense'(4:7) is obvious: 'Let my prayer be counted as incense before you'(Psalm 141:2).

As is stated in verse ten, the treatment of the fat is the same as in the voluntary communion sacrifice (3:1-17).

So dangerous in inadvertent 'sin' committed by the high priest that the whole carcass, apart from the burnt fat, has to be reduced to ash 'outside the camp'(4:12) in a specially prepared and ritually 'clean' place.

#### 4.2. Purification Offering by the whole congregation

It is no accident that the sacrificial procedure here is identical with that in the 4:3-10. This covers the ‘harm on the whole people’ that is the result of the inadvertent sin of the high priest (4:3). ‘Congregation’ translates ‘ēdâ, an older term for what is later called the qāhāl.

Note the role of the ‘elders’ (zākēn), mentioned here for the first time in Leviticus.

The priest can ‘make atonement’ (kipper, 4:20; see 1:4). His ritual action with the blood of the sacrificed animal removes the polluting effect on the sanctuary of the impurity. ‘Forgiven’ (sālah) is something only God can do. It includes not abandoning and restoring communion.

**<sup>13</sup>If the whole congregation of Israel errs unintentionally and the matter escapes the notice of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by YHWH’S commandments ought not to be done and incur guilt;**

**<sup>14</sup>when the sin that they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull of the herd for a sin offering and bring it before the tent of meeting.**

**<sup>15</sup>The elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before YHWH, and the bull shall be slaughtered before YHWH.**

**<sup>16</sup>The anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the tent of meeting, <sup>17</sup>and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before YHWH, in front of the curtain. <sup>18</sup>He shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before YHWH in the tent of meeting; and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.**

**<sup>19</sup>He shall remove all its fat and turn it into smoke on the altar.**

**<sup>20</sup>He shall do with the bull just as is done with the bull of sin offering; he shall do the same with this. The priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven.**

**<sup>21</sup>He shall carry the bull outside the camp, and burn it as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly.**

**<sup>22</sup>When a *clan chief* sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by commandments of YHWH his God ought not to be done and incurs guilt,**

**<sup>23</sup>once the sin that he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a male goat without blemish. <sup>24</sup>He shall lay his hand on the head of the goat; it shall be slaughtered at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered before YHWH; it is a sin offering.**

**<sup>25</sup>The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering.**

**<sup>26</sup>All its fat he shall turn into smoke on the altar, like the fat of the *communion sacrifice*. Thus the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin, and he shall be forgiven.**

### 4.3. Purification Offering by a Clan Chief

‘Clan chief’ (nāšî’, 4:22) is a word that goes back to the tribal, pre-monarchic period. A tribe is subdivided into clans.

The pollution in this case is judged not to penetrate into the tent. It is less dangerous than the situations just described. It is sufficient to daub the blood on the horns of the altar in the tabernacle courtyard.

For the significance of ‘atonement’ and ‘forgiveness’ (4:26), see the note on 4:20.

#### 4.4. Purification Offering by an Ordinary Person

The ritual here is the same as for the clan chief, except that in the case of an ordinary person the goat (4:28), or the sheep (4:32) is female, not male. The most plausible reason is that an ordinary person is unlikely to be able to afford more than one male for his small flock.

**<sup>27</sup>If anyone of the ordinary people among you sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by YHWH's commandments ought not to be done and incurs guilt, <sup>28</sup>when the sin that you have committed is made known to you, you shall bring a female goat without blemish as your offering, for the sin that you have committed. <sup>29</sup>You shall lay your hand on the head of the sin offering; and the sin offering shall be slaughtered at the place of the burnt offering.**

**<sup>30</sup>The priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and he shall pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar.**

**<sup>31</sup>He shall remove all its fat, as the fat is removed from the *communion sacrifice*, and the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar for a pleasing odour to YHWH. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf, and you shall be forgiven.**

**<sup>32</sup>If the offering you bring as a sin offering is a sheep, you shall bring a female without blemish. <sup>33</sup>You shall lay your hand on the head of the sin offering; and it shall be slaughtered as a sin offering at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered.**

**<sup>34</sup>The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar.**

**<sup>35</sup>You shall remove all its fat, as the fat of the sheep is removed from the *communion sacrifice*, and the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar, with the *food gift* to YHWH. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the sin that you have committed, and you shall be forgiven.**

**<sup>1</sup>When any of you sin in that you have heard a public adjuration to testify and—though able to testify as one who has seen or learned of the matter—does not speak up, you are subject to punishment.**

**<sup>2</sup>Or when any of you touch any unclean thing—whether the carcass of an unclean beast or the carcass of unclean livestock or the carcass of an unclean swarming thing—and are unaware that you have become unclean, and *experience guilt*.**

**<sup>3</sup>Or when you touch human uncleanness—any uncleanness by which one can become unclean—and are unaware of it, when you come to know it, and *you experience guilt*.**

**<sup>4</sup>Or when any of you utter aloud a rash oath for a bad or a good purpose, whatever people utter in an oath, and are unaware of it, when you come to know it, you shall in any of these *experience guilt*.**

**<sup>5</sup>When you realize your guilt in any of these, you shall confess the sin that you have committed.**

**<sup>6</sup>And you shall bring to YHWH, as your penalty for the sin that you have committed, a female from the flock, a sheep or a goat, as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for your sin.**

Four situations are noted here. They seem to be appendices which attempt to cover borderline cases.

In case number one (5:1), a person has heard a proclamation calling for evidence in a certain case, and the proclamation has a curse attached, but he fails to speak up even though he has information that is pertinent to the case. He has failed to do something he should have done. Even though he is not unaware of his failure, the fact that he later experiences remorse and confesses (5:5) lets him take advantage of the rite normally available only to *inadvertent* 'sins'. We should not underestimate the educative power of this legislation. When faced with the call of truth and justice, remaining silent is not an option.

Case number two (5:2) involves contact with the carcass of an animal that is not allowed to be sacrificed (that is 'unclean'). The problem here is that the person has become impure but does not realise it. The being unaware has prolonged the pollution, which increases the danger to the sanctuary. When a person realises what has happened and is truly sorry, he can qualify for the purification rite explained in chapter four.

Case three (5:3) is similar, though here contact is with something unclean other than a carcass.

Case four (5:4) is when someone blurts out an oath without attending to what he is saying, then comes to realise it later and is sorry.

Verse five covers each of the four situations. If those who have brought about pollution in any of these ways experience genuine remorse when they become aware of it, and confess what they have done, their situation comes under the regulations in chapter four for *inadvertent* sins.

As in 4:27-35, they are to offer a female sheep or goat, and the priest, through the blood rite, purifies the tabernacle of the negative energy that threatens to cause the dwelling to be a place where the Holy One cannot stay.

To ensure that this purification offering is within everyone's reach, two concessions are offered here for the poor. The first reminds us of the provision made in the voluntary offering (1:14-15), except that one of the birds here is for a purification offering, as is required by the situation of pollution that needs purgation.

The statement on atonement and forgiveness in verse ten parallels 4:20, 26, 31 and 35.

Verse eleven is an even greater concession for the poor. This offering recalls the voluntary cereal offering (see 2:1-2). Here the amount of wheat flour is determined at 2.3 litres – the amount required for a day's supply of bread for one person. In other words, it is within everyone's reach. However, this offering comes as something of a surprise in this context, for it is a purification offering, but, unlike all the preceding ones, there is no blood involved.

One suggestion is that this indicates the level of uncertainty of the legislators about the existence of pollution in the situations described here in chapter five. To be safe they require a purification offering, just in case, but they are making it as easy as possible for anyone to comply, even if they are so poor that they can't even afford a bird.

**<sup>7</sup>But if you cannot afford a sheep, you shall bring to YHWH, as your penalty for the sin that you have committed, two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. <sup>8</sup>You shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer first the one for the sin offering, wringing its head at the nape without severing it.**

**<sup>9</sup>He shall sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering on the side of the altar, while the rest of the blood shall be drained out at the base of the altar; it is a sin offering. <sup>10</sup>And the second he shall offer for a burnt offering according to the *edict*. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the sin that you have committed, and you shall be forgiven.**

**<sup>11</sup>But if you cannot afford two turtledoves or two pigeons, you shall bring as your offering for the sin that you have committed one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour for a sin offering; you shall not put oil on it or lay frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering. <sup>12</sup>You shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall scoop up a handful of it as its memorial portion, and turn this into smoke on the altar, with the *food gift* to YHWH; it is a sin offering.**

**<sup>13</sup>Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for whichever of these sins you have committed, and you shall be forgiven. Like the grain offering, the rest shall be for the priest.**

<sup>14</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>15</sup>When any of you commit a *sacrilege* and sins unintentionally in any of the holy things of YHWH, you shall bring, as your *reparation offering* to YHWH, a ram without blemish from the flock, convertible into silver by the sanctuary shekel; it is a *reparation offering*.

<sup>16</sup>And you shall make restitution for the holy thing in which you were remiss, and shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. The priest shall make atonement on your behalf with the ram of the *reparation offering*, and you shall be forgiven.

<sup>17</sup>If any of you sin without knowing it, doing any of the things that by YHWH's commandments ought not to be done, and you *experience guilt*, you are subject to punishment.

<sup>18</sup>You shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock, or the equivalent, as a *reparation offering*;

and the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the error that you committed unintentionally, and you shall be forgiven.

<sup>19</sup>It is a *reparation offering*; you have incurred guilt before YHWH.

## 5. Reparation Offering

In verse fourteen there are two words which are always defined in relation to each other. The first is 'sacrilege' (ma'al); the second is 'reparation offering' ('āšām). The 'holy things (qodšê) of YHWH' refers to anything at all that has been dedicated to YHWH. It includes a place, a thing, a person, an offering. If the offering is food it is sacred from the time it is dedicated to the time it is eaten or incinerated. The ritual of verses fifteen to sixteen enables a person who has unintentionally treated something sacred inappropriately to make restitution for the harm caused, and purge away the pollution, through the sacrifice of a ram from the flock (only domesticated animals can be used for sacrifice).

Alternatively, he can substitute currency. The amount is surprisingly small in light of the fact that we are talking of sacrilege. The fact that the fault was unintentional is, of course, relevant. The lightness of the restitution was probably to keep it within everyone range.

On atonement and forgiveness (5:16,18) see 4:26.

Verses seventeen to nineteen cover every situation in which a person feels ill at ease, fears the worst, but is not aware of anything specific that he has done wrong. It provides a way to do something and find peace of mind in the kind of situation described by the Psalmist:

But who can detect their errors?  
Clear me from hidden faults.

– Psalm 19:13



These verses bring to a close the first section of Leviticus: the instructions which Moses is to relay 'to the people of Israel' (1:2). They also round off the section devoted to offerings concerned with purging pollution, whether by purification offerings (4:1 - 5:13), or, where sacrilege is involved, by reparation offerings (5:14 - 6:7).

In every case from 4:1 to 5:19, the 'sin' has been committed inadvertently, unintentionally, except for the sin of neglect in 5:1. There, the fact that the 'sinner' later experiences remorse and confesses (5:5) lets him take advantage of the rite normally available only to inadvertent 'sins'.

A similar logic seems to be at work in this final section, though this is initially somewhat surprising. For here we are speaking of sacrilege: calling on God by oath to support a lie (6:3,5). How can such a serious matter be atoned for (expiated, purged, purified) through a reparation offering normally restricted to sins committed unintentionally? Especially when one of the basic principles underlying the sacrificial system is that a person who knowingly and willingly sins is barred from entering the sanctuary and taking part in sacrificial atonement.

Like the situation described in 5:1, the sinner does experience remorse, he feels his guilt and repents, and he also makes restitution, which implies an acknowledgment of his sin and an acceptance of blame.

What this final section demonstrates is that the avenue to forgiveness is open to a sinner who genuinely repents. This demonstrates an extraordinary faith in YHWH's readiness to forgive. At the same time, repentance and restitution, while necessary conditions, are not enough. To gain forgiveness a reparation offering is also necessary.

Here, perhaps more than in the previous examples, we see the sacrificial rite as a healing balm that opens a way forward for a repentant sinner and makes peace possible for a tormented conscience.

It also demonstrates that the boundaries of the sacred are coextensive with God's will and embrace ethical behaviour as well as ritual purity.

**<sup>1</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>When any of you sin and commit a sacrilege against YHWH by deceiving a neighbour in a matter of a deposit or a pledge, or by robbery, or if you have defrauded a neighbour, <sup>3</sup>or have found something lost and lied about it**

**—if you swear falsely regarding any of the various things that one may do and sin thereby—**

**<sup>4</sup>when you have sinned and experience guilt, and would restore what you took by robbery or by fraud or the deposit that was committed to you, or the lost thing that you found,**

**<sup>5</sup>or anything else about which you have sworn falsely,**

**you shall repay the principal amount and shall add one-fifth to it. You shall pay it to its owner when you experience your guilt.**

**<sup>6</sup>And you shall bring to the priest, as your reparation offering to YHWH, a ram without blemish from the flock, or its equivalent, for a reparation offering.**

**<sup>7</sup>The priest shall make atonement on your behalf before YHWH, and you shall be forgiven for any of the things that one may do and experience guilt thereby.**

Further Regulations governing the Sacrificial Cult (6:8 – 7:38)

A. Addressed to Priests (6:8 – 7:21)

1. Concerning the Burnt Offering (6:8-13; see 1:3-17)

Note that the priest must wear the sacred vestments when serving at the altar, and must not wear them apart from this service (6:10-11). Note also the threefold insistence that the fire is an eternal flame (6:9, 12, 13). Is this to retain the ‘fire that came out from YHWH’(9:24)? ‘Ritual’(6:9) translates Hebrew *tôrâ* (also 6:14 below).

**<sup>8</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>9</sup>Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the ritual of the burnt offering. The burnt offering itself shall remain on the hearth upon the altar all night until the morning, while the fire on the altar shall be kept burning. <sup>10</sup>The priest shall put on his linen vestments after putting on his linen undergarments next to his body; and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar, and place them beside the altar. <sup>11</sup>Then he shall take off his vestments and put on other garments, and carry the ashes out to a clean place outside the camp. <sup>12</sup>The fire on the altar shall be kept burning; it shall not go out. Every morning the priest shall add wood to it, lay out the burnt offering on it, and turn into smoke the fat pieces of the *communion sacrifice*. <sup>13</sup>A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar; it shall not go out.**

2. Concerning the Cereal Offering (6:14-18; see 2:1-16)

Note that the priests are to eat their share of the offering ‘in the court of the tent of meeting’(6:16).

**<sup>14</sup>This is the ritual of the grain offering: The sons of Aaron shall offer it before YHWH, in front of the altar. <sup>15</sup>They shall take from it a handful of the choice flour and oil of the grain offering, with all the frankincense that is on the offering, and they shall turn its memorial portion into smoke on the altar as a pleasing odour to YHWH. <sup>16</sup>Aaron and his sons shall eat what is left of it; it shall be eaten as unleavened cakes in a holy place; in the court of the tent of meeting they shall eat it. <sup>17</sup>It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it as their portion of my *food gift*; it is most holy, like the sin offering and the guilt offering. <sup>18</sup>Every male among the descendants of Aaron shall eat of it, as their perpetual due throughout your generations, from the *food gift* of YHWH; anything that touches them shall become holy.**

Insert: The Cereal Offering of the Priest when he is Consecrated (6:19-23)

**<sup>19</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>20</sup>This is the offering that Aaron and his sons shall offer to YHWH on the day when he is anointed: one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour as a regular offering, half of it in the morning and half in the evening. <sup>21</sup>It shall be made with oil on a griddle; you shall bring it well soaked, as a grain offering of baked pieces, and you shall present it as a pleasing odour to YHWH. <sup>22</sup>And so the priest, anointed from among Aaron’s descendants,**

shall prepare it; it is YHWH's—a perpetual due—to be turned entirely into smoke. <sup>23</sup>Every grain offering of a priest shall be wholly burned; it shall not be eaten.

### 3. Concerning the Purification Offering (6:24-30; see 4:1 – 5:13)

This is the third sacrificial 'ritual' (tôrâ, see 6:9, 14. 7:1 below is the fourth). The earlier regulations addressed to the people spoke of the slaughter of the animal, the blood rite, the burning of the suet and the disposal of the carcass. They did not include the information that the flesh was to be eaten by the priest. It is this that is regulated here, plus the necessity of washing within the sanctuary any blood stains from the priest's clothing, and destroying earthen vessels, since the pourous material makes thorough washing impossible. What is 'holy' cannot be used outside the sanctuary.

<sup>24</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>25</sup>Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the ritual of the *purification* offering. The *purification* offering shall be slaughtered before YHWH at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered; it is most holy. <sup>26</sup>The priest who offers it as a *purification* offering shall eat of it; it shall be eaten in a holy place, in the court of the tent of meeting. <sup>27</sup>Whatever touches its flesh shall become holy; and when any of its blood is spattered on a garment, you shall wash the bespattered part in a holy place. <sup>28</sup>An earthen vessel in which it was boiled shall be broken; but if it is boiled in a bronze vessel, that shall be scoured and rinsed in water. <sup>29</sup>Every male among the priests shall eat of it; it is most holy. <sup>30</sup>But no *purification* offering shall be eaten from which any blood is brought into the tent of meeting for atonement in the holy place; it shall be burned with fire.

### 4. Concerning the Reparation Offering (7:1-7; see 5:14 – 6:7)

As with the purification offering above, we learn here that the flesh of the offered animal is eaten by the priests (7:6-7).

<sup>1</sup>This is the ritual of the *reparation* offering. It is most holy; <sup>2</sup>at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered, they shall slaughter the *reparation* offering, and its blood shall be dashed against all sides of the altar. <sup>3</sup>All its fat shall be offered: the broad tail, the fat that covers the entrails, <sup>4</sup>the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which shall be removed with the kidneys. <sup>5</sup>The priest shall turn them into smoke on the altar as a *food gift* to YHWH; it is a *reparation* offering. <sup>6</sup>Every male among the priests shall eat of it; it shall be eaten in a holy place; it is most holy. <sup>7</sup>The *reparation* offering is like the *purification* offering, there is the same ritual for them; the priest who makes atonement with it shall have it.

### The Priests' Portion (7:8-10)

<sup>8</sup>So, too, the priest who offers anyone's burnt offering shall keep the skin of the burnt offering that he has offered. <sup>9</sup>And every grain offering baked in the oven, and all that is prepared in a pan or on a griddle, shall belong to the priest who offers it. <sup>10</sup>But every other grain offering, mixed with oil or dry, shall belong to all the sons of Aaron equally.

5. Concerning the Communion Sacrifice (7:11-21; see 3:1-17)

**<sup>11</sup>This is the ritual of the offering of the communion sacrifice that one may offer to YHWH.**

**<sup>12</sup>If you offer it for thanksgiving, you shall offer with the thank offering unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of choice flour well soaked in oil. <sup>13</sup>With your thanksgiving communion sacrifice you shall bring your offering with cakes of leavened bread. <sup>14</sup>From this you shall offer one cake from each offering, as a gift to YHWH; it shall belong to the priest who dashes the blood of the communion sacrifice. <sup>15</sup>And the flesh of your thanksgiving communion sacrifice shall be eaten on the day it is offered; you shall not leave any of it until morning.**

**<sup>16</sup>But if the sacrifice you offer is a votive offering or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that you offer your sacrifice, and what is left of it shall be eaten the next day; <sup>17</sup>but what is left of the flesh of the sacrifice shall be burned up on the third day. <sup>18</sup>If any of the flesh of your communion sacrifice is eaten on the third day, it shall not be acceptable, nor shall it be credited to the one who offers it; it shall be an abomination, and the one who eats of it shall incur guilt.**

**<sup>19</sup>Flesh that touches any unclean thing shall not be eaten; it shall be burned up. As for other flesh, all who are clean may eat such flesh. <sup>20</sup>But those who eat flesh from YHWH's communion sacrifice while in a state of uncleanness shall be cut off from their kin. <sup>21</sup>When any one of you touches any unclean thing—human uncleanness or an unclean animal or any unclean creature—and then eats flesh from YHWH's communion sacrifice, you shall be cut off from your kin.**

This is the fifth and final sacrificial ritual (*tôrâ*) listed in this section (see 6:9, 14, 24; 7:1). As noted in the commentary on chapter three, the purpose of this rite was to control the slaughter of domestic animals. Slaughter of domestic animals for food was essentially problematic. Hence the necessity of killing the animal in the courtyard of the tabernacle where the priest could perform the blood rite (7:14), which purged any element of pollution from the slaughter.

This section mentions two motives for celebrating a well-being offering. One is thanksgiving for a blessing received from God (7:12-15); the other is to fulfil a promise attached to a prayer that has been answered (7:12-16).

The instructions are included here because the priests have the obligation to teach these regulations to the people, and, in so far as they can, to see that they are carried out. Mention is also made here of the portion set aside for the priest (7:14).

Since the animal has been dedicated it is 'holy'. Special regulations cover when it can be eaten and by whom. Since the meat is eaten at home, the person making the offering has the primary responsibility to see that the flesh is eaten, either on the same day (7:15), or within two days (7:16).

'Cut off from your kin' (7:20, 21; also 7:25, 27) is a punishment executed only by God. The threat is that the offender's line will be terminated, and that he will not join his ancestors when he dies (see Exodus 12:15, 19; 30:33; 31:14).

## B. Addressed to the People (7:22-38)

## 1. Suet and Blood may not be eaten (7:22-27)

<sup>22</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>23</sup>Speak to the people of Israel, saying: You shall eat no fat of ox or sheep or goat. <sup>24</sup>The fat of an animal that died or was torn by wild animals may be put to any use, but you must not eat it.

<sup>25</sup>If any one of you eats the fat from an animal of which a *food gift* may be made to YHWH, you who eat it shall be cut off from your kin.

<sup>26</sup>You must not eat any blood whatever, either of bird or of animal, in any of your settlements. <sup>27</sup>Any one of you who eats any blood shall be cut off from your kin.

## 2. Portion of the Communion Sacrifice set aside for the Priest (7:28-36)

<sup>28</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>29</sup>Speak to the people of Israel, saying: Any one of you who would offer to YHWH your sacrifice of well-being must yourself bring to YHWH your offering from your *communion sacrifice*.

<sup>30</sup>Your own hands shall bring the *food gift* to YHWH; you shall bring the fat with the breast, so that the breast may be raised as an elevation offering before YHWH.

<sup>31</sup>The priest shall turn the fat into smoke on the altar, but the breast shall belong to Aaron and his sons. <sup>32</sup>And the right thigh from your *communion sacrifice* you shall give to the priest as an offering; <sup>33</sup>the one among the sons of Aaron who offers the blood and fat of the *communion sacrifice* shall have the right thigh for a portion. <sup>34</sup>For I have taken the breast of the elevation offering, and the thigh that is offered, from the people of Israel, from their *communion sacrifices*, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons, as a perpetual due from the people of Israel. <sup>35</sup>This is the portion allotted to Aaron and to his sons from the *food gift* to YHWH, once they have been brought forward to serve YHWH as priests; <sup>36</sup>these YHWH commanded to be given them, when he anointed them, as a perpetual entitlement from the people of Israel throughout their generations.

## 3. Concluding Summary (7:37-38)

<sup>37</sup>This is the ritual of the burnt offering, the grain offering, the *purification offering*, the reparation offering, the offering of ordination, and the *communion sacrifice*, <sup>38</sup>which YHWH commanded Moses on Mount Sinai, when he commanded the people of Israel to bring their offerings to YHWH, in the wilderness of Sinai.

These concluding verses directly summarise the section beginning in 6:8. Indirectly they cover all the regulations of the sacrificial system that have been presented from the opening verse of Leviticus. These regulations are from YHWH, mediated through Moses, and go back to the beginnings of their existence as God's holy people on Mount Sinai. Obedience to them is part of the covenant. Strict observance of these laws makes it possible for the Holy One, the source of all blessing, to dwell among them.