

Frequently Asked Questions About the Old Testament

SESSION 6 – LEVITICUS 1-27

What is a “fellowship offering” (3:1)?

In the phrase “fellowship offering,” the word translated “fellowship” includes the ideas of health, wholeness, welfare, and peace. It is reflected in the common Jewish greeting “Shalom!” This offering apparently symbolizes peace with God because the worshiper joins in the sacred meal (symbolized sharing a meal with the Lord). A fellowship offering could be voluntary as a special offering of thanks to God or could be given as the result of a vow or as a freewill offering (7:12-26). This offering was given by the thousands at special celebrations when many people joined in the sacred meal (1Kings 8:63). If a man was too poor to bring a voluntary fellowship offering, he would probably be given a share in the offerings of others

– NIV Bible Commentary

With so much emphasis on “blood sacrifices,” why was provision made for a grain offering (Leviticus 2:1-16; 6:14-18)?

The grain offering was presented as a gift, an act of worship rather than restitution for sin. The grain offerings were offerings of fine flour or of unleavened bread, cakes, wafers, or of ears of grain (2:1, 4, 13-14; 5:11) Although the poor could mix grain with an animal sacrifice as a substitute sin offering (Leviticus 5:11), the grain offering itself was probably intended simply to remember God’s favor and, by remembering, to please him (an aroma pleasing to the Lord).

–The Quest Study Bible and NIV Commentary

Why burn the fat separately (3:3-5)?

The fat was considered a choice portion of the meat and thus the best part of the sacrifice that could be given to God. Because fat smells so good when meat is cooking, it became the “aroma pleasing to the Lord.” Some think burning the fat separately may also have been God’s way of limiting cholesterol intake. He later commanded them not to eat fat in certain instances (7:23-25).

—*The Quest Study Bible*

Why would God hold someone responsible for an accidental sin (4:2)?

The original word for “unintentionally” meant “wandering away.” It is our human condition that we tend to wander from God. Whether this is done intentionally or accidentally, the Lord holds us accountable to our choices and makes it clear that the “wages of sin [accidental or intentional] is death” (Romans 6:23). A holy God demands that we are holy, and any sin makes us “unclean.” This is true whether our sin is “intentional” or “unintentional.”

—Don Porter

Why were the people guilty for a priest’s sin (4:3)?

In the Old Testament, it was the role of the priest to represent the people before God. Thus, the life of the priest would impact the people. If the representative was guilty, he “brought guilt upon the people.” Fortunately, God made provision for dealing with the priest’s sins. Also, it should be noted that this principle of “representation” is picked up in the New Testament as Jesus is seen as the representative of humanity in whom our righteousness is found!

—Don Porter

If there are sin and guilt offerings for “unintentional sins,” are there no offerings for “intentional sins” (5:15)?

The expression “to sin unintentionally” calls for some comment. The NIV reading may give the impression that there was no sacrifice for intentional sins. This presents a problem, for many of our sins are more or less intentional (though not necessarily deliberate). The word basically means “to err, go astray, wander, or stagger.” That is, the notion of intent or lack of intent is not basic to the meaning of the Hebrew word and ought not to be imported. The usual sins we fall into are covered by the sin offering and the guilt offering. For instance, lying, stealing, cheating, and false swearing are surely intentional. And yet, each of these sins are specifically covered by the guilt offering (6:2-3).

–NIV Bible Commentary

What is the difference between a “sin offering” and a “guilt offering” (6:24-30 and 7:1-10)?

The difference between the sin offering and the guilt offering was in the nature of the sin. The former was for what might be called general sins; the latter was for sins that injured other people or detracted from the sacred worship. The guilt offering thus involved not only a sacrifice but also restitution plus a fine of 20 percent (6:5).

–NIV Bible Commentary

Why is a woman declared unclean twice as long after giving birth to a girl as opposed to a boy (12:1-5)?

First, let's look at why the woman would be considered unclean after giving birth. According to the text, bleeding made the woman unclean. Some suggest this regulation protected women from infection. Others see it as a symbol for a lack of wholeness. Perhaps because blood meant life, bleeding implied the opposite, symbolizing death and sin.

Now, with regard to the question above, we don't really know why God gave this command. Sometimes God's instructions reflected cultural views held during that time. Ancient peoples may have believed a woman bled longer after delivering a girl. Or perhaps the passage acknowledges the higher value their culture placed on males. Though such a perspective seems unfair today, Biblical teaching raised the status and rights of women far above any other laws or cultures of the time.

–The Quest Study Bible

Why send a goat off into the desert (16:20-22)?

A sacrifice was a substitute, symbolically bearing sin and receiving its consequences. This goat, however, was a living sacrifice—banished from camp as a symbol of guilt removed far from the people and God's presence. The people watched as the goat was led to a distant spot—a striking portrayal of God's promise to remove their sins from them.

–The Quest Study Bible

Why were male goats sacrificed for some sins, females for others?

It's unclear why. Some think a sinner of higher status required a sacrifice of greater value. A high priest's sin, for example, would have had more serious repercussions than an individual's. If so, then male goats were considered more valuable, though this does not always seem to be the case. Others, however, think the distinction was due to the public nature of the sin. Since priests and leaders were more visible, sacrifices for their sins were treated like public sin offerings.

—The Quest Study Bible

Were all of the animal offerings completely consumed by the fire?

Only in the case of the burnt offering was the whole animal consumed by fire (all of it offered to God). This became a picture of total consecration, for in the same way the nation was to be utterly committed to God. In most sacrifices, however, the animal was eaten as part of a meal. The priests would literally butcher the meat and bring it back to the person and/or family who offered it (they would then eat the meal as part of worship).

—Don Porter

If we're all “beautiful” in the sight of the Lord, then why is He so selective and prejudicial with regard to the handicapped (Leviticus 21:18)?

This rule had nothing to do with individual rights. Serving as a priest was not a right but a privilege reserved for only a few. Those with physical defects were no more discriminated against than were most of the people of Israel: Only men of a certain age, ceremonially clean, without defect, from the tribe of Levi and descended from Aaron were granted the privilege to represent God as priests. At issue was whether the priests would project an image of a holy, perfect God to the people. Like the sacrifices that had to be without defect, the priests were to typify Christ's perfection (Heb 9:13-14). The uniqueness of the call preserved the image. Nonetheless, Aaron's descendants with defects were not barred from other priestly benefits.

—The NIV Study Bible and The Quest Study Bible

Why were people with diseases asked to live outside the camp?

It doesn't seem fair. The ones who lived outside the camp faced great difficulties, since they were completely cut off from society (except for supplies left behind). Yet everyone understood the measure as

an unpleasant but necessary way to prevent God's dwelling from being defiled (Numbers 5:1-4). On the positive side, these harsh requirements served to protect the unclean person, keeping the holy things at a distance so no one would die for accidentally touching them. These rules also protected the rest of the camp, quarantining the disease and preventing its spread. No exceptions were made—even Moses' sister Miriam was exiled.

—The Quest Study Bible