

## Leviticus 4:1-5:13

### Laws for Sin Offerings

**Lev 4:1** The LORD said to Moses,

Lev 4:2 "Say to the Israelites: 'When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands--

Lev 4:3 "'If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the LORD a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed.

Lev 4:4 He is to present the bull at the entrance to the tent of meeting before the LORD. **He is to lay his hand on its head** and slaughter it there before the LORD.

Lev 4:5 Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and carry it into the tent of meeting.

Lev 4:6 **He is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle some of it seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain of the sanctuary.**

Lev 4:7 **The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is before the LORD in the tent of meeting. The rest of the bull's blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the tent of meeting.**

Lev 4:8 **He shall remove all the fat from the bull of the sin offering--all the fat that is connected to the internal organs,**

Lev 4:9 **both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the long lobe of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys--**

Lev 4:10 **just as the fat is removed from the ox sacrificed as a fellowship offering. Then the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering.**

Lev 4:11 **But the hide of the bull and all its flesh, as well as the head and legs, the internal organs and the intestines--**

Lev 4:12 **that is, all the rest of the bull--he must take outside the camp to a place ceremonially clean, where the ashes are thrown, and burn it there in a wood fire on the ash heap.**

Lev 4:13 "'If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, even though the community is unaware of the matter, when they realize their guilt

Lev 4:14 and the sin they committed becomes known, the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering and present it before the tent of meeting.

Lev 4:15 The elders of the community are to lay their hands on the bull's head before the LORD, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD.

Lev 4:16 Then the anointed priest is to take some of the bull's blood into the tent of meeting.

Lev 4:17 He shall dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it before the LORD seven times in front of the curtain.

Lev 4:18 He is to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before the LORD in the tent of meeting. The rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

Lev 4:19 He shall remove all the fat from it and burn it on the altar,

Lev 4:20 and do with this bull just as he did with the bull for the sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for the community, and they will be forgiven.

Lev 4:21 Then he shall take the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull. This is the sin offering for the community.

Lev 4:22 "When a leader sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the commands of the LORD his God, when he realizes his guilt

Lev 4:23 and the sin he has committed becomes known, he must bring as his offering a male goat without defect.

Lev 4:24 He is to lay his hand on the goat's head and slaughter it at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered before the LORD. It is a sin offering.

Lev 4:25 Then 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 the blood at the base of the altar.

Lev 4:26 He shall burn all the fat on the altar as he burned the fat of the fellowship offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for the leader's sin, and he will be forgiven.

Lev 4:27 "If any member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, when they realize their guilt

Lev 4:28 and the sin they have committed becomes known, they must bring as their offering for the sin they committed a female goat without defect.

Lev 4:29 They are to lay their hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it at the place of the burnt offering.

Lev 4:30 Then the priest is to take some of the blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.

Lev 4:31 They shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as an aroma pleasing to the LORD. In this way the priest will make atonement for them,

and they will be forgiven.

Lev 4:32 "If someone brings a lamb as their sin offering, they are to bring a female without defect.

Lev 4:33 They are to lay their hand on its head and slaughter it for a sin offering at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered.

Lev 4:34 Then 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 the blood at the base of the altar.

Lev 4:35 They shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the lamb of the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar on top of the food offerings presented to the LORD. In this way the priest will make atonement for them for the sin they have committed, and they will be forgiven.

**Lev 5:1** "If anyone sins because they do not speak up when they hear a public charge to testify regarding something they have seen or learned about, they will be held responsible.

Lev 5:2 "If anyone becomes aware that they are guilty--if they unwittingly touch anything ceremonially unclean (whether the carcass of an unclean animal, wild or domestic, or of any unclean creature that moves along the ground) and they are unaware that they have become unclean, but then they come to realize their guilt;

Lev 5:3 or if they touch human uncleanness (anything that would make them unclean) even though they are unaware of it, but then they learn of it and realize their guilt;

Lev 5:4 or if anyone thoughtlessly takes an oath to do anything, whether good or evil (in any matter one might carelessly swear about) even though they are unaware of it, but then they learn of it and realize their guilt--

Lev 5:5 when anyone becomes aware that they are guilty in any of these matters, they must confess in what way they have sinned.

Lev 5:6 As a penalty for the sin they have committed, they must bring to the LORD a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for them for their sin.

Lev 5:7 "Anyone who cannot afford a lamb is to bring two doves or two young pigeons to the LORD as a penalty for their sin--one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering.

Lev 5:8 They are to bring them to the priest, who shall first offer the one for the sin offering. He is to wring its head from its neck, not dividing it completely,

Lev 5:9 and is to splash some of the blood of the sin offering against the side of the altar; the rest of the blood must be drained out at the base of the

altar. It is a sin offering.

Lev 5:10 The priest shall then offer the other as a burnt offering in the prescribed way and make atonement for them for the sin they have committed, and they will be forgiven.

Lev 5:11 "If, however, they cannot afford two doves or two young pigeons, they are to bring as an offering for their sin a tenth of an ephah of the finest flour for a sin offering. They must not put olive oil or incense on it, because it is a sin offering.

Lev 5:12 They are to bring it to the priest, who shall take a handful of it as a memorial portion and burn it on the altar on top of the food offerings presented to the LORD. It is a sin offering.

Lev 5:13 In this way the priest will make atonement for them for any of these sins they have committed, and they will be forgiven. The rest of the offering will belong to the priest, as in the case of the grain offering."

The remains of sin-offering bulls (like the hide, flesh, and dung) were burned outside the camp to physically and symbolically remove sin, shame, and uncleanness from God's dwelling place. This geographical separation highlighted the utter incompatibility of sin with God's holiness.

The ritual served several distinct purposes:

### **1. The Total Removal of Sin**

While the blood of the bull was brought inside the Tabernacle to make atonement, the rest of the animal symbolized the bearer's sin and guilt. Because God's immediate presence cannot coexist with defilement, leaving any part of the sacrifice near the sanctuary would represent sin remaining in the community's midst. Burning the remains away from the camp emphasized that forgiven sin was completely taken away.

### **2. Protecting the Camp's Holiness**

The Israelites' camp was considered a holy sphere because it was the dwelling place of God. Unclean things—such as lepers, dead bodies, and refuse—were commanded to be kept outside the camp. Including parts of the animal like the dung, which was inherently emblematic of uncleanness and offal, required the disposal process to take place in a clean place designated for this purpose.

### **3. Prophetic Symbolism (Typology)**

In the New Testament, the author of Hebrews directly ties this Levitical practice to the crucifixion of Jesus. The text of Hebrews 13:11-13 explains that just as the sin-offering animals were burned outside the camp, Jesus "suffered outside the gate" in order to bear the reproach, shame, and sin of the people.

**Hebrews 13:11** The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp.  
Heb 13:12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.  
Heb 13:13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

The horns of the altar serve primarily as sacred focal points for the **ritual of atonement** and the purification of the Israelites. The priests applied the blood of sacrificial animals to these four horn-like projections at the corners of the altar.

Specific uses and meanings of the horns include:

- **Atonement and Cleansing:** Leviticus requires priests to smear the blood of the sin offering onto the horns of the altar (such as the altar of incense and the altar of burnt offering). This action symbolized the transfer of sin, the purification of the worship space, and the seeking of divine mercy.
- **Symbol of Power and Refuge:** Throughout biblical literature, horns symbolize strength and power. Historically, the horns were also used as a place of asylum; fugitives would grab the horns of the altar to seek sanctuary and plead for their lives (as seen in 1 Kings 1:50).

**1Kings 1:50** But Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, went and took hold of the horns of the altar.

- **Typological Significance:** In Christian theology, the blood applied to the horns foreshadows the cleansing power of Christ's sacrifice, with the altar's blood acting as a shadow-picture of the atonement later fulfilled on the cross.

**Hebrews 9:11** But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation.

Heb 9:12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

Heb 9:13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.

Heb 9:14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences

from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Heb 9:15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

The specific animal required for a sin offering was largely determined by the **social rank and economic status of the person who committed the sin**. Rather than different animals corresponding to different specific sins, the system was scaled to ensure that the sacrifice was a meaningful, personal cost for everyone.

### **Scaling by Social Status**

God required a sliding scale of offerings depending on who was atoning for the sin, ensuring the cost reflected the offender's capacity:

- **High Priest or the Entire Community:** Required a **young bull**. Because the priest and the community represented the spiritual leadership, their sins carried broader implications, necessitating the most valuable offering.
- **Leaders (Kings or Princes):** Required a **male goat** without defect.
- **Common People / Average Individuals:** Required a **female goat** or a **female lamb** without defect.
- **The Economically Disadvantaged:** For those who could not afford a goat or lamb, God accepted **two doves or two pigeons** (one for a sin offering, one for a burnt offering).

### **Why Specific Animals Were Used**

Beyond economic scaling, the animals selected for the altar were deeply symbolic and strategic:

- **Domesticated & Owned:** Sacrifices had to be domestic animals that the person raised, owned, and had invested in. Wild animals were not accepted because they cost the worshipper nothing. This made the sacrifice deeply personal and highlighted the weight of the sin.
- **Unblemished & Innocent:** The animals had to be flawless. This served as a pedagogical tool to teach that God deserves the absolute best, and the innocent animal foreshadowed the ultimate, perfect sacrifice.
- **Clean Animals:** Sacrificial animals were required to be from the ritually "clean" categories (such as cloven-hoofed ruminants).

**2Corinthians 8:12** For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

Burning animal fat on the altar in the Book of Leviticus served as a symbol of offering the choicest, most valuable portion to God, representing total devotion. It signified the divine ownership of all life, acknowledged the worshiper's gratitude, and produced a "pleasing aroma" indicating the acceptance of the offering.

Understanding the significance of the fat goes deeper into several symbolic, theological, and practical layers:

### **1. Offering the "Best" to God**

In ancient agrarian societies, fat (specifically visceral fat surrounding the vital organs) was scarce, highly valued, and equated to energy, wealth, and health. By requiring the fat to be burned on the altar, God established the principle that He is entitled to the very best of one's possessions, life, and abundance. It was, in essence, God's "tithe" of the animal.

### **2. A "Pleasing Aroma" and Atonement**

The combustion of fat produces a thick, sweet-smelling smoke. In Leviticus (such as Leviticus 3:5), the smoke is described as a "food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD." This fragrant smoke signified that the relationship between God and the worshiper was restored and that the sacrifice was fully accepted.

### **3. Total Consecration**

Unlike sacrifices where the worshiper or priest was allowed to partake in the meat, the inner fat and the kidneys were strictly reserved for the Lord and wholly turned to smoke on the altar. This complete consumption symbolized total dedication—yielding one's most hidden, innermost parts to God without holding anything back.

### **4. Respecting Vulnerability**

Scholars and theologians note that the fat surrounds and protects vital, vulnerable organs like the kidneys. Because it serves as a guardian for the most essential but vulnerable parts of life, the burning and prohibition of consuming fat is understood as a statement on the sacredness of life, making it a fitting exclusive portion for the Divine.