

Vayikra

ויקרא “He called”

Leviticus 1:1 – 6:7

Torah Together



The book of **Leviticus** defines the tasks that the Levites were to carry out in their roles as priests. There are many complex and detailed rules and rites described, some of which may seem foreign to our modern minds. However, a good deal of insight into the nature and character of God can be gained by thoughtfully and prayerfully studying these rules.

1. The Burnt Offering - 1:1-17

a) What process was followed to bring a burnt offering to YHWH*? What was the purpose of the action described in verse 4? What was done with the blood?

A burnt offering was presented to the priests at the entrance to the tabernacle. The offerer placed his hands on the animal's head, symbolically transferring his sins to the animal. The animal was killed and its blood was sprinkled around the altar as proof of its death, the required payment for sin.

b) How much was consumed by fire? Who did it? Why did they wash it?

The entire animal was consumed by fire. The priests prepared the offering, washing the entrails and legs so only that which is clean is presented to God.

c) What animals could be offered? Why different ones? What do you think the purpose was for this offering? Was it a required offering or was it voluntary?

Normally, the burnt offering was a male from the herd or flock (bull or ram). If the person wasn't wealthy enough to bring this, he could offer a dove or young pigeon. Thus any one could make atonement for their sin. This was a voluntary offering made for repentance of sin and symbolizing the total commitment of the offerer to YHWH.

* **NOTE:** The words “the LORD” in most modern Bibles are translated from the Hebrew characters yod-hey-vav-hey, which according to Exodus 3:14-15 is the personal name that God gives himself. This is usually rendered as YHWH in English and often pronounced “Yahweh.”

The Hebrew name for this book, *Vayikra*, follows the naming pattern of all the *Torah* portions. That is, it comes from the first line, which reads, “He (YHWH) called.” The Greek name for this book, *Leviticus*, means “belonging to or pertaining to the Levites.”

Types of Offerings

As we learn about the different offerings described here, pay attention to the names of the offerings and to the differences between them. The **Burnt Offering** is called *Korban Olah* in Hebrew, meaning **Offering of Ascent**.

Scripture Link:

In **Hebrews 9:22**, the writer reminds us that “without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.” The link between blood sacrifice and forgiveness of sin is central to a proper understanding of God. Indeed, it is the primary reason that *Yeshua* came to earth: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Matthew 26:28

Approaching God

In these chapters of Leviticus, the English word "sacrifice" or "offering" is translated from the Hebrew word "*korban*." (The plural of "*korban*" is "*korbanot*.") Perhaps it is because pagan religions often required sacrifices and offerings from worshippers as appeasement for blood-thirsty or angry gods that the word has been translated in this way. It is unfortunate, however, because the Hebrew word "*korban*" is better understood as "**to approach**," "**to draw close**" or "**to become intimate with**." God's defined method of approaching Him is through a "**surrogate**" or a "**substitute**" - one who takes the place of the worshipper for a specific purpose. In this case, an animal "from the herd or the flock" dies as a substitute for the worshipper, as a consequence of his or her transgressions. This voluntary act by the worshipper is the God-ordained process to be followed to "draw close" to Him. This helps explain why it is regarded "as a sweet aroma" by God: it demonstrates both the worshipper's obedience and desire to "approach, draw close and become intimate" with his God.

The processes described here were not new to the followers of YHWH. It is recorded that each of the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, at some time in their lives performed a *korban olah* to draw close to God. (See **Genesis chapters 12, 13, 22, 26, 33 and 35**) Also, **Genesis 8:19-21** records that the first thing Noah did after leaving the Ark was to "build an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it," a *korban olah*. And it was a *korban olah* that Cain and Abel were to perform in **Genesis chapter 4** that led to Cain's sin. In fact, when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, **Genesis 4:21** records that "the LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them." Could it have been that the animal skins used for this clothing were the results of a *korban* and that God was teaching Adam and Eve the way in which He was to be approached in the future?

So why aren't these types of offerings made today? In **Deuteronomy 12**, God makes it very clear that we are to bring our offerings to "the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling." That place is, of course, Jerusalem. Since 70 AD, when the Roman general Titus destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, there has been no place for YHWH's followers to present their offerings. However, it seems that this will not always be the case. **Ezekiel chapters 40 – 46** describe in great detail the future "restored" Temple that will some day be built in Jerusalem and it seems clear that *Korbanot* will again be presented to God.

2. The Grain Offering - 2:1-16

a) What were the ingredients in this offering? What freedom did the offerer have? What restrictions?

The grain offering was made from fine flour, either raw or cooked (baked or fried) with oil. It could not contain yeast or honey but must contain salt.

b) Can you see any significance to forbidding yeast & honey? What about adding salt?

Yeast is typically symbolic of sin, honey may represent temptation. Many possibilities exist. Salt represents permanence, reminding us of the permanence of our covenant with God.

c) What do you think the primary purpose was for this offering? Was it voluntary?

This voluntary offering expressed thanksgiving for the sustenance of life as well as for the bread of life, His Word. It also signified the offerer's dedication of all his earthly resources to God. The lack of blood sacrifice meant it was not for atonement.

3. The Fellowship Offering - 3:1-17

a) What kind of animals could be offered for this offering? How was this offering different than the burnt offering?

Either a male or female from the herd or flock (without blemish, as with all sacrifices) was offered. The offering was not totally consumed by fire.

b) Do you see any significance to the parts of the offering that were offered to God? What kind of atmosphere do you think surrounded this sacrifice?

The "fat portions" were to be burned on the altar. "All the fat belongs to YHWH" (3:16). These were considered the choicest part and smelled like an outdoor barbecue. It was probably a festive occasion.

c) This offering was also known as a Peace Offering. What do you think the purpose was for this offering? Was the offering voluntary?

Symbolically, this voluntary offering meant "sharing a meal with God in fellowship." It was often shared with invited guests of the offerer. In Hebrew, this offering is called shelem, because it represents peace between God and the offerer. Colossians 1:20 shows that Yeshua's sacrifice acted as a fellowship offering on our behalf.

The Grain Offering

In Hebrew, the name of this offering is *Korban Mincha* which means tribute or gift. It is sometimes called a **Meal Offering** and usually includes a drink offering of wine as well. It accompanied the burnt offering as well as the Fellowship offering. Since this offering lacked blood, it was not for atonement.

The Fellowship Offering

The Hebrew name for this offering is *Korban Shelem*. It is sometimes called a **Peace** offering or **Thanksgiving** offering. It was a voluntary offering intended as an expression of thanks and gratefulness to God for His goodness and blessing. This offering was shared between God, the priests, and the offerer (perhaps including other people as well). It can be thought of as a celebration between friends, communion between the offerer and his God.

The Sin Offering

This offering is called *Korban Chatat* in Hebrew which means to sin or to 'miss the mark.' This offering literally pays the price for sin – it is an atonement. Its purpose is to settle accounts with God and thus it brings the offerer back in good standing with YHWH. Notice that there is an offering available for every person, rich or poor.

The Guilt Offering

The Hebrew name for this offering is *Korban Asham* which conveys the idea of restitution or reparation for negative consequences. The purpose was to restore the offended party to his original position (plus an added amount). Do you see how this was different from the sin offering?

4. The Sin Offering - 4:1 - 5:13

a) In verse 2, most Bibles use the word "unintentional" or "inadvertent" to describe the sin to be atoned for with this sacrifice. What do you think this means? What does it imply about our attitude toward sin? What about repentance?

The Hebrew root is 'shagah' which means to wander away, to go astray (Strong's 7686). This implies that we will sin unintentionally as we go through life even though we try to obey God's teachings, i.e., "we all will fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). God knows this but yet, the sin must be dealt with. It is assumed that the sinner has already repented. See Numbers 15:22-31 for a more complete description of the unintentional sin.

b) Describe the different offerings that were to be brought as sin offerings? Is there any significance to the order in which they are presented here? How was this offering different than the others we've seen so far?

Sin offerings began with a young bull (most valuable for sins of the high priest or the entire nation) moving down to a dove or pigeon for sins of the poor and a tenth ephah of flour for the very poor. The offering was mandatory.

c) Chapter 5 lists sins for which a common person might be required to make a sin offering. What do you think of this list? What offerings must the sinner provide?

The sins listed indicate that God takes all of our conduct very seriously.

5. The Guilt Offering - 5:14 - 6:7

a) What was the required sacrifice for the guilt offering? What specific sins were atoned for with this offering?

The guilt offering must be a ram or male lamb "of the proper value in silver." [Yeshua (betrayed by Judas Iscariot for 30 pieces of silver) was a male lamb of the proper value in silver.] This offering atoned for sins against God's property or against the property of others.

b) How was the Guilt Offering different than the Sin Offering? Why do you think both offerings were necessary?

This offering required restitution: the value of the property plus 20%. The sin offering atoned for sin before God whereas the guilt offering "paid the price for our sin."

“. . .an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to YHWH.

Leviticus 1:17

Levitical Offerings

(*Korbanot*)

(Leviticus 1:1 – 7:21)

Name	Specifics	Purpose / Significance
Burnt Offering (<i>Korban Olah</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Voluntary offering - First offering presented - Bull, ram or male bird, without defect - Offering totally consumed by fire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offerer's total commitment to God - Atonement for sinfulness
Grain Offering (<i>Korban Mincha</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Voluntary offering - Accompanied both Burnt and Fellowship offerings - Grain: Raw Flour, Cooked <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Included salt, no honey or yeast - Partially consumed by fire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offerer's commitment of all earthly possessions to God - Thankfulness to God for all Blessings - Not for atonement (no blood)
Fellowship or Peace Offering (<i>Korban Shelem</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Voluntary offering - Any animal from herd or flock without defect - Variety of breads, wine - Shared with priests and sometimes invited guests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thanksgiving - Completion of a vow - Celebration of restored relationship with God - Fellowship with God
Sin Offering (<i>Korban Chata't</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Required offering - Bull for High Priest & Nation - Male goat for leader - Female goat or lamb for person - Dove or pigeon for the poor - Tenth ephah flour for very poor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Atonement for specific sin - Forgiveness after confession - Cleansing from defilement
Guilt Offering (<i>Korban Asham</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Required offering - Ram without defect, of the proper value - Restitution + 20% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Atonement for specific sin - Payment for sin to others - Cleansing from defilement

An Aroma Pleasing to the LORD

The phrase “an aroma pleasing to the Lord” appears 40 times in the *Torah*, and 17 times in the book of Leviticus alone. In the King James version, it is translated as “a sweet savor to the Lord.” The Hebrew word translated “savor” is *rayach* which is from the Hebrew root *ruach* which means spirit or breath, as in *Ruach HaKodesh*, the Holy Spirit. God obviously attaches a spiritual significance to the death and burning of the offering.

II Corinthians 2:15-16

reads, “For we are to God the aroma of the Messiah among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life.”

For each *Torah* portion (*Parashah*), the ancient Hebrew scribes defined a corresponding reading from the prophets, called the *Haftarah* (conclusion). These passages are tied to the *Torah* portion by a key idea or theme. Also, after the New Testament (*Brit Hadashah*) was formalized, Bible scholars chose from it passages that also complement the *Torah* portion. These often provide additional insight into the *Torah* portion and can lead to a better understanding of the unity and consistency of God’s word.

Digging deeper

1. We know from **Matthew 5:17** that *Yeshua* said, “I have not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them.” Examine the table on page 5. Can you see how *Yeshua* has fulfilled each of these sacrifices?

- ***Yeshua fulfilled the burnt offering as he was a male without defect who voluntarily gave his life to be completely consumed as an atonement for sin.***
- ***Yeshua fulfilled the grain offering in that he was the living Torah, the bread of life provided by God for life to mankind.***
- ***Yeshua fulfilled the peace offering because through him we have peace and fellowship with God (see Romans 5:1-2).***
- ***Yeshua fulfilled the sin offering as he was above and beyond the required sacrifice for the nation (God’s own son was infinitely more valuable than the most valuable bull in Israel.)***
- ***Yeshua fulfilled the guilt offering by paying the price for our sin in “the proper value in silver, according to the sanctuary shekel.” (Lev 5:15) (See Matthew 26:14-16)***

2. It can be seen that the essential part of every offering to God was sacrifice. What do we offer to God as a sacrifice today?

Most significantly, we offer ourselves as sacrifices to God: Romans 12:1-2 reads, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - his good, pleasing, and perfect will.”

Also, our worship is to be sacrificial. Hebrews 13:15 says, “Through Yeshua, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess his name.”

Finally, we offer our service to others. Ephesians 5:1-2 reads, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Messiah loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

For further study, see

Haftarah : Jeremiah 46:13-28

Brit Hadashah : Luke 2:22-24; John 19:31-37; Acts 13:16-17;
Revelation 8:6 – 9:12; 16:1-21