

Leviticus: Chapters 6-9

Introduction

Our goal today will be to get through chapters 5, verses 14-19 and chapters 8-9. That's a tall order and it will require that I skip over some things that I'd like to cover. But you're always welcome to ask questions if I leave time for it and/or email me so that I can try to address your question in the next class. Today we'll look at the *guilt offering* that is introduced in chapter 5, verse 14 and then start making our way through chapter 9. As we do that, we'll learn about how a person became a priest in the Old Testament and what it meant to be a priest.

The Text - 5:14-6:7

Read 5:14-6:7. I'll start, as I have with some of the other offerings, saying something about the name of this offering. The name of this offering is the *asham* and many translations refer to it as the "guilt offering". Calling this the "guilt offering" has something going for it in that the word used in the name of this offering (*asham*) refers, in some places, to people incurring guilt for sins they had committed (cf., 5:6; Isa 24:6). In fact, in chapter 5, verse 19, we read, "It is a guilt offering; he has indeed incurred guilt before the Lord." But, as Jay Sklar notes, the meaning of *asham* is broader than that.

First [...] the word *asham* is used elsewhere [in the Bible] to refer to a 'penalty' that must be paid for the consequences of guilt [...] that is, to a 'reparation for guilt'. Second, a breach of faith has been committed, and sinners must 'repair' the breach by payment of a penalty [...] The translation 'reparation offering' does justice to both these factors.

The idea of reparation, repairing through repayment what one broke, misplaced, or otherwise profaned, is explicitly commanded in chapter 5, verse 16 and chapter 6, verses 4-7. So, based on all of this, it's appropriate to refer to this offering as either the guilt offering or reparation offering. Both labels capture an important aspect of the offering.

VV. 5:14-15 & 6:1-2. I want to start by pointing out that the reparation offering was an offering that, like the purification offering that we discussed last week, worked atonement and forgiveness. We know this because the text tells us this very clearly in chapter 5, verse 18. There we read that if a man sins—the nature of that sin is something we'll discuss in a moment—if a

man sins he must bring a ram without blemish or its equivalent out of the flock (e.g.,) to the priest so that the priest can make atonement for him and so that he shall be forgiven. So, again, the reparation offering atones for sin and brings forgiveness to the worshipper.

Knowing what the reparation offering does, I want to take a look at what kinds of sins it atones for and forgives. This offering is mentioned in Leviticus as early as chapter 5, verse 6, but isn't really introduced in the sense of being expounded on until verse 14. It's in the next verse—verse 15—that we're introduced to this phrase “a breach of faith.” We see the same phrase again in verse 1 of chapter 6. In each case certain sins are mentioned that constitute a breach of faith with Yahweh. However, the sins mentioned in each case don't seem to be of the same kind.

In the first instance, the breach of faith seems to refer to unknowingly using something that belongs to God—something that was consecrated or set apart for God's house—and using it as though it was a common item. The reason for thinking that the sin being committed is one in which something sacred (set apart) has been used for common purposes is because of what we read in verse 16, “He shall also make restitution for what he has done amiss in the holy thing and shall add a fifth to it and give it to the priest.” The term translated “holy thing” here is the Hebrew word *qodashim* and it typically means “set apart” or “set apart ones”. It's used elsewhere in Leviticus to refer to various food items that belonged to Yahweh and that He then gave to the priests and their families (22:10-16). That food was holy (*qodashim*) and to be consumed only by a group of people who were themselves set apart.

There's some indication in chapter 22 of Leviticus that people might have unknowingly consumed some of the holy food of the priests (v. 14-15): “And if anyone eats of the holy thing unintentionally, he shall add a fifth of its value to it and give the holy thing to the priest. They shall not profane the holy things of the people of Israel, which they contribute to the LORD.” As with the purification offering, the guilt or reparation offering works to atone for (at least) unintentional sins—sins where the person was either aware of the law but unaware that s/he had broken the law, or unaware of the law all together.

But if we go to chapter 6, verse 1-3, we see that the reparation offering also seems to work to atone for and forgive what we might call high-handed sins. A high-handed sin is one in which the person was perfectly aware of what God commanded but went ahead with the

rebellious act anyway. It's a total breach of faith, a breach of covenant loyalty. In fact, the term unfaithful (or, what is translated as "breach of faith") is actually used of in Numbers 5:12 in reference to someone committing adultery and in 1 Chronicles 5:25 it's used to refer the treachery of idolatry—which we know from other places in Scripture that idolatry is viewed as adultery.¹

The kinds of sins mentioned here in the first section of chapter 6 are things like: deceiving one's neighbor regarding money, finding something that someone had lost but then lying about it, committing robbery, and swearing falsely. These seem pretty clearly to be things that people would be aware of and, probably, not the kinds of things one does unintentionally. I believe I mentioned in a previous talk that Adam was guilty of committing a high-handed sin against God in the Garden. This is because even though God gave Adam the instructions about eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and, therefore, Adam knew better, he stood by and allowed Eve to be deceived by the serpent. And more than that, he partook of the fruit in direct defiance of God's command.

In wrapping up this brief overview of the reparation offering, I want to point out two things. First, the animal that they're required to bring is a ram. While a bull might be more costly, most commentators will say that a ram was still a very costly animal. So, some scholars speculate that one of the reasons the common person is required to bring a ram in this case is because the sin is great and requires a costly sacrifice. The second thing I want to point out is that we can see God's mercy at work here. Even in cases where someone commits a high-handed sin, breaks faith with God in a way that is analogous to the treachery of cheating on one's spouse, God still provides a way of forgiveness and reconciliation for His people.

Interim

Now that we've looked at the reparation offering, we've covered all of the major offerings mentioned in the book of Leviticus. I want to shift our focus now to the priests who offered those sacrifices and offerings. In particular, I want to cover what it looked like for someone to be ordained to the priesthood in the Old Testament and what some of the various parts of the ordination rite of priests meant. We're now moving into chapter 8 and 9 of Leviticus.

¹ Sklar, 120.

The Text - 8-9

Chapter 8 is divided into eight sections that describe the ordination rite of the priests that served in the Tabernacle. I'm going to provide a brief summary of each section and then comment on some of the elements of the rite.

1.) vv. 1-4 - God commands Moses to assemble Aaron, his sons, the elements needed for the ordination rite, and the people (who were to assemble at the entrance of the tent of meeting) at the entrance to the Tabernacle.

- This ordination is one that took place before Yahweh—He's a witness to it—and, therefore, approves of it. As the Israelites brought their burnt offerings to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting in Leviticus 1:3 so that they (the worshippers) might be accepted by Yahweh, the ordinands in this case are brought before Yahweh so that they might be seen and approved of (accepted) by Yahweh.
- When we read that the entire assembly gathered at the entrance, that seems strange given that there were so many of them. But it's likely that just the elders of the people gathered at the entrance (4:15) with the rest of people getting as close as they could.

2.) vv. 5-9 - Aaron and his sons are washed by Moses. Aaron is anointed with oil. Aaron is then given the clothes that God commanded to be made (Ex. 28).

- In order to learn more about the details of the priestly garments, you need to read Exodus 28-29 because it's there—especially in chapter 28—that you can read about how they were made and what they looked like.
- Exodus 28:3 says that Aaron's garments worked to consecrate him for the priesthood. In fact, all of the priests *had* to wear their priestly garments when serving in the Tabernacle.
- I want to just point out a few interesting facts about specific parts of the priestly garments. First, each shoulder piece consisted of a stone that had the names of six of the tribes engraved on it. Verse 12 says that this was done so

that the High Priest could bear the names of the twelve tribes before the Lord in order for Yahweh to remember them. We see roughly the same thing with the breastpiece. It held twelve stones, each with the name of one of the tribes engraved on it.

- Finally, I want to say something about the headgear of the High Priest. We read about it in verses 36-38 of Exodus 28. The High Priest had a crown that he wore and on it was engraved the phrase “HOLY TO THE LORD”. We’re told that this crown did at least two things. First, it allowed Aaron to bear “any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts.” And it also allowed Aaron to be accepted before the Lord (v. 38). This is basically God’s mark/seal on Aaron, claiming Him as God’s own. It shows that he’s totally set apart for priestly service to Yahweh. There may be a connection here with the 144,000 saints mentioned in Revelation chapter 7. They’re said to have a seal on their foreheads and we see them in the presence of God worshipping Him and the Lamb; they’re doing a priestly thing (i.e., existing in God’s presence and worshipping Him). The idea I’m pushing toward here is that having a mark/seal (signet) on one’s forehead is a priestly mark. So, when we read about those who have the Mark of the Beast on their foreheads in Revelation 13, this might very well be a picture of a satanic priesthood. The people mentioned there with the mark are doing what priests—satanic priests—do, they’re worshipping the beast.

3.) vv. 10-13 - Moses anoints the Tabernacle and its furniture with oil to consecrate them. Moses then pours oil on Aaron’s head in order to consecrate him. Moses then clothes Aaron’s son with their priestly garments.

- One of the interesting things about this is that Aaron is anointed with oil as are the pieces of furniture in the Tabernacle. This suggests, not only that all of these things are set apart (consecrated) for service to God and are, therefore, sacred and no longer common, it also suggests that Aaron is as

much a part of God's holy house as the furniture. The point is: Aaron is a proper part of the Tabernacle, he belonged there.

- This is just one of the ways that this ordination rite communicated to Aaron and all of Israel that the priests were God's sons. If God brings a chair into His house and makes it His own, it's a throne. If He brings a person into His house and makes him His own, that person has been adopted; he's now a son.

4.) vv. 14-17 - The sacrifices and offerings of the ordination rite begin. The **first** offering that is brought is a bull for a sin offering. Moses places the blood of the bull on the horns of the altar and at its base in order to purify, consecrate, and atone for it.

5.) vv. 18-21 - A ram is brought forward as an ascension offering. This is the **second** offering in the rite. Aaron and his sons place their hands on its head before Moses kills it and throws its blood on the sides of the altar. The whole ram is then burned on the altar consistent with the instructions in chapter 1 of Leviticus for whole burnt offerings.

6.) vv. 22-29 - The **third** animal to be brought forward is referred to as the "ram of ordination". Aaron and his sons again place their hands on the head of the ram before Moses kills it. But, in this case, Moses doesn't immediately throw the blood on the altar as he did with whole burnt/ascension offering. Instead, he takes some of the blood and places it on the right earlobe, right thumb, and right big toe, of Aaron and his sons. Moses then throws some of the blood on the sides of the altar. After throwing the blood on the sides of the altar, Moses then takes the right thigh of the ram, as well as parts of the ram's fat from its internal organs, along with unleavened bread, and then places all of those things in the hands of Aaron and his sons. Those things were then waved before Yahweh as a wave offering (v. 27).

- The first thing I want to point out is the *order* of these offerings and then explain the logic of the order. The sin offering comes first because Aaron and his sons need to be cleansed from their sinful defilement so that God

can have them in His house without His holiness killing them. Now that they're cleansed/purified from the sin/purification offering, they can enter God's presence. As we learned when we covered the Ascension Offering of Leviticus chapter 1, the ascension offering carried one into God's presence in the form of smoke that would rise all the way to God's heavenly throne room. And that smoke was a pleasing aroma to Yahweh. Had it been tainted with sin, it couldn't be a pleasing aroma. Sin is detestable to God. So, this helps us see why the sin offering comes first. Finally, the ram of ordination is offered. What's interesting about this offering is that one, it's a male ram—which is one kind of offering one might make when bringing a peace offering to Yahweh—and two, Aaron and his sons get to eat some of the offering—along with bread that was used in the rite. This final offering resembles the Peace Offering that we looked at in Chapter 4 in that it shows Aaron and his sons feasting in God's presence. And we can see further the logic of the sacrificial system. The Sin/Purification Offering cleanses us (prepares us) for entering Yahweh's presence. The Ascension Offering carries us into Yahweh's presence as a pleasing aroma. And, finally, the Peace Offering—in this case the offering of the ram of ordination that functions like a regular Peace Offering—acts as the place where now cleansed and ascended worshippers get to be in fellowship with Yahweh by feasting with Him.

- Leviticus 5:7-10 suggests that the order here, at least with respect to the sin offering being offered prior to the ascension offering, was a *rule* that the priests followed.
- I won't have time to do it this week, but I'm planning to show you how a Christian liturgical service might look when it follows this pattern in Leviticus.

7.) v. 30 - Moses takes some of the anointing oil used in the rite, along with the blood that was on the altar, and sprinkles it on Aaron, his priestly garments, and Aaron's sons and their priestly garments. This was done in order to consecrate them and their garments.

8.) vv. 31-36 - This section tells us that Aaron and his sons get to eat a meal in the doorway of the Tabernacle—this kind of liminal space between being an ordinary, common worshipper and one of God's priests. The feast appears to consist of parts of the ram—the third offering—and bread from the basket of ordination offerings. Moses also commands Aaron and his sons to not leave the entrance of the Tabernacle for seven days because it would take seven days to ordain them (v. 33). Moreover, they had to repeat the series of offerings everyday for that seven day period and this was done, according to verse 34 in order to make atonement for them. The fact that it was repeated seven times probably indicates that the atonement was complete.