

# Leviticus

## Chapter 4

## Purification Offerings

20.08.2005

“There is a green hill far away, without a city wall, where the dear Lord was crucified, who died to save us all.” It is a lovely hymn, penned by Cecil Frances Alexander in the 1800’s.

As I grew up, I thought it was quite natural for a green hill to be without a city wall, and I always wondered why we were singing that there was not one around that hill. But then I understood English a bit more, to realise it meant just outside a city wall.

But then I wondered why Jesus was crucified outside the city wall of Jerusalem. Was it because it was pretty crowded inside, and that outside had the appropriate space? Was it because the Jews were fussy about holiness, and you could not have a dead body inside their city? I thought they were two reasonable solutions, until I read Hebrews 13.

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

That was helpful for me. For then I realised that his crucifixion outside the city wall had something to do with the ultimate sin offering that he made for us. But I did not appreciate more of the depth of this meaning of his death for us, until I delved into the book of Leviticus. Through the gory details of long forgotten sacrifices, I saw the pattern God gave Israel as the forerunner of what Jesus would do and fulfil.

In Leviticus 4, we find the beginning of the purification offerings, or as they are also called, the sin offerings. I do not want to stress the gory bits, except to remind you that the blood being splashed or poured was very significant. It showed that something had died as part of the necessary sacrifice. The Jews believed that life was in the blood. Some say that the splashing of blood is really the giving of life, but as I used to be a veterinarian, and saw a lot of splashing of

blood, I am much more convinced that here in Leviticus 4, as the blood was splashed and poured, it vividly portrays that there had been a death. The life blood has gone out from the body.

The pattern of Leviticus 4 also shows that there was a difference in the sacrifice needed for unintentional sins committed by the High Priest (occasionally translated as anointed priest), the whole community, specific leaders, and individuals.

Starting with the individual, the person brought a female goat or lamb and laid hands on its head (probably to show he identified with this animal – maybe conferring his own sins upon it). Then the priest daubed some blood on the horns of the burnt offering altar, poured the rest at its base, and the fat was burnt on the altar. By doing this, the man’s sins would be forgiven.

When a community leader sinned and needed forgiveness, he had to offer a male goat, and do what any individual would do.

However, if the whole community or the High Priest sinned and needed forgiveness, they had to present a young bull.

The elders or High Priest laid hands on it, then after it is death, the priest not only poured the blood on the base of the burnt offering altar, he also took the blood into the inner tent or holy room next to the Holy of Holies. There, he daubed the horns of the altar of incense with blood and sprinkled blood seven times in the area just in front of the curtain that separated the holy of holies from the rest.

We are told that this was all done “before the Lord” reminding us of the closeness of God in the Tent of Meeting. To the Israelites, God’s footstool was the Ark of the covenant, lying behind the curtain in the Holy of Holies. God graciously had come near His people through the Tent of Meeting. But since people were sinful and not holy, the sacrifices were the method he introduced so that he could accept

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and still be near them.

The shed blood meant death, but it also appears to have acted rather like a cleansing agent. It is as if the blood cleaned the stains that had been left by the sins.

For an individual or leader, their sin had affected the holiness of their offering, so the blood on the horns and base of the burnt offering altar somehow appeared to have cleansed it.

Yet the effects of the whole community and High Priest affected everyone's relationship with God even more. The blood was then sprinkled on the horns of the altar of incense, which was next to the Holy of holies, and an area just before the curtain.

The sprinkled blood in this area showed recognition of the fact that their relationship with God had been greatly affected, and needed a deeper cleansing.

The other difference for the whole community's and High Priest's sacrifice was that the hide, the legs, the intestines, the meat and head all had to be burnt in a different ceremonially clean place outside the camp.

None of this could be eaten. The whole sacrifice had to be burnt. It was a costly sacrifice, yet it resulted in forgiveness.

And this is where Jesus' death gains an extra dimension from Leviticus 4. For Jesus' death was not simply the sin offering for you. His death was not simply the sin offering for a leader. His death was a sin offering sacrifice sufficient for the whole community. We know that he did not have to offer a sin offering for himself, the great High Priest in the order of Melchizedek, as he never once wavered from His Father's will. So his sin offering outside the city wall, was for the whole community.

As Hebrews 13:11-13 says *The High Priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burnt outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered*

*outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.*

We are forgiven as we join with all those who believe that his death was for us. His sin offering is for the community who believe. We are forgiven. Rejoice in this. Our sins are forgiven.