

Leviticus Chapter Four

Commentary by Rev. Nate Wilson ©2002

Leviticus 4:1-2

4. 1 וַיְדַבֵּר¹ יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר²:

4. 2 דַּבֵּר³ אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר²

נֶפֶשׁ כִּי-תִחַטָּא⁴ בְּשָׁגָגָה מִכֹּל מִצְוֹת יְהוָה
אֲשֶׁר לֹא תַעֲשֶׂינָהּ⁵ וַעֲשֶׂה⁶ מֵאַחַת מֵהֵנָּה:

Verb#	Root	Parsing	Formatives	Meaning	Syntax
1	דבר	Qal Impf 3ms	V.C.	Speak	M.V.
2	אמר	Qal Infin. Constr.	Lamed	Say	Identical Action
3	דבר	Piel Imptv. 2ms		speak	M.V.
4	חטא	Qal Impf. 3fem.sing.		Miss/Sin	Cond.
5	עשה	Niph. Impf. 3fem.pl.	Negative	Make/do	Adj. - Rel Clause
6	עשה	Qal Perf. 3masc.s.	V.C.	Make/do	Cond.

4:1 Then Jehovah spoke¹ to Moses to say²,

4:2 “Speak³ to the sons of Israel to say², ‘When anyone shall sin⁴ in error from any of the commands of Jehovah that it should not be done⁵, and he does⁶ one of them:

Commentary

4:1 *Then Jehovah spoke¹ to Moses to say²:*

This is a truncated repetition of 1:1 “And Jehovah called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting to say,” so see notes there. This introduction indicates a new section (chapters two and three did not start thus). The section being started here is on the Sin Offerings and is laid out in order of rank in the Israelite social structure. The first rank to be addressed is the priest, the congregation is next, then the prince and the individual person.

4:2 *“Speak³ to the sons of Israel to say², ‘When anyone shall sin⁴ in error from any of the commands of Jehovah that it should not be done⁵, and he does⁶ one of them:*

See Leviticus 1:2 on “speak,” “sons,” “if/when” and “anyone.”

נֶפֶשׁ¹ literally “a soul.” Generally translated “anyone.” The Jewish commentator Ibn Ezra notes that this “anyone” applies to Gentiles, too. It is all-inclusive; sin in any person must be atoned for! God does not allow sin to go unpunished no matter who you are!

תִּחַטָּא² “shall sin,” from the Hebrew root meaning “to miss.” The LXX adds “before the Lord” in relation to sin, perhaps to parallel v.4. Although this is theologically true (and quite significant if you think about it!), it is probably an addition to the original text here in v.2.

בְּשָׁגָגָה³ “in error,” (LXX=ακουσσιως, NIV=unintentionally, KJV=through ignorance, ASV=unwittingly, K&D=by mistake) from the Hebrew root meaning “stray, stagger, sin.” This is an crucial concept being introduced here for the first time in Leviticus: not only is sin in EVERY PERSON culpable, but EVERY SIN is culpable, whether it was done intentionally or not. Even if you thought you were doing right or if the sin was accidental, your sin still needs atonement. K&D describe this as a sin done through “ignorance, carelessness, or accident,” and HAW show several instances where this plays out: Num. 35:22ff – accidental manslaughter, Num.

22:34 – Balaam kicking the donkey not realizing there was an angel in the way, Job 6:24 – Job assumes his trials are because of unknown sin, and Gen. 20:9 – King of Gerar punished for trying to take Abraham’s wife even though Abraham had indicated that she was available by saying she was his sister. We must realize that unintentional sin is a reality in our lives. God wants us to deal not only with the sins we’re obviously aware of but also of the hidden sins. When you confess your sins to God, take extra time in silence to ask God to reveal to you anything else that you might not have thought of. When I do this, I often find that the Spirit brings to mind sins that need to be confessed, but that I never would have thought of otherwise. “Forgive my hidden faults,” David prayed in Psalm 19:12.

HAW also noted that wine/strong drink (Isa. 28:7), strange women (Prov. 5), and bad counsel (I Sam. 26:1, 21) are causes of this kind of sin. Now, wine, women, and song are not necessarily bad in themselves – there is a proper time and procedure for every good thing (Eccl. 2:8, 5:18, 8:6, 9:9), but we must set firm boundaries and beware the path that leads down to sin. For me, the boundary is two glasses of wine - I don’t know if more would make me drunk or not, but that’s a good stopping place for me. Others may stop at three or four – or stop at one or not imbibe at all, but setting this kind of boundary to keep from sin is wise. Regarding women, I have boundaries like not being alone with a woman (my wife excepted, of course!), taking along my kids when I travel, avoiding magazines and movies that have defraudingly-dressed women in them, and not even touching another woman unless it is for a quick, side-to-side hug in greeting. None of this should be construed as God’s word on how to deal with these things, and it would be wrong for me to call it sin when I see other people cross the boundaries I have set for myself, but it is the path of wisdom not to flirt with sin, but to “remove your way far from [the strange woman] and come not night the door of her house” (Prov. 5:8). Bad counsel can be difficult to avoid in our media-inundated age, so we must set boundaries here too. I’ve seen how indiscriminate listening to secular music has messed up the thinking of Christian friends, so I generally don’t listen to the radio or watch TV or read newspapers or surf the web at all, and when I do it is for a limited time for a specific purpose. I try to find Christian sources of news in magazines and email so as to keep my thinking clear and godly. Each person needs to decide how to apply this principle of setting boundaries to curb unintentional sins beforehand – it doesn’t work to wait until you are in a compromising situation to think through how to deal with it. Have you set boundaries on these things? If you have, are you unjustly judging Christians around you who have not?

מִכָּל מִצְוֹת lit. “from all commands” KJV uses “against any,” but this is not generally what the preposition *מִ* means. Rashi comments that “it is a sin to even disobey one little part from a command – such as misspelling a name.” While I’d have trouble with calling spelling a sin, it is true that no less than full obedience to every part of a command of God is demanded by God’s righteousness.

לֹא תַעֲשֶׂינָהּ lit. “not she should be done” The feminine relates back to the word for “command” and carries through in the feminine “one of them” in the next phrase. ASV and KJV turn this passive verb into an infinitive “not to be done” and the NIV makes a new word “forbidden.” Rashburn comments that this emphasizes the prohibitive commands (i.e. “do not steal” as distinguished from the positive commands like “honor your father and your mother”). Even if we didn’t know that it was prohibited in God’s law, it was a sin. Ignorance is no excuse. If we sin unintentionally and then realize that it was a sin, we must deal immediately with it as a sin. As Adam Clarke says, “He who, when his iniquity comes to his knowledge, refuses to offer such a sacrifice, sins obstinately and willfully...” Take the time to specifically confess any sin in the past that you have not yet dealt with, and receive God’s forgiveness!

מֵאַחַת מֵהֵנָּה lit. “from one from them” (paragoric הֵ- on the pronoun) K&D “and do any one of them” God does not have a “good-ol’-boy” approach to sin like most people think. He doesn’t say, “Well so-and-so has been pretty good; he hasn’t done too many bad things, I’ll let him go this time.” He doesn’t say, “Well, she didn’t realize it was a sin, so it’s o.k.” NO! One minor infraction of God’s law is enough to damn a soul forever. Just one, that’s all it takes. You took a swipe of icing off the cake after Mom said to leave it alone? That’s it; you’re guilty as sin before God. We can’t take sin lightly. It must not be winked at and laughed about. It must not be flirted with. It must not be passed off as “boys will be boys.” NO! Every sin must be abhorred and atoned for by the blood of the lamb. The only other alternative is an eternity burning in hell.

That's what is so wonderful about what Jesus did. God pays attention to sin at a level of detail we cannot even imagine, and so we are all in trouble because we have broken His law, many times without even knowing it. We are all doomed to God's eternal punishment. Only a totally perfect person could ever satisfy God's standard of righteousness, and the only totally perfect person was Jesus. Jesus triumphed over sin in His life by totally keeping every aspect of the law of God in the Bible and then offered Himself to receive God's punishment for sin as a substitute for all of us who have lived lives tainted – or rather totally corrupted - by sin. If we believe in this Jesus, the guilt of our sins is transferred to Jesus, and the perfection of His life is transferred to us, and we no longer have to face God's punishment for sin! In fact we enter into the fantastic privilege of being God's children!

Leviticus 4:3-12

- 4.3 אַם הִכִּהֵן הַמְּשִׁיחַ יַחֲטֵא⁷ לְאַשְׁמַת הָעַם
וְהִקְלִיב⁸ עַל חַטָּאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא⁹
פֶּר בֶּן־בָּקָר תָּמִים לַיהוָה לְחַטָּאת:
4.4 וְהִבְיֵא¹⁰ אֶת־הַפָּר אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה
וְסָמַךְ¹¹ אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁ הַפָּר
וְשַׁחֲט¹² אֶת־הַפָּר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה:
4.5 וְלָקַח¹³ הַכֹּהֵן הַמְּשִׁיחַ מִדָּם הַפָּר
וְהִבְיֵא¹⁰ אֹתוֹ אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד:
4.6 וְטָבַל¹⁴ הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־אֶזְבְּעוֹ בַדָּם
וְהִזָּה¹⁵ מִן־הַדָּם שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה
אֶת־פְּנֵי פְרֹכֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ:
4.7 וְנָתַן¹⁶ הַכֹּהֵן מִן־הַדָּם עַל־קַרְנֹת מִזְבֵּחַ
קֹטֶרֶת הַסַּמִּים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד
וְאֵת כָּל־דָּם הַפָּר יִשְׁפֹךְ¹⁷ אֶל־יְסוּד מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֹלָה
אֲשֶׁר־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד:
4.8 וְאֵת־כָּל־חֵלֶב פֶּר הַחַטָּאת יְרִים¹⁸ מִמֶּנּוּ
אֶת־הַחֵלֶב הַמְּכַסֶּה עַל־הַקָּרֶב
וְאֵת כָּל־הַחֵלֶב אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַקָּרֶב:
4.9 וְאֵת שְׁתֵּי הַכְּלִיֹּת וְאֵת־הַחֵלֶב אֲשֶׁר עֲלֵיהֶן
אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַכֶּסֶלִים וְאֵת־הִיתְרֹת עַל־הַכֶּבֶד
עַל־הַכְּלִיֹּת יְסִירָנָה¹⁹:
4.10 בְּאַשְׁרֵי יוֹרָם²⁰ מִשּׁוֹר זָבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים וְהִקְטִירָם²¹
הַכֹּהֵן עַל מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֹלָה:
4.11 וְאֵת־עֹר הַפָּר וְאֵת־כָּל־בָּשָׂרוֹ עַל־רַאשׁוֹ
וְעַל־כַּרְעָיו וְקַרְבּוֹ וּפְרָשׁוֹ:
4.12 וְהוֹצִיא²² אֶת־כָּל־הַפָּר אֶל־מַחוּץ לְמַחֲנֶה
אֶל־מְקוֹם טְהוֹר אֶל־שַׁפּוֹף הַדָּשָׁן
וְשָׂרַף²³ אֹתוֹ עַל־עֵצִים בְּאֵשׁ עַל־שַׁפּוֹף הַדָּשָׁן יִשָּׂרַף²⁴:

Verb#	Root	Parsing	Formatives	Meaning	Syntax
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7	חטא	Qal Impf. 3ms		Sin	Cond./Protasis
8	קרב	Hiph. Perf. 3ms	v.c.	Come near	M.V./Apodosis1
9	חטא	Qal Perf. 3ms		Sin	Rel. Cl. Adj.
10	בוא	Hiph. Perf. 3ms	v.c.	Go	M.V./Apodosis2&6
11	סמך	Qal Perf. 3ms	v.c.	Lean	M.V./Apodosis3
12	שחט	Qal Perf. 3ms	v.c.	Slaughter	M.V./Apodosis4
13	לקח	Qal Perf. 3ms	v.c.	Take	M.V./Apodosis5
14	טבל	Qal Perf. 3ms	v.c.	Dip	M.V./Apodosis7
15	נזה	Hiph. Perf. 3ms	v.c.	Sprinkle	M.V./Apodosis8
16	נתן	Qal Perf. 3ms	v.c.	Give	M.V./Apodosis9
17	שפך	Qal Impf. 3ms		Pour out	M.V. (10)
18	רום	Hiph. Impf. 3ms		Lift up	M.V. (11)
19	סור	Hiph. Impf. 3ms	3fs (obj.)	Turn away	M.V. (12)
20	רום	Hoph. Impf. 3ms		Lift up	Comparative
21	קטר	Hiph. Perf. 3ms	v.c. + 3mp (ob.)	Smoke	M.V. (13)
22	יצא	Hiph. Perf. 3ms	v.c.	Go outside	M.V. (14)
23	שרף	Qal Perf. 3ms	v.c.	Burn	M.V. (15)
24	ישרף	Niph. Impf. 3ms		Burn	M.V. (15/Id. Act.?)

4:3 If the anointed priest shall sin⁷ to the guilt of the people, he shall then offer⁸ upon his sin which he sinned⁹ a perfect young bull - a son of the herd - to Jehovah as a sin-offering.

4:4 He shall bring¹⁰ the young bull to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting - to the face of Jehovah, and he shall lay¹¹ his hand upon the head of the young bull, and he shall slaughter¹² the young bull before the face of Jehovah.

4:5 Then the anointed priest shall take¹³ from the blood of the young bull, and he shall bring¹⁰ it to the Tent of Meeting.

4:6 Then the priest shall dip¹⁴ his finger in the blood, and he shall sprinkle¹⁵ from the blood seven times before the face of Jehovah - the face of the veil of the holy *place*.

4:7 Then the priest shall put¹⁶ *some* of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense, which is in the Tent of Meeting, before the face of Jehovah. And all the blood of the young bull he shall pour out¹⁷ to the base of the altar of the sacrifice for burning up, which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.

4:8 Now, all the fat of the young bull of the sin-offering he shall lift out¹⁸ from it - the fat covering upon the innards with all the fat which is upon the innards,

4:9 and both of the kidneys and the fat which is upon them (which is upon the flanks), and the lobe above the liver with the kidneys, he shall put this aside¹⁹,

4:10 like that which shall be lifted out²⁰ from the steer of the sacrifice of peace-offerings, and the priest shall burn²¹ them upon the altar of the sacrifice for burning up.

4:11 But the hide of the young bull with all his flesh, together with his head and with his legs, also his innards and his dung -

4:12 the entirety of the young bull - he shall bring out²² to the outside of the camp, to a clean place - to the ash dump, and he shall burn²³ it upon the sticks in the fire. Upon the ash dump it shall be burned²⁴.

Commentary

The instructions for sin offerings are first covered in the case of the high priest:

4:3 *If the anointed priest shall sin⁷ to the guilt of the people, he shall then offer⁸ upon his sin which he sinned⁹ a perfect young bull - a son of the herd - to Jehovah as a sin-offering.*

הַכֹּהֵן הַמְּשִׁיחַ “The anointed priest” - cf. Lev. 8:12 – the high priest

יִחַטֵּא לְאַשְׁמַת הָעָם lit. “shall sin to guilt the people,” ASV, SON, NIV= “shall sin so as to bring guilt on the people,” LXX= “shall sin so as to cause the people to sin,” KJV= “shall sin according to the sin of the people.” The word “guilt” in the Hebrew text is a noun, not a verb, so that’s why I rendered it “to the guilt of the people.” But despite the differences in translation, the link between the priest and the people is evident. To sin is to miss the mark of absolute perfection held out in the law of God. K&D offer that the priest’s sin spoken of here would be one done in his official position as a high priest, such as giving a wrong decision in a court case. The Medieval Jewish commentator Rashi, however, notes that if the high priest sins in any way, he renders all the people guilty because he is no longer qualified to atone for them. That is why we need Jesus. No high priest was ever able to be sinless, as the author of Hebrews points out; they all had to offer sacrifices for their own sins. Not so with Jesus; He lived a perfect life and laid His own body down as the ultimate sacrifice for the sin of the people.

וְהִקְרִיב עַל חַטָּאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא⁹ lit. “he shall offer upon his sin which he sinned” The preposition “upon” is generally rendered “for” in English translations (περι in the Septuagint), but I think that the original word paints the picture more vividly that this offering is to cover over sin. And the sin is not some vague concept, it is underscored by repetition that this sin is *his own* sin – “his sin which he sinned.” The NIV is remiss in overlooking this repetition. When we sin, we need to clearly acknowledge our fault before God, not gloss over it or try to blame it on somebody else.

פֶּרֶךְ בֶּן־בָּקָר תָּמִים lit. “a young bull, a son of the herd, perfect” This word פֶּרֶךְ occurs for the first time in Leviticus here, describing a young bull. Jewish commentators Rashi and Maimonides note that this “young bull” was to be about 3 years old, and was to be distinguished from a “calf” - which is one year old, and an “ox” - which is three years old. This was a highly valuable animal – the most valuable of all the animals required in the sacrificial system. Ibn Ezra comments that “the sin of the high priest is more serious because he is supposed to know the Torah thoroughly. As such he had to bring a bull, not a lamb or a goat, because it was the most valuable.” Are you a leader? Perhaps a father or a mother or a teacher in the church or school whose example children follow? Perhaps you have an even larger sphere of authority as a civil officer. James 3:1 tells us that “teachers ... will incur a stricter judgment.” We must take extra care to live exemplary lives and to shun sin because God holds us responsible for our influence over the lives of others. Dear God, I am not equal to this task. Please magnify Your Spirit in me so that such sin may be mitigated in me!

See 1:5 on בֶּן־בָּקָר “son of the herd” and see 1:3 on תָּמִים “perfect.”

לְחַטָּאת lit. “to a sin” The Syriac and Greek texts render it “for his sins,” but English translations generally render it “for/as a sin offering.” This is the first time in Leviticus the word “sin” is used to describe a class of offerings. The death of this valuable animal was required to cover or atone for the sins of the priest. Adam Clarke further comments:

“It is obviously in reference to these innocent creatures being brought as sin-offerings to God for the guilty that St. Paul alludes in 2 Cor 5:21, where he says, ‘He (God) made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God’ - holy and pure by the power and grace of God, in or through Him. And it is worthy of remark, that the Greek word used by the apostle is the same by which the Septuagint, in more than fourscore places in the Pentateuch, translate the Hebrew word “hattaah,” sin, which in all those places our translation renders sin-offering.”

4:4 *He shall bring¹⁰ the young bull to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting - to the face of Jehovah, and he shall lay¹¹ his hand upon the head of the young bull and he shall slaughter¹² the young bull before the face of Jehovah.*

- אֲבִיָּא “bring” see 2:2
- אֶת־הַפֶּרֶךְ “the young bull” see 4:3
- פֶּתַח “entrance” and לְפָנָי “before” see 1:1
- אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד “Tent of Meeting” see 1:3

- אֶת־יָדוֹ וְסָמַךְ “and he shall lay his hand” see 1:4
- וְשָׁחַט “slaughter” see 1:5

As you can see from the references to previous commentary, this verse does not introduce any new concepts. This sin offering for the priest was to be prepared in much the same way as the burnt offering of chapter one, except that this was specifically for a young bull.

The Hebrew word for “young bull” is stated three times in this verse. The place of presentation and slaughter, “before the face of Jehovah” is also repeated – stated twice in Hebrew and three times in the Greek Septuagint. Three things are therefore emphasized by repetition:

1. the action of the high priest “He shall bring... he shall lay hand... he shall slaughter,”
2. the animal to be offered “the young bull,”
3. and the sacred presence of God “before the face of Jehovah.”

This was an awesome moment when the eyes of the whole nation were riveted on this simple ceremony performed by their high priest. Nothing else mattered but what he did, what he offered, and the presence of God. Reminds me of the way the world also seems to come to a standstill in the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus. Like the high priest of old, He brought His own sacrifice to the altar - not a young bull, but His own body. Jesus brought the sacrifice of His own body as though He had sinned like any other high priest because, although He has no personal guilt before God, He had voluntarily and legally taken upon Himself the guilt of the whole human race. The crucifixion was a grand climax of history where nothing else mattered but Jesus, His death, and the acceptance of His death in the presence of Jehovah.

4:5 *Then the anointed priest shall take¹³ from the blood of the young bull and he shall bring¹⁰ it to the Tent of Meeting.*

וְלָקַח “He shall take/remove” First appearance of this verb in Lev.

“anointed priest” see 4:3. The Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch add another adjectival phrase to describe the priest’s purification.

מִמֶּנּוּ Lit. “from the blood;” K&D “part of the blood;” NIV “some of the blood.”

“Tent of Meeting” see 1:1. Here is where the sin offering departs from the regular burnt offering. Instead of the blood being put upon the altar at this point, the blood is carried into the tabernacle.

4:6 *Then the priest shall dip¹⁴ his finger in the blood, and he shall sprinkle¹⁵ from the blood seven times before the face of Jehovah - the face of the veil of the holy place.*

וְטָבַל הַכֹּהֵן “And the priest shall dip” The word “priest” is stated explicitly in Hebrew, even though the NIV uses a pronoun (they do the same thing a few words down, substituting “it” for “blood”).

אֶצְבָּעוֹ בְּדָמַי “his finger in the blood” The word for finger has a root meaning “to dip/dye.” It’s not found in the Cairo Codex.

וְהִזָּה מִן־הַדָּמַי “and he shall sprinkle from the blood” This word for “sprinkle” is the first occurrence in Leviticus. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, the previously-used word for “sprinkle” זָרַק found in 1:5, 1:11, 3:2 and 3:8 seems to indicate a heavier sprinkling done with the whole hand (sometimes translated “pour”) whereas this word נָזַה is a lighter sprinkling done with a finger. This word generally refers to cleansing from sin to obtain ritual purity (Isa. 52:15, Heb. 9:13, I Pet. 1:2), and is also used in the ordination ceremonies (Lev.8, Ex. 29:21, Num 8:7).

שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים “seven times” The root meaning of the Hebrew word for “seven” means to be satiated or filled. The seven sprinklings indicate a fullness or completion of something. Keil & Delitzsch interpret the action to symbolize the restoration of the covenant relationship after it had been broken by the sin of the anointed priest. Only after this restoration of the relationship could the blood of the sacrifice be applied to the altar. (For those interested in Hebrew grammar, the word translated “times” would by itself normally be translated “striking/stamping,” but when it occurs after a number it is translated “times.”) The Samaritan Pentateuch, the Vaticanus, and the Alexandrinus add the phrase “with his finger,” but there is no need for the repetition, as it has already been stated in this verse previously.

פְּנֵי ... לְפָנָי “to the face of ... to the face of” or “before ... before” Notice the repetition of this phrase. This was to be done in the presence of God. The sprinkling took place not only in the presence of God but also within the sanctuary – the holy place of the tabernacle where only the priests could go, between the entrance and the veiled-off ark of the covenant. The sprinkling was done facing the ark of the covenant itself, although it could not be seen through the curtain. This was a special and sacred ceremony, but it is not as removed from modern-day Christian experience as you might think. We do much the same thing when we pray. We are always in God’s presence, but when we pray, we come before God as a priest (I Peter 2:9) before the mercy seat – the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:15-16, 10:19), seeking restoration of the covenant relationship that we have broken ourselves through our sin. When we confess our sin to God and ask Him to forgive us on account of the blood of Jesus, our relationship with God is perfectly restored and we are able to fully minister to the needs of others in turn.

פְּרֻכֵּת הַקֹּדֶשׁ “the separating curtain of the holy” The word for the veil or curtain is only used of this particular curtain which separated the holy place from the holy of holies where the ark of the covenant stood. The word has a root meaning “to break/separate,” so I have sought to preserve that root meaning in my translation “separating curtain.”

Over the centuries, the heavy curtain inside the temple was stained with the blood of this sprinkling ceremony from hundreds of high priests who had sinned and had to be restored before the gracious face of God before they could offer a sacrifice for the people. However, Jesus did not have to take this step when He offered Himself for our sin. There is no mention of Jesus entering the sanctuary in His lifetime. In fact, the dividing curtain ripped in half when He died, forever bringing man to God and forever annulling any further sacrifices! He now sits in the true heavenly temple as our glorious high priest (Heb. 9)!

4:7 *Then the priest shall put¹⁶ some of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense, which is in the Tent of Meeting, before the face of Jehovah. And all the blood of the young bull he shall pour out¹⁷ to the base of the altar of the sacrifice for burning up, which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.*

וְנָתַן הַכֹּהֵן מִן-הַדָּם lit. “And the priest shall give from the blood” The LXX translates verb #16 as ἐπιθησει “place upon” and adds that the blood is “of the young bull.”

עַל-קַרְנֹת מִזְבֵּחַ “upon the horns of the altar” Keil & Delitzsch comment: “The significance of the altar as the scene of the manifestation of the divine grace and salvation culminated in the horns, as the symbols of power and might.” For detail on the construction of the altar and its horns see Exodus 30. The Cairo codex adds that this is the altar “of Jehovah.”

קִטְרֵת הַסַּמִּים lit. “smoke of sweet spices” KJV= “sweet incense,” NAS & NIV= “fragrant incense,” BDB= “incense of spices” The word for “incense” is derived from the “hiqtir” verb earlier used for burning up a sacrifice in smoke. Exodus 30 describes how the incense was to be made. The blood in this case is smeared onto the horns of the altar of incense in the holy place. John Gill, in his exposition on the Bible, takes the symbolic meaning of this action differently from Keil & Delitzsch, and I’m inclined to agree with him. Whereas K&D say that this application of blood to the altar is expiatory - that this is just another altar upon which the lifeblood of a substitute is offered to pay for sin, Gill sees the incense altar as a symbol of intercession: “This rite shows, that the intercession of Christ, signified by the altar of sweet incense, proceeds upon the foot of His blood and sacrifice.” In other words, before any

prayers can be made, sin must be paid. Gill is saying that Jesus' role of praying for us before the Father in heaven is based upon His role as the Lamb of God who was slain to take away the sin of the world. But we can take the symbolic meaning of this a step further. Not only is Jesus an intercessor, but all of God's people can take part in the role of intercession, just as the altar of sweet incense represented the prayers of the priests of Israel. This symbolic action of placing the blood of a sin-sacrifice upon the horns of the altar symbolized that the strength of our prayers comes as a result of the sacrifice of Jesus. When we approach God in prayer, we must do so with a conscious remembering that we can only speak to God because Jesus has paid for our sin and has reconciled us to God. That is why it is traditional to end prayers with the phrase "in Jesus' name, Amen."

וְאֵת כָּל־דָּם הַפָּר lit. "and all blood of the young bull" The word "blood" has no definite article ("the") in the Masoretic text, but it is definitely implied, so the Cairo and Samaritan texts add a definite article here. The construction of this sentence indicates that this is the start of a new sentence and it emphasizes "blood" as the subject of this new sentence. It is the first of three verses emphasizing the three parts of this animal that are to be offered upon the altars. The majority of the blood had not been used up in the sprinkling in the holy place or in the smearing on the horns of the altar of incense, so this verse instructs what to do with all the rest of the blood.

יִשְׁפֹּךְ אֶל־יְסוּדָהּ lit. "he shall pour out to the base of" KJV=the bottom of, Holliday=the foundation wall

מִזְבַּח הַעֹלָה "the altar of sacrifices-for-burning-up" See 1:3 on this adjective for the altar - most English translations render it "burnt-offering." This makes it clear that it is speaking of a different altar than that upon which the blood was smeared on the horns. The priest was to take the rest of the blood back out of the holy place to the big altar out front to pour it out and burn the fat and kidneys.

אֲשֶׁר־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד lit. "that entrance of the tent of meeting" (NIV omits the relative pronoun "which/that.") See 1:3 on "entrance" and 1:1 on "tent of meeting."

The level of detail which God provides in this verse shows how eminently-involved He is in the details of life on earth. God is not just out there in the heavens disconnected from life on earth; He cares about every little detail of His world, down to which altar should receive the leftover blood. If He pays attention to such little details, will He not pay attention to every detail of your life? On the one hand, it means He will not overlook even the smallest sin in your life, but on the other hand it means God will not overlook the smallest need in your life, either.

4:8 *Now, all the fat of the young bull of the sin-offering he shall lift out¹⁸ from it - the fat covering upon the innards with all the fat which is upon the innards,*

תֵּלֵב "fat" See 3:3. This starts the instructions on the second element to be offered upon the altar.

הַחֲטָאֵת "sin-offering" See 4:3. Omitted here in Cairo.

יָרִים מִמֶּנּוּ lit. "he shall lift out from it" This Hebrew verb is slightly different from the one in the parallel passage in 1:16 - which I translated "remove." The verb here is translated "lift off" by Keil & Delitzsch, "remove" by the NAS & NIV, and "take off" by the ASV & KJV. It's a messy job, ripping the fat tissue out!

The rest of this verse is an exact repeat of 3:3, so see commentary there. The only difference is that several ancient translations, including Samaritan, Greek (LXX), Syriac, and Aramaic (Targums) omit the word "upon" in the phrase "the fat covering upon the innards" and most English translations follow them in this omission. It is an extremely minor omission though.

4:9 *and both of the kidneys and the fat which is upon them (which is upon the flanks), and the lobe above the liver with the kidneys, he shall put this aside¹⁹,*

Finally the third of the three items to be offered on the altar is the kidneys and liver. This is an exact repeat of 3:4 (which describes the peace offering), so see commentary there. Although the Masoretic Hebrew text is the same as 3:4, there are some minor variations in other texts: The Cairo omits the parenthetical clause "which is upon the

flanks” altogether, and the Septuagint adds the verb of being (“is”) explicitly where one is only implied in the Hebrew text. The Septuagint also differs between 3:4 and 4:9 in the final word in the verse which is a definite pronoun (“this”), which is in both places in the Hebrew text, but is only in the Septuagint text here in 4:9.

Why is it that only these three inner parts (blood, fat, and kidneys) are offered on the altar in the case of a sin-offering, and all the rest of the body is burned outside the camp? In commenting upon these Levitical passages, it becomes difficult to know how much symbolism to find in seemingly-mundane actions of preparing and offering sacrifices. Keil and Delitzsch, in keeping with their thesis that the sacrifices are a symbol of offering oneself to God, find the kidneys and inner parts to be a symbol of the “better part or inmost kernel of man. By burning the fat portions upon the altar, the better part of human nature was given up in symbol to the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit of God that it might be purified from the dross of sin and ascend in its glorified essence to heaven for a sweet savor unto the Lord.” Perhaps other parallels could be drawn between Jesus’ life and death - His body was certainly taken outside the camp to be crucified and buried. Did He offer anything of His “inner parts” in the temple before being crucified? I can think of nothing but His teaching in the temple.

4:10 *like that which shall be lifted out²⁰ from the steer of the sacrifice of peace-offerings, and the priest shall burn²¹ them upon the altar of the sacrifice for burning up.*

פֶּאֶשֶׁר lit. “like that” (N)ASV=As it, NIV=Just as the fat

יִוָּרֵם lit. “shall be lifted out” This is a hapex legomenon - the only time this spelling appears in the Bible, but it is a passive form of the verb I translated “he shall lift out” in 4:8. Interestingly enough, this verb is not used in chapter three to describe the peace offering, rather the verb סִוֵּר is used, but all that indicates is that the two words are synonyms.

מִשְׁוֹר “steer” KJV=bullock, (N)ASV=NIV=ox. This is a full-grown bull, as opposed to the calf mentioned earlier in this chapter. It is a more specific word than the word “cattle” used in the stipulations for a peace offering in Chapter 3, but the NIV notes that this word could be used for male or female cattle, matching the instructions of 3:1. The Septuagint mistakenly carries over the word “calf” instead.

See 3:1 on “sacrifice of peace offerings”

וַיִּהְיֶה קִטְרָם lit. “and he shall burn them” See 1:9 on this Hiqtir verb for burning. The masculine plural suffix refers to the two masculine items of he fat and the kidneys of v. 9.

עַל מִזְבַּח הַעֹלָה “upon the altar of sacrifice for burning up” This is in construct form, so should not be translated “upon the altar as a burnt offering.” It continues the link from 4:7 that after the blood was smeared on the incense altar in the tent, the three inner elements of blood, fat, and kidneys are to be offered at a different altar - the big altar for burnt offerings outside the tent. (See 1:9 for commentary on “sacrifice for burning up.) “For this is the love of God: that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not difficult...” says John in his first epistle (5:3, ISV). Here is one instance of how God purposefully makes his commands easier to obey - the repetition and the specificity with which He gives these instructions concerning the sacrifices make it easy to understand exactly what God wanted. God is not trying to trip us up with hard rules, rather He has given very simple rules for living and He is rooting for us all the way, wanting us to obey them and helping His people to be faithful!

4:11 *But the hide of the young bull with all his flesh, together with his head and with his legs, also his innards and his dung –*

This verse is a continuation of v.10. Emphasis on the body parts parallels the emphasis of 4:8-9:

עֹר “hide” (from a verb with the same consonantal spelling, meaning “to be exposed”)

כָּל-בְּשָׂרוֹ “all his flesh”

רֹאשׁוֹ “his head”

כַּרְעָיו “his legs” (from a verb meaning “to bend the knee” See 1:9)

וְקִרְבָּיו “and his innards” (This same word for “inner parts” was used in 1:9, 13 and 3:3,9)

וּפְרָשָׁיו “dung” This is a new word. The root meaning of the verb is “to spread out.” Lexicographers Holiday and BDB give “stomach contents,” NASV= “refuse,” NIV= “offal.”

“In ordinary circumstances, these were perquisites of the priests. But in the expiation necessary for a sin of the high priest, after the fat of the sacrifice was offered on the altar, the carcass was carried without the camp, in order that the total combustion of it in the place of ashes might the more strikingly indicate the enormity of the transgression, and the horror with which he regarded it” (JFB).

4:12 *the entirety of the young bull - he shall bring out²² to the outside of the camp, to a clean place - to the ash dump, and he shall burn²³ it upon the sticks in the fire. Upon the ash dump it shall be burned²⁴.*

וְהוֹצִיא lit. “and he shall cause to go out” This disagrees with some other translations: The NIV doesn’t include the meaning of “out,” the Septuagint and Syriac make it plural – indicating more than one priest, and the KJV adds a meaning of “carrying.” At any rate, the priest is supposed to bring all these parts outside somewhere. כָּל־הַבָּרָהּ lit “all the young bull” This means, as the KJV, ASV, and LXX render it “the whole of the bull,” but the NIV and NASV make the logical assumption that it is not the whole bull, since parts of it have already been offered on the altar, so they render it “the rest of the bull.” I believe that the word “all” simply encapsulates the body parts listed in v.11.

אֶל־מִחוּץ לַמִּחֲנֶה lit. “to from outside to the camp” This is what is referred to in Hebrews 13:11-13, “For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.” (ASV) In Hebrews, however, it includes the concept of breaking out of Jewish norms and taking the Gospel to Gentiles.

אֶל־מְקוֹם טָהוֹר lit. “to a place clean” or “pure” (LXX=καθαρον) This was a ceremonially clean place as distinguished from the regular dump which was unclean. I suppose that ashes are not only ceremonially clean, but also physically free from germs – soap can be made from ashes.

אֶל־שֹׁפְךְ הָאֵשׁ ... עַל־שֹׁפְךְ הָאֵשׁ lit. “to a dump of the ash ... upon a dump of the ash” The word I translated “dump” is a noun form of the verb meaning “to pour out” so I disagree with pretty much all the English translations which render this as a verb and add a relative pronoun where there isn’t one (“where the ashes are poured out”); the LXX and NIV do better on the second repetition “on the ash heap.” The ashes are the same “fatty ashes” from 1:16, although in a different place – this time outside the camp instead of by the altar. “This answers to the place where Christ was crucified, being a place of skulls, or dead men’s ashes” (Gill).

וְשָׂרָף ... יִשָּׂרָף “And he shall burn ... it shall be burned.” (LXX=κατακαυσουσιν) This is a new word for Leviticus. So far, all the burning has been on the altar up to God and has been designated by the verb “hiqtir,” but the burning here is not a sacrifice to God but a disposing of something, so it is merely burned, not burned upward to God. (Hiqtir has more to do with the smoke that goes up from burning, and Saraph –used here - has more to do simply with the brightness and heat of the flame that burns.)

God is a God of repetition. Perhaps it is something He enjoys, or perhaps He so intimately knows human nature as our Creator that He knows the importance of repeating things to get His words through our thick little heads. Repetition is certainly a key part of the art of teaching. At any rate, the repetition of these phrases about the burning and the ash dump are part of God’s word, so we should not remove the repetitions (as the NIV and other more modern translations do) just because it seems pedantic or inefficient.

עַל־עֵצִים בָּאֵשׁ “upon the sticks/logs/wood in the fire” See 1:7. Again, we see the amazing detail of God’s instructions. A soggy carcass is not going to burn without some help, so God mentions that they’ll need some wood to get it going.

Keil and Delitzsch’s comments are great here:

“The death which the animal endured in the sinner’s stead rendered neither real nor symbolical satisfaction or payment for sin ... but represented merely the fruit and effect of sin... The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled ... in the holy place to cover the sinner from the holiness of God... and to restore the covenant relationship... After this, the soul covered in the sacrificial blood was given up to the grace of God that prevailed in the altar by sprinkling the blood on the horns of the altar of incense... But the sin that had been laid upon the animal lay upon it still [so it had to be burned] and that outside the camp – outside the kingdom of God” (K&D)

Only Jesus would really offer the sacrifice that paid for the sin of His people and satisfy God’s justice, but this animal as a sin offering *represented sin*. It was killed to graphically show that “the wages of sin is death,” and it was disposed of outside the camp because it represented sin, an intolerable offense against God, thus it could not be offered up to God as a sacrifice.

Applications:

- God does not have a “good-ol’-boy” approach to sin. Not only is sin in EVERY PERSON culpable, but EVERY SIN is culpable, whether it was done intentionally or not. Ignorance is no excuse (4:2).
 - Each person needs to set boundaries to curb unintentional sins beforehand – and must not judge other Christians who come up with different boundaries (4:2).
 - No less than full obedience to every part of a command of God is demanded by God’s righteousness (4:2).
 - We need covering for sin. No earthly priest or animal can make us right with God. We must believe in Jesus as the fulfillment of the sin-offering (4:3).
 - When we sin, we need to clearly acknowledge our fault before God, not gloss over it or try to blame it on somebody else (4:3).
 - God holds us responsible for our influence over the lives of others. The sin of a leader is more serious (4:3).
 - Like the priests of old, we come before God in prayer seeking restoration of the covenant relationship that we have broken ourselves through our sin. When we confess our sin to God and ask Him to forgive us on account of the blood of Jesus, our relationship with God is perfectly restored and we are able to fully minister to the needs of others in turn (4:6).
 - Before any prayers can be made, sin must be paid. We should pray “in Jesus’ Name” (4:7).
 - God cares about every little detail of His world, down to which altar should receive the leftover blood. He will not overlook even the smallest sin in your life, yet He also will not overlook the smallest need in your life, either (4:7).
 - God is not trying to trip us up with hard rules, rather He has given very simple rules for living and He is rooting for us all the way, wanting us to obey them and helping His people to be faithful (4:10).
 - God is a God of repetition. We should use repetition in our teaching and not omit it from our Bibles (4:12).
 - God cannot tolerate sin, it must be taken “outside the camp” (4:12).
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