

Forgiving the Defiled

The Sin/Purification Offering

Leviticus 4:1 "And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

² "Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them,

³ if it is the **anointed priest** who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering.

⁴ He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD and lay his hand on the head of the bull and kill the bull before the LORD.

⁵ And the anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting,

⁶ and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle part of the blood seven times before the LORD in front of the veil of the sanctuary.

⁷ And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense before the LORD that is in the tent of meeting, and all the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

⁸ And all the fat of the bull of the sin offering he shall remove from it, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails

⁹ and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys

¹⁰ (just as these are taken from the ox of the sacrifice of the peace offerings); and the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering.

¹¹ But the skin of the bull and all its flesh, with its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung--

¹² all the rest of the bull-- he shall carry outside the camp to a clean place, to the ash heap, and shall burn it up on a fire of wood. On the ash heap it shall be burned up.

¹³ "If **the whole congregation** of Israel sins unintentionally and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt,

¹⁴ when the sin which they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull from the herd for a sin offering and bring it in front of the tent of meeting.

¹⁵ And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD, and the bull shall be killed before the LORD.

¹⁶ Then the anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the tent of meeting,

¹⁷ and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD in front of the veil.

¹⁸ And he shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is in the tent of meeting before the LORD, and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

¹⁹ And all its fat he shall take from it and burn on the altar.

²⁰ Thus shall he do with the bull. As he did with the bull of the sin offering, so shall he do with this. And the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven.

²¹ And he shall carry the bull outside the camp and burn it up as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly.

²² "When **a leader** sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by the commandments of the LORD his God ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt,

²³ or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a goat, a male without blemish,

²⁴ and shall lay his hand on the head of the goat and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD; it is a sin offering.

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 its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering.

²⁶ And all its fat he shall burn on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings. So the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and he shall be forgiven.

²⁷ "If anyone of **the common people** sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt,

²⁸ or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed.

²⁹ And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill the sin offering in the place of burnt offering.

³⁰ And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar.

³¹ And all its fat he shall remove, as the fat is removed from the peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.

³² "If he brings a lamb as his offering for a sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish

³³ and lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill it for a sin offering in the place where they kill the burnt offering.

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 all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar.

³⁵ And all its fat he shall remove as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar, on top of the LORD's food offerings. And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven."

(Lev 4:1-35)

The Priestly Portrait of Dorian Gray

Basil Hallward was a deeply moral man, a painter, and artist. He had become infatuated with the object that helped

him realize all of his potential as an artist. That object was the flawless perfect physical specimen known as [Dorian Gray](#), of whom Hallward had just completed a life-sized portrait, his crowning achievement as an artist. Dorian was himself a young beautiful flawless creature, naïve in the ways of the world, but laden with boundless narcissistic tendencies. All they needed was the right trigger. They found them in the decadent aristocrat Lord [Henry Wotton](#) who convinced Dorian that his beauty and youth were the only things in life that mattered, but that they would very soon fade away into the grotesque markings of a body wrecked by the ravages of time and old age that no man can stop. Therefore, he should pursue pleasure with all the fervor he could muster now, before it was too late.

Dorian was shown his portrait, and quickly admitted to himself that he was a truly handsome man and he was captivated by the hedonism of Wotton. He immediately [wished that the portrait would age](#) instead of himself. Under the tutelage of Wotton, Dorian begins to explore a sensual lifestyle. He proposes marriage to Sibyl, a Shakespearean actress who is so smitten with Dorian that when she invites him to see a new performance, she acts so badly that Dorian dumps her, telling her that he had fallen in love with her acting,

which she can no longer perform. When he came home, he found that his wish had come true. The portrait had changed, and its face now bore a subtle sneer of cruelty. But he himself showed no outward signs of change.

Dorian feels guilty. So, he tells Lord Wotton what he has done and seeks to make amends, only to find that the actress has killed herself. To overcome his grief, he convinces himself that truly, all that matters in life is pleasure. He locks up the painting and for 20 years he lives a life of debauchery that goes from bad to worse. But he never ages a day. He never changes. Years later, he takes Henry to see the painting only to find that the figure is hideous it is unrecognizable.

One scholar has called the offering of Leviticus 4, “[The Priestly Picture of Dorian Gray](#).”¹ He suggests that it can teach us about [the problem of evil](#) and answer the question of Jeremiah, “[Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?](#)” ([Jer 12:1](#)). This is a profound question that comes from the lips of Israel’s Weeping Prophet. The answer from our text is that sinners may indeed run around apparently unmarred by their evil acts.

¹ [Jacob Milgrom](#), *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 30-33.

But something else bears the wounds, and with its destruction, all sinners will meet their doom.²

The “Sin” Offering

The Meaning and Translation of the Offering

Leviticus 4 introduces us to the **fourth offering** of the book. I looked at two dozen English translations and all of them call it a “**sin offering**” or an offering done because of sin. The offering is called a *chatta`t*. The idea is that it comes from the word *chatta`*, which means “**to sin**” or “to miss the mark” or “to offend.” This seems to be straightforward enough. What people usually think, therefore, is that somehow this offering is given because someone has done something morally offensive to God.

There are problems though. Other places where this offering appears include a **woman who has just given birth** (**Lev 12:6**), someone who has a serious **skin disease** (**14:19**), someone who has a **bodily discharge** (**15:15**), the completion of a **Nazarite vow** (**Num 6:14**), or the **dedication of the altar** (**Num 7:16**). None of those have anything to do with sin.

² Ibid., 32.

Altars can't sin. It isn't a moral wrong to give birth to a child. If this is the case, then by definition this offering cannot be *only* for moral sin. It may be *at least* for that, but it must also have to do with other things as well. Its significance must be larger.

In the case of our passage, the LORD tells Moses (**Lev 4:1**) to tell the people that if anyone “sins unintentionally in any of the LORD’s commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them...” (2). This is the context of our text. There are two important things to point out here.

First, we are dealing with “sins” (*chata*)³ that are “unintentional.” Other passages explain what was meant by this. For example, **Num 15:27ff.** contrasts unwitting sin with sinning “with a high hand” (v. 30), i.e., blatantly or deliberately. The sinner who sins “with a high hand” will not be forgiven, but must be cut off, whereas one who sins inadvertently can offer this sacrifice and enjoy forgiveness.⁴ So, what is in mind in ch. 4 (the law actually continues on into ch. 5 where this point is not quite as clear; we will save that

³ Notice the single *tet* (“t”) here, as opposed to the doubling we will see below. This is in the Qal stem, and it means “sin.”

⁴ **Gordon J. Wenham**, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 92.

for next time) are things done **without knowledge** that it was wrong, and most certainly, they **didn't do it defiantly** as an act of the will against God. That, again, does not necessarily mean that someone who does something defiantly can't be forgiven, either by this offering or another one. It just means that this is not what is in mind here.

The **second** point has to do with the object of the word “**commandments**” (*mišwôt*). You would think that it refers to moral commandments (like adultery or murder or bearing false witness, etc.). But this is not necessarily the case, as the examples above make clear. Those examples are all *ceremonial* commandments. At least one scholar argues that the term *mišwôt* applies *only* to the religious commandments (*fas*), not to civil ones (*jus*). I think this is true ... in Leviticus 4.⁵

⁵ **Jacob Milgrom**, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 230. Milgrom's argument seems to rest on the presupposition of the documentary hypothesis and that it is only the Priestly source that uses the term this way. I'll grant him that in Leviticus 4, this is how the word is being used. But that hypothesis is anything but certain. Furthermore, there is a question as to whether or not Leviticus 4 is **the general law or a particular application** of a more general law. At least one scholar argues that it is in fact a specific application, therefore the law itself is broader; it includes more than is here in Lev 4. It seems clear that in Lev 4, the sins involved are only ceremonial. But it is anything but certain that this the only kind of sins that this offering will cover (see **Lev 5:1-4; 16:30**). On the general vs. specific law see **Gary A. Anderson**, “The Interpretation of the Purification Offering (חטאת) in the Temple Scroll (11QTemple) and Rabbinic Literature,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111:1 (Spring, 1992): 17-35.

A reason is because many moral commandments seem to be enforced by God, not by man. For example, if you killed someone without pre-deliberation, such that it was something like third degree murder, you would have to go to a city of refuge until the high priest was dead (**Num 35:12, 15**). If it was first degree murder, you are simply put to death. This is how God dealt with those crimes. There is no prescription anywhere in the law for an individual bringing this offering to a priest in a temple to be forgiven of those. The same is true with adultery. In the case of adultery, you were put to death, you didn't bring this offering. And what sense would that even make in terms of justice? When someone dies at the hands of someone else, even if it is inadvertent, killing an animal with no other consequences is not justice. This doesn't mean that there is no forgiveness available in the OT for someone who sins deliberately (obviously, there is), but we have to be looking at the right place to find it (**Ps 51; 2Sam 12; Lev 16**). Leviticus 4 is not that place.⁶

⁶ This same offering is being offered on the Day of Atonement. Because of what we see in Lev 4, some, like Dr. Heiser, seem to argue that this offering could *never* be for intentional sins. This goes too far. On this point and the one I will make below regarding only the sanctuary being purged in this offering see **Joshua Vis**, "The Prepositions of Purgation in Lev 16:1-28 and the Purgation of Persons in Lev 4:1-5:13," Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement Program Unit, Annual Meeting of Society of Biblical Literature, Baltimore, MD, November 23–26, 2013, https://www.academia.edu/5239969/The_Prepositions_of_Purgation_in_Lev_16_1_28_and_the_Purgation_of_Persons_in_Lev_4_1_5_13; and Joshua M. Vis, *The Purification Offering of Leviticus and the Sacrificial Offering of Jesus*, a Dissertation at the Duke

These things lead to a point about the **translation of “sin-offering.”** There is a way to deal with the problem that our chapter is probably not talking about moral sins but unintentional *ceremonial sins*. An example would be a person ate forbidden fat (*ḥelev*) thinking it was merely ordinary fat (*shuman*), which is permitted.⁷ You may not think that is serious. God very much does. We’ll see why as we continue.

The translation “**purification-offering**” works well. In fact, as Heiser and others point out, grammatically speaking, this probably *must* be the translation. This has to do with the doubling of the letter *tet* (t) which puts the word into a specific verbal stem (Piel), which does not mean “to miss the mark” but rather “**to cleanse**” or “**to purify.**”⁸ Hence, most modern language commentaries opt for “**purification-offering.**” This is a basic point of Hebrew grammar and it is inexplicable that our translations haven’t noticed it. This doesn’t rule out that sin is in view; it is. But it means that the offering is probably different than what you thought. In Lev

University Program in Religion, 2012, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.863.1147&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

⁷ **Baruch A. Levine**, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 19.

⁸ See **Michael S. Heiser**, *Notes on Leviticus: from the Naked Bible Podcast* (BlindSpot Press), Kindle Edition; Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 96; R. E. Averbeck, “Sacrifices and Offerings,” ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 717–718.

4, these offerings refer to violations of the covenant in terms of fulfilling religious duties.⁹

The question then becomes, **purification of what?** To answer, let's turn to the passage. The law of the sin-offering or purification-offering technically runs from **Lev 4:1-5:13**. The whole thing falls into two categories: **unintentional sins (4:1-35)** and what Wenham calls "**sins of omission**" (**5:1ff**).¹⁰ We are only looking at the former today.

The Anointed Priest (Lev 4:3-12)

Ch. 4 can be divided into four main parts. The entire offering can apply to the "**anointed priest**" (**Lev 4:3-12**), "**the whole congregation**" (**13-21**), a "**tribal leader**" (**22-26**), and "**the common people**" (**27-35** and on into ch. 5). We find the **more serious offences are dealt with first**.

The LORD tells Moses to begin with **the anointed priest**. The word "anointed" is the same word for **Messiah** (*mashiach*), which makes this curious, especially given that only in Lev 4 and 6 do we find the phrase "anointed priest." While Aaron and his sons were all anointed, most commentators think that only the high priest is in view here, in part

⁹ Levine, 19.

¹⁰ **Wenham**, 92-93.

because his representation of God to the people is of a quality unlike that of any other priest (cf. **Num 35:25**). I agree, as the phrase is singular and definite (“the” anointed priest).

It says that he does something that brings “**guilt on the people**” (**Lev 4:2**). This, he has done **unintentionally**. Nevertheless, in his improper action, he causes the entire nation to become guilty. This is the biblical idea of **representation**, something that we have in our own form of government, which we get from Scripture. One man represents all the rest. He stands for them, in their place.¹¹ As such, he bears great weight and responsibility for doing all that he can to obey God. Think about what Moses told Aaron to tell his son Eleazar immediately after his brothers were killed in the tabernacle. “**Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation**” (**Lev 10:6**).

It makes a lot of sense that what is in view here is not some kind of moral failure, but some kind of failure in the performance of his priestly duties, because if he was guilty of a moral failure, he would either die or be executed or he would have to offer a sacrifice for his own sin, as we see in

¹¹ A interesting analysis of this in Leviticus 4 is in **Philip Peter Jenson**, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 106 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 171ff.

the Day of Atonement. So, Targum Jonathan gives the example that “he has offered a sin offering for the people not according to the rite” (Lev 4:3 PJE). As we will see in Leviticus 10 when the priests do not take great care to do exactly as they are commanded, God’s wrath might break out and destroy them or even others. These were the constant lessons we find throughout the Pentateuch with various plagues or disasters resulting in loss of many lives (think of the golden calf, Korah, the bronze serpent, Nadab and Abihu, etc.).

Many do not like this idea of representation. How many times in the last two administrations have you heard someone says, “He’s not my president!” The problem is, if you are an American citizen, actually, he is. Pretending it isn’t so won’t make it any less true. Nor will hating it. But why is their action so important with regard to the people? First, it could cause harm to the people as God’s wrath is kindled (Milgrom citing Shadal). Or, his actions could in fact lead the people to commit the same sins, thus multiplying the problem a thousand-fold (citing Ibn Ezra and Ramban).¹² It’s like if the priest adds some new corrupt element to worship and then everyone follows it, soon no one will even

¹² Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation*, 232.

know it is wrong. However you slice it, it is especially vital that he follow through with his responsibility here as soon as he becomes aware of the violation.

What must he do? He has to take a **bull** from the herd, **without blemish** to be a purification offering (3). This begins the way he will appease God for his unintentional sin. He must bring it to the **entrance of the tent** of meeting, **lay his own hand** on the head of the bull and **kill it** before the LORD (4). Next, he has to take some of the **blood, bring it into the tent of meeting** (5), dip his finger in the blood and **sprinkle the blood seven times** before the LORD in front of the veil of the sanctuary (6). He then has to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense before the LORD who is just inside the curtain in the Most Holy Place (7). This, then, is that gets purified. Not, the priest himself, but the horns of the altar.

Before talking about that, notice something. This marks **the first time** we have seen anyone go inside to **the Holy Place** in this book. Everything thus far has been out in **the Courtyard**, and he will return there in a moment. But this causes me to pause in order to explain something. First of all, this is the **first mandatory offering in Leviticus**. This

makes this offering of a different quality than the other three.

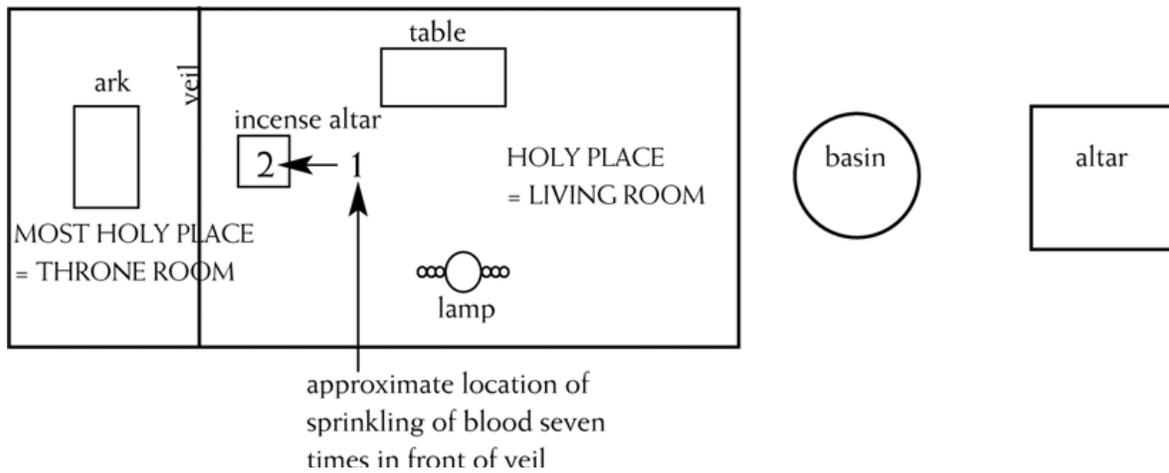


Chart in Gane, Leviticus, NIVAC, 101.

Second, the quality is represented by the fact that he is moving inside to the holy place to sprinkle the blood and put it on **the horns of the altar**. Let's look first at the space itself. The tabernacle complex is divided into three tiers of holiness: Courtyard, Holy Place, and Most Holy Place. Each tier is progressively more sacred, so much that only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place only one time a year! For this is where Christ himself dwelt between the cherubim on his ark-throne. What the priest has done is so bad that it must be taken care of inside the Holy Place. The **courtyard altar won't do the job of purification**. His sin has penetrated deeper.

Between the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place there was a [curtain](#). And just in front of that curtain in the Holy Place was an [altar of incense](#). This altar is a small square box, 1 ½ feet long and wide (1 cubit) and 3 feet tall (two cubits). It is made of acacia wood and overlaid in pure gold, like almost everything in there. In this altar the priest would place [incense](#) which would then be burnt in a prescribed way. This incense would cover the mercy seat, the place where Christ sat, so that he would be shielded and not die ([Lev 16:13](#)). As someone has said, “[The cloud of incense screens the High Priest from the Divine Presence.](#)”¹³ So part of the function of the altar of incense is to shield and protect the priest from God’s wrath, which he needs because he is sinful. I am not interested in the incense here, but rather, the horns, because this is where he puts the blood.



Altar of Incense found at Mediggo

¹³ [Nahum M. Sarna](#), *Exodus*, The JPS Torah commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 193.

Like the altar of the courtyard, it has horns at the four corners. Throughout Scripture, horns symbolize **power**. In this case, it is the **power of God** (perhaps the four horns at the corners symbolizes his complete power over the four corners of the earth). This power is especially symbolized in the **grace of salvation**. The Psalmist says, “**The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation**” (**Ps 18:2**). The NT explains, “**Blessed by the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us**” in Christ (**Luke 1:68-69**).

Putting the blood on the horns is incredibly important. It is not put onto the altar itself, but on its horns. The symbolism of horns has to be meaningful here, both in terms of power and salvation. **As for the power**, most modern scholars argue that it is the putting the blood on the horns of the altar that effects purgation (sanitation, purification) *of the altar*. The blood is not put on the priest, but on the altar. The altar has become contaminated.

Somehow, what the priest has done in his unintentional sin has actually polluted the altar itself. The priest has sinned,

but the altar bears the marks of that sin. This is the connection to [Dorian Gray](#), because for his part, the priest is utterly oblivious until it is made known to him. He bears no outward signs of wrongdoing.

Here, you have to understand that ancient peoples understood sin to be a kind of [pollution](#) that corrupts not just the one committing the sin, but everything else it comes into contact with. It is like the brown haze you see over Denver. It isn't just the cars causing the pollution that are affected, but the entire city and region that starts to inhale the fumes and get sick. It is like an oil tanker that gets a huge gash in its side and starts to bleed oil. It isn't just the tanker that is affected by the gash, but all living creatures that come into contact with the quickly spreading oil.

So, someone has said, “[A sin committed anywhere will generate impurity that, becoming airborne, penetrates the sanctuary in proportion to its magnitude.](#)”¹⁴ In the ancient world, this was conceived of by pagans as coming from the [demonic](#) realm.¹⁵ They were responsible for contaminating the holy places. All their rituals were therefore built around getting rid of them. *We wouldn't want to blame ourselves, now*

¹⁴ [Milgrom](#), *CC: Lev*, 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

would we? We do not find this in the Biblical ceremonies, except for in one place—the Day of Atonement with Azazel. But that is quite different. True religion sees man as the chief source of pollution. We sin. We defile things. Sure, demons do too, but these ceremonies are not concerned with that. Leviticus is a book about dealing with us and our pollution. God is sovereign over their realm too, and he has different ways of dealing with them as we find in other places.

The priest's sin has not affected merely the [Courtyard](#), the outer tier of the sanctuary. It has actually worked its way into the [Holy Place](#). God's house is becoming polluted. As we will see on the Day of Atonement, sometimes it is necessary to purge even [the Most Holy Place](#), because sin penetrates into the very inner chamber where Yahweh dwells between the Cherubim. And [this is the great danger](#). God cannot abide with sin. While his mercy is great, at some point, if it gets too bad, he must abandon his house, and when he leaves, as he did in the exile, it spells utter doom for the people. This is the seriousness of something so many take so flippantly—unintentional ceremonial sins, let alone moral sins that aren't even in view yet.

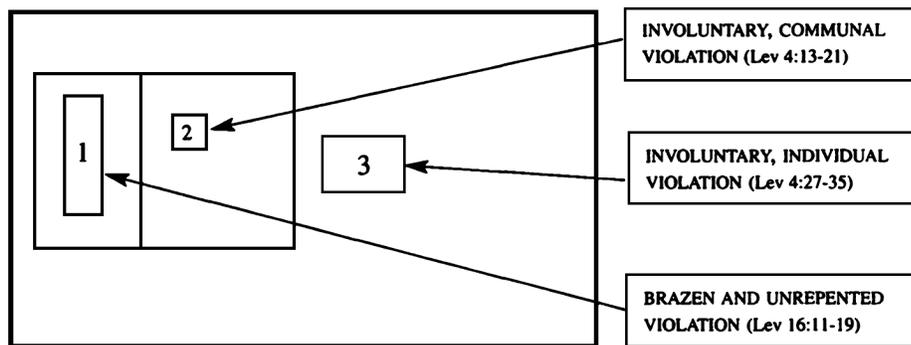


Chart in Milgrom, *Leviticus*, CSS, 31.

But carrying out this procedure is God's ordained way of **sanitizing his house** so that he can abide in it and not break out against his people. This happens not arbitrarily, but **through blood**. Blood is the key element, the detergent-power of the spiritual realm.¹⁶ It is the disinfectant of spiritual things. This is because the blood is the life-force (**Dt 12:23**), the thing that carries the very soul with it. Life and soul are spirit-things. And only life can replace the foul corrosive effects of sin, which is death. So placing the detergent-power of blood on the horns which symbolize God's power is a representation that God is powerful to now act in grace and mercy.

But I think **the salvation element** of horns is also significant. And this is something a lot of modern scholars seem to miss. Many are teaching that it is *only* the altar that is being

¹⁶ Milgrom calls it "The ritual cleanser that purges the altar of impurities inflicted on it by the offerer." Milgrom, *CCS*, 31.

purged. I do not believe this is true, because the horns are God's power of *salvation*. The symbolism is clear. Now, it isn't that this rite carries with it the fullness of an ability to utterly cleanse the sinner. Hebrews tells us that much. Something more was always needed. But it does start the process. It does it through the thing that is said to come to the sinner in this chapter: **forgiveness**. Let's keep going through the passage and see how this becomes an important feature.

We first need to complete the anointed priest's ritual. Notice that in **vs. 7**, the priest is to take the rest of the blood and pour it out at **the base of the altar in the Courtyard**, meaning that this space too has to be cleansed. From here, he takes the **fat** of the bull, removes the fat covering the **entrails** and on them (**Lev 4:8**), along with the two **kidneys** and their fat at the loins, and the long lobe of the **liver** (**9**) in the same way he did with the peace offering and he shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard (**10**).

But then, he does something we have **not seen before**. He must take the skin of the bull along with all of its flesh, its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung (**11**), all the rest of the bull, and carry it outside the camp to a clean place, to the ash heap, and burn the whole thing on a fire of wood (**12**).

This is not a sacrifice to be eaten. In fact, it was extremely costly, for no one may eat anything of the entire bull. It is completely burnt up.

Taking it **outside the camp** means that he has to go to a place far away with the offering, farther away than the last outskirts of Israelite tents. The reason seems to be that the animal in this case has become **unclean**. Milgrom argues that all animals in purifications offerings become unclean, which creates an interesting paradox that their blood simultaneously cleanses and yet causes the one handling the body to become unclean, which itself can only be removed through washing.¹⁷ We will see something akin to this again on the Day of Atonement, and the symbolism is that the unclean thing has to be burnt up outside, far away from the people. Since we will see something similar with the goat to Azazel, **I'll just leave this here for now.**

The Whole Congregation (Lev 4:13-21)

We can move more quickly through the rest of the passage. The second unintentional sin belongs to a group—“**the whole congregation of Israel.**” Thinking about what we just

¹⁷ **Milgrom** and the “Red Cow” paradox, *ibid.*, 34-39.

saw with the priest, it is not hard to figure out how this could happen. The priest starts to do something wrong, unintentionally. This is then naturally transferred to the people, who are not dedicating their lives to studying the Torah to figure out if anything is wrong. So, they quite naturally begin to commit the same ritualistic sins as the priest. That's one way this could happen.

It says that, “The thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the LORDs commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt” (Lev 4:13). This is like Josiah who rediscovered the book of the Law hidden away, covered with dust, having been untouched in decades. When he realized what this had caused the people to do, he immediately remedied the situation (2Kgs 22-23). It is only when we read God's word that we can know about things that are not built into our conscience. This is why the word of God is so vital.

At any rate, when the thing becomes known, the assembly is to offer a bull from the herd, same as the priest. It is to be a purification offering for their unintended sin (Lev 4:14). They bring it before the tent of meeting, the elders lay their hands on its head, and kill it before the LORD (15). The priest then takes some of the blood into the tent (16), dips

his finger in it, and **sprinkles** it seven times before the LORD in front of the veil (17). Again, we are in the Holy Place now. Again, he puts some of the blood on the **horns** of the altar, then the rest of the blood is poured out at the base of the **altar** in the Courtyard (18). He does the same thing with the fat, which he burns on the altar. And it says he does this “**to make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven**” (19-20). The rest of the bull is taken outside the camp again and it burnt up as a purification offering for the assembly (21).

Notice, something happens to the people, even though they are not sprinkled with the blood. Somehow, through the ritual and especially the blood being put on the horns of the altar of incense, atonement is made and the people are forgiven. God is propitiated, the altar is cleansed, *but they are forgiven*. It doesn't say they are cleansed. Not yet (see **Lev 16:30**). But they are forgiven.

A Leader (Lev 4:22-26)

Let's continue. The third instance for this offering is when “**a leader sins.**” He, again, does something unintentionally in any of these ceremonial things and he realizes his

guilt (22). What is interesting here is that even though he is a leader, it is not an expensive bull, but a goat that is offered. The crime is less than that of the priest or the whole congregation, even though he is a chieftain or a king. This also points out that it must be something ceremonial rather than moral going on.

The goat has to be a male without blemish (23). He then lays his hand on the head and kills it in the place in the same place as the others (24). Again, the priest takes some of the blood of the purification offering, but now he takes his finger and puts the blood *on the horns of the altar in the courtyard*. He does not go into the Holy Place. He does not sprinkle anything seven times. The crime is less. The sin hasn't penetrated as deeply.

Again, the rest of the blood is poured out at the base of the altar (25), its fat is burnt on the altar, like the sacrifice of peace offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and he shall be forgiven (26). Nothing is said this time about bringing the rest outside of the camp.

The Common People (Lev 4:27-35)

The final instance in the chapter for this offering is when anyone of the **common people** sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD’s commandments ought not to be done and realizes his guilt (27). Again, what is in mind is clearly **ceremonial negligence**. For he knows it is wrong to steal, and commit adultery, and take the LORD’s name in vain, and so on.

For this person, the sacrifice is to be a **female goat without blemish** (28). Everything is the same (29-30) as before, which results in the priest making “**atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven**” (31). However, he can also bring a **lamb** instead of a goat. It must also be **female and without blemish** (32). The other details are the same, including atonement and forgiveness (33-35).

4:1-12 Priest’s sin offering (herd)/sprinkle blood 7x (veil) , horns, poured
 4:13-21 People’s sin offering (bull)/sprinkle blood 7x (veil) horns, poured
 4:22-26 Leader’s sin offering for sins (goat) blood on horns and poured
 4:27-35 Person’s sin offering (female goat lamb) blood on horns/ poured

Purification (sin) Offering
 4:1-35

From a chart made by Anna Cool¹⁸

How Shall We Think of this Sin-Purification Offering?

What shall we make of this part of the Sin-Purification offering? At least as far as it concerns itself in Leviticus 4, I

¹⁸ Anna Cool, “Synthetic Chart of Leviticus: A Sanctified Nation,” Dallas Theological Seminary paper, https://www.academia.edu/7277357/Leviticus_Chart.

think we need to stay in the realm of [unintended sins that surround the idea of worshiping God improperly](#). Because that's its focus. There will be plenty of time to move to other kinds of sins, as we will do next time and when we come to Leviticus 16. I won't go there today.

Instead, let's content ourselves with sticking with what has happened here. In the case of this chapter, the focus is especially on [religious sins](#), unintended actions done in worship that do not align to the prescribed ways of approaching God. In a Christian world that has turned worship into entertainment and switched the object of worship from God to ourselves, there is no more important word to hear than this. The consequences of such actions permeate not only that morning service, but everything else the church touches and does. Like pollution, it contaminates the very essence of what we are corporately speaking. And I think this is at the heart of why the church's witness is so weak in so many places. We are corrupt and we don't even know it.

We've seen this especially in [the anointed priest](#). He should be the most careful because he represents the whole nation is the most culpable for bringing disaster upon the people. His failure creates failure throughout the entire system. It magnifies and multiplies unintended sins. The closest

counterpart here has to be today's church leadership, which in too many places seems almost hell-bent in not caring to attend to God's word when it comes to corporate worship. This is a terrible thing, and I do not think that the laws of pollution outlined in this chapter go away just because Jesus came. Thankfully, his position is typological, as we will see in a moment.

But before we get to that, we've also seen this pollution and contamination coming through **the entire assembly**. When the congregation together participated in unintended sins of religious worship, its stain penetrated into the Holy Place, even though they were not themselves allowed inside. In this way, the **representation** principle of the priest works its way into the population like leaven working through dough. It was an extremely serious thing for the congregation, but there was a remedy for them, albeit an expensive one, in this offering.

Certainly, we have to think about **the leader of the people** and the **common person** individually as well. For all groups are made up of individuals. And all groups have leaders. There is no one-to-one counterpart of a leader of a tribe of Israel in the modern world, because God has not chosen any other nation to be his theocracy on earth. It does seem

to me that when a leader claims to be a Christian, things become more serious for him on a personal level if he does not take Christian worship seriously. In America, this has been a problem since our inception. But however great such sins may be, we see in this ritual that it is not as serious as the high priest or the people acting in unintended sins together. The church bears *more* responsibility.

This is even more the case on the individual level, and this leads to [biggest point of application this morning](#). Many of the priests of old fell into great moral sin. Clearly the nation did. And obviously individuals did as well. It always *began* with their unintended sins performed in the sanctuary precinct. In this way, sins of the sanctuary always precede sins in the state. The former lead to the latter. Unintended sins in the cult, lead as we will see next time to sins of omission in the state, which in turn lead to sins of commission everywhere. [The thing compounds and fractures](#) under the weight of such heavy staining corrupting sin.

Nevertheless, our remedy is found in the antitype of the anointed priest; that is the High Priest himself—the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, and his work on our behalf as the perfect High Priest who offers up the perfect purification offering, thereby keeping the heavenly and living holy places

eternally pure. And though I think the law of pollution does not go away, there is always and forever a purification offering that is as near as having the unintended sin coming to mind and looking to that offering to receive forgiveness. In one sense, it really is that simple. It is good news.

The remedy is immediate, because his offering is perfect. Corrupt worship can instantly be stopped, if only it is found out and people turn to Christ. The remedy, like the problem, is also permeating in the reverse. For as sin can corrupt the sanctuary, through the blood, a purified sanctuary begins to have effects upon the population. Many scholars seem at present confused about this (see n. 19). In their recognition that the blood is applied to the altar (technically its horns), there seems to be this missing understanding that atonement is actually being made for the people. They are being forgiven of their unintended sins through the blood of the offering on the horns of salvation power.

The best explanation I've seen of this is not to deny that this offering has anything to do with sin. It does. Nor is it to think that it *only* has to do with sacred space, though clearly purification of the space is largely and firstly in view. Instead, consider the words of Joshua Vix who did his dissertation on this very problem.

“No text ... ever indicates how it is that the sins of the Israelites can materialize as stains to the [sanctuary]. Nonetheless, this fact has become difficult to deny. I see no reason, then, why the reverse could not also be true; that is, actions done to the [sanctuary] can affect the Israelites. The sanctuary and the offerer are in a reciprocal, but unequal, relationship; the Israelite can soil the sanctuary and the sanctuary can purge the Israelite. The blood of the [purification offering] has power beyond its physical limits just as the sin and uncleanness of the Israelites have power beyond their physical limits. Even when blood is only physically applied to parts of the sanctuary, it can affect the offerer.”¹⁹

¹⁹ Vix, “The Prepositions of Purgation,” 11. **Going Deeper.** Vix gives a practical translation example of this problem from Leviticus 4:26. Whereas the ESV renders it, “**So the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and he shall be forgiven,**” others want to translate it, “**Thus shall the priest effect purgation on his behalf for his wrong, that he may be forgiven**” (i.e. Milgrom, Lev 1-16, 227). Obviously, these are quite different. The reason for this translation is the apparent belief that the Hebrew cannot bear the ESV’s reading. Vix has shown that this is simply not true (see both the paper and dissertation in n. 6). The danger is that it can create a kind of disconnect between the OT rite and what Jesus did, such that it seems like scholars like Heiser are almost saying that the NT is not using the OT rituals in their original context, but are appropriating things to Jesus that were not even there in the first place. But what possible apologetic value would this have to a Hebrew priest to help him convert to Christianity? No, it is better to see that as Vix points out, the sinner is receiving forgiveness through the atonement that is being applied to the altar in such a way that, like a kind of reversal of Dorian Gray, what happens to the altar, because of salvific power represented in those horns and in the blood, now begins to permeate to the worshipper, reversing the polluting effects of his sin upon the sanctuary, thereby bringing him not only forgiveness, but eventually purging him of his sins on the Day of Atonement. But this takes us well into Leviticus 16 and we’ll see this much more at that time.

This is good news! Indeed, when people hear that they have done something wrong, if they will but turn to the Lord Jesus, the effects of his forgiveness upon them can be both immediate and pervasive, reaching first into a heart, then a church, then into many churches, and then into the culture itself. But it always starts with the church, not the culture, because it always starts with the purity of the sanctuary. The church and the individual are Christ's temple today. And we have seen how not only in our corporate worship, but also in our individual lives, we offer up NT offerings and sacrifices to God. If you find out you have unintentionally done something that is against those injunctions, you need to seek forgiveness in Christ, and he is faithful and just and will forgive you.

Friend, know that Jesus entered into a heavenly sanctuary and purified all things once-for-all so that this offering never needs to happen again. Then, not only know it, but believe it for yourself. It isn't the offering itself simply being offered that brings forgiveness. It is God doing it, through the offering, *through the recognition that you have sinned* and through the act of looking to the offering to bring forgiveness.

When **Dorian Gray** saw the twisted horror that his picture had become after 20 plus years of unmitigated debauchery, he was overwhelmed. So, one day, he takes a knife, **stabs the portrait**, and the people outside hear screams. When the police arrive, they find “**withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage**” man, lying on the floor next to a portrait of an exquisite young man. This is how many deal with their sins. There is no atonement here, only death. There is no forgiveness here, only guilt that leads to anger and rage. This is how many deal with lack of forgiveness in their own life as a result of whatever sin they have incurred.

Furthermore, even when someone has a conscience and wants to do what is right, in the pagan world, the gods were fickle and silent. This is expressed well by a Mesopotamian “**righteous sufferer**” who expressed this problem: “**I wish I knew that these things were pleasing to a god! What seems good to one’s self could be an offense to a god. What in one’s own heart seems abominable could be good to one’s god!**”²⁰ Uncertainty lead them to **divination**

²⁰ Contexts of Scripture 1.153:488; K. van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* (SSN 22; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 94–97. On the problem of unwitting sin in the ancient Near East, see also Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 361–63. Cited in **John H Walton**, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 294.

to try and discern the will of the gods. This in turn them to fear the demonic realm even more than they already did.

But **God has told you what he wants in his word**. He not only shows the seriousness of what happens when holy things become polluted, but he provided a very specific remedy for its solution. As you must recall, Leviticus more than any other book of the Bible tells us that Moses is only writing down **exactly what the LORD told him**. God is not silent. To know what God wants, all you have to do is hear and believe! And since it is through hearing that you believe, you can rejoice that today you have heard his word and that he is pleased to make it as effectual as the offering of Christ to those he gives the ears to hear.

Bibliography

Anderson, Gary A. "The Interpretation of the Purification Offering (תטאת) in the Temple Scroll (11QTemple) and Rabbinic Literature." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111:1 (Spring, 1992): 17-35.

Cool, Anna. "Synthetic Chart of Leviticus: A Sanctified Nation." Dallas Theological Seminary paper. https://www.academia.edu/7277357/Leviticus_Chart

Heiser, Michael. *Notes on Leviticus from the Naked Bible Podcast*.

Hulbert, Brandon. "A Picture of Dorian Gray As A Picture of Locative Substitutionary Atonement." (Oct, 2015). https://www.academia.edu/25835586/A_PICTURE_OF_DORIAN_GRAY_AS_A_PICTURE_OF_LOCATIVE_SUBSTITUTIONARY_ATONEMENT?auto=download

- Jenson, Philip Peter. *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 106. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992.
- Levine, Baruch A. *Leviticus*. The JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.
- Milgrom, Jacob. *A Continental Commentary: Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004.
- _____. *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Yale Bible Vol. 3 New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Sarna, Nahum M. *Exodus*. The JPS Torah commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991.
- Vis, Joshua. “The Prepositions of Purgation in Lev 16:1-28 and the Purgation of Persons in Lev 4:1-5:13.” Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement Program Unit. Annual Meeting of Society of Biblical Literature. Baltimore, MD (November 23–26, 2013). https://www.academia.edu/5239969/The_Prepositions_of_Purgation_in_Lev_16_1_28_and_the_Purgation_of_Persons_in_Lev_4_1_5_13;
- _____. *The Purification Offering of Leviticus and the Sacrificial Offering of Jesus*. A Dissertation at the Duke University Program in Religion. 2012, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.863.1147&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.
- Walton, John H. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.
- Wenham, Gordon J. *The Book of Leviticus*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Liippincott’s Monthly Magazine (1890).

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them,			
³ if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering.	¹³ "If the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt, ¹⁴ when the sin which they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull from the herd for a sin offering	²² "When a leader sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by the commandments of the LORD his God ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, ²³ or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a goat , a male without blemish,	²⁷ "If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, ²⁸ or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat , a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed.
⁴ He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD and lay his hand on the head of the bull and kill the bull before the LORD.	and bring it in front of the tent of meeting. ¹⁵ And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the LORD, and the bull shall be killed before the LORD.	²⁴ and shall lay his hand on the head of the goat and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD; it is a sin offering.	²⁹ And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill the sin offering in the place of burnt offering.
⁵ And the anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting,	¹⁶ Then the anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the tent of meeting,	²⁵ Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and	³⁰ And the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger
⁶ and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle part of the blood seven times before the LORD in front of the veil of the sanctuary.	¹⁷ and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD in front of the veil.		
⁷ And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense before the LORD that is in the tent of meeting, and all the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.	¹⁸ And he shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is in the tent of meeting before the LORD, and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.	put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering.	and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar.
⁸ And all the fat of the bull of the sin offering he shall remove from it, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails	¹⁹ And all its fat he shall take from it and burn on the altar. ²⁰ Thus shall he do with the bull. As he did with the bull of the sin offering, so shall he do with this. And the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven .	²⁶ And all its fat he shall burn on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings. So the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and he shall be forgiven .	³¹ And all its fat he shall remove, as the fat is removed from the peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven .
⁹ and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys			³⁵ And all its fat he shall remove as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar, on top of the LORD's food offerings. And the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven ."
¹⁰ (just as these are taken from the ox of the sacrifice of the peace offerings); and the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering.			
¹¹ But the skin of the bull and all its flesh, with its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung-			
¹² all the rest of the bull-- he shall carry outside the camp to a clean place, to the ash heap, and shall burn it up on a fire of wood. On the ash heap it shall be burned up.	²¹ And he shall carry the bull outside the camp and burn it up as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly.		