

LEVITICUS

Chapter 4

The Sin Offering

The LORD said to Moses, ² “Say to the Israelites: ‘When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD’s commands— ³ “ ‘If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the LORD a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed. ⁴ He is to present the bull at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it before the LORD. ⁵ Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull’s blood and carry it into the Tent of Meeting. ⁶ He is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle some of it seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain of the sanctuary. ⁷ The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the bull’s blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ⁸ He shall remove all the fat from the bull of the sin offering—the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, ⁹ both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys— ¹⁰ just as the fat is removed from the ox sacrificed as a fellowship offering. Then the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering. ¹¹ But the hide of the bull and all its flesh, as well as the head and legs, the inner parts and offal— ¹² that is, all the rest of the bull—he must take outside the camp to a place ceremonially clean, where the ashes are thrown, and burn it in a wood fire on the ash heap. ¹³ “ ‘If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD’s commands, even though the community is unaware of the matter, they are guilty. ¹⁴ When they become aware of the sin they committed, the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering and present it before the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁵ The elders of the community are to lay their hands on the bull’s head before the LORD, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD. ¹⁶ Then the anointed priest is to take some of the bull’s blood into the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁷ He shall dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it before the LORD seven times in front of the curtain. ¹⁸ He is to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁹ He shall remove all the fat from it and burn it on the altar, ²⁰ and do with this bull just as he did with the bull for the sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven. ²¹ Then he shall take the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull. This is the sin offering for the community. ²² “ ‘When a leader sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the commands of the LORD his God, he is guilty. ²³ When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering a male goat without defect. ²⁴ He is to lay his hand on the goat’s head and slaughter it at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered 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 the blood at the base of the altar.²⁶ He shall burn all the fat on the altar as he burned the fat of the fellowship offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven.²⁷ “ ‘If a member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, he is guilty.²⁸ When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering for the sin he committed a female goat without defect.²⁹ He is to lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it at the place of the burnt offering.³⁰ Then the priest is to take some of the blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.³¹ He shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as an aroma pleasing to the LORD. In this way the priest will make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven.³² “ ‘If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he is to bring a female without defect.³³ He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it for a sin offering at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered.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 the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.³⁵ He shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the lamb of the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made to the LORD by fire. In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven.

Ch 4 Highlights God's regulations covering inadvertent or accidental offenses made against Him. Unintentional sins in this chapter fall into four categories: those committed by the priests (vv 3–12); those committed by the whole Israelite community (vv 13–21); those committed by the leader (vv 22–26); and those committed by an individual (vv 27–35). In each of these four cases, God prescribes means of atonement leading to repentance and the forgiveness of sin (v 35) (TLSB)

4:2 *unintentionally*. See 5:15; contrast Nu 5:30–31. Four classes of people involved in committing unintentional sins are listed: (1) “the anointed priest” (vv. 3–12), (2) the “whole Israelite community” (vv. 13–21), (3) a “leader” (vv. 22–26) and (4) a “member of the community” (vv. 27–35). Heb 9:7 speaks of sins “committed in ignorance” in referring to the Day of Atonement. (CSB)

Contrasts unintentional sins with those of a deliberate nature recorded in Nu 15:22–31. (TLSB)

sins. Hbr *chata*’, “misses the mark.” Sin involves failure to keep God's Law (Rm 4:15; 1Jn 3:4). Any such violation deserves death (Rm 6:23a). (TLSB)

4:3 *anointed priest*. The high priest (see 6:20, 22). (CSB)

sins. All high priests sinned except the high priest Jesus Christ (Heb 5:1–3; 7:26–28). (CSB)

guilt. As representatives of the Israelite community, when priests sinned they brought God's wrath against the whole community. (TLSB)

on the people. The relationship of the priests to the people was so intimate in Israel (as a nation consecrated to God) that the people became guilty when the priest sinned. (CSB)

must. Although the burnt, grain and fellowship offerings (chs. 1–3) were voluntary, the sin offering was compulsory (see vv. 14, 23, 28). (CSB)

without defect. The final perfect sacrifice for the sins of God's people was the crucified Christ, who was without any moral defect (Heb 9:13–14; 1Pe 1:19). (CSB)

sin offering. See further priestly regulations in 6:24–30; Nu 15:22–29. As soon as an "anointed priest" (or a person from one of the other classes of people) became aware of unintentional sin, he was to bring his sin offering to the Lord. On the other hand, should the priest (or others) remain unaware of unintentional sin, this lack was atoned for on the Day of Atonement. (CSB)

Atonement was at the heart of this offering. By God's grace, the Israelites were provided a means by which God cleansed the tabernacle and freed His people from the iniquity of their sins. (TLSB)

4:5–6 *into the tent of meeting.* Ritual went beyond the eastern courtyard of the tent of meeting ("the entrance," v 4) into the inner courts and the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, the dwelling place of God. (TLSB)

4:4 Three principles of atonement are found in this verse: (1) substitution ("present the bull"), (2) identification ("lay his hand on its head") and (3) the death of the substitute ("slaughter it"). (CSB)

4:5 *blood.* See note on 17:11. There were two types of sin offerings. The first (vv. 3–21) and more important involved sprinkling the blood in the tabernacle in front of the inner curtain or, in the case of the solemn Day of Atonement (ch. 16), on and in front of the atonement cover (traditionally "mercy seat") itself. This type of sin offering was not eaten. The fat, kidneys and covering of the liver were burned on the great altar, but all the rest was burned outside the camp (v. 12). Heb 13:11–13 clearly draws the parallel to our sin offering, Jesus, who suffered outside the city gate. This type of sin offering was offered by and for a priest or by the elders for the whole community. In general, the animal to be sacrificed was a young bull, but on the Day of Atonement the sin offering was to be a goat (16:9). (CSB)

The second type of sin offering (4:22–5:13) was for a leader of the nation or a private individual. Some of the blood was applied to the horns of the great altar, the rest poured out at its base. The fat, etc., was burned on the altar, but the rest of the offering was given to the priest and his male relatives as food to be eaten in a holy place (6:29–30;

see 10:16–20). The sin offering brought by a private person was to be a female goat or lamb. If the person was poor, he could bring a dove or young pigeon (5:7–8; 12:6, 8; cf. Lk 2:24), or even about two quarts of flour (5:11). The offering included confession (5:5) and the symbolic transfer of guilt by laying hands on the sacrifice (v. 29; 16:21). Then the priest who offered the sacrifice made atonement for the sin, and the Lord promised forgiveness (5:13). By bringing such a sin offering, a faithful Israelite under conviction of sin sought restoration of fellowship with God. (CSB)

4:6–7 Ritual atonement. Blood is God’s atoning agent (17:11). Note how the author of Heb ties this Lv ordinance to the atoning death of Christ (Heb 9:20–22). (TLSB)

4:6 *finger*. The right forefinger (see 14:16). (CSB)

seven. The number was symbolic of perfection and completeness (see note on Ge 5:5). (CSB)

Used repeatedly: 4:17; 8:11; 14:16, 27, 51; 16:19; 25:8; 26:18, 21, 24, 28 (TLSB)

curtain. The great curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Ex 26:33). (CSB)

4:7 *horns*. The four horns of the altar (see Ex 30:1–3) were symbols of the atoning power of the sin offering (Ex 30:10). (CSB)

4:8–10 See 3:3–5. (CSB)

4:11–12 Remainder of sacrificial bull was taken to the ash heap outside the camp and burned. The camp housed the tent of meeting, where God resided, so care was taken not to defile the camp with anything unclean, whether a person or a thing. Only those persons declared ritually clean could enter the camp (cf 14:8; 16:26, 28). (TLSB)

4:12 *outside the camp*. See note on 13:45–46. So also Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem (Heb 13:11–13; see 9:11; 16:26–28; Nu 19:3; Eze 43:21). (CSB)

ceremonially clean. The distinction between clean and unclean was a matter of ritual or religious purity, not a concern for physical cleanliness (see chs. 11–15 for examples; see also Mk 7:1–4). (CSB)

burn. Since the sins of the offerer were symbolically transferred to the sacrificial bull, the bull had to be entirely destroyed and not thrown on the ash pile of 1:16. (CSB)

4:13 *sins unintentionally*. Anyone who sinned intentionally (e.g., blasphemed) was cast out of camp. In some cases, the punishment was death. Cf Nu 15:30–36. (TLSB)

realize their guilt. When God, through direct action or the action of others, draws attention to the sin, and those involved realize what they have done and repent. See King David’s response to the prophet Nathan when accused of adultery (2Sm 12:1–15). (TLSB)

4:15 *elders.* See note on Ex 3:16. (CSB)

When the Israelite community was found guilty of sin, elders of each tribe were to gather around the young bull offered to the Lord. All elders gathered corporately to confess the sins of the community and to lay hands on the young bull. Their sins were transferred to the animal, which was sacrificed as a sin offering before the Lord. (TLSB)

4:17 *veil.* Curtain that hung between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. (TLSB)

4:18 *altar.* Of incense (see v. 7). (CSB)

4:20 *sin offering.* The offering of the priest who had sinned (v. 3). (CSB)

will be forgiven. In 4:20–6:7 this is a key phrase, occurring nine times and referring to forgiveness by God. (CSB)

Or, “released.” God’s forgiveness releases one from the burden of sin, removing all impurity and guilt. His actions free our consciences and restore us to Him. (TLSB)

4:22 *leader sins.* Sins committed by a leader impact his whole family or clan. (TLSB)

4:23 *male goat.* Less valuable animals were sacrificed for those with lesser standing in the community or of lesser economic means. Thus a bull was required for the high priest (v. 3) and the whole community (v. 14), but a male goat for a civic leader (v. 23) and a female goat (v. 28) or lamb (v. 32) for an ordinary Israelite. If an offerer was too poor, then doves and pigeons were sufficient (5:7) or even a handful of fine flour (5:11–12). (CSB)

Old Testament Sacrifices

NAME	OT REFERENCES	ELEMENTS	PURPOSE
BURNT OFFERING	Lev 1; 6:8–13; 8:18–21; 16:24	Bull, ram or male bird (dove or young pigeon for poor); wholly consumed; no defect	Voluntary act of worship; atonement for unintentional sin in general; expression of devotion, commitment and complete surrender to God

GRAIN OFFERING	Lev 2; 6:14–23	Grain, fine flour, olive oil, incense, baked bread (cakes or wafers), salt; no yeast or honey; accompanied burnt offering and fellowship offering (along with drink offering)	Voluntary act of worship; recognition of God's goodness and provisions; devotion to God
FELLOWSHIP OFFERING	Lev. 3; 7:11–34	Any animal without defect from herd or flock; variety of breads	Voluntary act of worship; thanksgiving and fellowship (it included a communal meal)
SIN OFFERING	Lev 4:1–5:13; 6:24–30; 8:14–17; 16:3-22	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Young bull: for high priest and congregation 2. Male goat: for leader 3. Female goat or lamb for common person 4. Dove or pigeon: for the poor 5. Tenth of an ephah of fine flour: for the very poor 	Mandatory atonement for specific unintentional sin; confession of sin; forgiveness of sin; cleansing from defilement
GUILT OFFERING	Lev 5:14–6:7; 7:1–6	Ram or lamb	Mandatory atonement for unintentional sin requiring restitution; cleansing from defilement; make restitution; pay 20% fine

When more than one kind of offering was presented (as in Nu 6:16, 17), the procedure was usually as follows: (1) sin offering or guilt offering, (2) burnt offering, (3) fellowship offering and grain offering (along with a drink offering). This sequence furnishes part of the spiritual significance of the sacrificial system. First, sin had to be dealt with (sin offering or guilt offering). Second, the worshiper committed himself completely to God (burnt offering and grain offering). Third, fellowship or communion between the Lord, the priest and the worshiper (fellowship offering) was established. To state it another way, there were sacrifices of expiation (sin offerings and guilt offerings), consecration (burnt offerings and grain offerings) and communion (fellowship offerings)—these included vow offerings and freewill offerings).

4:25 *priest*. The priest who officiated for the civil authority or the lay person (see vv. 30, 34). (CSB)

4:27 *common people*. Members of tribes who were not priests or princes. (TLSB)

4:28 *female goat*. See note on v. 23. (CSB)

God permitted individual sinners to offer sacrifices based on their financial means. A bull (vv 4, 14) or male goat (v 23) emphasized the severity of sins committed by leaders. A female goat was offered by the general population (followers). (TLSB)

4:29 *lay his hand on*. See notes on 1:3; Ex 29:10. (CSB)

4:30 *horns*. See note on v. 7. (CSB)

4:32 *lamb ... female*. See note on v. 23. (CSB)

4:35 *fat ... of the fellowship offering*. See 3:3–5. (CSB)

Often, more than one offering was presented. First, the sin offering, then the burnt and grain offering, then the peace offering. (TLSB)