

Leviticus 2

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Sharing a meal with the Lord was an important aspect of the worship in the Temple. Obviously not everyone could afford an animal, and even those with animals could not afford to sacrifice them regularly. Animal sacrifice on a personal level was performed rarely.

The next offering described by Moses is the *Mincha* offering of grain. Mincha is the word used for the offerings brought by Cain and Abel in Genesis 4. It is the word used today for the second prayer of the daily prayers in Jewish tradition. It is a short prayer, often prayed in the afternoon and quickly followed by the last prayer of the day, the *Ma'ariv*. Whereas the offerings (Mincha) brought by the brothers in Genesis 4 were of both grain and animal, the offering described here in Leviticus is only of grain. There is no blood involved in this act of worship. The offering, not called a sacrifice, is a mix of fine flour, olive oil and incense. The English translation says that 'when anyone brings a grain offering', however the Hebrew word used is '*nephesh*', the word for soul. The implication is that the act of worship in bringing an offering is deep and personal; it is in conjunction with the heart and is not something done without intention. The offering can be prepared at home and then presented at the Temple. This is quite an intentional act and demonstrates that the worship of God is not restricted to Temple precincts but begins in the home. A portion is burnt on the altar and the rest of the bread-cake is given to the priest and his family. This portion of the offering is called the most holy part. Interesting that the most holy portion is used by the priest, a human, and the other smaller portion is burnt as a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

So far we have had two chapters of Leviticus, and we have not heard the word 'sin' mentioned once. What is being described thus far are simply acts of worship. What we have heard is word 'atonement', and we will need to discuss the meaning of that word in depth soon. Leaven (yeast) is not to be present in the Mincha grain offering. Leaven is usually associated with the Passover, its preparations, and the Feast of Unleavened bread that follows. Why leaven must be excluded here is not explained in the text. Honey is also prohibited and again no satisfactory answer is available from the text or tradition. What we do have in the grain offering is the opportunity for the poor to engage in worship. The rich have the opportunity to present a sacrifice of an animal, the poor have no such opportunity. But they can still participate in Temple worship through the Mincha. It is the heart of the worshipper that is on display to God, not the size or shape or texture of the product on the altar. Here we recall the offering of the widows mite in the Gospels.

Finally all sacrifices had to be seasoned with salt. Possibly the preserving nature of salt was a memorial of the everlasting covenant. Although no explanation is offered in the text itself. Salt became a theological symbol, as did water, wine, bread, blood and light, all facets of the Temple service. Blessed salt became part of the early church worship and baptism tradition and was also used in exorcisms. Jesus reminds us that we are to salt and light to the nations. Old Book of Common Prayer includes the blessing for holy salt next to the blessing for holy water.