

Leviticus 4:1-21

Aaron Eime, Christ Church Jerusalem, 2021

The Lord continues to speak to Moses. Why Aaron is left out of the conversation, considering that many of the instructions will pertain to the priesthood, is unclear. Moses introduces the first sacrifice for sin; these sins are unintentional or committed in ignorance. This chapter details mandatory atonement for unintentional sins, confession of sins, forgiveness of sins, and cleansing from defilement. The chapter details four types of people who bring a sacrifice for sin: the priest, elders of the community, those in leadership positions, and the common people. We note again that these sins are unintentional and the later prophets of Israel argue against turning this ritual around to mean intentional sins and thus think they can fool the Lord by sinning, sacrificing, and getting away with it. The sin is against any of the commandments of the Lord, no matter the size of sin nor commandment broken. This is very similar to James 2:10 where it says, if you stumble on one point of the Law you break all of it.

Interestingly the priest is called *cohen hamashiach*, the anointed priest. He is not called *cohen hagadol*, the high priest, nor *the b'eni aharon*, the sons of Aaron. When the priest sins his sin is transferred as guilt onto the whole community. A bull, which is an expensive offering and thus probably not performed on a regular occasion, is required for the sacrifice called קָרְבַּן חַטָּאת the sin offering. I read a commentary that noted the Septuagint Greek for sin offering was ἀμαρτία (*amartia*), which is the same word used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:21. Thus some translations of 2 Corinthians 5:21 read that Jesus became our sin offering (most translations say 'Jesus became sin'). The guilt of the community is taken away through the actions and sacrifice of the anointed priest. This is an incredible theological point within the Torah, that one person (though an anointed person) can remove sins and guilt from others.

The ritual is carefully detailed although without explanation or reason. Blood is sprinkled from a finger seven times before the curtain that protects the Holy of Holies. The animal is carefully butchered, with the fat and blood belonging to the Lord. The unused portion of the animal is removed from the entire camp and burnt in its entirety. Perhaps the number seven reflected on the creation week, the rest associated with the Sabbath, the concept of perfection and the heavenly number.

Verse 13 declares boldly, "If the whole Israelite community sins...". Well now, how did they all manage to do that? And what does the text mean by 'all'? Verse 15 explains that actually, the whole Israelite community is represented by the elders of the community, called the זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, *zekaynim*, from the root זָקַן which means beard. While Egyptian, Roman and Greek culture preferred smooth faces, hair become synonymous with wisdom in the Middle East. The elders, later called the Sanhedrin, acted as a body to provide the sin offering. Leadership shares in the burden and guilt of sin and also shares in the method and responsibility to deal with the sin. This is another interesting theological and sociological point. There is community responsibility as well as personal responsibility, and leadership take on an extra burden of that responsibility. We should be careful to understand the responsibility of leadership before taking upon ourselves that burden.