

Leviticus 6:1-7

Aaron Eime, Christ Church Jerusalem, 2021

This portion of chapter six continues the instructions for the guilt offering mentioned in chapter 5 vs 14-19. The guilt offering is an animal sacrifice mentioned previously for unintentional sins against the holy things of the Lord, that is now required in cases of the intentional sins of theft, extortion and lying to cheat a neighbour. The sin offering was for sins against the Lord, the guilt offering is for sins against the holy things and other people. In rabbinic tradition the guilt offering protected people in cases of doubt, that is, the guilty party did not know for certain if he or she had committed an offence. Stealing and swearing falsely are directly against two of the ten Commandments. And they are atoned for through the guilt offering.

The process for atonement and forgiveness begins with returning the stolen property with the addition of an extra fifth of the value. Why the addition of a further 20 per cent is not explained. The reimbursement must be given to the offended party before the guilt offering can be presented to the Lord. We see this pattern to fix the relationship with our neighbours before bringing our offerings to the altar of the Lord in Matthew 5. Leviticus is also demonstrating that the sacrifice or offering, while important, is second to the relationships between people. The spirit of the Law is people first. this same theology runs through both the Hebrew and Greek Bible.

Once restitution has been made between neighbours the guilty party proceeds to offer his or her guilt offering to the Lord. Two people have been offended in the sin, God and people.

Having made right with the person, the offender now makes right with the Lord. God's requirement is an unblemished animal of a certain value. Sacrifices had a monetary value attached to them. The biblical text does not disclose the amount. Some commentaries indicated that the value scaled in proportion to the wealth of the individual. The rich would offer more to the Lord and the poor would offer less. In both cases, the atonement would be efficacious. Should the offender be unable to procure an appropriate animal then a monetary replacement was given in its stead. To the proper value! As indicated by verse 6. The tradition developed that financial offerings could be given to the Temple in place of animal sacrifice. We see this tradition appearing in the Gospels where Jesus watches the rich proceed to offer large amounts of money whilst a poor widow makes a small contribution that truly impresses the Lord. All of this is predicated on the desire of the offender to actually repent and restore the broken relationship between their neighbour and God. A thief who does not repent and/or cannot afford to repay the debt plus 20 per cent begins indentured servitude. These instructions for the guilt offering pertain only to the worshipper of the Lord.

Lastly, the Leviticus text declares that the priest makes atonement before the Lord and forgiveness is granted to the offender. Atonement comes from the priest, not the sacrifice, although the sacrifice is concurrent with the actions of the priest. Forgiveness requires more than simply an offering, it requires repentance, confession, compensation and restoration. All of which begins in the heart of the offender who acknowledges his or her guilt before Man and God.