

Parashah Eighty

Leviticus 6:12–7:38 [Hebrew numbering - 6:5–7:38]; Malachai 3:4–12; Luke 6:39–49

notes by Tim Hegg

The Priesthood and the Offerings

Our *parashah* continues the laws pertaining to the sacrifices offered upon the altar of the Tabernacle, beginning with a reiteration of the commandment to keep the fire burning continually. It is no doubt repeated here because the removal of ashes, if not done carefully, might extinguish the flame. Moreover, the priest is to arrange new wood upon the altar every morning, and offer the fat of the peace-offering upon it. From this is derived the rabbinic teaching that the *tamid* or daily sacrifice (Ex 29:39–41) is the first one offered each day (b.*Pesachim* 58b; b.*Yoma* 34a). The fire, burning continually, reminded Israel that their approach to God was always and only through the means of sacrifice. Their acceptance before the Almighty was on the basis of a substitutionary sacrifice—that and nothing else.

Moreover, the burning of the fat of the sacrifice upon the altar also symbolized the God-ward perspective of the daily service, for as the flame burst forth with the placing of the fat, it symbolized a heart of praise and worship to God, the very goal of the sacrifices in the first place.

The text goes on to describe the laws of the grain offering, which consisted of “fine flour” (סֹלֶת, *solet*) mixed with oil and incense. *Solet* was most likely the “dust” that remained after wheat was ground between stones, and which remained above the sieve when the flour was separated (m.*Avot* 5:15). It was therefore far less plentiful than the courser flour, and thus more expensive. It produced bread that was lighter in texture, and sought after in the ancient world. Here, once again, the principle is seen that items brought for sacrifices were to be of the highest quality. This grain offering is apparently not the grain offering that accompanied the sacrifice of a cleansed leper (14:20) nor the grain offering given as the first fruits (23:13), nor that which was adjunct to the whole burnt offering (Ex 40:29). In all of these instances, the grain offering is entirely consumed upon the altar. The grain offering in this text, however, is partially burnt (a handful of the *solet*) and the rest belongs to the priest. Thus, our text reiterates the laws of the grain offering given in Lev 2:1ff, which differentiates between a raw grain offering and one that is cooked into cakes and then offered.

The laws of the raw grain offering go on to describe how the priestly portion is to be handled, giving additional information to that which has already been given in chapter two. The additional information given is: 1) the cakes made from the grain offering must be unleavened, 2) it must be eaten in a “holy place,” i.e., the Tabernacle or Temple precincts, and 3) the holiness of the grain offering is contagious (“Whoever touches them will become consecrated,” v. 18). Much discussion has ensued regarding this final aspect of the transferring of holiness or *sanctum*. Primarily the issue revolves around whether the imperfect form יִקְדָּשׁ in the phrase בְּהֵם יִקְדָּשׁ, “all who will touch them will be holy” should be understood as obligatory (“...ought to be holy”), injunctive (“...must be holy”) or simply declarative (“...will be [made] holy”). Grammatically, the last option is to be preferred, since the *qal* form of קָדַשׁ is regularly used in this way (“to make something holy; to consecrate something or someone”), and because its opposite, יִטְמָא, in exactly the same phrase, means “will be made unclean” (e.g., Lev 11:24). Note also Ezek 46:20.

What are we to learn from these added stipulations? First, even though the remainder of the grain offering belongs to the priests, it is still sacred since it was offered to Adonai. Thus, the flour which comprised the priests’ due could only be eaten as baked, unleavened cakes (differentiating it from the part that was offered upon the altar) and then these must be eaten in a “holy place,” meaning within the Tabernacle precincts—it could not be taken outside of the courtyard. Moreover, only priests could eat the remainder of the grain offering. In all of this, they were to be reminded that the offering was given to God, and that He graciously shared it with the priests who performed the mediatorial service on behalf of Israel.

The fact that the grain offering, like other offerings, transmitted holiness, also provides a stunning lesson. As a foreshadow of the ultimate sacrifice given in Yeshua, Israelites were to learn that one becomes clean through that which is offered. This very principle is demonstrated in the life of Yeshua when the woman with a flow of blood touches His *tzitzit* (Lk 8:43ff). Rather than rendering Him unclean, the woman is healed of her uncleanness. The holiness of the pure Sacrifice consecrated the one who touched Him.

Our text goes on to give instructions to the priests themselves regarding the offerings they were to bring

on the day of their anointing for service. The offering is of grain, completely mixed with oil and baked on a griddle (as though it were to be eaten). It is offered half in the morning, and half in the evening, and it is offered in its entirety—the priest receives no part of it. Moreover it is designated as a “soothing aroma” to the Lord.

What is the significance of this offering? It represents the dedication which the anointed priest is to have toward the Lord he serves. That the grain offering is specifically noted to be “stirred” (v. 14) emphasizes that it is to be a single substance. In the same way, the many aspects of a priest’s life must be fashioned into a single-hearted dedication to serving God. Further, the grain offering, burned entirely upon the altar, symbolized that his service was not for himself, nor primarily for the people, but first and foremost for God. Such dedication at the initiation of his service was considered of utmost importance, indicated by the fact that this grain offering is specifically called a permanent ordinance.

The next paragraph (6:24–30 [Heb 6:17–23]) deals with the sin offering, and specifically with two aspects of it: (a) that the priests received a portion of the sin offering as their food, and (b) that the sin offering, though partly eaten by the priests, was nonetheless entirely holy and could not be distributed among the people, a requirement made all the more clear by the fact that the vessel in which the sin offering is cooked must be broken (if clay) or thoroughly washed (if bronze). It is from these ordinances that the rabbis formulated their understanding of koshering cooking pots in general. Furthermore, the meat of the sin offering, like the grain offering, transferred consecration, so that it could not be distributed willy-nilly, else the distinction between the priests and the populace would be lost. V. 30 [Heb., 23] teaches that those sin offerings from which blood was taken into the Mishkan itself did not provide a priestly portion. These would include the bull of the Cohen haGadol (4:1–12), the bull of the community (4:13–21), and the bull of the Cohen haGadol and the he-goat of the community on Yom Kippur (16:27). It would thus appear that there were two levels of sanctity among the sin-offerings.

What is the significance of these laws of the sin offering? There are several which are apparent. First, the priests were to be supported by the offerings of the people. The sacrifices, however, were not brought as offerings to the priests, but were given directly to God. Based upon a similar principle, the Apostles taught that one who labored in the word and teaching was to be supported for his work (1 Cor 9:5ff; 1Tim 5:17–18). But such support is to be considered sacred and held with full integrity. Secondly, and most important, is the continuing foreshadowing of Yeshua as the ultimate sacrifice to which all the sacrifices pointed. In the case of the sin offering, the fact that the priest was given part of the sacrifice to eat (and to share with the other priests, 7:18) demonstrated a participation in the results of the sacrifice. The priest, who represented the people before God, is nourished by the sacrifice. The eating aspects connected with some of the sacrifices underlies the words of Yeshua when He spoke about “eating My flesh” (John 6:54f). Demonstrated by the sacrifices themselves, eating the flesh of the sacrifice signified a personal participation in the benefits of the sacrifice.

7:1-18 goes on to detail the laws of the guilt, grain, and peace or thank offerings regarding specifically the manner in which the priest may benefit from them. In each case, these offerings became the means by which the priesthood was sustained in terms of daily food and clothing (the hides of the burnt offering belonged to the priest, v. 8). The priest who offered the sacrifice owned the priestly portion. Thus, only as the priests fulfilled their service to God were they supported for their labors.

Once again, like the sin offering, those portions which were given to the priests as their rightful due were closely regulated. The flesh could not be stored up—it had to be eaten the day the sacrifice was given. Nothing could be left over until the morning (parallel to the Pesach lamb). In the case of a freewill offering (v. 16), the meat could be eaten on the day and the next, but what remained on the third day was to be burned. Whoever ate the meat on the third day committed an offense which was an abomination to God. The Hebrew text uses the word פִּגּוּל, *pigul*, “offensive thing,” which is used in Talmudic literature to describe spoiled meat. It is always used regarding the flesh of a sacrifice (cf. Lev 19:7f; Ezek 4:14; Is 65:4). To eat flesh that, especially in a desert climate, was spoiling was to profane the holiness of the sacrificial event. God intended that the significance of the offering not be missed by those who profited from the sacrifice. In other words, the fact that priests were allowed to eat of the sacrifice was never to change or cloud the focus of the sacrifice in the first place, i.e., that it was for the Lord and therefore must be, in every way, holy. Further, since the meat could only be eaten by priests, and since it could not be “stored,” there was no

temptation to use the sacrificial meat for one's economic advantage.

Our section ends with particular laws (some reiterated from previous sections) regarding the sacrifices so far enumerated. 7:22-27 reminds us that the fat was not to be eaten, nor the blood. Both of these especially represent the vital aspects of the sacrifice, that is, that worship belongs to God alone (so the fat flamed the fire upward), and foreshadows the blood of Mashiach, the ultimate sacrifice, by which atonement would be finally made. Symbolizing such important things, these two items are entirely sacred to Adonai and could not be eaten. Of course, this prohibition also stood in stark contrast to the pagan practices that utilized the blood as a symbol of empowerment, and ate fat as the choicest part of the meat.

Finally, the breast and right thigh of the peace offerings were designated for Aaron and his descendants as a perpetual ordinance. The breast was to be presented as a wave offering, the thigh as a heave offering, reminding the priest that even though it was his due, it nonetheless was a gift from God and rightly belonged to Him. Even the support of the priests could not be demanded—it was a matter of God's mercy.