

Does Leviticus 5:11 – 13 Teach Forgiveness Without Shedding of Blood?

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ABSTRACT

Leviticus chapter 5 is concerned with the trespass-offering. The difference between the trespass offering and the sin-offering most likely lay not so much in the sacrifices themselves, and the management of them, as in the occasions of the offering of them. They were both intended to make atonement for sin; but the former was more general, this applied to some particular instances. Thus, concerning the trespass, if a man commits a sin: (i) In concealing his knowledge, when he is adjured (v. 1). (ii) In touching an unclean thing (v. 2, 3). (iii) In swearing (v. 4). (iv) In embezzling the holy things (v. 14-16). (v) In any sin of infirmity (v. 17-19). Some other cases there are, in which these offerings were to be offered (chaps 6:2-4; 14:12; 19:21; Num. 6:12). And concerning the trespass-offerings, (i) Of the flock (v. 5, 6). (ii) Of fowls (v. 7-10). (iii) Of flour (v. 11-13; but chiefly a ram without blemish (v. 15, etc.)). This paper focuses on trespass offering of flour (v. 11-13). Provision is here made for the poor of the people of God, and the pacifying of their consciences under the sense of guilt. Those that were not able to bring a lamb might bring for a sin-offering a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons; however, if any were so extremely poor that they were not able to procure these so often as they would have occasion, they might bring a an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering, and this should be accepted. Therefore, it seems that the expense of the sin-offering was brought lower than that of any other offering, to teach the reader that no man's poverty shall ever be a bar in the way of his/her forgiveness. The poorest of all may have atonement made for them, if it be not their own fault. Furthermore, this paper seeks to find out whether the passage under consideration teaches that forgiveness can be obtained without the shedding of blood or not.

Keywords: Leviticus, Forgiveness, Blood

INTRODUCTION

But if he be not able to bring two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, then he that sinned shall bring for his offering the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering; he shall put no oil upon it, neither shall he put any frankincense thereon: for it is a sin offering. 12 Then shall he bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take his handful of it, even a memorial thereof, and burn it on the altar, according to the offerings made by fire unto the LORD: it is

a sin offering. 13 And the priest shall make an atonement for him as touching his sin that he hath sinned in one of these, and it shall be forgiven him: and the remnant shall be the priest's, as a meat offering. (Lev 5:11-13).

Throughout Christian history interpreters have identified salvation only through the shedding of blood. Leviticus 5:11-13 has long perplexed readers of the Old Testament. Yet the whole passage of Leviticus contains one of the most beloved descriptions of how salvation can be obtained.

What seems to trouble people about this passage is the confrontation with an unusual situation—a sin offering without blood. But, there is another remarkable issue about it that is: “sin offerings,” which came on the altar. God by way of emphasis repeats, “it is a sin offering.” Moreover, it seems that the most prominent feature of the sin offerings is the expiation of guilt by the sacrifice of a substituted victim. However, the most astounding provision is the sliding scale of graded responsibility.

LITERATURE REVIEW

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The Context of Leviticus 5

Leviticus 5:1-4 gives examples of sins that required a sin offering, it was the duty of a witness to come forward and give his/her testimony in the interest of truth and justice. All the people of Israel were involved in seeing that justice was done. On the other hand, “not to witness was a sin.” (R. Laird Harris , 1990, vol. 2, p. 548).

The laws of cleanness were partially for public health, the priests were public health officers. Also, the uncleanness demanded ritual cleansing. The sin offering was also available for any person convicted of his/her wrong doing (cf Lev.5:5-13). But it was not to be offered without oil and incense, because it was a sin offering; that is to say: “because it was not to have the character of a minchah, (Oehler).” (C. F. Keil, and F. Delitzsch, 1976, p. 529). The question is why not the character of a minchah (Netzari Emunah, 2019, pp. 236-239; Joshua A. Fogel, 2013, p. 246)—that is because only those who were in a state of grace could offer a minchah and not a man who had fallen from grace through sin.

A false oath is displeasing to the Lord (cf 5:4). Even though, if one is not fully aware of the falsity of what is said this does not constitute an excuse; the person is required to atone with a sin offering.

In the case of the sin offering: two young pigeons, one for the sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering. The pigeon intended for that purpose was to be brought to the priest who was to offer it by pinching off the head from opposite to its neck, “in the nape below the head.” (Keil and Delitzsch, 1976, p. 528). However, compassionate provision was made especially for the poorest of the poor (Cunningham Geikie, 1888, p. 28-32)—that is to say atonement is without money and without price. The point is that some type of offering must be made, even when the prescribed one is unattainable due to economic pressures. On contrast to the offering of oil in the grain offering, the fine flour is to be given without any olive oil or incense added. This is a sin offering; it has to demonstrate the awfulness and loathsomeness of sin. Therefore, if an individual for whom expiation was to be made in needy circumstances, instead of him/her offering a goat, or ewe sheep, or doves could be received as a sacrificial gift, or in case of grater poverty, the tenth of an ephah of fine flour as in offering “יָדוּ תְשִׁיגֵי” for תָּגִיץ his land reaches to anything, is able to raise it, or with an accusative, obtains, gets anything.” (Keil and Delitzsch, 1976, p. 529).

Such a man/woman could not offer to the Lord the fruits of the Spirit of God and of prayer; he/she was further instructed not to add oil and incense, as symbols of the Sprit and praise to God, to the sacrifice with which he sought the forgiveness of sin. Therefore, the priest was to take a handful of the meal offered, and burned upon the altar as a memorial, and thus, make atonement for the sinner on account of his/her sins.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conclusion

How are we to explain the ritual difference God in His infinite wisdom permits? The Bible makes it clear that there can never be actual remission of sin apart from the blood of Jesus Christ. If so, then, Christ’s death on the Cross would be in vain, but in type there were cases in the Old Testament where remission and cleaning were effected without the immediate shedding of blood.

The principle remains that without blood there is no atonement, “here is another case of an understood *ceteris paribus*, ‘all other things being equal,’” (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., 1994, vol. 1, p. 1036) in that, it permits fine flour to be used in what is basically a blood offering. It should be noted that in this case there is equality in spite of economic levels; thus, the principle does not apply to each level of society. This one exception seems to prove the rule, but an exception it surely is, mercifully provided by a loving God. Nevertheless, a distinction is made with the grain offering so that there is no adorning sin with frankincense and olive oil.

Furthermore, the Law of God required atonement by the shedding of blood – that is by the death of a substitute. In Leviticus 5:11-13 is set a side in the exceptional case where the person is unable to bring of either animals or birds. This provision goes a long way in relieving the charges of a harsh legalism in the Levitical law, for it shows that whatever is said often has a suppressed “if” or “unless” with it. This exception seems not to be in operation only when the law is based on the character of God. God cannot change; therefore, there is not a chance that the Moral Law based on the nature and the character of God will be modified. But in instances where the Moral Law is illustrated by setting forth ceremonial or civil provisions, each provision of the law is subject to the rule “all other things being equal.” Only in this manner can God be said to be immutable and yet graciously responsive to the needs of the people.

The writer of the book of Hebrews indicates clearly that “and without shedding of blood is no remission” (Hebrews 9: 22b), which is considered to be the general rule. However, Leviticus 5:11-13 seems to present to us an exception to the general rule. Moreover, the writer of the book of Hebrews indicates that not all things, but “almost all things are by the law purged with blood” (Heb.9:22 a). The truth of the matter is that in this case a bloodless sin offering effected atonement, which most likely explains the word “almost.” (Nichol D. Francis, 1978, 2002, vol. 1, p. 719).

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Fogel, Joshua A. (2013). *Grains of Truth: Reading Tractate Menachot of the Babylonian Talmud* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. The word minchah more accurately, bring “a cereal offering [minchah] as an offering. The word designates a gift presented to a superior. The present Jacob gave to Esau (cf Gen. 32:13), the gift that Joseph’s brothers gave him upon their arrival in Egypt (cf Gen 43:11; see also 2 Sam 8:2, 6; Gen 4:4, for further information see SDABC vol. 1, 719 -720).

Geikie, Cunningham (1888). *Short life of Christ: For old and young*. New York, NY: James Pott. The poor who could afford only a turtledove or a pigeon would bring one of these. Significantly Mary, the mother of Jesus, brought two turtledoves to the Temple as her gift after childbirth (cf Lev 12:8; Luke 2:22-24). Joseph and Mary were poor people.

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