

COMMENTARY

I. THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM (1:1—7:38)

LEVITICUS

A. Voluntary Sacrifices (1:1—3:17)

1:1—
3:17

BEHIND THE TEXT

Following the heading for the book of Leviticus (1:1), the section regarding voluntary sacrifices is introduced in v 2. The term *kî* (“when”) designates the general category of a legal instruction, following which specific instances are identified by the term *’im* (“if”). In this case, the general heading regarding voluntary animal offerings (1:2) governs the burnt offering in ch 1, which is subdivided into specific instructions related to whether/“if” (*’im*) the burnt offering is “from the herd” (1:3), or “if” the burnt offering is “from the flock” (1:10). This same general heading (1:2) also governs the well-being offering in ch 3, which is likewise subdivided in relation to whether/“if” (*’im*) the well-being offering is “from the herd” (3:1), or “if” the well-being offering is “from the flock” (3:6). The well-being offering from the flock is further subdivided into an offering of a lamb (3:7) or a goat (3:12). Accordingly, chs 1 and 3 appear to reflect a literary unity (Milgrom 1991, 144-46, 178, 203; Kaiser 1994, 1009).

The instructions regarding a burnt offering of birds (1:14-17) appears out of place because birds do not fit under the general heading of livestock (*bēhēmā*) that introduces the voluntary offerings (1:2). Nevertheless, this section does begin with *'im* ("if"), as though the bird offering was intended to be a specific case under the general heading of livestock offerings. Due to this seeming misclassification, and because the well-being offerings (ch 3) do not include a case involving birds, Lev 1:14-17 may be a later addition. The purpose of this addition is to provide a means for the poor to participate in presenting burnt offerings to the Lord. This rationale is explicit elsewhere in relation to bird offerings (5:7; 12:8; 14:21-22, 30-31; Milgrom 1991, 166-67).

Similarly, ch 2 (grain offering) appears to interrupt the unity between chs 1 and 3, which deal with the livestock offerings governed by the general heading at 1:2. Chapter 2 not only deals with grain as opposed to animals but is further set off by the presence of its own general heading beginning with *kî* ("when," v 1), followed by specific types of grain offerings introduced by *'im* ("if . . . on a griddle," v 5; "if . . . cooked in a pan," v 7; "if" as "firstfruits," v 14). One would also expect v 4 to begin with *'im* as implied by the NIV's use of "if" at the head of that verse; however, v 4 actually begins with *kî* ("when"). Perhaps this is because the baked grain offering introduced in v 4 can be made into one of two varieties. Thus, the *kî* of v 4 introduces the general category of baked grain offerings, which can be subdivided into baked "cakes" or baked "wafers." Accordingly, the structure of the discussion in ch 2 reveals five types of grain offerings. Rashi clarifies that the first grain offering discussed is that of raw fine flour (vv 1-3). Next, the two types of baked grain offerings are identified (cakes or wafers, v 4), followed by grain offerings "prepared on a griddle" (v 5) and those "cooked in a pan" (v 7; in Herczeg 1999, 18-19, see 19 n. 5). A sixth type of grain offering is discussed in vv 14-16 in the form of a firstfruits offering.

The grain offering may have been placed between the burnt offering and well-being offering because, like the offering of birds, it is designated as an offering that can be presented by the poor (5:11; Milgrom 1991, 167). In addition, the grain offering often functions as an accompanying sacrifice to burnt offerings and well-being offerings. This too may account for its position in the center of the voluntary sacrifices (Kaiser 1994, 1016).

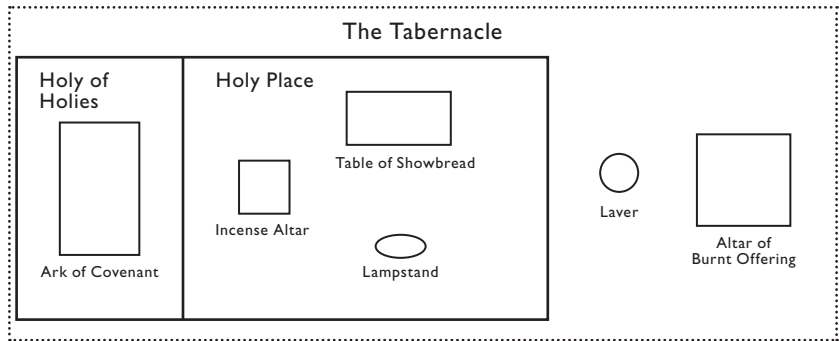
I. Burnt Offering (1:1-17)

■ I The opening verse of Leviticus serves as a heading for the entire book. The particular phrase, **called to Moses** (*wayyiqra' 'el-mōšeh*), with **the LORD** (YHWH) as subject, occurs only here and Exod 24:16 in the Hebrew Bible (in the MT of Exod 24:16 YHWH is implied as subject from the first half of the sentence, while the LXX explicitly names the Lord as subject). In the Exodus passage, the glory of the Lord had settled on Mount Sinai and the Lord called to Moses “from within the cloud.” At the opening of Leviticus, the Lord calls to Moses **from the Tent of Meeting**. The transfer of the presence of the Lord from cloud to tent is communicated at the end of the book of Exodus, which explains that “the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Exod 40:34). This final passage of Exodus is linked to the beginning of Leviticus by means of the tent of meeting, which the Lord enters at the end of Exodus and from which the Lord calls Moses at the beginning of Leviticus (Marx 2003, 105; see also Milgrom 1991, 134).

Two other texts in Exodus reflect similar terminology in relation to God calling Moses. At Exod 3:4 God called to Moses from the midst of the burning bush (here the MT specifies the subject as *’ēlōhīm*, though again the LXX names the Lord, *kyrios*, as subject). Finally, Exod 19:3 relates that the Lord called to Moses from the mountain (here, as with Exod 3:4, the proper name, Moses, does not appear as the object of the verb, but rather the masculine pronoun is used). While the phrase *wayēdabbēr YHWH 'el-mōšeh* (lit. “and the LORD spoke to Moses”) appears numerous times throughout the priestly literature, the unique heading that opens Leviticus (**The LORD called to Moses**) is considered a “rare, special revelatory formula” (Hartley 1992, 8). The formula reveals a progression of the Lord/God calling Moses from the burning bush (Exod 3:4), the mountain (Exod 19:3), the cloud (Exod 24:16), and finally the tent of meeting (Lev 1:1).

Two traditions appear in the Pentateuch regarding the **Tent of Meeting**. The nonpriestly tradition sees the tent as a place located outside the camp, upon which the Lord descends in the cloud, and where anyone may inquire of the Lord (Exod 33:7-10; Num 11:24-27; 12:4-5). This tent is guarded by Joshua (Exod 33:11). In contrast, the priestly tradition regarding the tent sees it located in the center of the camp and guarded by Levites (Num 2:17; 3:5-10). While the cloud of God’s presence descends periodically in relation to the nonpriestly tent, God’s cloud is always pres-

ent in the holy of holies according to the priestly tradition. In terms of function, the nonpriestly tent serves mainly for the purpose of inquiring from the Lord, while the priestly tent includes the additional function of serving as the center of the sacrificial system (Childs 1974, 590; Milgrom 1991, 139-40). In the priestly tradition, the tent of meeting (*’ōhel mō’ēd*) is also called the tabernacle (*miškān*; Exod 39:32; 40:2, 6, 29, 34-35; Lev 17:4; Num 3:7-8, 38; see Haran 1985, 179 n. 8, 272).



■2 This general introduction stipulates that **when an offering** of livestock is presented **to the LORD**, it should be chosen **from either the herd or the flock** (→ Behind the Text above).

■3 The first offering detailed in Leviticus is the **burnt offering** (*’ōlā*). This offering is characterized by being entirely consumed upon the altar (vv 9, 13), except for the skin, which is the property of the priests (7:8). Consequently, it is sometimes known as the *whole* burnt offering.

The following four functions stand out among the purposes of the burnt offering: invocation, devotion, celebration, and atonement. The burnt offering is consistently mentioned first in lists of sacrifices and in order of ritual practice. This suggests its function as a means of attracting God’s attention and invoking God’s presence (Levine 1989, 5-6). The **aroma pleasing to the LORD** (vv 9, 13, 17) further depicts the attention-seeking character of the burnt offering (Budd 1996, 43). Such invocation serves to provide opportunity to entreat a response from the Lord regarding whatever plea concerns the offerer (Kaiser 1994, 1010; Walton and Matthews 1997, 144).

Gerstenberger explains the burnt offering as a sacrifice of complete devotion to God in terms of its economic impact on the offerer: “Giving up to God a healthy ox as a burnt offering, without even partaking of it in a meal (as is presupposed for the sacrifices in chap. 3), would represent something like opening a vein for the person presenting the offering, comparable today only to the surrender of a portion of one’s wealth” (1996, 27,

see also pp. 33-34). The “ideal of self-less devotion to God” is profoundly illustrated in Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac (intended as a burnt offering), a typology for Christian theology that, when combined with Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, turns the crucifixion into the ultimate burnt offering (Watts 2006, 133, 136). In being fully consumed on the altar and ascending in smoke, the burnt offering stands out as the embodiment of complete surrender to the Lord (see Keil and Delitzsch n.d., 291).

The burnt offering shares with the well-being offering the distinction of serving for joyful expressions of celebration and thanksgiving. Great events such as the end of the flood, the return of the stolen ark of the covenant, and bringing the ark into Jerusalem were celebrated with burnt offerings (Gerstenberger 1996, 23). Elsewhere, legislation associates the burnt offering with the joyful occasion of the fulfillment of a vow or as a freewill offering (Lev 22:17-19; Num 15:3; see Kaiser 1994, 1010).

The atoning function of the burnt offering seems unusual since the purification and guilt offerings specialize in addressing atonement. Nevertheless, the burnt offering appears to participate in atonement (Lev 1:4; Ezek 45:15, 17), is associated with the purification offering (Lev 9:7; 14:19-20; 16:24-25), and is offered in case of possible wrongdoing (Job 1:5).

The burnt offering is to be presented **at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting**. This refers to the courtyard where the outer altar is located, between the opening to the gate and the opening to the tent (see Milgrom 1991, 147-48).

Love: The Motive for Atonement

Hartley speculates that since no specific sins are stipulated in relation to the burnt offering, it must serve to atone for the general sinful disposition of the offerer (1992, 19). However, such concern seems foreign to the priestly legislation. Even unintentional sins are qualified by the action of *doing* “what is forbidden in any of the LORD’s commands” (4:2, 13, 22, 27), placing the emphasis regarding the need for atonement on violating a known law of God.

Levine, acknowledging that the burnt offering was not occasioned by any offense needing expiation, claims the need here is for redemption from God’s wrath. He argues that proximity to God was inherently dangerous even when no violation had occurred to anger the Lord (1989, 6-7). This identifies the motivation for atonement as God’s wrath rather than love. Christians make the same mistake by asserting that appeasing God’s wrath is the motivation behind the crucifixion and the atonement it offers. Such thought would require the revision of John 3:16 so that it should read, “For God was so *angry* with the world, that he sent his only begotten Son . . .” In contrast, it is God’s love and grace that provide the means of atonement for ancient Israel through the sacrificial system, which is brought to fulfillment through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

■4 The offerer is instructed to **lay his hand on the head** of the offering. This same instruction for laying a single hand on the head of a sacrifice is given in the case of the well-being offering from the herd (3:1-2) or flock (lamb, 3:7-8; goat, 3:12-13), and for the various instances of the purification offering (priest, 4:3-6; community, 4:13-15; leader, 4:22-24; layperson, 4:27-29, 32-33). In the case of the community purification offering, the term for hand is plural (4:15). Nevertheless, the assumption is that the plural noun refers to the combined hands of the elders, each of whom extends one hand to the head of the animal. This same assumption applies to other instances of animal sacrifice in which laying hands (plural) on an offering involves a group (consecration of Aaron and sons, Exod 29:10, 15, 19; Lev 8:14, 18, 22; consecration of Levites, Num 8:12; king and assembly, 2 Chr 29:23). There is one instance in the Hebrew Bible that explicitly calls for “both” (*šē*) hands to be laid on the head of an animal, that is, the case of the live goat on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:21). This points to the key for understanding the meaning of the rite of hand laying (Milgrom 1991, 151; Péter 1977, 51-52; Wright 1986, 434).

A common view is to interpret the laying of hands on a sacrifice as a transference of sin so that the sacrifice becomes a substitute for the offerer. The offerer is thus excused by substituting the death of the animal for his or her own death (Kaiser 1994, 1011; Reeve 1956, 2643). However, the concept of substitution in relation to the sacrificial system lacks support from other biblical texts (Budd 1996, 47).

The transference of sin does apply in the case of the live goat ritual on the Day of Atonement (two-hand laying), in which the priest explicitly places the sins of the people on the head of the goat that then carries those sins to a solitary place in the wilderness (16:21-22). However, substitution is not pictured here; rather, the image is that of removing sin out of the community to a remote location. Consequently, two-hand laying represents transference, but not substitution. This is affirmed by the other cases of two-hand laying (not involving animals). When Moses lays his hands on Joshua, he transfers authority to him, as Joshua is commissioned to be Israel’s new leader (Num 27:22-23 [plural hands]; God’s instruction in Num 27:18 should also be read as plural [hands], with the LXX; Wright 1986, 435; Milgrom 1990, 235). Also, in the case of the witnesses laying hands on the blasphemer (Lev 24:14), there is a transference of pollution from those who heard the blasphemy back onto the blasphemer whose words defiled them (Péter 1977, 53; Milgrom 2001, 2113-14).

In the case of one-hand laying, the transference of sin is not possible because it is used for the burnt offering, which is completely offered to

God on the altar and therefore cannot be defiled by the transfer of sins to it. In addition, one-hand laying is prescribed for the well-being offering, which does not involve sin or the need for atonement (Hartley 1992, 20-21; see de Vaux 1997, 416). When the Israelites lay hands on the Levites, it is clear that no sin is being transferred onto them (for the Levites are being set apart for service to God), and no authority or power is being transferred (for *laypersons*, or their representatives, are laying hands on those who will “do the work of the LORD” [Num 8:10-11, emphasis added]). Thus, it is held that this must be a one-hand imposition, and it serves to identify the Levites as Israel’s sacrifice by which the Levites represent the people in doing the work of the Lord. By this, the service of the Levites accrues to all Israel (Wright 1986, 439; Milgrom 1990, 62).

In a similar manner, one-hand laying on animal sacrifices designates the offering as representative of the offerer and as accruing to the offerer (de Vaux 1997, 416). However, the significance of this rite should not be denigrated to mere substitution. Rather, it marks sacrifice in general as a giving of oneself (Noth 1977, 22). *One-hand laying conveys representation and participation by which offerers designate the animals through which they consecrate themselves to God in relation to acts of praise, thanksgiving, dedication, and purification.* Though Wesley held that laying hands on the sacrifice signified that the offerer was worthy of the death that the animal “suffered in his stead,” he also affirmed the representative character of the sacrifice by stating that “together with it he [the offerer] did freely offer up himself to God” (1765, 345).

■ **5-9** The offering is to be presented **before the LORD** (*lipnê YHWH*). This was already stipulated in relation to God’s reception of the offerer at v 3, which literally reads “for his acceptance before the LORD.” For the priestly legislation, since the presence of God is associated with the tabernacle (specifically the holy of holies), the phrase **before the LORD** generally refers to the area of the courtyard at the entrance to the tent of meeting (see Milgrom 1991, 150, 155). This is evident from texts, such as v 3, that directly associate “before the LORD” with the “entrance to the tent of meeting” (Exod 29:11, 42; Lev 4:4; 14:11, 23; 15:14; 16:7; see also Lev 9:5). “Before the LORD” can, however, refer more specifically to areas closer to God’s presence in the holy of holies; for example, the holy place inside the tent of meeting (4:6, 7, 18), or the holy of holies itself (16:13).

The rites involved in relation to the burnt offering are shared by the layperson and the priest. The wording of the text alternates the action of the sacrifice between the offerer and the priest (i.e., sons of Aaron). The offerer designates the sacrifice by laying a hand on its head, and then

slaughters the bull. The priest sprinkles the blood against the altar. The offerer skins the animal and cuts it into pieces (the skin is given to the priest, 7:8). The priest arranges the pieces of the sacrifice on the fire and the wood, on the altar. The offerer washes the inner parts and the legs. Finally the priest burns all of the animal on the altar. This partnership allows the layperson to be directly involved in meaningful interaction with God. The priest, who alone is permitted to carry out the work of the altar, acts on behalf of the offerer (Milgrom 2004, 17, 22; see also idem 1991, 155, 163).

The blood rite for the burnt offering calls for the priest to **toss** or **throw/dash** (*wězārēqû*) the blood of the sacrifice **on all sides** of (lit. “round about”) the altar. In contrast to the NIV and other common translations, the verb is not “to sprinkle” (*hizzâ*, from *nzh*) as found in the blood rite for other offerings. The blood rite for the burnt offering signifies returning the life of the animal back to God (Milgrom 1991, 156; Hartley 1992, 21). Ancient Israel was to understand that blood represented life (Gen 9:4; Lev 17:11), and life belongs to the Creator who gave it. Therefore when a life is taken in sacrifice, its blood (life) must be returned to God. In the sacrificial system, this is accomplished by pouring out the blood at the altar.

The offerer must **wash the inner parts and the legs** so that no excrement or dirt defiles the altar (Milgrom 1991, 159; Hartley 1992, 22).

■ **10-13** The instructions for a **burnt offering from the flock** basically repeat the rites described for the offering of a bull from the herd. Again, the action alternates between the offerer and the priest (→ 1:5-9; also Gerstenberger 1996, 29).

In dealing with the smaller animal from the flock, the ritual details are abbreviated. It is understood that the ritual should follow the same procedure as that for a sacrifice from the herd (Noth 1977, 24).

■ **14-17** The instructions for a **burnt offering of birds** varies somewhat from the routine described in relation to offerings from the herd or flock, presumably due to the size of the animal. In the previous sets of instructions (for herd and flock), the alternation of action between offerer and priest was marked by specific references to the priest or the sons of Aaron, contrasted by third person singular verbs (designating the offerer). The same pattern appears to be reflected in the instructions for the birds. Thus, the priest wrings off the head of the bird, burns it on the altar, and drains the blood on the side of the altar. The offerer removes the crop with its contents, throws it on the ashes, and tears the bird without completely severing it. Finally, the priest burns the bird on the altar (Harrison 1980, 48; in contrast to the view that the priest performs all the rites related to offering birds, Hartley 1992, 23; Gerstenberger 1996, 28).

In regard to the removal of the **crop with its contents**, Rashbam identifies the concern here as that of cleaning the bird for sacrifice. He associates the crop with filth, like feces or manure (in Lockshin 2001, 17). The common translation, “crop,” for the term *mur’â* has been taken to refer to a pocket in the throat of birds where food is retained during digestion. This pocket with its contents of undigested food was unfit for the altar and therefore had to be removed before sacrifice (Levine 1989, 8-9). However, Milgrom has clarified that *mur’â* should be understood as a reference to the lower digestive organs that contain the excrement of the bird. In addition, the term *nōṣâ*, which is commonly translated “plumage” or “feathers” (NIV = **contents**), specifically refers to the tail wing. Accordingly, the procedure is to remove the entrails by means of the tail wing (1991, 170-71). This rendering is reflected clearly in the New English Translation of the Bible: “remove its entrails by cutting off its tail feathers.” The removal of the entrails of a bird is consistent with washing the inner parts and the legs of the larger animals in order to remove any excrement, which would defile the altar (→ 1:5-9).

The offerer **shall tear it open by the wings, not severing it completely**, in correlation with the procedure of cutting up the pieces of the sacrifices from the herd or the flock, and in order to make the offering appear as large as possible (Milgrom 1991, 171-72).

2. Grain Offering (2:1-16)

■ I The general use of *minhâ* (**grain offering**) points to the basic meaning of the term as gift or tribute (de Vaux 1997, 421; Kaiser 1994, 1017; Marx 2003, 114). Such gifts serve to honor God and seek God’s favor, fulfill hospitality requirements for divine visitations (Judg 6:18; 13:19), secure general appeasement (1 Sam 26:19), or implement regular sanctuary procedure (1 Kgs 18:29, 36; 2 Kgs 3:20; 16:15; Ps 141:2; Budd 1996, 55). In at least two instances, the *minhâ* appears to participate in the function of atonement (Lev 14:20; 1 Sam 3:14; Milgrom 1991, 197; Budd 1996, 55).

In the priestly legislation, *minhâ* refers exclusively to the **grain offering** (Keil and Delitzsch n.d., 291; Rainey 1972, 602; Milgrom 1991, 179). The grain offering can serve as an independent offering (Lev 2; Num 5:15; 18:9) or is often used in accompaniment with other sacrifices (especially evident by the phrase, “with its/their grain offering”; Lev 23:18; Num 6:15; 7:87; 8:8; 15:4, 6, 9, 24; Ezek 46:5, 7, 14). Grain offerings may accompany sacrifices related to joyous occasions, such as well-being offerings and burnt offerings. On more somber occasions, such as those calling for the jealousy offering (Num 5:15, 18, 25-26) and the poor person’s purifica-

tion offering (Lev 5:11-13), no oil or frankincense was added to the grain offering (Rainey 1972, 602-3).

The grain offering of the priestly literature carries a similar range of applications as that of the burnt offering. In fact, it is held that the grain offering serves as a replacement for the burnt offering for the sake of the poor who cannot afford to sacrifice an animal or a bird (Milgrom 1991, 195-96). More than a surrogate, however, the grain offering adds a unique dimension to the sacrificial system. As food shared by God and the priest, the grain offering expresses intimate communion between God and humans (Gerstenberger 1996, 45; Marx 2003, 114).

The grain offering is to be made up of **fine flour** (*sōlet*). Rashi asserts that *sōlet* always denotes wheat (in Herczeg 1999, 19). Rabbinic tradition specifies that *sōlet* refers to the inner kernels of wheat that are left in the sieve after the flour has fallen through (Milgrom 1991, 179; Kaiser 1994, 1017). This is the choice part of the wheat, representing a gift of the best to God (Levine 1989, 9; Kaiser 1994, 1017). **Oil** and **incense** are to be applied to the grain. The oil is olive oil, and the term the NIV translates “incense” here specifically denotes frankincense; the former used commonly for cooking and the latter costly (see Milgrom 1991, 180-81). Frankincense is derived from certain trees of the genus *Boswellia*, which grow in southern Arabia and Somaliland (Masterman 1956, 1144). While some state that frankincense enhances flavor (Levine 1989, 9), others claim it has a nauseous taste (Masterman 1956, 1145).

■ **2** The priest separates a portion of the grain offering by removing a **handful of the fine flour and oil, together with all the incense**. The handful that the priest scoops is identified as the **memorial portion** (*ʾazkārā*) of the grain offering. Some prefer the rendering “token portion” (NAB; see NJPS), because the handful serves to represent the whole offering (Levine 1989, 10; Milgrom 1991, 181-82; Budd 1996, 58). However, *ʾazkārā* is commonly understood to derive from *zākar*, meaning “remember.” Accordingly, the memorial portion burnt on the altar is said to remind God of the offerer and his or her goodness and consecrations (Ps 20:3; so Rashi in Herczeg 1999, 21-22; Keil and Delitzsch n.d., 292). In addition, the burnt portion of the offering serves to remind the offerer of God’s grace and provision (Hartley 1992, 30; Kaiser 1994, 1020-21). The memorial portion is also described as **an aroma pleasing to the LORD**. This attention-seeking aspect of the offerings reflects a type of invocation (→ 1:3; see also Rainey 1972, 602; Gerstenberger 1996, 42). The idea is to symbolically attract God’s attention by means of the pleasing odor of the sacrifice.

■3 The remainder of the grain offering, after the memorial portion is burnt on the altar, **belongs to Aaron and his sons**. The priests have no tribal inheritance of land and are dependent on their allotted portions of the sacrifices for their meat and daily bread (Kaiser 1994, 1020). This portion assigned to the priests is designated **most holy** (*qōdeš qodāšim*). The designation most holy is applied to: the holy of holies (Exod 26:33); altar of burnt offering (Exod 29:37; 30:29; 40:10); incense altar (Exod 30:10, 29); tent of meeting, ark, table, lamp, and basin of the tabernacle (Exod 30:29); incense for the tabernacle (Exod 30:36); grain offering (Lev 6:17 [6:10 HB]; 10:12; Num 18:9); purification offering (Lev 6:17 [6:10 HB]; 6:25, 29 [6:18, 22 HB]; 10:17; Num 18:9); guilt offering (Lev 6:17 [6:10 HB]; 7:1, 6; 14:13; Num 18:9); the bread of the tabernacle (Lev 24:9); and things devoted to the Lord (Lev 27:28).

■4-9 The cooked grain offerings may be presented in any of four varieties: baked **cakes**, baked **wafers**, **prepared on a griddle**, or **cooked in a pan**. The instructions for the cooked grain offerings are essentially the same as those for the raw grain offering (vv 1-3). However, the cooked grain offerings do not include frankincense. This may be another concession to the poor, for whom frankincense would be too costly (Milgrom 1991, 183).

■10 **Belongs to Aaron and his sons** (→ 2:3).

■11 Grain offerings **must be made without yeast** (lit. “shall not be made leavened” [*ḥāmēš*]), **for you are not to burn any yeast** (*šē’ōr*) on the altar. The requirement that the bread of the grain offering be unleavened calls to mind the similar prohibitions against yeast in the instructions regarding Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread commemorating the exodus from Egypt (Exod 12:8, 15, 17-20). In relation to the annual pilgrimage festivals, similar legislation forbids that which is leavened to be included with blood sacrifices (Exod 23:18; 34:25). In contrast, the thanksgiving offering is to be presented with bread that is leavened (Lev 7:13), and the wave offering for the Festival of Weeks includes loaves that are leavened (23:17); both, however, are not burned on the altar. Thus, the prohibition only excludes leaven from being included **in an offering made to the LORD by fire**.

Honey (*dēbaš*) is also excluded from the altar. Rashi clarifies that *dēbaš* refers to anything sweet that comes from fruit, such as grapes, dates, or figs (in Herczeg 1999, 26; see also Noth 1977, 29; Milgrom 1991, 189-90). The Hebrew term *dēbaš* is cognate to Arabic *dibs*, which refers to the sweet syrup made from grapes, raisins, carob beans, or dates (Patch 1956, 1418). It is uncertain whether the OT references to *dēbaš* denote such fruit honey or honey from bees. Judges 14:8 clearly refers to bee honey as evidenced by the mention of a “swarm of bees” in proximity to the honey.

Other OT passages include *dēbaš* in the context of agricultural products, implying that *dēbaš* designates a sweet substance from the fruit of the field (Gen 43:11; Deut 8:8; 2 Kgs 18:32; 2 Chr 31:5; Ezek 16:13; Milgrom 1991, 189; Hartley 1992, 31). Consequently, the evidence leaves room for the probability that the prohibition in Lev 2:11 refers to both bee honey and fruit nectars (Levine 1989, 12).

It is commonly held that the reason for the prohibition of leaven and honey from the altar is due to association of these products with heathen worship. Ancient Near Eastern cults are known for their use of leaven and honey in sacrifices as indicated in ritual texts. Thus, the prohibition for Israel was intended to dissociate Israel's sacrificial system from pagan practices (Levine 1989, 12; Hartley 1992, 33; Kaiser 1994, 1018). Others argue that the fermentive action of leaven and honey is considered the basis for their rejection. The character of fermentation is associated with deterioration, corruption, and death and is therefore rejected from use on the altar (Keil and Delitzsch n.d., 294-95; Noth 1977, 28-29; Milgrom 1991, 188-90). In contrast, the fermentation of leaven and honey can also be understood as representative of a life force, like blood, which cannot be burnt on the altar (Porter 1976, 26; Budd 1996, 61-62; re blood as life, see Lev 17:11 and Milgrom 1991, 156). This is more consistent with the focus on life evident within the sacrificial system for Israel (→ 1:5-9; 3:16-17; also → 11:46-47 sidebar, "Rationale for the Dietary Restrictions," and From the Text for chs 11—15). This also clarifies why honey and leaven, though forbidden from being burned on the altar, are still acceptable as part of the firstfruits offering discussed in 2:12.

■ **12** The prohibition from v 11 is repeated with the words **they** [yeast and honey] **are not to be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma**. Nevertheless, yeast and honey are allowed **as an offering of the firstfruits**. The term translated **firstfruits** here in v 12 (*rē'sīt*) is different from the term also translated firstfruits in v 14 (*bikkûrîm*). The former (*rē'sīt*) generally means first or foremost, while the latter (*bikkûrîm*) more specifically refers to first ripened fruits or crops of the soil. Milgrom argues that, in the priestly legislation, *rē'sīt* should be translated "first-processed" in relation to grain, wine, oil, fruit syrup, and bread, which are processed from crops; while *bikkûrîm* should be understood as "first-ripe" crops (1991, 190-91). The two terms appear together in relation to the Feast of Harvest as "best [first/foremost] of the firstfruits" (*rē'sīt bikkûrê*; Exod 23:19; 34:26). The dedication of firstfruits to God is reflected in the law of the firstborn, in which the firstborn of livestock, and even the firstborn of one's body, are to be committed to God (Exod 13:11-13; 22:29-30; 34:19-20; Num 8:17; see Budd 1996, 63).

Similarly, the firstfruits of the produce of the land are to be offered to the Lord. In the case of those that include honey or leaven, they are to be “placed before God rather than burned on the altar” (Levine 1989, 13). The *rē’sīt* of this verse is often associated with the *’ōmer rē’sīt qēširēkem* (lit. “sheaf of the first of your harvest”) of the barley harvest (23:10). However, the instruction here is more directly reflected in the “wave offering of firstfruits” (*bikkûrîm*) of the wheat harvest, which is “baked with yeast” (23:17), and the Chronicler’s description of the offering of firstfruits (*rē’sīt*) in the days of Hezekiah, which included “honey” (2 Chr 31:5).

■ **13** The offerer is instructed to **add salt to all your offerings**. The rationale for the addition of salt is vaguely expressed by the command, **Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings**. The rare phrase “covenant of salt” appears only twice in the Hebrew Bible (Num 18:19; 2 Chr 13:5). In both cases, the meaning of the phrase seems to draw upon the character of salt as a preservative, highlighting the enduring quality of the covenant. Both texts include the term *’ôlām* (forever, eternal, everlasting) in relation to the covenant under consideration in each passage. Arabs and Greeks establish covenant and mark the bond of community by eating salt together (Noth 1977, 29; Hartley 1992, 32). Accordingly, Israel likely recognized salt as a sign of the permanence and communal character of the covenant relationship reflected in the sacrificial system.

■ **14-16** The final form of grain offering treated in ch 2 appears to be appended, due to its separation from the other grain offerings by the interruption created by the instructions regarding leaven, honey, and salt (vv 11-13). The addition of vv 14-16 could be in response to the prohibition in v 12 (Gerstenberger 1996, 41). Thus, this legislation clarifies that, though yeast and honey are only acceptable in relation to firstfruits offerings that are *not* burnt on the altar, regular offerings of firstfruits are acceptable on the altar as grain offerings (without yeast or honey).

The **grain offering of firstfruits** (*bikkûrîm*) here cannot refer to the *wheat* offering of firstfruits attached to the Feast of Weeks, because that offering includes yeast and is not burned on the altar (23:17). Thus, perhaps the grain offering of firstfruits here relates to the *’ōmer* and the firstfruits of *barley* (23:10-11; with Rashi in Herczeg 1999, 27). Yet, the *’ōmer* is described as a sheaf presented to the Lord as a wave or elevation offering, and “lacks oil and incense” (Milgrom 2001, 1985). Thus, the grain offering of firstfruits here in 2:14 appears distinct from both the wheat offering of firstfruits at the Feast of Weeks, and the *’ōmer* associated with the barley harvest. Nevertheless, there is a connection between the three. The distinct form of the grain offering of firstfruits, **crushed heads of new grain**

2:13-16

roasted including oil and incense, may denote a voluntary “form” of the firstfruits offerings, consistent with the other grain offerings in ch 2 (in contrast with Milgrom, 1991, 192-93, and 2001, 1985; see Levine 1989, 14). That is, though it is required that all firstfruits must be offered to the Lord (Milgrom 1991, 193), the grain offering of firstfruits as described in 2:14 constitutes an optional form for such an offering, which may be presented in addition to the forms mandated at 23:10-11 (the *’omer* of barley) and 23:16-17 (the wave offering of firstfruits at the Feast of Weeks, wheat harvest). Therefore, the grain offering of firstfruits described here at 2:14, which is not specified as *sōlet* (wheat flour), may refer to either a firstfruits offering of wheat *or* barley (see Hartley 1992, 32).

The rest of the instructions for this grain offering (vv 15-16) follow those of the previous grain offerings (vv 1-2, 9).

3. Well-Being Offering (3:1-17)

■ I This verse includes a dual heading in which the first “if” (*’im*) clause introduces the instructions for the well-being offering as a whole, and the second “if” (*’im*) clause designates the first section of those instructions, which pertains to whether/“if” (*’im*) the offering is from the herd (Hartley 1992, 34; → Behind the Text above). Accordingly, a literal rendition of the verse reads, “*if* his offering is a sacrifice of well-being; *if* he offers it from the herd . . .”

The designation for the *well-being offering* is made up of two terms: *zebah* and *šēlāmîm*. The use of these terms in the Hebrew Bible suggests that the well-being offering is identified by the full phrase, *zebah šēlāmîm*, or by either term alone (*zebah* or *šēlāmîm*). The priestly material prefers using the full phrase, while other biblical texts normally use one of the single terms (Hartley 1992, 38; see Budd 1996, 68). It must be added that *zebah* (sacrifice) is the broader term in relation to which *šēlāmîm* (well-being) appears as a type (Milgrom 1991, 218; Levine 1989, 14).

The distinguishing feature of a well-being offering is that it constitutes a shared meal between God, the worshiper, and the priests. The clearest depiction of such a meal is recorded in relation to the sacrifice (*zebah*) shared by Samuel, Saul, and the people of the town (1 Sam 9:12-25; see Levine 1989, 14-15).

The priestly literature presents three types of well-being offerings: thanksgiving (*tôdâ*), votive (*neder*), and freewill (*nēdābâ*). The thanksgiving offering serves to express thanks and praise to God; the votive offering celebrates the successful completion of a vow; and the freewill offering reflects the spontaneous response of a worshiper (Milgrom 2004, 28; see

Kiuchi 1999, 25). These three categories of the well-being offering are identified in ch 7 in relation to the instructions regarding the disbursement of the offering.

It is evident that the common foundation for the well-being offerings is joy (Deut 27:7). Milgrom claims that all joyous celebrations would have included well-being offerings (2004, 29). Gerstenberger describes the meals associated with the well-being offering as occasions of “unrestrained joy” with “sumptuous food and drink, and the experience of the divine presence and of blessing” (1996, 46).

In contrast to the burnt offering, the well-being offering may consist of either a **male or female** animal. The authorization to use either a male or female animal may reflect the concern for greater choice, since the offering serves to provide a meal for the worshiper’s family (Kaiser 1994, 1025; Milgrom 1991, 204). Such liberty of choice may also allow the poor to participate more readily in the well-being offering (Kaiser 1994, 1025).

Before the LORD (→ 1:5-9).

■ **2-4** Lay his hand on the head of his offering (→ 1:4).

Tent of Meeting (→ 1:1).

Sprinkle the blood against the altar on all sides (→ 1:5-9).

The instructions call for *the fat which covers the inward part and all the fat which is upon the inward part* to be burned on the altar to the LORD. The fat (*hēleb*) was regarded as a choice portion reserved for God (Harrison 1980, 57-58). The term *hēleb* is associated with “the best,” as indicated by its metaphorical use in relation to land, oil, wine, grain, and wheat (“*hēleb* of the land,” Gen 45:18; “*hēleb* of the oil, wine, and grain,” Num 18:12; and “*hēleb* of the wheat,” Deut 32:14; Milgrom 1991, 207, 210). The inward part (*qereb*) refers to the entrails (intestines) of the animal. Also, *the two kidneys and the fat which is upon them which is beside the loins, and the appendage upon the liver, in addition to the kidneys*, are to be removed in order to be burned on the altar, for the Lord. The portions given to the priests are outlined in ch 7. The remaining meat from the well-being offering goes to the worshiper and his or her family.

■ **5** The NIV clearly portrays the sharing of tasks within the ritual, as the singular references refer to the offerer and the plural references (sons of Aaron) indicate the priests. Verses 1-5 record alternate action between the offerer and the priests, in a manner similar to that of the burnt offering (→ 1:5-9). The worshiper is to “present before the LORD” the animal for sacrifice (v 1), and “lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it” (v 2). Then “the priests shall sprinkle the blood against the altar” (v 2). Next, the worshiper removes the fat and the elements to be presented

as the Lord's portion. Finally, the priests are to **burn it on the altar** (see Hartley 1992, 36). As in the case of the burnt offering, the ritual of the well-being offering demonstrates that the layperson actively participates in meaningful interaction in relationship to God.

The priests are instructed to burn the Lord's portions of the well-being offering **on top of the burnt offering**. The preposition 'al in this context can be translated "on top," "over," "beside," or "with." In any case, as Rashi points out, it seems evident that the implication here is that the regular morning burnt offering (Exod 29:38-39; Num 28:3-4) precedes any other offering for the day (in Herczeg 1999, 30; see Levine 1989, 16; Milgrom 1991, 208). Accordingly, the portions of the well-being offering are arranged "on," "beside," or "with" the remains of the burnt offering presumably still smoldering on the altar.

■ **6-10** The instructions for a well-being offering from the flock are virtually identical to the instructions for the well-being offering from the herd (vv 1-5). There are only two noticeable differences. In the case of the offering from the herd, the animal is to be presented "before the LORD" (*lipné YHWH*) and slaughtered "at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting" (*petaḥ 'ōhel mō'ēd*). The instructions for a well-being offering from the flock, however, stipulate that the animal should be presented **before the LORD** (*lipné YHWH*) and slaughtered **in front of [before] the Tent of Meeting** (*lipné 'ōhel mō'ēd*). This new phrase likely refers to the same location as "at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting" (parallel with "before the LORD"; → 1:5-9). **In front of the Tent of Meeting** may be an abbreviated form of the more complete expression **in front of [before the Lord at the entrance to] the Tent of Meeting** (*lipné YHWH petaḥ 'ōhel mō'ēd*), which appears in other passages (Exod 29:11; Lev 14:11; 16:7; Josh 19:51). This understanding of Lev 3:8 is also suggested by the LXX, which reads "at the entrance to (the Tent of Meeting)," and more so by the Peshitta, which inserts *YHWH petaḥ* in order to render the full expression "**in front of (before) the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting**" (see Milgrom 1991, 210).

The second distinction regarding the instructions for the well-being offering from the flock concerns the elements that make up the portions burned on the altar for the Lord. In the case of the **lamb**, its **fat tail** must be **cut off** and included among the fat portions burnt on the altar. Sheep from Palestine and Syria are known for having a large, fat tail that can weigh many pounds. It is considered a delicacy (Day 1956, 2756). The rest of the portions to be burnt on the altar are the same as those stipulated for an offering from the herd.

Rashi explains that separate instructions for lamb and goat (vv 12-16) are required in the case of the well-being offering (though they are treated together in the instructions for the burnt offering), because the well-being offering specifies that the fat tail of the sheep must be burnt on the altar. This is the only difference in the regulations for the offering of the lamb versus the goat, and prompts the need for separate instructions (in Herczeg 1999, 30; see Noth 1977, 31).

■ **11** The portions burnt on the altar to the Lord are designated as **food**. This may simply serve to indicate the nature of the well-being offering as a shared meal between God and the worshiper. As such, God's participation in the meal reflects the desire for fellowship with humanity and in no way indicates God's need for sustenance from animal sacrifices (Hartley 1992, 41). The designation of sacrifices on the altar as food, however, is not limited to the well-being offering (see also Lev 21:6, 8, 17, 21-22; 22:25; Num 28:24; Mal 1:7). Thus, the designation of sacrifices as food for the Lord appears to be a general reflection of the understanding that portions burnt on the altar are committed to God. Nevertheless, the Lord's sacrifices are not intended to feed God. Rashi considers the term for **food** (*lehem*) to be in construct with *'iššeh* (**offering made . . . by fire**), and therefore should be rendered "food of the fire" for the Lord. This is because God does not need food (in Herczeg 1999, 31 n. 2). Levine affirms that God required sacrifices, not for sustenance, but for fellowship with worshipers (1989, 17). This distinguishes Israel from pagan conceptions that do consider sacrificial food as necessary to nourish the gods. Psalm 50:12-13 rejects such pagan thinking in the context of relationship to the Lord (Walton and Matthews 1997, 147). References to sacrificial portions as food for God contribute to the recognition that much of the biblical sacrificial system reflects the influence of the larger ancient context within which Israel emerged (see Haran 1985, 17). Nevertheless, God's revelation clearly transforms pagan understanding and practice, and invests it with God's own meaning and purpose (→ 16:8 sidebar, "Azazel: Wilderness Satyr," and From the Text for ch 16).

■ **12-15** The instructions for the well-being offering that consists of a goat are the same as those for the lamb, except for the fat tail in the case of the lamb, which is added to the portions burnt on the altar (→ 3:6-10).

■ **16-17** As food (→ 3:11).

Verse 17 serves to conclude the instructions, not only for the well-being offering, but also for all the voluntary offerings (chs 1—3). Throughout these instructions, references to the offerer have been in third person singular form (except for much of ch 2 regarding the grain offering; recall ch 2 interrupts the unity evident in chs 1 and 3; → Behind the Text

above). However, this final verse of ch 3 switches to second person. This forms an inclusio with 1:2 that begins the instructions for the voluntary offerings, also in the second person (Milgrom 1991, 216).

Culminating these regulations is the declaration that **all the fat is the LORD's** and the prohibition that **you must not eat any fat or any blood**. Consequently, fat is added to blood as that which belongs to the Lord (re blood, → 1:5-9). Like blood, fat may be restricted from human consumption because it represents life (de Vaux 1997, 418; Porter 1976, 31). Alternatively, as blood denotes “life,” fat may denote its own quality of “strength” (2 Sam 1:22; Isa 34:6; Deut 32:15; Jer 17:4[5]; Heller 1970, 107).

Rashbam held that the stipulation **wherever you live** was added to the prohibition against fat and blood in order to clarify that the prohibition extended to common slaughter as well as to meat offered on the altar (in Lockshin 2001, 24). This means that the restriction applies in the homes of the Israelites as well as at the tabernacle (Levine 1989, 17). In fact, the application of “in all your dwelling places” (RSV) only seems sensible in a context that allows common slaughter (Gerstenberger 1996, 49-50). In contrast, based on the requirement that the fat of the well-being offering must be burnt on the altar, the prohibition against consuming fat may reflect the innovative concern of the Holiness School (HS) to actually prohibit common slaughter by requiring that all animals fit for the altar must be brought to the altar and made a well-being offering before they may be eaten (Knohl 1995, 49-51; Milgrom 1991, 28-29, 216; → Behind the Text for ch 17; and 17:3-7 sidebar, “Question of Common Slaughter and Centralization”).

FROM THE TEXT

The opening instructions in the book of Leviticus begin to reveal important themes and theological concerns imbedded in the sacrificial system. The sacrificial scheme serves to address much more than the expiation of sin. In addition to atonement, it provides a means of invoking God's presence, declaring one's devotion to God, and celebrating significant events with joy and thanksgiving. In providing for such expressions, it is evident that God's love and grace (not anger) motivate the sacrificial system, including its demand for atonement (→ 1:3 sidebar, “Love: The Motive for Atonement”). Accordingly, the sacrificial system reflects a foundational concern for right relationships.

Devotion to God is reflected in the dedication of firstfruits to the Lord. The first of the crop, the first of that which is processed from the crop, the first of the livestock, and even the firstborn of one's body, are all

to be committed to God. Thereby the faithful worshiper acknowledges that all comes from God, and everything is dedicated back to God by means of a token or representative “firstfruit.”

The rite of laying a hand on the head of one’s offering provides initial insight into the profound connection intended between an offerer and the sacrifice he or she brings. Too often this is understood only symbolically, in terms of substitution, such that the worshiper offers himself or herself only through the victim (Péter 1977, 52). In contrast, identification with the sacrifice is intended to compel the offerer to truly consecrate his or her own “life and labour to the Lord” (Keil and Delitzsch n.d., 283). The idea is not for the sacrifice to replace the offerer, but rather for the offerer to take on the representative consecration reflected in the sacrifice. Therefore, in order for the intent of an offering to be fulfilled, the offerer must follow up the act of sacrifice with behavior that is consistent with an authentic relationship to God. As Harrison states, “The sacrifice consecrated to God by the donor must be matched by an intent to live an equally holy and consecrated life” (1980, 53). The prophetic critique of the sacrificial system reinforces this very concept. The eighth-century prophets do not reject sacrifices but rather reject the hypocritical abuse of the sacrificial system by which Israelites present their offerings to God while behaving in ways that deny their intent. The prophets proclaim that proper fulfillment of the sacrificial system should result in justice, care for the needy, loyalty, knowledge of God, righteousness, kindness, and a humble walk with the Lord (Isa 1:11-19; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Mic 6:6-8). Kaiser implies more than mere substitution when he writes, “At the core of Leviticus is a conviction that human life is most rich, beautiful, and free when, amid the confusion of life, people fashion themselves into offerings to God” (1994, 1014). This is surely the intention of the Apostle Paul, by the words, “I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as *living sacrifices*, holy and pleasing to God” (Rom 12:1, emphasis added).

The sacrificial system further reflects an emphasis on relationship as evidenced by the active participation of laypersons in the sacrificial rites, in cooperation with the priests. The tabernacle is not an isolated sacred space for the exclusive activity of the priests. It is a center for the community’s expression of its walk with God.

The addition of the burnt offering of birds, and the grain offering, for the sake of those who cannot afford a large animal, reinforces the relational foundation of the sacrificial system. Provision is made so that economic limitations should not prevent any member of the community from participating in the sacrificial expressions of genuine relationship with God.

The relational foundation of the sacrificial system is also evident in the divine-human fellowship reflected in the grain offerings and well-being offerings. Bread shared between God and priests (grain offerings) and meat shared between God and offerers (well-being offerings) represent a theme of communion uniting God and humanity in intimate fellowship.

Too often the sacrificial system of the Bible is considered messy and morose, with a sole focus on sin and impurity. However, the voluntary sacrifices, particularly the well-being offering, demonstrate that the sacrificial system includes expressions of praise, thanksgiving, and joyful celebration. Accordingly, in relation to the well-being offerings, Milgrom states, “Thus the freewill sacrifice makes a link between individual/communal joy and thanksgiving: in our moments of greatest happiness, the sacrificial system teaches us, we pause to appreciate the blessings in our lives and say thanks” (2004, 29). Wesley acknowledges this range of functions when he described the sacrifices with these words: “Some by way of acknowledgment to God for mercies either desired or received; others by way of satisfaction to God for men’s sins; others were mere exercises of devotion” (1765, 344).

B. Required Sacrifices **(4:1—6:7 [4:1—5:26 HB])**

4:1—6:7

BEHIND THE TEXT

The voluntary sacrifices (chs 1—3) are introduced by the phrase *’ādām kî* (“*When any* of you brings an offering . . .,” 1:2, emphasis added). In contrast, the required sacrifices are introduced with *nepeš kî* (“*When anyone* sins . . .,” 4:2, emphasis added; see 5:1, 15; 6:2 [5:21 HB]; see Marx 2003, 109). The voluntary sacrifices serve to invoke God’s presence, express devotion to God, and celebrate occasions of joy and thanksgiving (→ From the Text for 1:1—3:17). The required sacrifices serve to secure atonement for sin.

The required sacrifices are the *ḥaṭṭā’t* (purification offering) and the *’āšām* (guilt offering). The purification offering is treated in 4:1—5:13, and the guilt offering is prescribed in 5:14—6:7 (5:14-26 HB).

As with the voluntary sacrifices (→ 1:1—3:17 Behind the Text), the organization of the purification offering is evident through the use of the terms *kî* (“when”) and *’im* (“if”). In this case, the general heading regarding “when [*kî*] anyone sins unintentionally” (4:2) governs the purification offerings in ch 4, which are subdivided into specific instructions related to whether/“if [*’im*] the anointed priest sins” (4:3) or “if the whole Israelite community sins” (4:13) or “when a leader sins” (4:22; in this verse *’āšer*