

Leviticus Chapter 4 – John Karmelich

1. If I had to pick two words to describe Leviticus Chapter 4, they would be “responsibility and accountability”. Being a Christian is more than just believing in God. The price of our salvation comes with the fact that we must be accountable to God.
 - a) In Chapter 4, we are still discussing offerings to God. This has been the topic since the opening sentence of the book. These offerings are word-pictures designed to teach us about man’s relationship to God. These sacrificial offerings are God saying to us in effect, “Hey folks, you want to have a relationship with me (God)? Follow these rules”.
 - i) These rules involve sacrifices. A sacrifice is to give up something for some purpose. God is saying in effect that eternal salvation requires sacrifice. It requires living by God’s specified requirements. God does this for own happiness. It is His way of saying, “I know what’s best for You and do it this way.”
 - b) For the Christian, these sacrifices are not to be performed as Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice for us. They are to be studied as word-pictures. They tie to what Jesus did on the cross. It is important to study them prophetically as it gives us a greater appreciation for what Jesus did for us. These word-pictures also have practical applications to our daily lives. That is the emphasis of these bible studies.
2. Chapter 4 deals with a specific type of offering. This offering is called the “sin offering” or the “trespass offering”, depending upon one’s translation. Let’s recap the first three chapters and how it ties into this chapter:
 - a) Chapter 1 was about a burnt offering. This was about giving one’s all to God. It is a reminder of our lifetime commitment to God. It is similar to when a Christian first commits their life to serving God.
 - b) Chapter 2 focused on the grain offering. This also has other names, again depending upon which English translation is used. This is the only non-blood sacrifice discussed in Leviticus. The idea is to give of one’s substance to God. The word pictures have to deal with our on-going commitment to serve God.
 - c) Chapter 3 is called the peace offering, among other titles. The idea is now that we have made our commitment to God, and the general concept of “sin” was dealt with in the original burnt offering, we can have peace with God and a close-friend-like relationship with Him. The offering focuses on the peace of God. It involves another blood sacrifice to show that the peace of God requires atonement for sin. The general idea of Chapter 3 is, “God is in charge, God wants the best for my life and I am going to live forever. Because He loves me, I can have internal joy despite whatever is going on around me. Now I can have the peace of God within me and spend time with Him.”
 - i) In that culture to eat food with some one is to become “one” with someone. In this peace offering, one eats food with God (in a word-picture sense) as part of the sacrificed animal is burnt up to God and part is eaten.
 - d) Which leads us to Chapter 4: We now deal with sin after one has committed their lives to God. After a chapter long discussion of the peace of God, now comes the issue of how to deal with the issue of “unintentional” sin. You would have thought the order is reversed.
3. To understand why the sin offering comes after “peace of God”, one has to understand what the term “sin” (or “trespass”) is describing.
 - a) The NIV® translation used here describes the “sin” as unintentional sin. It is as if one is driving down the road at the same speed for the past ten minutes, and didn’t see the sign posted that the speed limit was lowered for the next mile.
 - b) Most people are familiar with the line, “Ignorance of the law is no excuse”. That means you can be arrested and convicted of a crime even if you didn’t know it was a crime.

- c) God has the same standards when it comes to His laws: Ignorance is no excuse. When we sin without knowing it, we still have to deal with it. That's the idea of Chapter 4.
- d) What is implied by this sin-by-ignorance concept is that we are "sinners" by nature. Most, if not all Christians are aware of this. It is another way of saying no one is perfect. Even if we are "perfectly forgiven" for our sins by our trust in Jesus, we still sin. God designed us that way for a number of reasons:
 - i) By still being a sinner, we realize just how bad sin is. When we see God's standard for right and wrong, we realize His way is the way we should live. A purpose of God's laws is to show just how much of a "sinner" we really are. The result is it draws us closer to God. God designed us with guilt. The idea is we know we did something wrong, and we desire to alleviate that guilt. Thus, God designed the sin offering in Chapter 4 to help us deal with the guilt.
 - e) Christians are not perfect beings once we make our commitment to God. Suppose God designed us so that once we committed our lives to Jesus, we never sinned again. If that were true, we would lose interest in God and not stick close to Him.
 - i) The best illustration I know on this is when you send your kids off to college. You don't give them all the money they need on day one. You give it to them a little at a time so that way, they stay in contact. ☺ God allows sin in a believer's life if for no other reason, that we stay close to Him.
- 4. Let's get back to the main topic of Chapter 4: The sin offering itself. The Hebrew word used for "sin" in Chapter 4 is broader than just "ignorance".
 - a) The idea is someone who does seek to please God in their life, but "messes up".
 - b) It is about distinguishing it from a sin from someone who could care less about being accountable to God and then violates one of God's laws. If someone willfully, defiantly disobeys God by their lifestyle, this Chapter 4 offering does not apply.
 - i) "But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the LORD, and that person must be cut off (killed) from his people. Because he has despised the LORD'S word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him." (Numbers 15:30-31 NIV)
 - c) First, let's talk about what is a forgivable sin for the Christian believer:
 - i) Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." (Mark 3:28-29 NIV).
 - ii) In that verse, Jesus says that all sins are "forgivable" with the exception of "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit".
 - iii) Let's define "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit". In the specific Christian scope, it refers to the denial of Jesus as God. In context of Mark Chapter 3, a group of Pharisees claimed that Jesus was of the devil. It was insulting (i.e., blaspheming) to the idea that Jesus was of God. Also note that this sin has the concept of continuity in one's life. For example, one could deny Jesus for years, and then truly change to believe in Jesus. In that case, one is not guilty of this specific sin.
 - iv) The broader concept of this sin is the continual denial of the existence of God. Let's face it; if you don't believe in God the Father, the deity of Jesus is irrelevant.
 - d) Now that this specific term is defined, notice what is forgivable: all sins. That means that any sin one commits, no matter how painful or horrible it is, is a forgivable sin. Again, the only exception is not accepting Jesus' payment for forgiveness. Understand there are still consequences for whatever sins we commit. We suffer during this lifetime due to our sins and the sins of others. For example, I do believe the murderer can ask God for forgiveness. God is perfect and is capable of perfectly forgiving sins. At the same time, the person must be punished, or in this case, capital punishment for our society.

5. This, surprisingly, leads us back to Chapter 4 of Leviticus. The idea of this sin offering is designed for the believer in God, not the unbeliever.
- Let's face it; the unbeliever has no interest in going to God's altar in the first place.
 - This offering is for the person who cares about pleasing God, realized they messed up and now they want to deal with that sin issue. The sin is "unintentional" in that the overriding desire of their life is to please God in all that we do. When we turn from that desire for a moment, a day or a period of time, we experience guilt as we know it is wrong as we desire to please God with our lives.
 - The fact we are "sinners by nature" is dealt with in the burnt offering of Chapter 1. That offering is a word-picture that we are imperfect people and we desire to come to God to deal with those sins. Chapter 4 is, "Ok, now I desire to walk with God, but I messed up today. I need to confess that sin." Chapter 4 is the methodology to deal with sins we commit after we have turned our lives over to God.
 - As I stated, the peace of God was described in Chapter 3. Dealing with "regular" sin comes in Chapter 4. This chapter is about having peace with God. The idea is we can have the peace of God anytime once we have committed our lives to serving God. That peace can be interrupted by sin. In order to restore that peace, we have to deal with confessing our sins. That is the idea of Chapter 4.
6. So why is this animal offering necessary? Can't I just confess my sin and move on? After all, 1st John 1:8 tells us the way to forgiveness for the Christian is just to confess the sin and one is cleaned. Why chop up more animals? ☺ In other words, why is Chapter 4 relevant to my life?
- The big answer is for us to see how bad sin is. Imagine not only bringing an animal for your sins, but then having to sit there and chop it up. It's a bloody mess. That's the idea. God wants us to see that failing to obey His standards for right and wrong "is a bloody mess". It is said the sign of maturity of a Christian is to realize just how bad sin is. We realize it when we see the effects of sin in our lives and those around us. We can realize it equally well when we see this bloody mess of a chopped up innocent animal.
7. Let's get back to my opening sentence of this lesson. "Accountability and responsibility".
- There is a mistaken notion that a born-again Christian is then free to sin all they want. Christians need to be aware that we are accountable to God based on our lifestyle. If we believe in Jesus, we now "represent" Him to the world around us. God holds us accountable for how we live. His commandments are still the standard for right and wrong. There are some exceptions to all of the Old Testament laws, but I'll save that for another day. The idea is we are to obey God's laws out of gratitude as opposed to just guilt-ridden obligation. We harness the power of God (i.e., the Holy Spirit) to have the ability to live a life pleasing to God.
 - When we mess, up, we sacrifice some sheep. Just kidding. ☺ When we mess up, we confess that sin. What Chapter 4 shows is, in word-picture form, is just how serious God takes sin and "what a bloody mess sin is in the first place." It is a reminder of how seriously the Christian is to take sin in our own life first, and then the world around us.
 - The other idea to comprehend is our responsibility to God, individually and collectively. Christians are not only accountable as individuals but as part of larger groups. This chapter is going to focus on group-responsibility as well as individual responsibility.
8. Chapter 4, Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses,² "Say to the Israelites: `When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands –
- Verse 1 says, "The LORD spoke to Moses". Whenever you see the word "LORD" is upper case, it is a translation of the most holy name of God. It is transliterated "Jehovah".
 - Verse 1 is almost a literal repeat of Chapter 1, Verse 1. It is as if Chapters 1-3 are designed to be one "section" and Chapter 4 begins another section. In Chapter 8, this same phrase is repeated again to start another section. It is as if God himself is separating Leviticus into "digestible pieces" for us to contemplate.

- c) Chapter 4 begins the section of dealing with sin in the life of the believer.
 - d) Verse 1 and 2 together are designed to be the overview statements of Chapter 4.
 - i) The next set of verses deals with a high priest and what to do when he sins.
 - ii) The following set of verses deals with all of Israel sinning collectively.
 - iii) Next is a set of verses deals with a government leader sins.
 - iv) Finally is a set of verses dealing with a “common” individual commits a sin.
 - v) My point here is that Verses 1 and 2 are to be overview statements of the issue of dealing with sins in the life of the believer. “Details by groups” follow.
 - vi) Also I want you to notice that only last is the issue of the “every-day believer” and how to deal with sin. First, God spells out how the leaders are to deal with sins. It is the idea that if God gives you responsibility, God holds you accountable.
 - e) Another key word in these verses is “unintentionally”.
 - i) The idea is when the believer realizes, “Uh oh, what I am doing is wrong, and I need to deal with it before God.” The Christian is forgiven of all sins, past, present and future when we first turn our lives over to God. With that in mind, God still desires that we turn from sin as much as possible when we realize we mess up. That is the word-picture behind this “unintentional-sin offering”.
 - ii) It is unintentional in that our main intent is to please God in all that we do. Committing our lives to Jesus encompasses every aspect of our lives. When we realize we’re falling short in some aspect of our lives, it needs to be dealt with.
 - f) Let me quote Jesus on the issue of how many times we can approach God for sin:
 - i) “Then Peter came to Him (Jesus) and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” (Matt. 18:22 NKJV)
 - a) Some translations say “77 times” while others say “70 times 7”. The idea is not to say, “OK, I’ve forgiven you 76 times, one more and we’re through.”
 - b) The idea is God knows we are imperfect beings and God is perfect. God is “perfectly” capable of forgiving us completely no matter how many times we mess up. God knows all things and knows how many sins we will commit the rest of our lives. Despite that, Jesus still paid the price for our sins. The problem is our egos. We think we should do better.
 - ii) The reason I’m bring this up is that we need to understand that there is no limit when it comes to doing an “unintentional sin offering”. Leviticus never says, “you can come here 76 times, but if you come a 77th time, you’re toast.” ☺ There is no limit to God’s forgiveness as long as we are trusting in Jesus for our sins and as long as we are striving to please God in all that we do.
9. Verse 3: “If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the LORD a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed.
- a) From Verse 3 until Verse 12, we are going to deal the sins of the priest.
 - b) Verse 3 says “anointed” priests. The word anointed means “chosen for service of God”.
 - i) The verse appears to be wider in scope than just the high priest. The primary person in focus is the high priest, but it is a subtle way to say that “anyone” who is chosen for this service is accountable and holds this responsibility.
 - c) Let’s talk about why the anointed priest is first on this list. Later in the chapter, we’ll get into sin offerings for other groups and individuals. First and foremost are priests.
 - i) The most important “group” to God was the priests, as they were God’s representatives between His chosen people and God-himself. They were the ones who were to intercede when it came to sin.
 - d) Let’s talk about this sin offering from the aspect of our local pastor or priest:
 - i) I have found that a church congregation often reflects the “style” of its leader. They admire the head person and it is common for a congregation to act like him.

- ii) When a pastor “sins”, it affects the whole church. I’ve personally seen churches fall apart when the head pastor commits a major sin. It is like a disease that spreads through the congregation. Sometimes it kills the church altogether. Sometimes it just wounds it so badly it takes a long time to recover.
- iii) In the history of Christianity, I’ve doubted there has been a priest or pastor that has “gotten away with anything” for a long term. Leaders are held accountable more than the layperson. For that reason, God holds them to a higher standard. That is why for accountability reasons they are listed first here in Leviticus.
- e) One of my premises for Leviticus is all Christians are called to be “priests” in that we are to put the needs of others in front of our own. That is the true definition of a priest. Because the sin offering of a priest is listed first, it tells that God holds us to a higher standard than the layperson. Our duty as Christian “priests” comes with accountability.
- f) Let’s get back to the text: When a priest commits a sin, they are to bring a young bull.
 - i) Let’s review a little. In the last half of Exodus, God told the Israelites to build a portable tabernacle. This includes is an indoor structure. This covered structure is surrounded by an outdoor fenced area. There is one gated entrance to this fenced area. The first thing one sees when entering the gate is a large fire pit.
 - ii) In Verse 3, a priest realizes he sins. In order to restore his role as priest, he must bring a young bull. The bull must be “perfect” in that it has no defects.
 - iii) As opposed to the previous offerings, no other animal is acceptable. A bull is an expensive animal. A “young” bull is one in the prime of his life, and is the most valuable as a livestock commodity.
 - iv) In other words, a priest is more accountable than a layperson. A layperson can bring in a less expensive animal. God is showing that when it comes to a priest sinning, it is a “greater crime” than a layperson sinning and must be dealt with according to that higher level of responsibility.
 - v) That reminds me to bring up a common misconception in Christianity about sin: Not all sins have equal weight. Any sin makes us imperfect before God and His standards are perfection. When Jesus was before Pontius Pilate, He said the people who brought Him to Pilate were guilty of “the greater sin” (John 19:11). If one can be guilty of a “greater sin”, then not all sins have the same weight.
- 10. Verse 4: He is to present the bull at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it before the LORD. ⁵ Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and carry it into the Tent of Meeting.
 - a) When the priest realizes he sins, he is to take a bull he owns (or buys one) and take to the gated entrance. The sinning priest puts his hands on the head of the bull. This is symbolic of associating oneself with the animal. It is to say in effect, “I have sinned. I should suffer because of this sin. I offer this valuable innocent animal in my place.”
 - b) Step two in the process is that the priest is then to take some of the blood into the covered area of this tabernacle structure. The covered area is called “The Tent of Meeting”.
 - c) The idea of the “uncovered and covered” area of the Tabernacle is we first deal with our sins before we approach God. The word-picture is God dwells within the Tent of Meeting. Once we deal with our sins, we can approach God.
 - d) Imagine having to kill a bull. One then gathers a bunch of blood from the carcass of the animal in say, a bucket and carries it into this structure. Does all of this sound gross? Yes, and that’s the idea. It is too teach us how “gross” sin is to God.
 - e) Christians don’t do this today because we accept Jesus payment for our sins. Next time one confesses sins, stop and realize how “expensive and messy” those sins are from God’s perspective. It should make us all the more grateful for what Jesus did for us on the cross.

11. Verse 6: He is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle some of it seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain of the sanctuary.
- a) The covered structure, i.e., the “tent of meeting” was divided into two sections. The two sections were separated by a large curtain. Inside one section was symbolic of God’s presence. It was called the “holy of holies”. It was only entered once per year.
 - i) The other half of the indoor structure is where the priest went when he sinned. The idea is that the priest is to take some of the blood inside, and put it in front of the curtain where God was “located”.
 - ii) This was to be done “seven times”. The number seven is associated with “completeness”. God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. By sprinkling the blood seven times, the idea is the payment for sins is complete.
 - b) What is the purpose of the curtain? A curtain is to separate one section from another.
 - i) The idea is sins have “separated” oneself from God. It is only by the shedding of blood that one can approach the separation.
 - a) “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.” (Isaiah 59:2)
 - c) It is important for the Christian to understand another symbolic event. When Jesus died on the cross, the Gospels tell us the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom. (Ref. Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38) It is as if God the Father is saying, I’m ripping the curtain itself, as the ultimate blood sacrifice is now paid, and there’s no more separation for sins.
12. Verse 7: The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the bull's blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.
- a) The ritual for the forgiveness of the sins continues: To recap, after the bull was killed, the “sinner” chops it up. He takes some bull-blood and throws it seven times in front of the closed curtain of the indoor section of this tabernacle.
 - b) Again, the indoor section is in two halves. The one half where the priest is has several pieces of furniture. One of them, as described in Exodus 30 has an altar of incense. A job of the priest is to keep this incense altar going. This altar symbolizes prayer to God as the sweet smell of the incense rises to heaven. In many ways, this prayer-altar is the most important location for the high priest, as his job was to intercede in prayer between God’s people and God-himself. By putting blood on the horns of the altar, it is restoring the priest’s duty of prayer intercession. The blood is symbolic of forgiveness of sins.
 - c) Let me talk a little more about the horns: The design of the incense altar includes four horns on the top corners of this altar. Animals use horns as their symbol of power. They use them to attack and for protection. Horns were placed on the corners of the altar to symbolize God’s power. Again, the blood was placed seven times on these horns.
 - d) The next step for forgiveness is the rest of the blood is poured out at the base of the “barbeque pit” back in the outdoors area. When this animal is sacrificed for sins, all the blood is separated. Blood represents life. The idea is one gives an innocent life as a substitute for our sins.
13. Verse 8: He shall remove all the fat from the bull of the sin offering--the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them,⁹ both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys--¹⁰ just as the fat is removed from the ox sacrificed as a fellowship offering. Then the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering.
- a) This next set of verses is a repeat of the “peace offering” from the last chapter. In summary, “fat” represents the best of the animal. (Think of the “fatted calf” in the prodigal son story in Luke 15:23. A fatted animal is a healthy animal). The idea is our “best” belongs to God.
 - b) The kidneys and liver were thrown on the fire as these organs clean the impurities out of our bodies. The “purifying effect” is the word picture.

14. Verse 11: But the hide of the bull and all its flesh, as well as the head and legs, the inner parts and offal--¹² that is, all the rest of the bull--he must take outside the camp to a place ceremonially clean, where the ashes are thrown, and burn it in a wood fire on the ash heap.
- a) This chapter, which describes an unintentional sin offering, is the third time so far we have had an animal being sacrificed.
 - i) In Chapter 1, the burnt offering, the entire animal was put on the fire pit.
 - ii) In Chapter 2, this was a grain offering. No animal sacrifice is involved.
 - iii) In Chapter 3, we have a peace offering. Part of the animal was put on the fire pit. The remainder of the animal was to be eaten and shared with the priests.
 - iv) Here in Chapter 4, the remainder of the animal had to be carried outside the camp, and burned up in a designated ash-heap place.
 - b) It might be good to talk about the Israelite "camp" at this time. It was estimated that two to three million Israelites came out of Egypt when the Exodus occurred. At the time of Leviticus, this group is now wandering around the desert. In the center of the camp, was this tabernacle structure, where all of these offerings are taken place.
 - i) Getting back to the sin offering, the final step was for the "sinner" to take the remainder of the bull outside of the camp. I don't know how far that is, but to walk past a group of several million people is a good walk.
 - ii) Imagine a priest having to carry parts of the bull (I wonder if he could use a wheel-barrow ☺) past a large group of Israelites. I'm sure the crowd would figure out what he was doing. Word around the camp would spread fast that a priest had sinned badly enough he had to perform the "bull-parts-removal-ritual".
 - iii) This gets back to responsibility and accountability. Remember that a priest is the one who sinned. The actions of the priest affect the ones who minister around him. This act of removing the bull from the camp had to be a visual sign of a public confession of the sin. You can run with that analogy from there.
 - c) For those who like Jesus-prophetic word pictures, know that Jesus was crucified outside the city gates of Jerusalem. The hill where He was crucified was outside the city. The cross for sin had to be carried through the city to a place outside the city.
 - i) "The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore." (Hebrews 13:11-13 NIV)
 - a) Notice the phrase "going outside the camp" in this context might be for a Jewish person to go outside Judaism in order to accept Jesus as Messiah.
 - d) One last thing on this issue and we'll move on to the next group. Four times in this chapter, the phrase is used, "and he will be forgiven". In Chapter 4, there are four separate "groups" that must give an offering for unintentional sin. These four groups are 1) priests, 2) the whole nation, 3) civil leaders and 4) the individual. Of these four groups, the only time the words "and he will be forgiven" is not listed is here with the priests.
 - i) Does that mean the priests are not forgiven? No, they are forgiven if they follow this procedure. The concept that the priest is forgiven is implied in these verses, it is just not stated. Obviously, if God does not forgive the sin of the priest, this ritual would not be listed as a way to forgiveness.
 - ii) Back to my point: The entire ritual of an animal sacrifice is repeated over and over again in this chapter for each individual group. I'm just curious why this "and he will be forgiven" phrase is not repeated for the high priest when he sins.
 - iii) I don't have a great explanation for this. I suspect it has something to do with the fact that the High Priest job was to "bear" the sins of the people. It could be symbolic of the fact of Jesus as our High Priest having to always bear our sins. Again, I do believe the priest was forgiven. It is implied, just not blatantly stated.

15. Verse 13: “If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, even though the community is unaware of the matter, they are guilty. ¹⁴ When they become aware of the sin they committed, the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering and present it before the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁵ The elders of the community are to lay their hands on the bull's head before the LORD, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD. ¹⁶ Then the anointed priest is to take some of the bull's blood into the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁷ He shall dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it before the LORD seven times in front of the curtain. ¹⁸ He is to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ¹⁹ He shall remove all the fat from it and burn it on the altar, ²⁰ and do with this bull just as he did with the bull for the sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven. ²¹ Then he shall take the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull. This is the sin offering for the community.
- a) From this point to the end of the lesson, we can move at a much faster pace. Much of the sin ritual is repeated from the last section. I’m going to focus on what is different for each section and briefly state what is repeated.
 - b) Verses 13-21 are a sin offering when “everyone” sins in an unintentional way.
 - i) First, let’s define “everyone”. In the bible, I usually state the rule, “all means all and that is all, all means”. This is a case of group accountability. Everyone in that group may not be responsible for this sin, but if everyone is in the group, then everyone is accountable.
 - ii) The point is if a significant sin exists within this group (e.g., a lot of people worshiping other Gods), then the whole group bears responsibility.
 - c) One thing to understand is that God judges groups as well as individuals. When it comes to one’s salvation, judgment is always on an individual basis. When it comes to blessings on earth, we are most definitely judged on a group basis as well.
 - i) The first example of this for the Christian is our local church. If you read Chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelation, Jesus is judging seven specific churches. Jesus takes the time to say in effect, “There are individuals in those churches who are not as bad as everyone else, but I’m still going to punish the whole church for doing wrong”. The punishment is usually the end of that church.
 - ii) Most veteran Christians have seen some churches fall apart. While the local congregation may think it is other reasons, consider the possibility that God was behind the scenes “judging” that church for some reason.
 - iii) Another judgment example is towns and cities. Jesus condemned the towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida in Israel for not believing in Him. (Reference Matthew 11:21, Luke 10:13). For the record, those towns no longer exist today.
 - d) Getting back to the text, God says that the nation can sin as a whole and be judged.
 - i) An example of a nation sinning would be if the majority of people turned away from the true God and worshipped other gods. The Book of Judges is full of examples of nationwide idolatry and nationwide repentance. (E.g., Judges 3:7-9).
 - e) As a Christian, one has to understand that the church they belong to or the nation they live in can be judged for failing to obey God. This has nothing to do with one’s salvation. Some Christians felt “led” to be in churches that are no longer effective witnesses for Christ. The problem is one is still accountable to God as a member of that “church”.
 - f) OK, back to the barbeque pit again. ☺ The ritual for the sin offering of the entire nation is the exact same animal sacrifice as when the priest committed the same unintentional sin.
 - i) Since the entire nation can’t literally stand next to this fire pit, there has to be representatives of the nations. Verse 15 says the “elders” do the work. This refers to those who are the appointed leaders. It would be as if each of the 12 tribes appointed a leader, and those twelve guys did this animal slaughter ritual.

- g) Notice the high priest is heavily involved in this ritual. The government leaders (i.e. “elders”) slaughter the bull, but the rest of the ritual is performed by the high priest.
 - i) The priest is the one who puts the fat and organs on the fire pit and that same priest has to take the remainder of the bull outside the camp.
 - ii) The high-priest has to take some of the blood and put it seven times on altar of incense. Specifically it is to be placed on the horns of this altar. This altar represents intercessory prayer between God and man.
 - iii) It is the role of the high priest to ask for forgiveness for the nation.
 - h) This is a good reminder to individually pray for forgiveness for our church or nation.
 - i) In the Old Testament, Daniel individually prayed for forgiveness for the sins of all of Israel. That prayer was not only answered, but God “interrupted” Daniel’s prayer in order to answer it! (Reference: Daniel 9:20-22).
 - i) Before I move on, let’s once again talk about the “pecking order” of this chapter:
 - i) The first set of verses focuses on when the high priest sins.
 - ii) This set of verses in focus is about when the whole nation sins.
 - iii) The next set of verses focus on when a civil leader sins.
 - iv) The final set of verses focuses on when a “commoner” sins.
 - v) The type of offering for the nation (“a young bull”) is the exact same as when a priest sins. When a government leader or “common person” sins, a lower-animal is accepted. What does that mean? God cares about whole nations that represent Him. God cares about His reputation. If a group (e.g., a church) or a nation want to be “under God”, then it is held to a high standard of accountability.
 - j) Verse 19 says, “And they will be forgiven”.
 - i) People need to know that they are forgiven. There is a sense of peace to know that once the ritual is done, they are forgiven. I believe it is the role of the high priest after the ritual is completed to go tell the representatives of the nation, “I have now completed this ritual; the bible says your sins are forgiven”. You can now go and spread the word that among the nation that the sins are forgiven.
 - ii) Does this contradict the idea that sins can only be forgiven by Jesus? No. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the High Priest (See Hebrews 8:1). This ritual was a way for the Israelites to deal with sin until the Messiah pays the ultimate price for sins. These rituals point the way to Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice.
16. Verse 22: “When a leader sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the commands of the LORD his God, he is guilty. ²³ When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering a male goat without defect. ²⁴ He is to lay his hand on the goat's head and slaughter it at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered before the LORD. It is a sin offering. ²⁵ Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. ²⁶ He shall burn all the fat on the altar as he burned the fat of the fellowship offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven.
- a) This next paragraph starts with the term “when a leader”.
 - i) Notice it is not more specific than this term. It could be a “mayor-type” role for a city. It could be a local judge. It refers to any type of governmental leader.
 - b) My first thought is “If a nation or a group wants to be God-based group”, then they need to pick government leaders who desire to be accountable to God.”
 - i) In other words, let’s say it is time to elect good church elders. They’re may be a guy who is a great natural leader and great administrator, but he “isn’t much of a Christian”. The point is that person is not to be chosen as a church leader.
 - ii) When it comes to picking civil leaders, I don’t believe the best person belongs to the same denomination or religion as us. Civil leaders who desire to accountable to God make better leaders. Let’s leave it there and get back to the sin offering.

- c) Next, the animal to be offered is a male goat. A goat has less value than a bull.
 - i) This means the civil-leader has more accountability than the common person (the next paragraph), but less accountability than a high priest or the whole nation.
 - ii) Here is a guy who is a civil leader in the nation. He commits an unintentional sin and wants to be forgiven of that sin. The verse says he is “lower in accountability status” than the nation as a whole. Don’t get me wrong. Animals still have to be slaughtered for these unintentional sins. My point here is to notice the status and priority as a government leader.
 - iii) The civil leader is still accountable for their sin. God is interested in obedience to His laws when that leader is over His people. Notice the paragraph does not say, “If this government leader fails to be a good leader, bring on the goat.” ☺ The text does say if the guy sins, then this sacrificial ritual is needed.
 - iv) What is implied is the “effectiveness” of the government leader is dependant upon the individual’s responsibility to be obedient to God.
 - v) What does that mean? If you are an elder of the church or a mayor of a town, take some time to do a personal inventory of one’s relationship with God! Your effectiveness in your position is directly related to your relationship with God.
- d) Like the ritual for the whole nation, the high priest does most of the work. The sinning civil leader kills the animal. The priest then puts the fat and organs on the fire-pit-altar.
 - i) This fire-pit altar also has horns on the corner the same way the incense altar does. The priest then puts some blood seven times on the sacrificial altar.
 - ii) Why is the blood put on the horns of the outdoor “barbeque” altar and not the incense altar located inside the tent? The incense altar is for the priest, not for the civil leaders. The blood is put on the sacrificial altar and not the “more special” altar (inside the tent) used for intercessory prayer.
 - iii) The text does not repeat the part about “taking the remainder outside the camp”. That part may be implied.
- e) The final phrase is “and he will be forgiven”. Like the last paragraph, it is important to state bluntly that, “If you follow this ritual, your sins are forgiven”. There is a path to forgiveness, but it must be done on God’s terms, and not man’s. People need to know that they are forgiven. There is a sense of peace to know that once the ritual is done, they are forgiven. I believe it is the role of the high priest after the ritual is completed to go tell the civil leader, “I have now completed this ritual; the bible says your sins are forgiven. You can now go in peace.”

17. Verse 27: “If a member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, he is guilty.²⁸ When he is made aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering for the sin he committed a female goat without defect.²⁹ He is to lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it at the place of the burnt offering.³⁰ Then the priest is to take some of the blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.³¹ He shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as an aroma pleasing to the LORD. In this way the priest will make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven.

- a) Now we come to the last “group” in focus. It says, “if a member of the community”.
- b) This is the “the average Israelite” who is not in any sort of leadership. The sin offering is designed for someone who does desire to seek God and His forgiveness.
- c) The type of offering to be made is a “female goat”.
 - i) The male goat is considered more valuable than the female goat as it is stronger. Also, men were appointed as leaders and held to the higher standard. Just as a female was subservient to a male, so a female goat for an “average citizen” is subservient to a male goat offering for someone in leadership.

- ii) The idea is the civil leader (last paragraph) has a higher sense of accountability than the average-person (this paragraph). Therefore the average person brings “only” a female goat to be offered.
 - d) The rest of the ritual is the same. The sinner kills and slaughters the goat. The priest then puts the fat and organs on the altar, and puts some of the animal blood on the horns of the same fire-pit altar.
 - e) There is one paragraph left. It is still about the same “common-person” offering. Let’s read the last paragraph and we’ll tie the whole thing together.
18. Verse 32: “If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he is to bring a female without defect.”³³ He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it for a sin offering at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered.³⁴ Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.³⁵ He shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the lamb of the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made to the LORD by fire. In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven.
- a) This paragraph is essentially the same as the last one. The only key difference is the sinner can bring a lamb as opposed to a goat. Like the goat offering, the lamb has to be a female. It is symbolic that the offering for a common person is “lower in statue” than it is for a civil leader, or the nation as a whole or the high priest.
 - b) My question is why is this paragraph necessary? After all, these four verses are essentially the same as the last four. Would not it have been much easier if God just said, “Bring a female goat or sheep” and go on from there?
 - i) The reason for the “double-emphasis” is to say to the person in effect, “Look, I know I did not call you to be a priest or a civil leader. I love you just as much as that person with more responsibility. I’m giving you twice as many verses as everyone else just to show I can and do forgive your sins. My requirements are not as strict as government leaders, but I still want to forgive you of your sins if you just follow this ritual. Grab a goat or sheep and come on down!” ☺
 - c) One more thing I want you to contemplate:
 - i) There are more verses dealing with this unintentional sin offering than any other offering in the past chapters or coming up in the next chapters.
 - ii) When it comes to the “average Israelite”, the text even takes the time and trouble to repeat a paragraph twice on essentially the same issue.
 - iii) My point is Chapter 4 is about the restoration of a relationship with God. If you were to judge what is the most important offering, a possible indicator is “which offering does God spend the most time discussing”. That answer is this sin offering. God in Leviticus spends a lot of text on how a leader or a non-leader can restore their relationship with Him and have their sins forgiven.
 - iv) Confused? Just remember, if God is spending a lot of text on a topic, it is important to Him. A lot of text is being spent on how to restore one’s relationship with God. If it’s important to Him, it should be important to us.
19. I want to wrap this up by discussing the role of the High Priests.
- a) One can see how the “priest doing all the forgiving” is tied to Jesus. It is the role of the priest to help those seeking forgiveness to actually receive forgiveness.
 - i) As Jesus performed one of the first miracles he did, he added the statement in effect that this miracle was performed so that people would know Jesus was given the power and authority to forgive sins. (Ref.: Matthew 9:6, et. al.)
 - ii) The reason Christians don’t do these rituals today is the cross “fulfilled” the sacrifices made for unintentional sins. When we do become aware of the sins, we are to bring them “to the cross” and ask for forgiveness.

- b) Let's get back to the High Priest: I've stated through these early lessons on Leviticus to understand the role of the Christian as an (not "the") interceding priest.
- i) Christians carry around a lot of guilt because we think we should be better people. One way Christians can help each other alleviate guilt is to remind each other our sins are forgiven.
 - ii) The mistake we make is "I understand God forgave me, but I can't forgive myself. I should have done better". Our response should be, "If God is willing to forgive you, why can't you forgive yourself?" God has forgiven you, why do you wish to carry a burden upon yourself when the God you worship has forgiven you!"
 - iii) A related issue is when one apologizes in a Christian setting and the other person is still angry. If one asks for forgiveness, God does forgive and so should we. One of the lines of the Lord's Prayer is for us to forgive others as God forgives us (See Matthew 6:12). Do you know that is the only line of the Lord's prayer for "us" to do something? God asks us to pray for the ability to forgive others just as He has forgiven us! Every other line of the Lord's Prayer is for God to do something.
 - iv) Back to my point, we as Christians carry around too much guilt. We see this high standard God sets for us and we realize our own imperfections. One way that Christians can help each other is to remind them that their sins are forgiven. That is why the High Priest intercedes so much in this chapter. That is also a reminder for the Christian to help work with one another to "heal hurts". Christianity is designed to be a group effort to help each other mature. Part of that maturity process is to help heal each other.
 - a) This does not mean we are to be the "sin police" in church. It means when the opportunity comes to help someone who desires our help we as priests are to reach out and help them. It is our "duty" as priests.

20. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, First of all, thank you for the continual forgiveness of our sins. May these bloody sacrifices remind us just how much You hate sin and want it removed from Your presence. Search our heart and help us discover the unintentional sins of our lives. Like the priests, help us to remove those sins far away from the "camp" of believers, so it can be burned and buried. Further, help us to have the heart of a priest to minister to others when they are hurting. Give us the wisdom as to how we can serve others around us. May these sin offerings make us all the more grateful for the cross and help us to be obedient to You in gratitude. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.