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## The Restitution Offering Leviticus 5:14 - 6:7

**Intro:** We've come to the last of the 5 offerings given to Israel in Leviticus. The burnt offering, grain offering and fellowship offerings were seen in ch 1-3. These first 3 sacrifices seem to convey a message related to having a right relationship with God. The burnt offering revealed an attitude of complete surrender to the Lord with nothing set aside, held back or reserved. The main purpose of the grain offering was simply worship – a demonstration of the worshipper's dedication to God. The fellowship (peace) offering convey just that – the worshipper, after having their sin atoned for by the burnt offering and after expressing their dedication and thanksgiving to God in the grain offering – was now able to enjoy real fellowship with God, having entered into a happy, right relationship with the holy God.

The last 2 offerings go together because they both deal with making atonement for the sin of the worshipper. The purification offering (sin offering – 4:1-5:13) focuses mainly on atoning for sins that bring ritual defilement. Our text describes the restitution offering (trespass offering – 5:14-6:7). The main focus of this sacrifice is to address sins related to the betrayal of covenant loyalty. Unlike the previous atoning offerings which simply dealt with sin in general, this offering deals with the specific violation of the tangible holy things of God (item or person).

If you're not clear on what this particular sin would be, the passage spells out 3 particular examples. The first type of offence (14-16) concerns the unintentional profaning of a holy item. The 2<sup>nd</sup> is for unknown sin (17-19) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> is the profaning of the Lord's name by making a false oath (6:1-7). This section deals with breaking covenant loyalty, particularly in relation to the Lord's property. To show disrespect for someone's property is to show disrespect to its owner. If an Israelite disrespected the Lord's property in some way such as by treating it as an everyday, common item (14-16) or by using it for a wicked purpose (6:1-7). They were disrespecting the Lord Himself. Quite naturally, this was seen as a serious act of unfaithfulness against the covenant.

In the culture of the Ancient Near East, a violator could atone for a breach of

covenant loyalty by acknowledging the wrong and paying a penalty. The penalty served as sort of a ransom payment. It was a reduced penalty substituted for the more severe penalty the violator actually deserved. In our text, the restitution offering served as just such a payment. If you'll notice, in 2 out of the 3 examples, the punishment was worse than the crime in that whatever was violated or stolen had to be restored and a 20% penalty was to be added to it. Only after the violation was made right could the offering be brought and atonement made.

While they may seem rather similar, the restitution offering ritual differed from the purification offering ritual in 2 ways. 1<sup>st</sup>, the violator was required to bring a more costly animal: a ram. This is in keeping with the nature of the sin: breaking covenant loyalty was a serious sin. 2<sup>nd</sup>, the blood of a purification offering was put on the horns of the altar to cleanse it (4:5-7) while the blood of the restitution offering was to be sprinkled all around the altar (7:2), most likely to emphasize the idea of a ransom more than just a cleansing.

**14-16** – The text makes reference to the holy things of the Lord (15). These could include, but were not limited to, the firstfruits, the firstborn, the tithe or a vowed offering. The idea here is not that the violator entered the tabernacle and took or damaged the holy things of the Lord. It could simply mean they failed to properly set them aside to bring to the tabernacle. This violation could also include damage or misuse of tabernacle materials (holy items) or personnel (anointed priests). Whatever the scenario, the violator has mistakenly taken from the Lord's holy things, profaning the item. As a result, they must repay the item in full, along with a 20% penalty, and bring a ram as a restitution offering so the priest could make atonement for them.

When holy things had been desecrated in some way, a mere sin offering wasn't enough. Restitution must be made with value added by 1/5<sup>th</sup>. In fact, the violator is said to have committed a trespass (15) and caused harm (16). This strong language refers to the treachery involved in breaking faith with a covenant partner. In a marriage relationship, this language can describe the ultimate act of treachery: adultery. In the covenant relationship between Israel and the Lord, it describes Israel's treacherous acts of worshipping other gods, abandoning the Lord's law, turning away from Him or rebelling against Him.

The violator was to bring a ram to sacrifice; this ram would serve as the restitution (trespass) offering ('asham). This Hebrew word is used in other passages to refer to a penalty that must be paid for the consequences of guilt. It is also used in the context of a breach of faith: the violator must repair the breach by payment of a penalty. The ram was to be of the proper value in silver or whatever the going rate of the sanctuary shekel was. But, before offering the ram, the violator had to first make restitution. In the case of a holy food item, the item must be replaced and 20% value must be added to it. Since the holy thing that was violated belonged in the realm of the priesthood, the violator would naturally give the penalty to the one who has been wronged or harmed; in this case, the priests. After restitution had been made, the priest makes atonement with the ram so that the violator may be forgiven.

This law reminded the Israelites of the importance of showing the due respect to their holy, covenant King by showing due respect to His holy property. To do so was to demonstrate covenant loyalty; failure to do so was to demonstrate utter disregard for the covenant King. The Apostle Paul picks up on this same principle when he exhorts Christians to lives of sexual purity by acknowledging that their bodies are the Lord's holy property, His temple (1 Cor 6:18-20). He also warns them not to harm the church as a whole as it also belongs to the Lord (1 Cor 3:16-17).

**17-19** – On the face of it, this one is a little difficult. It seems that this offering concerns a person who suspects they have violated the holy things of the Lord, yet they never really find out what the violation actually is. This may be why the text doesn't mention the need for a restitution payment or the 20% penalty: there's no way to calculate the value.

Of course, how would a violator know to bring a sacrifice if they don't even know what the violation was? The answer is seen at the end of v17 – he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity; meaning, they would experience the consequences of their violation even if they were unaware of it.

From the very beginning, God had communicated to Israel His intention to bless them for their obedience and to chastise them for their disobedience. If an Israelite was to experience what they believed to be God's chastisement, they would naturally think they had violated His covenant somehow. This would explain the common Israelite fear of inadvertently committing sins that remained unknown (Ps 19:12). Clearly, if someone

desecrated the holy things of the Lord, “I didn’t know” was not an acceptable excuse. They still had to bring a costly sacrifice to atone for their sin.

Sins of ignorance do differ from sins done intentionally as far as the degree of guilt is concerned (Lk 12:47-48). Yet, it’s important and even necessary for us to remember that you can be guilty of sin without feeling guilty or even thinking you are guilty. If the guilt of an action or violation entirely depended on man’s knowledge then we’d have no standard at all with which to judge right and wrong. The standard would fluctuate wildly in accordance with the knowledge and enlightenment of each person. C. H. Spurgeon even surmised that if this were the case: the art of forgetting would be diligently studied and ignorance would become an enviable inheritance. The reality is that ignorance of God’s law is itself a breach of the law since God’s people are called to know and remember it.

This offering underscores the fact that even inadvertent and unknown sins could be very serious, so much so that it could result in the Lord’s discipline by means of suffering. This certainly served as a call for Israel to avoid sins at all costs, an exhortation also given in the NT (Jude 23). But, this offering also highlighted the Lord’s grace to Israel, His covenant people, in that He provided a way for them to address such sin and so put their hearts at ease. Believers today whose hearts are repentant before the Lord can also have peace knowing that Jesus’ sacrifice atones for all our sins, both known and unknown. In this age of grace, suffering doesn’t always equate to some sin on our part but it could. Sometimes God allows suffering to build our faith, to guide us, to draw us close to Him or to draw others to Himself through our faithfulness in the midst of our suffering. But, sometimes it is because of sin; sin persisted in and unrepented of, even if we don’t know it’s a sin. How about your heart? Is it right with God?

**6:1-7** – This 3<sup>rd</sup> case deals with theft. Sure, the sins of lying and deception are mentioned but these are done in direct connection with lying in order to steal from someone else. Here, the violator has not only defrauded someone, they have then lied about it in a false oath, profaning the Lord’s holy name. How so? The primary way Israelites maintained their innocence in those days was by taking an oath. In doing this, they would swear their innocence and invite the Lord to bring some sort of calamity or punishment on them if they were guilty. Naturally, this could be abused and people could lie under oath. This law was just for that eventuality.

Also, the Lord's holy name was invoked in these oaths and to swear falsely was to profane that name: to treat it as a very common thing that could be used however one pleased (even for evil) instead of a very holy thing to be deeply respected. Swearing falsely was, thus, not simply one sin among many, but a major act of unfaithfulness (trespass) against the Lord that called for the restitution offering. This was not only a sin against a neighbor but it was a sin against God and it was required to be dealt with as such.

The text describes 4 ways in which a person could commit fraud against their neighbor: by taking something that had been entrusted to them (wrongly keeping a deposit or pledge); by robbery (seizing another's goods by force); withholding that which rightfully belongs to another (wages); finding lost property and lying about it. Clearly, there are many ways to steal and all of them are sin but the idea here is of a person gaining something that belongs to another person by means other than out-right theft; it usually involves trickery of some sort.

Of course, all of this is founded on the basic idea clearly stated in [Ex 20:15](#), "You shall not steal." What you may not realize is that every command against stealing in the Bible is an example of the divine recognition of the right to personal property; that God trusts people to manage property as delegated "owners" of that property. Since ultimately all things belong to God ([Ps 24:1](#)), men only "own" things that are delegated to them by God. Yet, God expects humanity to respect His delegation of property and other people (or governments) are not permitted to take that property without the due process of law. Thus, any economic or political system that rejects the principle of the private ownership of property (communism/ socialism), those systems reject both God's wisdom and will and as such, are destined for failure.

This offering addresses 2 sins: unfaithfulness to the Lord and unfaithfulness to a fellow Israelite. Using the Lord's holy name in a false oath was a serious act of disloyalty that showed utter disregard for the holy, covenant King. Repairing that breach involved a 2-step process of repentance: full acknowledgment of the wrong done to the offended party (the Lord) through confession and the payment of an appropriate penalty to Him: restitution offering. Significantly, the same 2-step process of repentance is called for when one has defrauded their neighbor. 1<sup>st</sup>, they were to fully acknowledge

the wrong to the offended party. This taught Israel that their sins against others must not only be confessed to the Lord, but also to those they had wronged. 2<sup>nd</sup>, the violator was to correct the wrong in full and add 20% extra. True repentance goes beyond just saying, "I'm sorry." It actually extends to correcting the wrong as fully as possible and then some.

Furthermore, it's clear that this repentance, restitution and penalty had to be made the same day as his restitution offering, even before the offering was made. This powerfully demonstrated that a person could not truly get right with God without also first making right the wrong they had done to the other person. This urgency of making things right with other people before we make things right with God is the same idea Jesus conveyed in [Mt 5:23-24](#). This shows that true spirituality not only involves a proper posture towards the Lord, but also to those in Christ around us.

There's a confusing aspect to this particular offering that needs to be addressed. If you recall, both the restitution offering here and the purification offering of [ch4](#) are described as being given for sins that have been committed unintentionally. The problem is that for both offerings but especially the restitution offering; a number of the violations it is said to atone for can hardly be seen as unintentional: refusing to testify, uttering a rash oath, deceiving /cheating a neighbor, lying about lost property, swearing falsely. These all seem very intentional and we've already seen that the intentional sin, defiant sin (with a high hand) could not be atoned for by offerings. What's the deal?

First off, the primary requirement of all these sins is that the violator must recognize that they are sin and publicly confess that they were wrong and that God is right. They must take God's side against themselves. Confession, repentance, sincerity and heartfelt sorrow must accompany these sacrifices and these motivations were evidenced in the restitution and added value charge that fixed the wrong. The violator was not merely required to right the wrong, mend the harm and restore property of the injured party; they were required to improve their situation. Only those who were truly interested in restoring a right relationship with the Lord would go to these lengths.

But it wasn't just the remorse of the sinner that facilitated this as remorse was required anyway. No, this can only be chalked up to the sheer grace

and mercy of Israel's covenant King; a grace is evident from the very start with the juxtaposition of the words trespass (unfaithfulness) and unintentional in 5:15. From the very beginning, God signals His intention to atone for both unintentional and intentional sins, even those that might be considered defiant sins. This was not a provision offered by the priests to override God's law; this was decreed by God Himself. This decree comes from the same place as the decree to allow the blood of sacrificial animals to be accepted as atonement for sin. It is purely an act of grace on the part of a sovereign, loving, forgiving God.

Finally, how does this offering relate to Jesus? The direct connection is easier to see when you look at the original language. As I mentioned before, this restitution offering is called 'asham in Hebrew and its primary purpose was to address violations against the holy things of the Lord. One of the most important OT passages for understanding the death of Jesus Christ is found in Isa 53. Isaiah's prophecy contains several mentions of an anonymous servant figure and ch53 describes this servant as having undergone tremendous suffering. Those sufferings are listed in 50:4-9.

The servant was beaten; his beard was pulled out by his tormentors, he was mocked and spat upon. Then, in 52:13-53:12 he's described as one whose appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and whose form was marred beyond human likeness (52:14). He was a man of suffering and familiar with pain. He was despised and held in low esteem. Now, there is also a "we" group in ch53 that speaks in the first person. They confess that they thought very ill of this servant figure; they were among those who despised him. They saw his sufferings as the just and deserved punishment of God; that he was being stricken and afflicted by God Himself. In fact, it's likely that this "we" group actively participated in afflicting suffering on the servant, thinking they were doing God a great service in being His agents to carry out this punishment on this servant.

Of course, this "we" group was correct in their assumption that the servant was afflicted by God but they were wrong to assume that the servant was suffering on account of his own sins and transgressions; that he was being punished for his own crimes. Eventually, they come to the astonishing realization that the servant wasn't suffering for his own sins, but for their sins! They rightfully recognize that God has laid iniquity on him (6) and that it pleased the Lord to bruise him (10a) but they now understand that the

Lord did this not on account of his wickedness but theirs (5-6, 8).

This is where the 'asham comes into play. Isaiah tells us that God sent this servant to establish justice in the earth (42:1-4) and was especially chosen by God to be a covenant for the people (42:6). He was given the mission of bringing Jacob back to the Lord and gathering Israel to himself (59:5). Yet, Israel had despised this abhorred servant (49:7), mocked him, spat on him and physically abused him, all the while thinking that he was cursed by God when in fact he was God's chosen servant to restore Israel back to the God of her fathers. If ever there was an act of unfaithfulness toward the holy things of God, this was it! If there was ever a need for a trespass offering to atone for sinners who had acted so ignorantly and horribly to the Lord's own beloved servant, this was it!

This is why, when Isaiah makes reference to the offering for sin in v10, he doesn't use the word hatta't (purification) but 'asham (restitution). This offering is uniquely appropriate in that it was used to address unfaithfulness to the holy things (or persons) of the Lord and it was especially focused on taking a deliberate sin, which couldn't be atoned for by sacrifice and for which the prescribed penalty was death, and turn it into an unintentional sin. The horrible sins of the "we" group, (including all of us), are reckoned to be unintentional sins that were committed in ignorance.

In spite of our sin and rebellion, God doesn't require a sacrifice from us to make restitution. Make no mistake, our sin requires an immense amount of restitution but God, in His grace, has allowed His only begotten Son to pay the price for our sin, to make full restitution plus the value added penalty. God gave the most expensive gift in the universe to pay for our sins but forgiveness isn't automatic! You can only acquire and obtain this forgiveness by first seeing your sin as God sees it, by repenting of that sin – turning away from it and towards God; and by inviting Jesus Christ into your heart to be your Lord and Savior. ☺