

The Grain Offering

Leviticus 2:1-16; 6:14-23

I. Exposition

- A. “Grain offering” translates the Hebrew term מִנְחָה (*minḥah*), a term of uncertain origin.
1. The root idea of the term seems to carry the idea of “tribute” or “gift” and occurs in contexts where a gift is presented out of reverence (Judg 6:19), gratitude (Ps 96:8), homage (Gen 32:14), or allegiance (2 Sam 8:2).
 2. By the time of Moses, it appears that it had become limited to use in cultic contexts where vegetable or grain offerings are in view.
- B. The grain offering was one of the most common sacrifices in Israelite worship. It was so common, that, with rare exception, it almost always accompanied the burnt offering (14:20, 31; 23:12-13).
1. Grain offerings were thought of as a completion of the overall “food offering” given to Yahweh, where bread was served to accompany the meat of the burnt offering, with a drink offering attending as a libation (Num 15:1-10).
 2. Grain offerings could also be given as a sin offering by extremely poor individuals who could not afford an animal (5:11). In such instances, the details of the sacrifice differed from those outlined in this chapter.
 3. Although it regularly accompanied the burnt offering, it differed from it in that only a handful of the offering was burned on the altar. The rest was eaten by the priest.
- C. Elements of the Grain Offering
1. Fine flour
 - a) The main component consisted of סֹלֶת (*soleth*), which refers to barley, wheat, or spelt flour which was ground especially fine, and thus represented the finest offering they could present to their covenant King.
 - b) The text doesn’t indicate how much grain was required, but Numbers 15:1-10 indicates that the amount of flour required varied by the type of burnt offering it accompanied. This aligns with the graduated system of the burnt offering. Someone who could only offer a lamb was required to offer a reasonably-appropriate amount of grain in accompaniment.
 2. Oil
 - a) This was a common ingredient in baking and cooking in the ANE, often used for frying, or to bind materials together into a dough.
 - b) It was also a product of human labor and so represented the worshiper’s dedication to Yahweh.

- c) It's inclusion in the grain offering also likely appears because it would act as a means of aiding the combustion process (Rooker, 94).
 - d) When the grain offering substituted for a sin offering (5:11), oil was not included, most likely because it represented joy and would be inappropriate for an offering for sin.
3. Frankincense
- a) This term refers to a gum-resin that was imported into Canaan from southern Arabia (cf. Jer 8:20).
 - b) Its inclusion in the grain offering appears to be based on its representative value (Isa 60:6) as a costly gift to God, and because it enhanced the pleasing aroma of the sacrifice.
 - c) Frankincense was not edible, and for this reason only a small amount was placed on top of the offering, so that all of it could be taken up by the priest and offering on the altar.
 - d) Even though frankincense does not appear in certain portions of the instructions in chapter 2, it is likely that it was used along with oil. The text expressly details any scenario when it was not to be used (cf. Lev 5:15).
4. Salt
- a) Salt was a requirement for every grain offering given to Yahweh (2:13). In fact, this component is so crucial that it is stated 3x in this verse.
 - b) "The salt is called *the salt of the covenant of your God*. In covenantal contexts, *salt* underscored the covenant's permanence (see Num 18:19; 2 Chr 13:5). The *covenant* in mind here is that which the Israelites had just entered into with the Lord in Exodus (Exod. 20-24). The *salt* served as a constant affirmation of this covenant relationship" (Sklar, 100).

D. Methods of Preparation

The worshiper had a variety of options available for preparing a grain offering, and only in specific instances was a particular method required.

1. Uncooked (2:1-3): Raw flour was mixed with oil and topped with frankincense. Its memorial portion was offered on the altar while the remainder was eaten by the priest.
2. Cooked (2:4-7): The worshipper could prepare a grain offering by baking loaves or wafers in an oven (2:4), cooking them on a griddle (2:5-6), or fry them in oil in a pan (2:7). Depending on the method chosen, certain details changed so that the priest could take up the memorial portion with its frankincense with relative ease.
3. Ripe Grain Offerings (2:14-16): This particular offering was connected with grain which was first ripened, and most likely is a kind of firstfruits offering. However, unlike the firstfruit offering mentioned in 2:12, this offering's memorial portion was

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burned on the altar and so would come under the restrictions of 2:11. The preparation involved fire-roasting newly ripened grain so that it could be ground and the kernels extracted.

E. Presentation of the Offering

1. The general process for presenting the grain offering remains constant, even while the details differ depending on the method of preparation.
2. In each case, the worshiper prepared the offering according to his chosen method at home, then brought the offering to the Meeting Tent where he would present it to the priest.
3. From there, the priest took a handful from the offering, including some of the oil and all of the frankincense (since it was inedible). If the offering was made on the griddle, the worshiper first crumbled the offering into pieces and poured oil on it so that the priest could take up a handful more easily.
4. The priest then offered the handful—the “memorial portion”—on the altar. The memorial portion served as tribute representative of the entire offering. It signified that all of it belonged to God. As a “memorial,” it also reminded the worshiper that everything he had belonged to God.
5. The remainder of the offering belonged to the priest, but because it was “most holy”, he could only eat it in a ceremonially clean location, i.e., in the courtyard of the Meeting Tent. Additionally, only he could eat it—his family could not.

F. Restrictions and Special Details

1. Yeast and honey (2:11-12)
 - a) The use of leaven and honey are expressly forbidden in the grain offering. Yeast most likely referred to wild yeast (e.g., sourdough starter) while honey not only refers to bee honey but also honey produced by fruit.
 - b) The reason for its prohibition is unclear, but several explanations have been proposed:
 - (1) Yeast was associated with corruption and spoilage and thus symbolic of evil
 - (2) Yeast changed the physical nature of the offering, which is not in keeping with Leviticus’ emphasis on order
 - (3) Yeast was a living thing, whereas only dead things could be offered on the altar
 - (4) Honey was a source of sugar that would fuel the fermentation process of yeast
 - (5) Honey (and yeast) were common in pagan worship practices
 - c) Some of these explanations are unlikely. For instance, associations with evil or pagan practices seems to be overruled by its acceptance in offerings that were not burned on the altar (e.g., firstfruit offerings; cf. 2:12).

- d) The remainder all have valuable points and could all be reasonable explanations. Unfortunately, the exact intent of the prohibition remains unclear.
2. Daily grain offering (6:19-23; cf. Num 4:16)
- a) Moses instructed Aaron that a daily grain offering must be given beginning on the day that Aaron and his sons were inaugurated into the priesthood
 - b) These offerings were presented morning and evening, and made specifically on a griddle.
 - c) These offerings were designated as “whole offerings” (6:23) and so could not be eaten by the priest.

G. Purpose of the Grain Offering

1. Recognition of God’s bountiful provision
- a) The OT worshiper recognized that Yahweh was the source of life, food, and fertility in the land. He also recognized that all he had belonged to him (see Deut 26:1-11, which outlines the prayer to be made at the dedication of the firstfruits offering during the annual Harvest Festival).
 - b) The grain offering was a means of giving back a portion of what he had given to them—a way to express their recognition of his goodness to them.
2. Expression of dedication, loyalty, praise, and thanksgiving to God
- a) The OT saint recognized that his fellowship with God was based on divine grace.
 - b) Since it often accompanied the burnt offering, it served as a means of expressing the worshiper’s dedication to the God who had made it possible to be in fellowship with him.
 - c) “The expectation is that those who have been reconciled to God and have access into his presence will regularly acknowledge that they owe everything to God—dedication follows atonement. This sacrifice gave the thankful Israelite worshiper the way to do this” (Ross, 99).
 - d) The grain offering served as a tribute or gift to the covenant King in acknowledgement of his goodness, his sovereignty, and the worshiper’s loyalty to him and the covenant.
 - e) The worshiper communicated with his offering that all he had, including his life, belonged to God, and that he was dedicated to obeying God’s covenant.
3. Provision for the sustenance of the priests
- a) The Levites had no means of sustaining themselves through regular labor. Their livelihood was based on the generosity of the people.
 - b) The Levites received their income through the tithe. But the priests received their income through the offerings (6:16).

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II. The Grain Offering and the New Covenant

The LXX translation of מִנְחָה is the Greek term *thusia* (*thusia*), which is the most common NT word for sacrifice. Thus, broadly speaking when the NT speaks of sacrifice, the authors may well have in mind the grain offering.

A. Relationship to Christ

1. Just as with discussions concerning Christ and the burnt offering, the grain offering as well demonstrates Christ's dedication and obedience to God's will (cf. Ps 40:6-8). His perfect obedience made it possible for him to please God through his life and death.
2. Jesus' self-identification as the Bread of Life (John 6:32-35), while largely a reference to the manna provided in the wilderness, certainly intersects with the intent of the grain offering as a recognition of God's bountiful provision. In Christ, God provided for the spiritual need of his people, and Christ's sacrifice made it possible for believers to enjoy that goodness in fellowship with God.
3. "As the grain was bruised and crushed to make the sacrifice for the ancient Israelite, so the Living Bread was bruised and crushed for all who would believe" (Kaiser, 1022).

B. Application for Christians

1. We should consistently and regularly acknowledge God's provision in our lives and offer appropriate thanks to him.
2. When we recognize what the Lord has done for us through the atoning death of Christ, our appropriate response should be the dedication of our lives and everything we have to God and to his service (Rom 12:1-2).
3. Christ's act of total selflessness in giving his life for his people is the sole basis for the believer's acts of dedication. We must recognize that any pitiful act of loyalty or gift we present to God is meaningful only in view of our acceptance we have gained through Christ.
4. The fact that the grain offering consisted of only the choicest elements—fine flour, oil, frankincense—indicates that loyalty to God means willingness to give to God the very best of our produce and the fruit of our labor. God desires and deserves our very best—not our half-hearted afterthoughts.
5. We should make certain that we provide for those who labor in gospel ministry (Luke 10:7; 1 Cor 9:13-14; 1 Tim 5:17-18).