Complex Conditional Sentences and the Verb אָשַׁם 'āšam in Leviticus 4–5

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Abstract: Conditional sentences with multiple conditions or alternative cases can be confusing and are challenging to translate. Those in Leviticus 4–5 are prime examples. Another challenge is that a “consistent” translation of the verb אָשַׁם 'āšam can produce unclear or even nonsensical texts. Following an overview of conditional constructions in Biblical Hebrew, this paper presents an analysis of the if-clauses in Lev. 4–5 with a view to determining whether וְאָשֵׁם wə'āšēm is part of the protasis or the apodosis. I conclude that וְאָשֵׁם wə'āšēm belongs to the protasis, but the translation may express an interim result. Additionally, the meaning of אָשַׁם 'āšam is discussed. Trying to decide between the debated renderings “be guilty”, “feel guilty”, “realize guilt”, etc., did not prove fruitful, none being viable in all contexts. I suggest that the verb should be defined more broadly as “to find oneself guilty”, and that different contexts will require adaptation. This article is written to help translators recognize the above-mentioned problems, understand the options in dealing with them, and make informed choices.

Keywords: apodosis, conditional, guilt, if-clause, inadvertently, Leviticus 4, Leviticus 5, protasis, reparation offering, sin, sin offering, suspicion, אָשַׁם 'āšam, יָדַע yāda', ןָנָשָׂא 'עָוôn, nāšā’āwôn.

1 Overview of conditional constructions in Hebrew

In order to provide context for the following discussion, I shall first give an orientation about conditional sentences in Biblical Hebrew in general.

Terminology: The protasis (plural: protases) is the subordinate conditional clause, i.e., the “if-sentence”. The apodosis (plural: apodoses) is the consecutive main clause, i.e., the “then-sentence”.

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Clause order: Almost always, the protasis comes first and the apodosis follows, but the reverse order is possible (e.g., Gen. 18:28).

Hebrew has many ways for constructing conditional sentences.¹

- They do not have to be specially marked. Protasis and apodosis may be simply juxtaposed asyndetically (without conjunction) (e.g., Ps. 104:28).
- Sometimes, a regular wawqatal sequence has to be interpreted as protasis and apodosis (e.g., Gen. 44:22).
- However, in real conditionals (fulfilled or capable of being fulfilled), the protasis normally begins with the conjunction אִם ‘im (e.g., Gen. 34:15).
- Sometimes, the conjunction כִּי kî is used instead (e.g., 2 Kings 4:29). Both אִם ‘im and כִּי kî can extend to a second condition without needing to be repeated (e.g., Job 10:15; Isa. 43:2). In legal texts, כִּי kî introduces a general case or main condition, and אִם ‘im introduces various circumstances or sub-conditions (e.g., Exod. 21:2–6).²
- Protases can further be introduced by הֵן hēn (e.g., Lev. 25:20) or הִנֵּה hinnēh (e.g., Exod. 3:13), or rarely by אֲשֶׁר ašer (e.g., Deut. 11:27).

Furthermore, the following constructions can have conditional force:

- a relative clause (e.g., 2 Kings 10:19 “Anyone who is missing ...” ≈ “If someone is missing ...”).
- a participle, especially in legal texts (e.g., Exod. 21:15 “A-striking-one his-father ...” ≈ “If someone strikes his father ...”).
- at times, an infinitive construct (e.g., Josh. 23:16 “When-transgressing ...” ≈ “If you transgress ...”).

The apodosis is often, but not necessarily, begun with waw. This is variously called waw of apodosis, resumptive waw, or conditional waw.

The apodosis may also begin with an affirmative כִּי kî (e.g., Isa. 7:9), or with אֲז az (e.g., Isa 58:14), הִנֵּה hinnēh (e.g., Prov. 1:23), or גַּם gam (e.g., Jer. 33:21).

Unreal conditionals (incapable of fulfilment, or purely hypothetical) are quite rare. They are introduced by לו lû (e.g., Deut. 32:29). Occasionally, they can

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¹ In this section, I refer to the following resources (see Appendix A for a complete list of abbreviations): BHRG §§ 19.2.1.3, 21.3.1.1, 40.11, 40.23.3.1.1, 40.23.3.2.1, 40.29.1.1, 48.1.1.4; EHLL; IBHS §§ 30.5.4, 32.2.1, 38.2; JM §§ 167, 176; Lambdin (1990) Lesson 55, § 196; Lettinga and von Siebenthal (2016) §§ 645.4, 742.4, 766, 775; Price (2019) §§ 9.3.6, 19.2.6, 21.12. For אִם ‘im, Bivin (2018). For כִּי kî, Follingstad (2001) §§ 1.2.2.1.3, 9.2.3 10.1.4.5.

² In English, this combination can sometimes be rendered by using “when” for כִּי kî and “if” for אִם ‘im, as is done, for instance, in Exod. 21:2–6 in ESVUS16.
also be introduced by אִמَ (e.g., 1 Kings 13:8) or כִּי (e.g., Jer. 49:16), or they can come without any conjunction (e.g., Exod. 33:5).

Regarding tense and aspect, verbs in conditional sentences are generally used as elsewhere. Two points worth mentioning are that in real conditionals, qatal can be used for future events (e.g., 2 Sam. 15:33), and in unreal conditionals yiqtol is rare.

Conditional (‘if’) and temporal (‘when(ever)’) relations are not strictly distinguished. This applies to both אִמَ and כִּי, and to waqatal protases.

The degree of certainty or probability is signalled not by the conjunction alone, but also by adverbs, particles, verbs, and the context. 4

2 Introduction to the conditional sentences in Leviticus 4–5

One of the challenges in translating Leviticus is the long if-clauses. My aim is twofold: (1) to provide a guide for some cases in Lev. 4–5, and (2) by way of these examples better equip translators to deal with similar cases elsewhere.

In chapters 4–5, the verb אָשָׁם poses special problems. In an attempt to be consistent, a translator might consult various versions on the closely related verses 4:13, 22, 27; 5:2, 3, 4, 5; 5:17; 5:23 [English 6:4] and might be puzzled by how differently they translate the same verb. These verses all contain the third person masculine singular (3MS) qal waqatal form וְאָשֶּם, except for 4:13 with the plural form וְאָשֶּמוּ, and 5:5 with the yiqtol. Since the versions come without annotations, the reasoning behind the different wordings will sometimes not be transparent. This article furnishes some background information and evaluates different approaches.

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3 Regarding אִמ, Bivin (2018:10f) states: “The epistemic stance taken toward the speech event determines whether אִמ prompts construction of a hypothetical space or temporal space. Temporal interpretation is prompted by context and results from reader/hearer construal.” Regarding כִּי, Follingstad (2001:268f) claims that it “marks the protasis as a hypothetical conditional”, whereas Revell (quoted ibid.) had stated it “presents an event expected to occur.” See further JM § 167i.

4 Whether the different syntactic constructions imply different intentions by the writer, and whether they should be translated differently, is not discussed in this paper (cf. the note in JM (590), which raises this issue).

5 In this paper, all Bible references refer to Leviticus, unless indicated otherwise.

6 אָשָׁם also occurs in 5:19 (two times), but this verse is not discussed here. The verb is not found in 4:3; 5:1, 15, where, by analogy, it could also be expected.
2.1 The problems

2.1.1 Protasis or apodosis?

\textit{Waqatal} verb forms can be used in protases and apodoses. Lambdin (1990:276) says:

In a series of three or more clauses, it is only a matter of the translator’s judgment where to end the protasis and begin the apodosis.

In Lev. 4–5, the \textit{waqatal} 3MS וְאָשֵׁם can be read as “and if he is guilty” or as “then he is guilty” (and in 4:13 in the plural). Translators have to make up their minds as to what the author intended to say.

2.1.2 The meaning of אָשַׁם 'āšam

The meaning of אָשַׁם 'āšam has to do with guilt and its consequences, as various dictionaries assert.\footnote{See TWOT 1:78, no. 180 אָשַׁם (ʾāsham) “be desolate, be guilty”, etc.; TLOT (191ff.), s.v. אָשַׁם ʾāšām guilt, § 3c and 3e; NIDOTTE 1:554 s.v. אָשַׁם (ʾāšam) “become guilty”, etc.} But regarding Lev. 4–5, there has been an extensive debate about its precise meaning.\footnote{It is conveniently summarized, for example, in Watts (2013:341f. on 4:13). For Watts’s own view, see the Summary § 3.5.2. For details, see § 3.1.2, “The meaning of אָשַׁם ʾāšam”.

In short, the issue is whether אָשַׁם ʾāšam should be understood objectively as “be guilty”, or subjectively as “feel guilt”, or – covering both – as “realize guilt” or otherwise.

The two major issues (protasis versus apodosis, and the meaning of אָשַׁם ʾāšam) are intertwined, but we will have to look at each of them separately. For an overview of the alternatives that a translator has to decide on, see table 1 below.
### Table 1: Different interpretations of אָשַׁם ‘āšam in Leviticus 4:13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntactic role</th>
<th>part of the protasis</th>
<th>part of the apodosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning</strong></td>
<td>be(come) guilty</td>
<td>feel guilt(y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample translations</strong></td>
<td>NRSV: “and incur guilt”</td>
<td>Milgrom: “and they feel guilty”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NRSV: “and incur guilt”</td>
<td>Milgrom: “and they feel guilty”</td>
<td>NIV11R: “when they realize their guilt”</td>
<td>NIV84: “they are guilty”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NET08: “they become guilty”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table only gives a partial overview because the above choices do not apply automatically to all other occurrences of אָשַׁם ‘āšam in Lev. 4–5.

#### 2.1.3 Other issues

Whereas the above two problems occur throughout Lev. 4–5, there is also the sheer complexity of multiple or alternative conditionals, and other grammar and meaning questions. We will address these where they come up.

#### 2.2 The themes of Lev. 4–5


The frame is always the same. It includes (1) a sinful act, (2) the consequential guilt, and (3) the required offering and reparation. See Lev. 4:3: “If the anointed priest sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, he shall offer to the LORD a bull.”

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9 Alternatively, “purification offering” (Milgrom and others) or “cleansing sacrifice” (KTOT). For the purpose of this paper, I retain the traditional term “sin offering”.

10 “Reparation offering”: so Milgrom and others, and KTOT. Traditionally “guilt offering”.

3 'אָשַׁמ in the conditional sentences in Leviticus 4–5

The texts are presented below in tables; they contain only the sections that are relevant to our discussion. Deletions are marked with ellipses (...). Essential matters for translation are pointed out in the column “Remarks”.

Below each table, I address the themes “Protasis or apodosis”, “The meaning of 'אָשַׁמ”, and where needed “Other issues”. After reviewing the commentaries and after my own discussion, I close each section with practical advice under “Translation”.

3.1 Lev. 4 Bringing a sin offering when sin becomes known

Leviticus 4 describes the procedures for the sin offering. They depend on the status of the person concerned. Four cases are distinguished (vv. 3, 13, 22, 27).

| Table 2: The three cases of 'אָשַׁמ in Leviticus 4 |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Verses | Hebrew | Translation | Remarks |
| 2 | נֶפֶשׁ כִּי נֶחָטָא בִּשְׁגָגָה מִכֹּל מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תֵעָשֶּׂה | When a person sins unintentionally in any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and commits any of them, [the following applies:] | – נֶפֶשׁ כִּי introduces the main protasis. In legal texts, it is not uncommon for כִּי to stand in second position. – The explication in brackets breaks up the long conditional clause. |

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11 The translation is based on NASB but is considerably adapted.
12 The following versions were regularly consulted: CEVUS06, EASY, ESVUS16, GNTD, KJV54, NASB, NET08, NIV11R, NJPS, NLT07, NRSV, REB89, and T4T (all on Paratext). In listings, they are ordered alphabetically. For more detail for these versions, see Appendix B.
3 if the anointed priest sins / (or: if it is the anointed priest who sins),
thus bringing guilt on the people,

| אִם | 'im introduces a second condition, to be specific, the first sub-case. |
| 'אַשְׁמָה | The noun 'ašmâ is used; in all later cases it is the verb אָשַׁם 'āšam. |

(then) he shall offer ... a bull ...

| לְאַשְׁמַת | The noun אַשְׁמָה 'ašmâ is used; in all later cases it is the verb אָשַׁם 'āšam. |
| יָשַׁםוּלֹא־תֵעָשֶׂינָה | The underlined is part of the protasis, but already states an “interim result”. It is fitting to add “thus / so / thereby”. |

13 Now if the whole congregation of Israel commits error and the matter escapes the notice of the assembly, and they commit any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and (thus) become guilty (or: find themselves guilty);

| וְהִקְרִיב ... פַּר | A wəqatal begins the apodosis. The waw is more naturally translated with “then”, not “and”. |

14 (then,) when/once the sin that they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull ...

| וְהִקְרִיב ... פַּר | A wəqatal begins the apodosis. The waw is more naturally translated with “then”, not “and”. |
| וְעָשָׂה אַחַת מִכָּל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה |TRANSLATION | דְעָה וְנֵהַחַטָּאת אֲשֶׁר | Translating the wəqatal with “when/once” makes it more natural. |
| הַחַטָּאת אֲשֶׁר | A wəqatal begins the apodosis (cf. v. 3b). |
### 3.1.1 Protasis or apodosis?

Grammatically, (וְאָשֵׁם) *wa‘āšem* in 4:13, 22, 27 can be read as part of the protasis (i.e., “and if he/she is/are guilty”) or as part of the apodosis (“then he/she is/are guilty”). Since the wordings of the different cases are largely parallel, we expect that they should all be read the same way. Here, we discuss v. 13.

Reading *wa‘āšem* as part of the protasis is preferable, because:

- **The protasis extends even beyond** this verb, to the first verb in v. 14, *דָעָה* “and when it becomes known”.

| 22–23 | (חָטָא בִּשְׁגָגָה | (But) if a leader sins unintentionally does any one of all the things which the LORD his God has commanded not to be done, and recognizes his guilt, 
- For the unusual *אֲשֶׁר* "šer, see the discussion below. |

| 27–28 | (וְאִם־נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת | Now if anyone sins unintentionally of the common people in doing any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and recognizes his guilt, 
- For *וְאִם* "im, see the discussion below. |

| 27–28 | תֶּחֱטָא בִּשְׁגָגָה | or his sin which he has committed is made known to him, then he shall bring for his offering a goat, ... |

| 27–28 | מִכָּל־הָיוֹרָה | and unintentionally does any one of all the things which the LORD his God has commanded not to be done, and recognizes his guilt, 
- For *אֲשֶׁר* "šer, see the discussion below. |

| 27–28 | שְׂעִירַת | and unintentionally does any one of all the things which the LORD his God has commanded not to be done, and recognizes his guilt, 
- For *אֲשֶׁר* "šer, see the discussion below. |

| 27–28 | וְהֵבִיא קָרְבָּן | then he shall bring for his offering a goat, ... |

- **Apodosis.**
In the first scenario in 4:3, the verb אָשַׁם 'āšam is not used, but the same root occurs in the noun אַשְׁמָה 'ašmâ ‘guilt’. In this verse, the noun אַשְׁמָה with the preposition לְ cannot – grammatically speaking – be rendered as an apodosis (*“then he brings guilt on the people”). This suggests that the other cases in the chapter work analogously.

Translation

The commentaries and most versions do indeed take וְאָשֵׁמ wa’āšēm(û) as a protasis. But we also need to recognize that וְאָשֵׁמוּ wə’āšēmû is already the fourth verb in a long protasis. Therefore, it is reasonable to express an “interim result”, as it were. This can be done by inserting “so / thus / thereby” (see REB89 with “and so incurs guilt, ...”). This makes the clause a transitional one.

Alternatively, if a multi-clause protasis becomes too long, one can follow the example of NLT07 which translates וְאָשֵׁמ wa’āšēm(û) as apodosis and ends the sentence there: “they are still guilty” (similar to CEVUS06). This is probably not due to a different analysis of the Hebrew text, but in the interest of readability.

Ironically, what was analyzed as protasis is translated as apodosis. But this does not conflict with the train of thought in the original; it is, in fact, quite fitting.

Support for reading an apodosis (“then they are guilty”) comes from JM’s explanation about the waw of apodosis. They say (§ 176a–d) it

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13 However, Hartley (1992) translates “they realize guilt,” and Gane (2004) does not speak against NIV84’s “they are guilty”.

14 I first found this in REB89, and in most places discussed below this proves appropriate. Cf. Lev. 26:15, where an interim result before the apodosis is expressed by an infinitive construct.

What further supports this rendering is the parallel in Num 5:6. It has the pronounced phrase וְאָשְׁמָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא wa’āšı̂m(hañnepeš hahiw). It would be difficult to read that purely as a protasis, because there is no reason for using the demonstrative pronoun for stress: *“When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind ... and if that person is guilty, ...”. By contrast, reading an “interim” or “provisional” apodosis fits well: “such a person incurs guilt” (cf. NRSV).

15 Cf. Levine (1989:22) “and thereby incur guilt”; German GCLNR00 “und dadurch Schuld auf sich lädt” (= and thereby incurs guilt); NET08 “so they become guilty”.

16 This term does not mean it only occurs in conditional sentences. JM also calls it waw of resumption or waw of linkage.
always presupposes that the train of thought has somehow been arrested. The Waw with its basic sense of and serves vividly to pick up the train of thought which has been held up or slowed down ...

They add in a note (608):

In order to render this Waw, which has no equivalent in English, we have had recourse to words such as then (Fr. alors, eh bien), the nuance of which is much stronger than that of the Hebrew. The Germ. so is much closer in meaning to the Waw of apodosis.

Other points relevant for translation

- NLT07 translates “they are still guilty.” This emphasis is in line with the whole chapter, but it is not the focus of these verses.
- In order to avoid the doubling of “if” (first in v. 2, and then in v. 3), the UBS Handbook recommends an introductory phrase for v. 2, as in GNTD: “would have to observe the following rules.” Cf. T4T: “This is what must be done if someone sins ...”.
  One language related to Arabic has a connector allowing for this construction:

  2 As for the matter of a person who sins unintentionally ... 3 If it is the anointed priest who sins, ...
  Thus, a new topic is introduced. This is an appropriate solution. Protases are typically topic clauses.¹⁷
- At the beginning of v. 14, temporal adverbs might smooth the transition, e.g., “Once you realize” (CEVUS06) / “then as soon as” (GNTD).
  NET08 finds a different way, putting the temporal clause at the end:

  “ 14 the assembly must present a young bull for a sin offering when the sin they have committed becomes known.”
- The tense depends on the receptor language. Instead of “If a person sins”, some languages might prefer, or require, the past: “If someone has sinned” (e.g., French PDV2017, “It is the high priest who has committed a sin”) (v. 3).¹⁸

¹⁸ Original: “C’est le grand-prêtre qui a commis un péché”.
3.1.2 The meaning of אָשַׁם āšam

How should this verb be translated in 4:13, 22, 27? Let us review the debate. 19 Milgrom (1991:343) translates “and they feel guilt”, and comments: 20

Contrary to usual translations, āšam without an object does not refer to a state of guilt; rather, ... it denotes the suffering brought on by guilt, expressed now by words such as qualms, pangs, remorse, and contrition. āšam would then mean to be conscience-smitten or guilt-stricken, and henceforth it will be rendered as “feel guilt.” 21

Somewhat differently, Kiuchi (2007) translates “and they realize guilt”, and Rendtorff (2004) and Hieke (2014) have an equivalent for “become aware”. 22 But there are some problems with the translation “feel guilty”:

- Our texts should not be reduced to addressing cases where the sentiment of being “conscience-smitten” matters. The heading in 4:2 addresses the problem of sin, and the result statements are about atonement and forgiveness (e.g., 4:20). These apply no matter how a person feels.
- The clause with the noun אַשְׁמָה āšmâ should not be rendered with “thus bringing a feeling of guilt on the people”. It states a fact. Here, Milgrom himself translates “to the detriment of the people”.

  The meaning of wē’āšēm in this verse can hardly be “incurring guilt” (NEB) or “is guilty” (RSV) because the contiguous “he shall bear his responsibility” would render it a tautology.

  But what we feel to be tautologous or redundant is quite subjective. 24
- The meaning “realize guilt” is also questionable, because the sin is said to “become known” (יָדַע yāda’) only in v. 14.

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19 Where commentaries comment directly on the verse under discussion, page numbers are not given here.
20 In his Comment “The Reparation Offering”, A. Etymology (pp. 339–345).
21 Wenham (1979), Gane (2004), and Sklar (2013) more or less follow Milgrom (1991).
22 Original: “sich seiner Schuld bewusst werden”, which is closer to mental “awareness / consciousness” than to heartfelt “realizing”.
24 To cite just one example, the last clause of 4:2 could be seen as superfluous. Also, there are several places where someone mentions an action, and then adds the explicit statement that it brings about guilt (see Gen. 26:10; 1Chr. 21:3; Judg. 21:22).
Rather differently, Levine (1989:23) holds the verb means “to be in a state of guilt” and translates “and thereby incur guilt”. He is convinced the verb does not imply any spiritual or psychological change in the offender, which might induce him to admit to an offense he had previously concealed or denied.

Regarding the verb יָדַע, yāda’, Levine states clearly:

“Awareness [of sin] is not expressed in our text by the verb ’asham, ... Awareness is expressed by the verb yada’, ‘to know’.

Watts translates “and they become guilty”. He says (2013:342):

Interpreters’ difficulties stem from demanding a level of technical precision from language that is instead being deployed impressionistically for rhetorical effect. When repeated word plays are recognized in chaps. 4–5, the interpretive question becomes what effect the writers were trying to achieve rather than what exact meaning the words carry (see also at v. 3 above). As it happens, the English word “guilt” carries many of the same ambiguities as Hebrew אָשַׁם ...

In these legal texts I would not speak of “rhetorical effect” or “word plays”, but I agree that we are tempted to confine the Hebrew term unduly.

Similarly, Hartley (1992:62) sees both the legal meaning – that “the sinners are culpable for their act” – and the emotional or dynamic nature. This is probably right. We may assume that a legal text would not be concerned with feelings of guilt unless guilt indeed existed.

Translation

In 4:13, no English version uses “feel guilt(y)” – and probably rightly so. The majority retain the traditional “be(come) guilty” (e.g., CEVUS06) or “incur guilt” (e.g., REB89), and this works well. In vv. 22, 27 “recognize guilt” is preferable. The wording “find oneself guilty” is broader and could be used in all these verses, and also covers some of the later cases.

A few versions say “realize (one’s) guilt”. This presents a challenge in combination with v. 14a, see NIV11R: “13 ... when they realize their guilt 14 and the sin they committed becomes known, ...”. Are these two events or one?

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26 The UBS Handbook does not comment on the problem presented here (its base translations RSV and TEV are both traditional in their renderings).
Interpreters struggle with the translation of דְעָה הַחַטָּאת wənôd‘āh hahattā‘t ‘and the sin becomes known’ at the beginning of v. 14. One wonders why wənôd‘āh follows and does not precede וְאָשֵׁמוּ wə’āšēmü. The text would read easier if the “becoming known” happened before the “being/feeling guilty”.

Some think the congregation somehow “feels guilty” even before realizing what they did wrong. Others think it is the becoming-known that causes the feeling of guilt. The verbs are simply reversed. But the text can be read as it stands: The scenario is described and the guilt is stated (v. 13), and before the offering procedures are spelled out, the final condition – that the sin becomes known – is mentioned. Many versions translate “when/once the sin becomes known”. Reversing the order of the two verbs (cf. 5:3–4) would be problematic: that could sound as if the becoming-known is a condition for guilt to occur.

3.1.3 Other issues: א או ‘or’ in vv. 23, 28

There is an issue which I did not include in the discussion above, but which is relevant. If וְאָשֵׁמ wə’āšēm is understood as “be guilty”, then it comes as a surprise that vv. 23, 28 are introduced by א או ‘or’. “Being guilty” and “sin becoming known” are not two cases that would exclude each other. At this point, the logic breaks down, for example in KJV54:

When a ruler hath sinned ..., and is guilty; or if his sin ... come to his knowledge ...

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A translation like this is not satisfying. There are textual variants for אֹ 'ô, but commentators do not accept them as the solution to the problem. The grammars and dictionaries do not put forward a real alternative for ‘or’. But when one translates אָשָּׁם 'āšam in v. 22 with “feel/realize guilt”, the continuation with “or” sounds logical. Milgrom translates: “and he feels guilt or he is informed of the wrong...” and comments: “Either the chieftain discovers his error or someone else informs him.” He adds (1991:243f.) that in v. 14, “or” is not used, because with the community, the insight can only come from among it, not from the outside. To sum up, it seems best to accept “or”.

Translation: “Or” was apparently felt to be problematic, and so some versions simply treat the clause as a continuation of the condition (e.g., NASB “if”; NRSV “once the sin that he has committed is made known”). More adequately, others do say “or” (e.g., ESVUS16, NJPS), and use “realize one’s guilt” for וְאָשֶׁם wə'āšēm in the preceding vv. 22, 27 (“be guilty” would not make sense). Similarly, NET08 presents another attractive possibility with “plead guilty”:

Whenever a leader ... sins ..., and he pleads guilty, or his sin that he committed is made known to him, ...

An alternative for “plead guilty” would be “recognize one’s guilt”.

---

31 See Hartley (1992), Kiuchi (2007), Noth (1977), and Rendtorff (2004). Hartley explains:

GKC § 69w takes the א in הוֹדֵעַ as an example where א stands instead of א in the hoph. LXX reads καὶ γνωσθῇ = אם נודע, “if it is known,” for MT אָשֶׁם, so too Syr. The particle או, “or,” is difficult in Heb. grammar, but this phrase should not be quickly emended, for it occurs again in v. 28.

In his translation, he has “or” in v. 23, but “and” in v. 28.

32 JM has two relevant entries that do not seem to fully match up. In § 167q ad loc., they translate “or”. But according to § 117d, they see a succession in 4:14, and then have a note “cf. vs. 23” – thus suggesting a succession there too – which would require “and”, not “or”. The case is not addressed in BHRG, IBHS, GBH, HAHAT, HALOT, or NIDOTTE. Either these two verses were neglected, or they were not considered exceptional, i.e., א או means ‘or’ here as it does elsewhere. Keil (1989) translated “If”.

33 Others who explicitly follow this understanding are Kiuchi (2007), Sklar (2013), Noth (1977), Rendtorff (2004:183), and Hieke (2014), and also Wenham (1979) and Hartley (1992), but without comment. Levine (1989) claims “there is no contrast implied, as between one’s own recollection versus being informed by others”, but he does not comment on how to read the א או here.
3.1.4 Other issues: אֲשֶׁר 'ašer in v. 22

The protases are introduced by אִם 'im or וְאִם wə'im in vv. 3, 13, 27, but by אֲשֶׁר 'ašer in v. 22. Wenham (1979) and Milgrom (1991) agree that this unusual word is probably used to signal the transition from the extraordinary sin offering, whose blood is brought inside the Tent, to the ordinary one in the following two cases.

Translation: It is not wrong to use “if” in all four verses. But carrying over the signal for a new kind of case is all the better, where it is easy to do so in the receptor language. The Russian SYNOD does this with “А если” (= But if).

3.2 Lev. 5:1–5 When is a sin offering needed?

This passage says what necessitates a sin offering. Verses 2–4 present various cases or, as the UBS Handbook says, examples. The ellipses ‹…› after “guilty” in the table show that the protases are incomplete sentences and all lead up to the summary in v. 5.
Table 3: The four cases of אָשַׁם 'āšam in Leviticus 5:1–6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ובש כִּי־תֶחֱטָא</td>
<td>Now when a person sins in that he has heard a public adjuration to testify, and – though able to testify (whether he has seen or otherwise known [what happened]) –, (if he) does not tell it, then he must bear the consequences.</td>
<td>– נֶפֶשׁ כִּי kî begins the main protasis. – The hearing alone does not make one a sinner. – The double ‚א (‘whether ... or ...’) sets out two possibilities. – אִמ introduces the condition that makes the person a sinner. – Apodosis. – This key phrase is used in a somewhat untypical way. See notes below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>... ובש אֲשֶׁר תִּגַּע</td>
<td>Or if a person touches any unclean thing, ..., and/though it is hidden from him [for a while], he became unclean, and is (thus) guilty, ...</td>
<td>– ‚א or’ introduces an alternative case. It is on the level of נֶפֶשׁ kî above, not on the level of אִמ above. – נֶפֶשׁ 'ašer is rare for נֶפֶשׁ kî. – Explicating “for a while” avoids the idea that he is to bring an offering without knowing of his sin (cf. vv. 3–4).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3.2.1 Protasis or apodosis?

The cases where וְאָשֵׁם wə'āšēm occurs in 5:2–4 can easily be handled in the same way as those in 4:13ff., i.e., as protases. This in itself is an argument for translating them in the same way. If the author intended a different

| 3 | Or if he touches human uncleanness ..., and it is hidden from him [for a while], – even though he [first] knew [it] –, and is (thus) guilty, … | - Two more alternative cases. – “Hidden” might not be natural. For other options see under “Translation”. – The implied “it” in v. 3 refers to the fact that he became unclean, the implied “it” in v. 4 to the fact that he used God’s name in vain in the oath. – Switching the clauses makes it simpler: “and he first knew it, but then it was hidden from him”. |
| 4 | Or if a person swears thoughtlessly ..., and it is hidden from him [for a while], – although he knew [it] –, and is (thus) guilty in one of these, … | - switch the clauses makes it simpler: “and he first knew it, but then it was hidden from him”. |
| 5 | Then, when he recognizes his guilt in one of these, he shall confess that in which he has sinned. | - הָיָה wəhāyāh summarizes the above possibilities, before the apodosis begins. |
| 6 | He shall bring his penalty for guilt to the LORD for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock ... as a sin offering ... | - For the exceptional meaning “penalty / reparation” for אָשָׁם āšām (not: “guilt/ reparation offering”), see the UBS Handbook and commentaries. |
understanding from before, the reader may expect a signal. It is all the more interesting that both RSV and GNTD put the verb into the apodosis, which differs from what they did in 4:13. Although the UBS Handbook takes these as its base translations, it does not take up this question. So translators need to decide for themselves. Those commentaries who offer their own translations do use protases.34

Further arguments for reading a protasis:

- **Verses 5b–6 determine what the person in view has to do.** It is unlikely that the verses before v. 5b already contain an apodosis.
- **In 5:5, יֶאְשַׁם ye’šam indisputably occurs in the protasis.** If there, in the summary, אָשַׁם ‘āšam serves to describe the scenario that leads to action, the verb should be read in the same way in the individual preceding cases.
- **5:4 ends with לְאַחַת מֵאֵלֶּה l’ahat mē’ēleh “in [any] one of these”.** This indefinite expression can hardly be read as apodosis.

Arguments for reading an apodosis:

- **In 5:1, וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנ wənāśā’ ‘awōn is taken by most as apodosis: “then he will bear his responsibility”**. Since אָשַׁם ‘āšam in vv. 2–4 is a synonym to וְנָשָׂא wənāšā’, one expects it to be treated analogously (as in NASB).
- **Verse 5 begins with wahāyā, marking a deeper incision.** Verses 2–4 may contain “preparatory” apodoses, and v. 5 may take things up from there (“If then…”).

Either way, vv. 1–4 express the state of affairs before the offering is brought. Translating אָשַׁם wə’āšēm as an interim stage does justice to all aspects: “and is (thus) guilty, ...”.

**Translation**

In many languages, it is acceptable to have a series of **multiple conditions** (“If ..., and (if) ..., and (if) ..., then ...”). Such sentences become long but are still logical and readable. Presumably more problematic are sentences that present **alternative or contrastive cases** (“If ..., or if ..., or if ..., then ...”). In such constructions, the risk is higher that the information load is too heavy and the
connection between the first protasis and the final apodosis gets lost by the reader. Here in 5:1–6 we find both multiple conditions and alternative cases!

Translation strategies for this and other issues in 5:1–6 include:

- **A transitional rendering of the verb ‏וְאָשֵׁם‏** ūə'āšēm in vv. 2–4 (stating the interim result) will work well. The versions are divided (compare, e.g., ESVUS16 putting it into the protasis, with GNTD putting it into the apodosis). What is important is that the reader can make the connection to v. 5.

- **Punctuation** will matter. A simple period at the end of v. 2 (as in Hartley 1992) will not work as the end of a protasis. A semicolon (as in NJPS) is the minimum requirement, in order to signal that the sentence will be continued. An ellipsis ‹…› as in the table might work in some languages. Punctuation is less of a problem if the last clause is rendered as an apodosis (as in GNTD).

- The **layout** can help. Beginning a new line for each of the vv. 2, 3, and 4 will make the passage more reader-friendly. In addition, these could be indented (as for instance in NJPS, German GCLNR00).

- The UBS Handbook recommends an **introductory statement** as in GNTD: “Sin offerings are required in the following cases” (similar in the German HFA).

- NLT07 begins v. 1 with “If you are called to testify …”, and introduces each of the following cases in vv. 2–4 with “Or suppose you …”. This prepares the reader for a new scenario. (To conclude each scenario, NLT07 finishes with a “preliminary” apodosis saying: “you must admit your guilt”. While the idea is in line with v. 5 (“shall confess”), it goes beyond what the verb means here.) NLT07 uses “Suppose …” also in 5:17 and 5:21 [English 6:2].

- The French FC97 sets out at v. 1 with “Supposons …” (= Let’s suppose ...), and then begins each of the vv. 2, 3, and 4 with “Autre exemple: …” (= Another example: ...) (similarly the French PDV2017).

- Another possibility could be a construction with **modal verbs**: “The person might have ... or might have ... He then has to ...”.

- In v. 2, some versions use the -ing form: “being unclean ...” (NJPS, REB89). This can avoid one if-clause.

- **Verse 1 is complex, and a literal rendering would be unclear:** “Now if a person sins and hears a public adjuration [to testify], and he is a witness ..., if he does not tell it, ...”. Neither being a witness nor hearing an adjuration makes anyone a sinner! It is only when he does not speak up that he becomes guilty. Almost all versions do something to deal with this. One successful restructuring is found in NIV11R: “If anyone sins because they do not speak up when they
hear a public charge to testify ...". Note how using both “if” and “when” can help to describe the situation. See NRSV and others for more solutions.

- Verse 1 has a double ה ו (‘whether ... or ...’), which makes the protasis even more complicated. The whole phrase can be set in between parentheses (e.g., NET08) or long dashes. Perhaps more elegant is an unspectacular “or”, as in NIV11R: “something they have seen or learned about”.

### 3.2.2 The meaning of אָשַׁם ‘āš

Regarding וְאָשֵׁם wə'āšēm in vv. 2–4, just looking at the English versions, the question is whether to say “be(come) guilty”, or “realize guilt”. Obviously, the latter option only works in a protasis.

Wenham (1979) and Milgrom (1991) translate “feel guilt(y)”. Sklar (2013) says about the sinners:

> They become aware of their sin by suffering guilt’s consequences, allowing them to reflect on what they might have done wrong.36


Regarding יֶאְשַׁם ye'šam in 5:5, Milgrom (1991:344) feels that the requirement for confession “makes better sense if it is motivated by genuine regret, in other words, if the sinner confesses because he ‘feels guilt’.”

Levine (1989, on v. 2) retains the objective “incur guilt”, affirming that “impurity is the basis of the offender’s guilt”.

So what should a translator do? Some arguments to consider are these:

- **When v. 1 says “he will be held responsible”, it states an objective fact.** Likely, vv. 2–4 do the same. This suggests translating “then he will be guilty”.

- **In v. 2, the clause נָאֵי ה וְתָּמֵא וְהוּ wəhû' tāme’ “and he is unclean” already expresses a conclusion.** It can hardly be read as “and if he is unclean”. The simplest continuation is to read the immediately following וְאָשֵׁם wə'āšēm in the same way, thus “he has become unclean and is guilty”.

- **In 5:3–4, the various translations “be(come) guilty”, “feel guilty”, “realize guilt” and “become aware of guilt” all work. But the vague “feeling guilty” becomes obsolete once the matter is known. And “feel/realize guilt” is an unnecessary weakening compared to “be

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36 Similar Gane (2004:120).

37 Originals: “sich seiner Schuld bewusst werden”.

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guilty”. Whatever the psychic and social dynamics, what the cases in vv. 1–4 have in common is that the person “finds himself guilty”.

- In the end, it is a secondary question whether the “knowing” refers to the time of the sinful act or a later point in time. The “knowing” is not what makes one guilty, but it is what leads the person to action. 38

**Translation**

Among the English versions, in translating וְאָשֵׁם wə’āšēm some retain “be(come) guilty”, as in 4:13ff. (e.g., KJV54; similarly NRSV, switching from “incur guilt” to “be guilty”). Those who had “realize one’s guilt” before, keep that (e.g., NIV11R). Some who used “be(come) guilty / incur guilt” in 4:13, now use “realize guilt” (e.g., GNTD). This reflects the problem that the objective “be guilty” does not sound logical here: “and then he comes to know it, he will be guilty” (so NASB, v. 3) sounds as if the “knowing” leads into the state of guilt. (This is not an issue if the knowing is interpreted as referring to the time of the sinful act, as in NJPS.)

I suggest that in vv. 2–4, וְאָשֵׁם wə’āšēm can be translated with “and is (thus) guilty”, as in 4:13. In v. 5, for כִּי־יֶאְשַׁם kî-ye’sam one could say “when he has become guilty”, but “when he recognizes his guilt” better takes into account the context (cf. NIV11R “become aware that they are guilty”). The fact of guilt is not at issue. It is a matter of the person gaining the insight.

3.2.3 **Other issues: the phrase וּלְהוּ יָדַע wəhû yāda’ in 5:3, 4**

The phrase וּלְהוּ יָדַע wəhû yāda’ in vv. 3, 4 presents a major problem that the English versions skip over. The pronoun interrupts the waqatal series. As a waqatal form, the verb would read easily: “and (then) he knows / finds out about it”, which would mean the person learns about the uncleanness, and the guilt is confirmed in the next clause. But the way it stands, it means “and he knew about it”. 39 There are two interpretations:

Some take the phrase to refer to the time when the act was committed. In other words, that action was done knowingly. These commentators have to explain:

- how something that he did “knowingly” can “be hidden” from a person.
  This is a problem if “hidden” is taken as synonymous with בִּשְׁגָגָה bîšgāgā

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38 The same applies to v. 2; the case in v. 1 is slightly different in that the sinner knows from the beginning and eventually wants to do something about it.

39 Cf. JM § 119a–e on w-qatalī and its idea of succession or even logical consequence, and its avoidance.
“inadvertently”, but it can be resolved if it is taken as “forgotten/ignored [afterwards]”, and that is the view of several commentators. Milgrom (1991) takes the form as a **pluperfect**. On v. 2, he concludes that “originally he knew that he had become impure but subsequently he forgot (Tg. Ps.-J.)”.40

- why the chronological order is not kept, where the “knowing” would come first, and the “being hidden” afterwards.
- why the passive (nip’al) form of הָלָם ‘lm would be used for a person’s own suppressing of the facts, when really he knew better.
- why the verb ידְעָ yd’ should mean ‘to know [here: all along]’ rather than having its prototypical meaning ‘to find out [here: later]’. But with such a frequent verb of such broad usage, both meanings are well-attested, and later in 5:17–18 both the durative “know” and the inceptive “find out” work.
- why the circumstances are expressed with a qatal, not a participle (“knowingly”).

Others retain the meaning **“and (then) comes to know it”**.41 They have to explain:

- the interruption of the wəqatal series, all the more since 4:14 uses a wəqatal. One argument for not overestimating the unusual form is that in v. 2 we find the same interruption, although with a different verb: אָשַׁם וְהוּא wəhû’ ṭāmē’ “and he became unclean”.42 The clause might mean he was unclean from the beginning, whether he realized it or not.
- why the person’s own knowing should matter; if it were someone else informing him of the uncleanness of what he touched, then, presumably, the same procedure would apply.

Either way, this clause remains problematic. Tentatively, I favour the first view.

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40 Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (an ancient Jewish text). So also Levine (1989) and Sklar (2013). A slight problem with this is that the opposite phrase in 5:17 יָדַע לֹא wəlō’-yāda’ “and he did not know” extends to the present: “and he [still] does not know” (see below), whereas here the phrase יָדַע הוּא wəhû’ yāda’ refers to the past. But one could say the “knowing” is only interrupted and refers to the present as well.

41 E.g., Rendtorff (2004), somewhat hesitantly.

42 There, Hartley (1992) explains:

Instead of אָשַם, “he has become unclean,” codices from the Cairo Geniza read ידְעָ, “he comes to know,” as in vv 3, 4. Elliger (56) suggests this alternative reading. It has much to commend it; the MT is followed as the harder reading.
A mixture of both is found in Wenham (1979): he adopts the idea of forgetting when he translates וְנֶעְלַם מִמֶּנּוּ wəne'lam mimmenû “it is hidden from him” idiomatically with “and it slips his memory”, but he continues with translating וְהוּא יָדַע wəhû' yāda’ with “but then later he discovers it”, so it refers to after the event (cf. REB89 “and it is unremembered by him, and becoming aware of it he realizes his guilt”).

**Translation:** Almost all versions translate the phrase as if it were part of the waqatal series, e.g., NASB “and then he comes to know it”. This makes for a fluent reading but ignores the unusual grammatical form. NET08, by saying “but he himself has later come to know it”, manages to keep the past tense. But it is not essentially different from NASB. It still follows the sequence of “(1) initial act in unawareness, (2) later coming to know, (3) finally stating the guilt”. An exception is NJPS with “though he has known it”. Here, the clause refers to the time of the act.

- I would, with some hesitation, follow NJPS. A suggestion for v. 3 is this:

  Or if he touches human uncleanness ..., **and he first knew** it, but then it escaped him (for a while), he is guilty, ...

- If one follows the majority of versions (with limited support from the commentaries, as far as I can see), where the “knowing” refers to a later point in time, the translation should avoid the idea that guilt only begins with knowing about the sin (“you are guilty as soon as you realize what you have done”, GNTD).

- גַּזְפָּת wəhû' yāda’ is found in vv. 3, 4, but “missing” in v. 2. NLT07 fills it in, with the same wording. This is probably an unneeded “improvement”.

- For translating “it is/was hidden from him”, some offer more natural wordings: “even if he did not realize it” (NET08); “even though they are unaware of it” (NIV11R); “the fact has escaped him” (NJPS). “Even if he ignored it / forgot about it” would be clearer, but perhaps too concrete and restrictive.

- Another point about the “becoming known”: suppose a person becomes aware of his error immediately, and is willing to act immediately, then the same offering procedures would apply. Therefore we may translate concessively: “even if / though it was hidden for a while”.

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43 Milgrom switches the clauses around (here v. 3): “and, though he has known it, the fact escapes him but (thereafter) he feels guilt;” He speaks of the person forgetting about his impurity (1991: 298). Kiuchi (2007:100) thinks that the touching of the unclean thing was “known subconsciously (v. 2) or consciously (vv. 3–4)”. He translates וְהוּא יָדַע wəhû' yāda’ with “while he is conscious about it”.
3.2.4 Other issues: the phrase וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנ wənāšāʼ ‘awōnô in 5:1

Normally, וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנ wənāšāʼ “wōnô means “he will bear his punishment / iniquity / guilt”. It is elsewhere used as an apodosis and is the “final word” on a case (e.g., in 7:18). But here it is used differently. Like וְאָשֵׁמ wə’āšēm, it describes the sinner’s initial situation and, in that sense, becomes part of the protasis. But vv. 5–6 show that the punishment is not irrevocable, and that confessing and sacrificing are the way out of the threatening situation. More freely, the meaning is: “He would normally have to bear his punishment”. Therefore, in a dynamic translation the above phrase should not sound like the final judgment (as in ESVUS16 “he shall bear his iniquity”). That would shut off the possibility of the very redemption which is presented afterwards!

Translation: Some translate the phrase in the same way as וְאָשֵׁמ wə’āšēm(û) in the next verses: “he is guilty” (e.g., French PDV2017; German ZÜR). That makes the distinct phrase disappear. Better are REB89 (“he must bear the consequences”) or CEVUS06 (“you can be punished”). These versions state that the person is in danger but leave open the possibility of a solution. NIV11R (“they will be held responsible”) is also attractive, but Sklar (2013) finds this too weak.

3.3 Lev. 5:17–19 What if a person does not know what he did wrong?

Leviticus 5:14–19 deals with the reparation offering, in particular concerning the desecration of holy things. Verses 17–19 address a special case: What should the reparation offering be when someone has a suspicion that he might have sinned, but cannot find out what his sin might have been?

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44 The phrase states liability or responsibility. It occurs in the same sense as here in Lev. 5:17; 7:18; 17:16; 19:8; 20:17, 19; 22:16. According to Milgrom (on 5:1), “The expression always implies that the punishment will be meted out by God, not by man ...”.

45 Hieke (2014:269): “The original apodosis “he bears his guilt” (and has to reckon with God’s punishment) is formally incorporated into the protasis in v. 1: at first he bears his guilt – then, however, when he confesses, atonement can happen (v. 5).” (Original: “Die ursprüngliche Apodosis »er trägt seine Sündenlast« (und muss mit der Strafe Gottes rechnen) wird formal in die Protasis in V 1 hereingenommen: zunächst trägt er seine Sündenlast – dann aber, wenn er bekennt, kann eine Entsündigung erfolgen (V 5).”) Cf. the discussion of the parallel case in 5:1.


47 For similar wordings, cf. French BDS: “il portera la responsabilité de sa faute.”; NBS: “il sera chargé de sa faute”; and German Menge: “und so in Verschuldung gerät”.
### Table 4: The case of אָשַׁם 'āšam in Leviticus 5:15–19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verses</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15–16</td>
<td>נֶפֶשׁ כִּי־תִמְעֹל מַעַל וְחָטְאָה בִּשְׁגָגָה מִקָּדְשֵׁי יְהוָה</td>
<td>When a person acts unfaithfully and sins unintentionally against the LORD’s holy things,</td>
<td>– nepeš ki begins the main protasis. Cf. 4:2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>then he shall bring his reparation offering to the LORD: a ram ...</td>
<td>– Apodosis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר חָטָא מִן־הַקֹּדֶשׁ יְשַׁלֵּם סֵף וְאֶת־חֲמִישִׁת לַכֹּהֵן עָלָיו וְנָתַן אֹת</td>
<td>and for that which he has sinned against the holy thing, he shall make restitution and shall add to it a fifth part of it and give it to the priest.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Now if a person [suspects he] has sinned and done any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and/but does not know [whether he did], he is reckoned to be guilty (or: but feels guilty) [nevertheless], and must bear the consequences:</td>
<td>– אָשַׁם introduces a sub-case. נֶפֶשׁ כִּי is the same as in v. 15. The sequence is unique in the OT.48 The כִּי is like a second “if” and remains untranslated. וְלֹא־יָדַע “does not know” has the implied object “it” referring to the fact that he did wrong (or perhaps to the question what he did wrong).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Complex Conditional Sentences and the Verb אָשַׁם ‘āšam in Leviticus 4–5

Watch the tense. The sin happened in the past, but the state of not-knowing continues. The assumption is that he has a bad conscience.

Apodosis.

The additional “fifth part”, required in v. 16, is missing here, because the embezzled value remains unknown.

“does not know”: for the tense, see the remark above on v. 17.

Protasis or apodosis?

In 5:17, deciding whether אָשֵׁם wa’āšēm is protasis or apodosis, is complicated by the following phrase והואא ‘ənāśā’ ‘wōnô. It comes as an apodosis. But we need to note that it is not used to express a “terminal judgment” (for the same issue in 5:1, see § 3.2.4). Rather, it serves to describe the situation before the offering is brought. Therefore, I rendered it with “he must bear the consequences” again. It is a hinge clause, preparing for what follows.

3.3.1 Protasis or apodosis?

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One could even include וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנ wanāšā’ ‘wōnô in the protasis, as several commentators do.⁴⁹ One argument for this would be that elsewhere in Lev. 4–5 the apodosis begins with the concrete actions that the guilty person has to undertake.

Taking וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנ wanāšā’ ‘wōnô as apodosis leaves two options for the verb וְאָשֵׁם wə'āšēm that precedes it: it is still part of the protasis, or it already begins the apodosis. Normally, the synonymous phrases וְאָשֵׁם wə'āšēm and וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנ wanāšā’ ‘wōnô should be rendered in the same way. But as we will see in the next section (§ 3.3.2), here the subjective experience matters more than in earlier cases: if the sinful matter itself remains unknown, it is this feeling of guilt that urges the person to bring an offering. In the course of the passage the feeling is relevant. Therefore, it is better to put וְאָשֵׁם wə'āšēm in the protasis.

Regarding the construction of if-clauses, note that in 5:2–4, א ’o ‘or’ introduced alternative cases, for which the same apodosis applied. By contrast, here in v. 17, אִם wə’āšēm introduces a contrastive case from the one in v. 15, and consequently the instructions regarding the offering also differ some.⁵⁰

Translation

As to וְאָשֵׁם wə'āšēm in 5:17, NET08 is an example for including it in the protasis. By contrast, NIV11R has it in the apodosis.

As to וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנ wanāšā’ ‘wōnô, regardless of several commentators taking the phrase as the end of the protasis, no English version does so.⁵¹ But an apodosis is also a valid rendering. The challenge is to combine וְאָשֵׁם wə'āšēm and וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנ wanāšā’ ‘wōnô with each other and with what follows.

The table shows one option: “he is reckoned to be guilty (or: but feels guilty) and must bear the consequences: …”. This way, וְאָשֵׁם wə'āšēm is part of the description of the situation, and וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנ wanāšā’ ‘wōnô prepares for the following instructions. A colon at the end of v. 17 can point to what the responsibility entails. Milgrom (1991) uses an elegant transitional construction:

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⁴⁹ Wenham (1979), Sklar (2013), Hieke (2014), Maier (2008), Watts (2013); not all of them do the same in 5:1, probably due to the list continuing with further cases. Hartley’s wording and punctuation are ambiguous. Kiuchi (2007) has וְאָשֵׁם wə'āšēm in the protasis, but וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנ wanāšā’ ‘wōnô in the apodosis.

⁵⁰ Likewise, the א ’o in 4:23, 28 introduced alternative cases that lead to the same result, whereas in 4:13, 27 וְאָשֵׁם wə’āšēm – and אֲשֶׁר ašer in v. 22 – introduced cases that had to be distinguished from each other, due to the different status of the people in view.

⁵¹ Menge, however, clearly takes all of v. 17 as protasis. Original: “und er unbewußt in Schuld geraten ist und ein Unrecht auf sich geladen hat, 18 so soll er ...”.

“... and he feels guilt, he shall bear his responsibility by bringing to the priest ...”.

A failure which is only suspected to have happened nevertheless calls for an offering. This can be expressed with an adversative construction, e.g., “even though he does not know what it was”, or “he counts as guilty nevertheless” (cf. NASB “still”; KJV54 “yet”, NET08 “although”, NLT07 “even if”).

### 3.3.2 The meaning of וָאָשַׁם 'āšam

For the overall understanding of these verses, I quote Wenham (1979:107–108) representatively. He explains that this case differs from the first where the offense was known, in that this time the offender does not know what he has done wrong: but did not realize it (v. 17). ... The discovery that he has done wrong comes through his conscience. He feels guilty and starts to suffer for it, i.e., bears his iniquity.

This then is an instance of a suspected trespass against sacred property, one of the most dreaded sins in antiquity. [Milgrom 1976:76ff.] Someone suspects he has sinned, but does not know exactly how. ... This sacrifice served then to pacify oversensitive Israelite consciences.52

Levine further comments (1989:32):

The rabbinic tradition understands the laws of 5:17–19 to mean that the offender did not know for certain, but only suspected, that he may have committed an offense. In effect, he had no positive, ultimate knowledge of the offense, and this is the sense of the clause ve-hu' lo' yada', “he did not know” – for certain. ... [He further points to Job 1:5.]

The initial protasis in v. 17 (literally, “if a person sins”) includes the idea of a suspicion.53

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52 Keil (1989) saw the difference from the former case in that “the violation of right ... was of such a kind as not to allow of material compensation.” Maier (2008:102) follows this, saying that the value of the offering speaks against only appeasing the conscience. But the interpretation by Wenham (1979) and Levine (1989), described above, is shared by many others, e.g., Milgrom (1976), Hartley (1992), Rendtorff (2004), Gane (2004), Baker (2008), Sklar (2013), Hieke (2014), Watts (2013).

53 Leviticus 5:17 is not the only instance where Hebrew describes a possibility without using an equivalent for the words “suspect / suspicion”. Lev. 13:2 describes what could be skin disease. Few versions address this. NLT07 does well with “that might develop into a serious skin disease” (cf. 13:42f.). Cf. the case of the suspected adulteress in Num. 5:11ff.
Within the above frame, the meaning of וְאָשֵׁם  is taken variously as “become / feel / realize guilt(y)”, etc. In 5:17, Milgrom (1991:334) translates “and he feels guilt”, claiming that “this is the only logical rendering and that it must end the protasis (and not begin the apodosis).” He thinks (343) that “realize guilt” cannot be right, because he takes לֹא־יָדַע  “he did not know” to mean that the action was done unconsciously; thus it cannot be realized later. But Levine cautions us when he says (1989:31f.) on 5:17:

In verses 3–4 the formulation is positive, “and he knew,” whereas here we have ve-lo’ yada’, “he did not know.” The new JPS translation understands this negative formulation to refer to lack of initial knowledge and the following verb, ve-ashem, to refer to the subsequent realization or awareness of guilt ...

[However,] Yada’, “he knew,” refers to ultimate knowledge, not initial knowledge. ... The translation above would make of this verse a repetition of 4:27–35. ... But since the language of legislative formulation is exceedingly precise, one would expect there to be a significant difference ...

Thus Watts (2013) translates in the present, “but they do not know (what it is)”, and with regard to v. 18 affirms that there is “not only inadvertence but also continuing ignorance of the nature of the offence” (Nihan 2007:249). לֹא־יָדַע  ‘he did not know’ in vv. 17–18 is not a mere synonym for בִּשְׁגָגָה  ‘by inadvertence’, but expresses that he never found out what his sin was. Taking יד’ in 5:17 as referring to the time of the sinful act, that is, to the past only, and וְאָשֵׁם  as meaning “then he realized his guilt later” blurs the difference to the case in vv. 15–16, where the sin was at first unnoticed, too.

54 In Milgrom’s explanation on v. 18, it does not become clear how an unconscious act (1991:334) differs from ignorant inadvertence (1991:228).
55 So also Sklar (2013:122f.). Hieke (2014), too, translates “but he does not know it (exactly)” (original: “aber er weiß es nicht (genau)”), and retains the present tense in v. 18: “[the transgression] about which he does not know (exactly)” (original: “[die Verfehlung] um die er nicht (genau) weiß”). This point is not reflected in some of the other translations, although they agree in the overall interpretation of these two verses. (Wenham: “but did not realize it”; Hartley (1992): “without being aware of it”; Rendtorff (2004): “und es nicht gewusst hat”; Kiuchi (2007) “while he does not know it”). The UBS Handbook raises the relevant questions, but in view of the extensive scholarly discussion provides unsatisfactory answers.
Translation

וְלֹא־יָדַע must not be translated with the same vocabulary as בִּשְׁגָגָה, nor must it be translated as referring to the past - that is, knowledge or awareness at the time of the sinful act only. This rules out the renderings in almost all English, French, and German versions (e.g., GN TD: “If any of you sin unintentionally”). NLT07 comes much closer to the meaning in saying “Even if you are unaware of what you have done”. For the reader to better understand the envisioned scenario, one might have to be even more descriptive:

E.g.: “and he does not find out whether he did …”
O r: “but he cannot remember what it was …”.

Keep in mind that the essential factor that makes this case special compared to 4:27–28 and 5:15–16 is that the sinner is not able to pinpoint what he did wrong.

As to עָשֵׁם, some retain “be(come) guilty” (e.g., NASB). Some keep “realize (one’s) guilt” (e.g., NJPS). NIV11R had that earlier in 4:13 and 5:3, but now has “be guilty”. Those who used “be(come) guilty / incur guilt” in 4:13, but “realize guilt” or something else in 5:2 all go back to their former wording (e.g., GNT D). By contrast, NET08 now uses “realize” for the first time. These variations within the same versions show that one rendering does not work everywhere.

Here, “to find oneself guilty / in a state of guilt”, as suggested earlier, still works. It leaves open the question whether sin actually happened, but is not totally subjective either in that it recognizes the potential guilt, or the guilt feeling, as a real problem. One could emphasize the objective side by saying “he is reckoned to be guilty”, or the subjective side by saying “and feels guilty”. “And finds himself guilty” would cover both but might not be natural. “Realize guilt” is not ideal, because it can sound as if insight (knowledge) came eventually.

Apart from the verb itself, there is an additional factor. Almost all scholars agree on the interpretation, but among thirteen English, six French, and ten German versions there is not one model that brings out the idea of a suspicion or bad conscience. They all start out “If anyone sins …”, which misses an important point. Hieke (2014) comes closest by explicating “but he does not know it (for sure)”. But the verse needs restructuring, for example:

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56 Rendtorff (2004), for example, rejects “be guilty” and prefers “become aware of one’s guilt” in other places, but in 5:17, he follows Milgrom’s “feel guilt” (1991:205).
57 Some of them deal better with the similar case in Num. 5:12–13 (e.g., GN TD).
58 Original: “aber er weiss es nicht (genau)”. 
If someone feels guilty, suspecting that he might have sinned by doing any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, he will be held responsible.

One further minor point: Milgrom begins 5:17 with “If, however, a person...”, thereby signalling that this case differs from the previous one.

### 3.4 Lev. 5:21–25 [English 6:2–6] Confessing fraud

This section presents further cases that necessitate a reparation offering. In contrast to Lev. 5:14–19, these cases concern “civil law” – mainly matters of fraud. Hartley (1992:84) explains the situation:

The hope for the victim to recover his property rests only with the wrongdoer’s having a change of heart and making confession. This law recognizes that limitation and provides the means for the sinner to find expiation and at the same time for the victim to recover his loss.

Lev. 5:23 [6:4] is analogous to 5:5 in that a final protasis summarizes all cases.

| Table 5: The case of אָשַׁם ’āšam in Leviticus 5:21–25 [English 6:2–6] |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Verses** | **Hebrew** | **Translation** | **Remarks** |
| 21 [2] | נֶפֶשׁ כִּי | When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, | – נֶפֶשׁ כִּי nepeš kî introduces the main protasis. Cf. 4:2. |
| | וְכִחֵשׁ בַּעֲמִית | and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or security or ... | – או ’ô ‘or’ connects alternative cases. |
Complex Conditional Sentences and the Verb **אָשַׁם** `āšam in Leviticus 4–5

| 22 [3] | ... and swears falsely in regard to any one of the things a man may do and sin thereby, then, when he has sinned and (thus) become guilty (or: then, when he has sinned and recognizes his guilt), he shall restore what he took by robbery or acquired by extortion ...; | – The protasis is continued with another condition, the false oath. – נִשְׁבַּע וְנִשְׁבַּע `am `asher melahat mishakha, **laḥ**`aṭō` ‘to sin’ (inf. cs.) is part of the relative clause.\(^{59}\) – עַל־אַחַת מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה הָאָדָם לַחֲטֹא **wəhāyāh** brings the listing of cases to a close and marks a new start. Cf. 5:5. – קִי **kî** introduces the summarizing protasis. – **וְהָיָה** `ōr ‘or’ connects alternative cases. |
| 23 [4] | ... and he shall make restitution for it in full and add to it one-fifth more. | – The apodosis is continued. |
| 24 [5] | ... and he shall make restitution for it in full and add to it one-fifth more. | – The apodosis is continued. |

### 3.4.1 Protasis or apodosis?

In 5:23 [6:4], in the commentaries and most English versions, both verbs, **כִּי־יֶחֱטָא** kî-yeḥ`ēṭā` wa`āšēm, are translated as protasis (for example NRSV; differently NLT07).\(^{60}\) For the majority, this seems to be intuitively the most natural. As before, the verb **אָשַׁם** `āšam functions as a hinge. It states the verdict that necessitates the actions on the side of the guilty person. This way it makes the transition to the apodosis.

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\(^{59}\) The “sin phrase” **לַחֲטֹא** `aḥaṭot is an infinitive and part of the relative clause. Most versions have it as part of the protasis, as in the table. NASB (“so that he has sinned”) does not precisely reflect the Hebrew here, but the translation in this transitional sense is justified. (“Inf. cs.” = infinitive construct.)

\(^{60}\) Wenham (1979), Milgrom (1991), Hartley (1992), Kiuchi (2007), Hieke (2014). The syntax in Milgrom’s translation is not too felicitous: “When one has thus sinned and, feeling guilt, he shall return that which he robbed ...”. 
Translation

- Again, a transitional protasis works well (see the table).
- GNTD combines vv. 23–24 [English 4–5]. CEVUS06 condenses the verses as well, which is admissible, but the phrase “When this happens, ...” does not capture וְאָשֵׁם at all.
- KJV54 is exceptional. It takes the כִּי kî as causal: “then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore ...”.
- A few versions take the verb וְהֵשִׁיב wəhēšîb “and he shall restore” in 5:23 [6:4] as anticipatory, and begin the apodosis only with the verb וְשִׁלַּם wəšillam “and he shall repay” in the next verse, e.g., NRSV:

  4 when you have sinned and realize your guilt, and would restore what you took by robbery ..., 5 or anything else about which you have sworn falsely, you shall repay ...

Although this rendering hardly distorts the meaning, it seems more straightforward to treat the verb as the beginning of the apodosis, saying what the person should do. Other verses where the וְאָשֵׁם clause is followed by the apodosis suggest so. One could, however, argue that reading וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנ wənāšā’ wōnô in 5:17 as protasis provides a parallel to the above rendering.

3.4.2 The meaning of אָשַׁם 'āšam

In 5:23 [6:4], Milgrom translates with “feel guilt” as before, and is convinced:

  The usage here is fatal for the current rendering “realize guilt” (e.g., NJPS; Kiuchi 1987). The defrauder, embezzler, robber, and the like are quite aware of their guilt. It is their consciences that subsequently disturb them.

But Kiuchi (2007) and Hieke (2014) rightly point out that someone can do a malicious deed consciously, disavow how evil it is, and get pangs of conscience later.

The question of what prompts the sinner to confess is secondary. The fact is: “He has sinned”. The command is: “He shall restore ...”. In between these two verbs we have וְאָשֵׁם. It could just state the interim result: “and has (thus) become guilty” (cf. NLT07). But since the sin is only known to the sinner, and he has to admit it, it is more meaningful to translate “and he recognizes his guilt”.

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61 Similar ESVUS16 “will restore”; NJPS “when one ... would restore”; Kiuchi (2007) “and restores ...”.
Complex Conditional Sentences and the Verb ἀσάμ \(\text{'āšam}\) in Leviticus 4–5

Translation

I suggest “recognize / acknowledge one’s guilt”. “Realize guilt” could suggest that the person sinned, having no idea it was wrong – which does not fit here.

The UBS Handbook proposes “and his guilt becomes known” or “and so becomes answerable” (NJB). These renderings suggest someone else found out about the sin and confronts the offender, and so does GNTD’s “to be found guilty”. But the scenarios envisioned in this section are probably of the kind where sinners come into the open by their own motivation (see Hartley’s comment above).

3.5 Summary

The pattern “When someone sins, he shall bring his offering” is easily recognized in Leviticus 4–5. One point in which the texts differ is what prompts the sinner to seek atonement. This is where the clauses that we studied with the verb ἀσάμ \(\text{'āšam}\) occur. This verb’s ambivalent syntactic position and its oscillating meaning are not accidental.

3.5.1 Protasis or apodosis?

Syntactically, \(\text{וְאָשֵׁמ} \) can be a protasis or an apodosis. Clues from the context encourage taking it as a protasis. Examining the meaning of ἀσάμ \(\text{'āšam}\) revealed that in different places it shows different facets of “be guilty / recognize guilt / feel guilt”, etc. (see § 3.5.2 below). This supports taking \(\text{וְאָשֵׁמ} \) as part of the description of the various scenarios (protases), which then lead to action (apodoses).

But semantically it proved worthwhile to read this verb as describing an interim result (Lev. 4:13 “and are thus guilty, ...”). Practically speaking, this can be a welcome means of interrupting a seemingly endless conditional sentence, and can be implemented with a (preliminary) apodosis (“they are guilty”). This is not just a clever way of handling a long sentence. Rather, such a rendering conveys well the hinge function of this verb.

If \(\text{וְאָשֵׁמ} \) is taken to be part of the protases, the apodoses begin at the latest where an action is expected:

4:14 “then the assembly shall offer a bull”
5:5 “then he shall confess”

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62 If otherwise, it is doubtful that the prescribed procedures would apply. For those who are convicted by outside evidence, there seems to be more severe punishment (see Wenham 1979:109).

63 This is also what we find in the Septuagint.
5:18 “then he shall bring a ram”  
5:23 [6:4] “then he shall restore”.

Translation

As shown in the tables, I suggest a transitional protasis (“and is thus guilty, ...” etc.) as the normal rendering, with adaptations as needed. Alternatively, an apodosis is also possible (“he is guilty”). Such a preliminary apodosis will then be taken up and continued in the next sentence. For details, see the respective sections.

How consistently do the versions treat the four texts? Here we pick two examples.

- NLT07 has וַאֲשֶֽׁמ waʾāšēm(û) in the apodosis everywhere (4:13; 5:2; 5:17; 5:23 [6:4]).
- NRSV translates וַאֲשֶֽׁמ waʾāšēm(û) as part of the protasis in 4:13 and 5:23 [6:4], and as part of the apodosis in 5:2 and 5:17.

In principle, one should aim at placing the translated verb always in the same syntactic slot. But this may conflict with the attempt to make certain verses read smoothly.

3.5.2 The meaning of אָשַׁם ʾāšam

TLOT (§ 3c / 3e, s.v. אָשַׁם ʾāšām guilt) states that the root applies equally to ...

- the sentence of liability for guilt ..., during the period of obligation for guilt ..., and in the event of fulfillment.

In that sense it acknowledges a faceted usage. But it also says (§ 3e):

The modern translation problem consists in the fact that we see primarily the different perspectives and express the distinctions and do not see and express the commonalities that are true of ʾšm despite the distinctions. With attention to the basic intention of the Hebr. term, one should consequently translate: ʾšm qal “to be/become guilt-obligated or liability-obligated”; ʾšm ni. “to suffer guilt-obligation, guilt-liability” (Joel 1:18); ... ʾāšām and ʾašmâ “guilt-obligation, guilt-liability, guilt-responsibility”.

Here, the personal experience discussed earlier is not taken into consideration.

NIDOTTE (1:554 s.v. אָשַׁם (ʾāšam)) says:

Although the existential feeling of guilt likely accompanied offenses, the meaning of “feel guilty” (Milgrom 1976:9–12) or “realize guilt” (Kiuchi 2007:31–34) goes beyond the objective usage of אָשַׁם for a person’s legal/moral culpability. In Lev 4–5, the vb. refers to the
moral/legal standing of a member (4:27; 5:2–5, 17) or a leader (4:22) of
the Israelite community or of the community as a whole (4:13), who
has done wrong inadvertently but has not been punished. It signifies
the state in which the perpetrator finds himself as a result of his
offense.

Although the last sentence is fully on target, the preceding statements do
not take into account some of the intricate details that we have seen in the texts.
On the other hand, Milgrom (1991:344) holds (here on 5:23):

The translations here err even more because they presuppose not just
a tautology but a contradiction. ... It is a mistake in a legal text to state
that after a deliberate crime, a person incurs guilt (NEB), becomes
guilty (RSV), or realizes his guilt (NJPS). Again, only the element of
remorse fits we'ēšēm here. The sinner is stricken with pangs of
conscience: he feels his guilt.

This, as well, restricts the scope of אָשַׁם 'āšam too much. It is simply not
understandable why a legal text should not want to state guilt.

Sklar (2013: 110f.) on 4:13 opts for “suffer guilt’s consequences”. This
rendering reads too involved a process into the simple sentence “If the anointed
priest sins, bringing guilt upon the people ...”. The priest may well recognize his
guilt without any foregoing suffering by the nation.

The challenge is to take into account each context. In a nutshell, our texts
say: “If a person sins, he shall bring his offering “ (cf. e.g., 5:15–16). In between
the sinful act and the presentation of the offering the person “finds himself
guilty”. This is what the verb אָשַׁם 'āšam means. There are different ways for
this to happen, and attempts to restrict the verb’s meaning too much are not
convincing.

Someone might know from the beginning that he does wrong, but
suppress this thought, and later recognize how serious his offense was, and
repent. Someone might not know he does wrong but find out about it himself
afterwards. Or others might tell him and confront him. Or he might only
suspect he did wrong due to his scrupulous conscience. Or he might undergo
suffering and realize this is God’s punishment for some wrong. As to
whether “guilt” is objective or subjective, this distinction might be a
modern one. The texts contain both, but the emphasis is not always the
same.

Let us review the cases: The noun in 4:3 states objective guilt. And “be
guilty” is also the easier rendering for the verb in 4:13, because personal insight
only follows in v. 14. Plus, just “feeling guilty” would not require an offering from
the congregation. But in 4:22, 27, “be guilty” would stand in a strange opposition
to “sin being made known (by others)” in 4:23, 28. Therefore, “recognize guilt (by oneself)” works better.

In 5:2–5, āšam can be read as stating the fact that the person is guilty, or as addressing the situation where the person realizes / recognizes his guilt. Either makes sense. The latter could be argued for as more appropriate, because the temporary forgetting was mentioned before, and because in v. 5 it reads well in the transition. But v. 2 had stated the “being unclean” as a fact, and to that the objective “be guilty” corresponds better.

5:17 might be the most difficult case. Since the sinner only has a suspicion, but cannot determine what he did wrong, his sin cannot be stated purely objectively. The meaning of āšam must at least include a subjective element. Without such a personal sensation, the person would not be compelled to bring an offering. Because of the vague feeling, “realize guilt / become aware of guilt” is not too fitting here. At the same time, this experience is reckoned as real, objective guilt (cf. the mentioning of āwōn). Otherwise, no offering would be required.

5:23 [6:4] is less problematic. The sin is evident, but only known to the sinner, and he has to recognize it as such. āšam can be rightly translated as “be guilty”, but “realize / recognize one’s guilt” is more meaningful in the context.

What emerges is a fairly balanced picture in regard to āšam comprising both objective and subjective guilt. It can include social, religious, and personal aspects. Naturally, we find the legal texts stating that sin results in guilt; more curiously, we also find them concerned with the sinners’ conscious or subconscious inner processes that lead to admitting guilt. The Law tells them what they have to do. And it does so with a glorious promise: “and they will be forgiven” (4:20ff.)!

Translation

Individual verses are not our concern here. The question is how consistently āšam can be rendered. Looking at the same versions as in § 3.5.1., we find that:

- NLT07 uses “be guilty” in 4:13; 5:17; 5:23 [6:4]; “admit guilt” in 5:2 and “become aware of one’s guilt” in 5:5.

Both versions saw the need for adjustments according to context and display a range of renderings that is within the scope of the meaning of āšam as we determined it. Only “admit guilt” (NLT07 in 5:2ff.) is perhaps going too far.

We try to distinguish aspects of meaning, as between “be guilty” and “feel guilty”. To the Hebrew speaker this might not matter that much. So one way of
dealing with this is to represent the Hebrew concept always with the same word or root. Watts’s suggestion (2013:342) is this:

Translations would do well to reproduce the word plays and associations as literally as possible so that readers can tease out the possible implications for themselves.

He uses “become guilty”. The strengths of this approach are recognizability and cohesion. But it also harbours the danger that readers draw wrong conclusions, or simply get stuck. I believe they are served better with context-sensitive renderings.

As a rendering in English that best includes all aspects of אָשַׁם ‘āš in Lev. 4–5, I suggest “to find oneself guilty / to find oneself in the state of guilt”. More naturally, where emphasis is on the Law’s judgment “become guilty” works well (e.g., Lev. 4:13); where the emphasis is on the sinner’s feeling, “feel guilty” is fitting (Lev. 5:17); elsewhere – while “realize guilt” is less than ideal for a number of reasons – wordings like “recognize / comprehend one’s guilt”, or “become aware / be convicted of one’s guilt” are appropriate (e.g., Lev. 5:23 [6:4]).

4 Conclusion

Gaining clarity about exegetical questions – be they syntactic (protasis versus apodosis) or semantic (meaning of אָשַׁם ‘āš) – is essential for producing meaningful translations. For concrete results, see the “Summary” (§ 3.5).

Translation should not be undertaken without a good understanding of the source text. Following a major version does not guarantee quality. We have seen that they can contain translations that are simply not very logical. I refer especially to:

1. in Lev. 4:22–23 the strange contrast between “being guilty” and “sin becoming known”, or the rendering of אֹּ ‘or’ with ‘and’ or ‘then/when’;
2. in 5:1 the announcement “he will bear his punishment”, although the way for redemption is explained a few verses later;
3. in 5:3–4 the state of “guilt” apparently being dependent on the person knowing about it;
4. in 5:3–4 the skipping over the grammatical irregularity with והו יָדַע wəhû yāda’;
5. in 5:17 the concept of suspicion not being expressed; and,
6. in 5:17–18 the equating of לא יָדַע lō-yāda’ ‘he did not know’ with בִּשְׁגָגָה bišgāgâ ‘by inadvertence’, thus failing to keep the case distinct from the ones in 4:27–28 and 5:15–16.
Translated texts that do not make sense will not be effective and will not be read. I hope that by evaluating many commentaries I have provided sufficient argumentation so that translators can produce a meaningful and clear text. They need to think through the consequences of certain choices and should be able to explain them.

Further, I have offered ideas on how to deal with complex conditional sentences, especially regarding Lev. 5:1–6. I have also commented on sundry other translation issues as they came up in discussing Lev. 4–5.

There are questions related to our topic that could not be discussed here. Among them are these:

(1) How does Lev. 4–5 apply to narrative sections of the Old Testament?\(^{64}\)
(2) I said impurity incurs guilt, whether or not the person realizes it. But in Paul’s argumentation in 1 Cor. 10:27–28, the knowing matters. Does this affect our understanding of Lev. 4–5 in any way?
(3) As to the question where the protasis ends and the apodosis begins, finding out their average length statistically could give one indicator for dealing with doubtful cases.

Leviticus chapters 4–5 are no less practical than the Sermon on the Mount. Christ’s sacrifice surpasses the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant, but Lev. 4–5 is occupied with a whole array of matters related to sin and guilt which are still relevant under the New Covenant: confronting sin, recognizing and admitting sin, guilt feelings and bad conscience, repentance, confession, restitution, and – forgiveness! The more comprehensible our translations are, the easier it will be to use them in Scripture Engagement.

**Appendix A: Commentary Abbreviations**

This table is provided as a quick reference to the commentary resources listed by abbreviation only in the body of the paper. (Refer to the References for a more complete listing.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Resource</th>
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## Appendix B: Scripture Versions Consulted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Publisher/Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KJV54</td>
<td>King James Authorised Version 400th Anniversary Edition. British and Foreign Bible Society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLT07</td>
<td>New Living Translation. 2007. Tyndale House Foundation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the versions listed above, the reader is referred also the following resources which are not included in Paratext or which have been superseded, and including also non-English versions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BDS</td>
<td>La Bible du Semeur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FC97</td>
<td>La Bible en français courant. 1997.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menge</td>
<td>Die Heilige Schrift (Bible translation by Hermann Menge).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Translation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NBS</td>
<td>Nouvelle Bible Segond.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEB</td>
<td>New English Bible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NJB</td>
<td>New Jerusalem Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSV</td>
<td>Revised Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEV</td>
<td>Today’s English Version.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZÜR</td>
<td>Zürcher Bibel. 2007.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Paratext 9. SIL International / United Bible Societies.


