

ONEG SHABBAS

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Oneg Shabbas explores drinking in the weekly Torah portion, along with timely essays on drinking in Jewish life.

Libations in Leviticus

While one might expect that libations would be plentiful throughout Leviticus, the truth is that there are only three mentions of libations in the entirety of the book. As we have discussed previously, libations are our offerings to God to drink. Inasmuch as we think of Jewish drinking as Jews drinking, what about Jews providing God to drink? Libations, in this sense, are certainly a matter of Jewish drinking. As all three of the mentions of libations in the book of Leviticus are in this week's Torah portion, what are these libations - the Libations of Leviticus?

Libations in Leviticus

The first mention of a libation is to accompany the offerings for the sheaf-elevating (Lev. 23:13), the second mention is to accompany the offerings for Shavuot (Lev. 23:18), and the final mention is a general, inclusive reference to holiday libations (Lev. 23:37). In fact, one of the only two references to יין (wine) in the entirety of Leviticus occurs with the sheaf-elevating libation (Lev. 23:13) (the other reference to יין (wine) in the book of Leviticus is found in the prohibition against *kohanim* serving while intoxicated (10:9)). With only these two mentions of יין (wine), that makes it have just one more mention than does the book of Exodus, which has only one mention of the word (Ex. 29:40). Basically, wine is not a focus of the book, nor are libations. It turns out that Leviticus is literally quite dry. In fact, there are no stories of humans drinking in this book. So what are these libations?

Libation for the Sheaf-Elevating

The libation for the sheaf-elevating is simply a quarter-*hin* of wine (Lev. 23:12-13):

On the day that you elevate the sheaf, you shall offer as a burnt offering to The LORD a lamb of the first year without blemish. The meal offering with it shall be two-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to The LORD; and the libation with it shall be of wine , a quarter of a <i>hin</i> .	וְעִשִׂיתֶם בְּיוֹם הַנִּיפְכֶם אֶת־הַעֹמֶר כֶּבֶשׂ תָּמִים בְּרִשְׁנֵתוֹ לַעֲלֹה לַה', וּמִנְחָתוֹ שְׁנֵי סֹלֶת בָּלוּלָה לַהּ לֶחֶם יִיחָם וְנִסְכָּהּ יֵין רְבִיעִית הַהֵין
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This amount of wine to be libated to God is the same amount to correspond with the first-year lamb it accompanies as we read in the book of Numbers in multiple places. However, what is peculiar about this offering (in addition to this day not being one where labor is forbidden, unlike the rest of the chapter) is that it has two-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in, even though the typical quantity would be one-tenth. However, an early rabbinic teaching considers these quantities (*Menahot* 89b and parallel in *Sifra, Emor* 10:8 (cf. רש"י, Lev. 23:13, S.V. וּנְסָכָהּ יֵין רְבִיעִית הַהֵין) (ונסכו יין רביעית ההין):

The Sages taught: "And its meal offering shall be two-tenths" (Lev. 23:13) - teaches about the lamb that comes with the omer that the size of its meal offering is doubled. One might have thought that just as its meal offering is doubled, so, too, its wine [libation] should be doubled; the verse states, "And its libation shall be of wine , a quarter- <i>hin</i> " (Lev. 23:13).	תנו רבנן (ויקרא כג, יג) ומנחתו שני עשרונים לימד על כבש הבא עם העומר שמנחתו כפולה יכול כשם שמנחתו כפולה כך יינו כפול תלמוד לומר (ויקרא כג, יג) ונסכו יין רביעית ההין
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One might have thought that it is only its **wine** [libation] that should not be doubled, as it is not intermingled with the flour of its meal offering, but its oil should be doubled, as it is intermingled with the flour of its meal offering. The verse states: "And its libation" - all of its libations shall be only a quarter-*hin*.

יכול לא יהא יינו כפול שאינו נבלל עם מנחתו אבל יהא שמנו כפול שנבלל עם מנחתו תלמוד לאמר ונסכו כל נסכיו לא יהו אלא רביעית

This is a clever explanation for that aspect. Regarding the wine to be libated, it otherwise remains at the same ratio to the animal, despite the increased amount of oil.

Libation for Shavuot

While the offering for the sheaf-waving is its only such appearance in the Torah, we do not find the same with Shavuot. In fact, there seems to be a discrepancy, as we read in this week's Torah portion (Lev. 23:18):

With the bread you shall present, as burnt offerings to The LORD, seven yearling lambs without blemish, one bull of the herd, and two rams, with their meal offerings and libations , an offering by fire of pleasing odor to The LORD.	וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם עַל־הַלֶּחֶם שְׁבַע־לָמְדִים תָּמִימִם בְּנֵי שָׁנָה וּפָר בֶּן־בָּקָר אֶחָד וְאֵילִם שְׁנַיִם יְהִי עֹלָה לַה' וּמִנְחָתָם וְנִסְכֵיהֶם אִשֶׁה רִיחַ יִיחָם לַה'
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However, the other time that Shavuot offering is mentioned, we have a slightly different count (Num. 28:28-31):

You shall present a burnt offering of pleasing odor to The LORD: two bulls of the herd, one ram, seven yearling lambs. The meal offering with them shall be of choice flour with oil mixed in, three-tenths of a measure for a bull, two-tenths for a ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs. And there shall be one goat for expiation in your name. You shall present them—see that they are without blemish—with their libations , in addition to the regular burnt offering and its meal offering.	וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם עֹלָה לַרִיחַ יִיחָח לַה' פָּרִים בְּנֵי־בָקָר שְׁנַיִם אֶל אֶחָד שְׁבַע־הֵנָּה כֶּבֶשִׁים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה וּמִנְחָתָם סֹלֶת בָּלוּלָה בְשֶׁמֶן שְׁלֹשָׁה עֶשְׂרִינָם לַפָּר אֶחָד שְׁנֵי עֶשְׂרִינָם לְאֵיל הָאֶחָד: עֶשְׂרוֹן עֶשְׂרוֹן לְכֶבֶשׂ הָאֶחָד לְשִׁבְעַת הַכֶּבֶשִׁים: שְׁעִיר עִזִּים לְכַפֵּר לְכַפֵּר מִלִּבָּד מִלִּבָּד תַּעֲשֶׂהוּ וּמִנְחָתוֹ יְהִי־לְכֶם וְנִסְכֵיהֶם
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Oneg Shabbas is composed by, edited by, and published by Rabbi Drew Kaplan. If you have any comments, compliments, or suggestions, he may be reached at Drew@JewishDrinking.com

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While it may not be a noticeable difference at first, the difference between these two presentations is that, in Leviticus, we are to offer one bull and two rams, while in Numbers, we are to offer two bulls and one ram (and one goat). With this different enumeration of animals, there is also a corresponding difference in the amount of wine to be libated.

For the libations for the Shavuot offering in Leviticus, it seems that the calculation would yield 2.9167 (35/12) hins to accompany the elevation offering, whereas the amount in Numbers would be 3.0833 (37/12) hins (plus the additional quarter-hin for the goat, bringing the total to 3 1/2 (40/12) hins). So, what are we to do with this difference?






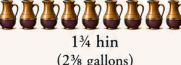

Rabbi Akiva was not the only rabbi to come up with a way to alleviate this seeming contradiction, as Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra (1092-1167) mentions two further approaches to this difference (אבן עזרא על ויקרא כ"ג:י"ח):





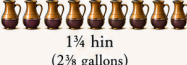



It is possible that Scripture changed the sacrifices in the first year because it was the outset of the beginning. Some say that the kohen shall offer either a bullock and two rams or two bullocks and one ram. It depends on the will of the kohen. We do not find such a commandment again.

ויתכן ששנה הכתוב בשנה הראשונה בעבור שהיא תחלת ההתחלה ויש אומרים כי יקרב פר ואילים שנים או שני פרים ואיל אחד כרצון הכהן ועוד לא ראינו מצוה כזאת

Somewhat similarly to Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi ibn Ezra posits that there is a chronological difference; whereas Rabbi Akiva argued for the offerings in Numbers to have taken place in the wilderness and the offerings in Leviticus to be potentially offered once our people arrived to the land, Rabbi ibn Ezra suggests that what we read in our Torah portion was offered while we were still in the wilderness, but just the first year, and then what we are commanded in the book of Numbers to take place the following year and subsequent to that year. Another approach Rabbi ibn Ezra mentions is the option on the part of the kohen - it is simply up to him as to how he feels: whether it is one bull and two rams or two bulls and one ram. It certainly is peculiar, as we are unfamiliar with this volitional style of offerings, yet that is something that Rabbi ibn Ezra also points out - this happens nowhere else in the Torah. For our purposes, then, it would also affect the amount of wine to be libated.

LEVITICUS	
Includes: 1 bull, 2 rams, 7 lambs	
ANIMAL	TOTAL WINE
 BULL (of the herd)	 1/2 hin (3/4 gallon)
 RAM	 1/2 hin (1 gallon)
 LAMB (yearling sheep)	 1 1/4 hin (2 1/2 gallons)
TOTAL WINE (Leviticus)	 = 2 7/8 hin (4 1/2 gallons)

NUMBERS	
Includes: 2 bulls, 1 ram, 7 lambs	
ANIMAL	TOTAL WINE
 BULL (of the herd)	 1 hin (1 1/2 gallons)
 RAM	 1/2 hin (1/2 gallon)
 LAMB (yearling sheep)	 1 1/4 hin (2 1/2 gallons)
TOTAL WINE (Numbers)	 = 3 hin (4 1/2 gallons)

Third and Final Mention of Libations in Leviticus

The third and final mention of libations in Leviticus is certainly an amusingly curious one, as it mentions libations in a broad sense (Lev. 23:37):

Those are the set times of The LORD that you shall celebrate as sacred occasions, bringing offerings by fire to The LORD – burnt offerings, meal offerings, sacrifices, and **libations**, on each day what is proper to it—

אלה מועדי אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרָאוּ אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרָאוּ אֵתֶם קֹדֶשׁ לַה' קָרִיב אֲשֶׁה אֵשָׁה עֲלֵהּ וּמִנְחָתָהּ זֶבַח וְנִסְכֵי דְבָרִים וְיִום דְּבָרִים



It is unclear as to how specific or broad this mention of libations is, since it does mention them in the plural and, after all, there are multiple references to libations, even if there are only two of them specified in this chapter.

Interpretive Strategies

One interpretive strategy was articulated by none other than Rabbi Akiva (50-135) who suggested (*Menaḥot* 45b):

The offerings that are mentioned in the book of Numbers were sacrificed in the wilderness, but the offerings that are mentioned in Leviticus were not sacrificed in the wilderness.

נמצא מה שאמור בחומש הפקודים קרב במדבר ומה שאמור בתורת כהנים לא קרב במדבר

Indeed, this thinking caught on, as one of his students articulated (*Mishnah Menaḥot* 4:3):

Rabbi Shimon (2nd c.) says: "...That all [the offerings that must be sacrificed on Shavuot] that are stated in the book of Numbers were sacrificed [when the Jewish people were] in the wilderness, but all [the offerings] stated in Leviticus were not sacrificed [when the Jewish people were] in the wilderness. When they arrived in the land, these and those were sacrificed."

אמר רבי שמעון...שכל האמור בחומש הפקודים קרב במדבר וכל האמור בתורת כהנים אין קרב במדבר משבאו לארץ קרבו אלו ואלו

In this way, these second century sages saw that the offering for Shavuot in our Torah portion was not brought during our time in the wilderness, but only once we got to the land of Israel, yielding to the sacrifices in the book of Numbers as being what we were to bring, at least in the wilderness. Their opinion is supported by Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1138-1204), who commented (commentary to *Mishnah Menaḥot* 4:3):

And everything that is mentioned in Leviticus was not offered in the wilderness, and this is easy to understand. Rather, what was offered in the wilderness are the offerings mentioned in the Book of Numbers, and they are, in their entirety, the additional offerings.

וכל מה ד'כ"ר פי ויקרא לם יקרב פי אלמדבר, והד'א נקל ענדה, ואנמא קרב פי אלמדבר אלקרבנות אלמד'כורה פי חומש הפקודים והי ג'מלה אלמוספין כלהא.

Further Curiosities

A couple of matters which remain unclear from the above: what is distinctive about the two offerings mentioned in this Torah portion regarding libations that they should be specified? What is it about Shavuot that it is the only holiday that has differing amounts to be offered in contrast to its command in the book of Numbers? What is it about the offering for Shavuot that the meal offering is doubled, yet the libation remains the same quantity? Why are these the only specific calendrical moments that are to yield libations, at least as far as the book of Leviticus is concerned? These remain questions for further inquiry.

Conclusion

These three mentions of libations in the book of Leviticus are fascinating, although they are further fascinating in that they have unique characteristics, specifically the first two mentions of libations. Either way, despite the many offerings mentioned throughout the book of Leviticus, the wine libations that God commands in Leviticus are not as numerous as some might think. However, despite their rarity within the book, they nevertheless remain intriguingly placed. Despite the utter dryness of the book of Leviticus at least we have these couple of references to providing God wine on these days.

L'chaim 