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Complex Conditional Sentences and the Verb אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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 *ʾāšam* 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 *wəʾāšēm* is part of the protasis or the apodosis. I conclude that וְאָשֵׁם *wəʾāšēm* belongs to the protasis, but the translation may express an interim result. Additionally, the meaning of אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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 *ʾāšam*, יָדַע *yāda‘*, נָשָׂא עָוֹן *nāśāʾ ʿāwôn*.

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 *wəqatal* 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 *ʾim*** (e.g., Gen. 34:15).
- Sometimes, the conjunction כִּי *kî* is used instead (e.g., 2 Kings 4:29). Both אִם *ʾim* 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 *ʾim* 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 *ʾᵃšer* (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 אָז *ʾāz* (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 לוּ *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 *ʾim*, 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 *ʾim*, as is done, for instance, in Exod. 21:2–6 in ESVUS16.

also be introduced by אִם *ʾim* (e.g., 1 Kings 13:8) or כִּי *kî* (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 אִם *ʾim* and כִּי *kî*,[3] and to *wəqatal* 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,[5] the verb אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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 wəqatal* form וְאָשֵׁם *wəʾāšēm*, except for 4:13 with the plural form וְאָשֵׁמוּ *wəʾāšēmû*, and 5:5 with the *yiqtol*.[6] 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.

[3] Regarding אִם *ʾim*, Bivin (2018:10f) states: "The epistemic stance taken toward the speech event determines whether אם prompts construction of a hypothetical space or temporal space. Temporal interpretation is prompted by context and results from reader/hearer construal." Regarding כִּי *kî*, 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] אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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?

Wəqatal 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 *wəqatal* 3MS וְאָשֵׁם *wəʾāšēm* 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 *ʾāšam*

The meaning of אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* has to do with guilt and its consequences, as various dictionaries assert.[7] But regarding Lev. 4–5, there has been an extensive debate about its precise meaning.[8] 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.

[7] See TWOT 1:78, no. 180 אָשַׁם (*ʾāsham*) "be desolate, be guilty", etc.; TLOT (191ff.), s.v. אָשָׁם *ʾāšām* guilt, § 3c and 3e; NIDOTTE 1:554 s.v. אָשַׁם (*ʾāšam*) "become guilty", etc.

[8] 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*".

Table 1: Different interpretations of אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* in Leviticus 4:13				
Syntactic role	part of the protasis			part of the apodosis
Meaning	be(come) guilty	feel guilt(y)	realize guilt	be guilty
Sample translations	NRSV: "and incur guilt" NET08: "they become guilty"	Milgrom: "and they feel guilt"	NIV11R: "when they realize their guilt"	NIV84: "they are guilty" NLT07: "they are still guilty"

The table only gives a partial overview because the above choices do not apply automatically to all other occurrences of אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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

Leviticus 4:1–5:13 talks about the sin offering,[9] Lev. 5:14–26 [English 5:14–6:7] about the reparation offering.[10]

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."

[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 אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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 ‹...›.[11] Essential matters for translation are pointed out in the column "Remarks".

Below each table, I address the themes "Protasis or apodosis", "The meaning of אָשַׁם *ʾāšam*", and where needed "Other issues". After reviewing the commentaries and after my own discussion, I close each section with practical advice under "Translation".[12]

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 אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* in Leviticus 4

Verses	Hebrew	Translation	Remarks
2	נֶפֶשׁ כִּי־תֶחֱטָא בִּשְׁגָגָה מִכֹּל מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תֵעָשֶׂינָה	When a person sins unintentionally in any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done,	– נֶפֶשׁ כִּי *nepeš kî* introduces the main protasis. In legal texts, it is not uncommon for כִּי *kî* to stand in second position.
	וְעָשָׂה מֵאַחַת מֵהֵנָּה׃	and commits any of them, [the following applies:]	– The explication in brackets breaks up the long conditional clause.

[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	אִם הַכֹּהֵן הַמָּשִׁיחַ יֶחֱטָא לְאַשְׁמַת הָעָם	[3] if the anointed priest sins / (*or*: if it is the anointed priest who sins), thus bringing guilt on the people,	– אִם *ʾim* introduces a second condition, to be specific, the first sub-case. – The noun אַשְׁמָה *ʾašmâ* is used; in all later cases it is the verb אָשַׁם *ʾāšam*.
	וְהִקְרִיב … פַּר …	(then) he shall offer … a bull …	– A *wəqatal* begins the apodosis. The *waw* is more naturally translated with "then", not "and".
13–14	וְאִם כָּל־עֲדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁגּוּ וְנֶעְלַם דָּבָר מֵעֵינֵי הַקָּהָל	[13] Now if the whole congregation of Israel commits error and the matter escapes the notice of the assembly,	– וְאִם *wəʾim* introduces the next sub-case. – The protasis is a series of conditions (in *wəqatal*).
	וְעָשׂוּ אַחַת מִכָּל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תֵעָשֶׂינָה וְאָשֵׁמוּ׃	and they commit any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and (thus) become guilty (*or*: find themselves guilty);	– The underlined is part of the protasis, but already states an "interim result". It is fitting to add "thus / so / thereby".
	וְנוֹדְעָה הַחַטָּאת אֲשֶׁר חָטְאוּ עָלֶיהָ	[14] (then,) when/once the sin that they have committed becomes known,	– Translating the *wəqatal* with "when/once" makes it more natural.
	וְהִקְרִיבוּ הַקָּהָל פַּר …	the assembly shall offer a bull …	– A *wəqatal* begins the apodosis (cf. v. 3b).

22–23	אֲשֶׁר נָשִׂיא יֶחֱטָא	[22] (But) if a leader sins	– For the unusual אֲשֶׁר *ʾᵃšer*, see the discussion below.
	וְעָשָׂה אַחַת מִכָּל־ מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תֵעָשֶׂינָה בִּשְׁגָגָה וְאָשֵׁם׃	and unintentionally does any one of all the things which the LORD his God has commanded not to be done, and recognizes his guilt,	
	אוֹ־הוֹדַע אֵלָיו חַטָּאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא בָּהּ	[23] or his sin which he has committed is made known to him,	– For אוֹ *ʾô* ‘or’, see the discussion below.
	וְהֵבִיא אֶת־קָרְבָּנוֹ שְׂעִיר עִזִּים…	then he shall bring for his offering a goat, …	– Apodosis.
27–28	וְאִם־נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת תֶּחֱטָא בִּשְׁגָגָה מֵעַם הָאָרֶץ	[27] Now if anyone sins unintentionally of the common people	– וְאִם *wəʾim* introduces the next sub-case.
	בַּעֲשֹׂתָהּ אַחַת מִמִּצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־ תֵעָשֶׂינָה וְאָשֵׁם׃	in doing any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and recognizes his guilt,	
	אוֹ הוֹדַע אֵלָיו חַטָּאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא	[28] or his sin which he has committed is made known to him,	– For אוֹ *ʾô* ‘or’, see the discussion below.
	וְהֵבִיא קָרְבָּנוֹ שְׂעִירַת עִזִּים …	then he shall bring for his offering a goat …	– Apodosis.

3.1.1 Protasis or apodosis?

Grammatically, (וְ)אָשַׁמְ(וּ) *wəʾāšēm(û)* in 4:13, 22, 27 can be read as part of the protasis (i.e., “and if he/they is/are guilty”) or as part of the apodosis (“then he/they 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 וְאָשֵׁמוּ *wəʾāšēmû* as part of the protasis is preferable, because:

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

- In the first scenario in 4:3, the verb אָשַׁם ʾāšam is not used, but the same root occurs in the noun אַשְׁמָה ʾašmâ ‘guilt’. In this verse, **the noun אַשְׁמָה *ʾašmâ with the preposition* לְ *lᵊ* 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(וּ) *wəʾāšēm(û)* as a protasis.[13] But we also need to recognize that וְאָשְׁמוּ *wəʾāšēmû* is already the fourth verb in a long protasis. Therefore, **it is reasonable to express an “interim result”**, as it were.[14] This can be done by inserting “so / thus / thereby” (see REB89 with “and *so* incurs guilt, …”).[15] 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(וּ) *wəʾāšēm(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*.[16] They say (§ 176a–d) it

[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 *wəʾāšəmâ hannepeš hahiwʾ*. 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]

[17] Cf. Haiman (1993:926f), "Conditionals".

[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 *'ašmâ* 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".
- Milgrom (1991:343) judges (on 5:17):[23]

  > The meaning of *wĕ'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".

[23] Similarly, Wenham on 4:13 (1979:99).

[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*ʿ, Levine states clearly:

> "Awareness [of sin] is not expressed in our text by the verb *ʾasham*, ... Awareness is expressed by the verb *yada*ʿ, 'to know'.[25]

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 אשם ...

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**.[26] 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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[25] Baker (2008) states it similarly.

[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 וְנוֹדְעָה הַחַטָּאת ***wənôd'āh haḥaṭṭā't* 'and the sin becomes known' at the beginning of v. 14**. One wonders why וְנוֹדְעָה *wənôd'āh* follows and does not precede וְאָשֵׁמוּ *wə'āšēmû*. 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.[27] Others think it is the becoming-known that causes the feeling of guilt. The verbs are simply reversed.[28] **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.[29] Many versions translate "when/once the sin becomes known".[30] 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: אוֹ *'ô 'or' in vv. 23, 28*

There is an issue which I did not include in the discussion above, but which is relevant. If וְאָשֵׁם *wə'āšēm* is understood as "be guilty", then it comes as a surprise that vv. 23, 28 are introduced by אוֹ *'ô* '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; [23] or if his sin ... come to his knowledge ...

[27] Wenham (1979:99).

[28] Hieke (2014:260); Kiuchi (2007); Milgrom (1991); Rendtorff (2004:175). Cf. the discussion in Hartley (1992:62).

[29] See Levine (1989).

[30] See, e.g., Hartley (1992), Kiuchi (2007), Milgrom (1991), Wenham (1979); several versions.

A translation like this is not satisfying. There are textual variants for אוֹ *ʾô*, but commentators do not accept them as the solution to the problem.[31] The grammars and dictionaries do not put forward a real alternative for 'or'.[32]

But when one translates אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* in v. 22 with "feel/realize guilt", the continuation with "or" sounds logical. Milgrom translates: "and he feels guilt [23] 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.[33] 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 וְאָשֵׁם wəʾāšēm 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, [23] or his sin that he committed is made known to him, ...

An alternative for "plead guilty" would be "recognize one's guilt".

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

> *GKC* § 69w takes the ו in הודע as an example where ו stands instead of וּ in the hoph. LXX reads καὶ γνωσθῇ = אם נודע, "if it is known," for MT או־הודע, 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., אוֹ *ʾô* 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 אוֹ *ʾô* here.

3.1.4 Other issues: אֲשֶׁר *ʾᵃšer in v. 22*

The protases are introduced by אִם *ʾim* or וְאִם *wəʾim* in vv. 3, 13, 27, but by אֲשֶׁר *ʾᵃšer* 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 *ʾāšam* in Leviticus 5:1–6

Verse	Hebrew	Translation	Remarks
1	וְנֶפֶשׁ כִּי־תֶחֱטָא וְשָׁמְעָה קוֹל אָלָה וְהוּא עֵד אוֹ רָאָה אוֹ יָדָע	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]) –,	– נֶפֶשׁ כִּי *nepeš kî* begins the main protasis. – The hearing alone does not make one a sinner. – The double אוֹ *ʾô* ('whether … or …') sets out two possibilities.
	אִם־לוֹא יַגִּיד	(if he) does not tell *it,*	– אִם *ʾim* introduces the condition that makes the person a sinner.
	וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנוֹ׃	then he must bear the consequences.	– Apodosis. – This key phrase is used in a somewhat untypical way. See notes below.
2	אוֹ נֶפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּגַּע בְּכָל־דָּבָר טָמֵא …	Or if a person touches any unclean thing, …,	– אוֹ *ʾô* 'or' introduces an alternative case. It is on the level of נֶפֶשׁ כִּי *nepeš kî* above, not on the level of אִם *ʾim* above. – נֶפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר *nepeš ʾašer* is rare for נֶפֶשׁ כִּי *nepeš kî.*
	וְנֶעְלַם מִמֵּנּוּ וְהוּא טָמֵא וְאָשֵׁם׃	and/though it is hidden from him [for a while], he became unclean, and is (thus) guilty, …	– Explicating "for a while" avoids the idea that he is to bring an offering without knowing of his sin (cf. vv. 3–4).

3	אוֹ כִי יִגַּע בְּטֻמְאַת אָדָם … וְנֶעְלַם מִמֶּנּוּ וְהוּא יָדַע וְאָשֵׁם׃	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	אוֹ נֶפֶשׁ כִּי תִשָּׁבַע לְבַטֵּא … וְנֶעְלַם מִמֶּנּוּ וְהוּא־יָדַע וְאָשֵׁם לְאַחַת מֵאֵלֶּה׃	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, …	
5	וְהָיָה כִי־יֶאְשַׁם לְאַחַת מֵאֵלֶּה	Then, when he recognizes his guilt in one of these,	– וְהָיָה *wəhāyāh* summarizes the above possibilities, before the apodosis begins.
	וְהִתְוַדָּה אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עָלֶיהָ׃	he shall confess that in which he has sinned.	– Apodosis.
6	וְהֵבִיא אֶת־אֲשָׁמוֹ לַיהוָה עַל חַטָּאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא נְקֵבָה מִן־הַצֹּאן … לְחַטָּאת …	[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.

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

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 *yeʾšam* indisputably occurs in the protasis.** If there, in the summary, אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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 *lᵊʾaḥat mēʾēlleh* **"in [any] one of these"**. This indefinite expression **can hardly be read as apodosis**.

Arguments for reading an apodosis:

- In 5:1, וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנוֹ *wənāśāʾ ʿᵃwōnô* is taken by most as apodosis: "then he will bear his responsibility".[35] **Since אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* in vv. 2–4 is a synonym to נָשָׂא עֲוֹנוֹ *nāśāʾ ʿāwōn*, one expects it to be treated analogously** (as in NASB).
- Verse 5 begins with *wəhāyâ*, 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 וְאָשֵׁם *wəʾāšēm* 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

[34] Wenham (1979), Milgrom (1991), Hartley (1992), Rendtorff (2004), Kiuchi (2007), Hieke (2014).

[35] Exceptions are found in Rendtorff (2004) and NJPS. Both use "so", which corresponds to the transitional understanding recommended for וְאָשֵׁמוּ *wəʾāšēmû* in 4:13 (see § 3.1.1).

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 *wə'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 אוֹ *ʾô* ('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 *ʾāšam*

Regarding וְאָשֵׁם *wəʾāšēm* 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]

Kiuchi (2007) and Hartley (1992) translate with "realize guilt", Rendtorff (2004) and Hieke (2014) with "become aware of one's guilt".[37]

Regarding יֶאְשַׁם *yeʾšam* 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 וְהוּא טָמֵא *wəhûʾ ṭāmēʾ* **"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 *wəʾāšēm* 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

[36] Similar Gane (2004:120).

[37] Originals: "sich seiner Schuld bewusst werden".

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'šam* 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 וְהוּא יָדַע **wəhû' yāda'** *in 5:3, 4*

The phrase וְהוּא יָדַע *wəhû' yāda'* in vv. 3, 4 presents a major problem that the English versions skip over. The pronoun interrupts the *wəqatal* series. As a *wəqatal* 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 *bišgāgâ*

[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-qataltí 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 עלם *'lm* would be used for a person's own suppressing of the facts, when really he knew better.
- why the verb ידע *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: וְהוּא טָמֵא *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 וְלֹא־יָדַע *wəlō'-yāda'* "and he did not know" extends to the present: "and he [still] does not know" (see below), whereas here the phrase וְהוּא יָדַע *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 טמא, "he has become unclean," codices from the Cairo Geniza read ידע, "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 *wəqatal* 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.[43] 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).
- וְהוּא יָדַע *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".

[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 עֲוֹנוֹ **wənāśāʾ ʿawōnô** *in 5:1*

Normally, וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנוֹ *wənāśāʾ ʿawōnô* means "he will bear his punishment / iniquity / guilt".[44] 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 וְאָשֵׁם *wəʾāšēm*, it describes the sinner's initial situation and, in that sense, becomes part of the protasis.[45] But **vv. 5–6 show that the punishment is *not* irrevocable,** and that confessing and sacrificing are the way out of the threatening situation.[46] 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(וּ) *wəʾāšēm(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.[47]

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.

[46] Cf. Milgrom (1991:315); Rendtorff (2004:194f.).

[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

Verses	Hebrew	Translation	Remarks
15–16	נֶפֶשׁ כִּי־תִמְעֹל מַעַל וְחָטְאָה בִּשְׁגָגָה מִקָּדְשֵׁי יְהוָה	When a person acts unfaithfully and sins unintentionally against the LORD’s holy things,	– נֶפֶשׁ כִּי *nepeš kî* begins the main protasis. Cf. 4:2.
	וְהֵבִיא אֶת־אֲשָׁמוֹ לַיהוָה אַיִל …	then he shall bring his reparation offering to the LORD: a ram …	– Apodosis.
	וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר חָטָא מִן־הַקֹּדֶשׁ יְשַׁלֵּם	[16] and for that which he has sinned against the holy thing, he shall make restitution	
	וְאֶת־חֲמִישִׁתוֹ יוֹסֵף עָלָיו וְנָתַן אֹתוֹ לַכֹּהֵן …	and shall add to it a fifth part of it and give it to the priest.	
17	וְאִם־נֶפֶשׁ כִּי תֶחֱטָא וְעָשְׂתָה אַחַת מִכָּל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תֵעָשֶׂינָה	Now if a person [suspects he] has sinned and done any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done,	– וְאִם introduces a sub-case. נֶפֶשׁ כִּי is the same as in v. 15. The sequence וְאִם־נֶפֶשׁ כִּי is unique in the OT.[48] The כִּי is like a second “if” and remains untranslated.
	וְלֹא־יָדַע וְאָשֵׁם וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנוֹ:	and/but does not know [whether he did], he is reckoned to be guilty (*or*: but feels guilty) [nevertheless], and must bear the consequences:	– וְלֹא־יָדַע *wəlō’-yāda‘* “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).

[48] Milgrom (1991:331) calls it an “awkward phrase”, Hartley (1992) says the Hebrew is “impossible”.

			– 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.
18	וְהֵבִיא אַיִל תָּמִים מִן־הַצֹּאן בְּעֶרְכְּךָ לְאָשָׁם אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן	(Then) he shall bring a flawless ram from the flock, according to your valuation, for a reparation offering, to the priest.	– Apodosis. – The additional "fifth part", required in v. 16, is missing here, because the embezzled value remains unknown.
	וְכִפֶּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן עַל שְׁגָגָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר־שָׁגָג וְהוּא לֹא־יָדַע וְנִסְלַח לוֹ׃	So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his error in which he erred and does [still] not know it (*or*: did not find out about it), and it will be forgiven him.	– "does not know": for the tense, see the remark above on v. 17.
19	אָשָׁם הוּא אָשֹׁם אָשַׁם לַיהוָה׃	It is a reparation offering; <u>he was certainly guilty</u> before the LORD.	Differently Wenham and Hartley: "he has indeed made reparation".

3.3.1 Protasis or apodosis?

In 5:17, deciding whether וְאָשֵׁם *wəʾāšēm* is protasis or apodosis, is complicated by the following phrase וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנוֹ *wənāśāʾ ʿāwōnô*. 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.

One could even include וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנוֹ *wənāśā' ʿᵃwōnô* 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 עֲוֹנוֹ *wənāśā' ʿᵃwōnô* 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 עֲוֹנוֹ *wənāśā' ʿᵃwōnô* 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, אוֹ *'ô* 'or' introduced *alternative* cases, for which the same apodosis applied. By contrast, here in v. 17, וְאִם 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 עֲוֹנוֹ ***wənāśā' ʿᵃwōnô***, 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 עֲוֹנוֹ *wənāśā' ʿᵃwōnô* 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 עֲוֹנוֹ ***wənāśā' ʿᵃwōnô* 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 עֲוֹנוֹ *wənāśā' ʿᵃwōnô* in the apodosis.

[50] Likewise, the אוֹ *'ô* in 4:23, 28 introduced alternative cases that lead to the same result, whereas in 4:13, 27 וְאִם *wə'im* – 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 …".

"17 … and he feels guilt, he shall bear his responsibility 18 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 אָשַׁם *ʾāšam*

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-huʾ loʾ yadaʿ*, "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 *wə'āšēm* 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 *lō'-yāda'* "he did not know" to mean that the action was done unconsciously; thus it cannot be realized later.[54]

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).[55]

לֹא־יָדַע *lō'-yāda'* 'he did not know' in vv. 17–18 is not a mere synonym for בִּשְׁגָגָה *bišgāgâ* 'by inadvertence', but expresses that **he never found out** what his sin was. Taking יָדַע *yd'* in 5:17 as referring to the time of the sinful act, that is, to the past only, and וְאָשֵׁם *wə'āšēm* 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.

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[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 *wəlō'-yāda'* must not be translated with the same vocabulary as בִּשְׁגָגָה *bišgāgâ*, 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., GNTD: "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 …"
Or: "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 וְאָשֵׁם *wə'āšēm*, 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., GNTD). By contrast, NET08 now uses "realize" for the first time. These variations *within* the same versions show that one rendering does not work everywhere.[56]

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.[57] 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)".[58] 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., GNTD).

[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 תֶחֱטָא וּמָעֲלָה מַעַל בַּיהוָה	When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD,	– נֶפֶשׁ כִּי *nepeš kî* introduces the main protasis. Cf. 4:2.
	וְכִחֵשׁ בַּעֲמִיתוֹ בִּפְקָדוֹן אוֹ־בִתְשׂוּמֶת יָד אוֹ …	and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or security or …	– אוֹ *'ô* 'or' connects alternative cases.

22 [3]	… וְנִשְׁבַּע עַל־שָׁקֶר עַל־אַחַת מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה הָאָדָם לַחֲטֹא בָּהֵנָּה׃	… and swears falsely in regard to any one of the things a man may do and sin thereby,	– The protasis is continued with another condition, the false oath. – לַחֲטֹא *laḥᵃṭō* ʾ 'to sin' (inf. cs.) is part of the relative clause.[59]
23 [4]	וְהָיָה כִּי־יֶחֱטָא וְאָשֵׁם	then, when he has sinned and (thus) become guilty (*or*: then, when he has sinned and recognizes his guilt),	– וְהָיָה *wəhāyāh* brings the listing of cases to a close and marks a new start. Cf. 5:5. – כִּי *kî* introduces the summarizing protasis.
	וְהֵשִׁיב אֶת־הַגְּזֵלָה אֲשֶׁר גָּזָל אוֹ אֶת־הָעֹשֶׁק אֲשֶׁר עָשָׁק …	he shall restore what he took by robbery or acquired by extortion …;	– Apodosis. – אוֹ *ʾô* 'or' connects alternative cases.
24 [5]	… וְשִׁלַּם אֹתוֹ בְּרֹאשׁוֹ וַחֲמִשָׁתָיו יֹסֵף עָלָיו …	… 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 וְאָשֵׁם *kî-yeḥᵉṭāʾ wəʾāšēm*, 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 *ʾāšam* 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.

[59] The "sin phrase" לַחֲטֹא laḥaṭō' 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 וְאָשַׁם *wə'āšēm* 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:[61]

  > [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 וְאָשַׁם *wə'āšēm* clause is followed by the apodosis suggest so. One could, however, argue that reading וְנָשָׂא עֲוֹנוֹ *wənāśā' ʿawōnô* 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 וְאָשַׁם *wə'āšēm*. 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".

[61] Similar ESVUS16 "will restore"; NJPS "when one … would restore"; Kiuchi (2007) "and restores …".

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).[62]

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 אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* occur. This verb's ambivalent syntactic position and its oscillating meaning are not accidental.

3.5.1 Protasis or apodosis?

Syntactically, (וְ)אָשַׁמְתִּי *wəʾāšēm(û)* can be a protasis or an apodosis.

Clues from the context encourage taking it as a **protasis**:[63] Examining the meaning of אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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 (וְ)אָשַׁמְתִּי *wəʾāšēm(û)* **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 (וְ)אָשַׁמְתִּי *wəʾāšēm(û)* 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 (וְ)אָשַׁמ *wəʾāšēm(û)* in the apodosis everywhere (4:13; 5:2; 5:17; 5:23 [6:4]).
- NRSV translates (וְ)אָשַׁמ *wəʾāšēm(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. אָשָׁם *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 *wĕʾāšēm* here. The sinner is stricken with pangs of conscience: he feels his guilt.

This, as well, restricts the scope of אָשַׁם ***ʾāšam*** 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 *ʾāšam* 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

(אוֹ ʾô ‘or’!) to “sin being made known (by others)” in 4:23, 28. Therefore, “recognize guilt (by oneself)” works better.

In 5:2–5, אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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 אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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 עָוֹן *ʿāwōn*). 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. אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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 אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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 אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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.
- NRSV uses “incur guilt” in 4:13; 5:17, “be guilty” in 5:2 and “realize guilt” in 5:5; 5:23 [6:4].

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 אָשַׁם *ʾāšam* 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 *ʾāšam* 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 *ʾāšam*) – 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 אוֹ ʾô '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 וְהוּא יָדַע wəhû' yāda';
(5) in 5:17 the concept of suspicion not being expressed; and,
(6) in 5:17–18 the equating of לֹא־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.

[64] For the New Testament, cf. James 5:15–16; 1 Corinthians 11:29–30.

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.)

BHRG van der Merwe, Naudé, and Kroeze. 2017. *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar.*

EHLL Beckman. 2013. Conditional clause: Biblical Hebrew. (In Geoffrey Khan (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics.*)

GBH Lettinga and Siebenthal. 2016. *Grammatik des Biblischen Hebräisch.*

HAHAT Gesenius. 2013. *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament.*

IBHS Waltke and O'Connor. 1990. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax.*

JM Joüon and Muraoka. 2011. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew.*

JNSL Bivin. 2018. Building Spaces: Reevaluating the Particle אם. *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages.*

KTOT Kroneman and McLarren, eds. (2021). *Key Terms of the Old Testament.*

NIDOTTE VanGemeren, ed. 1997. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.*

TLOT Jenni and Westermann, eds. 1997. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament.*

TWOT Harris, Archer, and Waltke, eds. 1980. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.*

Appendix B: Scripture Versions Consulted

CEVUS06 Contemporary English Version. Second edition. 2006. American Bible Society.

EASY EasyEnglish Bible. 2018. MissionAssist.

ESVUS16 English Standard Version. 2016. Crossway.

GNTD Good News Translation. Second edition. 1992. American Bible Society.

KJV54 King James Authorised Version 400th Anniversary Edition. British and Foreign Bible Society.

NASB New American Standard Bible. 2020. Lockman Foundation.

NET08 New English Translation. 2006. Biblical Studies Foundation.

NIV11R New International Version. Revised format. 2011. Biblica.

NJPS TaNaKH: A New Translation of THE HOLY SCRIPTURES: According to the Traditional Hebrew Text. 1985. Philadelphia/Jerusalem. The Jewish Publication Society.

NLT07 New Living Translation. 2007. Tyndale House Foundation.

NRSV New Revised Standard Version. 1989. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

REB89 Revised English Bible. 1989. Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press.

T4T Translation 4 Translators. 2017. Ellis W. Deibler.

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:

BDS La Bible du Semeur.

FC97 La Bible en français courant. 1997.

GCLNR00 Gute Nachricht Bibel. 2000. Stuttgart. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

HFA Hoffnung für alle. 2015. Biblica.

Menge Die Heilige Schrift (Bible translation by Hermann Menge).

NBS Nouvelle Bible Segond.

NEB New English Bible.

NJB New Jerusalem Bible

PDV2017 Parole de Vie. 2017.

RSV Revised Standard Version

SYNOD Synodal Orthodox Version. 1984.

TEV Today's English Version.

ZÜR Zürcher Bibel. 2007.

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