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Rethinking Sacrifice and Atonement: A Contextual, Exegetical, and Historical Analysis Of Leviticus 16

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HARDING
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RETHINKING SACRIFICE AND ATONEMENT:
A CONTEXTUAL, EXEGETICAL, AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS
OF LEVITICUS 16

A Guided Research Paper

Presented to Professor Lance Hawley

Harding School of Theology

Memphis, Tennessee

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

Ladye Rachel Howell

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Chapter One

Introduction

Why did Jesus die? Did Jesus *have* to die? Many Christians in the modern West have been taught to understand the death of Jesus as a “sacrifice” that actualizes “atonement,” which then functions as a mechanism for salvation.¹ However, non-specialists may not have access to the larger theological conversations surrounding atonement theories through the centuries, including the nuanced critiques of “Penal Substitutionary Atonement” (PSA). Additionally, although no single atonement theory has achieved an official place in the historical Christian creeds, many believers have been taught a version of PSA as the *definition* of the Gospel, and they remain unaware of the problems with this medieval theory and of the existence of other interpretations.

Penal Substitutionary Atonement claims that Jesus, in his death on the cross, served as a perfect sacrificial substitute for receiving the punishment from God that sinful humans deserve. This substituted punishment atones for human sin and thus creates the possibility for justification, forgiveness, relationship, and salvation.² I have become

¹ For many, without that substitutionary mechanism of expiation or propitiation, there can be no justification or salvation. This project acknowledges that the definitions of these concepts vary widely from one individual to the next and also between churches. Further, atonement theologies are not uniform between the different branches of the family tree of global Christian history; please see delimitations and definitions on p. 7.

² There are multiple subdivisions within each atonement theory or, properly, “theories”; however, space does not allow for a full treatment of the current debates over atonement models. Here it will suffice to note that standard treatments often divide models between “objective” and “subjective.” Objective models locate Jesus’s accomplishment on the cross outside the believer, while subjective models locate the work of Jesus inside a person; substitution models are categorized as objective. Additionally, it is often noted that *penal substitution* theory is a forensic development by the Protestant Reformers of the *legal (debt) satisfaction* theory promoted by Anselm 500

convinced that PSA is based on misunderstandings of Scripture. It is a corrupted narrative that has warped the storied faith of many in the church, affecting our theology, our discipleship, our evangelism, and our ethics.

Understandably, much atonement debate in Christian theology focuses primarily on New Testament texts that interpret Jesus's death on the cross. However, in most of these discussions, several texts and concepts from the Hebrew Bible hover in the immediate background, either explicitly or implicitly. These usually include the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52-53, sacrifice and atonement in Leviticus, and assumed doctrines about "the Fall" and God's holiness.³ Christians who come to faith through the narrative of PSA may be retro-fitting an interpretation of these Hebrew Bible texts to conform to those presumptions. When combined with centuries of supersessionism and rising biblical illiteracy, many Christians have more misunderstanding than understanding about atonement and the sacrificial system in the Hebrew Bible.

Does God require sacrifice for atonement? How should sacrifice and atonement in Leviticus inform our understanding of sacrifice and atonement in the New Testament and in our own lives with God and each other? In Luke 24, Jesus explained his suffering by

years earlier. See Adam J. Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015). See also J. Denny Weaver, "Violence in Christian Theology," in *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006). For a summary and bibliography of recent discussions, see Michael Hardin, "Out of the Fog: New Horizons for Atonement Theory," in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 55-57.

³ Also sometimes included are Genesis 22, Psalm 22, Zechariah 12-13, Habakkuk 1. See Steve Jeffrey, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 33-99.

referring to “all the Scriptures”; we should understand this as a reference to the entire OT canon (Luke 24.25-27 NRSV). This is much larger than an invitation to proof-text a handful of prediction passages from Isaiah and Leviticus. It is the whole canonical witness of Israel’s narrative that Jesus claims to fulfill, and we must relocate our understanding of sacrifice and atonement in that larger frame. Studying sacrifice and atonement in Leviticus 16, then, should be read and interpreted within the context of the whole canon of Hebrew Scripture.

Purpose and Significance

The primary goal of this project is theological exegesis. I will do a close reading of Leviticus 16 in order to understand the significance of the Day of Atonement ritual on its own terms, in its own contexts. More specifically, the orienting focus of this exegetical analysis is to investigate the dynamics of *kpr* (כפר), the role of ritual sacrifice in accomplishing כפר, and the ritual effects of the two different goats in Leviticus 16.

The book of Leviticus and the sacrificial system within it may intimidate readers; many who find it complicated, bewildering, or boring may give up trying to understand it or avoid it altogether. Ellen Davis describes how “there is a profound irony to the failure of Christians to take the book seriously, for it lies at the root of the most serious interpretive controversies and even permanent divides in the church.”⁴ Without resources

⁴ Ellen F. Davis, *Opening Israel’s Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 63. Hereafter cited as Davis, *Opening*. She recalls a professor at a seminary “commenting on why he did not treat it in an Old Testament introductory course: ‘There’s nothing but laws in there.’” On the absence of Christian and Jewish scholarship on Leviticus, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, Continental

for persevering further, the sacrificial system and Leviticus as a whole can remain misunderstood or ignored. This situation is exacerbated by centuries of inherited supersessionism that sees the Christian church as replacing Israel as the people of God, as well as vague Marcion-like tendencies that devalue the Old Testament as just a prerequisite to Jesus.⁵

In light of these historical handicaps, theological exegesis offers a way forward. Readers are empowered to approach difficult texts by always investigating the larger narratives inside which we are doing the close work of exegesis. In this frame, we reorient our analysis with these questions: What kind of God do we meet in the texts of Leviticus? What kind of ancient literature is this? What is the larger story inside of which this text makes sense? Instead of a tedious accumulation of laws, Davis invites readers to see Leviticus as “*enacted* language about holiness—a program of symbolically laden

Commentaries, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), xi-xii. Hereafter cited as Milgrom, *Ritual and Ethics*.

⁵ On supersessionism, see R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). See also Brent Strawn, *The Old Testament is Dying* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017). These unexamined layers of misunderstanding accentuate each other; PSA and supersessionism seem to cross-pollinate in the Protestant inheritance of the “law vs. grace” or “faith vs. works” debates that still persist; this is perhaps inextricable from foundational Protestant epistemology. Projects seeking to reconstruct atonement theology, then, run parallel to current discussions within the “New Perspective on Paul,” continuing since E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). In a recent series on hermeneutics, the preacher at my church titled his sermon “Looking for Leviticus” as a critique of our denomination’s history of legalistic patternism. Because I insisted that legalistic patternism was a misrepresentation of Leviticus, he declared that he was changing his title mid-sermon to “Searching for the Pattern”: Monte Cox, <https://downtownsermons.com/2021/11/08/looking-for-leviticus/> (accessed January 5, 2022).

actions developed over time.”⁶ She suggests that since “languages and symbols are by nature flexible and mutable,” we should “read it poetically.”⁷ Additionally, John Walton claims that ancient legal compilations are related to wisdom collections, since “kings in the ancient Near East *are not legislating*; they are circumscribing the nature of the cosmic order, particularly with regard to justice in society.”⁸ Although modern readers might assume “law” is technical material, Davis claims instead that Leviticus “focuses on the mystery of how ordinary Israel (or humanity), being prone to inadvertent error and deliberate sin, might nonetheless host the radical holiness of God.”⁹

By examining our own assumptions, and by foregrounding the theological narrative that is usually in the background, we can better prepare ourselves for studying the details of the sacrifices of the day of *כפר* in Leviticus 16: their ritual function and symbolized achievement for the tabernacle space and for the people. Walton claims that “an understanding of sacred space is one of the most underappreciated and neglected aspects of biblical theology.”¹⁰ Ritual, liturgy, and sacred space were not named as important or practical categories for religious life in my church heritage.¹¹ However, Jacob Milgrom points out that “anthropology has taught us that when a society wishes to

⁶ Davis, *Opening*, 63. Italics mine.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ John H. Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), 158. Italics mine.

⁹ Davis, *Opening*, 64.

¹⁰ Walton, 143.

¹¹ Although many “low church” settings may craft their identity over against high church liturgy, the truth is all humans are liturgical beings who practice communal rituals in sacred spaces.

express and preserve its basic values, it ensconces them in rituals,” and that “ritual is the poetry of religion that leads us to a moment of transcendence.”¹²

My deepest academic questions are driven by the pastoral challenge of how to make hermeneutical change possible and practical. If believers have been taught a wrong narrative, if churches have disconnected the Old Testament and the New, and if we have misunderstood the sacrifice and atonement of Jesus, then we may not be accessing the deepest resources for living by the larger narrative. This is also connected to missiology—we may be inviting neighbors into the wrong story.

For the purposes of this paper, studying sacrifice and atonement in Leviticus 16 is a significant piece of the larger project to reconstruct healthier atonement theologies for the church. Perhaps reconstruction begins when theological questions uncover the hermeneutical assumptions we did not know we held, which allows readers to study the biblical texts afresh in order to propose new theologies (or perhaps old theologies that need new presentation). Believing communities will then be equipped to wrestle with new applications for community belief, action, and desire.

Relation to Other Disciplines

The potential effects of this exegetical research reach into fields outside Biblical Studies and Hebrew Bible. Beyond the primary connections to atonement theology, this project is relevant to hermeneutics as well as to ethics and discipleship. First, this study relates to hermeneutics because of supersessionism; correcting misunderstandings of sacrifice and atonement could enhance efforts to integrate the two testaments into a more

¹² Milgrom, *Ritual and Ethics*, 1.

coherent narrative.¹³ Additionally, this study is relevant to Christian ethics and discipleship. Misconceptions regarding sacrifice and atonement in the Bible will directly affect Christians' ability to imitate the God who Jesus reveals.¹⁴ A further practical application of this research extends into the pastoral concerns of hymnody since the content of the songs people sing shapes their interior world. Critics of PSA have noted the high percentage of worship songs with heavy guilt and substitutionary sacrifice themes.¹⁵

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Definitions

I am engaging this research as a confessional scholar and a Christian theologian. My previous research in theological hermeneutics has led me to see the whole canon as a complex, coherent narrative of the persistent, progressive presence of God among God's world, and I continue to teach and minister from that center.¹⁶ A further assumption of

¹³ More specifically, the unexamined soteriological assumptions of many Christians contribute to devaluing the OT, which further perpetuates supersessionism.

¹⁴ If we think God requires a blood sacrifice in order to forgive, how should we imitate that in forgiveness between humans? The possibility that Christian forgiveness is anemic because of misconceptions in atonement theology is a related research question for the field of practical theology.

¹⁵ Leigh Barnard, "The Atonement We Sing," Dissertation, London School of Theology. (2011). <https://www.scribd.com/document/72734309/The-Atonement-We-Sing> (accessed January 8, 2022). See also Bob Smietana, "Song Dropped from Hymnal Sparks Atonement Debate," *National Catholic Reporter* 49:23 (2013), 6. See also Kyle Kenneth Schiefelbein-Guerrero, "The Theology of Atonement in Eastern Orthodoxy and Lutheranism Viewed through Hymnody," *Dialog* 48:4 (2009), 329–38.

¹⁶ See Ladye Rachel Howell, "The Holy Spirit And Biblical Interpretation: Alexander Campbell And Contemporary Hermeneutics" (2020). *Dissertations and Theses*. 14. <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/hst-etd/14> (accessed January 8, 2022), 76-78.

this project is the importance of replacing PSA with more robust atonement reconstructions that center both resurrection and Spirit-empowered human participation in God's works of New Creation in a way that is coherent with the canonical narrative just mentioned.

A comprehensive atonement-reconstruction proposal is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. I have already mentioned that atonement theologies are not identical among different groups of believers, neither globally nor historically. This research aims to serve those who are seeking healthier alternatives, though studying sacrifice and atonement is valuable even for communities not in need of immediate reconstruction. Additionally, Chapters Two and Four, the contextual analysis and reception history of Leviticus 16, will no doubt provoke numerous questions for further research that will be limited by the length of this project.

Atonement resists straightforward definition as it stretches over a large category of meaning; the semantic range shifts as it is translated between languages. Many sources reference the English etymology as a Middle English term combining at-one-ment to signify the bringing-together aspect of reconciliation.¹⁷ The discussion often goes beyond the broader meanings of reconciliation and covering to more specific ideas of expiation and propitiation; expiation is the cleansing, covering, removing, or forgiving of the offense, while propitiation is when the offended party is appeased and pacified.¹⁸ Walter

¹⁷ Richard E. Averbeck, “כפר,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 690.

¹⁸ See J. C. Connell, “Expiation,” in *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, eds. Moises Silva and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 2:485-496. See also P. K. Jewett, “Propitiation,” in *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, eds. Moises Silva and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 4:1028-30.

Brueggemann emphasizes the covering aspect of atonement; the reconciliation produces a remedy or rehabilitation by the priestly rituals that result in purgation and purification of the space so the people can host a holy God.¹⁹ The Hebrew verb כפר can mean to “cover, paint, smear” in the Qal, and “atone, appease, make amends” in the Piel, “be atoned for” in the Hithpael, and “be atoned, be appeased” in the Niphal.²⁰ Further, the noun כפר can mean ransom or bribe, the noun כפרם can mean atonement, while the noun כפרת is translated “mercy seat” or “cover.”²¹

Scholars have not reached a consensus between the possible Arabic or Akkadian influences on the Hebrew meaning, “to cover, hide” and “to uproot, wipe away” respectively.²² Additionally, scholars do not agree on the translation of the Greek terms related to atonement in the NT (*hilasmos*, *hilaskomai*, *hilasterion*, which occur two times each); some translators lean toward meanings closer to propitiation while others see expiation in these passages.²³

Finally, in Leviticus 16, one goat is for YHWH and is sacrificed, and the second goat is for Azazel and is sent into the wilderness carrying the sins of the people. Scholars propose and debate three possibilities for translating Azazel: as a scapegoat, as the name

¹⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith : A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 13-15.

²⁰ Averbeck, 689-91.

²¹ Ibid.

²² F. Maass, “כפר pi. to atone,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Vol 2, eds. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 624-25.

²³ Averbeck, 708. *Hilasmos* (1 John 2.2 and 4.10), *hilaskomai* (Luke 18.13 and Hebrews 2.17), *hilasterion* (Romans 3.25 and Hebrews 9.5).

of a physical location in the wilderness, or as the name of a demon living in the wilderness.²⁴

All of these polysemous terms are examined in more detail in the following chapters. As tempting as it might be, the goal of this research is not to arrive at singular definitions in a final way but instead to explore the broad dynamics of atonement and sacrifice in Leviticus 16 within its own contexts.

The Shape of the Project

I began this research by translating Leviticus 16 from Hebrew to English and then performing a close reading of my English translation. I revised and adjusted my translation throughout the project, and I completed two more close readings during the course of the research.

In Chapter Two I demonstrate how Leviticus 16 both reflects and contrasts with the literary, cultural, and historical contexts within the ancient Near East, which helps interpreters de-center the assumptions of medieval soteriology. Chapter Three is the exegetical analysis of Leviticus 16, with attention to the ritual intentions and actions of כִּפֹּר. I discuss the broad dynamics of כִּפֹּר within the chapter's structure that centers the theme of facilitated approach towards a holy God. Chapter Four surveys the reception history of Leviticus 16 and how its interpretation developed through the centuries. I also

²⁴ J. E. Hartley, "Day of Atonement," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 59.

describe four outcomes that emerge from this research and suggest avenues for future study.

Chapter Two

Contextual Analysis

On the surface Leviticus 16 appears to be a chapter of ritual prescriptions for the annual Day of Atonement, communicated directly from YHWH to Moses, so that Moses can then give the instructions to his brother Aaron. For theological exegesis, however, our first question must examine contexts. Without investigating the multilayered contexts surrounding our subject, we will likely impose our own frameworks onto the inquiry.¹ In this chapter we will locate Leviticus 16 in three main frames: the Torah, the book of Leviticus as a structured whole, and the cultural world of the ancient Near East. Describing the contexts of Leviticus 16 will provide the foundation for exegesis in the following chapter.

Context: The Center of Torah

Leviticus is the center of Torah, also called the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. The first word of the opening line of Leviticus is ויקרא (“and he called out”), which gives the book its Hebrew name; the book begins, then, with the first word in the narrative tense as YHWH calls out to Moses. The whole book presents itself as taking place at Mount Sinai, and the vast majority of its content is instructions and laws

¹ The readers’ contexts are not irrelevant; indeed, many texts are meant to involve the readers’ world in the encounter in various ways. However, since everyone always begins where they are, it is important to remember in our intentional approach that the text is an other that I should not assume is like me. See Ladye Rachel Howell, "The Holy Spirit And Biblical Interpretation: Alexander Campbell And Contemporary Hermeneutics" (2020). *Dissertations and Theses*. 14. <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/hst-etd/14> (accessed January 8, 2022), 52-58.

dictated to Moses for the people of Israel or for Aaron's line of priests. Here at the heart of Torah is a *narrative* of communication at Sinai, and Sinai occupies a significant portion of Torah. Balentine shows how the Sinai pericope is 42% of the Pentateuch even though it covers only one year out of 2,706 years claimed by the Pentateuch's internal chronology.²

Describing Leviticus as including narrative will surprise those who assume it is only law. Our expectations of genre will affect our interpretation; we will anticipate and find different things if we think we are reading law or history or ancient ritual. Even the category "Torah" in some people's minds means "law," instead of the broader category of instruction; thinking of Leviticus as "just a bunch of laws" at the center of Torah might tempt some readers to skip over it. Damrosch encourages readers instead to approach Leviticus as complex material where "law and history meet on a common ground composed of ritual, symbolic, and prophetic elements, in the most ambitious revolution in genre since the early Yahwistic merging of prose chronicle and poetic epic."³ More straightforwardly, Milgrom claims that "theology is what Leviticus is all about."⁴ We

² Samuel E. Balentine, *Leviticus, Interpretation: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 17-18.

³ David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 262-63. He laments that "Leviticus customarily receives short shrift from literary analysts. Indeed, faced with such an unappetizing vein of gristle in the midst of the Pentateuch, the natural reaction of most readers is simply to push it quietly off the plate," and he criticizes von Rad for overlooking Leviticus in his work on narrative form-criticism.

⁴ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, V. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 42. Hereafter cited as Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*. He says that theology "pervades every chapter and almost every verse."

must remember that theology is never primarily academic but is essentially embedded in the community identity.

Further, Leviticus is featured as communication from God at Sinai with the narrative of recent events of Exodus still fresh in their memory. The people whom God has spectacularly liberated from slavery in Egypt met with God at the wilderness mountain, and the people were first called a nation there as God entered into covenant with them:

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.⁵

The people then answered God wholeheartedly, through Moses, with an affirmative response, and they vowed that “everything that the LORD says we will do.” However, they soon betrayed their promise in flagrant idolatry.⁶ In spite of that, Moses urged God to stay close to them, reminding God that “this nation is your people,” and God is persuaded not to abandon them. Following Exodus, then, Leviticus functions as a theological narrative embedded within the larger Sinai pericope.⁷

One central question of Exodus is “Can this people host the presence of this God?” Leviticus, then, is still primarily concerned about the presence of God as it fleshes

⁵ Exod. 19.4-6 NRSV.

⁶ See Exodus 32-34. Moberly compares the golden calf narratives to “committing adultery on the wedding night.” R. W. L. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 192.

⁷ Multiple large sections of Leviticus begin with the *wayyiqtol* narrative tense followed by a long section of direct speech from God to Moses; many of these occur after modern chapter breaks.

out the ritual, ethical, and communal dimensions of how this recently ruptured covenant relationship can work. Davis suggests we read Leviticus *poetically* as “enacted language about holiness.” She explains that it describes the,

mystery of how ordinary Israel (or humanity) being prone to inadvertent error and deliberate sin, might nonetheless host the radical holiness of God. Holiness is, at its fullest intensity, almost too much for ordinary human beings to bear.... Leviticus, more than any other book of the Hebrew Scriptures, understands that YHWH is immediately present to Israel.⁸

In this covenant relationship “the divine presence dwells in the midst of the community,” who is “‘bodying forth’ this story.... The ritual and social enactments envisioned and called for in Leviticus are ways of actualizing this particular vision of reality within the context of the flesh and blood world of a living community.”⁹ The center of Torah, then, is inviting Israel to learn how to host their holy Creator.

Additionally, the Sinai narrative engages the question of divine presence even in the transitions between books that frame Leviticus. At the end of Exodus 40, God’s glory fills the tabernacle so much that Moses cannot even enter, and Leviticus 1 begins with God calling out to Moses *from* the tent. Then when we are finished traveling through Leviticus, the book of Numbers begins with God speaking to Moses *in* the tent.¹⁰ This poetic book of ritual texts can be read, then, as a kind of script for a community on the threshold of commitment; they can learn to perform their promises as they learn to host a

⁸ Ellen F. Davis, *Opening Israel’s Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 63-64. Hereafter cited as Davis, *Opening*. See excursus on holiness on p. 57.

⁹ Frank H. Gorman, *Leviticus: Divine Presence and Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 5.

¹⁰ See Exod. 40.32-38; Lev. 1.1-2; 27.34; and Num. 1.1.

covenant-making God on behalf of the world. At the center of Torah, therefore, Leviticus is a poetic narrative of ritual instruction that is in service to a larger theology of presence.

Excursus: Sources Within the Torah

Still considering Leviticus within the Torah, we must briefly discuss Leviticus as a document itself and what we can know about how this material was shaped into the form that we have today. Scholars have long debated how to distinguish the multiple sources within the Torah, much of which was curated long after the experiences they describe.¹¹ Leviticus is commonly attributed to the Priestly source (P), though P itself is acknowledged to contain multiple layers.¹² The Priestly writers allegedly collected and formed their work during or after the exile using older pre-exilic material and with a cultic emphasis that distinguishes P from other sources.¹³ Additionally, another source, or

¹¹ See Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, trans. Sr. Pascale Dominique (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 102-61, for a brief history of the Documentary Hypothesis. Unquestioned assumptions of Mosaic authorship are insufficient to account for the variety in the material of Pentateuch, and I am sympathetic to the concerns that gave rise to proposing sources J, E, D, and P. I am also grateful to participate in scholarship in a time when scholars are going beyond the Documentary Hypothesis (and its acknowledged insufficiencies) to approach books of Scripture as composite artistry and as literary and theological wholes.

¹² See the detailed summary of scholarly discussion concerning layers within P from Klostermann through Knohl to Noth in Jason M. H. Gaines, *The Poetic Priestly Source* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 276-82.

¹³ Ska, 111, summarizes Wellhausen's assumptions about chronology: that Yahwistic religion was natural and authentic, then the Deuteronomistic material represented a move of centralized institutionalization, and the later Priestly material was later legalistic reform during the postexilic period. This, according to Ska, demonstrates that Wellhausen was imposing his "Lutheran 'creed' regarding the Law and the Gospel into historical categories." Space does not allow for a full treatment of the debated antiquity of P's material. Based on linguistic dating of terminology using the book of Ezekiel as a fixed, datable source, Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 3-34, argues that P's content is preexilic, and he engages detractors. He explains that "the antiquity of P is further

editorial school of P, is the Holiness Source (H), found only in the second half of the book of Leviticus, chapters 17-27. The vocabulary and emphases of H are different from P; Milgrom explains that H “demonstrates an advance in compositional technique,” and that “H articulates and develops what is incipient and even latent in P,” and therefore must be dated later.¹⁴ Leviticus 16 comes at the end of the first half of the book and shows signs of multiple influences, though scholars disagree on finer points of distinction between sources and the chronology of editorial work.¹⁵

The disputed dating of sources within the Torah is relevant to research concerning the meaning of sacrifice and atonement in Leviticus in that the various motivations of writers or editors from different eras will have led them to shape the material the way that they did. Although questions of dating will be referenced in this project, definitive dating is out of reach.

buttressed by comparing it chronologically with D. If we assume that the pentateuchal sources are the products of schools that probably overlapped each other, it can still be demonstrated that in some places one source is dependent on another so that a relative chronology between the two is discernible. This clearly holds true for P and D. There is not one demonstrable case in which P shows the influence of D (Kaufmann 1937-56: 1.61-65). The reverse situation, however—that D is dependent on P (and H)—is manifest in many instances” (8-9).

¹⁴ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 42, and Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, V. 3A. (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1319-63. Hereafter cited as Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*.

¹⁵ Knohl distinguishes between two corpuses, PT and HS (Priestly Torah and Holiness School), and elaborates on his thesis of editorial influence, Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). He summarizes how he divides up the strata within books and chapters in two charts on pp. 104-10. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 3-62, highlights evidence of editorial layers within P, seeing ch. 16 as “a rich source for this terminological shift” due to variations in shrine and tent vocabulary (36) as well as sin and sacrifice vocabulary (24). Milgrom engages and critiques earlier versions of Knohl’s editorial distinctions throughout, though both agree that vv. 29-34 show the presence of H (62).

Context: Leviticus as a Whole

We will approach the complete book of Leviticus before examining chapter 16. Although basic outlines divide the material into two or four sections, a closer study reveals a more complex structure.¹⁶ Mary Douglas explains that “Leviticus is a ring composed of rings...ring composition has an unequivocal ending in the return to the beginning.”¹⁷ Without anticipating this level of intentional design, a modern reader may see the material as a linear catalog of laws and miss that this is instead a,

consciously contrived literary form, ring composition, used in antiquity to construct longer pieces. In ring composition the conclusion matches the start and so encloses the piece as a ring. The opening unit, this matched by the conclusion, is repeated in the mid-term. This puts the main idea, the central thesis, at the turning point or centre of the literary work, splitting it into two halves which frame the middle.¹⁸

Following Douglas, Jacob Milgrom maps the book of Leviticus into a ring structure, shown here in Figure 1:¹⁹

¹⁶ Wenham, for example, claims that Leviticus is “for the most part clearly and logically arranged,” and his content-based outline is typical: “(I) Chapters 1-7 Laws for Sacrifice, (II) Chapters 8-10 the Institution of the Priesthood, (III) Chapters 11-16 Uncleaness and its Treatment, and (IV) Chapters 17-27 Prescriptions for Practical Holiness.” Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 3-6.

¹⁷ Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50-52. Hereafter cited as Douglas, *Literature*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1364-65. He says he prefers Douglas’s diagrams from earlier publications in 1993 and 1995. See Figure 1.

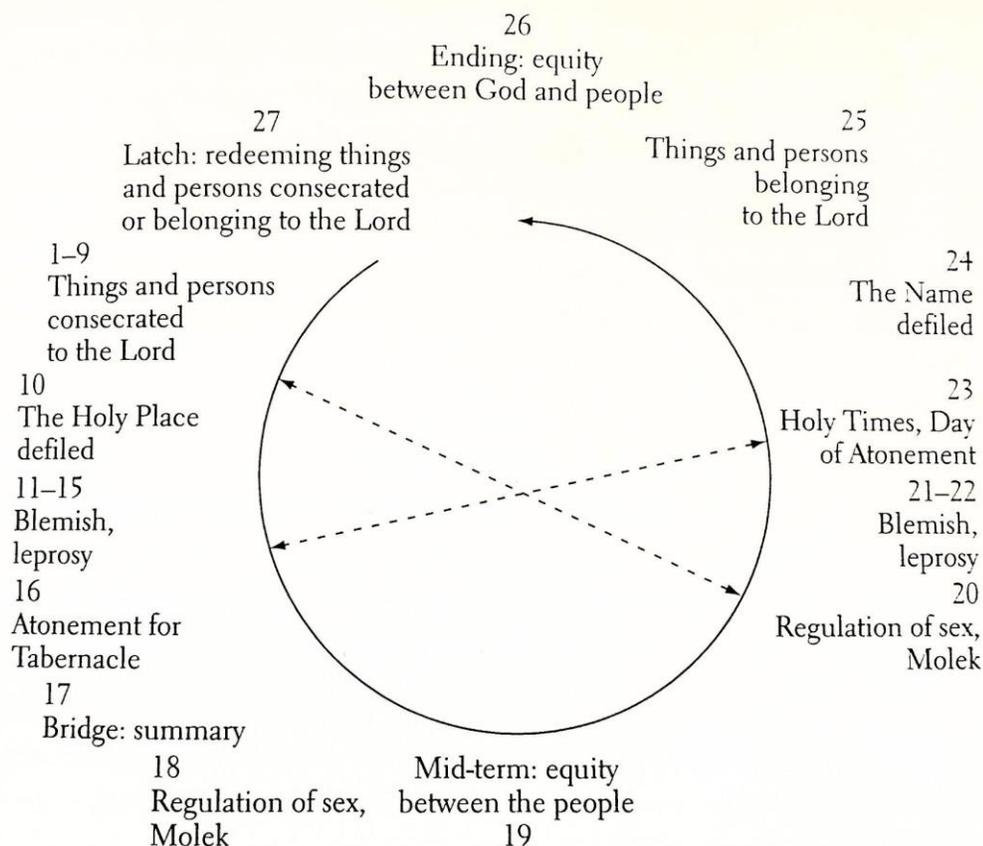


FIGURE 1. Leviticus in a Ring

This ring structure features chapter 19 as the center of the whole with paired layers that correspond as one moves out from that center. With this awareness, after passing through the midpoint, a reader would have a sense of circling back through familiar material but in reverse order.²⁰

²⁰ Douglas, *Literature*, 193-94, writes that “the first half of the book is as constrained as a sonnet, rhyming its meanings back and forth, withholding the completion of a thought, teasing with ironies, tender and grotesque, always holding the overall pattern. Its confident artistry astonishes. It is powerful and controlled, meticulous in following conventional rules. Yet it is bold in imagery, its scope running from grandiloquent law of sacrifice to intimate details of anatomy and disease, from the familiar livestock to the curious little creatures with feet and no legs, from high style to bathos. Throughout it sustains its set direction and delivers its message. The first part of Leviticus looks so firm and complete, no loose ends, a perfect ring, no wonder that chapters 1-16 have been thought to be a separate piece. Its very compactness invites the

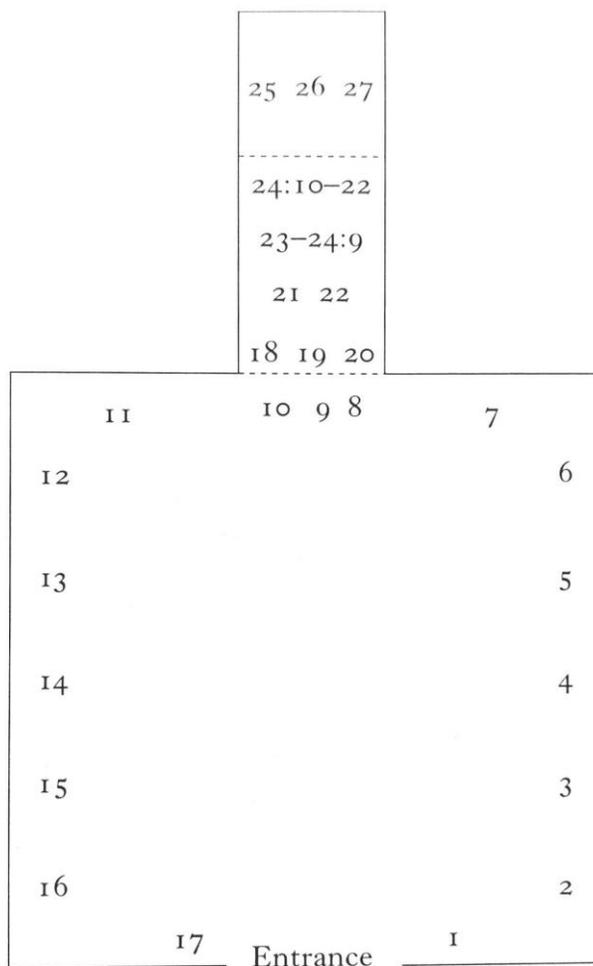
However, Douglas further developed her diagram of the book's structure, suggesting that Leviticus can be read as a "pilgrimage text."²¹ By mapping the "ring of rings" onto a tabernacle diagram, the book becomes a kind of auditory tableau of the tabernacle. She proposes that exilic or postexilic worshippers could take a virtual tour of the tabernacle before the building of the second temple: "Learning the book becomes a way of internalizing the tabernacle: it suggests a form of 'spiritual geography.'"²²

questions about whether Leviticus is two compositions or one.... a single composition written in the tradition of binary halves." She further explains, 225-27, that in the first ring, chapters 1-7 and 11-17 also show symmetry of seven chapters for each side of the outer court of the tabernacle.

²¹ Ibid., 197. She even suggests that Leviticus could be characterized as its own genre, "a genre is a form that moulds its material to produce a unique inner structure, with a coherent analogy as the structure."

²² Ibid., 230. Scholarly opinions on Douglas's model vary. Hendel appreciates Douglas's anthropological background that is evident in her "fresh and powerful perspective on how to read priestly discourse," and he tries to apply her methods to levitical texts on skin diseases. Ronald S. Hendel, "Review of Leviticus as Literature by Mary Douglas," *The Journal of Ritual Studies* 18, no. 2 (2004): 172-85. Jenson, however, applauds Douglas's "impressive insight and thoroughness," but he is not convinced by her connection of Leviticus to the tabernacle. He calls Douglas's *Leviticus as Literature* a "revisionist project" that is "provocative and important" for scholarly discussion. He explains that "the notorious lack of explanation in Leviticus means that any interpretation can be disputed, and not all [Douglas's] analogies are equally persuasive. The correlations she detected between the literary structure of Leviticus and the Tabernacle seemed particularly tenuous." Philip Jenson, "Review: Leviticus as Literature by Mary Douglas," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 52, no. 2 (2001): 725-26. Additionally, Watts admits that "association between mountains and sanctuaries was a commonplace of ancient Near Eastern religious thought," but he critiques Douglas's correlation between the internal structure of the book of Leviticus and the tabernacle as too far a stretch with no support in the text (20-21). Watts insists that Douglas has gone beyond what is in the text by transposing too many presuppositions from her field of comparative anthropology. He critiques Douglas's assumptions about Leviticus's analogous or correlative thinking as incompatible with more straightforward Deuteronomic discourse. He encourages more nuance: "the fact, however, that ideological differences can and do lead to mutual incomprehension between groups is not the same thing as claiming that their modes of reasoning made misunderstanding inevitable. Conscious ideological commitments rather than unconscious modes of logic separate such groups" (19). I appreciate how Watts's critique insists on more nuance in Douglas's arguments, but I

Douglas first includes two figures that show the placement of the furniture and the dividing screens in the tabernacle before mapping the chapters of Leviticus onto the diagram of the tabernacle, which is shown here in Figure 2:²³



Many scholars have noted that the three levels of increasing presence and holiness on Sinai in the covenant ceremonies of Exodus 24 become modeled in the three

also disagree with his rejection of the possible “unconscious modes of logic” in rhetoric that divides groups. James W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture*, 15-36.

²³ Douglas, *Literature*, 223.

concentric spaces of the tabernacle design in Exodus 25-31.²⁴ Therefore, if Leviticus is additionally mapped onto the tabernacle, and the tabernacle is mapped onto Sinai, then as readers of Leviticus “move around the tabernacle with the book, they are also moving round Mt. Sinai, and even having access to parts of it that only Moses had.”²⁵ The text reveals a mountain shape as the multilayered ring structure proceeds in progressively tighter circles:

As to the architectural space of the building and the space of the book, the pattern is narrowing. It converges, movement in it flows through a funnel, burrows toward an interior point, or climbs to an inaccessible hidden summit. It is concentrated and increasingly focused, it does not expand in all directions.²⁶

In this suggested structure, the only two narrative episodes in the book represent the two screens that divide the tabernacle spaces from each other. The placement of the narratives occurs as readers would pass by the screen in their virtual pilgrimage without entering through the screen, since “using them to stand for barriers against unauthorized entry is a

²⁴ For example, see Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 540-41; John H. Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief*, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017), 148-49, and Jeffrey H. Tigay, “Exodus Study Notes,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, Jewish Publication Society, ed. by Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler. Second ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 155-56.

²⁵ Douglas, *Literature*, 218-30.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 230-31. She continues: “The model of the tabernacle is so deeply embedded in Leviticus that it contributes further to the differences with Deuteronomy on the subject of a central sanctuary. Leviticus’ teaching on plural sanctuaries has a doctrinal basis too spiritual to have a risen as a strategy and a political impact about rival holy places. A projectable universe constantly reconstituting itself in objects and places is the essence of its microcosmic thinking.... The effect of microcosmic thinking is not to deny the importance of physical boundaries, but it makes them projectable.”

device for sliding between the ground plan and the text and back again. The stories themselves are parables about trespass on forbidden ground.”²⁷

As readers move through chapters 16 and 17 in the tableau, they encounter Aaron again at the close of the first and largest ring. Strangely, the descriptions for the Day of Atonement, which include Aaron’s activities *inside* the holier spaces, are in chapter 16, which is still *outside* those holier spaces for readers wrapping up the first ring on their virtual tour. According to the proposed ring structure, then, the main focus is still to come.

In Douglas’s frame, the first ring is completed with ch. 17. As the opening of ch. 17 directly recalls the opening of ch. 1, it forms a bridge or latch that connects back to the beginning.²⁸ Now that the first ring is complete, readers or listeners can now virtually enter the curtain into the holy place, where ch. 19 is the heart of a second ring just inside the Holy Place, flanked by chs. 18 and 20. Chapter 26 is then the center of a third ring inside the Most Holy Place, flanked by chs. 25 and 27.²⁹ This concentric crescendo features the imitation of a holy God by demonstrating equity and ethics in ch. 19, and the ascent tightens into a magisterial declaration of and invitation into God’s covenant

²⁷ Ibid., 200.

²⁸ Ibid., 225-26. Compare Lev. 17.1-4 and 1.2-3. On ch. 17’s function within Milgrom’s structure, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1364-65.

²⁹ Douglas, *Literature*, 234-44. She calls the flanking chapters “pedimental composition,” an architectural term describing two columns that support an arch between them. In literature, then, pedimental composition describes two very similar texts on either side of a passage that is the featured center. The surrounding repetition serves the effect of amplifying the content in the middle.

faithfulness in ch. 26.³⁰ In Milgrom's figure, ch. 19 concerning "equity between the people" is the center of the book, matched by its echo in ch. 26 "equity between God and people."³¹ Whether one is convinced by Douglas's proposed multi-ring structure or prefers Milgrom's single ring, both options functionally de-center ch. 16. The purification of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement is not the climax or the center of the book, which is a significant point in the larger atonement debates.

Context: The Cultural World of the Ancient Near East

When studying ancient life and community practice, modern readers may find it challenging to understand concepts like ritual, sacrifice, and atonement. Part of the challenge is linguistic; these words in English span categories of multiple meanings and are imprecise. Additionally, cultural research should also acknowledge that we are interpreting layered material from more than one era. Not only does the Torah weave together multiple voices (see excursus), but those sources themselves are re-presenting older elements. From an anthropological perspective, Douglas suggests that the absence of kings and oracles of divination are among multiple features that show the evolution of older material, concluding that "Leviticus is presenting a new religion out of old practice."³² She suggests that Leviticus's "priestly editors no doubt wanted to reinstate

³⁰ Ibid., 243, notes that the redistributions and returns of Jubilee "effectively [prohibit] private accumulation... ensures there will be no gross inequality of wealth-holding." She highlights that covenant is then named eight times in ch. 26.

³¹ Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1364-65.

³² Mary Douglas, "The Impurity of Land Animals," in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, ed. M. J. H. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Boston: Brill, 2000), 36. Hereafter cited as Douglas, "Land Animals."

the pure Mosaic legacy shorn of accretions”]; scribal priests writing down sacrifices and rituals were concerned about the accumulated widespread “cults to avert the harm caused by demons” common to the ancient world:

Leviticus separated the theory of impurity from belief in demons, and classified impurity as a form of *lese majeste*, an attack on God’s honor as the covenanted lord of the people of Israel. The simple move, expressed in rules for controlling ritual contagion, teaches the people not to blame non-existent demons for misfortunes... in the ongoing history of the religion Leviticus’ doctrinal effort to transcend fear of demons is a modernizing move.³³

This demythologizing move demonstrates development, over against widespread belief in demonic forces that cause harm.

On account of this, we acknowledge multiple historical layers to the testimony recorded in Leviticus. Although priests and scribes likely curated the book during Iron Age 2, in exile under Neo-Babylonian rule, the content describes an earlier era of their community backstory during the Late Bronze Age or Iron Age 1, depending on the dating of an Exodus event.³⁴ Therefore, even though Leviticus contains “no historiography per se,” we can describe historical political realities that have shaped the material.³⁵ We can

³³ Douglas, *Literature*, 8-11.

³⁴ For a recent survey of scholarship on dating options for an Exodus event, see *Five Views on the Exodus: Historicity, Chronology, and Theological Implications*, ed. Mark Janzen and Stanley N Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021).

³⁵ Baruch A Levine, *Leviticus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), xxv-xxx. Hereafter cited as Levine, *Leviticus*. Levine explains how “in substance, certain Torah institutions are very ancient, even antedating the lifetime of Moses, which history would assign to the late thirteenth or early twelfth century BCE. Other institutions appear to be relatively late.... Once we accept the possibility that certain of the laws and institutions, as set forth in Leviticus, derive from later periods of biblical history, we may explore by comparison and contrast, the relationship of Leviticus to Ezekiel.” Levine suggests a position similar to Speiser, in which “priestly law and literature took form over a protracted period of time and that it would be inaccurate to assign all of their contents to a single period of ancient history. This approach helps to explain the presence of some

envision the political and social realities of a small people, overshadowed by powerful empires, recording and reworking their ritual texts.

Further, ritual should not be reduced to thoughtless repetition; instead “all ritual is a form of social drama,” and so “what is required is an imaginative construal of both the ritual described in the text—their gestural acts and symbolic words—and how their enactment has meaning within a specific understanding of the world.”³⁶ The theology of Leviticus is “not expressed in pronouncements but embedded in rituals. Indeed, every act, whether movement, manipulation, or gesticulation, is pregnant with meaning.”³⁷ Rituals are not isolated from narrative but are connected to a community’s story; according to Gorman, “rituals can help interpret narratives, and narratives can help interpret rituals,” as they “provide occasions for enacting the self within the context of a community that exists in the presence of God.”³⁸ Rituals, then, can be understood as collaborative meaning-making practices that are layered into community life and history.

Ritual texts, therefore, show how a group performs their ideas about God, and for Israel, “ritual is a means of theological enactment and reflection. It is a means of ‘doing

relatively early material in Leviticus, while at the same time allowing for the inclusion of exilic and postexilic creativity.” Levine further conjectures that “there is a certain logic in supposing that, at a time when the Second Temple was being rebuilt, priestly writers would be engaged in recording their interpretation of the historic events that had contributed to the Judean restoration. One hears echoes of exilic prophecy in Leviticus, in such themes as redemption.” Levine reminds us of “the talmudic dictum, ‘there is no early or late in the Torah.’”

³⁶ Balentine, 3.

³⁷ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 42.

³⁸ Gorman, 7.

theology.’ ... a way of participating in world construction and world maintenance.”³⁹ To further facilitate the connection between ritual and theology, Dru Johnson reminds us that annual ceremonies and repeated rituals in the Hebrew Bible are often accompanied by knowing phrases, “so that you may know.”⁴⁰ The link between rituals and theology, then, includes an embodied epistemology that acknowledges that humans often learn by doing and learn in the doing.

Studying the meaning of ancient rituals within their specific cultural milieu includes investigating the motivations behind the practices. Gane describes how,

Israel’s festivals were similar to other ancient Near Eastern festivals in that they revolved around agricultural cycle, celebrated the sovereignty and beneficence of the deity and harvests that he provided, included special festival offerings, provided for the renewal of the cult by purification of the sanctuary and in several cases involved feasting by the people.⁴¹

The recorded cultic practices of Israel should be read in light of the neighboring peoples.

Within that broader context of the ancient Near East, according to Milgrom,

the basic premises of pagan religion are (1) that its deities are themselves dependent on and influenced by the metadivine realm, (2) that this realm spawns a multitude of malevolent and benevolent entities, and (3) that if humans can tap into this realm they can acquire the magical power to coerce the gods to do their will.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁰ Dru Johnson, *Scripture’s Knowing: A Companion to Biblical Epistemology* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015), 65-77.

⁴¹ Roy E. Gane, “Worship, Sacrifice, and Festivals in the Ancient Near East,” in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, eds. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 367.

⁴² Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 42.

This network of assumptions about the cosmos would have been familiar to Israel and her neighbors, but when investigating motivation for rituals, we must also remember that ancient practices were fleshed out in the context of a given group's patterns of social organization. Watts urges scholars to remember that "*texts are not rituals and rituals are not texts*" and to consider the potential rhetorical motivations behind the material.⁴³

Ancient ritual texts come to us through the matrix of cosmology and the social structure of community relationships, and modern interpretation should expect that level of complexity.

Ritual is a larger category than sacrifice: "ritual implies repetition, the routinized sequence of actions, patterns that may or may not intersect with concepts of the sacred."⁴⁴

Sacrifice, however, is a notoriously difficult concept to define. Schwartz notes that the English term comes from a combination of Latin terms *sacre* and *facere*, meaning "holy" and "to make."⁴⁵ According to Eberhart, sacrifice is multivalent, pointing to at least five

⁴³ Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 27-32, italics original. He suggests beginning with the following questions: 1) Why did P write about these rituals? 2) What did P think the rituals meant? 3) Do P's descriptions reflect actual practice? 4) What did these rituals mean in ancient Israel? 5) How did these rituals function in ancient Israel?

⁴⁴ Brian Hesse, Paula Wapnish, and Jonathan Greer, "Scripts of Animal Sacrifice in Levantine Culture-History," in *Sacred Killing: The Archaeology of Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, eds. Anne Porter and Glenn M. Schwartz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 230-31. They caution that even though repetitions can be discernible in archeological finds, there is still a gap between the frozen evidence and inferring sequences of behavior based on cultural values.

⁴⁵ Glenn M. Schwartz, "Archaeology and Sacrifice," in *Sacred Killing: The Archaeology of Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, eds. Anne Porter and Glenn M. Schwartz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 1-4. He notes that scholars struggle to differentiate between categories: religious and secular, killing or just gift giving or exchange. Later in the same volume, Pongratz-Leisten insists on distinguishing two main categories: ritual offering and ritual killing. She says that offering has a "communicative function" and killing has a "distancing function," with the former occurring in cultic spaces in service to the deities and the latter occurring outside sacred spaces. She samples

possible referents: ritual actions, the material being offered in the ritual, metaphors for other worship activities, secular metaphors of gift giving, or a person who self-donates to the greater good.⁴⁶ Watts, however, emphasizes the narrative element behind the ritual sacrifice—all those referents are meaningless without the story behind them. Despite the elaborate detail in the extensive instructions on how to perform sacrifices, the biblical texts offer very little information on the precise meaning behind the rituals.⁴⁷

Eberhart surveys three main categories of sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: קרבן, מנחה, and זבה. He lists five different sacrifices in the concentrated depictions all classified as קרבן in Leviticus 1-7: burnt offering, cereal offering, sin offering, guilt offering, and sacrifice of well-being.⁴⁸ The noun is derived from the hiphil form of the

ANE texts to demonstrate these functions, but also admits that scholars should proceed with caution as they separate features of ancient rites since they were integrated into complex community life. Beate Pongratz-Leisten, “Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East: Offering and Ritual Killing,” in *Sacred Killing: The Archaeology of Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, eds. Anne Porter and Glenn M. Schwartz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 291-300.

⁴⁶ Christian A. Eberhart, “Sacrifice? Holy Smokes! Reflections on Cult Terminology for Understanding Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Ritual and Metaphor: Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Christian A. Eberhart (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 20-22. Hereafter cited as Eberhart, *Sacrifice*.

⁴⁷ He adds that “the effect of the burnt offering is often described as an odor pleasing to God (Gen 8:21; Lev 1:9, 13, 17, etc.), which seems to invoke ideas of feeding the deity, while other texts strenuously deny that interpretation (Ps 50:8-14; Isa 1:11).... But no text systematically elaborates on the symbolism of a rite’s offerings or other ritual elements. That has been left for interpreters, who since ancient times have quarried the possible symbolism of these rituals.” James W. Watts, “The Rhetoric of Sacrifice,” in *Ritual and Metaphor: Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Christian A. Eberhart (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 4-16. Hereafter cited as Watts, “Rhetoric of Sacrifice.”

⁴⁸ Eberhart, *Sacrifice*, 23-27. He includes scripture citations, engages various attempts by other scholars to classify the different sacrificial vocabularies, and briefly considers Greek translations for זבה.

verb קרב, meaning draw near. The emphasis in this category is the “bringing” of something to offer when approaching God; it does not have to involve slaughter, and it can often be a celebratory circumstance. מנחה is a second category of offering that extends beyond ritual sacrifice to gift giving outside the cult between people; within the cult it emphasizes “reverence or reconciliation for God.”⁴⁹ זבח often means an offering that is slaughtered, but can also refer to the celebratory meal where the meat is eaten together with others. Eberhart briefly describes four ritual situations that are not considered קרבן or מנחה: Passover, leprosy purification, the Day of Atonement, and after land has been defiled by bloodshed. He concludes that the common feature of the various קרבן sacrifices is burning that goes up in smoke, and this is the crucial ingredient in drawing near to God with reverence.⁵⁰ With this brief introduction to broader concepts of ritual and sacrifice, we now turn to more specific practices similar to those found in Leviticus 16.

Analogous ANE Practices to the Day of Atonement

There are two main movements to the Day of Atonement ceremonies described in Leviticus 16, purgation and elimination, and both have analogous practices within cultures neighboring Israel in the ANE. Regarding the need for purgation or purification of holy spaces, Milgrom describes how ancient cultures viewed impurity as “dangerous

⁴⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 28-32.

from a distance.”⁵¹ He quotes incantations from Mesopotamian, Akkadian, and Sumerian sources, and he explains that the ancients perceived impurity as a “malignant power of supernatural origin. They conceived it as demonic, aggressively alive, contagious not just to touch, but reaching out through the air and solid matter to assail its victims.”⁵² From the anthropological perspective, Douglas explains the logic concerning their need to cleanse a holy space:

Ritual purity is a kind of two-way protection, a holy thing is protected from profanation, the profane thing is protected from holiness... [this is the] double-edged paradox of holiness, inherently dangerous, liable to break out and needing to be protected from profane intrusion. This is very hard for a secular culture to understand.”⁵³

Purification as protection from impurity was a common category of human life for Israel and her neighbors, especially for sacred spaces.

Milgrom describes a temple cleansing ritual from Babylonian New Year’s festival in which a specific space inside Marduk’s temple is exorcized and purified. Designated priests wearing prescribed clothing slaughter animals and perform purifications and incantations with incense on a censer. Milgrom notes the similarities between this Babylonian procedure with the Day of Atonement instructions in Leviticus 16: special linen clothing, use of a censer, sprinkling, animals for slaughtering, temporary defilement

⁵¹ Jacob Milgrom, “The Priestly Laws of Contamination,” in *Sha’arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, eds. Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 137-38.

⁵² *Ibid.* Fascinatingly, Milgrom includes at the end of this article a mathematical equation for ancient views on contamination that he designed to aid modern understanding.

⁵³ Douglas, *Literature*, 11-12.

of those involved, and an oral confession.⁵⁴ Differences include the goal of exorcizing demons (instead of the sins of the people of Israel), a ram's carcass as the purifying agent (instead of goat's blood), the slaughterer is impure for 7 days (instead of 1), and the use of lower temple personnel so the Babylonian high priest will not become contaminated (instead of Israel's high priest). Further, in the Babylonian ritual, the king is brought in, beaten, and made to recite a confession; those involved could then divine the pleasure of the gods by whether or not the king cries during this procedure.⁵⁵

Elimination rituals like the goat for Azazel are also found in the ANE. David Wright describes disposal rites from Hittite practice and the larger Mesopotamian world. He surveys categories of Hittite ritual actions by "motif," which means their assumed method to effect elimination: transfer, detergent, substitution, appeasement, analogy, concretizing, annulment, disposal, prevention, and invigoration.⁵⁶ Wright acknowledges that multiple motifs can be combined within one ritual, and then analyzes five specific

⁵⁴ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1068. The full text can be found in "Temple Program for the New Year's Festivals at Babylon," trans. A. Sachs, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed., ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 331-34. Hereafter cited as ANET. The notation explains that the translations are from two duplicate tablets dated to the Seleucid period, though "the program described may go back to a much earlier time." Milgrom is not using ANET but instead an adapted translation from a student.

⁵⁵ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1067-71. He also includes discussions on the dating of these Babylonian New Year festivals, the possible dating of Yom Kippur actually being practiced, and the possible link of Yom Kippur celebrated on day 10 of the Jewish New Year at the culmination of Rosh Hashanah.

⁵⁶ David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity* (Atlanta: SBL Scholars Press, 1987), 31-45. Hereafter cited as Wright, *Disposal*.

Hittite rituals.⁵⁷ He then surveys five Mesopotamian rituals, including the elimination aspect of the Akitu festival mentioned above.⁵⁸

Wright examines both the prescribed actions and the associated terminology of the surveyed elimination rites, and when the features of these practices are compared and contrasted with the Azazel rite in Leviticus 16, Wright sees a “definite conceptual gulf.”

He explains that the differences are,

mainly visible in the lack of the ideas of substitution and appeasement in the latter. Azazel does not appear to be an angry deity who needs to be appeased nor a desert demon who is the custodian of evil. The goat, moreover, is not an offering of appeasement, nor is it a substitute to suffer Azazel’s anger or some other evil in the place of the Israelites. The animal merely receives the community’s sins and bears them to a harmless locale.⁵⁹

Wright further notes that one of the main impressions obtained from a study of elimination rites in Hittite and Mesopotamian religion is that these rites are practiced so often. In these ritual prescriptions,

mankind and its concerns are perceived as being frequently beset by many types of evils: plague caused by angry deities, witchcraft, sorcery, sickness, demons who cause evils, and the like. Such frequency and multiplicity of affections demand frequent and variously applied rites.⁶⁰

The contrast, then, shows in the infrequency of the annual elimination rite described in Leviticus 16; the elimination need only be performed once per year. Wright attributes this limit to the demythologizing effects of this Priestly material:

This corpus’ conception of evils is limited. The object of purification rites is always ritual impurity except for sins in the scapegoat rite. We never find the wrath of angry deities, demonic attack, witchcraft, sorcery, and sickness as

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 45-60.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 60-72.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

objects of purification in P. Another important contrast is that the Bible does not view the dismissal of the scapegoat to the wilderness as a disposal of evil in the nether world as some of the nonbiblical rites have exhibited. Sending the goat into the wilderness is only to remove the impurity from the sanctuary and habitation so that they might become and remain clean.⁶¹

Studying temple purification rituals from the ANE reminds us that, strange as they may seem to us, descriptions of inner-tabernacle purifications that we find in Leviticus were not alien among their neighbors in the ancient world but expected categories of cult life.

Modern interpreters must read beyond the first experience of strangeness to both compare and contrast the ritual instructions against the backdrop of neighboring societies of the era. Patrick Miller explains how,

the claim of Yahweh to the exclusive worship of Israel is represented with such flexibility and creativity that it may at one time involve explicit rejection of language or forms associated with another deity while at another time appropriating them openly.... The revelation of God is not confined to acts, events, moments, or insights that break into or erupt out of the historical context isolated from and undetermined by that context.⁶²

When the purification and elimination movements of Leviticus 16 are studied within the wider background, the matrix of concepts, forms, actions, and assumptions are all recognizable within the ANE. What then stands out as distinctive, according to Wright, is

⁶¹ Ibid., 73.

⁶² Patrick D. Miller, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 392-395. Some communities, including my own, may have been taught the expectation that authentic revelation from God must be thoroughly peculiar and dissimilar from surrounding religious expressions, but this expectation must be outgrown. Miller says this comes with certain ideas about nature of revelation. In my experience, when dictation via prophetic conduit is the exclusive definition of revelation, the result is assumed expectation of completely unique revelation.

the absence of substitution and appeasement motivations, as well as the downshift in frequency to only once per year.⁶³

Excursus: Animals

The ceremonies described in Leviticus 16 involve four different animals: a bull, a ram, and two different goats; space does not allow, however, for a full treatment of the animal sacrifices in the Hebrew Scriptures beyond this excursus. The categorization of animals as clean or unclean in Leviticus has long puzzled scholars, many of whom suggested moral, spiritual, or hygienic interpretations.⁶⁴ Scholars, clergy, and laity alike should resist oversimplifying this classification of animal life within ancient, distant religion; all human cultures make rules about food and occasionally struggle to enforce them on other groups. Hesse, Wapnish, and Greer invite us to “contemplate this complexity;” they insist that,

sacrifice is one part of the effort by human groups to make sense of their animal killing activities. By sacrificing, in either the sense of “giving to” or “giving up” animals and their products, humans create complex systems of exploitation, but ones they can live with.⁶⁵

Ellen Davis insists on the current relevance of these ancient questions of animal life. She claims that “we have no obligation more immediate than producing and consuming food

⁶³ Wright, *Disposal*, 72-74.

⁶⁴ Douglas, *Literature*, 143-44.

⁶⁵ Hesse, Wapnish, and Greer, 217.

in wise and respectful ways.”⁶⁶ Meaning-making around food, or meat specifically, is not just an ancient question but a universal human experience.

With that awareness of present relevance, Davis focuses primarily on the description of animal sacrifices in Leviticus 11, where the phrase “on the earth” occurs seven times. She insists that the “subtext is unmistakably Genesis 1,” recalling all the descriptions of creatures and their seed-bearing food sources at the end of that creation account.⁶⁷ Leviticus’s view of animals is connected to Genesis 1’s declaration that all God’s animals are created good. Douglas explains that, “having made these living creatures the God of Genesis does not suddenly turn round in Leviticus and revile them.... The God of Leviticus requires an account of blood of animals shed.”⁶⁸

Milgrom agrees that Leviticus’s food system “is to teach the Israelites reverence for life,” and its “acknowledgment that bringing death to living things is a concession of God’s grace and not a privilege of man’s whim.”⁶⁹ The limitations prescribed in Leviticus 11 have the net result of “1) reducing his choice of flesh to a few animals, 2) limiting the

⁶⁶ Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 95-96. Hereafter cited as Davis, *Agriculture*.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* Davis notes that the phrase “on the earth” from Genesis 1 is in Leviticus 11 seven times: in verses 2, 21, 29, 41, 42, 44, and 46 (but missing in the correlated passages in Deuteronomy). She also notes more overlapping vocabulary: “Most of these allusive words are repeated multiple times in Leviticus 11, to the point of awkwardness... the pronounced pattern of allusion makes it clear that Leviticus 11 is picking up where Genesis 1 left off.”

⁶⁸ Douglas, *Literature*, 11. Further in Douglas, “Land Animals,” 38-45, she notes one distinction between the classifications of land animals that are unclean in Deut. 14.3-8 and Lev. 11.2-8 in that the Deuteronomy passage conflates the unclean with abomination, while the Leviticus account does not.

⁶⁹ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 735.

slaughter of even these few permitted animals to the most humane way, and 3) prohibiting the ingestion of blood and mandating its disposal upon the altar or by burial.”⁷⁰ Further, Hawley sees the priestly system for classifying animals as constructed on the foundation of Genesis 1 with the formation of the community in mind: “the Priestly charge in Leviticus 11 is an expression of *imitatio dei*, a command to separate and order as God has already done in the act of creation.”⁷¹ This complex system of animal care has theological motivation and communal pedagogical value.

This communal element is important to remember. This is a relational covenant in which people host God, and care for human and animal life is essential. Douglas reminds us that “as vassals of God their unworthiness is immeasurable, but yet they are invited to eat at his table, and may eat the food that is offered to him. ...Theoretically, the people of Israel never eat meat except in God’s company, in his house and with his blessing.”⁷² Thus the involvement of the four animals in Leviticus 16 should be understood against this wider system of valuing animal life in Leviticus, especially chapter 11. Limiting the use of animals for sacrifice put boundaries on their slaughter and trains practitioners to value their lives.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Lance Hawley, “The Agenda of Priestly Taxonomy: The Conceptualization of נמט and יקש in Leviticus 11,” *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2015): 247.

⁷² Douglas, *Literature*, 149.

Conclusion

Researching contexts is an essential primary step for theological exegesis. Without doing this, we are susceptible to “cultural and religious egocentrism,” and inevitably center our own cultural categories in our interpretation of ancient texts.⁷³ Miller reminds readers to look for meaning “not only where Israel’s religion seems to differ from the understanding of reality shared by her neighbors, but also where these religions touch, interact, develop out of, and affect one another.”⁷⁴ Holding the cultural similarities together with the contrasts enhances our inquiry into how they understood God to be present among them, distinct among their neighbors; “Israel spoke in just such a manner of its God and in so doing affirmed the prior history of religion as also the sphere of God’s revelation.”⁷⁵ Situating Leviticus 16 within the frameworks of Torah, Leviticus as a literary whole, and the cultural world of the ANE equips readers to understand the chapter within its own contexts instead of imposing our own.

⁷³ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 2.

⁷⁴ Miller, 393-95.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* A question for future hermeneutics research is how ritual texts reveal God. Understanding ritual texts only as dictation of legalistic prescriptions is insufficient.

Chapter Three

Exegetical Analysis

Having surveyed the literary and cultural contexts of Leviticus 16, I now turn to analyze the text itself. This chapter begins by assessing the form and genre of Leviticus 16, outlining its internal structure, and then proceeds section by section in detailed analysis of the passage.

Formal Analysis

Leviticus 16 presents itself as a block of continuous communication. The chapter is held within a narrative inclusio of *wayyiqtol* verbs at the opening and the closing. The content held inside the envelope is mediated communication; more precisely, it is a long passage of instructions from YHWH to Moses, but for the purpose of passing along the information to Aaron. This mediated material is a set of ritual directions for a yearly observance, the day of כִּפּוּר, though it is not specifically named as a one-day annual event until the end of the chapter in vv. 30-31. Gerstenberger notes that the “reconciliation festival” described in this text is both “multilayered and incomplete.”¹ The instructions are detailed, but they are not comprehensive, and readers are left with many questions.

Additionally, tragedy is in the narrative background of the chapter. Multiple previous sections begin with “and YHWH said to Moses” or “and YHWH spoke to

¹ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 214.

Moses and Aaron,² but Lev. 16.1 deviates from this pattern and gives a specific occasion. The deaths of Nadab and Abihu are recalled, and that reference serves as a setting for the rest of the material.³ Though that backstory is not explicitly mentioned again, the concern to prevent the death of priests as they approach God's presence in The Holy Space with care continues to echo throughout the chapter.

Since Leviticus 16 resembles a list of instructions, many scholars organize this chapter with a linear content outline; YHWH is telling Moses what to tell Aaron to do, so the directions are organized sequentially.⁴ An outline of the chapter is as follows:

- I. Preparation: the day of כִּפּוּר (vv. 1-10)
 - A. Narrative introduction (vv. 1-2)
 - B. Preparation: Clothing, washing, animal acquisition (vv. 3-5)
 - C. Summary of animal preparation (vv. 6-10)
- II. Instructions: the rituals for the day of כִּפּוּר (vv. 11-22)
 - A. Incense and blood for the lid inside the curtain (vv. 11-17)
 - B. Cleansing the altar (vv. 18-20a)
 - C. Expelling the live goat (vv. 20b-22)
- III. Finishing: cleanup and the future of the day of כִּפּוּר (vv. 23-34)
 - A. Finishing and cleanup (vv. 23-28)
 - B. Schedule for annual celebration (vv. 29-31)
 - C. Priests' sons are qualified (vv. 32-33)
 - D. Restatement of timing (once a year, forever) (v. 34a)
 - E. Narrative closing (v. 34b)

² See, for example, Lev. 4.1, 5.14, 6.1, 6.8, 6.19, 6.24.

³ See Leviticus 10 for the narrative of the deaths of Nadab and Abihu; see also the further discussion on pp. 43-44 of this paper. Multiple scholars note the possibility that Leviticus 16 was meant to follow Leviticus 10 and that chs. 11-15 were inserted later; see Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 3 (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 207-08.

⁴ For example, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible, V. 3. (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1009-10. Hereafter cited as Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*. See also Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989): 101-09. Hereafter cited as Levine, *Leviticus*.

This content outline moves through the information assuming the ordered procedures for the day of כִּפּוּר: preparation, the two sets of ritual actions (purging the tabernacle spaces from the inside out and sending away the Azazel goat), and then the finishing.

Some scholars, however, see beyond ordered instructions to observe symmetry in the chapter that is more developed than just an inclusio of narrative ends. Rodriguez, for example, sees the entire chapter as an elaborate chiasm.⁵ More specifically, in my view, vv. 16-17 function as the center point of the chapter, with verbs of movement coming before and after this center. These two verses serve as dense summary sentences that tightly pull together most of the themes within the chapter. In this reading, then, everything before v.16 flows builds toward approaching The Holy Space, and everything after v. 17 flows outward, exiting The Holy Space, expanding out into the wilderness with the goat for Azazel, and even onward to future generations. My symmetrical outline follows here:

- A Inclusio: Narrative and timing (vv. 1-2)
 - B Preparing to approach with animals, clothing, and washing (vv. 3-5)
 - C Bringing the animals inward (vv. 6-10)
 - D Entering to purge with blood (vv. 11-15)
 - E Purging The Holy Space and the people (vv. 16-17)
 - D' Exiting to purge with blood (vv. 18-20a)
 - C' Sending animals outward (vv. 20b-22)
 - B' Finishing: animals, clothing, and washing (vv. 23-28)
- A' Inclusio: Narrative and timing (vv. 29-34)

This scheme fits with the discussion of literary contexts in ch. 2 of this paper. If the entire book of Leviticus can be viewed as ritual instructions in service to a theology of presence, structured in a ring of rings, then the internal structure and grammar of chapter

⁵ Angel Manuel Rodriguez, "Leviticus 16: Its Literary Structure," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 34, no. 2 (1996): 270-72.

16 also moves toward that centered presence of YHWH, in The Holy Space behind the curtain, and then recedes back out, extending beyond the instructions for the annual ceremony and into the future.

Detailed Analysis

We will now examine each section of the symmetrical outline for detailed exegesis, though space does not allow for an exhaustive grammatical analysis of Leviticus 16. We will focus on how the text's descriptions of cultic directions serve the larger theology of presence and examine how the language of entrance and exit serves the directional flow towards and away from The Holy Space. I will also focus on the verbs to analyze the actions of the day of כפר: who does what, and where and when and why they do it, and the role of the two goats in these rituals. The dynamics of כפר are developed in each section of the chapter, so questions of synthesis will be addressed briefly at the midway point (in the discussion of vv. 16-17) and again at the end of this chapter.

Section A: Inclusio — Narrative and timing (vv. 1-2)

<p>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי־יְהוָה וַיָּמָתוּ</p>	1	And YHWH spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron (when they drew near before YHWH and died).
<p>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אַחִידִי וְאֵל־יָבֹא בְכָל־עֵת אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִבַּיִת לַפָּרֹכֶת אֶל־פְּנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרוֹן וְלֹא יָמוּת כִּי בְעָנָן אֶרְאֶה עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת</p>	2	And YHWH said to Moses, Tell Aaron your brother he may not enter at just any time into The Holy Space (inside the curtain, before the cover which is upon the ark) lest he die. For I will appear in the cloud over the cover.

Our chapter opens with a narrative communication formula; because of the manner of the deaths of Aaron's two sons, YHWH gives Moses instructions for the timing of Aaron's entrance into The Holy Space.⁶ Time is referenced three times: *after the death, when they drew near, and at any time*. This discourse comes within a specific occasion; in light of the previous deaths, preventing a similar fate for Aaron's death is in part connected to the how often he may enter. The reason given here is proximity to God's presence. Seven spatial prepositional phrases are used in these two verses (*before YHWH, into The Holy Space, inside the curtain, before the cover, upon the ark, in the cloud, over the cover*), which fits with Douglas's suggested genre seeing Leviticus as a virtual pilgrimage text.⁷

Verse 2 is the first mention of שֶׁדֶּקֶה, which significantly occurs seven times in Leviticus 16.⁸ This chapter's usage of "The Holy" or "The Holy Space" is unusual compared to its name "holy of holies" elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.⁹ With our focus on

⁶ See Leviticus 10. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 598, 628-635, for a survey of possible interpretations of the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. Milgrom interprets the offense as the offering of coals from a profane fire, and he also acknowledges that this story is "the Priestly counterpart to the episode of the golden calf." Douglas acknowledges the lack of scholarly consensus on the exact cause of the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, and sees that story as a "low key inverted version" of the golden calf episode from Exodus 32 and lines up corresponding elements from each narrative. She also interprets Leviticus 10 as an example of "drink and doom pattern" within the context of ANE culture. Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 200-205. Hereafter cited as Douglas, *Literature*.

⁷ See pp. 20-23 of this paper.

⁸ I am choosing to translate שֶׁדֶּקֶה as The Holy Space in all capitals.

⁹ See Exod. 26.33-34. Noth puzzles over the usage of שֶׁדֶּקֶה in Leviticus 16. Since we would expect the priestly writer to use שֶׁדֶּקֶה שֶׁדֶּקֶה, he is "doubtful what exactly is meant" by this different name. Martin Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, trans. J. E. Anderson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 120.

this chapter's movement towards God's presence, beginning with the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, brings the manner of their inappropriate approach to central concern; Moses must receive instructions for appropriate entrance. This section has two verbs of entrance: a ב-infinitive with קרב referring to Nadab and Abihu's approach, and an אל-jussive negative command of בוא. Because of the backstory of the "illegitimate access" of Aaron's sons, Milgrom translates קרב here as "encroach."¹⁰ Death is mentioned here twice; Aaron's sons' deaths "before YHWH" give occasion for instructions to prevent Aaron from dying "before the cover.... For I will appear in the cloud over the cover." The other mention of death in this chapter is in v. 13, again in reference to God's presence in the cloud over the cover.

The cover or lid on the ark, the כפרת, is the only form of כפר in this section. It is mentioned twice here, and then again five times in the dense details of vv. 11-15, totaling seven times in Leviticus 16. Milgrom transliterates the term because he considers it "untranslatable, so far," though he surveys scholarly opinions and rejects anything related to "mercy" or "cover."¹¹ Gerstenberger suggests the possibility that later tradents may not have had any experience with the ark or its lid, and therefore that since the name כפרת derives from כפר, this can "easily prompt suspicion that this is an artificially coined term

¹⁰ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1012.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1014.

referring to the more theological significance of the holy of holies (“place of atonement”) than to the actual interior arrangement of this dark room.”¹²

Levine explains that traditional interpretation connected the עֲנַן (cloud) here in v. 2 to refer to God’s כְּבוֹד, described as a fire in chapter 9, while some Talmudic sources thought this cloud was the incense that would be brought in later in v.12. Levine explains that this cloud refers to God’s presence, continually there, while the incense cloud is a temporary protection for the priest.¹³ God’s presence is highly charged; the momentum of the chapter centers on it, but the stakes are very high, a matter of life and death.

Section B: Preparing to Approach with Animals, Clothing, and Washing (vv. 3-5)

בְּזֹאת יָבֹא אַהֲרֹן אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּפָר בָּוֶן־בְּקָר לְחַטָּאת וְאַיִל לְעֹלָה	3	In this way Aaron will enter The Holy Space: with a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a whole burnt offering.
כְּתֹנֶת־בִּד קֹדֶשׁ יִלְבָּשׁ וּמְכַנְסֵי־בִד יִהְיוּ עַל־בְּשָׂרוֹ וּבְאַבְגָּט בִּד יִחְגָּר וּבְמִצְנֶפֶת בִּד יִצָּגֵף בְּגִדֵי־קֹדֶשׁ הֵם וְרָתַץ בַּמַּיִם אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ וּלְבָשָׁם	4	He will dress in a holy linen garment, and linen undergarments will be upon his body. And with a linen sash he will gird, and with a linen turban he will wrap; they are garments of holiness. And he will wash his body with water and put them on.
וּמֵאֵת עֵדֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִקַּח שְׁנֵי־שְׂעִירֵי עֲזִים לְחַטָּאת וְאַיִל אֶחָד לְעֹלָה	5	And from the congregation of the sons of Israel he will take two male goats as a sin offering and one ram as a burnt offering.

¹² Gerstenberger, 216-17. Levine, *Leviticus*, 100, translates the term “cover,” and he sees כִּפְרֹת as directly derived from the “expiatory process.”

¹³ Levine, *Leviticus*, 100-01.

There is no form of כפר in this section, and the only verb of entrance in this section is here at the beginning: בַּזֹּאת יָבֵא. The emphasis on the specific care with which Aaron must enter The Holy Space is shown in his preparation: “in this way.” Verses 3 and 5 discuss the acquiring of animals and surround the description of clothing and washing in v. 4.¹⁴ All of Aaron’s garments will be made from holy linen: tunic, undergarments, sash, and turban. These are simpler garments than the more ornamental clothing for priests described in Exodus 28 and Leviticus 8; several scholars note connections to linen garments of angels in Daniel 10 and Ezekiel 9 and suggest a “mixed symbolism... for entering a liminal zone.”¹⁵

Verse 3 specifies that Aaron will bring a young bull for a הִטָּאת and a ram for the עֹלָה; verse 5 indicates that the congregation will provide two male goats as the הִטָּאת and the single ram for the עֹלָה.¹⁶ Although the ram is never explicitly named again, Aaron is instructed to perform the עֹלָה later in v. 24.¹⁷ However, these verses are not merely

¹⁴ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1015, notes the absence of additional spiritual preparation, second temple rabbis added instructions here.

¹⁵ Samuel E. Balentine, *Leviticus, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 126-27. See also Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 230.

¹⁶ Gerstenberger, 216, hints at the possibility that the bull, being the larger animal, was required “for the more grievous sins of the clerics.”

¹⁷ Leviticus 4 provides some background for understanding the הִטָּאת as a sin offering. Hayes, however, examines the even wider field of meaning, since הִטָּאת is also used to describe cleansing from impurities after childbirth in Leviticus 12 or a Nazirite after completion of a vow in Numbers 6. John H. Hayes, “Atonement in the Book of Leviticus,” *Interpretation* 52, no. 1 (1998): 7. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1018, also notes that הִטָּאת is used to describe the ritual of the red heifer ashes in Numbers 19. Levine also discusses הִטָּאת and the potential confusion of the Masoretic pointing from the Piel and

scripting the priest's meticulous steps; in my reading, the main function of vv. 3-5 is also a vicarious experience of preparation. The audience is pointed towards the goal or destination of the whole chapter; Aaron and the congregation's preparation of bodies and clothing and animals builds anticipation towards the annual ritual.

Section C: Bringing the Animals Inward (vv. 6-10)

והקריב אֶהָרֹן אֶת־פֶּרֶק הַחַטָּאת אֲשֶׁר־לֹו וּכְפָר בְּעֵדוֹ וּבְעֵד בֵּיתוֹ	6	And Aaron shall bring near the bull of the sin offering, which is for him, and it shall purge on his behalf and on behalf of his house.
וּלְקַח אֶת־שְׁנֵי הַשְּׂעִירִים וְהִעֲמִיד אֹתָם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּפֶתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד	7	And he shall take the two male goats, and he shall present them before YHWH at the opening of the tent of meeting.
וַיִּתֵּן אֶהָרֹן עַל־שְׁנֵי הַשְּׂעִירִים גִּרְלוֹת גֹּזֶרֶל אֶחָד לַיהוָה וְגֹזֶרֶל אֶחָד לְעִזָּאֵזֶל	8	And Aaron shall cast lots over the two male goats, one lot for YHWH and one lot for Azazel.
והקריב אֶהָרֹן אֶת־הַשְּׂעִיר אֲשֶׁר עָלָה עָלָיו הַגֹּזֶרֶל לַיהוָה וַעֲשֶׂהוּ חַטָּאת	9	And Aaron shall bring near the goat over which was cast the lot for YHWH, and he shall make it a sin offering.
והשְׂעִיר אֲשֶׁר עָלָה עָלָיו הַגֹּזֶרֶל לְעִזָּאֵזֶל יִעֲמַד־תִּי לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו לְשַׁלַּח אֹתוֹ לְעִזָּאֵזֶל הַמִּדְבָּרָה	10	But the goat over which was cast the lot for Azazel shall be presented living before YHWH for purging over it, for releasing it for Azazel into the wilderness.

Verses 6-10 continue the momentum of preparation; this section focuses more on distinguishing the actions surrounding the different animals leading up to the actual

the Qal forms and notes that includes both purification from contamination *and* expiating the sins of the people. Baruch A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of Cult and Some Cultic Terms in Ancient Israel*. Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity, V. 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 101-08. Hereafter cited as Levine, *Presence*. Klawans also discusses the nuances of the interrelated categories of ritual and moral impurities in the Hebrew Bible; the fact that חַטָּאת sacrifices were required for removal of both kinds of impurities “is one similarity among many differences.” Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also the further discussion on pp. 52-59.

slaughtering. כפר begins and ends this section; קרב and עמד are each used twice as alternating verbs of approach in vv. 6-7 and 9-10. Aaron brings (קרב) his bull as a קטאת which achieves כפר, and he presents (עמד) the two goats, one of which will be designated by lot to be brought (קרב) also as a קטאת, and the other which will be presented (עמד) alive to achieve כפר by its journey out to Azazel.¹⁸

The second goat is destined to be released (שלח) for Azazel.¹⁹ Scholars generally debate among three possibilities for the strange name Azazel: 1) as a descriptor of a wild, fierce place, 2) as a contraction of two words עז and אזל (“goat” and “go away,”) and 3) the later name of a mythical goat demon.²⁰ The name Azazel is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture, and has no power or personality in this text. Milgrom suggests the possibility of a lingering place name in the region, developed from a demythologizing over time of earlier belief in a demonic being, especially at the hands of later priestly scribes.²¹

¹⁸ Gerstenberger, 218-19, thinks it is “astonishing” that in v. 5 both goats are together referred to as a sin offering, but that in vv. 7-10 the Azazel goat is distinguished separately without that label.

¹⁹ This is the only verb of outward movement before the center of the chapter in vv. 16-17; this fits within the context of the larger chapter since this section is still describing the order of preparation and specifically distinguishing what the different animals will be designated for throughout the full day of the annual celebration.

²⁰ See Sklar, 208-10, and Levine, *Leviticus*, 102. Sklar prefers the first or second option, while Levine prefers the third option. Levine also notes how this “has been disputed since antiquity and remains uncertain even to the present time.” See pp. 61-63 for continued discussion of the scapegoat ritual.

²¹ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1021.

Strikingly, both the sacrificed bull and the living goat released for Azazel are achieving כפר here, though כפר does not appear as part of the later description of the actual scapegoat ritual in vv. 20b-22. This usage of כפר here in v. 10 reminds us that the conceptual category of כפר cannot exclusively be a designation requiring blood sacrifice.²² Further, the double-preposition phrase לַכַּפֵּר עָלָיו in v. 10 is puzzling; the living goat seems to be the referent in the direct object pronoun receiving the action of כפר, but it is unclear why that goat needs purging over or upon it. Levine describes the variety of interpretations of this “exceptional usage”: some understood it to inherently refer to the sinfulness of the people, others see this phrase as implying the confession that will be spoken “over” the second goat in v. 21, and others understood it to imply the function of the goat carrying what was placed “on” it.²³ The other prepositions in this section are also interesting; in v. 8 the cast lots are “for YHWH” and “for Azazel” using the ל preposition. However, in v. 10 the second goat is presented alive *before* (לפני) YHWH before it can go to Azazel in the wilderness. It seems then that the action of כפר here concerns the agency of YHWH and not Azazel; Milgrom notes that this is emphatic on the part of the writers that this second goat is not “offered” to Azazel.²⁴

²² Ibid., 1023, mentions that this usage clearly means expiation. Levine, *Leviticus*, 103, says this is “actually perplexing” since normally כפר “almost without exception” requires a blood sacrifice. See pp. 52-56 for the continued discussion on כפר.

²³ Ibid. Levine agrees with the third option.

²⁴ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1023.

Section D: Entering to Purge with Blood (vv. 11-15)

<p>והקריב אֶהָרֹן אֶת־פֶּר הַחֹטְאֹת אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וּכְפָר בְּעֵדוֹ וּבְעֵד בֵּיתוֹ וְשָׁחַט אֶת־פֶּר הַחֹטְאֹת אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ</p>	11	<p>And Aaron shall bring near the bull of the sin offering which is for him, and he shall purge on his behalf and on behalf of his house, and he shall slaughter the bull of the sin offering, which is for him.</p>
<p>וְלָקַח מְלֵא־הַמִּחְתָּה גֹחַל־אֵשׁ מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וּמְלֵא חֻפְנָיו קִטְרֹת סַמִּים זָקָה וְהֵבִיא מִבֵּית לְפָרֹכֶת</p>	12	<p>And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from upon the altar before YHWH, and filling his fist with fine sweet incense, he shall bring it from inside the curtain.</p>
<p>וַנָּתַן אֶת־הַקִּטְרֹת עַל־הָאֵשׁ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְכֶסֶה אֶעֱנֹן הַקִּטְרֹת אֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָעֵדוּת וְלֹא יָמוּת</p>	13	<p>And he shall place the incense upon the fire before YHWH, and the cloud of incense shall enshroud the cover which is upon the testimony and he will not die.</p>
<p>וְלָקַח מִדָּם הַפֶּר וְהִזָּה בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ עַל־פְּנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת קִדְמָה וּלְפָנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת יִזָּה שִׁבְעַ־פְּעֻמִּים מִן־הַדָּם בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ</p>	14	<p>And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle with his finger upon the front of the cover, and before the cover he will sprinkle seven times some of the blood by his finger.</p>
<p>וְשָׁחַט אֶת־שְׂעִיר הַחֹטְאֹת אֲשֶׁר לְעָם וְהֵבִיא אֶת־דָּמּוֹ אֶל־מִבֵּית לְפָרֹכֶת וַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־דָּמּוֹ כְּאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְדָם הַפֶּר וְהִזָּה אֹתוֹ עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת :וּלְפָנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת</p>	15	<p>And he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people. He shall bring its blood inside the curtain, and he shall do with its blood just as he did with the blood of the bull, and he shall sprinkle it upon the cover, and before the cover.</p>

Having completed the preparations, this section describes in dense detail the actual entrance and actions that should be done by the priest inside the curtain, though modern readers should not assume that we have exhaustive information.²⁵ Verse 11 begins with wholly repeating the approach-to-purge of v. 6 with the addition of the slaughter of the bull; vv. 12-13 give instructions for the censer of coals and putting incense upon fire, and then vv. 14-15 describe the details for sprinkling the blood of the

²⁵ Gerstenberger, 214, comments that these extant ritual instructions that come to us in this chapter are “multilayered and incomplete... unique and internally tense.”

bull and then repeating with the blood of the goat.²⁶ Milgrom explains that blood from a *הטאת* sacrifice was a “purging element, the ritual detergent.”²⁷ The instructions for the seven-fold sprinkling with his finger in v. 14 appear to be a chiasm of sorts: blood-sprinkle-cover-cover-sprinkle-blood.²⁸ This section, then, contains the technical details of approach and entrance which prepare us for the climax in the next section. Here in vv. 11-15 we see *קרב* once and *בוא* twice, *כפרת* occurs five times as the lid of the ark, and *כפר* occurs only once as a verb in v. 11.

The goal of the censer of coals and the incense on the fire serve to protect the priest so “he will not die”; this implies that the cloud of incense will be where the presence of YHWH appears, referring back to v. 2 “for I will appear in the cloud over the cover.”²⁹ These instructions for protection are given before the instructions for sprinkling;

²⁶ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1024, says v. 11 is resumptive repetition, picking up where v. 6 left off after a tangent concerned with distinguishing between the goats.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 254-57, describes how blood as a cleansing agent or detergent is attested in the ANE. Space does not allow for a study of the full range of blood sacrifice in Leviticus. On the complications and nuances of the prohibitions against ingesting blood in Lev. 17.10-12, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, V. 3a (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1472-79, 1501-03, and also Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Prohibitions Concerning the ‘Eating’ of Blood in Leviticus 17,” in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 125, eds. Gary A. Anderson and Saul M. Olyan, (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1991), 34-66.

²⁸ See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 233-34, for a discussion on the multiple sevenfold sprinklings throughout in Leviticus.

²⁹ Many scholars note that the smoky haze of incense was for the protection of the priest. Entering into The Holy Space behind the curtain was dangerous, since the lid of the ark was thought to be the throne of God. Gerstenberger, 216, questions how the priest could hold the censer and have both fists full of incense since it is a dual construction. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1025-30, for a full discussion on interpreting the details of the incense rituals, including the “long-enduring and bitter controversy” on whether or

YHWH is providing care for the one approaching. While in that smoky cloud, the priest then enters to sprinkle the bull's blood upon the front of the cover of the ark.³⁰

According to this section, the priest needs to perform כפר for the innermost spaces behind the curtain of the tabernacle, though the name הקדש is left out of this section. Verse 15 closes this passage with instructions to repeat for the goat what was done to the bull, beginning with slaughter and ending with sprinkling. Between v. 11 and v. 15, then, the bull's blood was sprinkled on behalf of Aaron, the goat's blood was sprinkled for the people, and the priest is protected as he performs the necessary כפר inside the curtain. The details of vv. 11-15 lead readers towards the more summary-like statements in vv. 16-17.

Section E: Purging The Holy Space and the People (vv. 16-17)

<p>וּכְפַר עַל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִטְמֵאתָּהּ בְּגִי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִפְשָׁעֵיהֶם לְכָל־חַטֹּאתֵהֶם וְכִן יַעֲשֶׂה לְאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד הַשֹּׁכֵן אִתָּם בְּתוֹד טְמֵאתָּהֶם</p>	16	And he shall purge over The Holy Space from the uncleanness of the sons of Israel and from their transgressions and all their sins, and thus he will do for the tent of meeting, dwelling with them in the midst of their uncleanness.
<p>וְכָל־אֲדָם לֹא־יִהְיֶה אִבְיָהֶל מוֹעֵד בְּבֹאוֹ לְכַפֵּר בַּקֹּדֶשׁ עַד־צֵאתוֹ וְכַפֵּר בְּעֵדוֹ וּבְעֵד בֵּיתוֹ וּבְעֵד כָּל־ קְהַל יִשְׂרָאֵל</p>	17	But there shall be no one else in the tent of meeting when he enters to purge in The Holy Space until his exit, and he shall purge on his behalf and on behalf of his house and all the assembly of Israel.

not the incense was lit before entering the curtain and whether or not it was already too dark behind the curtain to need to obscure vision.

³⁰ The front of the cover of the ark faces east, according to Exodus 27, 38.

Here at the heart of Leviticus 16, the concentrated technical details of the previous section fall away. No blood or animals or incense or coals are mentioned here. In my reading, vv. 11-15 focuses more on meticulous instructions; this section, however, widens the frame and describes the larger goals that this annual ritual aims to accomplish. This central section is where we arrive at the destination. Performing כפר for The Holy Space has been the anticipated goal so far in this chapter, and this section pivots from the movement of approach (בוא) and arrival to the beginning of movement outward (יצא).

Although the goal of this research is a deeper understanding of “atonement,” this section at the heart of Leviticus 16 prevents us from reducing כפר to a singular exclusive definition. If we are encountering poetic language of community ritual instruction that reflects a rich theology, then we should expect words to have multivalent fields, and כפר is no exception.³¹ Here at the hinge of the chapter we see that כפר is performed both for The Holy Space and for the people, and with various prepositions. The כפר action in v. 16 is followed by the על and מן prepositions; he will purge *over* The Holy Space *from* the uncleanness of the people and *from* their transgressions and all their sins, and the tent of meeting is also included in this purging. The first use of כפר in v. 17 is in a temporal clause specifically describing the solitary entrance of the priest (when he enters) and is followed by a spatial preposition with ב (to purge in). The second use of כפר in v. 17 uses

³¹ Levine, *Leviticus*, 99, 231, notes that these “rites of riddance” were inherently complex, accomplishing multiple objectives for the people before God; prioritized themes could shift over time, like from a focus on cleansing of the sanctuary to focusing on atonement for the sins of the community.

the preposition **בְּעַד** with three direct objects; the priest is to purge *on behalf of* himself, his house, and the whole assembly. In my view, the overall effect of the way **כָּפַר** is paired with prepositions and direct objects in this section shows the comprehensive scope of the instructed actions.³²

The second half of v. 16 seems to indicate that the priest must repeat the **כָּפַר** actions from the previous section for the outer structures of the tabernacle,³³ but Levine

³² Several scholars have attempted to distinguish between **כָּפַר** meanings based on its usage in different prepositional phrases, and I made a separate **כָּפַר** chart myself before writing the first draft of this chapter. Noth, 118-19, lists **כָּפַר** usage among the “unusual difficulties” of Leviticus 16, since it “appears freely in almost all the possible Hebrew constructions.” Roy Gane has produced an elaborate chart entitled “Components of Language Governed by **כָּפַר**.” His data covers uses of **כָּפַר** from Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers and includes prepositions, subjects, direct objects, intended results, and the relationship to evil in each usage of the verb, in Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 110-111. His aim throughout this book is to show that **כָּפַר** holds a core meaning to “remove evil from the offerer(s), rather from the sanctuary” (142); he sees the inauguration of the altar and the day of **כָּפַר** rituals (including the goat for Azazel) as the exceptions to this thesis. He admits that **כָּפַר** in Leviticus 16 is not associated with any mention of forgiveness, and explains that these annual purifying actions “accomplish **כָּפַר** that is beyond forgiveness” (232-35). Central to his thesis is the problem of theodicy, that forgiveness “creates an imbalance between justice and kindness,” after which “restoration of equilibrium is enacted through ritual purification of the sanctuary, which represents vindication of YHWH’s administrative justice as he sheds judicial responsibility” (379-81). A full engagement of Gane’s thesis is beyond the scope of this project; at present I remain unconvinced by the mechanistic detail required for his interpretation. Alternatively, Gerstenberger, 222, surveys irregularities in this “ensemble” text and says the tradents’ methods were “eclectic.” He thinks that “Chapter 16 by no means preserves the entirety of ritual events associated with the Day of Atonement. Only fragments have come down to us, and even those often enough in an incorrectly assembled sequence. The main concern of this day of penance, however, is clear: the annual expiation of the congregation.”

³³ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1034-35, and Wenham, 232.

also sees a focus on presence.³⁴ YHWH is a God who abides with his people; he is “dwelling with them in the midst of their uncleanness.” Balentine reminds us of the Priestly view that the “sanctuary is a microcosm of the world,” and therefore “the defilement of the sanctuary and the potential of God’s consequent departure threaten far more than the local community’s welfare;” the rituals on the annual day of כִּפּוּר, then, “engage the community of faith in an active restoration of the sanctuary, *not for its own sake alone but for the sake of the world.*”³⁵ The momentum of approach had brought us here to the heart of this chapter, and כִּפּוּר is required for the *continual* hosting of God’s holy presence.

Much meaning is often loaded into this Hebrew word כִּפּוּר, which is used three times here in these two verses. Multiple scholars note other verbs paired in parallel phrases with כִּפּוּר: מָחָה “to wipe/ off” (Jer. 18.23), כָּסָה “to cover” (Neh. 4.5), סוּר “[hifil] to remove, take away” (Isa. 27.9), as well as הִטָּא “purify” and טָהַר “to be clean” (Lev. 14.48-53).³⁶ Remembering the ANE cultural contexts from the previous chapter, and

³⁴ Levine, *Leviticus*, 105.

³⁵ Balentine, 130, italics original.

³⁶ Multiple scholars, like Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1079-80, discuss the possible relevance of the older Akkadian cognate term (meaning “to wipe”) or the later Arabic cognate term (meaning “to cover”); Milgrom suggests that “to rub” could satisfy both fields. Averbeck notes that the related nouns derived from כִּפּוּר signify ransom or bribe money and also bitumen pitch for the ark. Richard E. Averbeck, “כִּפּוּר,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 692-693. Additionally, Joseph Lam only treats כִּפּוּר within his discussion of the conceptual metaphor SIN IS A BURDEN. He explains that “actual usage [of כִּפּוּר] reveals a high degree of lexicalization, whether the underlying metaphorical idea was that of ‘covering’ or ‘wiping clean,’” though he acknowledges most recent scholars “do not consider the etymological connection with ‘covering to be

considering the evidence summarized here, and also in light of the verbs of movement that carry the audience through this chapter, I am convinced that “purge” is the most useful English term against other options. However, I have left the word as the Hebrew root as much as possible in this paper in order to counter potential oversimplification in my subconscious assumptions.

כפר functions on behalf of spaces and places as well as individuals and groups of people; ritual impurities as well as sin and rebellion are purged and removed.³⁷ Further, for all that כפר might mean, it is not the end goal; if my thesis is correct that the main idea of Leviticus 16 is about facilitating Israel’s vocation to host YHWH, then an annual day of כפר serves that larger objective. Additionally, if Leviticus 16 is not the central focus of the book, and we instead find the ascending centers of gravity in chapters 19 and 26, then our interpretation of the meaning and importance of כפר should reflect those priorities. How does כפר serve neighbor love and the covenant faithfulness of God?

significant.”” Joseph Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible : Metaphor, Culture, and the Making of a Religious Concept* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 80-81.

³⁷ כפר must remain polysemous. Shalom Paul explains that two main categories of lexical polyvalency are homonymy/ homography (same sound/spelling, different meaning) and polysemy (one word, multiple meanings), but that a polysensuous word “refers to one thing while alluding to another... has explicit and implicit meaning.... This stylistic device is a fertile source for intentional ambiguity.” Shalom M. Paul, “Polysensuous Polyvalency in Poetic Parallelism,” in *Sha ‘arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, eds. Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 147.

demonic influence to moral states.⁴² Additionally, Douglas explains that purity is less an essential attribute and instead “a relation between things which are required to be kept apart.”⁴³ Stated another way, “purity is the stage between the holy and the impure.”⁴⁴ Common, modern definitions of devotional holiness as “set apart,” then, are insufficient. Instead, “holy” as a descriptor of God refers more to an ontological designation for one who is “Totally Other.”⁴⁵ Schwartz explains that for Israel,

holiness is not identical to, nor is it strictly a function of, the maintenance of purity. True, the impure may not come in contact with the sacred (for this reason the priests are forbidden to become defiled); if it does, the consequences are disastrous. But Israel’s holiness depends on compliance with the entire range of commandments.... Holiness is an emanation from the Godhead outward, radiating the divine abode to whatever is in range and tuned in to receive it. Impurity is what is exuded by earthly death and its manifestations, moving inward towards the divine abode and accumulating there unless it is not cleansed.... As long as YHWH remains in the midst, the dynamic, contagious holiness which He exudes is present for the taking. If, by keeping his laws, they remain tuned in to the

⁴² Milgrom explains further, “Thus, *tum’ a* and *qedusha*, biblical impurity and holiness, are semantic opposites and as the quintessence and source of *qedusha* resides with God, it is imperative for Israel to control the occurrence of impurity lest it impinge on the realm of the holy God. The forces pitted against each other in the cosmic struggle are no longer the benevolent and demonic deities that populate the mythologies of Israel’s neighbors but the forces of life and death set loose by humans themselves through their obedience to or defiance of God’s commandments. Among all of the diachronic changes that occur in the development of Israel’s impurity system, this clearly is the most significant: the total severance of impurity from the demonic and its reinterpretation as a symbolic system reminding Israel of its imperative to cleave to life and reject death.” Milgrom, “Dynamics of Purity,” 32.

⁴³ Mary Douglas, “Impurity of Land Animals,” in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, ed. M. J. H. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Boston: Brill, 2000), 35. Hereafter cited as Douglas, “Land Animals.”

⁴⁴ Marcel Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz, “Purity and Holiness: An Introductory Survey,” in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, ed. M. J. H. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Boston: Brill, 2000), 12.

⁴⁵ Lance Hawley, Class Lecture Notes, Advanced Introduction to the Old Testament, Harding School of Theology, Summer 2019. See also Kevin J. Youngblood, Class Lecture Notes, Old Testament Theology, Harding School of Theology, Summer, 2021.

transmission, it is theirs. Holiness is therefore what the Israelites stand to gain from the Godhead present in their midst; maintenance of purity is what will prevent Him from leaving.⁴⁶

Schwartz laments the insufficiencies of the English terms *sacred* and *holy* normally used to translate קדש , since “no matter how they are defined or derived, in the final analysis always express value.... As used in the Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, the root *qds* does not convey any value judgment at all.... Thus the use of *holy* and its synonyms to convey *qds* is at best an approximation.”⁴⁷ Schwartz adds that “the Israelites are not told to be holy like God; rather they are commanded to be holy *because* he is holy.”⁴⁸ The

⁴⁶ Baruch J. Schwartz, “Israel’s Holiness: The Torah Traditions,” in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, ed. M. J. H. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Boston: Brill, 2000), 59. Hereafter cited as Schwartz, “Torah.” Additionally, Wright notes that “searching for the rationale of the priestly impurity laws in the Bible is a never-ending project,” and he organizes the data in a helpful chart that distinguishes between tolerated and prohibited and intentional and unintentional. David Wright, “Spectrum of Priestly Impurity,” in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel*, eds. Saul M. Olyan and Gary A. Anderson (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1991), 150-181. Hereafter cited as Wright, “Spectrum.”

⁴⁷ Schwartz, “Torah,” 47-57. He explains that there are two forms of קדש in the Hebrew: קדש I and קדש II . קדש I carries the sense of “designated for,” “separate,” God as “totally other,” and things that are set apart for God. קדש II carries the sense of “purified” or “clean” and is never used by P except once, here in our chapter in Lev. 16.19 concerning the consecration of the altar. Schwartz further examines how the concept of קדש differs between sources: “Israel’s holiness, in the non-priestly tradition, is therefore its status as God’s servants. In Exodus, this status is still a promise; in Deuteronomy it is already an accomplished fact” (51). In H’s curating of P material, then, Israel is designated as קדש I , as a possession belonging to God, whose holiness emanates or radiates out from God’s presence in their midst. Schwartz explains how “a corollary to this unique priestly idea that the holiness conferred by YHWH on Israel is an effusion of his essence rather than a mere designation or election is a temporal element. In all of the non-priestly texts Israel became holy to God at some point in history; in the priestly texts God sanctifies Israel—the verb is always in the participial form—constantly, by virtue of His enduring, abiding Presence. Priestly thought perceives Israel’s holiness not as an historical event but as a dynamic process, always taking place” (55).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

people’s holiness can never approximate YHWH’s holiness. Instead, they are to be “other” because God is “other,” and “their holiness consists of their loyal obedience to Him.”⁴⁹

Section D’: Exiting to Purge with Blood (vv. 18-20a)

וַיֵּצֵא אֶל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי-יְהוָה וַיִּכָּפֵר עָלָיו וְלָקַח מִדָּם הַפָּר וּמִדָּם הַשְּׂעִיר וַנָּתוּ עַל-קַרְנֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב	18	And he shall go out to the altar which is before YHWH and he shall purge over it. And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat and he shall put it upon the horns of the altar all around.
וַהֲזָה עָלָיו מִן-הַדָּם בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים וְטָהַר וְקִדְּשׁוּ מִטְּמֵאֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	19	And he shall sprinkle over it some of the blood with his finger seven times, and he shall purify it and consecrate it from all uncleanness of the sons of Israel.
וַכִּלֶּה מִכַּפֵּר אֶת-הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֶת-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ	20 a	And he shall finish from purging The Holy Space and the tent of meeting and the altar.

The section is oriented outward as we return to detailed instructions; the very first word is a verb of exit. The priest takes the animal blood and exits the innermost spaces to repeat the earlier sprinkling, now on the altar and its horns. Scholars disagree on whether this altar mentioned in this section is the incense altar or the sacrificial altar.⁵⁰

This section blends technical details with the wider language of purpose. The altar needs to have כִּפֵּר performed over it, for the purpose of purifying and consecrating it (קִדְּשׁוּ and טָהַר). This verb form of קִדְּשׁ is the only form other than the noun הַקֹּדֶשׁ in this

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Levine, *Leviticus*, 105, thinks this is the incense altar; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1036-39, disagrees and thinks instead this is the sacrificial altar and includes a reflection on the number of times blood is to be dabbed or sprinkled in the instructions.

chapter. The outward direction is also marked by v. 20a which I include in this section as a concluding summary statement. Three direct objects are named as “finished,” having received their needed כפר: The Holy Space, the tent of meeting, and the altar. The tasks for the annual day of כפר are not yet complete, but the remaining tasks carry the action outward.

Section C': Sending animals outward (vv. 20b-22)

והקריב את־השעיר הַחַי	20 b	And he shall bring near the living goat,
וּסְמַךְ אֶהָרֶן אֶת־שְׁתֵּי יָדָיו עַל־רֹאשׁ הַשְּׂעִיר הַחַי וְהִתְנַדָּה עָלָיו אֶת־כָּל־עֲוֹנוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־כָּל־פְּשָׁעֵיהֶם לְכָל־חַטָּאתָם וְנָתַן אֹתָם עַל־רֹאשׁ הַשְּׂעִיר וְשָׁלַח בְּיַד־אִישׁ עֲתִי הַמְדַבֵּרָה	21	and Aaron shall lay his two hands upon the head of the living goat and he shall confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions and all their sins. He shall place them upon the head of the goat, and he shall send it away by the hand of a ready man into the wilderness.
וְנִשָּׂא הַשְּׂעִיר עָלָיו אֶת־כָּל־עֲוֹנוֹתָם אֶל־אֶרֶץ גְּזֵרָה וְשָׁלַח אֶת־הַשְּׂעִיר בַּמִּדְבָּר	22	The goat shall carry upon him all their iniquities to a separate land, and he shall send away the goat into the wilderness.

Even though כפר is complete for spaces and objects, this section shows that the day's rituals are only half over. Verse 20b begins with the hifil form of קרב, but Aaron is himself outside of the inner spaces as he “brings near” the goat. The living goat is named twice in quick succession before the task is described. Then with both his hands on the head of the living goat, Aaron will confess over it three direct objects: the iniquities, transgressions, and sins of the people, which are symbolically placed on the head of the goat. The goat will be escorted by the hand of another man, and the movement continues

flowing outward with two uses of שלח paired with מדבר and נשא in between; the living goat is sent away to the wilderness carrying all the sins of the people.

Scholars have not reached a consensus regarding these strange rites performed on the second goat, and theories abound. Gerstenberger sees the second goat as “representatively” bearing away Israel’s sins, but he also notes the thoroughness of these instructions: two hands when in other situations one is enough, and the extent of the three major sin categories (iniquities, transgressions, sins). He also notes the absence of a specific script in this text for the priest’s confession of the people’s sins and suggests other OT confessional texts as potential examples (Ezra 9, Nehemiah 1, Daniel 9, Psalm 106).⁵¹ Sklar emphasizes the public, visible nature of this part of the annual ceremony, since the whole community could potentially witness the expulsion of the goat. He also infers that the goat was then responsible for the penalty of the bloodguilt as it was led away to “endure its consequences on their behalf.”⁵²

Levine sees magical thinking in the instructions for the priest in the Azazel goat ritual. He claims it is evidence of a “phenomenology of riddance” that uses animals in a power encounter to “boomerang” the sins of the people back onto “the demonic prince of the wilderness,” though he is aware that modern audiences prefer to view it as symbolic representation.⁵³ Milgrom, however, insists that this is a judicial function, not magical; he further explains that “purgation and elimination rites go together in the ancient world.

⁵¹ Gerstenberger, 220-21. He also suggests that this strange passage would possibly be “archaic and murky” to later Second Temple Jews.

⁵² Sklar, 212-13; he references connections with 2 Samuel 1 and Isaiah 53.

⁵³ Levine, *Leviticus*, 250-53.

Exorcism of impurity is not enough; its power must be removed,” and he surveys similar Mesopotamian and Hittite rituals.⁵⁴ Alternatively, Gorman suggests that Azazel is a wilderness chaos being, not a demon, since wilderness is “a liminal state, a time and place in which normal structures do not hold.... Thus sins, the cause of pollution and possible chaos, are put in their place; they are sent to Azazel and placed in the realm of chaos.”⁵⁵

Schwartz sees two distinct forms of elimination: the slain (first) goat “eradicates” impurities, but then sin must be carried away by the living (second) goat.⁵⁶ Adu-Gyamfi admits there is “continuity and discontinuity,” but in general sees more coherence between the two goat rituals; he thinks the second goat is completing the כפר of the first goat.⁵⁷ Additionally, Joseph Lam takes a whole chapter to discuss the range of meaning of the verb נשא (bear, carry, lift, forgive) and reminds readers of the conceptual metaphor underneath the Azazel ritual: SIN IS A BURDEN.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1071-79; see also pp. 30-35 of this paper.

⁵⁵ Frank H. Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community: A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus*. International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 97-98.

⁵⁶ Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, eds. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 17-21. Hereafter cited as Schwartz, “Bearing of Sin.”

⁵⁷ Yaw Adu-Gyamfi, “The Live Goat Ritual in Leviticus 16,” *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa* 112, no. 1 (2013): 5-8.

⁵⁸ Lam, 16-86, sees this ritual enactment with the goat for Azazel as the “explicitization” of the metaphor, which is the opposite direction of what may have become idiomization (“bearing my sin”) for some in the modern era.

It is a daunting task to attempt to synthesize the range of diverse interpretations of the Azazel goat passage attested nowhere else in Scripture. In my view, it is important to note that synchronically, the ritual described here could be “real” to an audience in one era, but diachronically this can also represent a demythologizing innovation of representative symbols by priests. Nowhere does the text indicate that the rituals are purely representative, and yet much language is built on conceptual metaphors, and much of human perception of reality is based on metaphorical language. Regarding our interest in the conceptual range of כפר, we already noted that the earlier section concerning the Azazel goat in vv. 6-10 expands the meaning of כפר to include non-blood sacrifices. Though the Mishnah discusses later Second Temple practices that included the death of the second goat, the second goat is specifically designated as “living” in both vv. 6-10 and vv. 20b-22 and is not slaughtered in this text.⁵⁹ כפר expands beyond the cleansing of the sanctuary and the people to include the removal of their sins away into the wilderness.

However one interprets the obscure background to the Azazel ritual of Leviticus 16, vv. 20b-22 serve as a continuation of the sense of movement in the chapter; YHWH provides instructions for his people to approach, and he also provides a vehicle to carry their sins far away from them.

Section B': Finishing — Animals, Clothing, and Washing (vv. 23-28)

<p>וּבָא אֶהְרֹן אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּפָשַׁט אֶת־בְּגָדֵי הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר לְבָשׁ בְּבָאוֹ אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְהִנִּיתָם שָׁם</p>	23	<p>And Aaron shall enter the tent of meeting and shall strip off the linen garments which he put on when he entered The Holy Space, and he shall leave them there.</p>
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⁵⁹ See ch. 4 of this paper.

וְרָחַץ אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם בְּמִקְוֹם קָדוֹשׁ וְלָבַשׁ אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וַיֵּצֵא וַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־עֹלֹתָו וְאֶת־עֹלֹת הָעָם וַכִּפֵּר בְּעֶזְרוֹ וּבְעֶד הָעָם	24	And he shall bathe his body in water in a holy place and dress in his garments, and he shall go out and make his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and he shall purge on his behalf and on behalf of the people,
וְאֵת חֵלֶב הַחַטָּאת יִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ	25	and he shall burn the fat of the sin offering on the altar.
וְהַמְשַׁלַּח אֶת־הַשְּׂעִיר לְעֵזְאֵל יִכְבֹּס בְּגָדָיו וְרָחַץ אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יָבֹא אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה	26	And the one who expelled the goat for Azazel will wash his garments and bathe his body in water, and after thus he will enter the camp.
וְאֵת פֶּרֶ הַחַטָּאת וְאֵת אִשְׂעִיר הַחַטָּאת אֲשֶׁר הוּבֵא אֶת־דָּמָם לְכַפֵּר בַּקֹּדֶשׁ יּוֹצִיא אֶל־מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְשָׂרְפוּ בָאֵשׁ אֶת־עוֹרָתָם וְאֶת־בְּשָׂרָם וְאֶת־פְּרָשָׁם	27	And the bull of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering (whose blood was brought in for purging in The Holy Space) he will take outside the camp and they shall burn in fire their skins and their flesh and their offal.
וְהַשֹּׂרֵף אֹתָם יִכְבֹּס בְּגָדָיו וְרָחַץ אֶת־ בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יָבֹא אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה	28	The one who burns them shall wash his garments and bathe his body in water, and after thus he will enter the camp.

This section is dense with detailed instructions for cleanup after concluding the main tasks for the annual day of כִּפּוּר. Having just sent away the living goat, from his position now outside the tent, Aaron is instructed to re-enter to wash and bathe inside the tent of meeting before exiting again to perform the burnt offering along with burning the fat of the sin offering. The order of the directions for washing has puzzled many commentators. Later rabbis moved v. 23 to follow v. 25 to rearrange the order based on which tasks were performed in which set of garments, but Milgrom suggests that it “raises as many questions as it answers.”⁶⁰ This is followed by washing instructions for the Azazel goat-guide, burning instructions for the remains of the two sin offerings outside the camp, and washing instructions for the one who burns the remains.

⁶⁰ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1046-47.

כפר is almost complete for the day. In the middle of this section, Aaron is instructed to exit in order to complete the whole burnt offering, referring to the ram of section B. This is also included as an action of כפר on behalf of Aaron and the people.⁶¹ As a whole, this section still moves away from the center of the chapter, and yet, there are multiple verbs of entrance and exit in this passage. For all the detail in this section, the washing-for-reentry instructions for the individuals who guide the goat to the wilderness and burn the remains are not complicated. Reentry is expected and planned for.

Section A': Inclusio — Narrative and timing (vv. 29-34)

וְהָיְתָה לָכֶם לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּעֶשְׂרֵי לַחֹדֶשׁ תַּעֲנִי אֶת־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם וְכֹל־מְלֹאכֶה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ הָאֲזָרָח וְהַגֵּר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם	29	And it shall be for you as a statute forever, in the seventh month in the tenth of the month, you shall afflict yourselves, and you shall not do any work, native or sojourning stranger in your midst.
כִּי־בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטָהָר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטָּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תִּטְהָרוּ	30	Therefore on that day he will purge over you to purify you; from all your sins before YHWH you will be purified.
שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן הִיא לָכֶם וְעֲנִיתֶם אֶת־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם	31	It is a super sabbath for you. You shall afflict yourselves; it is a statute forever.
וְכַפֵּר הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר־יִמָּשַׁח אֹתוֹ וְאֲשֶׁר יִמְלֵא אֶת־יָדוֹ לְכַהֵן תַּחַת אָבִיו וְלָבַשׁ אֶת־בְּגָדֵי הַבְּדָה בְּגָדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ	32	And the priest (who is anointed and ordained as priest under his father) shall purge, wearing the garment of linen, the holy garment.
וְכַפֵּר אֶת־מִקְדָּשׁ הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ יִכַּפֵּר וְעַל הַכֹּהֲנִים וְעַל־כָּל־עַם הַקְהָל יִכַּפֵּר	33	He shall purge The Holy Sanctuary and the tent of meeting and he will purge the altar. And over all the priests and over all the people of the assembly he will purge.
וְהָיְתָה־זֹאת לָכֶם לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְכַפֵּר עַל־בְּגֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל־חַטָּאתָם	34	And this shall be for you a statute forever

⁶¹ Outside of Leviticus 16, כפר paired with the בעד preposition only occurs in Leviticus 9 when the tabernacle was inaugurated. Baden sees this as possibly showing an early strata of material older than the frequent pairing of כפר with על like in Leviticus 1-4 and 11-15. Joel S. Baden, “The Purpose of Purification in Leviticus 16: A Proposition Pertaining to Priestly Prepositions,” *Vetus Testamentum* 71, no. 1 (2020).

אָתְּ מִשָּׁה וַיַּעַשׂ כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה	for purging over the sons of Israel from all their sins one time a year, and he did just as YHWH commanded to Moses.
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This final section addresses the community with a plural pronoun; it deals largely with instructions for the continuation of this annual ceremony into future generations. According to Milgrom, Wright, and Douglas, the fact that this sanctuary cleansing ritual is only performed once a year is significant when compared to the more frequent practices of other ANE groups.⁶² It is only once a year, but it is for everyone. The priest in Aaron's line was to perform the rituals on behalf of the community, but everyone was instructed to be fasting and resting on this day, even strangers living among them.⁶³ Verse 30 reads like a summary statement of what results from this day for the people: כִּפֹּר accomplishes purifying (טָהַר) from sin before YHWH. This day is declared a super sabbath in v. 31, which brings a whole host of connections to other passages and experiences into the conversation, and yet it is still not the center of gravity of Leviticus.

The priests' descendants will continue the practices of כִּפֹּר just like has been instructed to Aaron.⁶⁴ The innermost space is named again here but with an emphatic

⁶² See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1056, Douglas, *Literature*, 10-11, and David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 73. Hereafter cited as Wright, *Disposal*.

⁶³ Levine, *Leviticus*, 109, notes that later rabbis made the list of limitations explicit: they were to abstain from food and drink, bathing, oils on the body, leather shoes, and sexual intercourse.

⁶⁴ This section does not mention Aaron by name. Verse 32 describes who may perform these functions, literally "and the priest will purge – the one who will anoint him, the one who will fill the hand for priesting under his father." Levine, *Leviticus*, 53, 110, 205, explains that the Hebrew idiom "to fill the hand" signifies ordination or appointment to the office. Additionally, the final line of the chapter seems to include

hapax legomenon, “The Holy Sanctuary,” again emphasizing the presence of God located among the people.⁶⁵ כפר rings six times through this section and gives a sense of comprehensive scope; the priest in the line of succession will perform כפר over the tabernacle structures from the inside out, over the other priests, and over all the people, down through the generations, once a year forever.

Conclusion

Leviticus 16 is a complex chapter of instructions for the annual Day of כפר. Verbs of approach (קרב, בוא, עמד) usher the hearers with the priest towards God’s presence in The Holy Space in vv. 16-17. These two verses are the heart of the chapter in my reading, and then verbs of exit (יצא, ושא, שלח) escort the listeners away. כפר in Leviticus 16 has a wide semantic range, involving purgation of contamination and elimination of sin burdens. כפר was needed for The Holy Space, the whole tabernacle, the altar, and the people, and it was achieved within rituals that both did and did not require blood. The actions were performed by the priest on behalf of the people, but it is YHWH who gives

Aaron in the Qal wayyiqtol 3ms verb עשה “and he did” since it is followed by a כאשר clause “just as YHWH commanded to Moses.” Though the direct narrative of the chapter portrays the first time Aaron is receiving these instructions from God through Moses, the final line connects back to the inclusio of vv. 1-2 and implies that he (Aaron) followed through on the directions he received.

⁶⁵ Knohl identifies two traditions interwoven into the Torah concerning the tent of meeting. Leviticus 16 and other texts identify the tent of meeting with the tabernacle that housed the presence of YHWH, while a shorter list of texts, like Exodus 33, name the tent of meeting as a site of prophetic revelation that was located outside the camp. Israel Knohl, “Two Aspects of the Tent of Meeting,” in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, eds. Mordechai Cogan, Barry L. Eichler, and Jeffrey Tigay (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 73-79.

the instructions. God provides for both riddance and reparations, but God also invites the people to participate in the practices that bring their own cleansing and redemption.

Within Leviticus 16, כפר includes purgation and elimination, and in my view, the Azazel goat ritual was for elimination, not substitution, especially when interpreted within the wider context of ANE practices surveyed in ch. 2. The limitation of the Day of כפר to once a year also makes a theological claim; this God does not need frequent riddance rituals to dwell among this people. YHWH provides for presence for the coming year.

But we must still ask “to what end?” In my interpretation, the effect of the chapter *by itself* is to facilitate drawing near to the presence of God, for the priest and for the community, and to prevent disastrous consequences like those that befell Nadab and Abihu. In the wider context of the structure of Leviticus, however, כפר serves larger end-goals. Purification or purgation in ch. 16 facilitates continual presence, which facilitates communal ethical transformation by imitation of a holy God in ch. 19 and an invitation to covenant faithfulness in ch. 26.

Chapter Four

Reception History and Conclusion

As modern readers we do not have direct access to the realities immediately behind the biblical texts. Instead, we are in conversation with centuries of readers and hearers who have come before us and whose interpretations affect our own. Additionally, our understanding of the witness and reflection of ancient peoples is always mediated through the layered experience and interpretation of others.¹ Before drawing a few conclusions about the dynamics of כִּפּוּר in Leviticus 16, we will briefly survey the reception history of this chapter in the wider canonical witness, in the Second Temple period, in the New Testament, and in Jewish and Christian theology since antiquity.

The Wider Canonical Witness

The canon of the Hebrew Bible is a library of layered testimonies; beyond the multiple sources within the Torah, we find a wider perspective (on sacrifice, on temple, on holiness) in prophetic, exilic, and postexilic texts. First, the prophets critiqued all those who prioritized the sacrificial cult without loving and caring for the poor. Often in tension with priests, the writing prophets announced God's reproof of performing temple ritual while neglecting love and justice.² Hendel proposes that due to their differing

¹ For Christian interpreters, the Holy Spirit also connects generations of interpreters; see Ladye Rachel Howell, "The Holy Spirit And Biblical Interpretation: Alexander Campbell And Contemporary Hermeneutics" (2020). *Dissertations and Theses*. 14, 47-73. <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/hst-etd/14>. Accessed May 24, 2022.

² See specific passages about temple sacrifice in Isa. 1.11-20, Amos 5.21-27, Hosea 6, Mic. 6.6-8, Isaiah 58, and Jer. 7.1-15. Additionally, the Deuteronomistic

assumptions about God and how the world works, “these priests and prophets are not talking *to* each other but *past* each other. The ways that concepts and categories are connected in these two views represent incompatible understandings of the order of things.”³ He suggests that a comparison of the texts of Leviticus 19 and Micah 6 shows that they both appeal to salvation history but come away with different perspectives on sacrificial ritual: “Each argued for a coherent interpretation of a common heritage, yet the two interpretations are, in large measure, incompatible.”⁴ However, a few later texts put priestly sacrificial language in the mouths of prophets. In Isaiah 66, some of the

historian even levels this critique at King Saul in 1 Samuel 15, and the poets of Psalm 40, 50, and 51 also criticize sacrificial worship that ignores righteousness, justice, and mercy.

³ Ronald S. Hendel, “Prophets, Priests, and the Efficacy of Ritual,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, eds. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 190-98. He is basing this on Mary Douglas’s anthropological scheme for analyzing low/high group/grid. Hendel explains the nuanced critique that is not denunciation but contrast: “whereas the priests see a correspondence and mutuality between ritual and ethics, the classical prophets *contrast* the ethical with the ritual.... What is most remarkable in these passages is not the prophets’ denunciations of ritual per se, but their emphatic contrast between rituals and ethics” (191). He references how Amos and Amaziah talk past each other in Amos 7 as they debate “religious and political authority,” but that we should not see this as an isolated argument between two individuals. Instead, as interpreters, we are also implicated as part of the community, since “the people who grant the prophet and priest their legitimacy are the immediate arbiters of these conflicts of interpretation; and so finally are the readers of the composite text that preserves these conflicting cosmologies” (198).

⁴ *Ibid.* Hendel reminds us that every community does hermeneutics from their social location: “the cosmology corresponding to a particular social context should be defined not as an ideal pattern as such, but as the consequence of an interpretation of a preexisting cultural tradition” (193). Community training, calling experiences, and history formed priests differently than prophets. “The prophet and the priest both appeal to Israel’s religious traditions, yet each interpreted these traditions in a particular way. The prophet and the priest occupied different social positions and were committed to different hermeneutical stances, hence they interpreted their world differently” (195).

foreigners who escort Israel back to Jerusalem as an offering may potentially become priests and Levites.⁵ In Ezekiel 20, the people will bring their gifts to the holy mountain, and God will manifest his holiness among them, and in Ezekiel 40-48 we find rich language envisioning a new temple.⁶

Interestingly, none of the prophets explicitly reference the day of כִּפּוּר in Leviticus 16, and as we turn to postexilic texts this absence is conspicuous as well. The day of כִּפּוּר as described in Leviticus 16 on the tenth day of the seventh month is not mentioned in Ezra 3, Nehemiah 8 and 9, 2 Chronicles 7 (also 1 Kings 8), or Ezekiel 45.⁷ These texts

⁵ Werman describes how this development can be seen in the later chapters of Isaiah: “Radical change can be observed in Deutero-Isaiah. The notion that God resides only within the boundaries of the land of Israel began to fade from the scene, if not during the first temple period, then certainly during the Babylonian exile and the early Second Temple period. God was now viewed as omnipresent in the world.” Werman explains that this is a broadening innovation beyond the particularism of the Deuteronomist, and that “for Deutero-Isaiah the purpose of being chosen is to bring the nations closer to Israel and its religion; that is, it serves a universal purpose. The prophecies even go so far as to envision the alien peoples worshiping in the temple itself. The sanctity that the priestly code ascribed to the priests alone has now expanded beyond the priesthood to include not only the Israelite nation but the alien people as well.” Cana Werman, “The Concept of Holiness and the Requirements of Purity in Second Temple and Tannaic Literature,” in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, eds. M. J. H. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Boston: Brill, 2000), 168.

⁶ Göran Eidevall, “The Role of Sacrificial Language in Prophetic Rhetoric,” in *Ritual and Metaphor: Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Christian A. Eberhart (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 55-61. Hendel, 197 n. 50, gives his interpretation of Ezekiel’s dual roles: “Born into a priestly lineage (1:3), Ezekiel experienced a “conversion” to the role of prophet after having been displaced from his institutional locus in Jerusalem. Apart from the temple, the sine qua non of the classical priestly system, the exiled priest is transformed into a visionary prophet (chaps. 1-3). Ezekiel’s vision and discourses draw deeply on traditional priestly images and concepts, but do so through a hermeneutic at odds with that of the classical priesthood.”

⁷ Within the Torah, the day of כִּפּוּר is mentioned in Leviticus 23 and Numbers 29, but not in Deuteronomy 15-16.

mention festival dates and details but seem to have no knowledge at all of an annual day of כִּפּוּר on the tenth of Tishri, and some critics have interpreted that silence as evidence that the annual observance in Leviticus 16 was created at a later date.⁸ Absence could indicate later authorship or the loss of earlier material; either way, the violent upheaval of Babylonian invasion and exile would have affected the transmission of both oral traditions and sacred texts.⁹ This conspicuous absence in prophetic, exilic, and postexilic texts creates the hypothetical scenario that not all of Leviticus 16 as we have it was contained in the earliest Sinai pericope, but that it was developed into the form we have it at a later date, perhaps after the testimonies of Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles, and Ezekiel were curated.

⁸ Milgrom systematically refutes these suggestions text by text and insists that “the tenth of Tishri as the annual event for the purgation of the temple was observed in preexilic times.” Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible, V. 3. (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1070-71. Hereafter cited as Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*.

⁹ This extends beyond texts to the regular routines of community life; regarding priestly practice, Watts explains that exile, after a violent invasion, “presents a situation of ritual discontinuity lasting centuries. The gaps exceed the lifespan of even the oldest ritual specialists and so raised the problem of ritual accuracy in an acute form for those proposing to revive the ancient rituals.” James W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 202. Hereafter cited as Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*. Leuchter additionally proposes that Leviticus 1-16 is best understood as a later redactional work by Aaron’s postexilic descendants in Persian Yehud when Nehemiah had enlisted the broader group of Levites as political administrators. Mark Leuchter, “The Politics of Ritual Rhetoric: A Proposed Sociopolitical Context for the Redaction of Leviticus 1-16,” *Vetus Testamentum* 60 (2010): 362-65. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 134-141, agrees that much of the rhetoric surrounding כִּפּוּר is to justify the authority of Aaron’s descendants as priests.

Second Temple Judaism

Beyond the wider canonical witness, the volume of commentary and reflection on Torah grew during the Second Temple period. The pseudepigraphal book of Jubilees is dated to the second century BCE and the author draws on Leviticus 16 in Jubilees 34. This chapter explicitly connects the narrative betrayal of Joseph by his brothers in Genesis 37-40 to a community atonement ritual with a goat on the tenth day of the seventh month.¹⁰ Carmichael argues that law grows out of narrative, and he suggests that Jubilees makes explicit what the writer of Leviticus was conveying implicitly: the author of Jubilees saw the older Joseph story as the foundation underneath YHWH's Sinai instructions to Moses in Leviticus 16.¹¹ In this light, the day of כפר could be understood as an annual ritual that involves the community in a symbolic reenactment of their ancestors' narrative, both in slaughtering the first goat because of their sins against their brother who they have abandoned alive to the wilderness, but who, like the second goat presented before YHWH, is not destroyed in the wilderness.¹²

¹⁰ See the Book of Jubilees, chapter 34: https://www.sefaria.org/Book_of_Jubilees Accessed May 19, 2022.

¹¹ Calum Carmichael, *Illuminating Leviticus: A Study of its Laws and Institutions in the Light of Biblical Narratives* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 37-52.

¹² Carmichael, 45-46, suggests that connecting Leviticus 16 with the Joseph story (where God intervened to transform group violence against a sibling) stretches it into a story of community salvation by involving their participation in commemorating “the first time ever in the nation’s history when forgiveness is sought and granted for an offense... the brothers deceitfully and wrongfully shift their wrongdoing to the goat, whereas in the ritual their descendants openly and honestly have the goat remove theirs.” Carmichael notes that other Jewish interpreters see this connection, including Maimonides in the twelfth century.

The Mishnah, though compiled after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, purportedly contains Second Temple rabbinic discussion of the Hebrew Scriptures. Specifically, the eight chapters of the tractate Yoma develop and augment the directions for the day of יוֹם כִּפּוּר from Leviticus 16 and fill in details. Their meticulous instructions are too extensive to fully represent here, so a few examples will suffice. First, m. Yoma 3.3 expands on the washing and bathing directions for the priest, and in m. Yoma 7.4 the priest is instructed to retrieve equipment that was used to scoop the coals and the incense as well as host a feast for his kin after the whole ceremony was completed. Additionally, m. Yoma 6.1 states that the two goats have to be identical, m. Yoma 4.2 instructs the priest to tie a red cord on the head of the send-away goat to distinguish between the two, and m. Yoma 6.6 states that the man escorting the goat must push the goat off a cliff which will end its life. M. Yoma 4-6 gives scripts for priestly and communal prayers as well as instructions for hypothetical interruptions, for example, if blood is spilled or if a goat dies before the ceremony, but in all that elaboration there is no substitutionary language for the second goat. These are some of the ways that rabbis during the Second Temple period expanded on the material from Leviticus 16 as they repeated the rituals each year.¹³

¹³ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, references mishnaic and other rabbinic interpretations throughout his detailed commentary. Examples cited above are from https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Yoma accessed May 18, 2022. The community at Qumran also recorded their various interpretations of Leviticus 16. For example, in the Temple Scroll, they understood the priest's "finishing" in v. 20 to include the burning of the remaining parts of the bull and ram of vv. 24-25 before the handling of the wilderness goat; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1063-64.

Gutmann suggests that not all of the content of Leviticus 16 reflects preexilic practice; specifically, he claims that the rituals surrounding the *כפרת*, the cover of the ark, described in vv. 11-15 were part of a “novel annual atonement ritual” at their newly rebuilt temple introduced by those who returned from Babylonian exile.¹⁴ He suggests that the rituals of the day of *כפר* continued during the Second Temple period until Jerusalem was devastated by Rome in 70 CE. After the temple was destroyed, the blood sprinkling practices were abandoned.¹⁵

Overall, the Second Temple period fostered much commentary and reflection on the Torah, including complex themes like atonement and Yom Kippur. Levine indicates how this continued to change over time, chiefly after 70 CE when the Jerusalem temple was destroyed, and “atonement for the sins of the people eventually replaced purification of the sanctuary per se as the central theme of Yom Kippur.”¹⁶ With the temple gone,

¹⁴ Joseph Gutmann, “Mitteilung - the Strange History of the Kapporet Ritual,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 112, no. 4 (2000): 624-26.

¹⁵ Ibid. Gutmann gathers historical sources that report that during the First Crusade, as Jews in Europe were threatened with violence, some of them chose self-sacrifice, spilling their own blood on the replica of the ark in their synagogue as a symbolic reenactment of the older ritual. This then inspired the reinstatement of its regular practice.

¹⁶ Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989): 99. Hereafter cited as Levine, *Leviticus*. Hawley notes that “in Christianity, if the people are metaphorically the temple, then the two concepts are not totally distinct.” Lance Hawley, Personal Communication, July 2022. Goodman explains in the later evolution of Yom Kippur celebrations, that “eventually as the practice developed, prophetic perspectives were included in the Haftarah readings on the annual occasion; Isaiah 58 was included as the Haftarah reading for the morning, while Jonah was read as the Haftarah for the afternoon.” Philip Goodman, *The Yom Kippur Anthology* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1971), 7-11.

there was no longer a central sanctuary to be cleansed, and the community would need to reconfigure their performance and understanding of this yearly ritual.

The New Testament

Christians look to the New Testament to develop and reinterpret the subject of sacrifice from the Hebrew Scriptures, and more specifically, atonement from Leviticus, in light of Christ. Space does not allow for an exhaustive treatment in this paper, but we will survey intertextual connections from four scholars on the gospels and epistles and then two scholars on the book of Hebrews.

First, Moscicke surveys recent research questioning whether the synoptic accounts of the passion narrative of Jesus (and/or Barabbas) should be interpreted typologically as the sacrificial goat and the living goat of Leviticus 16. He names four interpretive categories: 1) Jesus as abused scapegoat (both goats together), 2) Jesus as *Pharmakos*-like Scapegoat (an ancient Greek ritual dressing up vagabonds like kings and then abusing them), 3) Barabbas as Scapegoat and Jesus as Immolated Goat, and 4) Jesus as Neither Goat (interpreting with alternative OT typologies like Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, Daniel 7, and Zechariah 9-14); the scholarly works he accesses are broad and resist consensus.¹⁷

Second, outside of the passion narratives, Hannah An suggests that after Jesus's baptism in Matthew 3-4, his Spirit-led departure into the wilderness to deal with

¹⁷ Hans Moscicke, "Jesus as Goat of the Day of Atonement in Recent Synoptic Gospels Research," *Currents in Biblical Research* 17, no. 1 (2018): 59-80. For a longer treatment, see Hans M. Moscicke, *The New Day of Atonement: A Matthean Typology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020).

humanity's sins is patterned after Lev. 16:20-22. She explains the allusion as primarily linked through references to the people's sins, to an emphatic repetition of the word "all," to Jesus's phrase in Matt. 3:15 "to fulfill all righteousness," and John's baptism likened to Aaron's laying hands on the goat.¹⁸ She does acknowledge with many other scholars that the primary allusion of Jesus's forty days of wilderness temptations links to Israel's forty year wilderness wandering; where Israel failed, Jesus triumphed.¹⁹ Additionally, she suggests that Jesus's baptism and wilderness trial also allude to the binding of Isaac of Genesis 22, but she thinks this is a weaker connection than the scapegoat of Leviticus 16.

Third, Siker considers John the Baptist's declaration in John 1:29: "behold the lamb of God who *takes away* the sin of the world," as connecting Jesus's death to Passover at the end of the book, even though Passover is not a sacrifice of expiation. Siker sees three possible connections to explain the implied expiation in the phrase "take away sin:" 1) anticipating the expulsion of merchants from the temple that immediately follows in John 2, 2) a Jewish association in that era with the *akedah* of Genesis 22 to Passover lambs, and 3) a Yom-Kippur-like expiatory animal sacrifice on behalf of human sin.²⁰ He suggests that the potential connections to Leviticus 16 are at least as strong as to Isaiah 53. Siker also compares Pauline texts, and, borrowing a term from genetics,

¹⁸ Hannah S. An, "Reading Matthew's Account of the Baptism and Temptation of Jesus (Matt. 3:5-4:1) with the Scapegoat Rite on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:20-22)," *Canon & Culture* 12, no. 1 (2018): 11-13. She references Milgrom's four options of translating or interpreting the term "Azazel," and she says her thesis works whichever Azazel interpretation one chooses.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

²⁰ Jeffrey S. Siker "Yom Kippuring Passover: Recombinant Sacrifice in Early Christianity," in *Ritual and Metaphor: Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Christian A. Eberhart (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 65-82.

suggests a “recombinant” view: that Christian thought on the death and resurrection of Jesus drew on paradigms of the Jewish rituals of *both* Passover and Yom Kippur. He discusses passages from Paul in 1 Cor. 5.7, 2 Cor. 5.21, and Rom. 3.21-26, proposing that “by evoking both Passover and Yom Kippur imagery to describe the death of Jesus, Paul succeeds in blurring the distinctive ritual functions originally associated with each religious observance.”²¹

Fourth, one common interpretive move for some Christians struggling with sacrificial language surrounding Jesus’s death is to “spiritualize” sacrifice. Finlan discusses the spiritualization of sacrifice terminology as falling into at least six possible categories: a substitution of one offering for another, a moralizing shift, interiorization, metaphorical appropriation of cultic images, a rejection of sacrifice altogether, and a rising above sacrifice to a higher reality.²² He identifies imagery in 2 Cor. 5.21 and Rom. 8.3 as a “conflation of sacrificial and scapegoat metaphors,” and concerning Rom. 3.25 he insists that a *hilasterion* is “never a sacrificial victim in any Greek source.”²³

However, it is the book of Hebrews that contains the most complex NT material on OT sacrifice; it aims to show that Christ is greater than all of their previous categories, including high priest, covenant, sanctuary, and sacrifice. Finlan thinks the writer of Hebrews inconsistently applies the sacrificial metaphors to Jesus, possibly because the writer is still working out their own understanding. Jesus is portrayed as priest in Heb.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Stephan Finlan, “Spiritualization of Sacrifice in Paul and Hebrews,” in *Ritual and Metaphor: Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Christian A. Eberhart (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 83-86.

²³ Ibid., 87-88.

9.11, but also the one who “bears our sins” in Heb. 9.28, which sounds like a reference to the wilderness goat. Sacrifice is portrayed as positive and useful as an interpretive category (Heb. 10.19-22) but also as a negative comparison (Heb. 10.1-11).²⁴ In the end, Finlan says that for Hebrews, “spiritualization is a discourse of *progress within continuity*.”²⁵ For centuries the temple sacrificial system gave the Jewish community categories of living life before God, and the writer of Hebrews is still struggling to allow their language to overflow those categories like Christ has.

Much of earlier scholarship assumed that the heavy atonement typology in Hebrews focused on Jesus’s death, since “the crucifixion itself is viewed as the slaughter of a sacrificial victim like the goat for YHWH on Yom Kippur, and the priest’s entrance into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the sacrifice.”²⁶ Moffitt, however, thinks that many commentators have overlooked the resurrection and ascension of Jesus in chs.1-2 as the starting point of the author of Hebrews; “the author’s affirmation of Jesus’s bodily resurrection unifies and drives the high-priestly Christology and the soteriology of his homily.”²⁷ Further, it is Jesus’s “power of an indestructible life” that qualifies Jesus to serve as priest in Melchizedek’s line. Moffitt adds that because of the centrality of resurrection,

the logic of sacrifice in the biblical account is not a logic centered on slaughter, but a logic centered on the presentation of blood/life before God.... It is only because Jesus rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, appeared before God,

²⁴ Ibid., 91-93.

²⁵ Ibid., 97.

²⁶ See Moscicke, *New Day*, 89.

²⁷ David M. Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 299.

and presented himself alive to God, that Jesus' death can be seen, retrospectively, to be part of the sacrificial process.

Focusing on Christ's crucifixion in a way that minimizes his resurrection and ascension will impair our study of the intertextual interpretation of sacrifice.²⁸

Antiquity Through the Middle Ages

Jewish and Christian reflection on Leviticus 16 continued through the subsequent centuries. The writer of the second century document Epistle of Barnabas opens with a supersessionist reading of Isaiah 1 and Jeremiah 7; in chapter 7 of the Epistle he comments on Leviticus 16, interpreting both goats as symbolizing types for Christ and calling the wilderness goat "accursed."²⁹ Third century theologian Tertullian (d. 220 CE) wrote a five-book apology against Marcionite heresy; he begins one section with an antisemitic critique of Jews who missed the prediction of Christ's suffering in Isaiah 53, and he then connects this to his figural interpretation of both goats of Leviticus 16 representing Christ.³⁰

²⁸ Additionally, texts in 1 Peter 2 and Revelation 1 that also portray Christians as God's holy priests are relevant to our survey of intertextuality between Leviticus and the NT, though not exclusively to Leviticus 16. See Timothy Wardle, "Who is Sacrificing? Assessing the Early Christian Reticence to Transfer the Idea of the Priesthood to the Community," in *Ritual and Metaphor: Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Christian A. Eberhart (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 99-114.

²⁹ See Epistle of Barnabas chapter 7. Motivated by strong supersessionism, the writer quotes prophetic critique of sacrifice in the first few lines. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/barnabas-lightfoot.html> Accessed May 19, 2022.

³⁰ See Tertullian, *Against Marcion* Book III Chapter VII. This chapter begins with "Our heretic will now have the fullest opportunity of learning the clue of his errors along with the Jew himself, from whom he has borrowed his guidance in this discussion. Since, however, the blind leads the blind, they fall into the ditch together." The attempt to fight

Coming forward, the medieval commentator Rashi (d. 1105 CE) concluded that the emphasis on presenting the second goat *alive* before YHWH implied that that goat would eventually be killed out in the wilderness. He also thought that כפר in Lev. 16.10 implied verbal confession from Aaron in order to harmonize it with v. 21.³¹ In the same era, Jewish philosopher Ibn Ezra (d. 1167 CE) saw כפר in Lev. 16.16 as performing a ransom so that the holiness of the sanctuary would not destroy anyone who was unclean.³² In the following century, rabbi-philosopher Ramban (d. 1270) assumed the widespread practice of tying a red thread on the horns of the second goat, which would turn white as it was pushed off a cliff to its death.³³

Beyond Leviticus 16, theological reflection regarding sacrifice expanded in Jewish and Christian circles through the centuries. Fishbane describes how rabbis over time came to describe Torah study and teaching as a “small sanctuary”—a substitute for temple and sacrifice. He surveys writings that show how rabbinic teaching was “transformed by the exegetical imagination,” coming to see “the sacred divine Presence is hereby given a Temple in which to dwell, however momentarily, among the students of scripture.”³⁴ Additionally, Christian scholar Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) reasoned that the

Marcionite heresy with supersessionism is astounding.

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian123.html> Accessed May 19, 2022.

³¹ Rashi is also known as Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki.

https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Leviticus Accessed May 19, 2022.

³² See https://www.sefaria.org/Ibn_Ezra_on_Leviticus Accessed May 19, 2022.

³³ See https://www.sefaria.org/Ramban_on_Leviticus Ramban is also known as Nachmanides. Accessed May 19, 2022.

³⁴ Michael Fishbane, “Aspects of the Transformation of Sacrifice in Judaism,” in *Sacrifice, Scripture, and Substitution: Readings in Ancient Judaism and Christianity*,

impulse to make sacrificial offerings was a broadly human attribute that represented universal trait of devotion; therefore he thought that the “sacrifices of Greco-Roman antiquity and of the Old Testament, particularly those of the Day of Atonement, foreshadowed various facets and the content of one of the seven sacraments of Roman Catholicism.”³⁵

Moving forward, much of the “law vs. gospel” dichotomy in modern Protestantism (conflating Moses, “works of the law,” Torah, and OT sacrifices as abolished by the grace of Jesus) can be traced back to the inherited influences of Martin Luther (d. 1546). In a sermon entitled, “How Christians Should Regard Moses,” Luther explains,

We must know what the law is, and what the gospel is. The law commands and requires us to do certain things. The law is thus directed solely to our behavior and consists in making requirements.... The gospel, however, does not preach what we are to do or to avoid. It sets up no requirements but reverses the approach of the law, does the very opposite, and says, “This is what God has done for you; he has let his Son be made flesh for you, has let him be put to death for your sake.”³⁶

Luther elaborates that “just as we and God are separated from one another, so also these two doctrines are widely separated from one another.”³⁷ He insists that everything from

eds. Ann. W. Astell and Sandor Goodhart (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 124-38.

³⁵ Christian A. Eberhart, “Introduction: Constituents and Critique of Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement in Early Judaism and Christianity,” in *Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement in Early Judaism and Christianity*, eds. Henrietta L. Wiley and Christian A. Eberhart (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017), 3. Hereafter cited as Eberhart, *Constituents*.

³⁶ Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna, *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 95.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

God through Moses on Sinai was only for the Jews, explaining that “this entire text does not pertain to the Gentiles.”³⁸ His antisemitism shows as he continues to set up an antithesis of Moses and Christ:

We would rather not preach again for the rest of our life than to let Moses return and to let Christ be torn out of our hearts. We will not have Moses as ruler or lawgiver any longer. Indeed God himself will not have it either. Moses was an intermediary solely for the Jewish people. It was to them that he gave the law. We must therefore silence the mouths of those factious spirits who say, “Thus says Moses,” etc. Here you simply reply: Moses has nothing to do with us. If I were to accept Moses in one commandment, I would have to accept the entire Moses. Thus the consequence would be that if I accept Moses as master, then I must have myself circumcised, wash my clothes in the Jewish way, eat and drink and dress thus and so, and observe all that stuff. So, then, we will neither observe nor accept Moses. Moses is dead. His rule ended when Christ came. He is of no further service.³⁹

The rhetoric of using the commandments of Moses on Sinai as a Jewish foil to promote Christ is not new. This sad legacy is long and continues today; many Protestant Christians have heard similar contrasts promoted by modern theologians. This makes it hard for Christians to read Leviticus or study atonement without first learning to deconstruct antisemitism or supersessionism or both.⁴⁰ Christian scholars face the

³⁸ Ibid., 96.

³⁹ Ibid., 96-97.

⁴⁰ See Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, 158-159, for Wellhausen’s low view of P and Second Temple priests in relationship to his antisemitism and nationalism. See also Eberhart, *Constituents* 7-8, on Wellhausen’s disdain for the sacrifices of the priestly cult as practices adopted from pagan neighbors. Gerstenberger laments how “Christian tradition has often arrogantly distanced itself from the sacrificial practices of the Old Testament, and has strictly rejected the ceremonial legislation of the Jews,” and speculates that the horrors perpetrated by the Nazi regime would not have happened the way they did if it were not for centuries of persecution or slander of Jews by Christians. Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 15-16.

generative task of constructing a hermeneutic that creatively interprets Hebrew Scriptures without supersessionism.⁴¹

Conclusion and Direction for Further Research

The goal of this project was a contextual and theological exegesis of Leviticus 16. I chose this text because it is one of the OT texts often used in support of the medieval doctrine of Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA), and this project is part of my larger reconstructive research seeking healthy atonement theology.⁴² As a Christian interpreter of the Hebrew Scriptures, a primary question when investigating atonement doctrines is “why did Jesus have to die?” Returning to atonement in Leviticus is *one part* of a strategy to deconstruct PSA; the deconstructive work is in service to reconstruction within a more generative trajectory. Theological exegesis reorients readers to ask “what kind of God do we meet here in Leviticus, within Israel’s testimony as a sacrificing community, and how can it help us understand Jesus’s death?”

⁴¹ See p. 4 fn. 6 on antisemitism and supersessionism. For further analysis of effects of supersessionism on late medieval theology, see also Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

⁴² Unfortunately, a full treatment of PSA is beyond the scope of this project. Standard treatments classify the *penal substitution* model as a development by Protestant Reformers of Anselm’s *legal satisfaction* model from the end of the first millennium; before Anselm, the church fathers are generally classified as promoting the *Christus Victor* model. Some promoters of PSA have claimed that the church fathers support that model, such as Steve Jeffrey, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007). However, these claims are countered by others such as Derek Flood, “Substitutionary Atonement and the Church Fathers: A Reply to the Authors of *Pierced for Our Transgressions*,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (2010): 142–59. Please see resources footnoted on pp. 1-2 in the Introduction to this paper as well as resources for further study on p. 89.

In light of that question, here at the close of this paper, I will summarize four main outcomes of this project that are avenues for continued examination. First, medieval controlling questions are de-centered when we research ancient contexts. The historical and cultural contexts of Leviticus 16 include a broad world of neighboring peoples who participated in sacrificial rituals in temples. Interpreters today must consider the continuity of OT material with other ANE texts, as well as points of contrast. The literary contexts are also crucial; Leviticus should not be read primarily as a legal technical manual, but as poetic, ritual theology. Additionally, Mary Douglas's analysis of the internal structure of Leviticus as an ascending ring of rings that provides a virtual tour of the tabernacle (and Mt. Sinai) effectively de-centers Leviticus 16 as the central high point of the book. Instead, Leviticus 19 and 26 become the ascending centers of gravity through which interpret the rest of the material. Considering the ANE cultural and literary contexts helps scholars and ministers cultivate hermeneutical humility for teaching beyond the late medieval interpretive categories.

Second, an important overlooked theme of Leviticus 16 is *approach*. The internal structure of Leviticus 16 hinges on vv. 16-17 with verbs of approach before the hinge and verbs of exit after. This internal flow carries the attention of the hearer with the priest's actions towards and into The Holy Space, and then outward and away as God provides a carrier to bear the sins of the people away from the sanctuary so they can continue to host the presence of God. Everything about this close reading seems to facilitate *approach*; this God wants to be hosted by this people to dwell among them. As I completed the close reading of Leviticus 16, this theme of desired *approach* eventually recalled Heb. 4.16 with its familiar invitation "let us then *approach* the throne of grace with boldness,

so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Beyond the single verse, *approach* is a theme of the book of Hebrews, which has been a primary NT text for many Christians’ assumptions about reinterpreting OT sacrifice.⁴³ This then made investigating Moffitt’s research intriguing; seeing Jesus’s resurrection and ascension as central to the message of the writer of Hebrews is an important direction for future exegesis and theology of Hebrews in our current context five hundred after Luther’s Reformation.

A third outcome of this research is the interpretive primacy of narrative. Carmichael’s thesis that we should let narratives interpret legal material seems more appropriate to ancient Hebrew texts than the frameworks of medieval legalistic assumptions, whether Christian or Jewish. Learning that the pseudepigraphal book of Jubilees connects Leviticus 16 to the Joseph narrative of Genesis 37-45 was significant to me, especially in light of the absence of the mention of a day of כפר in postexilic texts. If Leviticus 16 (in the form we have it) was potentially unknown to the writers of Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles, and Ezekiel, could we propose an event within the later community that would cause the subsequent priestly scribes to develop the Levitical material the way that they did, possibly even a significant crisis that caused the community to recall the Joseph narrative of scapegoating-and-restoration?⁴⁴ This

⁴³ Two Greek verbs that can be translated *approach* (or *come near*, *draw near*) continue throughout Hebrews: *proserchomai* seven times (4.16, 7.25, 10.1, 10.22, 11.6, 12.18, 12.22) *eggizo* two times (7.19, 10.25).

⁴⁴ Interpreting Leviticus 16 together with the Joseph narratives of Genesis 37-45 brings Girard’s scapegoat theory for mimetic violence into the conversation. In the last century, French literary historian René Girard expanded the atonement debates by proposing an anthropology of violence called “mimetic desire.” In this view, imitation and competition arise from envy, and conflict builds until community violence

potential primacy of narrative interpretation of legal texts also decenters the assumptions of medieval transactional legalism.

A fourth outcome of this research is a broadening of Christian soteriology. Many Christians may have been taught that Jesus's crucifixion was a sacrifice that provoked a legal mechanism for propitiatory forgiveness, taught with analogies to Yom Kippur. However, not only does forgiveness as a primary trait of YHWH precede Leviticus in the Sinai pericope, but also forgiveness is not mentioned at all in Leviticus 16; interpreters should not expect this passage to be primarily addressing that question. Our exegesis of כפר in Leviticus 16 includes both purgation *and* elimination of both ritual impurity *and* sin that was needed for both the sanctuary *and* the people. The verbs of approach and the internal structure of the chapter show the larger purpose of כפר is to facilitate the presence of God among the people, which facilitates the larger goal of a people whose

(expulsion, murder) is enacted upon an innocent member which functions as a scapegoat mechanism and releases the pressure in the community. His work began as literary theory but then expanded into anthropological conversations and interpretations of religious sacrifice. He questioned why human societies curate violence, especially lynching of innocent victims, and then turn those practices into myths, epic sagas, and stories. Girard interprets Leviticus 16, the Joseph story, Psalm 22, Job, Jeremiah, and the suffering servant of Deutero-Isaiah through this lens, and he also extended the application of his theory to Christ's passion as the ultimate example that defies and ends the sacrificial mechanism of violence. René Girard, "Mimesis, Sacrifice, and the Bible: A Conversation with Sandor Goodhart," in *Sacrifice, Scripture, and Substitution: Readings in Ancient Judaism and Christianity*, eds. Ann. W. Astell and Sandor Goodhart (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 48-60. See also René Girard, "Generative Scapegoating," in *Violent Origins: Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 73-78, 85-93. See also René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (New York: Orbis Books, 2001). See also Raymund Schwager, S.J., *Must There be Scapegoats? Violence and Redemption in the Bible*, trans. Maria L. Assad (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). In the foreword to Schwager's book, Robert J. Daly, S. J. predicts the possibility that Girard's name will join Machiavelli, Luther, Calvin, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Marx, Freud, and Barth among the greats of Western intellectual history.

ethics are transformed by divine imitation, seen in the larger internal structure of the book. Regarding the appropriation of OT texts in support of PSA, this research allows us to discard any inherited propitiatory lenses so we can re-center Passover as the primary metaphor from Israel's calendar for the death and resurrection of Christ. Deliverance out of generational slavery, national bondage, and violent empire is a much bigger framework for interpreting the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This does not mean that the multivalent categories "sacrifice" or "atonement" that we encounter in Leviticus 16 have nothing to do with the death of Jesus. I am claiming instead that we cannot begin by defining those terms narrowly as "propitiatory mechanisms that holds back forgiveness unless the deity is appeased," because that is a distortion of Leviticus 16. Constructively, Jesus fulfills (fills and overflows) Israel's practices for purification of the sanctuary and the people and for bearing or removal of sin to a faraway place, all for restoration of continual presence so that the people can host God on behalf of the world.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The contextualization of incarnation is a hermeneutical category that begins before Jesus. The enacted rituals of the people of Israel represent their conceptual world to us—they believed that blood was a purifying agent for spaces and for people and that scapegoats could carry away sin and contagion, and YHWH met them, dwelled with them within *their* conceptual world, and provided for a participatory plan so that they could keep hosting God. Jesus then "fulfills" Israel's Scripture, meaning he fills and overflows all the interpretive categories of the Hebrew Scriptures, including Leviticus 16.

Not only do we need to re-center Passover as the primary metaphor for Christ's passion, but Christian theology also needs to re-center the Resurrection with the Crucifixion as the primary locus of salvation; that PSA undervalues the Resurrection is a common critique. See N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). Common construals of PSA assume that forgiveness is what God will not do unless there is a blood sacrifice. One consequence of this is that it can turn believers into "vampire Christians" who just want Jesus for his blood; Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 14. See also the "Assumptions" about hermeneutics from pp. 7-8. God has in Christ defeated death;

Penal Substitutionary Atonement as popularly conceived is a burden inherited from medieval theology that Christian faith does not need to bear any longer. The picture of a God who demands blood from a vicarious substitute in order to forgive and save people is a corrupted narrative.⁴⁶ Instead, Leviticus 16, and many other texts, can be interpreted in clearer light as we practice telling a different story of a holy God who wants to tabernacle among his children, teaching them to continually make space for him, learning to be holy like him and to love their neighbors, living up to jubilee as a vision of anticipated deliverance into New Creation.

the healing work of New Creation has begun, and the whole cosmos is awaiting that healing. I interpret metaphors of cleansing as pointing towards the healing of New Creation.

⁴⁶ For further resources on reconstructing atonement theologies, see works by Girard noted on the previous page. See also Michael Gorman, *The Death of the Messiah and the Birth of the New Covenant: A (Not So) New Model of the Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014); Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (New York: Orbis, 2011); Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (New York: Orbis, 2015).

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