

## A Literary and Ritual Analysis of Leviticus 16

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### Abstract

*Leviticus 16 is an important text in the book of Leviticus and the entire Pentateuch. The rituals in Leviticus 16 were central to the religious life of ancient Judah. It provided the means of atonement for the sins of the household of the high priest and the people annually. The text shows the seriousness of sin in the sight of YHWH. The various rituals in the text together reveal YHWH's way of atoning for the sins of his people annually. The rituals of both the slayed and live goats meant the removal of categories of evil – impurities, sins and transgressions – from the community. Leviticus 16 shows that on the Day of Atonement, purification was meant not only for the people but also for cultic objects.*

**Keywords:** Literary; Ritual; Leviticus 16; Analysis; Atonement

### Introduction

Leviticus lies at the centre of the Pentateuch, emphasising its importance. While it is beyond the scope of this article to look at the origin of the fivefold division of the Torah, it is vital to understand the theological function of Leviticus within the Pentateuch. Structurally, Leviticus 16 portrays the most important ritual in Leviticus. It takes place once a year, and it is on this occasion that the sanctuary (cf. vv. 14–19) and the entire Israelite community (v.20) are cleansed from all impurities contracted during the year. In addition, it is the only ceremony in the book in which Aaron is allowed to enter the *adytum*, the most holy place, where YHWH resides. The centrality of the chapter in Leviticus is highlighted by the divine speech introduced by vv.1–2aα, which is the eighteenth of thirty-six such speeches in Leviticus. The central position of Leviticus 16 within Leviticus and even in the Pentateuch is underscored by the fact that it is framed by the two teachings on divine justice and retribution found in Exod. 34:6–7 and Num. 14:18. In sum, the book of Leviticus and Leviticus 16 are at the very heart of the Pentateuch. The creator of the Pentateuch seems to have intentionally arranged the composition to highlight the significance of Leviticus and more specifically the ceremony of the Day of Atonement. It is certainly not coincidental for such a ceremony to have been situated at the centre of Torah.

The celebration of the Day of Atonement<sup>1</sup> in Leviticus 16 has attracted much attention from scholars. It appears that the attention has been on the term Azazel, where scholars have used rituals in other ancient Near East cultures to reveal its origin and purpose. However, not much attention has been given to the individual rituals and their significance. The main purpose of the article, therefore, is to engage in an analysis of

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Day of Atonement” never occurs in Leviticus 16, but is used in Leviticus 23, where the dates of the celebration of the annual festivals are listed.

ritual stages of Leviticus 16. The focus is to break the passage into ritual stages to affect their meanings and significance and to show that Leviticus 16 reflects a coherent and intelligible conception of ritual action as a presentation of world through the ritual breakdown and reinstatement of the categorical distinctions of holy/profane, pure/impure and order/chaos. The primary issue, then, will be how to discover the meaning of the rituals in the text. It is generally acknowledged that the best way to study rituals is to observe them directly and to have local informants explaining their meaning (Gorman 1990:13; Grimes 1982), but our only access to the ritual in Leviticus 16 is through the text, which only reflects rituals without fully capturing the ritual experience. Since we are compelled to view these rituals through the filter of the texts, our search for the locus of their ritual meaning must take into consideration both the nature of the ritual itself and the nature of ritual text. As Grimes (1990:13) posits, the study of ritual performance should inform readings of ancient ritual texts, even though the usual methods of field study are not possible, “because in all but the most bookish traditions, ritual texts exist to serve ritual enactments, not the other way round”.

### The Time and Manner of the Ceremony (vv. 29–34)

Verse 29 carefully specifies the date for the annual observance of the Day of Atonement: *the tenth day of the seventh month*. “The seventh month” was called *Tishri*, which ran roughly from mid-September to mid-October (Porter 1976:133); “it was in the autumn when the early rains fell and the land was ploughed ready for sowing in the following month” (Harrison 1980:174–175). This date is chosen because the seventh month is a sacred month of the year. The number seven is the number of completeness in ancient Israel. The performance of the Day of Atonement is to last as long as there is a people of Israel. The phrase *לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם*, “a perpetual decree”, is repeated three times in this section (vv. 29a, 31b, 34a) to stress the importance of the continual observance of this day.

The solemnity of the festival was underlined by the call for self-denial. The text does not explain the manner or meaning of the observance indicated by the command *תַּעֲנִי נַפְשְׁתִּיכֶם* or *אֶת-נַפְשְׁתִּיכֶם* *וְעִנִּיתֶם אֹת* – “you shall afflict yourselves” (vv.29, 31).<sup>2</sup> Texts outside Leviticus have some suggestions. In Num. 30:14 [13], “to practise self-denial” (*לַעֲשׂוֹת נִפְשׁ*) includes sexual abstinence, because the command involves husband-wife relations. In Ps. 35:13, the *pi’el* of *עָנָה* appears with *נִפְשׁ*, where the psalmist’s voluntary self-denial involves fasting while wearing sackcloth and is associated with prayer. In Isa 58:3, 5, fasting and practising self-denial before YHWH are functional equivalents. In v.5, the action is associated with bowing the head and lying in sackcloth and ashes. Furthermore, Ezra 8:21 and Dan. 10:12 use the *hitpa’el* of *עָנָה* instead of the *pi’el* form with *נִפְשׁ* to express the reflexive notion of denying oneself. The self-denial carried out by Ezra and his group involved fasting. Daniel 10:2–3 describe Daniel’s self-denial as part of his mourning and specify that he abstained from luxurious food and drink and from anointing himself. Thus, self-denial is an outward expression accompanying the supplication to God in times of fear, grief, and distress.

On the Day of Atonement, the observance of self-denial possibly involved corporate fasting and other forms of abstinence that were associated with mourning over sin (Baentsch 1903:386). The observance perhaps included departures from normal

<sup>2</sup> The text does not explain the nature and function of the activity.

activities to wearing sackcloth, bowing the head, abstaining from oil to anoint oneself, and abstaining from sex.<sup>3</sup> In the present text, the author did not specify these behaviours because what was required would have been well known within the culture. Notwithstanding, **נפש ענה** may be a technical expression for a cluster of behaviours that included fasting and other related practices.

In general terms, the function of self-denial was “to express humble dependence upon God at a time of special need and to allow for uninterrupted concentration on him” (Gane 2005:313). Such a function was at the forefront of the Day of Atonement, when self-denial was mandatory. It was not a voluntary response to an institutional cultic event because the fate of the entire community depended on it. Gane thinks that, unlike other occasions, on the Day of Atonement, the Israelites were not required to make verbal petitions to YHWH, because “the sanctuary rituals constitute their corporate supplication for **כפר**” (Gane 2005:314). But since the high priest did so on their behalf, there was no need for them to do so. Gorman identifies ‘the ritual humbling of the people’ as one of the two central acts of the Atonement, the other being the **כפר** performance of the high priest (Gorman 1990:63). In sum, the Day of Atonement was the only day in the year on which fasting was required. Fasting would be the outward expression of their sorrow and repentance. In this regard, the Day of Atonement stands in marked contrast to the annual feasts, which were times of rejoicing, especially the feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:40; cf. Deut. 12:7, 12) (Davidson 1954:148), probably because these were agricultural festivals.

In addition to self-denial, there was a prohibition against performing laborious work. According to Lev. 23:24, 39, the annual festival days, other than the Day of Atonement, are periods of **שבתון**, “cessation/rest”, which carried a prohibition against laborious work. However, like the weekly Sabbath and the sabbatical year, the Day of Atonement is called **שבת שבתון** “Sabbath of cessation” or “super-Sabbath”, and required complete rest (v. 31, 23:32; cf. Exod. 31:15; 35:2). On the Day of Atonement **כל-מלאכה**, “all work” of any kind was prohibited (Lev. 16:29; 23:28, 30, 30, 31; Num. 29:7). The prohibition against labour on the weekly Sabbath was due to the consecration of the entire seventh day (cf. Gen. 2:3; Exod. 20:11); the Day of Atonement was also entirely consecrated. The sanctity of the Day of Atonement is reflected in the fact that the high priest enters the Holy of Holies only on this day. Enacting holiness by total rest would also make it possible for the Israelites to focus fully on their relationship with YHWH, as expressed by their self-denial.

The stranger, **הגר**, appears in the regulation for the Day of Atonement in 16:29, marking the first reference to this group in the entire book. The final paragraph of the law of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29–34) begins with the statement that the command of self-denial and prohibition to work were for **האזרה** and **הגר** to observe. The latter is a man who alone or with his family leaves his village and tribe because of famine (e.g., Ruth 1:1), war (e.g., 2 Sam. 4:3) and seeks shelter and sojourns elsewhere, where his right to own land, to marry, and to participate in the administration of justice is curtailed. The term is translated the “stranger” (e.g., JPS), an “alien” (e.g., NRSV) or a “sojourner” (e.g., Clines 1995:372). The former refers to one born in the land; an original, a native of the land, a citizen with full rights (e.g., Exod. 12:49). **גר** is regularly

<sup>3</sup> The Mishnah specifies that “eating, drinking, anointing, putting on sandals, and marital intercourse are forbidden” (*m. Yoma* 8.1).

juxtaposed with אֲזָרָה. In priestly laws in the Pentateuch, the two terms are often used in immediate relation to each other. Most of the texts explain certain aspects of the law that are valid for both the גֵר and the אֲזָרָה. The majority of these texts deal with cultic matters: (1) both are entitled to offer עֹלָה and זֶבַח (Lev. 17:8), (2) both have to bring their sacrifices “to the entrance of the tent of meeting” in accordance with Lev. 1:3 and 3:2, and (3) both were forbidden to eat any blood (Lev. 17:10, 12 and 13) and what has died or has been torn by beasts (Lev. 17:15). In some texts, the *gēr* is made co-responsible, together with the natives, for the purity of the land (Lev. 18:24–30); and in Num. 19:10b–13, both the Israelites and the *gēr* alike are to purify themselves in order not to defile the tabernacle.

Scholars and commentators are divided as to whether the *gēr* is only included in the commitment of doing no work or also in that of self-denial on the Day of Atonement. The New JSP translation divides the verse by semicolon: “you shall practise self-denial; and you shall do no manner of work, neither the citizen nor the alien who resides among you” and favours the notion that the *gēr* was only forbidden work; he was not included in the law of self-denial (Rendtorff 2002:84). Milgrom (1991:1055) favours this interpretation. He argues that “the *gēr* is bound by the prohibitive commandments and not by the performative ones” and explains that performative commandments are violated by refraining or neglecting, and so generate no pollution either to the land or to sanctuary. Therefore, the *gēr* does not jeopardise the welfare of natives by not complying with the performative commandments (Milgrom 1991:1055). He concludes that, on the Day of Atonement, the *gēr* is required to refrain from all work (a prohibitive commandment) but he needs not afflict himself (a performative commandment) (Milgrom 1991:1055; see also Levine 1989:109). Nevertheless, the question arises as to who is included in the “you” in the verse that follows: “For on this day, atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord” (v. 31). Is the stranger included? (Rendtorff 2002:84). Milgrom does not discuss this question at all. If the *gēr* is included in the purification activities, should he not be included in the cleansing on the Day of Atonement? (Rendtorff 2002:84). Whatever answer one might give, the text mentions the *gēr* alongside the citizen in obeying the perpetual commandment for the Day of Atonement. This shows the close relations between the *gēr* and the citizen, particularly in cultic life (Rendtorff 2002:84). As Davidson (1954:150) has observed, since the strangers enjoyed privileges among the citizens, they were to conform to many of their laws and customs (cf. 17:8, 10, 12, 13, 15).

Verse 32 explicitly states the identity of the person qualified to officiate at the ceremony on the Day of Atonement in subsequent years. He was to be a successor of Aaron, who has been anointed מִשָּׁח; cf. Lev. 8:12) and consecrated מִלֵּא אֶת-יָדָיו cf. Lev. 8:22, 33).

### **The Narrative Framework (vv. 1–2)**

Verses 1–2 introduce the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement within a narrative framework as originating from YHWH “after the death of the two sons of Aaron” at the time when the sanctuary was inaugurated (cf. Lev. 10:1–2). It is a flashback to Leviticus 10, which places the laws about the Day of Atonement in a larger narrative context. Geller (1992:105–106) suggests that this introduction provides a literary clue that the reader is to focus on the blood manipulation in the Holy of Holies rather than on the

bloodless ritual with the so-called “scapegoat”. The reference to the death of Nadab and Abihu has led many scholars to conclude that the verse does not belong to Leviticus 16. But we should see the words “after the death of the two sons of Aaron...” (v. 1) as spoken *by the narrator* rather than by God to Moses and/or Aaron. So rather than warning the priests of the tragic precedent, these words merely show that the instructions in Leviticus 16 were given after Nabab and Abihu had died. However, since no further information about the incident is found in Leviticus 16, the reason for introducing a reference to the death of Aaron’s sons in Leviticus 16 “is to sternly warn the high priest to conduct himself properly when he enters the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement so that he does not lose his life as they did” (Hartley 1992:234).

It is important to understand the meaning of the infinitive construction **בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי-יְהוָה** (“When they drew near before the Lord”) in v.1. The phrase has been interpreted in various ways. Among many possibilities, Milgrom (1991:1012) has suggested it be translated “enter”, “seek access” and “encroach” into the presence of the Lord. However, there is no other use of *qrb* to mean “encroach”. Hartley (1992:220) has translated the phrase as “when they drew near” but indicates that the LXX renders it as “when they entered” (1992:221). The words only mention, but do not explain, the circumstances of the death of Aaron’s sons. In other words, the narrator did not aim to provide a reason but simply to note the circumstances. Ultimately, Aaron’s sons did not die *because* “they came near to YHWH”, and neither would the priests die if they approach him to minister in the tabernacle.

The imperative in the phrase **אַל-יבֹא בְּכָל-עֵת** (“Do not enter at any time”) in v.1, directed to Aaron, is important here. One is tempted to interpret the phrase to mean a total prohibition against entering the Holy of Holies. But this is not the case, because a total prohibition would have used **לֹא תֵאָכַל** instead of **אַל**, as it appears in Gen. 2:17: **לֹא תֵאָכַל מִמֶּנּוּ** (“of that you *shall not* eat”) where the command is a total prohibition. The jussive construction with the negative **אַל** usually conveys a warning; not a prohibition (so, Levine 1989:100; Milgrom 1991:1012; Hartley 1992:221; Keck et al. 1994:1110). In addition, it is illogical to interpret the phrase to mean a prohibition because in v.3 Aaron is told how to enter the sanctuary area; thus, with proper precautions he may enter the inner sanctum, and in v.7 he is to present items before YHWH. The phrase therefore states that Aaron should enter the Holy of Holies on only one day, the Day of Atonement, each year and not whenever he wishes.

The reason Aaron may not enter the innermost sanctuary as he wishes is that it houses the ark on which the “mercy seat” is found. The word “mercy seat” here is *kappōret*. The most appropriate way to translate this term is disputed. Perhaps it relates to *kipper*, “to make atonement”, as suggested by the LXX translation *hilastērion* (propitiation), which is found also in other ancient versions. The English rendering “mercy seat” reflects the notion that this part of the ark was used for atonement. The idea of it’s being a ‘seat’ comes from remarks such as Ps. 99:1, “the Lord reigns....He sits enthroned upon the cherubim”. These cherubim flanked the “mercy seat” (Exod. 25:17–22), making it look like a throne. However, some scholars have associated the *kappōret* with Arab, *kafara*, “to cover”, and translate it “lid, cover”. The plausibility of this etymology depends on *kipper*, meaning “to cover sin”. But it seems unlikely that *kappōret* means just “lid”. It was a sort of lid for the ark, but it was much more. It was the place where YHWH’s glory appeared and where atonement was made once a year. The biblical writers were not

concerned with the etymology of *kappōret*; their concern here and in Exod. 25:22 is that it was the place where YHWH met with and spoke with Israel's representative, who, in our present context, is the high priest (Wenham 1979:229, n. 2).

### **Preparation for the Main Rituals (vv. 3–5)**

In preparation for the main rituals of the day, Aaron had to make preparations in advance. He was to bring for himself and his house two animals: a young bull for a purification offering (קטאת; cf. 4:3) and a ram for a burnt offering (עלה; 1:10–13; 8:18–21). The community (עדה; cf. 4:13), represented by the elders, was to present two goats for purification offerings and a ram for a burnt offering (cf. 8:18). The text here does not indicate the regulations governing the selection of these animals. Those found in Leviticus 1 and 4 are assumed.

Secondly, Aaron was to cast lots to determine which of the two goats was to be sacrificed as a purification offering for the people and which was to be sent to the wilderness (vv.7–8).<sup>4</sup> The use of lots to determine the respective ritual roles of the animals is unique here in Israelite rituals, where the roles of other animals are decided by the worshippers before they bring them to the sanctuary. In addition, in the bird ritual used to purify a scale-diseased person, in which one bird is slain and the other is set free (Lev. 14:4–7), no lots are needed. We cannot explain the purpose of this preliminary procedure by the need to differentiate between two creatures of the same kind.<sup>5</sup> We can only assume that the reason to perform the lot ritual “before YHWH” (v.7) is that *he* must decide the roles of the goats.

### **The Main Ceremony (vv. 11–28)**

The main ceremony of the Day of Atonement comprises five stages or phases. I will discuss these five stages under their various places of enactment.

#### ***In the Tent of Meeting***

Before the high priest entered the Tent of Meeting to perform the necessary rituals, he needed to go through certain rites to be fit to minister in the presence of the Lord. First, he had to bathe his body completely;<sup>6</sup> thus, complete physical cleanliness was necessary

<sup>4</sup> Casting lots was a popular means in antiquity for determining the will of the deity or fate. It was a means of allowing forces beyond human reason to determine the actions one should take in a situation of uncertainty (cf. Josh. 7:14–18; 1 Sam. 14:41–42). According to Gerstenberger (1996:219), ‘normally a yes-stone and a no-stone was shaken in a container, and the stone that bounced out first provided the answer to the previously posed question of alternatives. In the case of the goats, of course, one might identify the stones with the names of the recipients: Yahweh or Azazel’. In our present context, the purpose was to leave the choice of the goat to YHWH. Once determined, the lots were perhaps placed on the heads of the goats for identification purposes.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Lev. 14:4–7. Also, compare Lev. 5:7–10; 14:22, 30–31, where a single worshiper brings two birds of the same kind but lots are not cast to determine which is to function as a purification offering and which is to be a burnt offering.

<sup>6</sup> The bathing of persons and washing of objects and related cleansings of laundering clothes, sprinkling water and water mixtures were part of a purification procedure. In the priestly material, bathing for humans (complete washing of the body) and washing for objects were basic elements in all purification rites. The Old Testament laws about purity (e.g., Lev. 11:24–15:33) prescribed that vessels, clothes or persons that had been defiled through contact with something unclean were to be washed in water. The priests were required to wash their hands and feet on the assumption that they might have touched some impurity. In Num. 31:16–24, after war, the fighting men, their clothes their prisoners and all leather materials, textile and wooden objects were to be washed, prior to their cultic service. See Wright 1987:185, n.38 and 212. In addition, water was used to wash

before he entered the Holy of Holies, symbolising the complete inner purity required of him.<sup>7</sup> Second, instead of wearing the splendid clothes of his office, the golden garments: **אֶפֶד** (ephod; Exod. 28:6–12; 39:2–7), **מְעִיל** (robe [sleeveless]; Exod. 28:31–35; 39:22–26), **חֹשֶׁן** (breastpiece; Exod. 28:15–30; 39:8–21), and **צִיץ** (diadem; Exod. 28:36–38; 39:30–31), he needed to appear before God in clothes similar to those worn by the ordinary priests, plain linen garments (Lev. 16:4): **כְּתֹנֶת** (tunic; Exod. 39:27),<sup>8</sup> **אֲבֵנֵי** (girdle; Exod. 28:39–40), **מִגְבָּעוֹת** (cup for the priests, Exod. 28:40, in the case of Aaron **מִצְנֶפֶת**, turban), and **מִכְנָסִי** (breeches or trousers; Exod. 28:42; 39:28).<sup>9</sup> The biblical text is silent as to why the high priest, who alone is ordained to perform the rituals of the day, had to put on a tunic that rejects his office. Various reasons have been given, among which are: (1) since angels were dressed in linen (Ezek. 9:2–3, 11; 10:2; Dan. 10:6; cf. Mal. 2:7) the high priest was to wear linen to be admitted into the heavenly council;<sup>10</sup> (2) to prevent staining the regular high priestly clothing with blood;<sup>11</sup> (3) as a mark of humility, a sign of one “stripped of all pretence” (Jenson 1992:100; Harrison 1980:169; Milgrom 1991:1016–1017) and status (Milgrom 1991:1016; Gorman 1997:95).

The first explanation is not likely, because the idea of angels is a late development in the history of ancient Judah. The second explanation could be possible in practical terms; blood could easily stain the priestly clothing of the high priest. Similarly, the third explanation is convincing, in that, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest himself was to atone for his sins and so was to appear before God as a supplicant. So it was “a significant reminder that when the high priest enters the very presence of God he is nothing more than a simple servant” (Demarest 1990:174). It is likely, therefore, that the change of clothing here might be for the last two reasons. However, since the Bible is silent on this issue, any suggestion is speculative.

### *The Sin Offering for the High Priest and his Household (vv. 6, 11–14, 17)*

Verse 11 is a repetition of v. 6. It continues the instruction for Aaron to bring near his own bull as a purification offering. Verse 11a simply restates the statement in v. 6. Milgrom (1991:1024) regards this as a stylistic repetitive resumption, which is frequently found in Hebrew construction. On this day, and this day alone, the high priest is to enter the Most Holy Place and officiate in the immediate presence of God. Aaron is to bring near the bull for purification offering for himself and his household. Before he can serve as a priestly representative, his own sin and that of his household must be expiated. Thus, the principle of descending sanctity requires that the high priest’s sacrifice be performed

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things that had been in contact with something sacred (see, e.g., Lev. 6:21). For example, in Leviticus 16 the high priest had to change his clothes and to wash his entire body after he had come out of the holy of holies.

<sup>7</sup> In later years, the preparation of the high priest was taken so seriously that it commenced seven days before the Day of Atonement began (*Mishnah*, 265).

<sup>8</sup> In the case of Aaron, it is “chequered” (Exod. 28:4).

<sup>9</sup> These were worn for officiating at the outer altar. The high priest wore these in addition to those of his office for rites in the sanctum. When Aaron took part in offering sacrifices in the court, he wore the same linen vestments as the ordinary priests, and is distinguished from them only by his special girdle and turban. For details of the priestly vestments, see Haran 1978:165–174.

<sup>10</sup> Milgrom (1991:1016–1017) outlines five explanations for this dress, including the possibility that it was the dress of an angel.

<sup>11</sup> So e.g., Haran (1978:211): “They are also too costly and magnificent to be worn for such tasks as splashing the blood, cutting up the carcasses of the victims, washing their entrails, and the like.”

before that of the community. Not much is said here about the regulation of the offering, except the manner of manipulating the blood. Before taking the blood into the Holy of Holies, the high priest is to fill a censer with glowing coals taken from the altar and put on the coals two handfuls of *finely* ground incense (הַקֶּהָרִי; Exod. 25:6). The adjective הַקֶּהָרִי, “fine”, indicates that the highest quality of incense is to be used on this day (Hartley 1992:239).

Scholars are divided on the purpose of the smoke created by the incense. Keil and Delitzsch (1956:399) think that the incense represents the prayers of the people entreating YHWH to accept the blood offering and to forgive his people. This view is not indicated by the text in any way. Moreover, Keil (1887–1888:399) has suggested that the incense was to prevent YHWH from seeing the sinner. The weakness in this interpretation is that the incense is said to cover the mercy seat and not the high priest (v.13). Levine has suggested that the incense was a means of propitiating YHWH to ease the wrath for the presumption of coming into his presence (cited in Milgrom 1991:1029). In this case, Aaron would be duplicating the incense offering he made to save the Israelites from an outbreak of YHWH’s wrath as manifested in a plague (Num. 17:11) (Milgrom 1991:1029). As Milgrom (1991:1029) shows, the weakness of this interpretation lies in the wording of the text under investigation: if the cloud of incense were propitiatory, why is it necessary that the cloud of incense covers the *kappōret* over the Ark so that the high priest does not die? The need to cover can only be to screen the Ark from the sight of the high priest. Therefore, like other scholars (see e.g., Milgrom 1991:1031; Snaith 1967:113; Porter 1976:130; Harrison 1980:172; Noordtzi 1982:165; Tidball 2005:191),<sup>12</sup> I think that the smoke serves to protect the high priest, as he stood in the immediate area of God’s presence, to screen him from direct contact with God. This is supported by the phrase וְלֹא יָמוּת “and not die”, in v. 13bβ. It is important to indicate that since incense by itself would not be adequate for providing such a smoke screen, we can assume that on this occasion it is mixed with a special smoke-producing substance (Milgrom 1991:1030–1031).

The procedures for the high priest’s sin offering here differ from that outlined in Leviticus 4. First, in the Day of Atonement ritual, the high priest does not lay his hands on the head of his bull (cf. 4:4). How do we explain the lack of hand-laying here? Gane (2005:224) explains that the absence of hand-laying is because the Day of Atonement rituals are annual and for the entire Israelite community, so identification is not necessary.<sup>13</sup> The weakness in this view lies in the significance of hand-laying in ancient Israel’s sacrificial system. Whether calendrical or not, the worshippers, in this case the entire Israelite community, are supposed to lay hands on the victim. Therefore, one would expect that Aaron, the representative of the people, would lay hands on the victim on their behalf. The best explanation for the lack of laying-on of the hand in the text is that since most prescriptions for such sacrifices are abbreviated (e.g., Leviticus 23;

<sup>12</sup> While Gorman (1997:26) agrees with this interpretation, he adds as another purpose, “an indication that Yahweh is indeed present in the holy of holies.” Thus, the smoke has a dual function: to “veil” and to “reveal” the presence of Yahweh (Gorman 1997:96; cf. 1990:70, 89).

<sup>13</sup> The gesture is required for noncalendrical offerings of herd and flock animals, for an individual (e.g., burnt offering – 4:4, 24, 29, 33), a group within the community (burnt offering – Exod. 29:15; Lev. 8:18; Num. 8:12); purification offering (Exod. 29:10; Lev. 8:14; Num. 8:12) or the entire community (purification offering – Lev. 4:15; cf. 2 Chr. 29:23).

Numbers 28–29), it is possible that here hand-laying was performed, even though it is not mentioned.

The high priest then followed the procedures for the high priest's sin offering outlined in Lev. 4:3–12, with the exception that, on this day, the blood of the bull was sprinkled once “on the front” and seven times “before” the *kapporet* instead of sprinkling on the outside of the curtain in front of the veil. The number, “seven”, indicates completeness.<sup>14</sup> Keil and Delitzsch (1956:399) have explained the two-fold rite of sprinkling the blood: the first rite was for the expiation of the sins of the priests and the people, and the second rite for the cleansing of the sanctuary.<sup>15</sup> But there is no textual support to prove this view; no explanation for the two-fold rite of sprinkling the blood is given. Harley (1992:239) indicates that the blood was sprinkled directly in front of YHWH's feet. This view is unlikely; how could Aaron be in direct contact with YHWH and at the same time be screened by the cloud from the smoke of the incense?

### *The Sin Offering for the People and Atonement of the Inner Sanctum (vv. 15–16a)*

Following the purification of the high priest and his household, the high priest offered a sin offering for the people. The goat that by lot fell to YHWH was sacrificed as the sin offering for the people. This sin offering is performed in both the inner sanctum and the outer sanctum. First, in the inner sanctum he offers the sin offering for the people. The preposition **כִּ** in the phrase **כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לָדָם**, “likewise he did with the blood”, indicates correspondence, implying that the high priest followed the same procedure when he performed the sin offering for himself and his household. This sin offering for the people, however, differs from other sin offerings.<sup>16</sup> The objective of this offering appears to be clear: to make atonement for the people so they will be forgiven (Lev. 4:20). But what is said about the sin offering here is somewhat different. According to v.16a, in presenting this sin offering, Aaron “will make atonement *for* the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been”. The problem lies in the term **כִּפָּר** and its syntagmatic relation. Verse 16 offers **עַל + כִּפָּר**; + impersonal noun (the Holy of Holies). Generally, there is a broad consensus with regard to the meaning of **עַל + כִּפָּר**; + personal noun. In these cases, **עַל** is generally translated as “for” or “on behalf of”. Since **עַל כִּפָּר** followed by a personal object is best translated as “to atone for” or “to atone on behalf of” the person, it is unclear what it might mean in the case where it is followed by an impersonal noun like the Holy of Holies (and the altar or its horns, v.18).

<sup>14</sup> Gorman (1997:96) has suggested that the sevenfold sprinkling is indicative of the seriousness of this particular blood rite.

<sup>15</sup> According to Gorman (1997:96), the blood “on the front” purifies while the blood “behind” re-consecrates.

<sup>16</sup> First, as in the case of the high priest's sin offering, there is no laying-on of hands in this sacrifice. If it were, it would have been performed by the elders (cf. 4:15). Apart from being a calendrical offering, we can explain the lack of laying-on of hands here on the grounds that there would be no potential ambiguity regarding the identity of the community of worshipers because the community and their victim had already been identified by the lots. To the contrary, Hasel (1981:128, n.33) thinks that the absence of laying-on of hands indicates that the sacrifice purged that to which the blood was applied rather than cleansing the worshiper. Secondly, in ancient Israel people slaughtered their own sacrificial animals, but here it is not the case. Since no one except Aaron could be involved in this particular rite, he acted as their representative and slaughtered the goat (v.15). Thirdly, on this occasion the blood of the goat, like that of the bull, was sprinkled not in the customary location in the outer sanctum (v.17) but exclusively in the holy of holies on the atonement cover and in front of it (v.15).

On the one hand, Milgrom (1991:1023, 1036) holds that in instances such as this, **על** is best translated as “on” or “upon”. He renders Lev. 14:53 as follows: “...he shall release the live bird over the open country outside the city. Thus, he shall perform purgation upon the house (**וּכְפַר עַל-הַבַּיִת**) and it shall be pure” (1991:829). This translation seems possible in some instances, insofar as the object of the preposition is the recipient of some aspect of the **כִּפּוּר**-rite, for example, where blood is sprinkled upon the altar (v. 18).

On the other hand, Kuichi (1987:91) argues that the **על** in these instances should be translated the same as it is when followed by a personal object (i.e. with “for”). He buttresses his point with the idea that atoning for sancta is in perfect keeping with the priestly system, which often treats both animate and inanimate objects and people in the same way, at least from the perspective of purification and sanctification. Thus, the priestly writer does not make a semantic distinction between **על** in **על + כִּפּוּר + sanctum** and **על** in **על + כִּפּוּר + person**. For instance, Aaron and priests are to be holy, just like the altars (Exod. 29:33 with 29:37); also, not only Aaron and the priests but also their garments are said to become holy (Exod. 29:21).

Both views present some challenges. The problem with Milgrom’s view is that, if his translation is applied to our present text (v. 16), it will read as “thus to perform purgation *on* or *upon* the Holy of Holies (**וּכְפַר עַל-הַקֹּדֶשׁ**)...” However, Milgrom is uncomfortable with this rendering. Rather, he prefers to translate the **על**; differently in this instance as a direct object marker: “Thus he shall purge the *adytum* (**וּכְפַר עַל-הַקֹּדֶשׁ**). . .” (1991:1010). This usage of the preposition **על** is unusual, and unfortunately, Milgrom provides no explanation for his translation. A more natural approach in this case is to follow Kiuchi in treating **על** here in the same way as with a personal subject: “Thus, he shall make atonement for the Holy of Holies...”. Kiuchi’s view will be difficult to apply in Exod. 30:10a. In this instance, it would read: “Aaron shall make atonement for its horns (**וּכְפַר אֶתְרֹן עַל-קַרְנֹתָיו**)...”. Although this translation may appear strange, it is possible, “especially if the horns are seen here as a synecdoche for the altar” (Sklar 2005:191). Notwithstanding, this verse can be read naturally by translating **על כִּפּוּר** as “to make atonement upon”: “Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns...”.

In sum, one may translate **על כִּפּוּר + impersonal object** as either “to atone for” or “to atone upon”. On the one hand, we should realise that, in these contexts, impersonal objects are positively affected by the **כִּפּוּר**-rite. Therefore, Kiuchi’s view that impersonal objects are sometimes treated as personal objects with respect to purification and sanctification is appropriate, so that in Lev. 16:16, “to atone for” is applicable. On the other hand, however, even if **על כִּפּוּר** is translated as “to atone upon”, it is still clear from the larger context that impersonal objects benefit in the **כִּפּוּר**-rite.

The rite is said to cleanse the inner sanctum from **פְּשָׁעִים**, “acts of rebellion” to the **הַטְּאוֹת**, “sins”, of the Israelites. These terms indicate that the people sin both wilfully and accidentally. The term **פְּשָׁע** stands for any act that was an intentional violation of YHWH’s law (Hartley 1992:240); it connotes “the worst possible sin: open and wanton defiance of the Lord” (Milgrom 1991:1034). The term **הַטְּאוֹת** stands for sins in general, regardless of magnitude or deliberateness. The prepositions **מִן** “from” and **לְ** “to” used with these two terms suggest that the ritual covers wrongdoing of every kind, from an overt act to accidental act. The expression **כָּל-הַטְּאוֹתָם**, “all their sins”, apparently refers to all the category of moral faults insofar as they have affected the sanctuary since the previous Day of Atonement (cf. Hasel 1981:119). For Milgrom, “all” here is limited to

sins that have not already been removed from the sanctuary by means of the outer-altar and outer-sanctum purification offerings (1991:257; cf. Wright 1992:73). But although in some contexts, כָּל can mean “all the rest of” (e.g., 4:7, 12, 18), in Leviticus 16 there is no evidence for this limitation as regards the הַטְּאֵה sins. As Kiuchi (1987:156) has observed, the fact that the sanctuary must be cleansed on the Day of Atonement from all the sins of the Israelites indicates some form of redundancy, since expiation has been made for the same sins on regular occasions (Lev. 4.1–5.13).<sup>17</sup> This redundancy suggests two phases of sacrificial cleansing (Gane 2005:267–284): (1) the purgation of the worshippers/sinners, as a prerequisite to forgiveness through the sacrifices offered throughout the year (e.g., Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35),<sup>18</sup> and (2) the purgation of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement, resulting in the moral purification of the people (Lev. 16:30).<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the result of the two phases is forgiveness and moral cleansing.

It should be pointed out that the two “purification offerings of purgation” – the one on behalf of the priests and the other on behalf of the community – form a complex unit; thus, although the two הַטְּאֵה rituals are performed on behalf of different worshippers, they are structurally bound together by interweaving and merging. The two offerings are designated הַטְּאֵה הַקָּפְרִים, “the purification offering of purgation” (Exod. 30:10). The construct expression refers to a single הַטְּאֵה sacrifice, which covers both rituals. This understanding is supported by the fact that in vv.14–16 and 18–19, the blood of both inner-sanctum purification offerings is used to purge the sanctuary and its sancta. Moreover, the burning of the suet of the הַטְּאֵה, “the purification offering” (sg.) in v.25 undoubtedly refers to both purification offerings collectively.<sup>20</sup> The collective singular ‘purification offering of purgation’ refers to the ritual complex that contains both הַטְּאֵה rituals.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Purgation in the Outer Sanctum (v. 16b)*

The text specifically indicates that the two previous rituals were to take place in the inner sanctum. In v.16b, another ritual, to be performed in the Tent of Meeting, is described. The Tent of Meeting here, no doubt, refers to the outer sanctum; it cannot refer to the inner sanctum, which had already been purged and so cannot be purged again in this

<sup>17</sup> Kiuchi (1987:156–157) notes that because sinners receive forgiveness following purification offerings throughout the year, it is difficult to solve the problem of the relationship between these rituals and the Day of Atonement ceremonies by assuming that the former are lacking in validity. Rather, he suggests an analogy with the purification of the leper, who is purified in stages and is clean enough at each stage (Leviticus 14).

<sup>18</sup> Gane shows that an outer-altar purification offering for a person who is physically impure purges ritual contamination from the worshiper to make the person pure. Similarly, an outer-altar or outer-sanctum purification offering for sin purges ritual contamination from the worshiper, after which YHWH forgives the sinner (p. 275).

<sup>19</sup> Gane explains that the corporate inner-sanctum purification offerings on behalf of the priests and the people on the Day of Atonement purge the sanctuary from the physical ritual impurities and הַטְּאֵה sins of the Israelites. He maintains that the purgation of the sanctuary completes the process of כַּפֵּר for הַטְּאֵה sins, as a result of which the corporate group of הַטְּאֵה (but not פֶּשַׁע) sinners are (morally) pure (v. 30), provided the people demonstrate submission to YHWH by self-denial and abstaining from work on the day (Lev. 16:29, 31; Lev. 23:27–32; Num. 29:7).

<sup>20</sup> Elliger (1966:216) conjectures that the singular in the MT probably indicates that originally only one הַטְּאֵה was offered.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. use of the singular עֹלָה “burnt offering”, in Numbers 28–29 for two or more regular or additional burnt offerings that form a burnt-offering complex and are performed on behalf of the same worshiper, all Israel (e.g., 28:3, 6, 10, 11, 19, 27).

instance. The text does not show what procedure to follow; however, the phrase “he is to do the same” suggests that the purgation procedure followed in the inner sanctum was to be followed. This supports the idea that it is the outer sanctum which is referred to here. In addition, the absence of a prescribed procedure is because the procedure for the purgation of the altar is already given in Lev. 4:6–7, 17–18. Since one object, the altar of incense, was in the outer sanctum, it is assumed that it was the object to be purged by direct contact with the blood, while the rest of the space was to be purged by a sevenfold sprinkling on the floor.

According to v.17, while the high priest was enacting these rituals in the inner sanctum, no one was to be in the Tent of Meeting until he emerged. The Tent of Meeting here refers to both the outer sanctum and the inner sanctum, since no one apart from the high priest could enter the latter, but priests could enter the outer sanctum. Practically, therefore, this warning was addressed to the other priests rather than to lay Israelites because non-priests had no access to the outer sanctum. The phrase “until he comes out” can be confusing: until he exits the inner sanctum or the outer sanctum? Since no one was allowed in the outer sanctum, no one would know when the high priest had left the inner sanctum. Therefore, the only logical answer is the phrase means until his exit from the Tent of Meeting into the courtyard (Milgrom 1991:1035). The purpose of this prohibition was to prevent the contamination of the Tent, which would render the ritual ineffective and give cause for YHWH’s wrath to befall everyone in the Tent (Hartley 1992:240).

## **The Ritual in the Courtyard (vv.18–19)**

### ***The Purgation of the Outer Altar***

The high priest went to the altar in the courtyard to put (בָּתַר) the blood of the bull (for his own offering) and of the goat (for the offering of the people) on the horns of the altar roundabout (cf. 8:15). He then sprinkled (הִזָּה) blood on the altar of sacrifice seven times with his finger. As Hartley (1992:240) notes, this is the only time that sprinkling is prescribed for the altar. The reason is uncertain; however, Kuichi (1987:129) has suggested that it is because “sprinkling” is more powerful than “putting” blood on the altar. The purpose of this rite was to cleanse (טָהַר) the altar and sanctify (קִדְּשׁ) it from the impurities of the people. It thus טָהַר removed past defilement and קִדְּשׁ sanctified it for future use.

The text does not indicate which altar is intended here: the altar of incense *in* the Tent of Meeting, or the altar of burnt offering *before* the Tent of Meeting. Scholars such as Rashi (1965), Hoffmann (1953) and Harrison (1980) think that the altar of incense is intended. Since the verb יָצָא “go out” suggests that the high priest leaves the inner sanctum, Rashi (1965:24–25) has suggested that the high priest must go outwards from the inner sanctum to the east side of the outer sanctum where the altar of incense stands for this rite.

This argument seems to depend on the phrase לְפָנֵי-יְהוָה, for the location of the altar: “the altar before YHWH”. The reference could appear to be the incense altar close to the

inner sanctum.<sup>22</sup> To rely on such a phrase is unfortunate because this characterisation is also found in the case of the outer altar (cf. Lev. 1:11), so that this observation cannot be used to argue in favour of the altar of incense. In addition, the verb **צָא** “go out” could equally be taken to mean that the high priest was to leave the Tent of Meeting for the court for this rite. Verse 17 had already indicated that the high priest’s exit from the Tent of Meeting into the courtyard means that the altar referred to is the altar of burnt offering. The best interpretation is that the object here is the altar of the burnt offering. It seems to be logical for the following reasons. First, Lev. 16:20, 33 speak of atonement for the “Most Holy Place”, the “Tent of Meeting” and the “altar”. Since the “altar of incense” is a part of the “Tent of Meeting”, there is no need to specify it, while there would be a need to specify the altar of burnt offering, located outside the Tent of Meeting (Noordtzijs 1982:167–168). Secondly, if the sprinkling of blood in the inner sanctum and in the outer sanctum cleansed all parts of the Tent of Meeting, it is reasonable that a blood rite was performed to cleanse the altar of burnt offering, a representative of the furniture in the court, especially since this altar was used so often in the work of the sanctuary. Thirdly, having cleansed the Tent of Meeting, which included the altar of incense, the cleansing of the altar of burnt offering would cleanse the court, so that on the Day of Atonement, the entire sanctuary, both the inside and outside, would have been cleansed.

In sum, the high priest was to perform a seven-fold sprinkling in front of the altar of burnt offering to purge the court, just as he did the Tent of Meeting. Just as the seven-fold sprinkling in the inner sanctum (vv.14, 15) purged that area (v.16), in the same way the seven-fold sprinkling in v.18 cleansed the court area. In this way, the sanctuary complex was entirely cleansed.

### ***The Azazel Goat Ritual (vv. 10, 20–22)***

The fourth action performed on the Day of Atonement was the live goat ritual. I have done a detailed study of this ritual elsewhere (Adu-Gyamfi 2013:1–10). However, for easy flow of the analysis of the text, I will give a summary here. Having cleansed the Tent of Meeting and the court, Aaron brought forward the live goat and laid both hands on its head and confessed over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites (v.20). According to v.20a, the purging of the sanctuary had to be completed before the Azazel goat rite was performed. Thus, all the impurities of the sanctuary had first to be removed by the blood rites before they could be transferred onto the head of the goat (Milgrom 1991:1040). The goat was then handed over to someone appointed for the task, who escorted it away from the court out through the camp and to the regions beyond, where he released it in the desert.

The identity of Azazel has attracted scholarly debates. The term has been variously interpreted to mean a scapegoat, goat that departs (see Gaster 1962:325–326; Feinberg 1958:326–327); name of a place, precipitous place (cf. Driver 1956:97–98);<sup>23</sup> an abstract

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<sup>22</sup> So e.g., Harrison (1980:173) endorses this interpretation for two reasons: first, the altar to be atoned for is intimately associated with the outer sanctum and the tent of meeting; secondly, this altar of incense was smeared with blood as part of the ritual for sin offerings (Lev. 4:7, 18) and so it needs to be purified.

<sup>23</sup> Thus, it was taken to be an inaccessible region. Verses 10 and 22 seem to favour this interpretation when they are literally read as “and sent it (the he-goat) off to Azazel, to the Wilderness”.

“destruction” (Hoffmann 1953:304–305) or “entire removal” (BDB 736);<sup>24</sup> and the name of a spirit-being (cf. de Vaux 1961:509; Tawil 1980:58–59; Kaufmann 1960:114–115; Wright 1987:21–22). Arguments favour the interpretation that the term refers to a spirit-being. First, the *lamed* prefix, which expresses ownership, provides parallelism between the designation “for YHWH” and “for Azazel”. Thus, the text demands that the second name, like the first, should be the name of a spirit-being. Secondly, the goat is sent out into the wilderness, which is the dwelling place of demonic characters (Wright 1987:25–30). The weakness of this interpretation is that the *lamed* prefix can equally be translated in terms of ownership, destination or recipient. Whatever the meaning of Azazel, be it the mountain where the goat was destroyed, the sin that was given to destruction, or the evil angel who was bribed so he did not become an accuser, it all comes back to the same basic idea: sin was exterminated from Israel.

The second rite that needs comment is the use of both hands in the laying of hands upon the head of the goat. In purification offerings made throughout the year, a single hand is laid on the head of the animal (see e.g., Lev. 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33). For Milgrom (1976:765; 1991:1041), while the use of one hand expresses identification with the worshipper, the use of two hands expresses transferal in non-sacrificial contexts.<sup>25</sup> But as Zohar (1988: 613, n. 24) notes, the difference between using one hand or both hands is unlikely to convey such disparate meanings but rather suggests a difference in *degree*. In his effort to support a substitutionary interpretation of atonement, Kaiser (1994:1011) argues that in the original consonantal text, ידו in Lev. 1:4 and elsewhere could have represented a dual form (יָדָיו), referring to two hands, even though the MT invariably vocalises this form as singular (יָדוֹ). Kaiser, however, fails to give sufficient weight to the fact that only in Lev. 16:21 the text unambiguously specifies the placement of two hands on the ritual animal by using the numeral שְׁתֵּי, “two”. For Gane (2005:58), the Azazel goat ritual is unique in its requirement that two hands be laid on the victim rather than one. Perhaps the use of two hands is representational: one hand for Aaron and his family and the other for the people.<sup>26</sup>

The purpose of the scapegoat rite is first introduced in v.10: “...to make atonement upon it to send it away (לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו לְשַׁלַּח אֹתוֹ) into the wilderness to Azazel”. In v.22, the goat is said to “bear all their iniquities upon itself” (וְנָשָׂא הַשְּׂעִיר עָלָיו אֶת-כָּל-עֲוֹנוֹתָם). Our understanding of the phrase עָלָיו נָשָׂא in v.22 rests on the relationship between the phrases לְשַׁלַּח אֹתוֹ and לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו in v.10, particularly one’s understanding of לְשַׁלַּח. For the RSV, לְשַׁלַּח acts as a purpose clause, which implies that atonement is made upon the goat *so that* it may then be sent into the wilderness: “But the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel”. This translation implies that the atonement rite is

<sup>24</sup> BDB, 736. Thus, the Azazel rite is an elimination rite charged with the removal of pollution through the agent of a living substitute.

<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, Kiuchi (1987:118–119) thinks that the hand-laying does not warrant an automatic transfer of sin. He agrees that the purpose of the hand-laying is to transfer the guilt of the Israelites to the Azazel goat. He intimates that the act itself does not necessarily symbolise the ‘transference of guilt’ mentioned in v.21b. He argues the possibility that the hand-laying in Lev. 16:21 also symbolises the notion of ‘substitution’ as in Lev 1:4. However, he acknowledges that since on the Day of Atonement the high priest lays his hands on behalf of the Israelites, the question remains in what sense the substitution is envisaged.

<sup>26</sup> So Ginsburg (1961:155) has linked the use of two hands with the fact that the animal functioned for both the priests and the lay community.

complete before the goat is sent off; thus, the rite consists only of confessing and placing the sins of the people upon the head of the goat. Another understanding of לשלח is to take it as explicative of לכהן עליי, which will mean that atonement is made with the goat by sending it into the wilderness (so, Kiuchi 1987:151; Milgrom 1991:1009; Hartley 1992:220, 236; NIV). Thus, the atonement rite consists not only of confessing the sins and placing them upon the head of the goat but also in sending the goat into the wilderness. Although both notions are possible grammatically, logically, the first view is doubtful. There is no doubt that atonement is made so that people can be forgiven or purified. However, “it is not as clear what it would mean that atonement is made so that the goat can then be sent into the wilderness” (Sklar 2005:97). Therefore, the second view is to be preferred: atonement is completely achieved by sending the goat bearing the sin into the wilderness.

### ***The Burnt Offering Ritual (vv. 23–28)***

The fifth action is the burnt offering. Aaron had to sacrifice the two rams selected in the morning: one as a burnt offering for himself and the other as a burnt offering for the community. The parts of the animals to be burned are not clearly stated here in detail. Nevertheless, it is assumed that, in addition to the fat, the kidneys and covering of the liver were burnt, as in Leviticus 4.

The high priest was to perform this ritual in his normal high priestly attire. But before donning these clothes he had to put away the linen priestly garments and go through a second bath.<sup>27</sup> There are three views about why the second bath was needed. Some scholars think that it was to purify the high priest from defilement contracted during the two purification rites designed to purge the sanctuary.<sup>28</sup> This view is incorrect because it does not consider the fact that the high priest was immune to the impurity that he removed (Milgrom 1991:1048). This is shown by the fact that he subsequently deposited his special linen vestments in the outer sanctum and bathes in the sacred precincts (vv. 23–24) (Gane 2005:188).

A second approach suggests the bath is to remove the super-holiness contracted by the high priest when he entered the inner sanctum (Milgrom 1991:1048; Kiuchi 1987:137; Gerstenberger 1996:223; Hartley 1992:242), so that those who were to join him in the more regular offering might not endanger themselves (Hartley 1992:242). The third view, like the second, suggests that the second bath is a rite of passage. Gorman (1990:90–95) sees the high priest’s second bath as an exit to normality from a marginal status, during which he had entered the inner sanctum and confessed over the Azazel goat, so contacting the diametrically opposed dynamic qualities of holiness and defilement. Baumgarten (1994:445–446) adds that if the high priest puts on his clothes and rejoins the people without the bath, it would be an intolerable intrusion of the sacred into non-sacred realms.<sup>29</sup> According to Ezek. 44:19, priests are required to remove their

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<sup>27</sup> The Rabbis calculated that the high priest was required to bathe himself five times and wash his hands and feet another ten times on this day (*Mishnah*, 268). See Milgrom (1991) for details.

<sup>28</sup> At one time Milgrom (1976:336) held this view.

<sup>29</sup> His position derives from his theory that impurity is a deviation from a normal level of purity: if someone contacts the excessive holiness of sacrificial blood in the course of fulfilling his ritual role, “he and his garments must be cleansed” (p. 445).

vestments when they go out from the temple to the people, in order not to transmit holiness to the people.

The best we can say is that, via the second bath, the high priest renewed his purification in preparation for his subsequent officiation at the altar (vv.24b–25) because the non-sacrificial ritual involving the goat of/for Azazel had interrupted the continuity of his sacrificial officiation (cf. Exod. 30:20). Gorman (1990:90) is correct to point out the correspondence between the high priest's two baths. The first takes place before he puts on his special linen garments (v.4) and his second after he takes them off (vv. 23–24). The two baths bracket the cleansing of the Tent of Meeting and Azazel's goat **הטאת** ritual, during which the priest wears special linen garments and following, which he returns to his usual ornate garments. Therefore, in some sense, it seems the high priest is involved in a communal rite of passage.

Contrasting the **הטאת** that is eaten with the burnt **הטאת**, Milgrom contests that the latter “represents higher degrees of impurity caused by inadvertences of the high priest and community, and at its worst, by presumptuous sins. The impurity is powerful enough to penetrate the shrine and adytum and is dangerously contagious” (Milgrom 1991:263).<sup>30</sup> So in this instance, the **הטאת** is burned. However, the notion that there are degrees of uncleanness does not work in the case of the burnt **הטאת** in Leviticus 8–9, because no sin is envisaged. It is unlikely that the mode of disposal of the **הטאת** is conditioned by the degrees of uncleanness with which the **הטאת** deals.

The symbolic meaning of the burnt **הטאת** can be deduced from Lev. 16:26–28. The person who burned the **הטאת** flesh outside the camp and the person who handles the Azazel goat are both assumed to be unclean. The injunction to undergo purification rites is formulated in both verses in the same words. This seems to suggest that the symbolic meaning of the burning of the **הטאת** relates to what the Azazel goat does: the bearing and removing of guilt (Kiuchi 1987:133–135).

### Rituals Outside the Camp

The final ritual was the disposal of the carcasses of the sin offerings. The remainder of the animals not burned on the altar (“the hide”, “the meat”, and “offal”) was taken outside the camp and incinerated rather than eaten (Lev. 4:11–12, 21). The disposal may have been deemed necessary because the ritual involved the high priest, not only as officiant, but also as the worshipper. The burnt offerings made on behalf of the priests and laity are thought to have been purification offerings made on their behalf. Some scholars seek a separate significance for the burnt offerings. Rainey (1970:498, esp. n. 5) interprets the combination of purification and burnt offerings to represent expiation followed by consecration. Gorman (1990:126–127) explains the purpose of such a pair to be the purging of the sanctuary (purification offering) followed by the provision of a gift to YHWH to secure right relations with him, averting divine wrath caused by the offence of sin (burnt offering). It is unnecessary to seek such separation; “such approaches fail to account for the fact that an unaccompanied **הטאת** sacrifice can be functionally equivalent to a purification-burnt offering pair (Lev. 5:5–6; Num. 15:24, 27)” (Gane

<sup>30</sup> Milgrom thinks that the **הטאת** to be eaten is “the largess granted the priest for assuming the burden...of purging the sanctuary”. In this case, he posits that the impurity is not transferable to the **הטאת**. Noordtzi (1982:80) assumed that the burnt **הטאת** represents a higher degree of holiness.

2005:220–221, n. 10). The best interpretation is that “when these two kinds of sacrifices are coupled on behalf of the same worshipper, the burnt-offering token ‘gift’ enhances the efficacy of the purification-offering’s token ‘debt payment’ in a quantitative sense, making what amounts to a greater purification offering (cf. Lev. 5:6–7; Num. 15:24–28)” (Gane 2005:219).

Like the one who led the scapegoat to the wilderness, the person who disposed of the carcasses re-entered the camp, washing his clothes and bathing in water to become ritually clean. It is not immediately clear why he had to do this, since it is argued in Leviticus 4 that the flesh of the animals was most holy, not being defiled by the worshipper’s sin. Kiuchi (1987:135–141) suggests that the cleansing was required because the remains of the offerings symbolised death and that the person who handled them contacted death and so had to go through ritual cleansing. Thus, the bathing of body and clothes apparently was intended to prevent his bringing defilement he contracted via the carcasses back into the community of Israel.

### **The Significance of the Day of Atonement**

In accordance with its name, the Day of Atonement was designed to effect atonement on a large scale: for the entire community (both “clergy” and “laity”). The blood sacrifices, suffering death in the place of sinful people, symbolised the propitiation of YHWH’s wrath, first against the high priest and his family (Lev. 16:6, 11), for even the high priest, in theory the holiest person in Israel, stood before YHWH as a sinner (v.13).<sup>31</sup> The rite implies that no person, however holy, could approach God without appropriate atonement being made.

Atonement was further wrought for the sanctuary, which had been defiled by Israel’s contamination. In particular, the Holy of Holies was cleansed, then the holy place and then the altar. With the way thus prepared, a climactic atonement took place for all the transgressions of the congregation since the last Day of Atonement. Blood was the appointed means of purging and sanctification. Unless Israel’s sin and uncleanness were purged, YHWH would condemn his people to judgement.

The departure of the sin-laden scapegoat, which symbolised the removal of the guilt of Israel, was particularly significant. The rites in the inner sanctum were not seen by the community. The ritual involving Azazel’s goat was seen by all and could be understood by all. As Wenham (1979:237) observes, “it was a powerful visual aid that demonstrated the reality of sin and the need to eliminate it”. This point was further underlined by the total prohibition against work and the exercise of penitential practices such as fasting. The rite involving Azazel’s goat may have led some people to suppose that it was an easy task to purify the nation from its sinful deeds. The command to “afflict yourselves” therefore underlined the need for everyone to examine himself or herself and repent of his or her sins.

Another significance of the Day of Atonement was the role of the high priest. He was the representative of the people who alone was qualified to stand before YHWH to perform rites of atonement and cleansing. Without him, it would have been difficult for such rites to be performed.

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<sup>31</sup> The flesh of the sin-offering animals was not permitted to be eaten because it was sacrificed for the sins of the high priest and his family (cf. Lev. 16:27 with 6:23; 4:11, 21; Exod. 29:14; Lev. 8:17; 9:11; 10:19).

The important role of the Day of Atonement in the life and thought of Israel led Rylaarsdam (1962:314) to call it the “Good Friday of the OT”.<sup>32</sup> This designation fits the Day because it was a tremendous moment of renewal that permeated all Israel and united it in a solemn joy. If the Year of Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement (see Lev. 23:27 and 25:9) as some propose (e.g., Rylaarsdam 1962:314; Hartley 1992:434; Kiuchi 2007:456),<sup>33</sup> then it was indeed a “Good Friday” – a day of cleansing and restoration. Furthermore, since the Day of Atonement was a gathering together of the entire community, it could serve as a day of affirmation of the nationhood of the community. During the post-exilic period, for example, it might have celebrated the restoration of the Israelite community, with the high priest as its head.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have shown that the Day of Atonement played an important role in the religious life of Judah. Although it is difficult to describe precisely how the rituals were performed, the text as we have it shows that YHWH provided a means by which the worship place and the worshippers could be atoned for and cleansed of evil deeds. The rituals of the two goats imply that evil deeds of all categories were atoned for and removed from the community. The important role of the high priest in the performance of the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement was highlighted. He alone had the authority to perform the various rites for the atonement of the priesthood and the community. Apart from the rite involving Azazel’s goat, all the others were performed in “secret” by the high priest. Furthermore, the important role of blood and water as detergents in the rituals has been demonstrated. Blood was used to atone for sins and for purging impurities. Water was used to cleanse the people from impurities contracted from contact with sin-stained objects. Leviticus 16 shows that, on the Day of Atonement, purification was meant not only for the people, but also for cultic objects. Thus, the evil deeds of the people affected the sanctity of these objects, which, consequently, also needed purification. Finally, the cleansing (טהרה) of the people from sin on the Day of Atonement (v.30) differed from the removal of imperfections through individual offerings during the year because, as Gane (2005:175) has observed:

on the Day of Atonement those who know that they have sinned are already either forgiven (סליח) through sacrifice (e.g., Lev. 4:20, 26, 31) or bearing condemnation for which there is no ritual remedy, as a result of defiant/wanton sinning (Num. 15:30–31; cf. Lev. 20:3). Persons who know that they have had severe physical ritual impurities during the year are already either pure (טהרה) from application of appropriate remedies (e.g., Lev. 12:7, 8) or condemned to death or extirpation as a result of neglecting the remedies provided by YHWH (15:31; Num. 19:13, 20).

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<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Hartley (1992:220) asserts that “Good Friday, became the Christians’ Day of Atonement, so to speak, a day of self-denial, penance, expiation, and reconciliation.”

<sup>33</sup> Hartley (1992:434) and Kiuchi (2007:456) assert that the year of Jubilee appropriately begins on the Day of Atonement, because it is the most solemn day of the year when the entire community receives forgiveness for all their sins. Rylaarsdam (1962:314), however, acknowledges the difficulty in explaining why an interval of ten days should later separate the two observances.

So on the Day of Atonement, moral cleansing did not purge sin as a prerequisite to forgiveness, nor did it provide physical ritual purity by purging persons of their impurities.

Verse 30 shows that the priestly literature understands sin and impurity to be closely related: “For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you (לְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם); from all your sins you shall be clean before the LORD (מִכָּל חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תִּטְהָרוּ)” so that the people are not *cleansed* only of their impurities, but also of their *sins*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For detail discussion on the relationship between sin and impurity see Sklar (2005:139–159).

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