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Reconsider the Meaning of Scapegoat Ritual in Leviticus 16:20-22

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Abstract

The scapegoating ritual in Leviticus 16 is central to ancient Jewish religion as part of the Yom Kippur celebration. The sacrifice of a scapegoat thrown into the desert is a unique ritual because it only appears in Leviticus 16 of the entire biblical text, and the only story that uses an animal to take away all the sins of the Israelites. The issue that will be discussed in this study is to find the origins and meaning of this ritual. From the historical criticism interpretation approach to the text of Leviticus 16:20-22, it can be concluded that the meaning of this ritual can be used as a warning (threat) for the Israelites, in which expulsion/exile is a real possibility if they live in sin, and also as a means (ceremony) to reconcile God and man.

Keywords: atonement; Azazel; sin; symbol; Yom Kippur

INTRODUCTION

The scapegoating ritual in Leviticus 16 reflects significant elements within the ancient Jewish religious panorama. This ritual is not merely a sequence of ceremonial actions but also carries symbolism that penetrates the essence of beliefs and religious practices. This study aims to explore various aspects and interpretations associated with the scapegoat ritual. The aspects to be analyzed include the mechanisms of implementation the scapegoat ritual, encompassing the significance of the High Priest who lays his hands on the scapegoat, the release of the scapegoat into the wilderness, and the purpose and meaning behind the implementation of the ritual.

The scapegoat being cast out into the wilderness is a unique ritual as it only appears in Leviticus 16 of the entire Bible text, and is the only story that employs an animal to bear the sins of the entire Israelites. In this study, this scapegoat ritual appears unconventional and markedly distinct from other religious practices of the Israelites. Upon examining Leviticus 4, 7 and 16:11-16, the sins of the Israelites can indeed be expiated through the ritual of the *ḥaṭṭā'āt* (חַטָּאת), using a slaughtered animal, without the need for sending or casting it away. This aligns with the initial *ḥaṭṭā'āt* ritual involv-

ing two sacrificial animals. Furthermore, this scapegoat ritual exclusively serves the purpose of expiating the sins of the Israelites (cf. Lev. 16:16). Thus, this further highlights the uniqueness and distinction of this ritual that is the concept of expulsion, where the transfer of sins onto the scapegoat and its subsequent expulsion are indirect and symbolic.

The actual purpose of casting out the scapegoat does not indicate that it is a means to appease the wrath of God. This is stated because there is no indication in Leviticus 16 the reason why God should be angry with the Israelites. Essentially, the scapegoat ritual is designed to expunge or remove the sins of the Israelites from their presence, sins that could potentially incur the wrath of God (cf. Deu.11:16-17; 28:15; 31:29). The scapegoat is considered as an intermediary facilitating this process and ensuring the purity and restoration of the relationship between Yahweh and Israelites.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study of the scapegoat ritual within the Jewish tradition will be analyzed using a hermeneutic approach to the interpretation of the Holy Scripture from a historical-critical perspective. Historical-critical analysis is a method of interpreting the Holy Scripture that examines the historical background of the text, delves into the theologi-

cal meaning of the Hebrew language used in the text, and explores the intended meaning of the scapegoat ritual.¹ This historical interpretation is conducted by detailing various understandings and viewpoints expressed by scholars through literature review and by understanding the text from the Hebrew language used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Description of the Goat Ritual

Yom Kippur, as described in Leviticus 16, is a highly significant celebration in the Jewish religion. Simply mentioning the words “Yom Kippur” conjures images in the minds of Jewish of a day spent standing in the “shul” or synagogue all day, fasting, praying, and reciting viduy (confession of sins). Yom Kippur, known as one of the holiest days in their tradition, is depicted as a solemn day for reflection and repentance. This is why Yom Kippur remains one of the most sacred religious celebrations with profound significance for the Jewish community worldwide, even to this day.

The holy day of Yom Kippur, falling on the tenth day of the month of Tishrei or the seventh month in the Jewish calendar (Lev. 16:29-30; 23:26-32), marks for hope

of freshness and new beginnings, both individually and collectively. Leviticus 16 provides detailed instructions and guidelines on how the Yom Kippur ceremony should be conducted, as well as the key role played by the high priest in “purifying” the Israelites from their impurities and sins. In this ceremony, the high priest would atone (כפר) for the impurities of the House of God and the altar, while simultaneously atoning for sins of the whole community: himself, his family, his fellow priests, and all of Israelites (Lev.16:10-11, 16-19, 21-22, 24, 29-33; 23:27; Num. 29:7; Ex. 30:10).

Considering that the celebration of Yom Kippur only occurred in Leviticus 16 in the entire Holy Scriptures, its origins become obscure and challenging to comprehend comprehensively. There is insufficient of detailed information from other sources within the Bible that could provide a complete picture of the origins and development of this celebration. Outside Israel, the Hittites have a ritual Pulisa for avoiding a plague. They offer animals such as sheeps, goats, and bulls for the gods. David Asmat argues that there is a possibility for Israelites to adopt the Hittites ritual.² In the development during the period of the Second Temple,

¹ W. Randolph Tete, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 38-40.

² David Asmat, “Identidad Y Función Del Macho Cabrio Para Azazel Según Levítico 16,” *Theologika* 30, no. 1 (2015): 2–37.

Yom Kippur was already regarded as a significant holiday.³

The etymology and contextual meaning of the term כִּפֶּר (*kippēr*) in Leviticus 16 have been subjects of scholarly debate without reaching a consensus. Various translations of כִּפֶּר have been suggested in its context, such as appeasement, atonement, calming, soothing, redemption, reconciliation, and ransom. In the context of the *ḥaṭṭā'āt* (sin offering), additional translations like “cleansing” or “removal” have been proposed. This is because the *ḥaṭṭā'āt* offering is considered an effort to cleanse impurity from the Holy Place or to remove someone's sin. Some scholars argue that this word may originate from the Arabic *kafara* (to cover), where כִּפֶּר (in the piel form) means “to cover” the sin or impurity of an object or the object itself. Thus, כִּפֶּר can be interpreted as “atonement” for the believer (an individual who is sinful or brings impurity), or as “cleansing” for a contaminated structure (the Holy Place). We argue that the meaning of כִּפֶּר in the context of the *ḥaṭṭā'āt* refers to atonement and sanctification/purification for an object (a person or the Holy Place).

Meanwhile, in other contexts, the term כִּפֶּר only carries the meaning of “ran-

som” without involving the concept of purification/cleansing. This explanation helps to understand better whether the scapegoat ritual serves כִּפֶּר in the sense of atonement and purification, or whether it exclusively focuses on atonement for sin. In fact, the implementation of the scapegoat ritual in Leviticus 16:10, 21 is carried out exclusively to “atone for” the sins of the Israelites, without any relation to the purification or sanctification of an object. This is certainly different from the implementation of other *ḥaṭṭā'āt* rituals (bull and male goat) in Leviticus 16:11-16, where those rituals are performed to “cleanse” ritual impurity and simultaneously atone for the sins of the Israelites. Therefore, we can state that the term כִּפֶּר based on other *ḥaṭṭā'āt* rituals (bull and male goat) can be interpreted as sanctification, where the Holy Place and people obtain purification from impurity and sin. The term כִּפֶּר based on the scapegoat ritual must be specifically interpreted as atonement for sin. Thus, the implementation of this ritual will enable the Israelites to receive forgiveness and be reconciled with God.

In Leviticus 16, it is recounted that the ceremony is performed by offering the sin-offering sacrificial animal (חֵטְאָה), the

³ Isaac Kalimi, “The Historical Uniqueness and Centrality of Yom Kippur,” TheTorah.com, 2014,

<https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-historical-uniqueness-and-centrality-of-yom-kippur>.

Yom Kippur holds two purposes: to reconcile the people of Israel with Yahweh because of their sins (Lev. 16:6-11, 15, 17, 21-24, 30-32), and to cleanse or purify the holy place and the altar from their impurities, violations, and sins (Lev. 16:16, 18-20, 33). The word “*kāpār*” (כָּפַר), meaning to cover, cleanse, purify, make reconciliation, and atone, further elucidates these purposes. Therefore, concerning the context of the “*ḥaṭṭā’āt*” (חַטָּאת) offering, Yom Kippur can be understood in two senses: as a day of atonement⁴ and a day of purgation.⁵

Based on Leviticus 16, both sin and impurity require sacrificial rituals to obtain purification and atonement. Therefore, in the Yom Kippur ceremony, several sacrificial rituals involving five animals are conducted. Two male goats are used for offerings (עֹלֶה) (Lev. 16:3, 5), and three animals, a bull (Lev. 16:3), and two male goats (Lev. 16:5)⁶ are used for sin offerings (חַטָּאת). The bull serves as a sin offering for High Priest Aaron and his family (Lev. 16:3, 6, 11),

while the two male goats serve as sin offerings for the Israelites (Lev. 16:5, 7-10). Then Aaron casts lots for the two goats, one lot for God and the other for Azazel (Lev. 16:8). The goat for God is to be presented and processed as a sin offering (Lev. 16:5-9). Meanwhile, the goat for Azazel is to be set alive and released into the wilderness, carrying all the sins of the Israelites (Lev. 16:10, 21-22).

Here is the structure of the scape-goat ritual for atonement of sin (verses 20-22). This structure aims to briefly describe how the mechanism of the ritual is carried out.

- (1) Bringing the live goat (verse 20).
- (2) Implementation of the ritual (verses 21-22):
 - a. Transfer of the sins of the Israelite nation (verses 21a-21b):
Placing the hands of the high priest on the head of the goat (verse 21a). Confession and transfer of "sins" onto its head (verse 21b).
 - b. Disposal of the "sins" into the wilderness (verses 21b-22b):
Sending the goat into the wilderness by a designated sender (verse 21b).

⁴ In Lev 16:30, it is written, “For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the God from all your sins.” Regardless of the clear meaning in the phrase “all your sins,” Jewish rabbis believe that the phrase “before the Lord” indicates that Yom Kippur redeems sins “between man and God” (בֵּין אָדָם לַיהוָה), and this is only for certain context. (*Mishnah, Yoma* 8:8-9; *Babylonian Talmud, Yoma* 85b-87a; *Shabuoth* 12b-14a). Isaac Kalimi, “The Historical Uniqueness and Centrality of Yom Kippur.”

⁵ Milgrom prefers to translate יוֹם כִּפּוּר as “Day of Purgation” rather than “Day of Atonement” because

he believes that the meaning of the verb כָּפַר in the context of חַטָּאת is 'to cleanse' or 'to purify' the Israelites from serious physical uncleanness such as those experienced by a woman giving birth, leprosy, or gonorrhea (Lev. 12-15), or from unintentional sins (Lev. 4). See, Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 24.; Jacob Milgrom, “Israel’s Sanctuary: The Priestly « Picture of Dorian Gray »,” *Revue Biblique* (1946-) 83, no. 3 (1976): 390-99, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44088340>.

⁶ According to the Mishnah, the goats must be identical in every way. (*Yoma* 5.6).

Carrying all the sins to the barren ground (verse 22a).

Releasing the goat into the desert (verse 22b).

In Leviticus 4-5:13, the sin offering ritual (*ḥaṭṭā'āt*) follows a consistent chronology, which includes: laying on of hands, slaughter, sprinkling of blood, and burning. However, the sin offering ritual in Leviticus 16 has its own uniqueness. For example, in the scapegoat ritual, the laying on of hands is done on the live goat, rather than on the goat to be slaughtered (cf. Lev. 4:13-21). Therefore, there are several interesting aspects to be further discussed regarding the mechanism of the scapegoat ritual, including: the laying on of hands, the transfer of sins, and the disposal of the goat.

The Significance of Laying Both Hands over the Scapegoat

The act of laying hands on a specific object is not something new in the Hebrew Bible, whether it's done for humans or animals (see Gen. 48:14, 17-18; Num. 8:5-26;

27:18; Lev. 4:15; 8:14). Some exegetes argue that the laying on of hands can be distinguished into two models: the single-handed model and the double-handed model. This difference applies to the laying on of hands for both humans and animals.⁷ According to David P. Wright, the distinction lies in the double-handed model being exercised in non-sacrificial rituals, while the single-handed model is used in the rituals.⁸ The ritual of laying both hands can be found in three contexts: the scapegoat ritual (Lev. 16: 21), the ordination of Joshua as Moses' successor (Num. 27:18, 23), and in executing a blasphemer (Lev. 24:14).⁹

Actually, the explanation of this difference is quoted by Wright from Péter's opinion, who stated that the concept of one hand is found in the context of sacrifice, and the concept of two hands is found in the context of non-sacrifice. The difference between these two models allows Péter to provide different meanings. For him, the two-handed model indicates transfer, such as the

⁷ Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character, Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 57.; David P. Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106, no. 3 (July 1986): 433-46, <https://doi.org/10.2307/602103>.

⁸ Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature."

⁹ According to Wright, the ordination of Joshua creates confusion because in Numbers 27:18, God commands Moses to lay his hand (יָדָא, singular) on Joshua, but in reality (verse 23), Moses lays both

hands (יָדָא, plural). The most plausible solution is that the laying on of hands was done with both hands, as indicated by its Greek version and related texts, such as Deuteronomy 34:9. Additionally, in the case of the blasphemer (Leviticus 24:14), the biblical text does not clearly state whether the witnesses laid one hand or two hands, as the laying on of hands was done collectively within a group. Therefore, he assumes that the witnesses laid two hands on the perpetrator because this is not a case of sacrificial laying on of hands. David P. Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature," 434-435.

shift of leadership from Moses to Joshua (Num. 27:18, 23; Deu. 34:9) or the transfer of sins to the scapegoat (Lev. 16:21-22), while the one-handed gesture depicts 'identification' between the offerer and the animal. Thus, the offerer asserts that he is the one who presents the goat and simultaneously offers himself through the sacrifice.¹⁰ Wright agrees with this opinion, but his interpretation of the function of the two-handed laying on of hands is different, where the meaning of this model is 'designation' and not 'transfer'.¹¹ Regarding the function of the one-handed laying on of hands, Wright agrees with Péter's 'identification', which for him has the same definition as 'ownership'.¹² In short, for Wright, the one-handed laying on of hands indicates 'ownership' and the two-handed laying on of hands means 'designation'.

With this understanding, Wright asserts that the laying on of hands with two hands on the scapegoat should be interpreted as “designation.” This is to indicate where

the sins of the Israelites should be placed, rather than as a transfer of sins. For him, the act of transferring sins is done through the verbal confession of the high priest and not the laying on of hands. Thus, the placing of sins on the goat is done through the 'designation' and 'confession' of sins spoken and then transferred to the head of the goat.¹³ Additionally, there are several reasons why the meaning of “transfer” is rejected: (1) the ritual of the scapegoat is not a sacrificial ritual; (2) apparently, the process of transferring sins is not seen in the idea of reconciliation offerings as shown in Leviticus 3:2, 8, and 13, where this type of offering is not intended as a means of atoning for sins;¹⁴ (3) the sacrificial meat is considered holy after the laying on of hands. This indicates that the meat is not contaminated by the transferred sins;¹⁵ (4) the implicit explanation of the laying on of hands in the burnt offering, as described in Leviticus 1:4, seems to capture the concept of “substitution”¹⁶ or “ownership.”¹⁷

¹⁰ See Rene Peter, “L'imposition Des Mains Dans l'Ancien Testament,” *Vetus Testamentum* 27, no. 1 (January 1977): 48–55, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1517355>, as quoted by Wright, “The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature.”

¹¹ Wright, “The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature.”

¹² Wright.

¹³ Wright.

¹⁴ Wright.

¹⁵ N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function* (Sheffield:

Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 115-16.; Gane, *Cult and Character, Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement and Theodicy*, 57, 91.; A. M. Rodriguez, “Transfer of Sin in Leviticus,” in *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, ed. Frank D. Holbrook (Washington DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 180.

¹⁶ Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function*, 116-17.

¹⁷ Gane, *Cult and Character, Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement and Theodicy*, 54.

Furthermore, Wright's view on “designation” is not comprehensive, especially when he claims that the two-handed laying on of hands only indicates the place where the sins of Israel will be placed. For Wright to support this view, he needs to explain in more detail how sins are transferred to the designated object (the scapegoat). So, it is important to accept the idea that through the laying on of hands, something is “transferred” to a specific object, where the transfer of sins is the effect provided by the act of laying on of hands. The use of the term “both his hands” in the scapegoat ritual (Lev. 16:21) indicates that the use of both hands is mandatory and must be done only in this case. This means that in other cases, the use of both hands may be optional, as entiled in the problem of the ordination of Joshua (Num. 27:23). Thus, the author understands that the meaning of laying hands on the scapegoat is “the transfer of sins.”

In addition to the transfer of sins, the laying on of hands on the scapegoat also

holds the significance of substitution or identification. In this context, substitution can be understood as a replacement.¹⁸ Meanwhile, identification is understood as the integration between the offerer and the sacrificial animal.¹⁹ In other words, the sacrificial ritual provides a close connection between the offerer and the sacrificial animal, where the animal identifies the offerer.²⁰ In this context, Kiuchi highlights the significant implications of Leviticus 1:3-4, where the practice of laying on of hands is placed between bringing the animal to be accepted before the God (verse 3b) and the declaration that the animal may be accepted (verse 4b). This indicates that the gesture of laying on of hands serves to make the sacrifice acceptable. Furthermore, Kiuchi states that the effect of “making atonement for him” (Lev. 16:6, 11) is the goal of the sacrificial offering, triggered by the laying on of hands. In this context, the scapegoat is offered to Yahweh. Thus, the acceptance of the offering by Yahweh becomes a step towards

¹⁸ From his interpretation of Leviticus 1:4, Kiuchi draws the conclusion that the laying on of hands on the burnt offering depicts the idea of substitution, and the meaning may be employed to other sacrifices. N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, 116-18.

¹⁹ Kiuchi states that in the context of sacrifice, the laying on of hands is performed by the offerer to the redeemer. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that the gesture shows a connection between the offerer and the sacrificial animal. N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, 112.

²⁰ Leviticus 1:4 shows that the laying on of hands has a beneficial effect for the offerer. Thus, this implies an connection between the offerer and the sacrifice. Additionally, the relationship between the two is also supported by Leviticus 7:18b, which warns against delaying the consumption of the peace offering. Violating this regulation would result in the sacrifice not being accepted and could be annulled. Therefore, Kiuchi states that rejection of the sacrifice is synonymous with rejection of the offerer. N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, 116-17.

atonement.²¹ Although in verses 21-22, the word “atonement” does not occur, the intention of the priest to confess people’s sins implies the meaning of atonement. In this understanding, the study can conclude that through identification, the sacrificial animal presented to Yahweh is accepted as a substitute or representative of the offerer.

Sending the Scapegoat into the Wilderness

Information about sending the scapegoat is first depicted in verse 10: “...to make atonement upon it to send it away (לְכַפֵּר (עָלָיו לְשַׁלְּחָה אֹתוֹ into the wilderness to Azazel.” The word Azazel לְעִזָּאזֵל (*la ‘āzāzēl*) is interpreted as “for the powerful wrath of God.”²² The word עִזָּאזֵל is understood as a metathesis form of עִזָּאזֵל, where עִזָּא and its synonym עִזָּא, meaning “strength, ferocity,” and אֵל, which refers to YHWH, aim to depict the immense wrath of God as retribution for sin (see Ps. 66:3; 90:11; Isa. 42:25; Ezra 8:22). Therefore, the scapegoat ritual functions as an atonement to soothe and alleviate the mighty wrath of God. Walter C. Kaiser provides another explanation that

one of the goats enables the atonement of sins that are imposed upon it, thus becoming a means to redeem and reconcile the sins of Israel, while the other goat demonstrates the effect of that atonement process.²³

By examining verse 22, it can be seen that the goat is tasked to “bear all their iniquities upon itself.” The understanding of the phrase נָשָׂא עָלָיו “bear upon itself” in verse 22 is based on the relationship between the phrase לְשַׁלְּחָה אֹתוֹ “send it away” and לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו “to make atonement upon it” in verse 10, particularly our idea of the word לְשַׁלְּחָה “send away.” If the word לְשַׁלְּחָה “send away” in Leviticus 16:10, as rendered in the RSV,²⁴ is understood as a purpose clause, then it implies that atonement is performed upon the goat so that it can be sent into desert. This understanding suggests that the atonement ceremony is completed before the goat is sent away. Thus, the ritual of the scapegoat consists only of confessing and placing the sins of the Israelites upon its head.²⁵ In contrast to this interpretation, another understanding of לְשַׁלְּחָה “send away” is to understand it as an explanation of לְכַפֵּר

²¹ Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function*, 116-18.

²² Jacqueline C.R. de Roo, “Was the Goat for Azazel Destined for the Wrath of God?,” *Biblica* 81, no. 2 (June 30, 2000): 233–42, <https://doi.org/10.2143/BIB.81.2.3200433>.

²³ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Book of Leviticus. The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 1* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 983-1191, 1111.

²⁴ “But the goat on which the lot fell for Aza'zel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Aza'zel” (Lev. 16:10, RSV).

²⁵ Yaw Adu-Gyamfi, “A Literary and Ritual Analysis of Leviticus 16,” *Scriptura: Journal for Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics* 122, no. 1 (May 10, 2023): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.7833/122-1-2075>.

עָלָיו “to make atonement upon it,” which means that atonement is made by sending the animal into desert.²⁶ The laying on of both hands on the goat before it is sent into the desert should be understood as a “designation.” This is meant to show where the sins of the people of Israel should be placed, and not as a transfer of sins. The transfer of sins is carried out through the verbal confession of the high priest, and thus, the purpose of this ritual is to eliminate the transgressions of the people of Israel. Therefore, the atonement ceremony not only consists of confessing sins and laying on of hands but also by sending the goat into the wilderness.²⁷ Consistent with Adu-Gyamfi's opinion, the Yaw Adu-Gyamfi tends to accept the second view that atonement is fully achieved by sending the goat, which carries the sins of the people, into the wilderness.²⁸

The scapegoat is not a sanctified entity but rather a “vehicle” through which atonement is achieved. Indeed, the transfer occurs through the laying on of hands and the confession of sins by the high priest, but these sins do not simply dissipate into the

air; rather, they are transferred onto the goat to be carried away. The question now arises: why must the scapegoat be sent into the wilderness, carrying the sins of the Israelite nation?

Kiuchi suggests that the ritual of the scapegoat should be understood symbolically, where the goat carries the sins of the people into the wilderness.²⁹ According to Joshua Marlin Vis, the sending or releasing of the goat bearing all the sins of Israel in Leviticus 16:21-22 demonstrates one way in which the high priest annually eradicates these offenses.³⁰ Maimonides explains that the scapegoat sent into desert symbolizes the atonement for all violations, thus the goat holds a remarkable position surpassing other sacrificial offerings for the atonement of sins. He emphasizes the symbolic nature of this ritual by stating that sin cannot be literally borne and transferred. Instead, the sending of the scapegoat laden with sin aims to make a significant impression on everyone, urging them to repent and conveying liberation from all sins, distancing them as far as possible.³¹

²⁶ See Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function*, 151.; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1009.; NIV (*But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat*, Lev. 16:10). As quoted by Adu-Gyamfi, “A Literary and Ritual Analysis of Leviticus 16.”

²⁷ Adu-Gyamfi, “A Literary and Ritual Analysis of Leviticus 16.”

²⁸ Adu-Gyamfi.

²⁹ Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function*, 310.

³⁰ Joshua Marlin Vis, “The Purification Offering of Leviticus and the Sacrificial Offering of Jesus” (Duke University, 2012), 117.

³¹ Yaw Adu-Gyamfi, “The Live Goat Ritual In Leviticus 16,” *Scriptura: Journal for Biblical, Theological*

The destination of the scapegoat sent off in the Yom Kippur ceremony is described using two terms: *אֶרֶץ גְּזֵרָה* (a land not inhabited) and *מִדְבָּר* (wilderness, Lev. 16:22). *מִדְבָּר* (*midbār*) is a term typically depicted as a desert or wasteland. In the Old Testament, the wilderness is portrayed as “vast and terrifying” (Deu. 1:19, 8:15), “barren and howling” (Deu. 32:10), “a place without water and teeming with wild animals” (Deu. 8:15), and “a place of destruction” (Is. 64:1, Jer. 12:10, Joel 2:3). Ultimately, the wilderness is related to hardship and death (Ex. 14:11; cf. Num. 21:5, 32:13-15). The term *אֶרֶץ גְּזֵרָה* (*‘ereṣ gezērā*) is translated by Milgrom as “an inaccessible region,” or “a separated land.”³² This is a place entirely different from the new Eden on Mount Zion. It may not be surprising that over time, the location designated for the scapegoat's destination is increasingly portrayed as a place leading into the “abyss of death” (a common biblical depiction of a place without hope).³³ Thus, this is a depiction of the ultimate destination for the scapegoat. It is believed that the goat carries

all the sins of the people to a “desolate” place, physically removing them from the community as far as possible. The goal is to ensure that these sins no longer disturb the community.³⁴ Through the sending off of the scapegoat bearing the sins of Israel, “evil” is cast back to its origin in the “realm of death” (the wilderness).³⁵

The Purpose of the Scapegoat Ritual

As explained above, there remains an unanswered question regarding the scapegoat ritual which appears uniquely in Leviticus 16. Jacob Milgrom argues that the primary purpose of the Yom Kippur ceremony is to clean the Holy Place from impurity and sin.³⁶ Based on Milgrom's main thesis, it can be said that the Yom Kippur ceremony is actually completed when the blood ritual of the first two sin offerings “*ḥattā’āt*” is performed (Lev. 16:11-15). Therefore, the scapegoat ritual is no longer necessary. The functional relationship between the scapegoat and the other sacrificial animals has brought scholars into debate because the urgency of the scapegoat implies that the other sacrificial animals are not sufficient to achieve atonement for the Israelites.

and *Contextual Hermeneutics* 112 (October 31, 2013): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.7833/112-0-61>.

³² Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1043.

³³ Therefore, post-biblical Yom Kippur traditions state that the Azazel goat was pushed backward into a ravine (Mishnah Yoma 6:6).

³⁴ Adu-Gyamfi, “The Live Goat Ritual In Leviticus 16.”

³⁵ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1072.

³⁶ Milgrom, 1062.

At this stage, it is first necessary to examine the functional relation between the two rituals (the other sin offering “*ḥaṭṭā’āl*” ritual and the scapegoat ritual). J. H. Kurtz states that both rituals are different versions of the same act of the sins atonement, where the scapegoat is only used to expiate sins that have been absolved through the sacrifice of other goats. The sins that have been expiated are then transferred to the animal, and then it is sent into the wilderness.³⁷ In this context, the act of transferring sins to the scapegoat and releasing it into the wild becomes an additional symbol of the same act of sins atonement.³⁸ In line with this view, A. M. Rodriguez states that both rituals have a continuous function to remove the same “evil.” The combined sin offerings “*ḥaṭṭā’āl*” function to cleanse evil from the Holy Place, and the scapegoat functions to remove the evil that has been cleansed to the wilderness.³⁹ However, N. Kiuchi opposes this idea by stating that if sins have already been cleansed through the purification of the

Holy Place, the scapegoat ritual is no longer necessary.⁴⁰

According to Wright, with their respective functions, both rituals aim to address two types of offenses: uncleanness and sin. In this context, it can be said that the uncleanness of the Holy Place is purified with the blood of the sin offerings “*ḥaṭṭā’āl*,” which is sprinkled or smeared. Meanwhile, the sins of the people are expiated through the scapegoat ritual, by transferring those sins to the live goat through the laying on of hands, and then the goat is taken to the wilderness.⁴¹ Leviticus 16:16 says that one goat is killed to “make atonement for the holy place;” but the other goat is sent away bearing the “inquiries, transgressions, and sins of the people” (16:21).

In this context, the blood rituals involving the bull and the male goat serve specifically to cleanse the Holy Place. Meanwhile, the scapegoat ritual is dedicated to the atonement of the sins of the people. In other words, the “atonement” of the Israel-

³⁷ J. H. Kurtz, *Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 411-12.

³⁸ Schwartz argues that initially all sins are gathered or unified in the Holy Place, and then transferred to the head of the goat for Azazel, to be cast away forever. See, 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 Honour of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright, David N. Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 17.

³⁹ Rodriguez, “Transfer of Sin in Leviticus,” 178.; Cf. Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus (The JPS Torah Commentary)* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 105.

⁴⁰ Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function*, 147.

⁴¹ Cf. David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 17-21.

ites is achieved through the purification of all “uncleanness” from the Holy Place (via the combined sin offering “*ḥaṭṭā ’āḏ*” ritual) and the banishment of sins from the people (through the scapegoat ritual). This implies that on the Day of Atonement, purification is intended not only for the Israelites but also for the objects of worship.⁴²

We agree with Milgrom's statement that the blood cleanses the uncleanness of the Holy Place and the scapegoat cleanses the sins of the people.⁴³ In other words, both goats represent two forms of atonement provided by God. Therefore, we reject Kiuchi's statement that the scapegoat ritual is a special action of burning the sin offering “*ḥaṭṭā ’āḏ*” flesh, as in the sin offering ritual (Lev. 4-5:13), performed in a clean location (Lev. 4:12) outside the camp (Lev. 4:1-5:13).⁴⁴ In other words, according to Kiuchi, releasing the scapegoat into the wilderness corresponds to burning the sin offering “*ḥaṭṭā ’āḏ*” flesh outside the camp (Lev. 4:1-5:13), where both serve for the atonement of sins.⁴⁵

The reason we rejects Kiuchi's opinion is that, based on Leviticus 4:3-21, the

ritual for atoning for sin involves only the sin offering “*ḥaṭṭā ’āḏ*” sacrificed. Kiuchi does not address why in the sin offering ritual in Leviticus 4:3-21, an additional live animal like the scapegoat, which can expiate sin, is not required. If the sacrificial animal alone is effective enough without involving the scapegoat in Leviticus 4:3-21, the same should apply to the sin offering “*ḥaṭṭā ’āḏ*” ritual performed on the Yom Kippur ritual. Conversely, if the scapegoat is needed in the Yom Kippur ceremony to expiate the sins of the people, then in the sin offering “*ḥaṭṭā ’āḏ*” ritual in Leviticus 4:3-21, there should also be a specific “agent” tasked with expiating the sins of the Israelites. Thus, from P's perspective, the sacrificial goats in Leviticus 16 are already sufficient to cleanse the Holy Place. This makes the scapegoat role in an entirely different realm, namely the expiation of the sins of the Israelites.⁴⁶ This study reiterates that the Yom Kippur ceremony serves two purposes: the purification/ cleansing of the Holy Place and the expiation of the sins of the Israelites. In other words, the two sacrificial animals (the bull

⁴² Adu-Gyamfi, “A Literary and Ritual Analysis of Leviticus 16.”

⁴³ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 24, 1043.

⁴⁴ Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function*, 149.

⁴⁵ Kiuchi, 135.

⁴⁶ Milgrom states that “... the sacrificial animals of Leviticus 16 are also sufficient to cleanse the Holy

Place (from ritual impurity). This makes the live goat function in an entirely different realm: the expiation of Israel's sins.... the live goat has nothing to do with the impurity of the Holy Place, but, as the text expressly and clearly states, the live goat deals with ‘*āwōnōt*’ (iniquities)...” Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 24, 1044.

and the male goat) and the scapegoat play separate yet interconnected roles in expiating the sins of the people and cleansing the uncleanness from the Holy Place. Thus, atonement (כִּפּוּר) for the Israelites, especially with the presence of the scapegoat ritual, is achieved in a unique manner.

Based on the explanation above, it can be seen that there are two main expectations that must be addressed on the Day of Atonement. Both are related to maintaining holiness amidst sin. Both of these rituals generally rectify things or situations characterized as negative and harmful, whether it be impurity, wrongdoing, sin, or transgression. In response, rituals are created to remove all these negative aspects in various ways, whether through burning, sprinkling, or expulsion. The ultimate result of all these ritual actions is redemption or atonement.⁴⁷ Adu-Gyamfi complements this concept by stating that whatever the meaning of Azazel, whether it be the mountain where the goat is destroyed, or sin sent to destruction or to a demon, it all returns to the same underlying idea, namely that sin has been eradicated from Israel.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

The expulsion of the scapegoat laden with sin, symbolizing the removal of the guilt of the Israelites, holds tremendous significance. The ritual that takes place inside the Holy Places and is performed only by the high priest makes it invisible to the entire nation. However, the ritual of the scapegoat can be observed by everyone and understood by the entire community. Therefore, the ritual of the scapegoat is capable of creating a process of transformation or repentance for the Israelites, especially because they can witness firsthand the consequences of sin, namely expulsion (of the goat). Additionally, the expulsion of the scapegoat also depicts the act of driving sin away to a distant place, so that those sins cannot return.

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⁴⁷ Nicole J. Ruane, "Constructing Contagion on Yom Kippur: The Scapegoat as Ḥaṭṭā't," in *Writing a Commentary on Leviticus*, ed. Christian A. Eberhart

and Thomas Hieke (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 144-45.

⁴⁸ Adu-Gyamfi, "A Literary and Ritual Analysis of Leviticus 16."

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