

# The Logic of Atonement in Israel's Cult

Bernard Low

Singapore Bible College, Singapore  
bernard@sbc.edu.sg

---

## *Abstract*

The complex symbolic system of Israel's cult expresses important theological truths relating to atonement. The process of atonement through six rites involves the worshipper's identification with the sacrificial animal and participation in what happens to it. Atonement demands his submission to the judgment of death, which is both punitive and redemptive; incorporates him back into YHWH's presence, restoring fellowship with YHWH; transforms him, rendering him acceptable to YHWH; and celebrates the restoration through the communion meal. When the cultic ritual is penitently performed as prescribed, the priestly declaration of acceptance of the offering mediates and assures forgiveness. This is the logic of atonement. (*Keywords: Israel's cult, atonement, redemption, sacrifices, rites*)

## I. Introduction

Atonement lies at the heart of Israel's cult. In fact, all of its principal offerings—the burnt offering, the grain offering, the well-being offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering<sup>1</sup>—have an atoning function in addition to other functions.<sup>2</sup> The need for atonement is occasioned by

<sup>1</sup> See Lev 1–7. Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotations in English are from the NRSV. Hebrew and Greek quotations are from the *BHS* and the *NA*<sup>27</sup>, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> For the atoning value and function of the burnt offering, see Lev 1:4; cf. 16:24; for the sin-offering, see Lev 4:3, 20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13; 6:26, 30; for the guilt-offering, see 5:16, 18; 6:7; 7:7; for the grain-offering and well-being offering, see Lev 14:19-20, 30-31; 1 Sam 3:14. In his “The Atonement,” in *Essays on Biblical Theology* (trans. K. Crim; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 103, H. Gese writes, “The whole sacrificial system serves to atone and finds its meaning in the

sin that causes estrangement between man and God and between man and man. To repair this estrangement and to effect atonement, YHWH has instituted the cult whereby sin's damaging effects on both man and God can be remedied. But how is atonement effected in the cult? What logic underpins its *modus operandi*? What follows is an attempt at uncovering this logic.

## II. The Meaning of *kipper*

The Hebrew term commonly used to refer to atonement in Israel's cult is *kipper*, usually translated as "to make atonement." On the basis of usage and internal Old Testament evidence, most scholars today hold the view that the foundational meaning of *kipper* is "to wipe off" and hence "to cleanse" or "to purify."<sup>1</sup> What this means for atonement in Israel's cult is that atonement has to do fundamentally with wiping away sin. But how is sin atoned for in Israel's cult?

To understand the *modus operandi* of atonement, Gese's study on this subject has proven both helpful and fruitful.<sup>2</sup> Gese pursues his subject as he finds it in non-cultic and cultic contexts. In both contexts, he importantly notes that atonement presupposes the forfeiture of the sinner's life and entails his willing submission to the judgment of death.<sup>3</sup>

## III. Atonement in Non-Cultic Contexts

Gese's study of atonement in non-cultic contexts refers to four passages which reveal how Israel understands atonement. These are Exodus 32:30-32, 2 Samuel 21:1-14, Isaiah 6:1-7, and Deuteronomy 21:1-9.

---

atonement function of sacrifice itself."

<sup>1</sup> See R. K. Yerkes, *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1953), 179-82; S. Lyonnet and L. Sabourin, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice: A Biblical and Patristic Study* (AnBib; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1970), 127-40; J. Milgrom, *Leviticus I: 1-16* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1079-81; B. A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of Cult and Some Cultic Terms in Ancient Israel* (SJLA 5; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 57; Gese, "Atonement," 99 n. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Gese, "Atonement," 93-116. Gese's work was further developed by B. Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen: Studien zur Sühnetheologie der Priesterschrift und zur Wurzel KPR im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (WMANT 55; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen Verlag, 1982); O. Hofius, "Erwägungen zur Gestalt und Herkunft des paulinischen Versöhnungsgedankens," in *Paulusstudien* (WUNT 51; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 1-14; O. Hofius, "Sühne und Versöhnung. Zum paulinischen Verständnis des Kreuzestodes Jesu," in *Paulusstudien*, 33-49; R. H. Bell, "Sacrifice and Christology in Paul," *JTS* 53 (2000): 1-27.

<sup>3</sup> Gese, "Atonement," 94-95, 99.

**Exodus 32:30-32**

This passage records Moses' making atonement for Israel following the golden calf incident (Exod 32:1-29). The word used for making atonement is the Piel imperfect cohortative **אָכַפֶּרְךָ** (Exod 32:30). In his intercession seeking YHWH's forgiveness for Israel who has forfeited her existence by her "great sin," Moses strikingly implores YHWH to blot his name out of the book of life should he refuse to forgive Israel (Exod 32:32). "Blot me out" translates the Qal imperative **מָחַדְנִי** which carries the force of "wiping, obliterating, exterminating."<sup>4</sup> In Clements's view, this word signifies death.<sup>5</sup> Gese writes,

Moses wants to atone. He offers himself a *kopher*, that is, he offers his existence which is recorded in the book of life. It is a substitution of life for life through a total surrender of self.<sup>6</sup>

Stated differently, *kipper*, atonement, involves a willing submission to the judgment of death.

**2 Samuel 21:1-14**

This passage records how Saul's un-expiated blood-guilt toward the Gibeonites has brought about a three-year famine on the land. When the reason for the famine is revealed to David, he summons the Gibeonites asking, "How shall I make expiation?" (2 Sam 21:3). David's question significantly uses the Piel imperfect **אָכַפֶּר**. In response, the Gibeonites demand the life of seven members of Saul's family whom they subsequently impale before YHWH. Gese, commenting on this passage, notes, "Once again sin is removed by the sacrifice of a life."<sup>7</sup> Concurring, Baldwin points out, "the answer of the Gibeonites illustrates the meaning of the Hebrew *kipper*."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Morris astutely writes, "Both the Gibeonites and David accepted without question that the way to make atonement was to bring about death."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> BDB 562, s.v. "מָחַדְנִי."

<sup>5</sup> R. E. Clements, *Exodus* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 209.

<sup>6</sup> Gese, "Atonement," 96.

<sup>7</sup> Gese, "Atonement," 96.

<sup>8</sup> J. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel* (TOTC; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1988), 283-84.

<sup>9</sup> L. Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1983), 59.

***Isaiah 6:1-7***

This passage records Isaiah's vision of YHWH which causes him to realize his uncleanness with the consequence that he must die. Cornered with the divine confrontation, Isaiah experiences his own "death-demanding sin."<sup>10</sup> This confrontation, as Oswalt points out, "cannot help but produce despair. For the finite, the mortal, the incomplete, and the fallible to encounter the Infinite, the Eternal, the Self-consistent, and the Infallible is to know the futility and the hopelessness of one's existence."<sup>11</sup>

However, Oswalt also notes that "God does not reveal himself to destroy us, but rather to redeem us."<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, one seraph flies to Isaiah and touching his mouth with a live coal from the altar, declares, "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out" (Isa 6:7). "Blotted out" translates the Pual imperfect **נִכְפַּר**. This illustrates once more how guilt is removed and sin atoned for, namely, through the judgment of death, since, as Gese astutely notes, Isaiah's contact with the "all-consuming heavenly fire" "would have burned [him] fatally."<sup>13</sup>

***Deuteronomy 21:1-9***

This passage describes the procedure for dealing with the blood-guilt for a murder committed by an unknown person. It involves the elders from the town nearest the corpse taking a heifer, breaking its neck beside a wadi with running water, and washing their hands over the heifer whilst declaring,

Our hands did not shed this blood, nor were we witnesses to it. Absolve, O LORD, your people Israel, whom you redeemed; do not let the guilt of innocent blood remain in the midst of your people Israel (Deut 21:7-8).

When this procedure is followed, verse 8 states that "they will be absolved of blood-guilt." This verse uses the Piel imperative **כִּפֵּר** and the Hithpael perfect **נִכְפַּר** ("absolve" and "absolved," respectively). For profaning the land by innocent blood, atonement is effected by the heifer's death. Commenting on this passage, Gese notes that this ritual of slaying the heifer is an act of "taking life, for which the breaking of the neck is typical."<sup>14</sup> The ritual described here is, in Janowski's view, a rep-

<sup>10</sup> R. H. Elliott, "Atonement in the Old Testament," *RevExp* 59 (1962): 10.

<sup>11</sup> J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah I: 1-39* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 182.

<sup>12</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah I*, 184.

<sup>13</sup> Gese, "Atonement," 97.

<sup>14</sup> Gese, "Atonement," 98, citing Exod 13:13; 34:20.

lication of the criminal's execution.<sup>15</sup> Concurring, Thompson describes it as "a kind of ceremonial judicial execution."<sup>16</sup> The heifer, taking the place of the unknown murderer, is executed. This agrees with the law in Numbers 35:30-34 which not only demands the murderer's death but also says that "no expiation can be made . . . except by the blood of the one who shed it" (Num 35:33). Atonement, in other words, entails the sinner's death.

### *Numbers 25:1-16*

Besides the four passages which Gese discussed, Numbers 25:1-16 should also be added. This passage records Israel's apostasy into sexual immorality and idolatry as a result of the seduction by Moabite women. Zimri's immoral relationship with Cozbi is particularly highlighted. Phinehas, in his zeal for YHWH, takes resolute action and kills the couple, thereby making atonement (כִּפֵּה) for the nation (Num 25:13). In this incident, it is noteworthy how *kipper* is connected with death.<sup>17</sup> Wenham notes how Phinehas' act of killing the couple dispenses with any animal sacrifice, which would normally be required for the purpose of atonement. This is because the two sinners themselves die.<sup>18</sup> Some scholars even suggest that the couple have become the sacrifice.<sup>19</sup>

### *Summary*

The passages discussed above involve the use of *kipper* in non-cultic contexts. In every instance, *kipper* always entails the willingness to die or inflicted death. For the people concerned, it is evident how they understand the logic of atonement: it involves the total surrender of one's life. Gese aptly summarizes the matter thus:

Atonement means a readiness to die . . . *kipper* means . . . to pay the penalty of death, and from the human side that can be accomplished only by total surrender.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen*, 165-66.

<sup>16</sup> J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (TOTC; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1976), 227.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Morris, *Atonement*, 58: "atonement [is] by way of death, in this case, the death of two principal sinners against God."

<sup>18</sup> G. J. Wenham, *Numbers* (TOTC; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1981), 188.

<sup>19</sup> T. R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 523, refers to the sinful couple's death as "sacrifice." Cf. also I. Gruenewald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel* (BRLJ; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), 213.

<sup>20</sup> Gese, "Atonement," 99.

In Gese's view, this understanding of how non-cultic atonement works was later ritualized in Israel's cult and should accordingly inform our understanding of the logic of cultic atonement.<sup>21</sup>

#### IV. Atonement in the Cult

To clarify the logic of cultic atonement, we need to study the meanings of the different rites which are required in the ritual of sacrifice. These rites are: (a) the presentation rite, (b) the hand-laying rite, (c) the slaughtering rite, (d) the blood rite, (e) the burning rite, and (f) the communion rite.

Leviticus, unfortunately, rarely explains the meanings of these rites. Nevertheless, we can be certain that they are there and have been taken for granted by the ancient participants.<sup>22</sup> Sacrifice, as various modern studies have pointed out, is an institution which is essentially symbolic.<sup>23</sup> According to Grabbe, sacrifice is a symbolic system filled with metaphor, allegory, and analogy.<sup>24</sup> In this system, every ritual act has meaning.<sup>25</sup> The meaning is implicit and understandable in the ritual action itself. It is "primarily displayed rather than explained"<sup>26</sup> and found in the enactment of the ritual itself.<sup>27</sup> Stated differently, every ritual act has its own "grammar," that is, "an idea that sustains it or that it sustains," and its own language.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, when rituals are performed, meaning is created or established. This meaning is "contained in the performed essence of the rituals"; established in the very structuring of the ritual act; and crystallised in a performative setting and in the doing of the ritual. It in turn has an effect on those who performed the ritual.<sup>29</sup> Gorman therefore rightly infers that "ritual is a means of theological enactment and reflection . . . a means of 'doing theology' or of 'theological enactment.'"<sup>30</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Gese, "Atonement," 98-99.

<sup>22</sup> See N. Kiuchi, "Spirituality in Offering a Peace Offering," *TynBul* 50 (1999): 24.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. B. K. Smith and W. Doniger, "Sacrifice and Substitution: Ritual Mystification and Mythical Demystification," *Numen* 36 (1989): 196: "the theory of sacrifice is...a branch of the more general theory of symbolism."

<sup>24</sup> L. L. Grabbe, *Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period* (London: Routledge, 2000), 132.

<sup>25</sup> L. L. Grabbe, *Leviticus* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 43.

<sup>26</sup> R. E. Averbeck, "Offerings and Sacrifices," *NIDOTTE* 4:997.

<sup>27</sup> F. H. Gorman, *Leviticus: Divine Presence and Community* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 189, 199, 209.

<sup>29</sup> Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 198-99.

<sup>30</sup> Gorman, *Leviticus*, 6.

Given the cult's symbolic nature, it is unquestionable that it is extremely meaningful to the participants. Because YHWH has invested the rites with complex symbolism and deep religious significance, they are filled with profound spiritual meaning for the participants.<sup>31</sup> Besides, this meaning must necessarily be expressed through rites. This is a point Kiuchi urges in his recent noteworthy study which convincingly argues that the worshipper's inner motive must necessarily be expressed outwardly by sacrifice. One's impulse towards YHWH, for example "thanksgiving," cannot be confined merely to the subjective inner feeling. This is insufficient before YHWH. The feeling must be expressed in the form of animal sacrifice.<sup>32</sup> This constitutes one aspect of true spirituality which is that "worship should not be confined to the heart, but . . . should be expressed outwardly in the form of sacrifice."<sup>33</sup>

What this means for cultic atonement is this: the need and desire for atonement must be effected in and through the various cultic rites. Attention must therefore be paid to all the rites because, as Gruenwald astutely reminds us,

Every sacrifice is a ritual process and is composed of various details, the sum total of which brings into effect the sacrificial goals. It is, therefore, essential to concentrate on what is done in every part of the sacrificial process and how it is done, then draw conclusions regarding the overall ritual theory implied in the sacrificial act.<sup>34</sup>

Only in this way could we arrive at what Gruenwald also calls the "functional structure" or "inner logic of the ritual process."<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, Gorman rightly states, "The whole ritual process—the presentation, the hand-laying, the slaughter, the blood manipulation, the flaying, and the burning—accomplishes expiation."<sup>36</sup> How, then, do these rites together effect atonement?

### *The Presentation Rite*

The process of atonement begins with the presentation of the animal. This applies to all types of animal offering involving blood shedding (Lev 1:2, 3, 10, 14; 3:1, 6; 4:3, 14, 23, 28, 32; 5:7; 5:15, 18; 6:6). In cases of poverty, provision is made for the poor to offer non-animal sacrifices (Lev 5:11, etc.). Leviticus clearly stipulates that only domestic

<sup>31</sup> Grabbe, *Leviticus*, 65, 75.

<sup>32</sup> Kiuchi, "Spirituality in Offering," 26.

<sup>33</sup> Kiuchi, "Spirituality in Offering," 27.

<sup>34</sup> Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 183.

<sup>35</sup> Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 187, 192.

<sup>36</sup> Gorman, *Leviticus*, 25.

animals are acceptable.<sup>37</sup> What is the reason for this? According to Philo, domestic animals are chosen for sacrifice because they are “the most gentle,” “the most manageable of all animals” and “the most useful to man.”<sup>38</sup> Wright suggests two other reasons.<sup>39</sup> Firstly, wild animals belong to nobody and so could not have that sense of identification with the worshipper that a domestic animal from his own flock or herd would have. Secondly, only the sacrifice of a domestic animal represents any actual cost to the worshipper (cf. 2 Sam 24:24).

Recent scholarship, however, has suggested a better approach to understanding why only domestic animals are chosen. Very fruitful in this regard is Douglas’s groundbreaking study, “The Abominations of Leviticus.”<sup>40</sup> In her study, Douglas argues how holiness in Leviticus is not merely defined negatively as separation from evil but positively as purity, wholeness, integrity and completeness. According to her interpretation, holiness in Leviticus means keeping distinct the categories of creation. This requires correct definition, discrimination, and order. Individuals and animals, accordingly, must conform to the class to which they belong. Mixtures of any kind and transgression of boundaries are abominated. In Douglas’s view, this understanding of holiness governs not only the physical and moral spheres<sup>41</sup> but also the animal world where animals are categorized as clean or unclean according to whether or not they conform to their classes.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> O. Borowski, “Animals in the Literature of Syria-Palestine,” in *History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East* (ed. B. J. Collins; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002), 290, states: “The sacrificial lists...almost exclusively comprise domestic animals.”

<sup>38</sup> Philo, *Spec. Leg.* I: 549.

<sup>39</sup> C. J. H. Wright, “Leviticus,” in *The New Bible Commentary – 21st Century Edition* (ed. D. A. Carson et al.; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1994), 123.

<sup>40</sup> M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966; rep. 1984), 42-58.

<sup>41</sup> In the physical sphere, holiness means physical wholeness. Thus the priests must not cut themselves but “shall be holy to their God” (Lev 21:5-6). They must not be physically blemished. Those who are deformed in any way may not officiate as priests (Lev 21:5-6). In the moral sphere, holiness means integrity. Thus honesty and consistency in all one’s dealings are emphasized (see, e.g., Lev 19).

<sup>42</sup> For this, see Lev 11 and Deut 14. The animal world is divided into three spheres: those that walk on the land (Lev 11:2-8), those that swim in the waters (9-12), and those that fly in the air (13-25). Each sphere has a particular mode of motion associated with it. Thus birds have two wings to fly with and two feet for walking; fish have fins and scales to swim with; and land animals have hooves to run with. The clean animals are those that conform to these standard pure types. Animals which do not conform are unclean. Thus fish without fins



Going by her analysis, Douglas discerns an isomorphism between the human and animal worlds. She notices how the holiness expected from man parallels the cleanness of animals. Just as man must conform to the norms of moral and physical perfection, so also animals must conform to the standards of the group to which they belong.<sup>43</sup> In another study, "Deciphering a Meal," Douglas demonstrates convincingly how each sphere of the animal world is structured in a fashion which resembles remarkably the human world.<sup>44</sup> The divisions among animals and their behaviour mirror mankind's divisions and behaviour. Accordingly, just as there are in the animal realm (a) clean animals that could be sacrificed on an altar, (b) clean animals that could be eaten but not sacrificed on an altar, and (c) unclean animals that ritually defile the eater and could not be sacrificed, similarly in the human world there are (a) priests who are "holy" and separated from other Israelites for service in the sanctuary, (b) ordinary Israelites who are "clean" and separated from non-Israelites, and (c) non-Israelites who are "unclean." The three principal divisions among men thus correspond to the three classes of animals: sacrificial animals correspond to sacrificial men (i.e., priests), clean animals to clean men (i.e., pure Israelites), and unclean beasts to unclean men (i.e., polluted Israelites, Gentiles, and so on).

Douglas's thesis that there is an isomorphism between the human and animal worlds is confirmed by other studies. Wenham, for example, highlights various Pentateuchal texts to demonstrate the close relationship between man and animals. Wenham's list is worth producing in full:

According to Gen. 1:29-30 man and the animals were both expected to be vegetarian. In 2:18-20 the animals were formed as man's companions. According to the Decalogue, domestic animals were expected to keep the Sabbath along with their masters (Exod. 20:10; Deut. 5:14). If Israel kept the covenant law, both man and beast were to be blessed with offspring (Deut. 28:4); but if the nation proved faithless, both children and animals were to be destroyed (Lev. 26:22; Deut. 28:18, 50-57).

Very striking are the close analogies between the role of the first-born among men and the first-born among animals. Both are dedicated to

---

and scales are unclean (Lev 11:10; Deut 14:10). Insects which fly but which have many legs are unclean, whereas locusts which have wings and only two hopping legs are clean (Lev 11:20-23). Animals with an indeterminate form of motion, i.e., which "swarm," are unclean (Lev 11:41-44). In so far, then, as some animals do not conform, they are unclean.

<sup>43</sup> Douglas, *Purity*, 54-5.

<sup>44</sup> M. Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1999), 231-51, esp. 242-47.

God (Exod. 13:2; 22:29-30 [Heb. 28-29]; 34:19). Both have to be redeemed (Exod. 13:13, 15; 34:20). The first-born of non-sacrificial animals like asses must be redeemed by sacrificial animals such as lambs (Exod. 13:13). Ordinary first-born Israelites are redeemed by Levites (Num. 8:16-18). Another point of similarity is that no animal may be offered to God in sacrifice until it is seven days old (Exod. 22:30 [Heb. 29]; Lev. 22:27), which parallels the rule that circumcision is not to be performed until the eighth day after birth (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3). Finally, it may be noted that only perfect unblemished animals may be offered in sacrifice (Lev. 1-4); so too only unblemished priests may officiate in worship (Lev. 21:17-21; cf. 22:19-25).<sup>45</sup>

Eilberg-Schwartz's study on animal metaphors in ancient Israel's ritual and narratives also validates Douglas's thesis. He notes how "husbandry images . . . constitute the vocabulary for expressing the theological, national, social and moral conceptions of ancient Israel." Further, "In the habits of animals, Israel found a symbolic representation for its own social life, its relations to its neighbours and for comprehending the divine-human relationship." Eilberg-Schwartz concludes, "In short, animals . . . were conceived of as a parallel world to Israelite society."<sup>46</sup> They are "in some sense like Israelites. It follows then that they should in some respects be treated like Israelites. And so they are."<sup>47</sup>

Noteworthy too is Borowski's recent study on animals in the literature and religions of Syria-Palestine.<sup>48</sup> Borowski demonstrates conclusively the existence of a close relationship between the human inhabitants of the region and their animal counterparts. Where the Hebrew Bible is concerned, Borowski points out how almost any animal possesses the potential to convey symbolic meaning.<sup>49</sup> The sheep, for example, provides a metaphor for the Israelites, and their leaders, especially YHWH, are their shepherds.<sup>50</sup> The ram, too, is a designation for leaders, princes and nobles.<sup>51</sup> Borowski concludes his study noting,

<sup>45</sup> G. J. Wenham, "Theology of Unclean Food," *EQ* 53 (1981): 10-11.

<sup>46</sup> H. Eilberg-Schwartz, "Israel in the Mirror of Nature: Animal Metaphors in the Ritual and Narratives of Ancient Israel," *JRitS* 2 (1988): 4.

<sup>47</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, "Israel in the Mirror of Nature," 6.

<sup>48</sup> O. Borowski, "Animals in the Literature of Syria-Palestine," 289-306; O. Borowski, "Animals in the Religions of Syria-Palestine," in *History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East* (ed. B. J. Collins; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002), 405-24.

<sup>49</sup> Borowski, "Animals in the Literature of Syria-Palestine," 297.

<sup>50</sup> Borowski, "Animals in the Literature of Syria-Palestine," 297, citing Ps 23; 74:1; 79:13; 100:3; Jer 23:2; Ezek 34:31; Mic 7:14. Cf. Jer 50:17.

<sup>51</sup> Borowski, "Animals in the Literature of Syria-Palestine," 304, citing Exod 15:15; 2 Kgs 24:15; Ezek 31:11.

[The] clear picture of the powerful role played by animals in connecting the realm of the divine with that of humanity in Syria-Palestine. As offerings, animals were conduits of communication between man and god, and through the conveyance of symbolic messages, they animated the images of the divine.<sup>52</sup>

These studies by Douglas, Wenham, Eilberg-Schwartz, and Borowski clarify one of the most debated issues in the interpretation of sacrifice, namely, the relation between the worshipper and his animal victim. Given the isomorphism between the human and animal worlds, Eilberg-Schwartz concludes that Israel's cult "capitalizes on the metaphoric relationship between Israelite society and the animal world."<sup>53</sup> From the animal realm sacrificial victims are chosen which are "the most human in nature."<sup>54</sup> They are chosen to be offered in sacrifice because they are identified with and represent the worshippers themselves.<sup>55</sup> Wenham sums up the matter thus: "In the symbolic system of Israel, clean animals offered in sacrifice represented the Israelite worshipper."<sup>56</sup>

In the presentation rite then, we see the worshipper drawing near to YHWH's sanctuary with an animal which symbolizes him. The animal has this symbolic significance because of the "metaphoric relationship" that exists between the Israelites and their herds and flocks. This enables the animal to represent the worshipper in the cult.<sup>57</sup>

### *The Hand-Laying Rite*

Following the presentation rite, the worshipper proceeds to lay his hand on the animal's head (Lev 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, etc.). In Hebrew, this rite is called the *semikhah*. According to Leviticus 1:4, the *semikhah* makes the offering acceptable as atonement. The Hebrew verb  $\text{שָׁחַט}$  is better rendered "lean" or "press" because of its force in Hebrew.

<sup>52</sup> Borowski, "Animals in the Religions of Syria-Palestine," 424.

<sup>53</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, "Israel in the Mirror of Nature," 16.

<sup>54</sup> J. de Maistre, "Eclaircissement sur les sacrifices," *Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg* (Lyons, 1890), 2:342; cited by R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (trans. P. Gregory; London: Athlone, 1972; rep. 1995), 3.

<sup>55</sup> Supporting this view, see also E. Leach, "The Logic of Sacrifice," in *Culture and Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 84; J. H. M. Beattie, "On Understanding Sacrifice," in *Sacrifice* (ed. M. F. C. Bourdillon and M. Fortes; London: Academic Press for the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1980), 31; Lyonnet and Sabourin, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice*, 169.

<sup>56</sup> G. Wenham, "The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice," in *Sacrifice in the Bible* (ed. R. T. Beckwith and M. J. Selman; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 78.

<sup>57</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, "Israel in the Mirror of Nature," 17.

This verb is used in Psalm 88:7 to describe YHWH's wrath lying heavy (הִמְכִּחַ) upon the Psalmist (cf. Isa 59:16; Ezek 24:2; 30:6; Amos 5:19). In his study of the *semikhah* controversy between the schools of Shammai and Hillel, Zeitlin alludes to Amora who argues that the act of הִמְכִּחַ "must be done with full force."<sup>58</sup> The *semikhah*, therefore, requires the worshipper not just to *touch* the animal's head but to press hard on it with a leaning motion, thereby exercising pressure.<sup>59</sup>

What is the *semikhah*'s significance? Von Rad once said, "We would give much to know the special significance which attached to the laying on of hands upon the head of the victim."<sup>60</sup> Since this rite is essential to making atonement (Lev 1:4), understanding its meaning is critical to our understanding of atonement.<sup>61</sup> Various interpretations have been advocated which will now be discussed and evaluated.

### *Transference of Sin*

One interpretation understands the *semikhah* to signify the transference of sin.<sup>62</sup> This interpretation, however, is fraught with serious difficulties. Firstly, the *semikhah* performed on occasions like the appointment of successors and the consecration of Levites clearly involves no transfer of sin (e.g., Num 8:10; 27:18, 23; Deut 34:9). Secondly, if the *semikhah* involves the transfer of sin from the worshipper to the animal, the animal would no longer be immaculate, unblemished, and holy—

<sup>58</sup> S. Zeitlin, "The Semikah Controversy Between the School of Shammai and Hillel," *JQR* 56 (1965): 242.

<sup>59</sup> See J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas: Word, 1992), 19; W. H. Bellinger Jr., *Leviticus and Numbers* (NIBCOT; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), 23; M. C. Sansom, "Laying On of Hands in the Old Testament," *ExpTim* 94 (1983): 324.

<sup>60</sup> G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology I: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions* (intro. W. Brueggemann; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 256.

<sup>61</sup> So Gese, "Atonement," 104.

<sup>62</sup> Those holding this view include von Rad, *Old Testament Theology I*, 248; N. H. Snaith, "The Sin-Offering and the Guilt-Offering," *VT* 15 (1965): 74; R. Rendtorff, *Studien zur Geschichte des Opfers im alten Israel* (WMANT 24; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967), 204-16; E. S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus* (trans. D. W. Stott; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 73; N. Zohar, "Repentance and Purification: The Significance and Semantics of תַּשִּׁיחַ in the Pentateuch," *JBL* 107 (1988): 613.

which is a cultic requirement<sup>63</sup>—but rather be defiled<sup>64</sup> and hence unfit for sacrifice.<sup>65</sup> Passages describing the animal offerings and/or their carcasses as “most holy” tell decisively against this interpretation of the *semikhah*.<sup>66</sup> Thirdly, the subsequent “turning into smoke” of the animal-offering with its consequent ascension to YHWH as a “pleasing odour” (e.g., Lev 1:3, 17; 3:5) also tells against this interpretation. If the worshipper’s sin has been transferred to the offering, how could it be a “pleasing odour” to YHWH?<sup>67</sup> Fourthly, the stipulation that the animal’s remains must be carried to a “clean place” outside the camp also speaks against this interpretation (Lev 4:12; 6:11; cf. Heb 4). Had the remains become unclean due to the transfer of sin, they would have defiled the clean place.<sup>68</sup> Fifthly, the notion that sin can be transferred goes against the principle of individual responsibility. According to passages like Ezekiel 18:4 and 18:20, only the person who sins shall die and nobody else can suffer for his sin. For these reasons therefore, the *semikhah* cannot signify the transfer of sin.

### *Ownership*

The second interpretation understands the *semikhah* as the act by which the worshipper signifies his ownership of the animal.<sup>69</sup> This

<sup>63</sup> See Lev 1:3; 10; 3:1, 6; 4:3, 23, 28, 32; H. Blenkin, *Immortal Sacrifice* (London: DLT, 1964), 26; F. C. N. Hicks, *The Fullness of Sacrifice* (London: Macmillan, 1938), 11; R. Abba, “The Origin and Significance of Hebrew Sacrifice,” *BTB* 7 (1977): 134.

<sup>64</sup> In priestly theology, sin has a defiling effect. See Lev 18:24-30; 19:31; 20:1-3; Num 35:33-34. See also J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 26-31.

<sup>65</sup> S. C. Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood Jewish and Christian* (2d ed.; London: Methuen & Co., 1953 [1924]) 107; W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament I* (trans. J. A. Baker; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961 [1959, 6th ed.]), 165 n. 2.

<sup>66</sup> See Lev 2:3, 10; 6:17 [Heb 10], 25 [Heb 18], 29 [Heb 22]; 7:1, 6; 10:12, 17; 14:13; etc. In support of this point, see R. de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964), 94; S. R. Driver, *The Book of Leviticus* (London: James Clark, 1898), 66.

<sup>67</sup> F. D. Kidner, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1952), 20.

<sup>68</sup> Kidner, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, 21.

<sup>69</sup> See de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, 28; R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. J. McHugh; London: DLT, 1965), 416. See also P. J. Budd, *Leviticus* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 47; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 151-52; R. Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. D. Orton; Tools for Biblical Study 7; Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2005), 532; D. P. Wright, “The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature,” *JAOS* 106 (1986): 433-46.

interpretation is also fraught with difficulties. Firstly, if the rite signifies ownership, why is it confined only to bloody sacrifices? Non-bloody offerings are equally the worshipper's property.<sup>70</sup> Secondly, ownership is "such an obvious point" and so "self-evident" that it hardly seems necessary to express that sentiment in the *semikhah*.<sup>71</sup> Thirdly, it has been urged that this interpretation fails to do justice to the Hebrew term  $\text{שָׁמַח}$  which does not simply mean "place" the hand but "press."<sup>72</sup> The act of pressing down on the animal's head suggests the worshipper's attempt to establish identification with the animal.<sup>73</sup> For these reasons then, the *semikhah* cannot signify ownership.

### *Dedication*

The third interpretation understands the *semikhah* to signify the "dedication" or "setting apart" of the animal for a specific sacrificial purpose.<sup>74</sup> This interpretation, however, suffers from the same weaknesses as the second. If the *semikhah* signifies the dedication of the animal to YHWH, why is it done with some sacrifices and not others like the grain offering?<sup>75</sup> This interpretation therefore cannot be the correct one.

### *Identification*

The fourth interpretation understands the *semikhah* to signify the worshipper's identification with his sacrifice. Several arguments favour this interpretation. The first comes from a point already noted above, namely that the animal is identified with and hence symbolises the worshipper. Second, Leviticus 1:3-4 indicates that when YHWH accepts the animal for the purpose of atonement, he also thereby accepts the worshipper. This clearly suggests an identification between the animal and the worshipper. Third, it is noteworthy that the action of *sāmak* is carried out on the animal's head (Lev 1:4). According to Gese, the head is the locus of the *semikhah* because it is "the expression par excellence of individuality."<sup>76</sup> Fourth, on the basis that only one hand is mentioned in the *semikhah* described in Leviticus 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, in con-

<sup>70</sup> W. C. Kaiser Jr., "Leviticus," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (12 vols.; ed. L. E. Keck et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994-2002), 1:1011.

<sup>71</sup> G. Wenham, *Leviticus* (NICOT; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), 62.

<sup>72</sup> Wenham, "The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice," 79.

<sup>73</sup> This point will be discussed below.

<sup>74</sup> See B. A. Levine, *Leviticus* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 6; Budd, *Leviticus*, 48.

<sup>75</sup> H. Ringgren, *Sacrifice in the Bible* (London: Lutterworth, 1962), 30.

<sup>76</sup> Gese, "Atonement," 105.

trast to two hands mentioned in Leviticus 16:21,<sup>77</sup> some scholars have urged a clear distinction between the two gestures and argued that the former denotes form of identification and the latter, transference.<sup>78</sup> Last but not least, this interpretation best explains the same rite as it is used outside the cult where “identification seems to be the chief rationale.”<sup>79</sup> Dunn writes,

Thus, in Num. 27:18, 23 and Deut. 34:9, Moses lays hands on Joshua, thereby imparting some of Moses' authority to him, that is, conveying some of himself in his role as leader to Joshua, so that Joshua becomes in a sense another Moses. In Num. 8:10, the people lay their hands on the Levites so that the Levites become their representatives before the Lord, in particular taking the place of their first-born. Finally, in Lev. 24:14, hands are laid on a blasphemer prior to his execution by stoning. The whole people perform the execution, but only those who witnessed the blasphemy lay their hands on his head. This suggests that they do so to identify themselves with the blasphemer insofar as by hearing the blasphemy they have been caught up in his sin.<sup>80</sup>

There are therefore compelling reasons to interpret the *semikhah* as signifying identification. This is the view, increasingly, of many scholars. Thus Ashby writes, “[C]learly we are dealing with an action of *identification*.”<sup>81</sup> Averbeck similarly writes, “The laying on of the hand identified the offering with the one presenting it.”<sup>82</sup> Gese also argues that the *semikhah* “expresses an identification in the sense of delegated succession, a serving in the place of, and not a transference of mere ‘sinful material.’”<sup>83</sup> Wenham, even more pointedly, writes that when the Israelite places his hands on the animal's head, that act is “a dramatic declaration that he is this animal, that it is taking his place in the ritual.”<sup>84</sup> Therefore, the *semikhah*, as Lang puts it, “identifies the sinner with the sacrificial victim to be slain and symbolizes the offering of his own

<sup>77</sup> See the table in Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen*, 200.

<sup>78</sup> Budd, *Leviticus*, 48; Sansom, “Laying On of Hands in the Old Testament,” 326; de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, 96; T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 218-19; Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen*, 219-20.

<sup>79</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, “Paul's Understanding of the Death of Jesus as Sacrifice,” in *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology* (ed. S. W. Sykes; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 44.

<sup>80</sup> Dunn, “Sacrifice,” 44-45.

<sup>81</sup> G. Ashby, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Purpose* (London: SCM, 1988), 41.

<sup>82</sup> R. E. Averbeck, “Sacrifices and Offerings,” *DOTP*, 712.

<sup>83</sup> Gese, “Atonement,” 106.

<sup>84</sup> Wenham, “The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice,” 80.



life.”<sup>85</sup> Through this rite, the worshipper “is regarded as himself involved or represented in what happens to the offering.”<sup>86</sup> And what happens to the offering? Symbolically and spiritually, death happens to the worshipper, too. Rowley explains, “[The worshipper] laid his hands upon [the animal], and was conceived of as in some way identified with it, so that in its death he was conceived of as dying—not physically, but spiritually.” Rowley further writes, “The death of the victim symbolized his death to his sin, or to whatever stood between him and God, or his surrender of himself to God in thankfulness and humility.”<sup>87</sup> Wenham similarly notes that what the worshipper does to the animal he does symbolically to himself: “The death of the animal portrays the death of himself.”<sup>88</sup> Janowski too argues that by the *semikhah* the worshipper participates in the animal’s death which symbolically represents the surrender of his life to God.<sup>89</sup>

To sum up, the *semikhah* signifies the worshipper’s identification with the animal and its fate. As to how this relates to the logic of atonement, Gese writes, “Atonement takes place through the sacrifice of the life of an animal which, by the laying on of hands, is identified with the one bringing the sacrifice.”<sup>90</sup> This involves what Gese calls a “Stellvertretung,” which Bell aptly translates as “inclusive place-taking.”<sup>91</sup> This place-taking, however, is not an “ausschließende Stellvertretung” (“exclusive place-taking”) which would be essentially a *substitution*. Instead, it is an “einschließende Stellvertretung” (“inclusive place-taking”) which is an act of identification such that the worshipper participates in the animal’s death.

### *The Slaughtering Rite*

After the *semikhah*, the worshipper slaughters the animal (Lev 1:5).<sup>92</sup> It is important to note that the worshipper himself must do the killing.<sup>93</sup> The priest kills the animal only when he makes his own offering or when

<sup>85</sup> B. Lang, “כִּפָּר,” *TDOT* 7:295.

<sup>86</sup> Kidner, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, 14.

<sup>87</sup> H. H. Rowley, “The Meaning of Sacrifice in the Old Testament,” *BJRL* 33 (1950): 88.

<sup>88</sup> Wenham, “The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice,” 77.

<sup>89</sup> Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen*, 220-21.

<sup>90</sup> Gese, “Atonement,” 106.

<sup>91</sup> Bell, “Sacrifice and Christology in Paul,” 9.

<sup>92</sup> The ritual is modified if the victim is a bird. See, e.g., Lev 1:14-17.

<sup>93</sup> Gorman, *Leviticus*, 25.



the High Priest acts representatively on behalf of the nation on the Day of Atonement.<sup>94</sup>

The Hebrew verb which is used consistently to describe ritual slaughter is  $\text{זָבַח}$ , a cultic technical term.<sup>95</sup> According to the Mishnah and Talmud,  $\text{זָבַח}$  strictly means “to cut the throat.” Drawing a knife across the throat effectively ensures the maximal draining of blood from the animal’s body.<sup>96</sup>

Some scholars have downplayed the importance of the slaughtering rite, viewing it as only incidental and not a significant factor in sacrifice.<sup>97</sup> But as recent ritual studies have shown us, every detail in the ritual process is important.<sup>98</sup> Accordingly, the slaughtering rite is critical to the cultic process which would lose its meaning without it.

What, then, is the significance of the slaughtering rite? Since the animal represents the worshipper, when he kills it, he is symbolically enacting his own death before YHWH’s presence. The worshipper’s death is “his own repentance carried to its completion through a death unto self, self-will, sin.”<sup>99</sup> But why is the worshipper’s death, albeit symbolic, necessary for his atonement?

This question is very fundamental for understanding the logic of atonement. Few scholars have addressed it as well as Bromiley. In a significant essay entitled, “The Significance of Death in Relation to the Atonement,”<sup>100</sup> Bromiley helpfully explains why death stands in what he calls “a teleological relationship to sin”:

By its very nature, sin is alienation from God, and alienation from God means necessarily alienation from life. Furthermore sin, again by its very nature, is destructive. Indeed, even in the most literal, the physical sense,

<sup>94</sup> According to Ezek 44:11 and 2 Chr 29:22, 24, 34; 35:11, the slaughtering on these occasions was done by the Levites and/or priests. But it is to be noted that these occasions involved *public* offerings. Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 65, therefore rightly notes that when the Levites and/or priests slaughtered the animals, they did so as representing the worshippers, and not *qua* priests or Levites.

<sup>95</sup> BDB 1006, s.v.  $\text{זָבַח}$ ; N. H. Snaith, “The Verbs *zābāḥ* and *šāḥaṭ*,” *VT* 25 (1975): 242, 244, 246.

<sup>96</sup> Snaith, “The Verbs *zābāḥ* and *šāḥaṭ*,” 244-45.

<sup>97</sup> See R. J. Daly, “The Power of Sacrifice in Ancient Judaism and Christianity,” *JRitS* 4 (1990): 183; B. H. McLean, *The Cursed Christ* (JSNTSup 126; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 30.

<sup>98</sup> Grabbe, *Leviticus*, 43; Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 189, 199, 209.

<sup>99</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 111.

<sup>100</sup> G. Bromiley, “The Significance of Death in Relation to the Atonement,” *EQ* 21 (1949): 122-32.

the sinful acts of men are frequently directly responsible both for suffering and for death. But beyond that, in the wider spiritual sense, sin destroys the moral and spiritual being. It brings both the understanding and the will into bondage. The final result of sin is the destruction of the moral personality, or spiritual death.<sup>101</sup>

Death, in sum, is the consequence of sin which is “the infringement of the divine law, the opposition of the divine will, the affront to the divine righteousness.”<sup>102</sup> This consequence accords with a necessary moral and spiritual law which God has ordained and which expresses his divine character and will: “the soul that sins shall die” (Ezek 18:4, RSV).<sup>103</sup> Accordingly, since death derives from the divine will, it is to be understood as penalty.<sup>104</sup> It is in fact “the ideal penalty” since it proceeds “logically and necessarily from the sin itself.”<sup>105</sup> Luc concurs when he notes that “punishment is inherent in sin.”<sup>106</sup> Death, however, is not only “the logical outcome of sin.” It is also, as Bromiley proceeds to argue, “The means to contain and to destroy sin . . . the weapon by which sin itself is broken and destroyed.”<sup>107</sup>

Bromiley’s insight into death’s significance as both sin’s consequence and the means by which sin is destroyed helpfully clarifies why the worshipper has to die. His death is necessary because it is sin’s penalty which he incurs. His death is also necessary because this is the way to break and destroy sin’s hold over him. All this is necessary if he is to return to YHWH,<sup>108</sup> for, otherwise, YHWH’s holiness will prove deadly to him.<sup>109</sup> Death is therefore “a penal condition for the sinner’s reunion with the Holy God.”<sup>110</sup> To have fellowship with YHWH, the worshipper needs to remove what Koch calls “the sphere of  $\text{מִצְרַיִם}$ .”<sup>111</sup> This is what the slaughtering rite accomplishes.

Death, therefore, is not only the judgment YHWH has ordained in response to sin but also the means of salvation from sin.<sup>112</sup> It is only by

<sup>101</sup> Bromiley, “Significance of Death,” 124.

<sup>102</sup> Bromiley, “Significance of Death,” 125.

<sup>103</sup> See also Gen 2:17; Jer 31:30; Ezek 3:18ff.; 18:20; 33:14; Rom 6:23.

<sup>104</sup> Bromiley, “Significance of Death,” 126.

<sup>105</sup> Bromiley, “Significance of Death,” 126.

<sup>106</sup> A. Luc, “ $\text{מִצְרַיִם}$ ,” *NIDOTTE* 2:90.

<sup>107</sup> Bromiley, “Significance of Death,” 126.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Lyonnet and Sabourin, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice*, 169: “no return to God is granted to sinful man unless man himself first dies to his egotism or, to use a biblical expression, to his flesh.”

<sup>109</sup> K. Koch, “ $\text{מִצְרַיִם}$ , etc.,” *TDOT* 4:317.

<sup>110</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 119.

<sup>111</sup> Koch, *TDOT* 4:317.

<sup>112</sup> So R. Schwager, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine*

the sinner going through the passage of death that his sin could be wiped out. Atonement, as Gayford puts it, “could only be effected through a dying, a life wholly surrendered with nothing kept back.”<sup>113</sup> The only salvation, the only redemption from sin, the only undoing of sin, Gayford writes, “lies in . . . an absolute self-surrender, a self-sacrifice, so entire that no self-regarding element is left in it, i.e. in a death unto self.”<sup>114</sup> This explains why, in Israel’s cult, nothing less than the animal’s death is required.<sup>115</sup>

In the slaughtering rite, it is noteworthy that the worshipper himself is not destroyed even as he submits to the judgment of death. The significance of this for understanding atonement cannot be underestimated. Bromiley astutely writes, “The atonement is . . . the divine will and action to destroy sin without also destroying the sinner.”<sup>116</sup> He also writes,

[B]y virtue of the atonement, which [God] Himself has planned and executed out of His love for the sinner, He can now receive the sinner again *qua* person where once he must have been rejected and destroyed *qua* sinner. The constant will to destroy sin and the constant will to save the sinner are not by any means mutually exclusive.<sup>117</sup>

Barth therefore rightly argues how in sacrifice Israel finds both *divine judgment* but also *divine grace*.<sup>118</sup> In sacrifice, Israel “signifies man judged by God and judged therefore to his salvation . . . man passing through death to life.”<sup>119</sup>

In summary, the significance of the slaughtering rite lies in this: by killing the animal which represents him and with whom he identifies by the *semikhah*, the worshipper symbolically enacts and expresses his willing submission to the judgment of death as the just deserts for his sinfulness. In doing so, however, he is also judged to his salvation.

---

*of Redemption* (trans. J. G. Williams; New York: Crossroad, 1999), 187, citing favourably Maximus the Confessor’s doctrine of redemption in *Thal.* 61 (PG 90:633AD, 636CD).

<sup>113</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 111.

<sup>114</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 116.

<sup>115</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 116.

<sup>116</sup> Bromiley, “Significance of Death,” 126.

<sup>117</sup> Bromiley, “Significance of Death,” 125-26.

<sup>118</sup> K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (trans. G. Bromiley; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), IV/1:278.

<sup>119</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1:279.

### *The Blood Rite*

Following the slaughtering rite, the priest's work begins since only the priest could ascend the altar (1 Sam 2:28). The priest now manipulates the collected blood. The blood rite is essential for effecting atonement.<sup>120</sup> In Gruenwald's view, it is the "sacrificial quintessence of the entire sacrificial act."<sup>121</sup> The importance which Israel attaches to blood is evident from the varied ways in which it is manipulated in its cult.<sup>122</sup> Thus blood can be "tossed, dashed, scattered" on the altar and also on people (Exod 24:6, 8; Lev 17:6; Num 18:17); it can be "sprinkled" toward the curtain, against the side of the altar, on people, on houses, and on the mercy-seat (Lev 4:6, 17; 5:9; 14:7, 51; 16:14, 15, 19); it can be "daubed" on the horns of the altar (Lev 4:7, 25, 30, 34); and it can be "poured out" at the base of the altar (Lev 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34; 8:15; 9:9).

How does blood function in Israel's cult to effect atonement? On this issue, Gese's interpretation of the blood rites is both helpful and fruitful. According to him, the point of the blood rites is that the blood is taken inside the sanctuary where it comes into contact with the holy. Since the blood, by the principle of *pars pro toto*, represents the animal which in turn symbolically represents the worshipper, it also represents the worshipper. The blood is, as Gayford states, "the offerer's own life."<sup>123</sup> Accordingly, its shedding symbolically represents "the offering of the life of the one sacrificing."<sup>124</sup> By the blood rites, therefore, the worshipper is symbolically conveyed into YHWH's presence.<sup>125</sup> He is symbolically surrendering his life to and being incorporated into the holy.<sup>126</sup> This is true whether the blood rites are minor, major or take their highest form on the great Day of Atonement.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Gese, "Atonement," 104.

<sup>121</sup> Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 206, 226.

<sup>122</sup> For a recent helpful study of the different verbs associated with cultic blood manipulation, see W. K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 25-28. See also G. André, "zāraq," *TDOT* 4:162-5; N. H. Snaith, "The Sprinkling of Blood," *ExpTim* 82 (1970-71): 23-24; T. C. Vriezen, "The Term *hizza*: Lustration and Consecration," *OTS* 7 (1950): 201-12.

<sup>123</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 111, 112, 114.

<sup>124</sup> B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 505.

<sup>125</sup> Gese, "Atonement," 106. In support of this understanding, see Heb 9:12 which states how Jesus entered the heavenly sanctuary with his own blood. Cf. Eph 2:13; Col 1:20.

<sup>126</sup> Gese, "Atonement," 107-8.

<sup>127</sup> Gese, "Atonement," 102-3, has helpfully classified the blood rites into

In the minor and major blood rites, the significance of the altar should be noted. The altar, being “the symbolic center of the priestly cult,” is the meeting place between God and man,<sup>128</sup> or, to use Rendtorff’s words, the place of “encounter” with YHWH.<sup>129</sup> The altar is the locus of interaction between Israel and YHWH and a portal to the sphere of the holy.<sup>130</sup> Since the blood represents the worshipper’s life, its application on the altar symbolically brings the worshipper into fellowship with YHWH. Milgrom confirms this point by his noteworthy remark that the horns of the altar in the ancient Near East are “emblems of the gods.”<sup>131</sup> Even more pointedly, Gayford states that the altar represents God.<sup>132</sup>

What has just been said about the altar applies equally to the atonement seat which is located in the tabernacle’s innermost sanctuary. “Atonement seat” translates the Hebrew כַּפֹּרֶת (LXX, ἰλαστήριον) which is in turn derived from כָּפַר.<sup>133</sup> The atonement seat is not a part of the Ark of the Covenant but a distinct top-piece placed upon it; it is a sheet of pure gold of the same dimensions as the ark.<sup>134</sup> According to Janowski, the כַּפֹּרֶת is the locus of God’s presence in Israel, conceived of as a pure plane.<sup>135</sup> From here, YHWH promises to manifest his presence and to meet with or speak to Israel.<sup>136</sup> The כַּפֹּרֶת is hence “the most God-

---

three types: the *minor* blood rite in which the blood is applied on the horns or sides of the burnt-offering altar (see Lev 1:5, 11, 15; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:25, 30, 34); the *major* blood rite in which the blood is applied on the horns of the incense altar and sprinkled before the veil (see Lev 4:5-7, 16-18); and, the Day of Atonement ritual where the blood is sprinkled on the atonement-seat itself (see Lev. 16:14, 15).

<sup>128</sup> L. D. Hawk, “Altars,” *DOTP* 35-36; R. D. Haak, “Altar,” *ABD* 1:162.

<sup>129</sup> Rendtorff, *Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 511, 512, 522.

<sup>130</sup> Hawk, “Altars,” 35.

<sup>131</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 235, citing the work of K. Galling, *Der Altar in den Kulturen des alten Orients* (Berlin: K. Curtis, 1925).

<sup>132</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 14 n. 1, 39, 71. On this point, Lang, “xxx,” 297, concurs.

<sup>133</sup> W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 666.

<sup>134</sup> Gese, “Atonement,” 99 n. 3 notes, “the Hebrew noun *kapporet* formed from the intensive stem, which is used to designate the symbol of atonement on the Ark of the Covenant, does not mean ‘lid’ (this does not fit the data, since the Ark was a closed chest) but rather ‘implement for atonement,’ ‘symbol for atonement.’”

<sup>135</sup> Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen*, 347.

<sup>136</sup> Exod 25:22; 30:6, 36; Lev 16:2; Num 7:89; Rendtorff, *Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 513.

filled, most sacred spot on earth.”<sup>137</sup> It is also “a vehicle whereby Israel’s sin is regularly and effectively overcome. . . [and] whereby Israel can be restored to full relationship with Yahweh.”<sup>138</sup> It is, in fact, the greatest means or place of atonement because YHWH’s presence dwells on it.<sup>139</sup> At the *כַּפֹּרֶת*, the most complete atonement is made and this occurs on the Day of Atonement when it would be sprinkled with blood (Lev 16). The *כַּפֹּרֶת* is thus a “place of atonement.”<sup>140</sup> It is “the particular place of Yahweh’s readiness to re-enter relationship with Israel.”<sup>141</sup> So, like the altar, the *כַּפֹּרֶת* is a place of encounter with YHWH. When blood is sprinkled onto it, the worshipper is symbolically brought into contact with YHWH.<sup>142</sup>

The intent of the different blood rites is therefore identical: it is to convey the sinful but repentant worshipper into YHWH’s presence so that fellowship is established. By the blood rites, “the priest carries out the symbolic surrender of the worshipper’s own life to the sanctuary and thus to the deity.”<sup>143</sup>

If the purpose of the different blood rites is identical, why then do they differ in their places of application? On this matter, Gayford helpfully clarifies that where the blood is applied actually depends on the rank of the worshipper in the congregation; this in turn determines his degree of “spiritual nearness” to YHWH.<sup>144</sup> If the worshipper is an ordinary Israelite or leader, his access to YHWH is limited to and represented by applying the blood on the horns of the burnt-offering altar which stands at the entrance to the tent of meeting (Lev 4:25, 30, 34). If he is the High Priest or it is the whole congregation, the access to YHWH is limited to and represented by sprinkling the blood before the curtain of the sanctuary and applying some on the horns of the incense altar (Lev 4:6-7, 17-18). On the Day of Atonement, however, the High Priest and the entire nation have access to YHWH all the way to the atonement-seat and this is represented by sprinkling the blood in front of and upon the atonement seat (Lev 16:14-15). The blood rites therefore serve to restore the worshipper to his proper spiritual nearness to YHWH.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 87.

<sup>138</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the OT*, 666.

<sup>139</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 92.

<sup>140</sup> So translates Rendtorff, *Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 513, in light of the LXX translation of *כַּפֹּרֶת* with *ἵλαστήριον* thereby relating *כַּפֹּרֶת* to *kipper*. Cf. R. L. Harris, “*כַּפֹּרֶת* (*kāpar*),” *TWOT* 453.

<sup>141</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the OT*, 666.

<sup>142</sup> Gese, “Atonement,” 113.

<sup>143</sup> Lang, “xxx,” 295.

<sup>144</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 76-77, 114-15.

<sup>145</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 114.

Since the blood rites serve to restore the worshipper to his proper spiritual nearness to YHWH, this gives cultic atonement “the greatest positive meaning.” As Gese puts it, “sins are not simply wiped away or capital punishment inflicted but in a comprehensive substitution the *nephesh* is dedicated to the sanctuary and bound up with the holy.”<sup>146</sup> Through the blood rites, the worshipper gains “access . . . to God.”<sup>147</sup> But he can do so only as one who is worthy of death and submits to the judgment of death.<sup>148</sup> In sum, cultic atonement “is coming to God by passing through the sentence of death.”<sup>149</sup>

### *The Burning Rite*

Following the blood rite, the whole or part of the animal will be burnt. This rite is also an important constitutive element of sacrifice.<sup>150</sup> It is common to all five types of offerings. In the burnt offering, the entire animal carcass, except its hide, is burnt (Lev 1:6-9, 12-13, 16). In the grain offering, the memorial portion is burnt (Lev 2:2, 9, 16). In the sin offering, the guilt offering, and the well-being offering, the animal's fat, kidneys, and the covering of its liver are burnt (Lev 3:3-5, 9-10, 14-15; 4:8-10, 19-20, 26, 31, 35; 7:3-5).

The Hebrew verb used for this burning is *קָטַר* which means “to make sacrifices smoke” or literally, “to turn into smoke.”<sup>151</sup> *קָטַר* has a specific cultic significance, being always used to refer to the burning rite on the altar.<sup>152</sup> It is to be distinguished from *שָׂרַף*, also used in cultic contexts but carries no cultic significance. *שָׂרַף* is always used to describe the incineration of leftovers and never the burning of offerings on the altar.<sup>153</sup> When the animal or, in the case of the grain-offering, the memorial portion, is placed on the altar to be burnt (*קָטַר*), the primary sense

<sup>146</sup> Quotations are from Gese, “Atonement,” 108. Crim translates the original *Stellvertretung* as “substitution.” Gese's thesis, however, is better communicated as “inclusive place-taking.” See Bell, “Sacrifice and Christology,” 9.

<sup>147</sup> Gese, “Atonement,” 109.

<sup>148</sup> Gese, “Atonement,” 108.

<sup>149</sup> Gese, “Atonement,” 114.

<sup>150</sup> This point has been convincingly argued by C. A. Eberhart, “A Neglected Feature of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: Remarks on the Burning Rite on the Altar,” *HTR* 97 (2004): 485-93.

<sup>151</sup> Hartley, *Leviticus*, 22; Levine, *Leviticus*, 7; Eberhart, “Neglected Feature,” 489; BDB 883, s.v. “קָטַר.”

<sup>152</sup> Eberhart, “Neglected Feature,” 489.

<sup>153</sup> R. Abba, “The Origin and Significance of Hebrew Sacrifice,” *BTB* 7 (1977): 134; Eberhart, “Neglected Feature,” 489; BDB 977, s.v., “שָׂרַף.” See Lev 4:12, 21; 6:30; 8:17; 9:11; 10:16; 16:27.



is that it goes up as smoke.<sup>154</sup> The burning changes it into smoke which ascends to YHWH as a “fire offering”<sup>155</sup> and as a “pleasing odour.”

What is the significance of the burning rite? One view suggests that it symbolizes, firstly, YHWH’s consuming wrath utterly destroying the animal which represents the sinner and, secondly, hell’s eternal fire.<sup>156</sup> This view should be rejected for at least three reasons. Firstly, it contradicts the positive spirit and purpose of the cult. Secondly, it is incomprehensible how such burning can be described as a pleasing odour to YHWH! Thirdly, “hell’s eternal fire” hardly belongs to priestly theology.

More plausible is the view which recognizes the *transformative* significance of the burning. Gayford, for example, speaks of the fire’s effect on the offering as “to refine and etherealize what is carnal and earthly.”<sup>157</sup> Milgrom notes that the burning is more concerned with *transformation* than incineration.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, Blenkin argues that the burning is not intended to *destroy* but to *transform* the animal so that it can ascend to God.<sup>159</sup> Hicks likewise writes, “The offering is not destroyed but transformed, sublimated, etherealised, so that it can ascend in smoke to the heaven above, the dwelling place of God.<sup>160</sup> More pointedly, Lyonnet and Sabourin argue that “the whole victim, apparently transformed into the vapour of smoke (but not destroyed or reduced to nothing), could ascend unto God ‘in fragrant odour’ . . . and thus represent in a visible manner . . . the return of man to God.”<sup>161</sup> With these scholars’ sentiments, Eberhart also concurs.<sup>162</sup>

The significance of the burning rite therefore consists in the animal’s transformation into smoke so that it can ascend to YHWH. Since cultic burning in passages like Leviticus 9:24 and I Kings 18:38-39 also

<sup>154</sup> S. E. Balentine, *Leviticus* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 25.

<sup>155</sup> Eberhart, “Neglected Feature,” 489 n. 16, on the basis of the LXX translation of  $\text{עֹלֶת}$  concludes that  $\text{עֹלֶת}$  connotes both fire and offering and hence should be translated as “fire offering.” He reiterates the same thesis in his “The Cult Term  $\text{עֹלֶת}$  (*Ishet*): Remarks on Its Meaning, Importance, and Disappearance,” a paper presented at the 2005 SBL Annual Meeting, [http://www.law2.byu.edu/Biblical\\_Law](http://www.law2.byu.edu/Biblical_Law) (accessed 20 April 2006). Cf. BDB 77-78, s.v. “ $\text{עֹלֶת}$ ” and “ $\text{עֹלֶת}$ ”; Levine, *Leviticus*, 7.

<sup>156</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 80-81 refers to this view and rightly rejects it.

<sup>157</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 79.

<sup>158</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 160-61.

<sup>159</sup> H. Blenkin, *Immortal Sacrifice* (London: DLT, 1964), 29.

<sup>160</sup> Hicks, *Fullness of Sacrifice*, 13.

<sup>161</sup> Lyonnet and Sabourin, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice*, 169.

<sup>162</sup> Eberhart, “Neglected Feature,” 493; Eberhart, “The Cult Term  $\text{עֹלֶת}$  (*Ishet*),” 1.



signifies YHWH's acceptance of the sacrifice,<sup>163</sup> this may also be the case here. In accepting the offering, YHWH transforms it into a condition which can then enter his life.<sup>164</sup> Since the animal symbolically represents the worshipper, the burning rite therefore signifies his transformation and ascent to YHWH and also YHWH's acceptance of him. The burning rite thus marks the climax of sacrifice, indeed of human communion with God which is the goal of sacrifice.<sup>165</sup>

### *The Communion Rite*

At the end of a sacrifice, the worshipper participates in a communion meal. In Israel's cult, an actual sacrifice always involves several offerings which follow this procedural order: sin offering, burnt offering, grain offering, well-being offering.<sup>166</sup> In the guilt offering, the sin offering, and the grain offering, whatever remains after the burning of the prescribed portions from the offerings is "most holy" and is eaten by the priests. The exception to this rule is the priests' own offerings (Lev 2:3, 10; 10:12-13; 6:24-29; 7:6, 7). In the burnt offering, the entire animal, less its hide, is consumed on the altar. It is only in the well-being offering, which is the concluding offering of a sacrifice, that we see the worshipper eating a share from his offering. The distribution of the well-being offering between YHWH, his priests, and the worshipper, constitutes its distinctive feature. YHWH receives the animal's fat, kidneys, and the covering of its liver (Lev 3:3-5, 9-10, 14-15). The priests receive their portions of breast and right thigh which constitute the compensation for their priestly services (Lev 7:31-34; 10:10-15).<sup>167</sup> What remains goes to the worshipper who eats it together with his family and friends as a communion meal (Lev 7:11-21) in which YHWH is perceived to be favourably present, thus making the meal a joyous occasion (cf. Deut 12:7).

The worshipper, having made atonement for his sin, could now in this communion rite thankfully and gratefully celebrate his renewed fellowship with YHWH. This is what the communion meal signifies and to this meal he invites his family and friends to celebrate and rejoice with him. Wenham suggests that the meat which YHWH partially returns to the worshipper symbolizes the life which YHWH gives back to the wor-

<sup>163</sup> Gayford, *Sacrifice and Priesthood*, 80.

<sup>164</sup> Hicks, *Fullness of Sacrifice*, 13.

<sup>165</sup> Eberhart, "Neglected Feature," 485, 492, 493.

<sup>166</sup> See A. F. Rainey, "The Order of Sacrifices in Old Testament Ritual Texts," *Bib* 51 (1970): 485-98.

<sup>167</sup> See Hartley, *Leviticus*, 136 and Levine, *Leviticus*, 34, 39.

shipper to go on enjoying, life which he has previously forfeited.<sup>168</sup> With this, Gruenwald concurs when he writes, “Partaking in a meal naturally signals that a life-enhancing process has begun again.”<sup>169</sup>

### *Summary*

Israel’s cult of atonement comprises six rites which are found in any animal sacrifice. In the presentation rite, the worshipper brings before YHWH an animal which symbolically represents him and takes his place in sacrifice. In the hand-laying rite, the worshipper establishes an identification with that animal such that he could participate in the spiritual realities which are signified by what happens to the animal. In the slaughtering rite, he kills the animal signifying thereby his willing submission to pass through the sentence of death. The blood rite that follows signifies the worshipper’s incorporation into YHWH’s presence and restoration to fellowship with him. The burning rite signifies the worshipper’s transformation and acceptance by YHWH. Finally, in the communion rite, the worshipper celebrates his restored communion with YHWH following the atonement of his sin.

These six rites of atoning sacrifice follow one another in an orderly and logical sequence. The important thing to highlight here is that atonement for the Israelites means all of these stages.<sup>170</sup> Atonement is a process rather than a single act. It is not to be confined to a single rite as if it were the slaughtering rite, or the blood rite, or the burning rite, which atones.<sup>171</sup> Atonement involves all six rites. Through these rites and the spiritual realities which they signify, indeed through what Gese calls “symbolic atonement,” YHWH opens for the worshipper a way to himself.<sup>172</sup> YHWH forgives his sin (Lev 4:20, 31; 16:16, 21, 22, 30, 34) and accepts him.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>168</sup> Wenham, *Leviticus*, 81.

<sup>169</sup> Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory*, 218.

<sup>170</sup> V. Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice: A Study of the Passion-Sayings in the Gospels* (London: Macmillan, 1939), 54; Blenkin, *Immortal Sacrifice*, 30; J. Moses, *The Sacrifice of God: A Holistic Theory of Atonement* (Norwich: Canterbury, 1992), 73.

<sup>171</sup> R. J. Thompson, “Sacrifice and Offering,” *NBD* 1052.

<sup>172</sup> Gese, “Atonement,” 108-9.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Lev 1:3, 4 where the animal is said to be “accepted” or “for acceptance” on the worshipper’s behalf. These cultic technical terms identify the sacrifice as having efficacious merit. See Hartley, *Leviticus*, 19; von Rad, *OT Theology I*, 261.

## V. The “Declaratory Formulae” in the Cult

This study would be incomplete without reference to what von Rad calls the “declaratory formulae” in the cult, a special aspect of the ritual act which is important but which has hitherto received scant scholarly attention.<sup>174</sup> Von Rad points out that terms like “it will not be acceptable (Lev 7:18; 19:7; 22:23, 25), “it is a burnt-offering” (Exod 29:18; Lev 1:9, 13, 17; 8:21), “it is a grain-offering” (Lev 2:6, 15), “it is a sin-offering” (Exod 29:14; Lev 4:21, 24; 5:9), “it is most holy” (Lev 6:18 [25], 22 [29]; 7:1, 6), “it is abominable” (Lev 11:41), and so on, are actually declaratory formulae which the priests pronounce authoritatively and aloud. As YHWH’s mouthpiece, the priest would pronounce the *placet* upon the offering or refuse it. In accepting or rejecting the offering he thereby declares in categorical terms YHWH’s will.<sup>175</sup> This “divine word” of acceptance or rejection decides whether or not the offering is “reckoned” or “credited” to the worshipper who brings it.<sup>176</sup> According to von Rad, when the priest acknowledges that a sacrifice has been properly performed, this is to “reckon” it to the worshipper. YHWH has accepted his sacrifice and allows it to stand to his credit.<sup>177</sup> Von Rad is of the view that this priestly declaration is the most important part of the entire ritual procedure. The significance of the role played by the priestly declaration has recently been affirmed by Grabbe.<sup>178</sup>

## VI. Conclusion

In this paper, we have considered how Israel’s cult, via a complex symbolic system, expresses important theological truths relating to atonement. Atonement involves the worshipper’s identification with the animal and participation in what happens to it. It demands his submission to the judgment of death which is both punitive and redemptive. Atonement also incorporates him back into YHWH’s presence and restores fellowship with him. Atonement transforms him, rendering him acceptable to YHWH. Atonement is celebrated with a communion meal.

<sup>174</sup> See von Rad, *OT Theology I*, 247-48, 261-62; von Rad, “Faith Reckoned as Righteousness (1951),” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (trans. E. W. T. Dicken; Edinburgh/London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 125-30.

<sup>175</sup> Von Rad, “Faith Reckoned,” 126.

<sup>176</sup> See Lev 7:18; 17:4; Num 18:27 where, according to von Rad, “Faith Reckoned,” 126-27, אָשַׁב (“credit”) denotes “a declaratory act which the priest performs on behalf of Yahweh.”

<sup>177</sup> Von Rad, “Faith Reckoned,” 127-28.

<sup>178</sup> L. L. Grabbe, “The Priests of Leviticus—Is the Medium the Message?,” in *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception* (ed. R. Rendtorff and R. A. Kugler; VTSup 93; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003), 210, 211-12, 220, 221.

When the cultic ritual is penitently performed as prescribed, the priestly declaration of acceptance of the offering mediates and assures forgiveness. This is the logic of atonement.