

The Scapegoat

1.1 THE BIBLICAL RITE

The most familiar of all biblical disposal rites is the dispatch of the scapegoat¹ on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). Scholars have given more attention to it than to any other disposal rite in the Bible.² The reason for this is its central importance on the annual day of purification and the great light it sheds, or is believed to shed, on notions of expiation and purification in the Old and New Testament traditions. In this chapter I will examine the significance of the scapegoat rite as a ritual of disposal by paying attention to the relationship of the rite to the

¹I will use the term "scapegoat" to refer to the goat dispatched to the wilderness in the Day of Atonement ritual though, as we will see, the term derives from an incorrect interpretation of the term *ʿāzāzēl*.

²See, for example, S. Ahituv, "*ʿĀzāzēl*," *EM* 6 (1971) 113–15 (Hebrew); "Azazel," *EncJud* 3 (1972) 999–1002; D. Ashbel, "The Goat Sent to Azazel in the Wilderness (Lev. 16:8, 10, 22)," *Beth Mikra* 27/3 (1966) 89–102 (Hebrew); M. Atidiah, "The Goat for Azazel," *Beth Mikra* 6/11–2 (1961) 80 (Hebrew); A. Y. Brawer, "Sending the Goat to Azazel and the Bird of the Leper—Symbolic *Tašlik*," *Beth Mikra* 12/30 (1967) 32–33 (Hebrew); M. Delcor, "Le mythe de la chute des anges," *RHR* 190 (1976) 3–53; G. R. Driver, "Three Technical Terms in the Pentateuch," *JSS* 1 (1956) 97–105; C. L. Feinberg, "The Scapegoat of Leviticus 16," *BSac* 115 (1958) 320–33; J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion; Part IV, The Scapegoat* (3d ed.; London: Macmillan, 1913); *The New Golden Bough: A New Abridgement of the Classic Work by Sir James George Frazer* (ed. T. H. Gaster; New York: S. G. Phillips, 1959; reprint, New York: New American Library, 1959) 609–40; T. H. Gaster, "Azazel," *IDB* 1 (1962) 325–26; S. B. Hoenig, "The New Qumran

larger scheme of purification on the Day of Atonement, the evil or evils that the rite seeks to remove, the figure Azazel, and the meaning of dispatching the goat into the wilderness. After the study of the biblical rite itself, I will examine Hittite and Mesopotamian parallels using the method of contrastive comparison.

1.1.1 The Two-Part Day of Atonement Ritual

The scapegoat ritual is the second part of a larger two-part purification rite on the Day of Atonement. In the first part, Aaron purifies all the major areas in the Tabernacle with blood from *ḥaṭṭāʾ* sacrifices.³ He takes blood from a *ḥaṭṭāʾ* bull brought for his and his household's benefit, goes to the adytum (the most-holy place of the Tabernacle), and sprinkles some of it once on the front of the *kappōret* and then seven times on the floor before the *kappōret* (Lev 16:14). He repeats this action with blood from a *ḥaṭṭāʾ* goat brought for the people (v 15) that was earlier in the rite designated "for *Yhwh*," as opposed to the scapegoat which was designated "for Azazel" (v 8). He next purifies the shrine (the larger room east of the most-holy place) with blood (v 16b). Lev 16 does not say how this was to be done, but it is likely that the phrase "thus shall he do for the Tent of Meeting" in v 16b refers back to the *ḥaṭṭāʾ* rite detailed in Lev 4:5–7, 16–18 which prescribes a seven-fold sprinkling of *ḥaṭṭāʾ* blood on the floor of the shrine before the veil and then an application of blood to the four horns of the incense altar. After purifying the shrine, Aaron goes out to the altar of burnt

Pesher on Azazel," *JQR* 56 (1965–66) 248–53; S. H. Hooke, "The Theory and Practice of Substitution," *VT* 2 (1952) 2–17; H. M. Kümmel, "Ersatzkönig und Sündenbock," *ZAW* 80 (1968) 289–318; E. Kutsch, "Sündenbock," *RGG* 6 (1962) 506–7; S. Landersdorfer, *Studien zum biblischen Versöhnungstag* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1924); "Keilinschriftliche Parallelen zum biblischen Sündenbock (Lv 16)," *BZ* 19 (1931) 20–28; B. Levine, "Kippûrîm," *Eretz Israel* 9 (1969) 88–95 (Hebrew); A. Louf, "Caper emissarius ut typus Redemptoris apud patres," *VD* 38 (1960) 262–77; L. Sabourin, "Le bouc émissaire, figure du Christ?" *Sciences Ecclesiastiques* 11 (1959) 45–79; H. Tawil "Azazel The Prince of the Steepe [*sic*]: A Comparative Study," *ZAW* 92 (1980) 43–59. Also see the other literature cited throughout this chapter.

³On the *ḥaṭṭāʾ* sacrifice generally and on its blood as a purifying agent, see chaps. 6 and 7.

offering in the court (16:18–19). He takes some blood from both the bull and goat and applies it to the horns of the altar, after which he sprinkles blood on the altar seven times. Thus the three main parts of the Tabernacle—the adytum, shrine, and outer altar⁴—beginning with the most important part and ending with a part of less importance,⁵ are purified in this comprehensive annual purgation rite.

The second part of the purification rite employs the second of the two goats brought for the people which was earlier designated by lot “for Azazel” (vv 8, 10). The animal is brought forward after the sanctuary purification (v 20). Aaron places both of his hands on the animal’s head and confesses over it the sins of the Israelites. By this act he puts the sins on the animal’s head (v 21).⁶ The goat is then sent away to the wilderness (vv 21–22).

1.1.2 The Evils or Impurities Removed

Notably the two parts of the Day of Atonement rite each remove different evils. The *ḥattāʾt* blood rites performed in the adytum, shrine, and at the outer altar efface impurity attached to these places. By sprinkling the blood in the adytum, Aaron “purges the sanctuary from the impurities of the Israelites” (*miṭṭumʾōt bēnê yiśrāʾēl*, v 16a).

⁴Cf. v 20 where this is made explicit: “When he has finished purging the sanctuary, the Tent of Meeting, and the altar, . . .” For the purification in the shrine, see also Exod 30:10.

⁵For examples of rites in which a substance is applied to three places, beginning with the most prominent, see chap. 7, n. 19.

⁶This two-handed handlaying is distinct in form and meaning from the one-handed handlaying found in sacrifice (cf. Lev 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 24, 29, 33). The two-handed rite identifies the scapegoat as the recipient of the ritual action (in this case, as the recipient of the sins, cf. Lev 24:14; Num 27:18, 23) while the one-handed rite in sacrifice identifies the animal as belonging to the offerer (cf. R. de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice* [Cardiff: University of Wales, 1964] 28–29; see also my remarks on a hand placement gesture in Hittite ritual, below, n. 118, which has essentially the same significance as the one-handed rite in the Bible). See my article, “The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature,” *JAOS* 106 (1986) 433–46 and D. P. Wright and J. Milgrom, “*Sāmak*,” *TWAT* 5 (1986) 880–88. Also see J. Milgrom, “Sacrifices and Offerings, OT,” *IDBSup* (1976) 765; R. Peter, “L’imposition des mains dans l’Ancien Testament,” *VT* 22 (1977) 48–55.

Similarly, by applying blood to the outer altar, he purifies and sanctifies it “from the impurities of the Israelites” (*miṭṭumʾōt bēnē yiśrāʾēl*, v 19b). That the shrine is purified from impurity is implied in v 16b: “and thus shall he do for the Tent of Meeting which dwells with them in the midst of their *impurities*” (*bētōk ṭumʾōtām*). The Tent being located among impure people becomes impure and, consequently, needs purification by the rite implicit in v 16b.

In contrast to these blood rites which remove *impurity* from the sanctuary, the scapegoat rite serves to eliminate the *transgressions* of the people. Aaron is to confess over the goat “all the transgressions of the Israelites” (*kol-ʿāwōnōt bēnē yiśrāʾēl*, v 21) which the animal then carries to the wilderness (v 22; *kol-ʿāwōnōtām*).

But though there is a difference in the evils removed by the two parts of the rites, some further data in the prescriptions caution us not to completely separate the goals of the two parts. The summary phrase concerning the effect of the blood rite in the adytum, in addition to stating that impurities of the Israelites are removed, says that “their crimes including all of their sins” (*pišʿēhem lēkol-ḥaṭṭōʾtām*, v 16aβ) are removed. The scapegoat rite lists this same evil as an object of disposal. In addition to the Israelites’ transgressions, Aaron places “all their crimes including all their sins” (*kol-pišʿēhem lēkol-ḥaṭṭōʾtām*, v 21aβ) on the head of the goat. Hence, while the two rites from one perspective eliminate different evils—impurity versus sins—from another, they work together to dispose of Israelite crimes and sins.

How can this apparently contradictory situation be explained? My tentative solution is to view the phrase (*kol*) *pišʿēhem lēkol ḥaṭṭōʾtām* in vv 16aβ and 21aβ as an addition.⁷ At an earlier stage, the rite would have distinguished clearly between the evils removed by each part of the larger rite. This clear distinction in the earlier form of the text, however, should not be taken to mean that the two parts were originally separate entities composed apart from one another and then later brought together. Though the evils are distinct, they are conceptually very intimately related. The one, impurity, is merely the effect flowing from the other, transgression. The relation of these two evils to one another is observed in the Priestly conception that the sin of an Israelite causes impurity to

⁷M. Löhr, *Das Ritual von Lev. 16 (Untersuchungen zum Hexateuchproblem III)* (SKGG 2/1; Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1925) 3–4; K. Elliger, *Leviticus* (HAT 1/4; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1966) 200–1, 206.

become attached to the sanctuary. This is evident from the need to bring a *ḥaṭṭāʾ* sacrifice after various sins in order to purify the sancta (Lev 4:1–5:13).⁸ Moreover, certain sins are explicitly described as defiling the sanctuary. If a person does not purify from corpse contamination, that person pollutes the Lord's Tabernacle (Num 19:13, 20).⁹ Sexual impurities have the potential of polluting the sanctuary if prescriptions are not properly observed (Lev 15:31). Similarly, offering children to Molech pollutes the sanctuary (20:3).¹⁰ The relation of sin and impurity is especially patent elsewhere in the scapegoat ritual itself in the fact that the one who leads the goat away which carries sins becomes impure and must undergo ablutions (16:26). If we understand that the sanctuary acquires impurity through the unholy acts of the people, then the bipartite purification rite on the Day of Atonement makes perfect sense. The blood rite removes the impurities caused by the people's sins, and the scapegoat rite removes the sins themselves—the cause of the impurity. The two evils belong naturally together, and, consequently, the two parts of the rite belong together.¹¹

The addition of the phrase (*kol*) *piš'ehem l'ekol-ḥaṭṭōʾtām* seems to have arisen from a need to explain a feature unique to the annual rite—the purification of the adytum and the *kappōret*. The sancta purified by *ḥaṭṭāʾ* blood in rites other than the rite on the Day of Atonement are the outer altar (Lev 4:25, 30, 34), and the shrine and

⁸For a discussion of this idea, see J. Milgrom, "The Function of the *Ḥaṭṭāʾ* Sacrifice," *Tarbiz* 40 (1970) 1–8 (Hebrew); "Israel's Sanctuary: The Priestly 'Picture of Dorian Gray,'" *RB* 83 (1976) 390–99; "Sacrifices."

⁹Corpse contamination by itself is not a sin, only a delay of purification is. Similarly, a person who has delayed purification from a minor source of impurity needs to bring a *ḥaṭṭāʾ* sacrifice (Lev 5:2), but the contraction of the impurity itself is not a sin. See J. Milgrom, "The Graduated *Ḥaṭṭāʾ* of Lev 5:1–13," *JAOS* 103 (1983) 251–52.

¹⁰Note that the sinner does not need to be in the sanctuary during or after his sin to pollute it. The impurity can be caused from a distance without direct contact. See J. Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The Asham and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance* (SJLA 18; Leiden: Brill, 1976) 127–28; "Israel's Sanctuary," 394; "Graduated *Ḥaṭṭāʾ*," 251.

¹¹The bipartite rite on the Day of Atonement in which one animal supplies blood and another carries away impurity is similar to the *šāraʿat* bird rite. This similarity is further support for the original connection of the two parts of the Day of Atonement rite. See my historical reconstruction in chap. 2, section 2.1.3.

incense altar (Lev 4:5–7, 16–18). Nothing outside of Lev 16 tells about purifying the most holy place and the *kappōret*. Why the innermost part of the sanctuary requires purification is suggested in the passages about purifying the outer altar and shrine in Lev 4. These indicate that *ḥaṭṭāʾt* blood is used on these sancta in accordance with the seriousness of the sins committed. For sins by an Israelite leader or by an individual Israelite, the outer altar undergoes purification; for sins by the anointed priest or by the whole community, the shrine and incense altar must be purified. The rule underlying these prescriptions is clear: the more responsible the sinner or the more universal the sin, the more severe the pollution that penetrates the sanctuary. Consequently, a more rigorous purification is needed by bringing blood into the shrine.¹² The phrase (*kol*) *pišʿehem lēkol ḥaṭṭōʾtām* becomes intelligible in view of this principle. It is an explanation of the need for the blood rite in the adytum. It says that the adytum needs purification because it has been sullied by the crimes or brazen sins (*pēšāʿim*) of the Israelites—sins much worse than those committed by the high priest, Israelite community, or individual that have only polluted the shrine or the outer altar. The impurity caused by the crimes has penetrated to the very heart of the sanctuary (see n. 12).

The addition of the phrase in v 16aβ does not present a contradiction in regard to the evils removed by the first part of the rite. As previously noted, sins are the cause of impurity. To say, therefore, that *pēšāʿim* are removed when the adytum is purified only makes explicit the origin of the impurities in that locale. Accordingly, we may conclude that the addition follows the intention and spirit of the original text and complements it; it does not contradict it.

Why the phrase was also added in v 21aβ must now be explained. The most reasonable interpretation is that the editor wanted to make explicit that the crimes that polluted the adytum were being placed on the goat with all the other sins. Thus the addition in v 21 was not absolutely necessary, but was made in order to be consistent and to make the meaning unambiguous. The phrase in v 21aβ also serves to emphasize that the scapegoat carries away all of Israel's sins, not just some of them.

Lastly, the fact that the phrase has been added to both parts of the rite shows that the editor perceived the two parts to be integrally connected

¹²See Milgrom, "Function of the *Ḥaṭṭāʾt*"; "Israel's Sanctuary"; "Sacrifices."

with one another in purpose. This is further proof that the two parts belong together from the earliest stages of the text.

1.1.3 The Term ʿĀzāʾzēl

The most problematic item in the scapegoat ritual is the term ʿĀzāʾzēl. Lots are cast for the two goats brought for the people, one “for Yhwh” and one “for ʿĀzāʾzēl (v 8). The latter goat is to be sent out “to ʿĀzāʾzēl into the wilderness (vv 10, 26). What is the meaning of ʿĀzāʾzēl? Surely the early explanation of the term as meaning “(e)scapegoat” from ʿēz ʾōzēl “goat that departs” or the like cannot be accepted.¹³ Nor are the interpretations of the term as a place name “precipitous place” or “rugged cliff,”¹⁴ or as an abstraction “destruction”¹⁵ or “entire removal”¹⁶ satisfactory. The evidence indicates, instead, that ʿĀzāʾzēl is the name of a god or demon.¹⁷ This is suggested first of all by the parallelism

¹³Cf. the Greek *tō apompaiō* “for the one carrying away evil” (v 8; cf. v 10) or *ton diestalmenon eis aphenin* “the [goat] determined for dismissal” (v 26). The Latin has *caper emissarius* “dispatched goat.” These translations apparently construed ʿĀzāʾzēl to mean ʿēz ʾōzēl “the goat that departs” or the like. Some commentators explain ʿĀzāʾzēl by connecting it with Arabic *ʿazala* “to remove, set aside” and obtain a similar meaning. See Gaster, “Azazel,” 325–26; Feinberg, “Scapegoat,” 326–27.

¹⁴Cf. G.R. Driver, “Technical Terms,” 97–98 and literature cited there.

¹⁵D. Z. Hoffmann, *The Book of Leviticus (Seper Wayyiqraʾ)* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1953) 1. 304–05.

¹⁶BDB, 736. For discussion of the various views, see the commentaries, especially Hoffmann, *Leviticus*, 1. 304–05; also see Ashbel, “Goat,” 98; Brawer, “Sending”; Delcor, “Mythe,” 35–37; G. R. Driver, “Technical Terms,” 97–98; Feinberg, “Scapegoat,” 320–33; Gaster, “Azazel,” 325–26; Hoenig, “Peshet,” 248–49 and n. 3; Landersdorfer, *Studien*, 15–20; M. H. Segal, “The Religion of Israel Before Sinai,” *JQR* 53 (1962) 249–51; Tawil, “Azazel,” 43; R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1961; reprint, 2 vols.; New York: McGraw–Hill, 1965) 2. 509; *Studies*, 97.

¹⁷Cf. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2. 509; Levine, “Kippûrîm,” 94; Tawil “Azazel,” 58–59; Delcor, “Mythe,” 35–37; Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel from Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1960; reprint, New York: Schocken, 1972) 114–15; Kutsch, “Sündenbock.” D. Ashbel (“Goat”) thinks that Azazel is a storm god living in the wilderness to whom the goat was sent as an offering (cf. A. Y. Brawer, “Sending,” 32).

between the designation “for *Yhwh*” and “for *ʿāzāʿzēl*” (v 8). As the former phrase refers to a being, so the latter should refer to a being. Secondly, the goat is sent out to the wilderness which is a place of habitation for demonic characters.¹⁸ Thirdly, in postbiblical literature, *ʿāzāʿzēl* appears as a full fledged demonic being.¹⁹ Lastly, though the etymology of the name is not certain, it is best explained as a metathesized form of *ʿzz-ʾl* meaning something like “fierce god” or “angry god.”²⁰

But though we recognize Azazel as a demon, care must be taken not to misunderstand his true character in the present rite. Caution must be exercised not to presume automatically that as a demon he functions like demons in similar rites outside biblical culture.²¹ Azazel’s demonic nature must be sought primarily within the framework of the Priestly literature. Significantly, this corpus says little about demonic issues. Apart from the figure of Azazel in Lev 16, the only indication that Priestly writers entertained the idea of demons is in Lev 17:7. Here the Israelites are warned not to offer their sacrifices to goat demons (*šēʿîrîm*),

¹⁸See, below, in section 1.1.4.

¹⁹1 Enoch 8:1; 9:6; 10:4–8; 13:1. Cf. 54:5–6; 55:4; 69:2. For a discussion of Azazel in Enoch and the Midrash, see Tawil, “Azazel,” 45–47; Delcor, “Mythe,” 35–40; Hoenig, “Peshet,” 248–50; Landersdorfer, *Studien*, 20–25; Segal, “Religion,” 250; P. L. Hanson, “Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11,” *JBL* 96 (1977) 220–25; G. Nickelsburg, “Apocalyptic and Myth in 1 Enoch 6–11,” *JBL* 96 (1977) 397–401.

²⁰G. A. Barton (“The Origin of the Names of Angels and Demons in the Extra-Canonical Apocalyptic Literature,” *JBL* 31 [1912] 163) gives the etymology as *ʿzz-ʾl* but translates “strong one of God.” B. Levine (“*kippûrîm*,” 94) explains the name as *ʿzz-ʾl* meaning “God is strong, fierce.” M. Delcor (“Mythe,” 36) similarly understands the name as “El est fort.” H. Tawil (“Azazel,” 57–59), after reviewing motifs of angry gods in Mesopotamia and referring to the attribution of *qšh* // *ʿzh* “fierce // overbearing” to *šʿwl* // *mwt* “Nether World // Death (personified)” in Cant 8:6, concludes that the name *ʿzz-ʾl* means “fierce god,” referring to the Canaanite nether world god Mot. He compares this to the biblical name *ʿzmwt* (Azmaveth) “Mot is fierce” (e.g., 2 Sam 23:31). The form *ʿzʿzl* arose from a deliberate alteration of the name “to conceal the true demonic nature of this supernatural being.” On the interpretive context for this textual change, see M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) 69–72 and n. 14 there.

²¹See the treatment of the Hittite and Mesopotamian parallels, below.

but to bring them to God at the sanctuary. Superficially this may be taken as evidence for a belief in actively functioning demons, but a second look raises questions about this assumption. The term *šēʿîrîm* is used in this verse in a pejorative sense, subtly criticizing and undermining the supposed efficacy of sacrifice to them.²² Consequently, we may doubt that the use of *šēʿîrîm* is a true expression of belief in active demons.

Depreciatory use of demonic terminology is found outside of the Priestly writings and thus gives indirect support to the foregoing skepticism about *šēʿîrîm* being real evidence of active demons in Priestly thought. The “Song of Moses” depicts Israelite faithlessness as sacrificing to “demons (*šēdîm*), no-gods—gods they did not know.” (Deut 32:17). Psalm 106 says that the Israelites, after having entered the land of Canaan, sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons (*šēdîm*; v 37). These examples appear to use demonic terminology in a disparaging manner. They do not show by it a belief in real active demons or lesser gods, but use it to characterize the sins of idolatry and its negative value.²³ These demons to whom Israel sacrificed must surely be thought of as nonvital, just as elsewhere idolatrous gods are considered to be nothing more than wood, stone, and metal.²⁴ It is possible that, like *šēdîm* in the foregoing passages, *šēʿîrîm* in Lev 17 should be understood as a term specially chosen to polemicize against potential Israelite idolatry. *Šēʿîrîm* would not indicate a vital object of devotion, but would be a term of devaluation and belittlement.

The disparaging way in which *šēʿîrîm* is used in Lev 17 and the general silence about demons in the Priestly literature lead to the surmise that there is little or no room for active demons in Priestly theology.

²²D. Hillers (“Demons, Demonology,” *EncJud* 5 [1971] 1523) notes the negative significance of *šēʿîrîm* in Lev 17:7 and 2 Chr 11:15. The word in the latter passage should probably be understood as concrete idolatrous objects rather than goat demons (see S. Loewenstamm, “*Šēdîm*,” *EM* [1976] 525).

²³A. Weiser (*The Psalms: A Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962] 678) translates *šēdîm* simply as “idols.” Note that the parallel terms *ʿāšabbêhem* (v 36) and *ʿāšabbê kēnāʿan* (v 38) give a context of idolatry.

²⁴Deut 4:28; 28:36, 64; 29:16; 2 Kgs 19:18; Isa 2:8, 20; 30:22; 37:19; 40:19–20; 44:9–20; 46:6–7; 48:5; Jer 10:1–15; 51:17–18; Ezek 20:32; Hos 8:6; 13:2; Hab 2:18–19; Ps 115:4–7; 135:15–17. On Israel’s view of foreign gods, see Kaufmann, *Religion*, 13–17 and *passim*.

Consequently, Azazel should be viewed as a demon, as the etymology of the name suggests, but perhaps as an inactive one with no real role to play in the rite except to indicate the place to which the sins are dispatched.

This view of Azazel is corroborated by the fact that the scapegoat is not an offering to him.²⁵ This is clear not only from the prohibition, just observed, in Lev 17 against offering to anyone but *Yhwh*,²⁶ but also from the fact that the goat is not sacrificed to Azazel; it is merely sent to him.²⁷ Furthermore, the animal is not decorated to make it an attractive offering to him, as are living appeasement offerings in other ancient Near Eastern cultures.²⁸ Nor is the goat a substitute sent to Azazel to suffer in the place of the Israelite community.²⁹ The goat only serves to transport the sins of Israel away from the habitation.³⁰

Finally, a hint about the impotence of Azazel in the rite may be found in the silence regarding his personality. Other than being the one to whom the goat is sent, we know nothing about him. He does not appear as an angry deity needing propitiation, nor does he appear as the custodian of evil sent to him.³¹ If Azazel was considered an active

²⁵Elliger, *Leviticus*, 212; Kümmel, "Ersatzkönig," 311; Brawer, "Sending," 33. Many commentators in the Middle Ages saw the goat as a gift to Azazel, the prince of demons. God allowed him to receive the goat for being his servant (cf. Ramban on Lev 16:8; Brawer, "Sending," 32).

²⁶Priestly prohibitions on idolatry include: Lev 17:3–9; 18:21; 19:4; 20:2–5; 26:1.

²⁷According to the Mishnah (*Yoma* 6:5–6), in Second Temple times the animal was put to death. This, however, was not to make it a sacrifice, but to prevent it from returning to the habitation. See the Hittite motif of prevention discussed in section 1.3.9, below.

²⁸See the Hittite and Mesopotamian rites, below. In the Second Temple rite, a piece of red wool was bound on the head of the scapegoat (*m. Yoma* 4:2; 6:6). This, however, was not for decorating the animal as in nonbiblical appeasement rites.

²⁹Cf. Hoffman (*Leviticus*, 1. 305): "the goat is a representation of the sinner," and S. H. Hooke ("Substitution," 8–9): "The 'primitive' features in the ritual may be defined as the selection of a goat to serve as the substitute for the corporate personality of Israel." See also C. Lattey, "Vicarious Solidarity in the Old Testament," *VT* 1 (1951) 272–74.

³⁰See Kaufmann, *Religion*, 114; Gaster, "Azazel," 326; Hoenig, "Pesher," 248–49.

³¹See the Hittite Ambazzi ritual, section 1.4.4, below, and the Shurpu ritual, section 1.5.4, below.

being, one would expect him to have been more fully described as in nonbiblical rites where similar beings appear (see below).

Because of the apparent devaluation of demons in the Priestly literature, the understanding that the scapegoat is not an offering to Azazel, and the relative silence about the function of Azazel, one can suppose that Azazel was not considered an active demonic being in the present form of the rite. He has been stripped of his personality. He represents little more than the place or goal of disposal.³² If this supposition is not completely acceptable because of its being based in part on silence, then the argument at least cautions us from going too far in the other direction and attributing to Azazel full demonic character.

1.1.4 Disposal in the Nether World?

Related to the question of whether Azazel is an active demon or not is the question of whether the dispatch of the goat and its burden of sins to the wilderness is to be viewed mythologically as the disposal of evils in the nether world. Tawil, a proponent of this view, supports it by reference to Mesopotamian texts where disposal is perceived as taking place in the nether world,³³ by reference to examples from apocryphal literature in which Azazel is placed in the underworld in the desert, and by connecting the name Azazel with the Canaanite god Mot whose domain is the nether world. Methodological caution against reading into the rite information from other cultures or from other later documents from the same culture urges us to take a careful look at the view that

³²T. Gaster ("Demon, Demonology," *IDB* 1 [1962] 818) notes that "demons often survive as figures of speech (e.g., 'gremlins') long after they have ceased to be figures of belief. Accordingly, the mention of a demon's name in a scriptural text is no automatic testimony to living belief in him." He discounts the idea that Azazel is considered a real demon in the rite (821; cf. "Azazel," 326). Cf. Brawer, "Sending," 33. For Kaufmann (*Religion*, 114–15), the rite of the scapegoat is evidence of an ancient pagan rite, transmuted to fit Israelite theology. The rite was originally to expel the demon Azazel into the wilderness. (I cannot accept this particular conclusion of Kaufmann on the basis of the nonbiblical rites; see section 1.6, below.) "But the Azazel of Lev 16 is not conceived of either as among the people or as the source of danger or harm; he plays no active role at all. . . . He is merely a passive symbol of impurity—sin returns to its like."

³³Hittite rituals show a similar conception, see section 9.4.2, below.

evils are symbolically disposed of in the nether world to see if it holds up within the context of biblical religion. To this end, I conducted a study of the terminology and passages in the Bible concerning impurity,³⁴ demons,³⁵ the nether world,³⁶ and the wilderness³⁷ in order to discover any interrelationships between the four topics. This study produced no conclusive evidence that the underworld and wilderness are to be connected in biblical thought,³⁸ nor did it show any connection between impurity and the nether world.

³⁴The root *ṭm*?

³⁵*Deber, lîlît, māwet, mašḥîṭ, qeṭeb, rešep, šāʿîr, šāṭān, šērāpîm, šēʾôl, šēdîm.* P. Arzi, "Lîlît," *EM* 4 (1962) 498–99 (Hebrew); H. Duhm, *Die bösen Geister im Alten Testament* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1904); Gaster, "Demons"; Hillers, "Demons"; S. Loewenstamm, "Qeṭeb, Qôṭeb," *EM* 7 (1976) 109–10 (Hebrew); "Šēdîm."

³⁶*ʿAddôn, ʿereš, bôr, dûmâ, ḥōšek, māwet, naḥâlê bêlîyaʿal, ʿāpār, šalmāwet, qeber, šēʾôl, šaḥat.* G. Beer, "Der biblische Hades," *Theologische Abhandlungen, Eine Festgabe zum 17. Mai 1902 für Heinrich Julius Holtzmann* (ed. W. Nowack, et al.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1902) 3–29; A. Bertholet, "Zu den babylonischen und israelitischen Unterweltsvorstellungen," *Oriental Studies Published in Commemoration of the 40th Anniversary (1883–1892) of Paul Haupt as the Director of the Oriental Seminary of the Johns Hopkins University* (ed. C. Alder and A. Ember; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1926) 9–18; T. Gaster, "Dead, Abode of the," *IDB* 1 (1962) 787–88; S. Loewenstamm, "Šēʾôl," *EM* 7 (1976) 454–57 (Hebrew); N. J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969).

³⁷*Hōreb, ḥorbâ, yešimôn, midbār, ʿarābâ, šēḥîḥâ, šîyyâ, šimāʾôn, šādê.* A. Haldar, *The Notion of the Desert in Sumero-Accadian and West-Semitic Religions* (UUA 3; Uppsala and Leipzig: A. B. Lundequistska and Otto Harrassowitz, 1950); J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture I–II* (London: Oxford University, 1926) 453–60.

³⁸Tawil ("Azazel," 54–55, n. 62) argues that *ʿereš maʾpēlēyâ* in Jer 2:31 is a designation of the nether world and that since *midbār* is parallel to it, *midbār* has a connection with the nether world. But an underworld interpretation of these words does not suit the context well and should be rejected. Tawil also argues that in Jer 2:6 *šûḥâ* ("pit") and *ʿereš šîyyâ wēšalmāwet* ("land of dryness and darkness") carry the idea of the nether world and that *midbār* which is parallel to these terms should thus have chthonic meaning. Again, the context does not support this view. The terms merely refer to the arid and undesirable desert the Israelites had to traverse before coming into the fruitful land of Canaan. Similarly, the

One might attempt to reach the conclusion that disposal in the wilderness is equal to disposal in the nether world indirectly by showing that demons inhabit both the wilderness and the underworld. But this is difficult. Certainly there is some evidence that demons are inhabitants of uninhabited places—the wilderness, ruins, and the like. Besides the case of Azazel, this idea appears in Isaiah’s description of the fauna dwelling among the ruins of Babylon and Edom:

Šiyyîm will lie down there,
And their houses will be filled with *ʾōḥîm*.
Ostriches will dwell there,
And *šēʿîrîm* will dance there.
ʾIyyîm will cry in its citadels,
And *tannîm*, in the palaces of pleasure.
(Isa 13:21–22a)

Qāʾat-bird and *qippôd* will possess it.
Owls and ravens will dwell in it.

.....
It will be a dwelling of *tannîm*,
An abode for ostriches.
Šiyyîm will meet *ʾiyyîm*,
And the *šāʿîr* will call to his companion
Even there the *lîlît* will rest,
And find for herself a resting place.
There the *qippôz*-snake will nest and lay eggs.

.....
Even there the *dayyôt*-birds will gather,
One with another.
(Isa 34:11a, 13b, 14–15)

Though the meanings of many of the terms for the ruin occupants here are not entirely clear, it is fairly certain that *šāʿîr* and *lîlît* are

passages given by Tromp for support of the connection of the wilderness with the nether world actually do not give the desired support upon close inspection (*Primitive Conceptions*, 131–33; besides Jer 2:6, 31, he refers to Deut 8:15; Ps 63:2; 107:40; 143:6; Job 6:18; 12:24–25). Indeed, Tromp finally admits that “the desert is never clearly and explicitly identified with the abode of the dead in the Old Testament” (p. 133). Haldar (*Notion*) also argues that the wilderness and nether world are connected but is, in my opinion, likewise unsuccessful.

demonic figures.³⁹ A further indication that demons inhabit uninhabited open areas might be in the warning to the Israelites not to offer sacrifices “in the open field” (*‘al pēnē haššādē*, Lev 17:5) which is considered sacrificing to *šē‘îrîm* “goat-demons” (v 7). But we must remember that doubts were raised (above) whether *šē‘îrîm* in this passage offers clear testimony as to how the Old Testament views demons.

But if the evidence is sufficient to show that demons live in the wilderness, it is, in my opinion, insufficient to show that they inhabit the underworld. In a difficult passage from Hosea,⁴⁰ God speaks to the underworld personified: “Where, Death, are your *deber*-plagues? Where,

³⁹The interpretation of the terms referring to animals or demons in these passages is disputed. Some understand some of the names, besides *šā‘îr* and *lîlît*, to be demonic (e.g., KB² [35, 801] takes *‘îyyîm* and *šîyyîm* as demons [KB³, 37, 956, leaves the interpretation open]; O. Kaiser [OTL; *Isaiah 13–39: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 8, 352] takes *šîyyîm* as demons). Others understand *šā‘îr* and *lîlît*, as well as the other terms, as animals (N. H. Snaith [“The Meaning of *Šē‘îrîm*,” VT 25 (1975) 115–16] takes *šā‘îr* here as nondemonic; NEB has “he-goat” and “nightjar” for the two terms respectively; see also Gaster, “Demon,” 818b). The attestations of these terms are few with uninforming contexts thus making interpretation difficult. Support for the view that these terms refer to animals is found in other passages about ruin dwellers in which only animals appear (Jer 50:39; Zeph 2:14; Mal 1:3). But later tradition envisages the wilderness and ruins as the haunt of demons (cf. Bar 4:35; Tob 8:3; Matt 12:43; Luke 11:24; Rev 18:2) suggesting that this tradition may already be found in the Old Testament. See Arzi, “*Lîlît*”; H. Duhm, *Die bösen Geister*, 46–48. My reasons for viewing at least *lîlît* and *šā‘îr* as demonic are the following: (a) A demon called *lîlû/lîlîtu*, cognate with Hebrew *lîlît*, is found in Mesopotamian literature (see CAD L, 190). In later Jewish literature *lîlît* appears as a major demonic figure (see T. Gaster, *The Holy and the Profane: Evolution of Jewish Folkways* [New York: W. Sloane Associates, 1955] 18–28; “Demon,” 819; R. Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* [New York: Ktav, 1967; reprint, New York: Avon, 1978] 180–225). The extent through time and cultures of these attestations indicates that *lîlît* in Isaiah is demonic. (b) Because *lîlît* is demonic in Isa 34:4 and because *šā‘îr* is demonic (though used pejoratively) in Lev 17:7, *šā‘îr* in Isa 13 and 34 is probably to be understood as a demon.

⁴⁰See F. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980) 639–40, for a summary of the problems of this verse. I follow their interpretation of the syntax.

Sheol, is your *qōṭeb*-plague?" (13:14b). It is hardly clear that *deber* and *qōṭeb* are to be considered anything more than just plagues; they are not necessarily demons. This may be just a figure of speech. To be judged similarly is Jer 9:20 in which death is personified as a demon who climbs through windows and into fortresses, cutting off "infants from the streets and young men from the squares." This again is just a literary image and not a clear indication of the belief that death was a nether world demon.⁴¹

In summary, the Bible does not give decisive evidence of the connection of the wilderness and the nether world, of the connection of impurity with the nether world, nor of the connection of demons with the nether world. It only gives evidence of the connection of demons with the wilderness. Hence, to say that the biblical scapegoat rite is a disposal of evils in the nether world is going beyond the expressed thought of Israelite religion and must be rejected.

Why then is the goat sent out into the wilderness? Simply to remove it from the populated areas so that as a bearer of contagious impurity it can do no harm.⁴² The meaning of *midbār* "wilderness" shows this to be the case. The *midbār* is arid land,⁴³ endowed with little vegetation except grass for pasturage.⁴⁴ Various wild animals—owls, jackals, ostriches, serpents, foxes—live in it and related places.⁴⁵ Most important, though, is the fact that the *midbār* is not inhabited by humans. Jeremiah calls it an "infertile land [literally, salty land] without inhabitant" (17:6), and Job characterizes it as a place "in which there is no man" (38:26).⁴⁶ Thus when the scapegoat is sent to the wilderness,

⁴¹Cf. S. M. Paul, "Cuneiform Light on Jer 9, 20," *Bib* 49 (1968) 373–76. The ghosts of the dead inhabit the nether world, but in Israelite religion they are not troublesome to humans nor are they the cause of evils. Hence, they do not prove to be an example of demons inhabiting the nether world (contra Beer, "Der biblische Hades," 16–20).

⁴²The danger the impure scapegoat poses is reflected in the impurity contracted by the one who dispatches it (Lev 16:26). On the impurity of the scapegoat, see chap. 8, section 8.3.2.1, q.

⁴³E.g., Gen 21:14–16; Exod 15:22; Num 21:5; 2 Sam 17:29; Isa 35:1, 6; 41:18; 43:19; Jer 12:10; Hosea 2:5; Ps 107:4, 33, 35.

⁴⁴See Joel 2:22. Cf. also Jer 9:9; 23:10; Joel 1:19; Ps 65:13; 78:52; Job 24:5; 1 Chr 5:9.

⁴⁵Deut 8:15; Isa 13:21–22; 34:11–15; 35:7; 43:19–20; Jer 2:24; 50:39; Ezek 13:4; Zeph 2:12–14; Mal 1:3; Ps 102:7; Job 24:5; 39:5–6; Lam 4:3.

⁴⁶Cf. also Jer 22:6; 51:43.

it is sent to a place where the impurity cannot threaten human populations.

Further evidence that dispatch to the wilderness is only to remove the impure animal from human habitation is found in the term *ʿereṣ gēzērâ* (16:22). Tawil has suggested that *ʿereṣ gēzērâ* is “used . . . in Lev 16 as a symbolic designation of the nether world.”⁴⁷ He bases this conclusion on a supposed underworld significance for some of the instances of the verb *gZR* and on a similar phrase from Akkadian, *ašru parsu* “a cut off (i.e., secluded/forbidden) place,” which, he argues, can be a designation for the underworld. I cannot agree with his conclusions about *ʿereṣ gēzērâ*. Granted that the verb *gZR* in some instances means to die or be doomed,⁴⁸ this is only a secondary semantic development from an original meaning “cut.”⁴⁹ None of the examples of the root appear to carry any chthonic overtones by themselves. Consequently, it is better to interpret *ereṣ gēzērâ* as “land of seclusion/separateness,” which emphasizes the distancing of the goat and sins from the human habitation.⁵⁰

1.1.5 Summary

To summarize this section, the purpose of the biblical scapegoat rite is to rid the community of the sins which are the cause of impurity in the sanctuary. The sins are placed on the goat and then sent to the wilderness in order to remove them from the people and from the sanctuary. The goat does not appear to be a propitiatory offering to Azazel, but only serves as a vehicle for transporting the sins. Azazel, to whom the goat is sent, is apparently not an active personality. He is simply a ritual “place holder,” denoting the goal of impurity.

⁴⁷Tawil, “Azazel,” 56.

⁴⁸Clearly Ezek 37:11 and Lam 3:54. In Isa 53:8 and Ps 88:6, *nigzar min* means simply “to be cut off from” without any inherent chthonic significance.

⁴⁹“Cut in two” (with direct object): 1 Kgs 3:25, 26; 2 Kgs 6:4; Ps 136:13; “cut off, separate” (with preposition *min*): Hab 3:17; 2 Chr 26:21. Isa 53:8 and Ps 88:6 are examples of this latter usage in the context of death. The verb has further development in the meaning “to decree” (Job 22:28; Esther 2:1) and “to cut off to eat” (Isa 9:19). The original meaning “to cut” is found in the nouns *gēzārîm* “pieces” (Gen 15:17; Ps 136:13) and *magzērâ* “axe” (2 Sam 12:31). For a discussion, see M. Görg, “Gzr,” *TWAT* 2 (1973) 1001–4 (= *TDOT* 2 [1975] 459–61).

⁵⁰Brawer, “Sending,” 33.

