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ARON PINKER, A GOAT TO GO TO AZAZEL

A GOAT TO GO TO AZAZEL

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1. INTRODUCING THE QUESTION

The ritual of the scapegoat is described in Lev 16:5–26. Each step of the ritual is clear, yet it remains enigmatic to this day.¹ Ehrlich succinctly summarized the situation saying, “Azazel—No one knows who he is or what he is. What previous scholarship said about him has no substance and cannot be relied upon.”² This is also true at the present time, almost a century later.

Scholars focused their attention mostly on understanding the term Azazel (עֲזָזֵל), which occurs only in Lev 16:8, 10 (2t), and 26, and on the occurrence of similar rituals in other ancient Near-East cultures to reveal its origins and purpose. Yet, the ritual poses a number of perplexing problems in addition to the studied issues. How is the עֲזָזֵל ritual related to atonement? Why were just two he-goats prescribed as atonement for the entire congregation of Israel rather than a bull (Lev 4:13–15)? Why were lots cast to select the scapegoat? What was the status of all the iniquities and transgressions of the Israelites that were symbolically placed on the scapegoat’s head? Were these sins forgiven, or in suspension? Why was the sacrifice of a single he-goat as a sin offering insufficient? Was each of the he-goats supposed to take care of the same kind of iniquities and transgressions? Why only on the Day of Atonement sacrifice is this ritual of a scapegoat enacted? Why was the ritual changed in the time of the Second Temple (m. Yoma 6:4–6)?

Albright collected material on the scapegoat ritual for years, but except for some remarks on this topic never published anything comprehensive.³

¹ The term “scapegoat” was coined by the translators of the King James Bible because they did not know how to translate the Hebrew term Azazel. The translators understood the ל in לְעֲזָזֵל (Lev 16:10) in the sense “as a” rather than “to.”

² Ehrlich, A. B. *Mikra Ki-Peshuto*. New York: Ktav (1969) 227.

³ Albright, W. F. “The High Place in Ancient Palestine.” VTSup 4 (1956) 245–6, note 1.

Certainly, the complexity of the issues associated with the scapegoat ritual is rather daunting. In this paper I will try to discuss the scapegoat ritual within the framework of competing notions of God's abode on earth. I hope to show that within this framework many of the questions posed find a natural explanation.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 MEANING OF AZAZEL (עזאזל)

2.1.1 INTRODUCTION

Already the Versions struggled with the term עזאזל, trying to harmonize between the practice of the ritual at the time of the second Temple and the meaning of the name. The Septuagint translates עזאזל τῷ ἀποπομπαίῳ (“for the one carrying away the evil”) in Lev 16:8, τοῦ ἀποπομπαίου and τὴν ἀποπομπήν in Lev 16:10, using a newly coined word. Such a sense would fit the context and usage.⁴ In Lev 16:26 it has for עזאזל τὸν διεσταλμένον εἰς ἄφεσιν (“that has been set apart to be let go”). This appears to be an attempt at explaining what the term means. Thus, עזאזל only describes a function, which is “set apart to let go.”

In MT עזאזל occurs twice in Lev 16:10. However, the Samaritan Bible has in Lev 16:10 once עזאזל instead of עזאזל, though it agrees with MT in all the other cases. This might be a scribal error, or a case that escaped a later editor's deliberate change of עזאזל into עזאזל. The Peshitta has in Lev 16 עזאזל (Azazael),⁵ Targum Onqelos עזאזל, and the Temple Scroll (11 QTemple 26:13) and other texts (4Q180 1 7–8 [2 times])⁶ at Qumran con-

⁴ Wevers, J. W. *Notes on the Greek Text of Leviticus*. SCS 41 Atlanta: Scholars Press (1997) 244.

⁵ Zipor, M. A. *The Peshitta Version of Leviticus*. Jerusalem: Simor (2003) 135–139.

⁶ Allegro, J. M. “Some Unpublished Fragments of Pseudepigraphical Literature from Qumran's Fourth Cave.” *The Annual of Leeds University Oriental Society* IV. Leiden (1964). These fragments from Qumran's Fourth Cave have been collated in two documents. Document I line 7 contains the following: פשר על עזאזל והמלאכים אשר [ל]דו להם גברים. Allegro felt that these fragments are “of the wealth of the pseudepigraphical literature that must have been circulating within Judaism at the turn of the era.” Hoenig disputes Allegro's assertion. In his view “these new documents belong to the period of early medieval Midrash, and Karaitic teachings, and are not to be included into the literature of the Second Commonwealth” (Hoenig, S. B. “The New Qumran Peshier on Azazel.” *JQR* 56 [1966] 253).

tain the form עזואל.⁷ Symmachus and Aquila in Lev 16:10 use τράγος for עזואל, i.e., a designation associated with going or sending. In Lev 16:8 Aquila uses for עזואל a term that means “strong.” Zipor felt that Symmachus and Aquila had in mind the following, אול + עז.⁸ The Vulgate’s caper emissarius considers עזואל a description of the goat, as the Septuagint does. As in the MT, עזואל or עזואל seem to be names of some entity. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan in its translation for Lev 16:10 supplies an explanation for the second עזואל, עזואל = אתר תקיף וקשה (a hard and difficult place); i.e., the word characterizes the place to which the goat was taken. It is interesting to note that Tg.-Ps.-J. Gen 6:4 explains שמחזאי ועזאל הינון נפלן מן שמיא, again using the form עזואל.

Scholars believed that if the meaning of Azazel could be deciphered all would fall in place. However, to this day the meaning of Azazel eludes categorical definition. The approaches that have been adopted for interpreting the term Azazel essentially fell into four types: *name of a supernatural entity*, *name or description of a place*, *abstract noun*, *description of the dispatched goat*, and, *miscellaneous opinions*.

2.1.2 NAME OF A SUPERNATURAL ENTITY

This approach capitalizes on the parallelism עזואל || יהוה in Lev 16:8 and the fact that the scapegoat was sent out into the wilderness, which was considered to be one of the abodes of supernatural entities (Hab 3:3, Isa 13:21, 34:11–15).⁹

In m. Yoma 6:1 Azazel is understood as a being, as clearly shown by תאם של עזואל מת “and if that of Azazel died.” This is also the dominant opinion in the Midrashic literature from the early post Biblical period to the very late Midrashim.¹⁰ In 1Enoch, Azazel is the tenth in the list of fallen

⁷ Grabbe, L. L. “The Scapegoat: A Study in Early Jewish Interpretation.” *JSJ* 18 (1987) 156.

⁸ Zipor, 135. Though אול is Aramaic it occurs in Prov 20:14 and Job 14:11.

⁹ Kluger, R. S. *Satan in the Old Testament*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press (1967) 44. The author notes that “the wilderness was already in the Babylonian conception the abiding-place of demons. This is shown by the following incantation against the evil Alu:

Evil Alu, go to the desert place!

Your dwelling is a destroyed ruin.

¹⁰ Ginzberg, L. *The Legends of the Jews*. (1945) vol I, 25, 126, 148–151; vol III, 472; vol V 123, 170–171, 230, 311; vol. VI 124, 291.

angels and is the source of all evil and corruption.¹¹ Azazel appears as a full-fledged demonic being in 1Enoch 8:1–2, 9:6, 10:4–8 and 13:1.¹² In a later Midrash one finds, “the lot of the Lord is a burnt offering, and the lot of Azazel is a goat as a sin offering” (*Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* 46).¹³ The Midrash tells that “Aza’el did not repent and still remains in his perverted state, corrupting the people by means of the multi-colored dress (attire) of women” (*Yalkut Shimoni* on Genesis 44).¹⁴ References to Azazel as an entity can be found in Sifra (on *Abare Mot* 2:8), Tob 8:3, and Matt 12:43. In later literature Azazel is identified as Samael or Satan. Azazel as Satan tempts the people of the world into sinning and for this reason the scapegoat was sacrificed to him on the Day of Atonement.¹⁵

It is possible that some of the Israelites portrayed in Deut 32:16–17 thought that rendering worship to minor semi-divine spirits was quite compatible with their faith and loyalty to the God of their ancestors. Perhaps, similar reasoning can be detected in the opinions of the medieval Jewish exegetes Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides. Ibn Ezra gives essentially two explanations for עֲזָאזֵל.¹⁶ His mystical (סוד) explanation alludes to the demonic

¹¹ Charles, R. H. *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha II*. (1964) 193–196, 220, 235. In Enoch I Azel or Azzel (the forms change) is one of the angels that lust the daughters of man (Gen 6:1–4) and taught man to make weapons and adornments (8:1–2). It is clear from what follows and its connection with the M. Yoma 6:4 that the reference is to the biblical Azazel.

¹² Grabbe, 153. The relevant verses in 1Enoch tell: “And to Raphael he said, ‘Bind Asael hand and foot and throw him into darkness. Make an opening in the wilderness, which is in Dadouel, and throw him into it. Place rough, sharp stones under him and cover the darkness over him. Let him reside there forever; cover his countenance and let no light shine. In the day of great judgment he will be led away to conflagration. And the earth, which the angels ruined will be healed. ... All the earth was made barren, ruined through the works of the teaching; of Azael, so write on him all sins.’”

¹³ The text makes it clear that the reference is to the Azazel in the Scriptures, “Yet Azazel persisted obdurately in his sin of leading mankind astray... For this reason two he-goats were sacrificed on the day of Atonement, the one for the Lord, that He pardoned the sins of Israel, the other for Azazel, that he bear the sins of Israel and this is Azazel of the Torah.” Note that it is assumed here that the scapegoat is a sacrifice to Azazel (Samael) intended to bribe him, so that he would mute his accusations.

¹⁴ Jellinek, A. *Beth ha-Midrash*, IV. Wien: Schlossberg (1865) 127.

¹⁵ Shiloni, Y. (Ed.). *Yalkut Shimoni* I. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook (1973) 155. It is not clear from the text whether the scapegoat was considered a sacrifice.

¹⁶ Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Lev 16:8 reads: “Rabbi Shmuel [R. Shmuel Ben

nature of Azazel and his simple (פשט) explanation considers עזאזל a name of a place. Nachmanides note that Ibn Ezra did not have to obscure his mystical explanation because it has been revealed in many places.¹⁷ He also believed that Azazel was one of the demons or one of God's angels (servants).¹⁸

Standard English translations in general consider עזאזל an entity. KJV uses for עזאזל its coined term 'scapegoat' in Lev 16:8 and 26 (for the scapegoat) understanding it as an entity. NASB also uses "for the scapegoat" in Lev 16:8 and first עזאזל in Lev 16:10. HNV has "for the scapegoat" for each occurrence of עזאזל. JB notes that Azazel is a demon of the desert and uses Azazel in the translation. NJPS leaves עזאזל untranslated, a name of some entity.

Hofni c. 997–1013] said, 'Although it is (only) with reference to the goat of the sin-offering that it is written (explicitly) that it was for the Lord, the scapegoat was also for the Lord.' But there is no need for this (comment). For the goat which was sent away was not an offering since it was not slaughtered. Now if you can understand the secret of the word after Azazel, you will know its secret and the secret of its name, since it has parallels in the Scriptures. And I will reveal to you part of the secret by hint: when you will be thirty-three, you will know it." The clue, to count 33 verses from this verse, brings us to Lev 17:7 "they may offer their sacrifices no more to the goat-demons." Ibn Ezra clearly considered Azazel a demon. However, it seems that in a different version of his commentary Ibn Ezra considered Azazel to be a heavenly constellation, according to Abarbanel (cf. Abarbanel's seventh question in his commentary on the Torah, where he says:

(ובין שיהיה עזאזל כנוי למערכות השמים כדברי הרב"ע).

¹⁷ In Nachmanides' commentary on Lev 16:8 one reads: "Now the Torah has absolutely forbidden to accept them (angels) as deities, or to worship them in any manner. However, the Holy One, blessed be He, commands us that on the Day of Atonement we should let loose a goat in the wilderness, to that 'prince,' which rules over wastelands, and this (goat) is fitting for it because he is its master, and destruction and waste emanate from his power, which in turn is the cause of the stars of the sword, wars quarrels, wounds, plagues, division and destruction... Also in his portion are the devils called 'destroyers' in the language of our Rabbis, and in the language of our Scriptures 'satyrs (demons)'." In Nachmanides' view Azazel is the angel Samael or Satan, one of God's servants, to whom God commands to give a portion of God's own sacrifice. Samael gets a bribe (שחד) that he might not annul the effect of Israel's offerings.

¹⁸ Yonge, C. C. (Ed.). *The Works of Philo*. Hendrickson (1995) 152. Philo says, "Those beings, whom other philosophers call demons, Moses usually calls angels; and they are souls hovering in the air."

Most modern scholars believe that Azazel is a supernatural entity¹⁹ of ancient origin connected to demons, believed to live in the desert, and the ritual is an adaptation of purification rites of the ancient Near-East.²⁰ Duhm felt that Azazel is the leader of the **שעירים**,²¹ a desert-goblin. Cheyne considered Azazel the leader of the fallen angels to which Enoch refers. The name of this angel has been deliberately changed from **עזזאל** “out of reverence, to conceal the true derivation of the fallen angel’s name.”²² Albright noted the parallels between the scapegoat and the Greek Pan and the satyrs as well as a number of Southwest-Asiatic goat deities. He felt that it is impossible to separate the **שעירים** from the scapegoat. It seemed reasonable to Albright “to suppose that popular fancy identified the scapegoat with the class of goat demons, giving rise to objectionable ideas which later ritual eliminated by the expedient of killing the goat.”²³ De Vaux also thought that Azazel is a supernatural being associated with demons.²⁴

It should be noted that there is a significant difference between **שעירים** and **שעירי עזים**.²⁵ Felix identifies **שעיר** as the “scops owl” (*Otus scops*), a small bird of prey.²⁶ Its inclined posture, the two horn-shaped crests of hair-like feathers on its head, hopping, dance-like gait, recall the long-hair goat (**שעיר עזים**). This might have led to some semantic confusion between the two. In Isa 13:21, which has been often quoted in support of a demonic Azazel, it seems contextually more natural to understand, **ושעירים ירקדו שם**

¹⁹ Smith, W. R. *Lectures on the religion of the Semites*, II. Edinburgh: A. and C. Black (1889) 418, 422, and 468.

²⁰ Zatelli, I. “The origin of the Biblical scapegoat ritual: the evidence of two Eblaite texts.” *VT* 48 (1998) 254–63.

²¹ Duhm, B. *Das Buch Jesaja*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht (1968). See Isa 13:21.

²² Cheyne, T. K. “The Date and Origin of the Ritual of the ‘Scapegoat’.” *ZAW* 15 (1895) 155.

²³ Albright, W. F. “The High Place in Ancient Palestine.” *VTSup* 4 (1956) 245–6, note 1.

²⁴ De Vaux, R. *Le sacrifice dans l’Ancien Testament*. (1964) 88–91.

²⁵ Albright, W. F. “The High Place in Ancient Palestine.” *VTSup* 4 (1956) 245–6. Albright says, “The **שעירים** were naturally rustic divinities, originally goat demons, and evidently included a heterogeneous lot of old pagan divinities, which were still worshipped, or at least venerated, in rustic areas, farthest removed from the influence of militant Yahwism.” He adds, “It seems reasonable to suppose that popular fancy identified the scapegoat with the class of goat demons, giving rise to objectionable ideas which later ritual eliminated by the expedient of killing the goat.”

²⁶ Felix, J. *The Animal World of the Bible*. Tel Aviv: Sinai (1962) 80

“and the Scops Owl shall dance there.” Similarly, **ושעיר על רעהו יקרא** in Isa 34:14 is “and the Scops Owl shall cry to his fellow.” Perhaps this verse alludes to the male’s hooting during the hatching period, which sounds like a moan. The Scops Owl apparently symbolized some devil and was worshipped. However, the association of the **שעיר עזים** with demons, via the **שעיר**, is not warranted.²⁷

In Tawil’s opinion the term **עזאזל** consists of **עז** and **אל** having the meaning “a fierce god.” He thinks “the spelling of this word as employed in the MT seems to be a scribal metathesis deliberately altered to conceal the true demonic nature of this supernatural being.”²⁸ There is some support for this position in the Samaritan Bible and the Peshitta. Tawil proposes to identify **עזאזל** with Mot, the Canaanite god of the underworld.²⁹ Zadok was able to show that the Neoassyrian Ab-di-a-zu-zi and Phoenician ‘bd ‘azz are theophoric personal names in which **עז** is a divinity, as **עזאזל** <== **עזאל** = **אל** + **עז** (“Els strength” or “God’s power”).³⁰ Some base the name **עזאזל** on a posited Egyptian **d3dr/l** (“the expelled culprit”), associating the Israelite ritual with elements of the Egyptian religion pertaining to demons (in some respects resembling Seth).³¹

Tawil’s position has been adopted by Zatelli. She says, “Perhaps the spelling **עזאל** in Qumran texts is acceptable for **עזאזל**; it has been changed

²⁷ Milgrom, J. *Leviticus 1–16*. AB 3. New York: Doubleday (1991) 1020. The references that Milgrom provides for the notion that the desert is the habitation of demons are, except for Isa 13:21 and 34:14, all post-biblical.

²⁸ Tawil, H. “Azazel the Prince of the Steepe [sic]: A Comparative Study.” *ZAW* 92 (1980) 58.

²⁹ Tawil, H. “Azazel the Prince of the Steepe [sic]: A Comparative Study.” *ZAW* 92 (1980) 58. Tawil makes the assumption that **עז+עזמות=מות**=Mot+(is fierce) and that **עזאל=אל+עז**=Demon+(is fierce) obtaining Demon=Mot. Certainly in the HB **מות** could mean the “angel of death.” However, it is questionable whether this is the meaning in **עזמות**. Further, while Tawil gives an extensive presentation of Babylonian beliefs in demons, their raging and ferocity, abode in wasteland and netherworld, and source of sickness and misery, he fails to establish any plausible links between these many beings and the **עזאזל** of the HB. Finally, the switch from Babylonian to Canaanite mythology, as if they were just one and the same, is not justified.

³⁰ Zadok, R. “Phoenicians, Philistines and Moabites in Mesopotamia.” *BASOR* 230 (1978) 57–58.

³¹ Görg, M. “Beobachtungen zum sogenannten Azazel-Ritus” *BN* 33 (1986) 10–16.

into the more neutral עזאזל in the textus receptus. Probably it was originally a kind of Canaanite demon—which developed in the Hebrew tradition—connected with the chthonian power expressed by goats. The wilderness is a symbol of the underworld.”³²

2.2.3 NAME OR DESCRIPTION OF A PLACE

This approach capitalizes on the correspondence in Lev 16:22 between עזאזל, עזירה, ארץ גזירה, and במדבר. Tg. Ps.-J. Lev 16:10, which reads as follows עזאזל באתר תקיף וקשי דבמדברא דצוק דהוא בית הדורי translates עזאזל as “in a rough and hard place in the desert at a cliff that is in Beit Hadure” drawing on *b. Yoma* 67b and *m. Yoma* 6:8. The discussion in *b. Yoma* is summarized in Sifra (on *Abare Mot* 2:8):

לעזאזל למקום הקשה בהרים. יכול ביישוב תלמוד לומר המדברה. ומנין שיהיה בצוק
תלמוד לומר אל ארץ גזירה

The text there explains that עזאזל is a hard to access mountain precipice exploiting the biblical details, namely המדברה (thus not in an urban place) and אל גזירה ארץ (thus to a precipice).

Sa’adiah has rendered עזאזל “to the Mount עזאז,” as in אל כהררי Ps 36:7 or יקתאל in 2Kgs 14:7, consisting of a descriptor and אל for exaggeration. Ibn Ezra’s simple (פשט) explanation for עזאזל seems to be “name of a mountain near Mount Sinai,” to which the goat was chased and then pushed off. Thus, the ritual during the Second Commonwealth was no different from in the desert. Kimchi explains that Azazel is the name of the mountain to which the goat was led (עז + אזול), and because the goat was led there the mountain acquired this name. Rashi, following the description in *b. Yoma* 67b, takes Azazel as a “precipitous place” or “rugged cliff,” reading עזאזל for עזאזל. Rashbam understands that the scapegoat was sent to the desert where goats pasture (Ex 3:1), as in the case of the birds of a leper (Lev 14:7) [Also cleansing a house suspect of being infected Lev 14:53]. The term עזאזל is then another word for “desert.” Note, however, that “desert” here carries a positive meaning, it is a grazing place sustaining life, and not the forsaken “out-place.” R. Behai says that the simple meaning of עזאזל is “hard.”

Driver, who adopts Sa’adiah’s interpretation, considers the ל as formative, similar to its use in כרמל (from כרם) and ערפל (from ערף). He finds similarities between עזאז (or עזו) and the Arabic ‘azâzu(n) “rough ground” or ‘azâzilu “jagged cliff/precipice.”³³

³² Zatelli, 262–263.

³³ Driver, G. R. “Three Technical Terms in the Pentateuch.” *JSS* 1 (1956) 97–

Milgrom felt that “in pre-Israelite practice he [אָזַזִל] surely was a true demon, perhaps a satyr (cf. Ibn Ezra on Lev 16:8), who ruled in the wilderness—in the Priestly ritual he is no longer a personality but just a name, designating the place to which impurities and sins are banished.”³⁴ Milgrom devotes a whole section to “Azazel and Elimination Rites in the Ancient Near East,” yet none of the Hittite and Mesopotamian rites that he mentions are associated with an entity called Azazel (or similar name). Demonolatry was universal and deeply rooted in ancient religions. Some Israelites apparently worshipped various ‘spirits’ and the Hebrew Bible warns against these practices (Ex 20:4–5, 22:19, Deut 5:7–8). “However, within the world of Pentateuchal traditions, demonolatry was construed as a practice that the Israelites have acquired only in Goshen or the desert, and could not have too deep roots (Deut 32:17). Moreover, there is no evidence in the Hebrew Bible or Ancient Near East literature for a demonic entity called אָזַזִל that would warrant Milgrom’s confidence.

2.2.4 ABSTRACT NOUN

Roskoff considered Azazel as the personification of impurity. He says, “Azazel is not a power to whom a sacrifice would be offered in atonement, and the dualism which suggests itself through him is only shadowy. He is merely the qualification of abstract impurity as against the absolute purity of YHWH; he is only a shadow image without reality against the solely real power of YHWH.”³⁵ BDB understand אָזַזִל as an abstract noun such as “destruction” or “entire removal.”³⁶ Gesenius says “I have no doubt that it should be rendered averter ἀλεξίκακος (אָזַזִל for אָזַזִל, from the root אָזַז, to remove, to separate).”³⁷ Hertz accepts Gesenius’ view and translates אָזַזִל as “dismissal.”³⁸

Janowski and Wilhelm found similarities between the אָזַזִל ritual and South Anatolian North Syrian ancient practices, in which donkeys and birds were used as substitutes for humans to appease an angry deity. They con-

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³⁴ Milgrom, 1021.

³⁵ Roskoff, G. *Geschichte des Teufels*, 2 vols. Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus (1869) 186.

³⁶ Brown, F., Driver, S. R. and Briggs, C. A. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (1955) 736.

³⁷ Gesenius, H. W. F. *Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scripture* (Trans. Tregelles, S.). Grand Rapids: Baker Books (1996) 617.

³⁸ Hertz, J. H. (Ed.). *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*. London: Soncino Press (1977) 481.

sider עזאזל a metathesized form of the original עזאל = “divine anger.”³⁹ Concerning עז Janowski and Wilhelm (158) say: “Im Westsemitischen, so im Ugaritischen und Hebräischen, bezeichnet die Wurzel ebenfalls oft eine göttliche Qualität, die aber nicht in der Weise des Akkadischen negativ Festgelegt ist, sondern auf die Macht und Starke abhebt, die sich freilich auch hart und zornig veräußern kann.” Yet, Janowski and Wilhelm do not give any evidence in support of the idea that עז or עזו can express God’s powerful wrath.

De Roo tries to rectify this omission reintroducing a similar notion. He quotes Ezra 8:22, Ps 66:3, 90:11, and Isa 42:25 in support of his contention that “a plausible rendering for the word עזו is ‘furious power’ or ‘powerful wrath.’” Unfortunately his effort is of no consequence, since the quoted cases do not support his thesis. In Ezra 8:22 ועזו ואפו clearly indicates that “strength” and “anger” are two separate qualities; in Ps 66:3 עזו does not warrant his translation “your furious power” as evidenced by standard English translations, which uniformly render עזו “your power/strength” (cf. KJV, NKJV, NLT, NIV, ESV, NASB, RSV, ASV, Young, Darby, Webster, HNV, JB, NJPS); in Ps 90:11 עז אפך is “power/strength of your anger” not “furious power of your anger”; and, in Isa 42:25 עזו does not parallel אפו, rather חמה אפו, the latter and מלחמה ועזו are two construct forms in a list. No wonder Janowski and Wilhelm did not quote any biblical sources. De Roo says, “The first goat is for YHWH: it will be offered to him as a sacrifice. The second goat is ‘for the powerful wrath of God’, that is ‘for placating God’s anger.’”⁴⁰ This notion, of one goat sacrificed to the deity and the other goat to its mood, appears artificial for it introduces a separation where one is naturally not expected.

Kluger says, “Azazel, originally probably an ancient demonic deity, is now nothing more than a concept, still extant as such, but largely hollowed out. He is no more than a symbol of the desert.”⁴¹ Recently, Dietrich and Loretz argued that עזאזל originally meant “for the removal of God’s an-

³⁹ Janowski, B. and Wilhelm, G. “Der Bock, der die Sünden hinausträgt. Zur Religionsgeschichte des Azazel-Ritus Lev 16,10.21f.” In *Religionsgeschichtliche Beziehungen zwischen Kleinasien, Nordsyrien und dem Alten Testament*. Internationale Simposion, Hamburg 17–20 März 1990 (eds. Janowski, B., Klaus, K. and Wilhelm, G.). Freiburg-Göttingen: OBO 129 (1993) 106–169.

⁴⁰ De Roo, J. C. R. “Was the Goat for Azazel Destined for the Wrath of God?” *Bib* 81 (2000) 236–237, 238.

⁴¹ Kluger, R. S. *Satan of the Old Testament*. Evanstone: Northwestern University Press (1967) 47.

ger.”⁴² In their view, the concept, stemming from a Canaanite tradition of ritual, was mistakenly linked by the Israelites with the desert associated demons.

2.2.5 DESCRIPTION OF THE DISPATCHED GOAT

Many consider Azazel to be a combination of עז+אזל “the goat that goes,” which would be a description of the goat. The Septuagint and the Vulgate seem to support this position. R. Behai (13th–14th century) considers both goats presents to God, one being slaughtered and the other sent free to the desert as in the ritual for a person cleared of leprosy, where one of the birds is set free (Lev 14:2–9). Thus, the scapegoat has been designated לעזאזל because it was sent into the desert.⁴³

KJV uses its coined term ‘(e)scapegoat’ as a description of the dispatched goat in Lev 16:10 (to be the scapegoat, for a scapegoat). NKJV seems to consider ‘scapegoat’ everywhere a description, using it in the phrases for the scapegoat (serve as a scapegoat?), to be the scapegoat, as the scapegoat. NLT and NIV understand azazel = ‘scapegoat’ as “the goat of removal.” NASB uses “for the scapegoat” for the first עזאזל and “as the scapegoat” for the second עזאזל in Lev 16:10 and in Lev 16:26. Young renders עזאזל “a goat of departure.”

2.2.6 MISCELLANEOUS NOTIONS

1. R. Isaac says, “ונשא עליו השעיר” (Lev 16:22) this is Esau as it is written הן עשו אחי איש שער (Gen 27:11); את כל עונותם (Lev 16:22) = עונותם = תם + עונות as it is written ויעקב איש תם (Gen. Rab. 65:10). The rite on the Day of Atonement symbolizes the transfer of Israel’s sins to its sworn enemies the Edomites, descendants of Esau.
2. The scapegoat is called עזאזל because it brings atonement for the deeds of עזא and עזאל (*b. Yoma* 67b), symbolically sins of incest.⁴⁴ In this explanation עזאזל = עזאל + עזא. Rashi explains “Uzza and Azael are demonic angels who came down

⁴² Dietrich, M. and Loretz, O. “Der biblische Azazel und A1T*126.” *UF* 25 (1993) 99–117.

⁴³ R. Behai son of R. Asher Ibn Hilavah. *Commentary on the Pentateuch, Leviticus*, Vol. II. Benei Braq; Mishor (1990) 79. This commentary was originally written in 1291.

⁴⁴ According to the Midrash (Deut. Rab. 11) Uzza and Azael were “the divine beings [who] saw how beautiful the daughters of man were and took wives from

plains “Uzza and Azael are demonic angels who came down to the earth in the days of Naamah the sister of Tubal Cain (Gen 4:22). Of them it is said that ‘the sons of God saw the daughters of men (Gen 6:2)’ that is to say (Azazel) atones for the sins of incest.”

3. The Gaon (917–926 CE) R. Mevasser Kahana Bar R. Kimoi read **זזל** instead of **זזלזל** assuming that the **ז** was inserted between the **ז** and **ז** to ease the pronunciation (*apud* Ibn Ezra on Lev 16:8).
4. According to Isaac of Antioch, the pagan Arabs worshiped the Venus Star under the title Al-‘Uzza “The Strong (Female),” and Syrian women ascended the roof tops to pray to the star to make them beautiful.⁴⁵ Grintz suggested that the Aza’el or Uza of *1Enoch 8:1* is none other than the goddess Al-‘Uzza.⁴⁶ Indeed, Enoch tells that Aza’el taught men to make among other things bracelets, and ornaments, and the use of anti-mony, and the beautifying of eyelids, and all kinds of costly stones, and all coloring tinctures.⁴⁷
5. Azazel is no ordinary demon, but a deity to be propitiated on equal footing with Yahweh. The sending of the goat for Azazel (= ‘Uzza, “Strong Lady,” i.e. ‘Astart-Anat) to the wilderness or steppe-land (*midbar*) is appropriate for the goddess whose Akkadian title was *belit seri*, “Lady of the Steppe.”⁴⁸
6. Some Standard English translations (ESV, RSV, ASV, Darby) leave Azazel untranslated, implying by the capitalization that it is an entity.
7. Tertullian suggested that the two goats represent Jesus. He says, “The two goats, which were offered at the Fast, are not these also figures of Christ’s two activities? The goats have to be alike, because both represent Christ. According to Tertullian, the goat ‘driven into perdition’ (a clear reference to the goat for Azazel) marks the Lord’s suffering: he was ‘cursed

among those that pleased them” (Gen 6:2).

⁴⁵ Pope, M. H. *Song of Songs*. AB 7C. Garden City: Doubleday (1977) 315–316.

⁴⁶ Grintz, J. M. “Do Not Eat on the Blood.” *ASTI* 8 (1971) 103 note 57.

⁴⁷ Charles, R. H. *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch*. APOT II. Oxford: Clarendon (1896) 192.

⁴⁸ Pope, 315.

and spit upon and pulled about and pierced.’ The other goat symbolizes Christ’s offering for sin.”⁴⁹

8. Carmichael suggests that the Azazel rite has a commemorative function. It harks back to the concealment of a transgression by the sons of Jacob with regard to Joseph. The rite is intended to imply that the descendants of Israel should not conceal their offenses, but should confess them when seeking forgiveness.⁵⁰
9. Fauth suggests that ‘Azazel originates from the circle of gods close to the Canaanite El (‘Azazel als einer originär dem kanaanäischen El bzw. Dem ihm zugeordneten Götterkreis nahestehenden Gestalt Rückhalt zu verschaffen).⁵¹
10. Rudman shifts the focus from לעזאזל to מדבר, claiming that the ritual as described by P, cleanses Israel (understood as a microcosm of creation) of sin (understood as chaos), and removes it outside creation itself into the chaotic area of wilderness.⁵²

2.2.6 CONCLUSIONS:

1. Most scholars are comfortable with the notion that עזאזל has

⁴⁹ Tertullianus. *Adversus Marcionem* (trans. Evans, E.). Oxford: OECT (1972) 191. Cf. also Treat, J. C. “Epistle of Barnabas.” *ABD* vol. I. New York: Doubleday (1992) 611–614.

⁵⁰ Carmichael, C. “The Origin of the Scapegoat Ritual.” *VT* 50,2 (2000), 167–181. Carmichael’s basic thesis is that all the laws in the Hebrew Bible stem from actual episodes found in Genesis- 2Kings. At some time an anonymous lawgiver invented the nation’s ancient laws by reviewing the historical episode and judging them according to his own ethical and legal thinking.

⁵¹ Fauth, 534.

⁵² Rudman, D. “A note on the Azazel-goat ritual.” *ZAW* 116 (2004) 400. The shift of focus from לעזאזל to מדבר obviates לעזאזל, which occurs three times in the MT. Also, the ultimate destination of the scapegoat is ארץ גזרה “precipitous area,” which presumably the scapegoat could reach, not the desert *per se*. Furthermore, it is doubtful that the Hebrew Bible ever considers “desert” as chaos, according to the definition given by Rudmen, which is on a par with the mythological sea monsters. Finally, Rudmen’s notion of “desert” that is part of the creation as being un-created, “places which God’s creative power has failed to penetrate” (see p. 399) seems contradictory.

been originally an epithet of a demonic personality,⁵³ which over time degenerated into a representation of “the geographical goal of the scapegoat’s dispatch,” because the figure became peripheral and impotent.⁵⁴ However, it seems inconceivable that Israel’s monotheistic religion would give equal footing, in a major annual rite in the Temple, to a competing demonic personality, even of reduced potency and significance.⁵⁵ Segal seems correct in saying, “It is also incredible that a priestly writer would have embodied in the Book of Leviticus a divine command to offer a sacrifice to a demon just immediately before the divine oracle in chapter 17 denouncing the sacrifices to the se‘irim.”⁵⁶

2. The theory that Azazel is the name of a place in the desert rules itself out, since its juxtaposition to the name of God obviously points to a personal being. Attempts to associate עזאזל with a specific place, or characterization of a place, seem to aim at forming a bridge between an old concept and new practices.
3. There is ample evidence in the Versions, midrashic sources, Qumran scrolls, pseudepigraphic literature, and later sources⁵⁷ that biblical עזאזל was originally the homophone עזאל (“strong God”).⁵⁸ While late post-biblical sources cannot di-

⁵³ Wright, D. P. “Azazel.” In *Anchor Bible Dictionary (ABD)*, I. (1992) 536–567.

⁵⁴ Wright, D. P. *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature*. Atlanta: SBLDS 101 (1987) 21–25.

⁵⁵ Duhm, H. *Die bösen Geister im Alten Testament*. Tübingen and Leipzig: (1904) 28, 32.

⁵⁶ Segal, M. H. “The Religion of Israel before Sinai.” *JQR* ns 53 (1962/63) 251–252.

⁵⁷ Fauth, 521. Fauth says, “der name ‘Aza(z)el in seinem verschiedenen formalen bzw. Orthographischen Ausprägungen überwiegend Engeln eignet, die ihrer Natur nach als einem Hochgott, zum Beispiel dem alttestamentlichen ‘Herrn der (Streit)kräfte’ (Ps 59:5 אלהים צבאות Sept. ὁ θεὸς τῶν δυνάμεων) unterstellte und auf sein Geheiß handelnde Potenzen minderen Ranges (δυνάμεις) innerhalb der Arkan- und Magiesphäre dessen ‘Macht’ repräsentieren, worauf der Name עז(ז)אל ‘Kraft Els’ oder ‘El [ist] stark’) von sich aus hindeutet.” De Roo (235) also claims that “The idea that עזאזל is a metathesized form of עזאל is very plausible.”

⁵⁸ Fauth, W. “Auf den Spuren des biblischen ‘Azazel (Lev 16) Einige Residuen

rectly attest to the original form of writing עזאזל, and in particular whether it was עזאל, they indicate that the variously derived orthographic forms predominantly refer to angels, the nature of which is God-like and who act on God's behalf. Since the terms עז or עזז are associated with the deity, it would be reasonable to assume the same for עזאזל.⁵⁹ What was the motivation for the metathesis is less clear. If the metathesis is assumed late, it might have been occasioned by a wish to more closely tie the later practice of the ritual with the designation of a goat. If the metathesis is assumed early, it was perhaps motivated by an attempt to divert the Israelites from a desert dwelling deity (עזאל) and direct them to the Temple dwelling deity.

4. It seems reasonable to conclude that the ritual described in Lev 16:5–26 was to the same God, identified as יהוה and עזאזל, respectively.

2.3 SUPPORT FOR THE CONCLUSIONS FROM SIMILAR RITUALS

The conclusion advanced in the previous section is bolstered by an analysis of rites in other ancient cultures that have some similarity with the scapegoat rite, even if there is no known rite in other ancient cultures that closely resemble the rite of the scapegoat described in the HB, nor do any of the potentially relevant rites mention a supernatural figure whose name is Azazel (or any name close to it).

This said, the concept of B assuming the inconveniences of A and thereby leaving A unencumbered is psychologically very appealing. The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni on Bereshit 44) says: “The sins are sent to Azazel, so that he may carry them.” Such rituals were probably practiced since early antiquity to this day. The following are some potentially relevant examples:

1. In the 14th and 13th centuries BCE, in Mesopotamia as well as in the Hittite kingdom, when unfavorable astrological omens threatened the life of a ruler, a prisoner was chosen, anointed and invested with royal insignia,

der Gestalt oder des Namens in jüdisch-aramäischen, koptischen, äthiopischen, syrischen und mandäischen Texte.” *ZAW* 110 (1998) 514–534. Fauth provides a variety of sources that attest to the use of עז or עזז in archaic names for supernatural beings of a lower order.

⁵⁹ Tawil, 58–59.

and installed as a substitute king. He was then sent to a distant land. It was believed that this ceremony averted the danger to the King and transferred it to the scapegoat.⁶⁰

2. At the festival of Akitu, the Babylonian New Year, a goat in lieu of a human was sacrificed to Ereshkigal, the goddess of the abyss or netherworld.
3. An Assyrian document dealing with the case of a person who could not drink or eat suggests tying a he-goat to his bed and transferring the disease to the goat. On the next morning the he-goat was to be taken to the desert, his head cut, meat cooked and with honey and fats put into a hole.⁶¹
4. The Hittite in time of a plague used to send a ram, crowned with colorful wool, to the enemy land, so that it would transfer the plague there.
5. The Roman year began on the Ides of March. On that day, a man clad in skins was driven through the streets of Rome, beaten with rods, and driven out of the city.
6. For additional cases see Milgrom, Tawil, Wright, Zitteli, and particularly Eberhart, etc.⁶²

In many of these rituals an offended or angry deity or demons must be propitiated so that a plague or other evil might be averted or lifted from mankind or an individual. The offerings made are of appeasement and substitution intended to assuage the demonic wrath. Wright rightly notes that Leviticus 16 does not speak of Azazel in any of these terms.⁶³ Indeed,

⁶⁰ Kümmel, H. M. *Ersatzrituale für den bethiteschen König*. StBoT 3. Weisbaden Harrassowitz (1967) 111–12.

⁶¹ Ebeling, E. *Tod und Leben nach dem Vorstellungen der Babylonier*. Berlin: DeGruyter (1931) 73–75.

⁶² Eberhart, Ch. *Studien zur Bedeutung der Opfer im Alten Testament. Die Signifikanz von Blut- und Verbrennungsriten im kultischen Rahmen*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener (2002), p. 211. Wright 1987, 31–74.

⁶³ Wright claims that Azazel receives no offerings (the scapegoat is not a sacrifice) and prayers are not made to him. This is debatable (cf. Volgger, 258–9). He says, “Such a laconic treatment of Azazel in view of these other rituals suggests that Azazel is not an active being that is due any sort of veneration or attention.” Yet, Azazel is clearly venerated. Wright suggests that the reason that he [Azazel] was retained in the Priestly version of the rite may be due to popular belief which would not allow total expunging of the personality. One would think that the

Azazel, on the Day of Atonement is not angry or offended, he causes no harm, and he is not malicious. In fact, on this day Azazel as a deity is no different from God. As YHWH, he also receives a sin-offering,⁶⁴ which is a he-goat, just as YHWH's. Moreover, the he-goat is selected by lot to eliminate any bias or preference. The goat to YHWH was presented at YHWH's abode—the Temple, Azazel's goat was presented to Azazel at the latter's abode—the desert. This is the essence of the thesis in this paper, which would be elaborated in subsequent sections.

2.4 APPENDIX: AZAZEL IN LATER SOURCES

Only in pseudepigraphic literature (1Enoch 8:1, 9:6, 10:4–8, 13:1, cf. 54:5–6, 55:4, 69:2; Apocalypse of Abraham 13:6–14, 14:4–6, 20:5–7, 22:5, 23:11, 29:6–7, 31:5)⁶⁵ does Azazel appear as a full-fledged demonic being, and the scapegoat rite is viewed as a symbol of demonic expulsion and eschatological victory over demonic forces.⁶⁶

I have mentioned that in 1Enoch, the demonic fallen angel Azazel is considered the source of all the sin and evil on earth. This would correspond to a personification of the **יצר הרע** “bad inclination.” God commands the angel Raphael to exterminate Azazel the source of all iniquities and corruption and thus purify the land. Raphael is instructed to bind Azazel hand and foot, make an opening in the desert, which is in Dudael, and cast him there onto the darkness. Raphael should also place upon Azazel rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness, and let him dwell there forever, and cover his face that he may not see light.

Hanson finds direct links between the binding of Azazel in 1Enoch 10 and the rite of purgation associated with the scapegoat.⁶⁷ Azazel is being treated in a way similar to that of demons and other hostile powers in Akkadian magical and incantation texts. Why did the author of 1Enoch link the

Priestly version, which has very little to say about demons, would be more anxious to expunge such reference, yet nowhere else but in Leviticus is Azazel mentioned. Wright's mistake was in comparing Azazel only with the supernatural beings in similar rites, rather than with God in the Day of Atonement rite.

⁶⁴ Fauth, 534.

⁶⁵ Volgger, D. “The Day of Atonement according to the Temple Scroll.” *Bib* 87,2 (2006) 258–9.

⁶⁶ Sparks, H. F. D. (ed.). *The Apocryphal Old Testament*. Oxford: Calderon (1984) 173–177, 188–191, 195, 251, 364–366, 378–379, 383–389.

⁶⁷ Hanson, P. D. “Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1Enoch 6–11.” *JBL* 96 (1977) 221–222. See 1Enoch 9:6, 10:4–6.

goat designated “for Azazel” with Azazel? Helm suggests that the answer to this question could be found in the fact that “the scapegoat was regarded the focus of evil, a visible representative of the demonic.”⁶⁸ He speculates that in addition to Leviticus 16 existed an oral tradition upon which both Leviticus 16 and Enoch drew, since Azazel is introduced abruptly in Leviticus 16, as if assuming general knowledge. However, it seems that stories about Fallen Angels were not circulating during the Second Commonwealth.⁶⁹

In the Apocalypse of Abraham (80–100 CE?) Azazel is also portrayed as a fallen angel and tempter of humankind. Azazel is described as an unclean bird that flies down on the carcasses of the animals sacrificed by Abraham and starts a verbal dispute with Abraham. He is rebuked by an angel and called “wickedness” (*Apoc. Ab.* 13:7). Azazel is depicted as an evil spirit. The image of Adam and Eve’s temptation, refers to a winged snake that tempts as Azazel (*Apoc. Ab.* 23:12).

A number of attributes commonly associated with Satan appear in the depictions of Azazel contained in these works. Certainly, they depict an aberration of the biblical concept of Azazel. How this aberration developed is a subject for a separate study. It should, however, be noted that it is a product of a mainly urban Jewish society that lost its link with the desert and tradition of a God that dwells in the desert.

3. PROPOSING A SOLUTION

3.1 PURPOSE OF THE RITUAL

The purpose of the scapegoat in Leviticus 16 is seemingly to carry the confessed sins of the Israelites into the desert to Azazel. Maimonides explains, “The goat [of the Day of Atonement] that was sent [into the wilderness] (Lev 16:20, seq.) served as an atonement for all serious transgressions more than any other sin-offering of the congregation. As it thus seemed to carry off all sins, it was not accepted as an ordinary sacrifice to be slaughtered, burnt, or even brought near the Sanctuary; it was removed as far as possible, and sent forth into a waste, uncultivated, uninhabited land. There is no

⁶⁸ Helm, R. “Azazel in Early Jewish Tradition.” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 32,3 (1994) 217–226 (221). Helm finds support in שְׂעִיר being a “male goat” or “demon,” and the possibility of understanding לְעִזְאֵל “on behalf of Azazel.”

⁶⁹ On the problems of the early Jewish tradition regarding עִזְאֵל, see Hanson (220–33) and Grabbe (153–55).

doubt that sins cannot be carried like a burden, and taken off the shoulder of one being to be laid on that of another being. But these ceremonies are of a symbolic character, and serve to impress men with a certain idea, and to induce them to repent; as if to say, we have freed ourselves of our previous deeds, have cast them behind our backs, and removed them from us as far as possible.”⁷⁰

Cheyne agrees with Maimonides that the purpose of the scapegoat ritual was to provide the primitive folk with a visible act of removal of the sins and of the consequences of those sins (cf. Lev 14:53). However, he also believes that the second purpose was to do away with the cult of the **שעירים**.⁷¹ However, one wonders how giving such a prominent role to a demonic Azazel in a major festival would undermine the cult of the **שעירים**.

Leviticus 16 details the solemn ceremonies and underscores the spiritual significance of the Day of Atonement. It naturally follows a section of Leviticus that deals with various impurities (of animals, human body, human clothing, and human dwelling) and their purification (Leviticus 11–15). Leviticus 16 concludes with the purification on the Day of Atonement of the sanctuary and the purification of the people from the spiritual impurities of their sins. The two he-goats were a sin-offering (Lev 16:5) for these two purposes.

Goats were selected for their symbolic value. The goats of the land of Israel (*Capra hircus mambrica*), usually black and long haired, perhaps adequately symbolized long term or persistent sinning. The jumpy behavior of the goat reminded the sinner’s deviations from the norm, and their eating habits (cf. the later expression, **מקצץ בנטיעות**) the destructiveness of sin. The **שעיר עזים** also conveniently alluded to **עזזאל**. On the Day of Atonement the Israelite wanted to be cleansed of his transgressions and wanted his Temple cleansed of any infractions made by its users. He wanted a clean slate and a new beginning. With so much at stake and God’s abode on earth uncertain, he could not gamble. Two he-goats were thus used one for each of God’s possible abodes on earth. The two he-goats were one sin-offering, but split for two different destinations.⁷² This would explain the meticulous insistence on the two he-goats being alike in every possible way

⁷⁰ Maimonides, M. *The Guide to the Perplexed*. (Trans. Friedlander, M). New York: Dover (1956) 366.

⁷¹ Cheyne, 154.

⁷² The term **קרבן** “offering, oblation” is derived from the root **קרב** “near,” drawing on the presentation ritual to deities. There appear to be essentially two types of animal **קרבנות**: **זבח קרבן** and **קרבן שילוח**. Thus, the scapegoat is a sacrifice,

insistence on the two he-goats being alike in every possible way and the selection by lot for the different functions.

3.2 TIME THE RITUAL WAS INTRODUCED

Cheyne thought it reasonable that the scapegoat ritual was one of the latest additions to the Priestly Code, about the 4th century BCE, but he does not supply any support for this opinion.⁷³ Modern critics who date Leviticus 16 late usually refer to Neh 9:1, which claims that a special fast and day of mourning was held on the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month. It is argued that if the tenth of the seventh month had been observed as the fast of the Day of Atonement there would have been no need for holding a special fast on the twenty-fourth day. Segal notes that “this argument is fallacious. The Day of Atonement is not only a fast but also a holy festival on which mourning in sackcloth with earth upon the head is strictly prohibited.”⁷⁴

Many felt that the ritual of the scapegoat is of ancient origins. Loehr observed: “Asasel, the Holy Tabernacle, above all the ‘camp’ of Israel, are signs seeming to point back to the period before the settling in Canaan, to an existence in the shepherd steppes of southernmost Palestine. Perhaps the sending of a goat to Asasel is a pre-Mosaic ritual of atonement of one of the Leah tribes, which for some unknown reasons was adopted into the cult of Yahweh when Yahwism arose.”⁷⁵ Driver says, “No doubt the ritual is a survival from another stage of popular belief, engrafted on and accommodated to the sacrificial system of the Hebrews....” He draws attention to the primitive character of the ritual, which has many analogies in the Old Testament itself (Lev 14:4, 49) and in other countries.⁷⁶

Bergmann considers the phrase “before the Lord” a clumsy attempt to demonstrate that the goat destined for the demon was still under God’s jurisdiction. He surmises “that the custom must have been a very old one going back to the time when YHWH did not yet have full dominion over the

albeit it is not slaughtered but sent away. Its function is the same as that of the slaughtered before YHWH. Certainly, Leviticus attests to few קרבנות שילוח (Lev 14:2–9, 53).

⁷³ Cheyne, 155.

⁷⁴ Segal, 248, note 32.

⁷⁵ Loehr, M. “Das Ritual von Lev. 16. Untersuchungen zum Hexateuchproblem III.” *Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten Gesellschaft* (1925) 11.

⁷⁶ Driver, G. R. “Azazel.” *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. I (ed. Davis, J. D.). Philadelphia: The Westminster press (1923) 207–8.

Hebrews. ... Much later, during the Second Temple, the custom was incorporated into the rites of the Day of Atonement (*m. Yoma*) once more.⁷⁷

In Zatelli's view "The material in Lev. xvi is pre-exilic. In this chapter, however, a strong distinction must be made between the textual and literary traditions with different levels, and the religious operative tradition that may have survived even from very remote times, obviously undergoing transformations and adaptations of various types."⁷⁸

Determining whether the scapegoat ritual was pre-exilic or post exilic does not appear trivial. Most of the opinions expressed do not rest on solid foundations. The ritual of the scapegoat is presented in Leviticus 16 as if its purpose and **אָזָזִי/אָזָז** are well known. This would seem to imply a tradition that was venerated for some time. Yet, except for Leviticus 16 **אָזָזִי/אָזָז** does not occur. Baffling is also the seeming predominance of **אָזָז** in later sources. Perhaps, **אָזָז**, which originally depicted God in the deity's desert abode, was intentionally suppressed, but continued to exist in the oral tradition.

3.3 GOD IN THE DESERT

It has been indicated that the basic thesis of this paper is that on the Day of Atonement the goat to YHWH was presented at YHWH's abode—the Temple and Azazel's (**אָזָזִי**) goat was presented to Azazel at the abode of the latter—the desert. The distinction is in the abodes and ritual, not the deities. The ritual of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement was a compromise, attempting to satisfy those who believed that God dwells in the desert when on earth and those who believed that He dwells in the Holy Tabernacle. It was not a compromise between two deities. Indeed, the Gaon (c. 997–1023 CE) R. Shmuel Ben Hofni says, "Although it is (only) with reference to the goat of the sin-offering that it is written (explicitly) that it was for the Lord, the scapegoat was also for the Lord" (*apud* Ibn Ezra on Lev 16:8, cf. R. Behai Ben Asher of Barcelona on Lev 16:7).

Loretz argued that the passages Lev 16:8, 10, and 26 do not point to an original desert abode of Azazel. In Leviticus 16 Azazel is "eine Potenz neben Jahwe und gleich diesem ohne Ortsbestimmung."⁷⁹ While the text

⁷⁷ Bergmann, M. S. *In the Shadow of Moloch, The sacrifice of children and its impact on Western religions*. New York: Columbia University Press (1992) 38.

⁷⁸ Zatelli, 262.

⁷⁹ Loretz, O. *Ugarit und die Bibel. Kanaanäische Götter und Religion im Alten Testament*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft (1990) 115–117.

does not specifically say that God's abode was in the desert and Loretz's contention is theologically appealing, the context of the scapegoat ritual provides a strong basis for the argument that the scapegoat was sent where Azazel would get it. Furthermore, the ritual cannot be viewed in isolation from the Israelites' history of encounter with God in the desert.

Segal surmises that during their sojourn in Egypt, until they became enslaved, the Israelites must have continued their ancestral practice of sacrificing animals and could do so only in the wilderness near Goshen.⁸⁰ Indeed, the nation's record of direct experience with God's presence in the desert is unique and unmatched by the deity's presence in the Temple in Jerusalem. God's self-revelation to Moses on the "mountain of God" is crafted in terms of speaking from a burning bush (Ex 3:1–5). This very mountain in the desert would be a place of worship (Ex 3:12). The request to be presented to Pharaoh: "The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; let us now go a three days' journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God" (Ex 3:18) is not considered a ridiculous ruse. When the request is actually made (Ex 5:1–3), Pharaoh has only problems with the identity of the God of the Hebrews and the latter's stature but not of the deity's being in the desert, and finally acquiesces to this seemingly strange request (Ex 8:23–24, cf. Ex 10:7–12, 24–26).

There might have been an early tradition that God's abode on earth is in the wilderness of the deserts. Inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud contain the expressions *brkth YHWH tmm w'šrb* ("blessing to the Lord of Teman and to its Asherah") and *YHWH šmrn w'šrb* ("to the Lord of Samaria and its Asherah").⁸¹ The occurrence of the tetragrammaton in these inscriptions raised the possibility that YHWH was at some time worshipped in that region. Emerton analyzed the available evidence and reached the conclusion that this is unlikely.⁸² However, Cross considers Teman to be a pre-Israelite sanctuary of YHWH in the southern mountains Sinai-Teman-Se'ir.⁸³ Similarly Weinfeld feels that YHWH was particularly esteemed in this area since YHWH also appears from Teman in all the different types of inscriptions

⁸⁰ Segal, M. H. "The Religion of Israel Before Sinai." *JQR* ns 53 (1962/63) 226.

⁸¹ Meshel, Z. Kuntillet 'Ajrud. A Religious Centre from the Time of the Judean Monarchy on the Border of Sinai. The Israel Museum, Catalogue No. 175.

⁸² Emerton, J. A. "New Light on Israelite Religion: The Implications of the Inscriptions from Kuntillet' Ajrud." *ZAW* 94 (1982) 10–13.

⁸³ Cross, F. M. "The Epic Traditions of Early Israel: Epic Narrative and the Reconstruction of Early Israelite Institutions." In *The Poet and the Historian; Essays in Literary and Historical Criticism. Harvard Semitic Studies* (Ed. Friedman, R. E.). Chico: Scholars (1983) 33.

from 'Ajrud.⁸⁴ This would agree with the Song of Deborah: O Lord, when You came forth from Seir, advanced from the country of Edom, the earth trembled; The heavens dripped, Yea, the clouds dripped water, The mountains quaked—Before the Lord, him of Sinai, Before the Lord, God of Israel (Jud 5:4–5).

A few years ago, Dan reopened the possibility that contrary to the accepted view, which links *רכב בערבות* (Ps 68:5) with a similar phrase in Ugaritic meaning “rider on clouds,” *רכב בערבות* means “rider in the steppes.”⁸⁵ Dan shows that the meaning “deserts” for *ערבות* enriches the text ideationally and in a literary sense. If correct, this would provide another aspect of God’s association with the desert and its place in the national memory. Dan says, “The historical memory of the Exodus and wandering in the desert is anchored in the Bible in the tradition of appearance from the south.”⁸⁶

The desert is usually considered in negative terms in the Bible (Deut 20:5, 8:15, Jer 2:2, 6, 31, Ps 107:4–5, Job 30:3). Yet, the Bible also construes positive memories of the desert that are linked to the Israelites’ encounter with God that dwells in Sinai. Amir says, “[i]ndeed, this tradition about the main residence of the God of Israel on Mount Sinai continued to live for many generations after they reached the Promised Land.”⁸⁷ God was very close and visible to the Israelites in the desert for forty years. The pillars of cloud and fire were a constant presence (Ex 13:21–22, 14:19–20). Miraculous things happened at times of distress (Ex 15:22–25, 16:4–5, 11–12, etc.). God’s self-revelation occurred on Mount Sinai and there God spoke to them. YHWH’s presence was visible when God descended onto the sanctuary in the Tabernacle, a place he chose to dwell in (Ex 25:8). No wonder that in the theophanies, God usually appears from the abode in the desert marching to war. It is there that God visibly manifested the deity’s “strength and fierceness” (*עוזאל*), and it is from there that the prophets saw YHWH come in time of distress in the theophanies (Deut. 33:2, Jud 5:4–5, Mic. 1:4, Hab 3:3, Ps 68:5, 8–10).⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Weinfeld, M. “Further Remarks on the Ajrud Inscriptions.” *Shnaton* 5–6 (1981–82) 238.

⁸⁵ Dan, D. *עיון מחודש בצירוף לרכב בערבות (תה' סח, 5) = לרוכב במדבריות*, *Beit Mikra* 184 (2005) 43–62.

⁸⁶ Dan, 49.

⁸⁷ Amir, Y. *מדבר*. In *Encyclopaedia Biblica* Vol IV. Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik (1962) 674–678.

⁸⁸ Avishur, Y. *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms*. Jerusalem: Magness Press

During the monarchic period the leadership was probably interested to promote a central and unifying place of worship, the Temple in Jerusalem, as God's dwelling on earth (1Kgs 8:13). It was necessary for the sake of national unity to minimize the historical notion of YHWH's dwelling in the desert, in an uncertain and hard to access location. The fact that in ancient Near-Eastern cultures the desert was a place of evil spirits might have played a role in this intent. The use of *aziz* in reference to a Phoenician deity, to whom the powerful effects of the sun are ascribed, and of *bel-aziz* "Bel the Strong," might have made the retention of עזזאל problematic. This could be the reason for such thorough eradication of עזזאל from the biblical text. Yet, history could not be erased or rewritten. History clearly states that the Israelites found God in the desert. On the Day of Atonement, as in the magnificent theophanies, they addressed YHWH with their most urgent concerns in the desert.

4. CONCLUSION

Jewish tradition associates the outstanding manifestations or attributes of God with the deity's various names. Thus with יהוה is associated "mercy," with אלהים "justice," with שלום "peace," etc. It has been shown that significant evidence suggests that biblical עזזאל was originally the homophone עזזאל "Powerful God," whose abode on earth was in the desert. Perhaps, עזזאל was associated with the deity's attribute of strength, explaining the coming of the deity from the desert in theophanies.

The ritual described in Lev 16:5–26 was to the same God, potentially being at two locations—the Temple or the desert, and identified as יהוה and עזזאל respectively. This would explain the meticulous rite of ensuring sameness of sacrifice and leaving the final pick of the scapegoat to God via the procedure of a lot. On the unique Day of Atonement God (as יהוה and עזזאל) was approached at both locations, there could not be even the slightest show of preference.

In later times, God's abode in the Temple or Jerusalem completely displaced God's desert abode, relegating it to evil forces as was the belief in Near-Eastern cultures. In this process עזזאל, or a derivative of this name, became a satanic figure.

(1994) 154. See also Ibn Ezra on Deut 33:2 and Hab 3:3.